

Thesis
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**AN URBAN HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVE: SWIMMING A
RECREATIONAL AND
COMPETITIVE PURSUIT 1840
TO 1914**

by

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ABSTRACT

Over the last three decades or more, there has been a considerable interest in the socio-historical analysis of sport. While a number of historians have examined the development of the major team games and commercial sports in the context of the changing nature of Victorian and Edwardian society, very few have considered the development of individual and more recreational sports, or located the transformation of sport to the process of urbanization. This thesis examines the relationship between growing urbanization and the transformation of swimming from a recreative activity, into an urban recreation and 'modern' competitive sport. Swimming as a recreation and as a competitive sport, developed as a reaction to and consequence of, both the positive and negative features of urbanization. The hypotheses that the greater the urbanization, the more developed and 'modern' sport became, will be supported with evidence from the sport of swimming.

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.A.A.	Amateur Athletic Association
A.S.A.	Amateur Swimming Association
A.M.S.C.	Associated Metropolitan Swimming Club
A.S.C.G.	Associated Swimming Clubs of Glasgow
A.S.C.S	Associated Swimming Clubs of Scotland
B.C.U	British Cycling Union
B.O.C	British Olympic Committee
B.S.S.	British Swimming Society
F.I.N.A.	Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur
L.S.A.	London Swimming Association
M.C.C.	Marylebone Cricket Club
M.O.H.	Medical Officer of Health
M.S.A.	Metropolitan Swimming Association
N.S.A.	National Swimming Association
N.S.S.	National Swimming Society
N.U.T.	National Union of Teachers
N.C.A.S.A.	Northern Counties Amateur Swimming Association
R.H.S.	Royal Humane Society
R.L.S.S.	Royal Life Saving Society
S.A.S.A	Scottish Amateur Swimming Association
S.A.G.B	Swimming Association of Great Britain

S.C. Swimming Club

Y.M.C.A Young Men's Christian Association

INTRODUCTION

Over the last three decades or more, there has been a considerable interest in the socio-historical analysis of sport and a body of literature has emerged which has examined the social significance of sporting practice, particularly during the Victorian era.¹ These accounts however, have mostly focused upon the major team games and commercial sports.² In contrast, individual or more recreational sports have largely been ignored. Swimming in particular, which today is one of the most popular physical recreations and has always been an important skill for the population of an island nation, undertaken by men and women, young and old, as a competitive sport or simply for enjoyment and health, is conspicuously absent from almost all social historical accounts of British sport.³ This study aims to redress this gap in our knowledge and to expand our understanding of sporting development, by examining the transformation of swimming during the period 1840 to 1914.

¹ Some of the key texts on the social history of British sport include; Holt. R. (1992) *Sport and the British*; Mason, T (1989) *Sport in Britain: A Social History* and Tranter, N. (1998) *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain 1750-1914*.

² Examples of texts concentrating on team and commercial sports include; Collins, T. (1999) *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*; Mason, T. (1980) *Association Football and English Society*, Sandiford, K. (1994) *Cricket and the Victorians* and Vamplew, W. (1988) *Pay Up and Play the Game. Professional Sport in Britain 1875-1914*.

³ One reason for the omission of swimming, in the key texts on nineteenth century sports history, is because as Tony Mason (1989: p.5) acknowledges in *Sport in Britain* 'Swimming has been ignored... largely because not enough work has been done on the subject'. Whilst, Richard Holt (1992: p.10) when considering which sports have been examined within his key text *Sport and the British* states, 'There are some major omissions... swimming which has become so popular a recreation is not discussed'. An exception is the series of texts by Derek Birley, *Sport and the Making of Britain* (1993); *Land of Sport and Glory* (1995) and *Playing the Game* (1995), all three include a brief discussion on the development of swimming.

The limited texts which have explored the history of British swimming fall broadly into three categories. Firstly, histories of the development of competitive swimming, which have been commissioned by the governing bodies of swimming,⁴ secondly, work by 'amateur' historians, detailing the development of clubs and competitions⁵ and thirdly, journalistic accounts of swimming's heroic figures and cultural development.⁶ Whilst many of these accounts are both informative and entertaining, there is little or no attempt to relate the development of swimming to broader social or cultural contexts. Certain aspects of the social history of swimming, for example, the sports progress within schools and universities, have formed part of academic theses. Unfortunately, due to the expansive nature of these studies, the analysis of swimming within them is somewhat limited.⁷ The one exception to date, has been the recent study by Sarah Batstone, where a comparison in the development of bathing habits between Birmingham and Thetford, Norfolk from 1800 to 1970, were explored.⁸

⁴ Such work includes Bilsborough, P. (1988) *One Hundred Years of Scottish Swimming*; Kiel, I. and Wix, D. (1996) *In the Swim: The ASA from 1869-1994*.

⁵ There are a number of club histories, deposited in local libraries and archives and the British Library.

⁶ Sprawson, C. (1992) *The Haunts of the Black Masseur; The Swimmer as Hero* gives an account of the meanings that different cultures attached to water. Whilst Watson, K. (2000) *The Crossing* is one of several accounts of Mathew Webb's Channel swim.

⁷ Theses that have included swimming within their analysis include, Bilsborough, P. (1983) *Development of Sport in Glasgow 1850 - 1914* (M.Litt. University of Stirling); James, T. (1977) *The Contribution of Schools and Universities to the Development of Sport up to 1900* (Ph.D. University of Leicester); and Davis, B. (1987) *Physical Recreation in Worcestershire and the West Midlands in the late Nineteenth Century* (Ph.D University of Manchester).

⁸ Batstone, S (2002) *Health and Recreation: Issues in the Development of Bathing and Swimming, 1800 - 1970, with special reference to Birmingham and Thetford, Norfolk*. (Ph.D University of Birmingham)

In other countries, a few historians have examined swimming and its relationship to wider society. Thierry Terret's work *Les Defis du Bain*, examined the development of bathing and swimming in the context of social change in France and a brief comparison to the development of swimming in Britain was made within the thesis. Whilst in Australia, Veronica Raszeja study *A Decent and Proper Exertion: The Rise of Women's Competitive Swimming in Sydney to 1912*, explored how competitive swimming was able to become the 'acceptable face of female activity, by virtue of its long association with health'. These studies indicate that sport does not exist in a social or historical vacuum. Whilst some of them have tentatively explored the relationship between the development of swimming and particular aspects of social or cultural change, none have drawn on the themes, identified within the best works on the social history of sport, as critical in the development of sport, such as, social class, the North/South divide, the amateur v professional debate, civic pride, rational recreation and female participation.⁹ Within this study these themes are explored on a recurring basis. There are a number of valid reasons for the present study, but perhaps the strongest is that in developing an empirically informed historical analysis of swimming in Britain, it makes a small contribution to literature which tries to demonstrate how the changing nature of Victorian and Edwardian society shaped the development of sport. The focal point of this analysis however, remains the activity of swimming and to provide answers to the more prosaic detailed but

⁹ Collins, T. (1999) p.xiii

essential questions of who took part in swimming, when, where and for what reasons? The work is essentially a chronological narrative of swimming's progress between 1840 and 1914, although the broad inter-connected stages of the sport's development, provide a basis for an analysis around a thematic format and allows the thesis to be arranged into the following four themes:

- I) Theme one examines the progress of recreational swimming from 1840 to 1880. Recreational swimming transferred from an outdoor activity, to a predominately indoor recreation, with the building of municipal baths during the 1840s. Swimming was promoted by social reformers as a valuable rational recreation, but it remained a low status activity, associated with cleansing the masses. Also, despite the provision of indoor facilities, the popularity of outdoor bathing, particularly at the seaside continued, and sea bathing was a significant factor in the continuing popularity of recreational swimming.
- II) Theme two considers the progress of competitive swimming from 1840 to 1914. Beginning with the influence of professional swimmers, on the initial formation of a competitive structure for swimming, through to the establishment of an international swimming organization, at the turn of the twentieth century. The theme concentrates on the transformation of swimming from a pre-modern to a modern sport and the impact of amateurism on the modernization of swimming.
- III) Theme three explores the influence of education on the development of swimming from 1870 to 1914. Education became an important issue for late nineteenth century Britain and the provision of appropriate physical exercise, within and outside formal education, was a constant concern. Swimming because of its qualities of health and cleanliness and the potential ability of people able to swim to save life, meant that many educational agencies vigorously promoted swimming as an essential part of education for the young.
- iv) Theme four reflects upon the progress of swimming for women from 1840 to 1914. The participation of women in sport posed

many problems for nineteenth century society. However, as this discussion highlights, swimming was one activity, for a number of reasons, that women were able and indeed encouraged to participate in.

Whilst such an approach is of value in itself and contributes to our understanding of swimming and society, it largely ignores the one factor which came to dominate nineteenth century Britain, the urbanization of the country. Nearly all contemporary major sports evolved or were invented within towns or cities and the process of urbanization was arguably the most influential factor in the development of sport and particularly swimming. The importance of urbanization on the transformation of sport has been examined by historians in America, where this genre of work has been crucial in explaining how the urban environment both shaped and was itself shaped by sport.¹⁰ Whilst, British sports historians have suggested that, as a general rule, the greater the urbanization, the more developed and 'modern' sport became¹¹ and that sport was crucial in creating and sustaining, new kinds of urban identity.¹² Despite these claims, urbanization has rarely been the main focus of analysis within texts on the social history of British sport.¹³ A focus of this work will be the relationship between creeping urbanization and the

¹⁰ American texts on sport and urbanisation include, Adelman, M. (1990) *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics 1820-70*; Hardy, S. (1982) *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation and Community 1865-1915* and Reiss, S. (1989) *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* and Gems, G.(1997) *Windy City Wars: Labor, Leisure and Sport in the Making of Chicago*.

¹¹ Tranter, N. 1998: p.29

¹² Holt, R. 1989: p.6

¹³ Most texts only mention urbanization in passing, although Holt, R. (1989) in *Sport and the British* includes a chapter on 'Living in the City'.

transformation of swimming from a recreative activity into an urban recreation and modern competitive sport.

The use of urbanization as a model for investigation has however, often been criticized for being used in the context of 'site' rather than 'process'; with the result that the urban environment merely emerges as the setting for the transformation of sport, with any analysis lacking an appreciation of the impact of urbanization on human behaviour.¹⁴ Sporting practice is though primarily concerned with human behaviour and a constant theme throughout this investigation, is the impact of urban living on the changing behaviour of swimming participants. Whilst a further difficulty of urbanization, as a tool for analysis, is that no two towns or cities developed at the same time or rate. Nevertheless, the process of urbanization eventually brought similar consequences, positive and negative, for all urban inhabitants. This study therefore, does not concentrate upon one specific town or city, but places are used to illustrate particular issues or moments of development. The consequences of rapid urbanization were though most severe within the major cities of Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow, and as these also provided some of the best data on the evolution of swimming, there is an emphasis throughout the study on these cities.

The lack of previous research and the universal popularity of swimming, also meant that the sources for this work were not been collected from one particular city or region. Rather, material was gathered from a variety of

¹⁴ Adelman, M. 1990: p.7

sources and locations in England and Scotland. The best material on the provision and use of public baths of the period, was obtained from the Baths and Wash-houses Committee minutes of a number of towns and cities. Whilst Acts of Parliament, which enabled the provision of municipal baths to proceed, gave useful detail of the changing considerations towards bathing provision. Information on all the public baths of the nineteenth century, was further enhanced by the detailed social survey, which was commissioned by the Carnegie Trust and undertaken by Agnes Campbell, in 1918, into the provision and use of public baths and wash-houses throughout the United Kingdom.

A major contemporary source, that provided opinions on the popularity and state of swimming, came from the numerous and eclectic volumes of swimming texts and swimming journals of the nineteenth century. Whilst many of these have to be treated with caution, as they were often written by professional swimmers, as a form of self-publicity and promotion, they do provide additional detail and verify, in a colourful way, the major debates which surrounded swimming. In addition, the national and local press provided further detailed information, when issues such as mixed bathing or professionalism, came to local or national prominence.

The minute books of the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) and the regional Associations, such as the Northern Counties Amateur Swimming Association (NCASA), were useful in detailing the amateur v professional debate, the North/South divide and the tenacity of the ASA in lobbying

parliament for the inclusion of swimming on the national curriculum. However, further information or the opinions of ordinary swimmers, regarding many of these issues, were difficult to obtain. Club histories did occasionally provide some insights, but by and large club histories consisted of names and records of annual events, with little additional social commentary.

For a social history of swimming, these themes and sources have to be harnessed to an over-arching synthesis which explains why, and in what ways swimming in Britain developed between the early nineteenth and twentieth century. In order to do this the thesis is organized into the following seven chapters. Chapters one and two set the scene and are essentially literature reviews. Chapter one considers some of the key issues which surrounded the growth of nineteenth century towns and cities. These initial considerations pave the way for a more specific exploration in chapter two, of the relationship between sport and the urban environment. In particular these chapters provide a framework for the subsequent discussion of swimming and open up new ways of thinking about swimming's relationship to urbanization. Together, chapters one and two provide the necessary background for conducting an analysis of the development of swimming in urban Britain. Such an analysis is developed in chapters three, four, five, six and seven.

Chapter three analyses the role that the development of swimming played in 'improving' the condition of the people. In particular it assess whether the provision of public baths, helped to improve the physical, social and moral health of the population of urban Britain, whilst at the same time, it

also considers whether the baths facilitated a rapid progress in the development of swimming. The chapter moves on to examine the promotion of swimming as a rational recreation, with the establishment of swimming clubs and private baths clubs, and its success or failure, in alleviating social amelioration in the urban population. Finally, the chapter considers, the role of the seaside excursion in providing town and city dwellers with the opportunity to escape the confines of the urban industrial environment and the overall attraction of sea bathing in the increasing popularity of recreational swimming.

The main focus of swimming in the first half of the nineteenth century had simply been for enjoyment and pleasure. The formation of swimming clubs at the newly provided public baths, in the middle years of the century, was the beginning of a change in emphasis for swimming. Chapter four examines the factors that influenced this shift in swimming from a 'rational' to a 'modern' sport. Its key focus is to assess whether swimming had become a 'modern' sport by 1880, using the modernization typology of Melvin Adelman. In doing so, it examines the instrumental role that professional swimmers played in the early rise of competitive swimming and the subsequent change in attitude towards swimming, by both government and social reformers, with the passing of the 1878 Baths and Wash-houses Act.

The continuing modernization of competitive swimming up to 1914, is the theme of chapter five. It considers how the character and development of the sport were determined by the institutionalisation of the sport. In particular, it analyses how debates within the ASA, over the amateur v

professional status of swimmers, led to a schism between northern and southern swimmers and culminated in the formation of district associations. The chapter also looks at the evolution of swimming strokes, as the desire to swim faster and to demonstrate superiority, even on an international stage, became feasible with the setting up of national and international competitions and organizations.

Competitive swimming had developed considerably by the last decades of the nineteenth century, yet swimming also remained a popular recreation and was considered to have a useful utilitarian function, particularly for the young. Chapter six explores the ways in which a number of educational agencies, promoted and encouraged swimming for the youth of urban Britain. It focuses particularly upon the provision and teaching of swimming within state schools and the influential role of the ASA in enhancing the status of swimming in education.

Chapter seven considers the separate development of female swimming. It argues that despite the many restrictions placed on nineteenth century sports women, the unique qualities of swimming enabled it to develop into the first modern urban sport for women and helped to break down ideologies surrounding the female body. In the conclusions the major strands of this analysis are drawn together.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY URBAN ENVIRONMENT

During the nineteenth century Britain experienced what has been called 'the urban transformation' it changed from an overwhelmingly rural society to a predominately urban one... though the extent of urbanization was to vary regionally, the transformation was remarkable, unprecedented anywhere in its scale and duration....a century later men were still struggling to grasp the nature of the change and its implications.¹

Nineteenth century British towns and cities came to dominate the physical, social and economic environment. Although the development of towns had been a feature of the eighteenth century, it was the increase in the number and size of towns and cities in the early nineteenth century that transformed Britain.² The rate and extent of urbanization was unprecedented and led to new physical, social and cultural environments, creating both opportunities and problems for urban dwellers, and included a revolution in sporting opportunity. The term 'the city' which previously had meant London alone, came to denote all the 'large towns and populous districts' designated in census reports.

The objective in this chapter is to examine the process of urbanization in Britain during the nineteenth century. A vast literature already exists on the

¹ Coleman, B.I. 1973: p.1

² Walvin, J. 1984: p.1

Victorian city and the urbanization of Britain.³ The focus within this chapter will be to give an account from the literature, of the key issues surrounding the rise and subsequent development of British towns and cities during the nineteenth century. A pan British approach will be adopted, for although each town and city's growth differed, in both time and scale, the consequences of urbanization, both positive and negative, were to some degree, eventually experienced within all urban environments. The process of urbanization was shaped by a number of issues, but in order to inform the subsequent examination of swimming, the chapter is divided into five sections.

Section one briefly examines how and why urbanization, an increase in the proportion of people living in towns, increased and subtly altered over the century. Section two looks at the physical growth of towns and cities, the alterations in the use of urban space and in particular the impact of the railway on the social geography of cities. Section three considers how, in the context of worsening class relations, the 'modern' city changed the way in which the structure of society was viewed, with the dissolving of a hierarchical society, and the emergence of a powerful middle-class. Section four reflects upon the many problems created by living in an urban environment, namely poor health, housing and crime: these are examined in relation to the growing need to bring order to society. The scale of change ensured that not only

³ Examples of just a small number of the texts on nineteenth century urbanization are listed in this bibliography.

individuals, but also groups and institutions had to adopt new strategies, section five examines some of the responses by central and municipal government, to the new challenges of city living.

Urbanization

Urbanization, an increase in the proportion of the population living in towns, was the most obvious, but also the most challenging aspect of the unprecedented changes taking place in nineteenth century Britain, especially for the new urban society to cope with or control. The absolute growth in the total population can, in retrospect, be plotted and analysed in several different ways, but all the figures point to rapid population growth in the first half of the century. Nationally, the first official census for England and Wales in 1801, recorded the population at just over nine million. By 1851 the population had doubled to almost 18 million and by 1901 it stood at 32.5 million. Scotland experienced similar rates of growth, from a population of 1.7 million in 1801 to nearly three million by 1851 and 4.5 million by 1901.⁴ These broad figures hide many regional variations, and they do not explain why the population expanded so quickly in the first half of the century. Initially the interpretation of these figures, placed the emphasis on a decline in mortality. Contemporary interpretation, now agrees that a rise in fertility, rather than a fall in mortality

⁴ Rose, M.E. 1981: p.276

was the detonator of the population explosion, with mortality rates in fact remaining and even rising as people crowded into insanitary towns. This pattern of high fertility outstripping high mortality began to change around mid-century. Mortality rates fell, mainly as a result of a fall in the incidence of infectious diseases, along with improved public health provision, cleaner water and more efficient drainage in urban areas. Then in the 1870s the fall in mortality was followed by a fall in fertility, as married couples increasingly limited the size of their families, especially but not entirely, amongst the wealthier classes.⁵

Population increase highlighted the dominance of the urban environment, with the most marked variation in population, being between agricultural and industrial areas. Many industrial activities had initially developed in rural communities, but as these industrial activities, of necessity had to become more urban, the geographical shift of the population was towards urban areas of employment. At the beginning of the nineteenth century one third of the population of England and Wales was classified as living in an urban area, by 1851 it had risen to approximately half of the population and by 1901, 80 per cent lived in towns and cities, with the large towns of more than 100,000 population taking a dominant share of the increase.⁶ In Scotland the pattern of urbanization followed that of England, but a larger proportion of the population remained in smaller and rural settlements

⁵ Rose, M.E. 1981: p. 277

and Scottish urbanization was dominated by the big four cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen. By 1851 one in five, of the Scottish population lived in these four cities,⁷ and by the 1880s over half of its population lived in centres of more than 5,000 inhabitants.⁸ Urbanization, as well as involving the expansion of very large towns, also included the emergence of an increasing number of smaller towns and this was where the definition of 'urban' became problematic. Despite the difficulties, of classifying some communities as either rural or urban, it remained the case that 'technically the British people had become an urban nation by mid-century, even if most of them lived in small towns rather than major cities'.⁹

This change to a predominately urban society did not prevent, at least up until the middle years of the century, relatively easy access to the surrounding countryside. Most new urban dwellers had been born in rural areas, with the result that many newcomers to the city had originally come from communities within 30 to 40 mile radius of the individual town or city. There were obvious exceptions, with migration over greater distances being more common among Irish immigrants (especially after the mid 1840s potato famine) and Scottish Highlanders. By 1871 there were 567,000 Irish born in England and 105,000 in Scotland, representing nearly 14% of the total population. The Irish spread out over most of urban Britain, but in many towns

⁶ Royale, E. 1997: p. 22

⁷ Fraser, W.H. and Morris, R.J. 1990: p. 73

⁸ Royale, E. 1997: p. 22

⁹ Walvin, J. 1987: p. 8

they were thin on the ground. By 1851, only in London, Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow, were there large Irish colonies of more than 50,000 apiece.¹⁰ But all cities proved a major attraction for immigrant and migrant alike, although London maintained its magnetic power.¹¹ Overall in nineteenth century Britain, the dominant influence on urban population increase was migration, the movement from rural to urban centres, which consisted mainly of young unmarried people, and included more women than men.¹²

By the late nineteenth century, the process of urbanization had subtly altered. It was now estimated that some three-quarters of the population, were living in large towns or cities, as opposed to the small towns that had predominated in the first half of the century. London remained the dominant example, but it was the remarkable growth of provincial cities, which attracted controversy and drew attention to the appalling conditions of city living. Between 1821 and 1831 the population of England and Wales increased by 16%, but the population of Manchester grew by 45%, Leeds by 47%, Sheffield and Birmingham by 40% and Bradford by 65%.¹³ Within the first decades of the nineteenth century the initial group of provincial towns to surpass the 100,000 population mark was reached: it included the newly classified cities of Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol and Glasgow. Then from mid-century the second group of towns, led by Sheffield, Wolverhampton,

¹⁰ Thompson, F.M.L. 1993, Vol 1: p.52

¹¹ Rose, M.E. 1981: p.277

¹² Morris, R.J. and Rodger, R. 1993: p.4

¹³ Walvin, J. 1984: p. 11

Newcastle, Bradford, Salford and Stoke-on-Trent reached this figure.¹⁴ The classification for an urban area had to alter accordingly, from a population of 5,000 in 1801, to 10,000 in 1861 to 20,000 in 1911.¹⁵ Therefore, although not all towns and cities experienced population increases at the same time or rate, there was little doubt that by 1900, Britain had been transformed into an urban society, dominated by the city, with all the accompanying benefits and difficulties that this encompassed.

Physical Growth of the Urban Environment

Population increase was just one aspect of a town or city's overall growth. Of equal significance was its growth in terms of space and the alterations in the use of that urban space. For example, between 1831 and 1911 the population of Glasgow increased 3.9 times whilst its acreage went up 5.9 times to 12,669,¹⁶ whilst the acreage of Bristol increased from 4,879 acres in the first decades of the nineteenth century to 17,004 acres by 1914.¹⁷ An increase in total acreage, was only one dimension of a cities physical growth. Changes to the physical structure of a city, from extensive alterations in land use, to significant developments in transport, had more immediate impact on a city, than an absolute increase in size.

¹⁴ Meller, H. 1976: p. 2

¹⁵ Morris R.J. and Rodger R. 1993: p.44

¹⁶ Fraser, H.W. and Morris, R.J. 1990: 75

¹⁷ Meller, H.E. 1976: p. 21

Land within the central areas of cities changed from being primarily residential to commercial and business centres. With the exodus of citizens from the centre, population density grew around a city's periphery, and with this the emergence of social zoning and the development of the suburb. The de-population of central districts of cities began from the 1860s, and helped ease the intense overcrowding of earlier decades. However, it left the city centre to become the place of 'commercial opulence and municipal pride', with only pockets of poor housing remaining, for the very low paid casual worker.¹⁸ The building of large, impressive civic buildings had begun in the 1830s, but it was from mid-century that civic pride became an important force, which culminated in not only the building of majestic civic structures but also saw expensive street widening projects and local public amenities being developed, such as libraries, parks and baths.¹⁹ The desire to display a city's status through its civic buildings ensured the central parts of Britain's cities, from the 1850s, 'became more tidy, business like, and consciously impressive'.²⁰ Hidden as far as possible, were the diminishing number, but more intensively overcrowded homes, of those who could not afford to escape.

The clearance of much of the worst slum housing in urban centres took place not only for the development of new government and commercial

¹⁸ Best, G. 1979: p. 33

¹⁹ Ibid p. 81.

²⁰ Ibid p. 83

buildings but also to accommodate railways. It was the railway which perhaps became 'the most important single influence on the spatial arrangements in the Victorian city'.²¹ They redefined Britain's cities by removing areas of congested housing, amending employment opportunities, contributing to congestion in adjacent districts and of traffic in the centre, and lowering the social tone of the neighbourhood.²² Within London, some 800 acres of central land were taken for railway purposes during the course of the nineteenth century, entailing the displacement of between 76,000 and 120,000 persons.²³ Proportionally, similar figures were estimated for the other major British cities, because the railways were extremely land hungry.²⁴ Even outside the central district of a city, the railways consumed large areas, with marshalling yards, locomotive carriage works and engine sheds.²⁵ The effect of these yards was to create a barrier within a city, by compressing areas which were within walking range of the city centre, stabilizing the land value for residential housing, and reducing the improvement prospects of the fringe areas of city centres.²⁶

Apart from the physical changes to the centre, the railway also altered the whole social geography of the city. Although the railway was only

²¹ Morris R.J. and Rodger, R. 1993: p. 22

²² Ibid p.22 and Best, G. 1979: p.51

²³ Royale, E. 1997: p. 27

²⁴ Kellet, J.R. 1993 'The railway as an agent of internal change in Victorian cities' in Morris, R.J and Rodger, R. (Eds.) *The Victorian City* p. 185

²⁵ Ibid p. 186

²⁶ Ibid p.191

reinforcing the existing social trend of the better off, moving out of the centre to the suburb, it did assist in enabling more people to live at a distance from their place of work. Social zoning was a characteristic of the modern city, and railways and later trams, helped to reinforce the situation, particularly in London. Elsewhere, in the provinces, many respectable suburbs, remained within walking distance of city centres. Here the reasons which determined where the better off moved to, was governed more by being 'upwind and uphill of the most noxious down-town areas' away from the 'stinking river, canal and railway line'.²⁷ By the end of the century, public transport became increasingly important to all cities, because it dictated how easily and cheaply a person could get to work, determined where people lived and largely kept the poor within the city centre.²⁸ However, it also united communities and gave provincial municipalities a new coherence and sense of identity.²⁹

The physical alteration and growth of all cities gave them the attributes of a modern city. City centres were largely transformed into commercial and civic zones and a modern transport system and suburbs divided the residents into social groups.³⁰ Alterations to the physical characteristics of a city, transformed the living environment of its citizens, but the accompanying social changes proved to be as extensive and far reaching.

²⁷ Royale, E. 1997: p.28

²⁸ Ibid p. 29

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Meller, H. 1976: p. 22

Social Class and the Urban Environment

British urban society became, 'more complex, stratified and regulated during the course of the nineteenth century'.³¹ The city, with its massing together of people, enabled a sustained awareness of different social conditions to take place, and it became the natural location for class formation.³² Pre-industrial society had been a hierarchical one, but the rise of industrialists, merchants and professional men within towns and cities, who resented the social and political privileges of landed aristocrats, saw the demise of this structure, to be replaced by a new urban class consciousness.

The social division and tensions of society had many roots and, 'was never as simple as the three-class wisdom suggests'.³³ The expansion of cities provided many elements in which new social structures and conflicts could develop. Elements included the residential social segregation of citizens, which 'emphasized the separate identities of different social groups' and the physical closeness of groups on the periphery, 'which nurtured the passion for fine distinctions and subtle nuances of differentiation of status which marked all levels of Victorian society'.³⁴ Class consciousness was not simply a matter of economic or residential status, but for many the real

³¹ Morris and Rodger 1993: p.39 and Thompson, F.L.M. 1993: p.33

³² Cannadine, D. and Reeder, D. 1982: p. 6

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid: p.34

embodiment of class, and class struggle was a struggle between ideals.³⁵ For this reason, no class was homogeneous, and divisions within a class, were as intense as between classes.

Throughout the century, social relationships alternated between periods of relative class harmony to periods of intense social unrest. One period of widespread social unrest occurred during the 1830s and 1840s. It was an occasion when the urban working-class, merged their various economic and political grievances and united against the dominant classes, stimulating a real fear of revolutionary conflict.³⁶ Critics blamed the city for these social tensions, citing the breakdown of traditional communities and the denial of social responsibility by the wealthy.³⁷ Legislative measures were introduced, but the ideal of social cohesion was promoted as achievable through paternalistic methods of social control. By mid-century, relative social harmony had been restored, and most Victorians, 'thought of themselves as living in a structured class society in which class positions were clearly recognized'.³⁸ They also prided themselves on 'the social stability which they enjoyed and believed that within the class system individuals could rise by hard work'.³⁹ Several theories have been used to explain these middle years

³⁵ Royale, E. 1997:p.278. Royale is discussing Harold Perkin's thesis that 'a viable class society was created with the triumph of the middle-class entrepreneurial ideal over its rival aristocratic and working-class ideals'.

³⁶ Rose, M.E. 1981: p. 278

³⁷ Coleman, B.I. 1973: p. 6

³⁸ Royale, E. 1997: p.108

³⁹ Royale, E 1997: p.108

of apparent social stability but the main credit is often given to the 'labour aristocracy'.⁴⁰

Labour aristocrats were skilled working men 'whose ideology of respectability was believed to have led to co-operation with the middle classes'.⁴¹ They headed the upper stratum of the manual working-class, whose skills as engineers, printers, instrument makers, boiler makers and others were essential to expanding industrial production. Their share of this expanding industrial production made them more ready to accept the values of the capitalist middle-class and less likely to challenge the dominant social order.⁴² A further explanation for the stabilizing of class relations has been credited to the 'owners of capital who, worried by the challenges of previous decades, used specific bribes, notably legislation on factory hours, to bring about an alliance with the working population which had threatened their power'.⁴³ Individual case studies of towns and cities have shown however, that far from attempting class collaboration, skilled artisans created their own distinct ideology, based upon 'respectability', which arose as much from their own pride, traditions and independence as through collaboration or indoctrination by another class.⁴⁴ The labour aristocracy was a distinct section within the manual working-class, but made up only about 10% of this large

⁴⁰ Royale, E. 1997: p.108-9.

⁴¹ Morris and Rodger 1993: p.30

⁴² Rose, M.E. 1981: p. 280

⁴³ Morris and Rodger 1993: p. 30.

⁴⁴ Royale, E.1997: p. 110

group by mid-century. Their concentration and economic improvement in some cities, enabled them to create areas of housing which were discrete and distinctive. To sustain a wide variety of formal organizations – friendly societies, building societies, literary clubs and co-operative societies – which were separate from the middle classes whose dominance was rejected but distinct from the labouring poor whose lifestyle they despised.⁴⁵

Below them in earning power and security of employment were a large number of workers employed in manufacturing industry, mining and transport. Many of this group also strove to achieve 'respectability', despite their less fortunate circumstances. Their working-class ideals have been described as 'pragmatic and conservative'.⁴⁶ The majority could not afford to challenge the established social order and most left the business of class struggle to the organized labour movement. By the end of the century, for a number of wage labourers, a new working-class culture had taken hold, which was centred not on work but leisure.⁴⁷ The urban environment helped foster this new leisure culture. Activities were a little more contained and disciplined than in the recent past, but they were equally open to popular innovation, and the expansion of opportunity and choice within the city was greater.⁴⁸ The local pub provided a convenient meeting place for many mutual interest groups to form, from pigeon fancying, dog breeding to dart playing and various sports,

⁴⁵ Morris and Rodger, 1993: p.30

⁴⁶ Royle, E. 1997: p.110

⁴⁷ Steadman-Jones G. 1983: pp. 179-238

⁴⁸ Morris and Rodger, 1993: p. 35

with the chapel and the street, also providing another focus for clubs, associations and family networks to gather.

Below this a larger number of unskilled labourers existed, who competed desperately for jobs. Underemployment, insecurity, and low earnings characterized this section of the working-class.⁴⁹ The majority were immigrants, often from Ireland, who huddled together in the unfriendly city for mutual support. Escape from the city centre, by those able to do so, had left only the most unpleasant areas of unwanted houses for this underclass to settle in. These inner city slum ghettos created a climate of fear and consternation among the rest of Victorian society, spread by suspicion and ignorance, because their absolute size was not vast.⁵⁰ Despite the relatively small area which the slums occupied within the inner city, the perceived moral collapse of the inhabitants, was the reason behind middle-class activists' attempts to first control and then civilize the urban working-class. Even amongst the poorest however, social networks of family, street and neighbourhood provided mutual support and prevented the anomie, anarchy and collapse of social order which was feared.

The diversity of experience within the working-class, 'between urban and rural, skilled and unskilled, 'aristocracy of labour' and common or garden workers', meant the working-class could rarely unite behind a common

⁴⁹ Rose, M.E. 1981: p. 281

⁵⁰ Thompson, F. M. L. 1993: p. 62

ideology.⁵¹ The positive consequences of urbanization and industrialization, of rising wages, stable prices and a better urban environment, had filtered down the social scale, by the end of the century but they were largely of benefit only to the labour aristocracy. A large number of working people saw little material improvement in their lives, and social investigations in the last decade of the century, revealed that one third of the population were still at a level below that for a healthy existence.⁵² Threat of a breakdown in society remained a real anxiety, from amongst this underclass. Nevertheless, the informal network of communities, family ties, street allegiances, which were often invisible to contemporary social investigators, sustained all the working-class and gave the social fabric of cities some 'stability, cohesion and orderliness'.⁵³

If the majority of the working classes benefited little from urbanization and industrialization, it was not the case for the middle-class, which became the dominant force within the city.⁵⁴ This new middle-class won important concessions from the upper landed class and had consolidated its power by the 1850s to the extent that 'the nineteenth century city became increasingly a middle-class place'.⁵⁵ The middle-class was the most numerous and the most influential and, like the working-class, it could not be considered as one monolithic group. It was 'a complexed and fissured social formation' and

⁵¹ Perkin, H. 1980: p. 231

⁵² Rose, M. E. 1981: p. 281. Social investigations included the surveys of Charles Booth in East London in 1886 and Seebohm Rowntree in York in 1899.

⁵³ Thompson, F.L.M. 1993: p. 57

⁵⁴ Rose, M.E. 1981: p. 278

⁵⁵ Morris and Rodger 1993: p. 35

consisted of leading businessmen, industrialists and members of the professions at one end, to shop keepers, small businessmen and clerks at the other.⁵⁶ As well as the wide range of economic positions, the middle classes were also acutely conscious of how their income was earned. The various means of earning a middle-class living, attached a differing social status to each occupation, and influenced the social acceptance of individuals, the formation of class ideals and effectively divided the class into numerous and subtly separate groups.

The roots of middle-class consciousness were formed from among what has commonly been called the 'entrepreneurial class'.⁵⁷ It included the industrialists and businessmen of the nineteenth century city, both large factory owners and small shop keepers. They were not typical of the whole of their class, and there were marked regional differences, but 'through the eyes of their contemporaries and in their own propaganda they were the embodiment of the middle-class'.⁵⁸ This embodiment was expressed through their independence and ideals of,

*proud self-reliance, disdain of aristocratic patronage, repudiation of idleness, luxury, and conspicuous display, belief in the career open to talent rather than to breeding and rewards for individual effort and merit rather than for good connections and fervent commitment to the virtues of work, earnestness, sobriety and strict sexual morality.*⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Kidd, A. J. and Roberts, K. W. 1985: p.4

⁵⁷ Perkin, H. 1971: p. 222

⁵⁸ Royale, E. 1997: p.106

⁵⁹ Thompson, F.L.M. 1993: p. 44

These ideals or as it was termed 'work ethic', were also the ideals of the professional middle-class.⁶⁰ However, the professional middle-class were quite separate from the middle-class of industry and commerce. One clear distinction was that they derived their income not from profits, but from fees and salaries. The older honourable professions, the church, the armed forces and the law, were almost part of the aristocratic world, but the newer professions, surgeons, writers, lesser clergy, schoolmasters and attorneys quickly acquired almost equal status. Gentrification was acquired through public school and university education, formal qualifications and professional organizations.⁶¹ For them, the city often became a focus around which they developed a varied culture of voluntary societies, church, chapel and family networks.⁶²

A further faction within the urban middle-class, were those who saw 'comfort, pleasure and display as proper rewards and necessary confirmations of their worldly success and came to have reservations about living in the city at all'.⁶³ Many of this upper middle-class detached themselves from the city and their source of income, by retreating to country mansions, whilst others built grand villas and established exclusive areas in parts of the city, such as Edgbaston in Birmingham, Victoria Park in

⁶⁰ Thompson, F. M. L. 1993: p.44

⁶¹ Royale, E. 1997: p. 106

⁶² Morris and Rodger, 1993: p. 35

⁶³ Thompson, F. M. L. 1993: p. 45

Manchester, Sefton Park In Liverpool and Kelvinside in Glasgow.⁶⁴ Leaving much of the leadership of cities to the middling and lower end of the middle-class, who lived in the city all the time.⁶⁵

Not all of the bourgeois elite who retreated from the city, neglected it entirely. Those who did retain an interest in their city often did so through voluntary action. Action to solve the social problems of the city, was a source of much middle-class debate. It included the desire to reform the morals and civilize the senses of the working classes and to improve the physical condition of the city.⁶⁶ Victorian social policy included government intervention, but another method of middle class intervention, which caused much debate, and became an issue of national importance, was rational recreation. Largely unsuccessful as an improving force, only slowly did the middle-class alter their ideals about reforming working-class behaviour.

One further middle-class faction, which 'virtually took control of the cities in the course of the fifty years before 1914' were the lower middle classes.⁶⁷ Comprised of small shopkeepers, tradesmen, clerks and businessmen, this group strove to establish a clear line between themselves and the skilled working-class. They considered themselves socially superior in education, respectability, refinement and lifestyle.⁶⁸ Yet their family incomes

⁶⁴ Thompson, F.L.M. 1993: p. 46

⁶⁵ Thompson, F.L.M. 1993: p.47

⁶⁶ Kidd, A.J. and Roberts, K.W. 1985: p. 15

⁶⁷ Thompson, F.L.M. 1993: p. 66

⁶⁸ Thompson, F.L.M. 1993: p. 63

were often lower, as it was not appropriate for their wives to go out to work, and they often resided in similar housing. Therefore to define their middle-class status, they developed 'the cult of the genteel – namely thrift, sobriety, disapproval of frivolity, abhorrence of debt, suppression of sexuality, attendance at church or chapel'.⁶⁹ Church or chapel, became the only communities to which it was either appropriate or affordable to belong. However, despite their isolation and retreat into the privacy of the family, the lower middle-class became highly visible within the city. Exodus from the city of those above them, ensured many from the lower middle-class were elected as local councillors and this helped maintained their control over the city.

Despite 'the complex, sometimes contradictory, matrix of values, practices and institutions which constituted Victorian middle-class ideology', and the wide variations in incomes, aspirations and places of residence, the urban middle-class became the social and cultural force within the nineteenth century city.⁷⁰ They maintained their independence from those above them and distanced and attempted to reform those below them, whilst always conforming to their ideal of respectability. Their numbers and presence within society, enabled mid-Victorian Britain to become a relatively stable and socially cohesive society, and their power and influence over the British city continued into the twentieth century.

⁶⁹ Thompson, F.M.L. 1993: p. 64

⁷⁰ Kidd, A.J. and Roberts, K.W. 1985: p.17

In contrast, aristocratic power and influence over the British city, diminished during the century. The members of the aristocracy were significantly smaller in number than for any other class and many abdicated their responsibility for the city by retreating to the country. Not all of the gentry could be accused of abandoning the city and London in particular, retained a high proportion of aristocratic residents. Yet in provincial cities, even the retaining of a town house declined. Many opted out of the city because of the obvious unhealthy overcrowding, dirt, smoke and smell, whilst provincial cities were considered too dull and unexciting in comparison to London.

In general, nineteenth century urban Britain had a restricted range of towns and cities where the aristocracy or gentry were part of the urban community. The contraction of the elite, in urban society, meant many lost touch with the majority of citizens and their understanding and connection with city life was dependent upon patronage of various associations. By the end of the century, 'British society was headed by a plutocracy, an aristocracy of wealth rather than land'.⁷¹

Aristocratic life did however, exert a substantial influence on Victorian urban society. It furnished some of its values and attitudes onto the upper middle-class and 'the gentrification of the bourgeoisie in manners, behaviour, family life and social conventions, was clearly something which happened in

⁷¹ Rose, M.E. 1981: p.279

towns'.⁷² At the same time however, acceptance of gentry values did not go unchallenged by the rest of the bourgeoisie. All sections of society within urban Britain, tried to claim and reinforce their independence, both from those above them and those below them. Specific class cultures and ideals emerged, culminating in a fragmented urban society, which the urban environment itself continued to foster, with its residential social segregation. Throughout the nineteenth century, further social divisions and tensions were continually created within the city through the elements of, uneven wealth distribution, income distribution, education, occupation and religion.⁷³ The excessive inequalities of the social condition of the people remained a powerfully divisive force.⁷⁴ Taken as a whole, the nineteenth century city and 'the triumph of urbanization proved to be socially divisive more than a socially unifying process'.⁷⁵

Problems of Urban Living

Social division and tension were never solely confined to the city. They had been and continued to be issues within rural society as well - but neither were they the most pressing problem of city living. The rampant, demographic, territorial and economic growth of cities, was accompanied by other more obvious problems. One of the most severe, was the poor health of

⁷² Thompson, F.L.M. 1993: p. 43

⁷³ Thompson, F.L.M. 1993: p. 33

⁷⁴ Walvin, J. 1987: p.51

⁷⁵ Thompson, F.L.M. 1993: p.33

city dwellers. Poor health was slowly attributed to the physical conditions within urban environments. Inadequate housing, primitive sanitation, polluted air and water, all inflamed the subsequent disease epidemics. Almost as challenging as a city's physical difficulties, were though the need to preserve law and order amongst the masses, to establish schools in a still predominantly illiterate society and to provide better basic public services and amenities. Adding to these difficulties, was the inexperience of the country as a whole, in dealing with the problems of over-rapid urban growth. Both national and local government were unprepared for the situation. The contemporary philosophy and *laissez - faire* attitude of leaving things alone, plus the lack of a coherent plan to address the issues quickly, caused the desperate problems and sufferings of many city residents in the first half of the century. By the end of the century, modern city life became infinitely more tolerable for the majority of citizens, through parliamentary legislation, repeated reorganization of local government, feats of civil engineering and countless philanthropic enterprises. However, it was the problems of the urban environment, which stirred social comment and characterized nineteenth century city living,

The new industrial cities into which people poured, were as unprepared to receive them as they were unprepared to live in an urban environment. Lack of proper housing, overcrowding, inadequate environmental sanitation, polluted water supplies, and malnutrition combined to make the life of the city dwellerand that of his family, hard desperate and hazardous to health and life .⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Skipp, V. 1983: p. 8

Inadequate housing for the working-class masses was considered the root cause of their poor physical, social and moral health, although it was not possible to separate the problems of housing, from those of health and poverty. Working-class housing varied enormously between towns, depending on geography, local traditions and materials.⁷⁷ It ranged from the cellars of Liverpool and Manchester, the wretchedness of St. Giles of the courts of the City of London, the large tenement blocks of Glasgow, to the improved dwellings of the complete industrial communities of New Lanark or Saltaire.⁷⁸ Manchester in particular, became infamous in the early nineteenth century for the appalling living conditions within its inner city slums, but 'Manchester was only the most shocking example of a phenomenon that came to characterize plebeian domestic life throughout urban England'.⁷⁹ The sheer human tide seeking accommodation had overwhelmed most town planners, so towns generally grew in an unplanned muddle, and 'there was little tidy logic in British urban development'.⁸⁰ Home for many nineteenth century working-class Britons remained 'a place of overcrowding, ill health, high mortality and damp and ill-lit discomfort'.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Walvin, J. 1987: p. 39

⁷⁸ Ryder, J. and Silver, H. 1972: p. 43 New Lanark developed by Robert Owen as an experiment in social provision for workers in the cotton mills between 1800-25. Saltaire was a community for 4,000 workers of the manufacturer Titus Salt near Shipley from 1851.

⁷⁹ Walvin, J. 1984: p.191

⁸⁰ Morris and Rodger 1993: p. 50

⁸¹ Walvin, J. 1987: p.42

Poor housing was only one of the more obvious factors in the appalling ill-health of British city dwellers. Overcrowding in itself was perhaps the least of the evils suffered by the city population, 'it was the dirt and lack of facilities for cleaning which made the cities poisonous dens of filth and disease'.⁸² Sanitary reports from the 1830s, first illustrated the link between the urban environment, poverty and poor health and high rates of mortality.⁸³ However, it was the regular outbreaks of infectious disease, which killed thousands, rich and poor alike, that intensified public debate.

The cholera epidemics of 1831-2 and 1848-9, in particular, ensured that public health became a priority. Alarmed by these outbreaks, the government began to consider their causes. Two major inquiries were set in motion, the *Report of the Health of Towns Committee* in 1840, and the *Report on an Inquiry into the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, sponsored by the Poor Law Commission and written by Edwin Chadwick. Before Government acted, a Royal Commission was ordered, which reported in 1844 and 1845 as the Health of Towns Commission. The final outcome of all government investigations was the creation of the Public Health Act of 1848.⁸⁴ Despite overwhelming evidence about the unhealthiness of British cities, the Government remained reluctant to act. Credit for the 1848 Act and other health reforms, must largely go to men like Chadwick. Chadwick

⁸² Gregg, P. 1971: p. 195

⁸³ In the 1830s medical men submitted reports on the insanitary conditions of city slums. The key reports were from, Dr Southwood-Smith, Dr Arnott and Dr Kay.

⁸⁴ Gregg, P. 1971: p. 193 and Ryder, J. and Silver, H. 1972: p. 48

was a central figure in shaping changes in social policy, and his *Sanitary Report* of 1842, demonstrated that the urban environment and conditions, were more liable to epidemic, more productive of disease, than non-urban conditions. Life expectancy was shown to be directly related to poverty and social class.⁸⁵ The most important outcome of Chadwick's report was however, the connection between disease and the environment. If poverty and disease were largely caused by the environment and not personal failing, then it was possible to improve them by intervention to change the environment.⁸⁶ Many of his findings and those of the subsequent Health of Towns Commission, set up in 1843, were initially treated with suspicion. The recommendations for sanitary reform proved difficult to implement, including the resultant 1848 Public Health Act, which was more restricted than Chadwick had hoped and aroused hostility from many because of the centralization it entailed.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the Act gave the General Board of Health real powers, including that 'of ordering an enquiry in a town if a tenth of the rate payers petition for it, or if the annual mortality in a town exceeded 23 per 1,000'.⁸⁸

High mortality rates and the differences between social classes, particularly for infant mortality, was immense. Yet all age groups and social

⁸⁵ Ryder, J. and Silver, H. 1972: p. 47

⁸⁶ Walvin, J. 1987: p.34

⁸⁷ Ryder, J. and Silver, H. 1972: p. 49

⁸⁸ Ibid

classes were at risk: whooping cough alone killed 10,000 each year by mid-century, and was much more virulent in the towns than the countryside, as was scarlet fever, typhus and typhoid.⁸⁹ But it was tuberculosis which ravaged its affliction on the urban poor. TB killed one Briton in six throughout the century and it was the awareness that towns were dangerous which created the urge to flee to the fresh air.⁹⁰

The precise cause of many diseases remained unknown, despite improving medical knowledge. The urban environment was normally cited as a primary factor, but there was little improvement in either the health or environment of city inhabitants. From the late 1850s, alternative approaches to public health began to take shape. John Simon, the first Medical Officer of Health for London, was an eminent medical figure, and ultimately more influential than Chadwick for he 'worked towards a conception of public health administration dominated by medical considerations'.⁹¹ Medical knowledge made great strides in the 1870s and the decline in mortality rates from this time were evidence of this expertise. Simon changed the focus of health policy from sanitation to medicine, and the subsequent 1875 Public Health Act was to remain the basis for control of public health over the next century.⁹² Nevertheless, despite improvements in public health, through both medical expertise and environmental improvements, 'the British remained an

⁸⁹ Ryder, J. and Silver, H. 1972: p.28

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ Ibid p. 50

⁹² Walvin, J. 1987: p. 36

unhealthy people' and city life continued to cause many of the nation's physical problems.⁹³

Fear of crime and lawlessness was another ever present concern within Britain's expanding cities. Urban disturbances illustrated the fragility of social control in the major cities and the decline in church attendance among the working-class in particular, also intensified belief that society was out of control.⁹⁴ Eighteenth century Britain had been considered ungovernable, and as cities expanded during the nineteenth century, the recurring nightmare was of a major urban explosion. Any massing together of people, for whatever reason, caused alarm as the forces of law and order that were in place, had proved inadequate to cope. Even many traditional forms of popular culture, that involved large crowds, such as games of street football, caused concern.

Urban riots were however, infrequent events. More worrying was the daily difficulty of keeping the peace among city inhabitants, many of whom were stricken by poverty.⁹⁵ Theories about criminal behaviour ranged from the belief that 'crime was a matter of individual moral failure' to the view that 'man is intrinsically good and is corrupted only by his environment'.⁹⁶ Among social reformers these contradictory views merged behind a reforming zeal, that

⁹³ Walvin, J. 1987: p. 37

⁹⁴ Walvin, J. 1987: p.46-7

⁹⁵ Walvin, J. 1987: p.68

⁹⁶ Walvin, J. 1987: p.213

believed Christian values, education and sanitary reform could purge cities of their criminals.⁹⁷

There continued to be periods of alarm at the level of crime, but it was generally confined to specific areas and communities. Law-abiding, peaceable behaviour was a consequence of the introduction of policing, with greater powers of law enforcement, and enhanced legislation, but many other institutions played a part in maintaining social order. Family, community, work place, church, school and leisure institutions were all places, which in different ways, encouraged obedient behaviour. Nevertheless, the greatest incentive to remain law abiding, was the increased material prosperity from the 1880s. Respectable working-class as well as middle-class citizens, had the same desire to protect their improved life styles.⁹⁸ Urban crime and unrest remained an underlying concern, but the fear of a breakdown in social order of the early decades, was replaced by a lengthy period of urban tranquility.⁹⁹

Many other endemic difficulties worried Victorian urban society, and included concerns about the decline in church attendance, to the problem of youth, the education of the masses, how to cope with the burial of the dead and inadequate nutrition. They were all concerns bound up with conditions within the city - unacceptable levels of poverty, ill-health, poor housing and the widening gap between rich and poor. These issues continued to plague

⁹⁷ Walvin, J. 1987: p.213

⁹⁸ Walvin, J. 1987: p.79

⁹⁹ Walvin, J. 1984: p.137

urban life and reminded even optimistic social reforms of how much needed to be done. Progress and reform were alarmingly slow. The state, local government and voluntary agencies, all initially seemed incapable of solving them.¹⁰⁰

National and Local Government Reform

Despite the overwhelming and obvious problems of city living, the prevailing philosophy of nineteenth century government, remained that of freedom for the individual and the maintenance of the lowest possible public expenditure. Legislation was often only permissive, allowing local authorities to preserve their independence and react according to local circumstance or upon the influence of individuals and groups in particular cities. Yet the increasingly complex modern urban society, eventually demanded, as many had feared, a more centralized administrative state.¹⁰¹ There was a steady increase in the extent, depth and density of governmental power through the century, as the need for a more effective form of urban government grew.¹⁰²

Increased governmental power essentially occurred through two avenues. Firstly, Parliament which supervised national legislation, created agencies and powers for much of urban government. Secondly, the reformed corporations, elected by ratepayers, consolidated and extended the power of

¹⁰⁰ Walvin, J. 1987: p. 80

¹⁰¹ Royale, E. 1997: p. 197

¹⁰² Morris and Rodger 1993: p. 37

the local state.¹⁰³ An early example of increased governmental power, and also the establishment of democratic and effective urban self-government for England, is often dated from the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835.¹⁰⁴ Although this piece of legislation was important, and profound transformation of urban government did occur subsequently, the process was a long drawn out one, and the 1835 Act was not a dramatic radical piece of legislation.¹⁰⁵ It required very little and left everything to the initiative of the individual municipal corporation.¹⁰⁶ Also the Act was not applicable to Scotland. Despite the many similarities in the processes of urbanization between England and Scotland, it was within the context of local municipal government that differences between the two countries was most distinct. It is where 'we need a distinctly Scottish language of Dean of Guild, of feu charters and Royal Burghs.... Urban refers to a specific form of local authority, located in space and associated with powers, in Scotland that meant the burgh in its various forms'.¹⁰⁷ The Royal Burgh despite its ancient origins still formed the basis of Scottish urban authority in the nineteenth century and clearly shape the development and experiences of Scottish urban places.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Morris and Rodger 1993: p.37

¹⁰⁴ Fraser, D. 1982: p.2

¹⁰⁵ Fraser, D.1982: p.2

¹⁰⁶ Best, G. 1979: p. 57

¹⁰⁷ Morris, R.J. *Urbanization in Scotland* in Fraser, H.W. and Morris, R.J. (Eds.) 1990: p.73

¹⁰⁸ Ibid p. 84

The key battle of administration, for all British cities, was that of local versus national control. National legislation was passed throughout the century, covering all the endemic problems of city living - housing, health, crime, and education.¹⁰⁹ However, up until the First World War, the Acts were permissive, relatively ineffective and did not require drastic action. Yet without intervention and pressure from central government, local corporations were generally reluctant to respond to public needs and more intent on the needs of civic dignity.¹¹⁰

Local self government and independence from 'centralization' was the strong feature of the mid Victorian urban authority. The consequence of this independence resulted in extraordinary variety and variation in the nature and quality of municipal activities.¹¹¹ Three cities can provide brief illustrations, of the independence and differences of municipal authorities. Liverpool's urban administration had for a long time been exemplary. It passed many local acts from the 1840s to control housing and sanitation and these were powerfully enforced. In 1847, it appointed Britain's first Medical Officer of Health (MOH) and improved the basic public utilities of gas and water. Again using local by-laws, Liverpool was one of the few cities, along with Glasgow, that interfered

¹⁰⁹ Some of the national legislation passed to deal with the problems of rapid urban development included - 1868 Artisans' and Labourers Dwellings Act, concerned with the individual insanitary house; 1875 Cross Act, concerned with the insanitary area; 1866 Sanitary Act, concerned with overcrowding; 1848 Public Health Act, set up local boards of health with medical officers of health; 1847 Town Police Act and 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act both contributed to greater police powers; 1870 Education Act created locally elected School Boards to provide basic education to the poorer classes. This was only a very small proportion of the vast legislation that was passed.

¹¹⁰ Ryder, J. and Silver H. 1972: p. 45

¹¹¹ Fraser, H. *Municipal Socialism and Social Policy* in Morris and Rodger (Eds.) 1993: p.260.

with private property rights, to widen streets and reduce congestion.¹¹² By contrast, in Manchester, the polarization of the city's social structure ensured that hostile local interests effectively delayed any meaningful legislation from the authority. However, the Sanitary Improvement Act of 1845 by Manchester was credited with being the model for the later national Public Health Act of 1848. Whilst at the same time, in continuing to guard its independence, Manchester did not appoint a MOH until 1867, despite this being a recommendation of Parliament in the 1848 Health Act.¹¹³ Such provincial independence was not limited to Manchester. Birmingham's approach to municipal government was also unique, and it earned the reputation of being the best governed city in the world. But it was not until the 1870s, and the 'civic gospel' of Joseph Chamberlin, that Birmingham acquired such prominence. It had lagged behind other major cities, in terms of effective municipal government, prior to the 1870s. There was little new in the measures taken by Birmingham, but

...it was Birmingham that awakened the nation to the possibilities of municipal enterprise as the main hope of improving the condition of large towns... Birmingham gave a momentum that continued for decades, helping to improve the quality of local government throughout the land.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Best, G. 1979: p. 62

¹¹³ Best, G. 1979: p. 63

¹¹⁴ Fraser, H. *Municipal socialism and social policy* in Morris and Rodger (Eds.) 1993: p.263

Whatever the individual nature of each city's municipal activity, all had introduced measures to combat the worst excesses of urban life by the 1870s. When reviewing the progress of municipal government nationally, particularly in terms of public health provision, several phases, common to all authorities, can be identified. The acute problem and concern for public health was recognized by the 1840s and initial investments in water and sewerage were made by the majority of towns. By the 1850s, the financial effect of these municipal initiatives were felt in terms of rising rates and many citizens voted against further costly improvements. There then followed a period of civic consciousness in most major cities with three further key initiatives. Firstly investments in sanitation were increased, then municipal authorities took over essential utilities like gas, water and tramways and lastly towns began extensive demolitions of crowded and unhealthy properties.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, all intervention, whether nationally or locally instituted had happened piecemeal, without any overall policy of state action, and although 'municipal socialism' was becoming acceptable, state socialism remained abhorrent.¹¹⁶ Yet the problems of late nineteenth century cities, rather than decreasing, were even greater and more intractable than earlier. The weakness of the existing legislation, the inadequacies of private and voluntary effort, and the inability of most local authorities to bear the cost of extended civic responsibilities were all too obvious. National government

¹¹⁵ Morris and Rodger 1993: p. 37

¹¹⁶ Royale, E. 1997: p. 203

began extensive subsidy of local authority income and also introduced legislation, which although still piecemeal in character, 'marked a significant extension of central government's responsibilities in society'.¹¹⁷ Late nineteenth century urban society saw the rise of the interventionist state, within health, housing, education, law and order, in an attempt to end deprivation and 'to remove the excessive inequalities in the social condition of the people'.¹¹⁸ Yet success was limited. City living had improved for many, but for others, poverty, ill health, overcrowding and the ever widening gap between rich and poor remained. A centralized administration was having some effect, but it was well into the twentieth century before government tackled the acute urban difficulties with any real intent.

Summary

The urban environment with all its problems and possibilities dominated British life throughout the nineteenth century. No two towns or cities were alike, each retained their own distinct characteristics and variations in economic and social structure. Nevertheless, all towns and cities underwent similar transformations in the process of modernizing. Rapid population growth, changes in physical development and altered social relationships were all part of the transformation. Plus the accompanying acute problems of poverty, ill health, poor housing, and rising crime, which proved difficult to

¹¹⁷ Coleman, B.I. 1973: p. 15

¹¹⁸ Attributed to Joseph Chamberlin cited in Walvin, J. 1987: p. 51

contain and necessitated the evolution of a new relationship between central and local government. The urban environment could also be an unfriendly and isolating experience for people more used to smaller rural communities. Despite these many difficulties urban living also brought with it certain advantages, and the overall impact of the modern town and city on the living patterns of its inhabitants was profound. To cope with their new environment and situation, inhabitants of towns and cities used the assets of urban life, 'freedom of choice, mobility and a wider range of social and cultural experiences to provide greater personal fulfilment and to oversee a revolutionary era in sporting development'.¹¹⁹ It is the impact of the urban environment on the development of sport in nineteenth century Britain which will be the focus of the next chapter.

¹¹⁹ Meller, H. 1976: p.1

CHAPTER TWO

THE PLACE OF SPORT IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY URBAN ENVIRONMENT

*...the city was the cradle of modern sport.
...recreation and sport were both reactions
to negative features of city life and products
of the city's technological, economic and
social advantages.¹*

Nineteenth century urbanization and the evolution of modern industrial towns and cities, were the most influential factor in the development of organized sport and recreational activities in Britain. Urban living created both opportunities and difficulties: it was overcrowded, polluted and often isolating, yet, it also provided expanding cultural and social opportunities, to a more concentrated population, who had increased facilities and greater mobility, through an expanding travel infrastructure. Towns and cities directly influenced the sporting culture and institutions of their inhabitants and in return, the new sporting forms impacted on the further modernization of the urban environment. Essentially towns and cities were the places where contemporary sports evolved or were invented.² There has been an increasing volume of literature on the history of British sport, but very little has specifically examined the process of urbanization and the development of

¹ Hardy, S. 1982: p.14

² Reiss, S. 1989: p.1

sport.³ In contrast, American sports history literature, has often placed the city as a focus for explaining the evolution of their sporting culture.⁴ The similarities in the process of urbanization between the two countries, allows the themes highlighted in the American literature to be examined within a British context.

The purpose of this chapter will be to explore, from the sports history literature, the relationship between sport and the urban environment, during the nineteenth century, whilst also providing a broad overview of the developments in swimming in relation to sports in general. In order to understand the influence of urbanization on sport, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the chapter will be divided into three sections. Section one provides a review of the state of popular sport in the first decades of the century and includes a discussion on the vacuum verses continuity debate, of mass sport during this period. Section two discusses the main themes, identified in the American literature for analysing the relationship between sport and the urban environment and will consider how they relate to British

³ Some work on the history of British sport has examined the process of urbanisation and sport, whilst others have concentrated on industrialisation and sport. For example Holt, R. (1989) *Living in the City: Working-class Communities*, chapter in 'Sport and the British'; Holt, R. (1988) *Football and the Urban Way of Life* and Vamplew, W (1988) *Sport and Industrialization: An Economic Interpretation of the Changes in Popular Sport in Nineteenth-Century England*, both in Mangan, J.A. 'Pleasure, Profit and Proselytism'; Tranter, N. (1987a) 'Popular Sports and the Industrial Revolution in Scotland' in *International Journal of Sports History* 4, 1, pp.21-38; Cunningham, H. (1980) *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*; Bilsborough, P. (1983) 'The Development of Sport in Glasgow 1850-1914,' M.Litt thesis; Meller, H. (1976) 'Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914'; and Croll, A. (2000) 'Civilizing the Urban: Popular Culture and Public Space in Merthyr 1870-1914'.

⁴ A few examples of the much more extensive work that has been undertaken in America on sport and the process of urbanisation include: Hardy, S.(1982) *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation and Community 1865-1915*; Reiss, S.A. (1989) *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports*; Adelman, M.L. (1990) *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern*

sport. Whilst the range of issues that the process of urbanization and the development of sport encompasses is very broad, section three of this chapter will concentrate upon three elements of urbanization: the physical, the social and the emotional. These three interrelated perspectives will form the framework, for an examination of the place of sport within the nineteenth century urban environment.

Continuity and Adaptation of Sport in the Urban Environment, 1800-1850.

The unprecedented urban and industrial upheaval was considered, in early accounts of the history of British sport, to have created a vacuum in sporting opportunity for the masses.⁵ Later, despite the fragmentary nature of the evidence which remained, more detailed examination of early nineteenth century popular sports suggested that 'growth or, at worst, stability rather than persistent, pronounced decline' occurred in the playing and watching of sport.⁶ The only pastimes for which there was definite proof of decline, were in blood sports involving animals, plus the clampdown by many local authorities on football, pugilism and other traditional violent sports, although in some

Athletics 1820-7 and Gems, G.R. (1997) *Windy City Wars: Labour, Leisure and Sport in the Making of Chicago*.

⁵ Malcolmson R.W. (1973) argued that there was an almost complete vacuum in working class sport in the first half of nineteenth century. Walvin, J. (1978) and Dunning, E. and Sheard, K. (1979) also argued the case for a decline in mass sporting culture in the early nineteenth century.

⁶ Tranter, N. 1998: p.7. and Cunningham, H. (1980) argue that opportunity for leisure for the masses increased, not declined in first half of nineteenth century.

regions, even these survived longer than was once assumed.⁷ Within many activities, the large population increase and rapid urbanization, of the first half of the nineteenth century, created an environment which encouraged rather than discouraged sport.⁸ In sports where the negative effects of urbanization, namely shortage of space, crowd disturbance and property damage, were not an issue, events continued to flourish. Prize fighting, rowing and sculling events, horse racing, pedestrianism and swimming matches were just a few activities, which continued to draw large urban working-class interest. Working-class involvement in these sporting events was limited for the majority, to the role of spectator. Whilst the size of crowds reported at many events was a reflection of the appeal of sporting occasions for the working classes, they also indicated that their attraction was not limited to the sport itself. Large sporting occasions provided an infrequent opportunity for the working classes, to gather socially, outside of their immediate work and home environment.⁹ More importantly, events were often organized by a local pub, whose proprietor would most probably have been patron and the overwhelming attraction of the occasion was the opportunity to drink and gamble.

⁷ Tranter, N.1998: p.5 and Vamplew, W. 1998: p.11. Evidence of cockfighting, badger-baiting, dog-fighting, hare and rabbit coursing and ratting all persisting until the middle of the century have been found from various regions, Tranter, N. 1987: p.29 and Holt, R. 1989: p. 57-63.

⁸ Tranter, N. 1998: p. 7

⁹ Ibid p.5-6.

Along with spectating, participation in sporting activities by the urban masses also continued. Much of what is now termed 'traditional' sport survived until at least mid-century, with annual festivals or wakes and more regular events, being held in most towns. The programme of activities at a festival usually consisted of ball games, which generally included a form of football, running races and a variety of fighting and animal sports.¹⁰ Such activities were very local in nature. Rules and customs were passed down orally, from one generation to the next and where competition did take place outside of the immediate locality, it would normally involve the neighbouring village or town. Whilst enjoyment of physical recreations, which were completely spontaneous and unorganised, such as swimming in local rivers, lakes or the sea, was a common pastime during the summer months.

Several sports, even in the first half of the century were however, sufficiently well structured to be able to be competitive on a wider scale. Cricket was one of the first team games to be played on a regular basis and became a popular spectator sport in villages and towns, throughout Britain.¹¹ The distinction between cricket, in comparison to the activities enjoyed at local festivals, such as street football, was the level of organization already established in the sport. Aristocratic domination and patronage in cricket, horse-racing, rowing and pugilism, undoubtedly helped in the earlier structural organization of these sports. Written rules, advertised challenges in the press

¹⁰ Holt, R. 1989: p. 13

¹¹ Ibid p.25-6

and the formation of more permanent teams or clubs, helped these sports acquire a more modern, respectable image.¹² In contrast, traditional sport remained associated with a spontaneous, informal, festival culture, where violence, drinking and gambling were more openly tolerated.¹³

That many forms of traditional sport continued within the first wave of urbanization is not now disputed. The process of urbanization itself is now regarded as having been 'evolutionary rather than revolutionary in nature'.¹⁴ Until mid-century, most towns remained within easy access of rural communities, with the urban population continuing to be influenced by rural traditions and customs. However, as the pace of urbanization increased, particularly from 1850s, the physical alteration to towns and cities, the changing social and emotional conditions of living in ever larger urban communities, demanded many changes of the urban environment and its population. Sport and recreation had to adapt in order to survive. A major reason for the decline in traditional working-class sporting recreations was not, as was initially proposed, the changes in patterns and hours of work, or the concerns of property and business owners from unruly crowds, but a desire for respectability.¹⁵ Higher standards of behaviour, in both public and private, were now advocated by those in authority, as well as many of the

¹² Holt, R. 1989: p.28

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Tranter 1998: p.12

¹⁵ Ibid p.10

skilled working classes, who also supported the banning of the more violent and brutal pastimes.¹⁶

Despite the pressure from above and below, the reform of working-class recreations was limited. Many sports, like rowing, did not offend the new code of respectability, whilst others sports, such as cricket and horse-racing, were pursued by the elite and working man together. A further difficulty in the attempt to ban uncivilized sporting contests, such as street football, was the ineffective policing and the determination of the majority of the working classes to retain their traditional festivals and casual sporting customs. The bulk of the working classes, the unskilled and the semi-skilled, did not subscribe to the new code of respectability and therefore continued to pursue their recreations in the manner to which they had become accustomed.¹⁷

Working-class sporting recreations remained vibrant and intact throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century. Alongside the continued sporting passions of the aristocracy and an emerging middle-class obsession, sport remained a vital form of leisure and recreation throughout Britain. The most brutal and violent animal pastimes were on the decline, but pockets of resistance in certain locations, saw the continuation of even these activities. By mid-century however, despite the determination of the masses to retain their traditional sporting forms, the changes associated with

¹⁶ Tranter, N. 1998: p.10

¹⁷ Tranter, N. 1998: p.11

urbanization and industrialization were to prove overwhelming. Town and city life had begun to play its part in transforming the culture of sport in Britain.

The Influence of the Urban Environment on the Emergence of Modern Sport

Nineteenth century British towns and cities, like their American counterparts, can claim that the evolution of the urban environment, 'more than any other single factor, influenced the development of organized sport and recreational athletic pastimes'.¹⁸ A town or city's role in the rise of modern sport consisted of both the physical geographic unit, with its large residential population and expanding transport system and the social unit, of a community of people with ideas and values, which changed over time.¹⁹ Both these roles created positive and negative conditions within the urban environment and from them, an opportunity for sport to counter or improve urban living. On the negative side, urban life could be very restrictive and stifling. The countryside was becoming more inaccessible, yet sports and pastimes provided an escape, for a brief period, from the congestion and dullness of the urban routine. Whilst on the positive side, the new environment created expanding opportunities through improved transport and communication systems, servicing a larger concentrated population, who increasingly had more money and time to spend. All of which enabled the innovations and new sporting recreational forms, which were being adapted to

¹⁸ Reiss, S.A. 1989: p.1

fit in with urban life to become more accessible. The positive and negative features of city life were not mutually exclusive and together they provided the conditions which enabled the development of modern sport to begin.²⁰

British sports history was, 'largely a product of the constant, continuous interaction of the elements of urbanization, with each other and with sport'.²¹ One way to analyse development and change within the urban environment and with sport, is through 'three interrelated perspectives', which include the physical structure, the social organization and the value system or state of mind of urban society.²² With a further critical connection between the changing nature of the urban environment and the changing structure of sport, being the need to establish a rational order and along with the three components of urban society, they help to explain the evolution of modern sport in Britain.²³

The physical structure of a town or city includes, 'its space, demographics, economy and technology', or how changes in population, technology, economy, land development and urban planning caused the evolution of 'specialized business districts, shopping districts, slums and recreation areas and suburbs'.²⁴ Within sport, the physical structures include

¹⁹ Reiss, S.A. 1989: p.1

²⁰ Hardy, S. 1982: p.15

²¹ Reiss, S.A. 1989: p.1

²² Hardy, S. 1982: p.17 These three elements or perspectives were first outlined by Louis Wirth in 'Urbanism as a Way of Life' *American Journal of Sociology* 44, July 1938: pp1-24 and it has remained a key text and form of analysis for much of American sport and urbanisation research.

²³ Adelman, M.A. 1990: p. 7

²⁴ Reiss, S.A. 1989: p.2 and Hardy, S. 1982: p.17

the facilities and environments in which the sport is played.²⁵ Sport stadiums and facilities were often part of the revitalization of slum areas of cities, helping to improve the image of a city and they were a central part in the element of civic pride, which was a strong force in Victorian Britain. Public baths and parks as well as libraries, museums and town halls were part of the civic pride initiative, all physical structures, which became synonymous with the nineteenth century British city.

As social organizations, cities are comprised of class, ethnic, gender and racial groups, social institutions and legal and political institutions.²⁶ All of which are constantly changing and have different ideas about social behaviour, social relationship and social order.²⁷ One element of sport as a social organization is the affect it can have on 'the mechanisms of social status in the city'.²⁸ Social status was displayed through many forms in Victorian life, but participation in particular sporting pastimes was a conspicuous way of confirming your place in society, particularly for the upper classes. Initially, participation in activities which took place outside of the urban environment, especially field sports, were an important way of displaying social superiority amongst the gentry. Later, activities such as yachting continued the trend. Whilst for the urban bourgeoisie, membership of particular sports clubs, either within the city or on its periphery, helped to

²⁵ Hardy, S. 1982: p.18

²⁶ Reiss, S.A. 1989: p.2

²⁷ Hardy, S. 1982: p.18

²⁸ Hardy, S. 1982: p.19

confirm their position within society. Certain sports and clubs, golf and lawn tennis primarily, were bastions of social exclusivity. The location of such clubs within a city could also raise the desirability of an area significantly and they became prime sites for upper class residences.²⁹

The urban value system or state of mind 'grew as a reaction to the physical environment of the city and to perceptions of suffering and degradation caused by cramped housing and industrial pollution'.³⁰ It included the emotional adjustments of both individuals and groups, to urban life and how this shaped their ideology and behaviour.³¹ Two reactions to unchecked urbanization were firstly, a desire to create or maintain rural space within the city and secondly, the need to improve cleanliness and health. The municipal park movement and public baths and wash-houses were products of this reaction. Both altered not only the physical environment of a town or city, by halting urban growth, redirecting railway lines and residential areas, but also the development of sport, by providing areas for sports participation, at least by the later decades of the century.³² Municipal parks and public baths, are two examples of how an outcome of the urban value system was influential in shaping not only the development of towns and cities, but equally important in the evolution of sport.

²⁹ Hardy, S. 1982: p.19

³⁰ Ibid p.20

³¹ Reiss, S.A. 1989: p. 2

³² Hardy, S. 1982: p.20

While the three elements of urbanization, the physical, social and emotional, help to provide a broad picture of the interrelation between the evolution of sport and the development of towns and cities, there are no clear distinctions between them, they overlap and it is difficult to separate one from the other. To assess more closely the development of sport in the nineteenth century town and city, particular sports, events and circumstances need to be considered in greater detail.³³ What part sport played in the lives of urban inhabitants and how the urban environment shaped their participation, will determine the place of sport in the nineteenth century urban environment.

Sport and the Urban Environment

From the 1850s, the scale and nature of Britain's sporting culture underwent a transformation. Over the next fifty years the characteristics of sport changed fundamentally and the pace at which these changes occurred was unprecedented. Sport in its modern, organized, commercialised and extensive form, was truly an 'invention' of the Victorian and Edwardian age and a consequence of the massive physical, social and emotional upheaval of widespread urbanization.³⁴ By 1901, 77% of the population were living in towns or cities.³⁵ Sport during this period, remained a largely male phenomenon, and a significant proportion of the male population would be

³³ Hardy, S. 1982: p.20

³⁴ Tranter, N. 1998.

³⁵ Vamplew, W. 1988: p.13

involved in sport, at some stage in their lives. The range of sports available and the numbers of people playing and watching them markedly increased, but different sports flourished at various times and rates and held different meanings for the widespread groups within society.³⁶ Team sports such as football, had mass popular appeal, others like tennis, remained exclusive to upper middle-class participants. Whilst cycling, badminton and ice skating all had brief periods of immense popularity, followed by a sharp decline, to a steady core of enthusiasts. On a national scale, sport was popular, although 'quantitative data on the numbers actively involved in sport are not easy to find' and it is possible to over emphasize the significance and popularity of sport.³⁷ By the turn of the century, the figures available suggest that ³⁸ 'playing sport, at least at an organized level, was very much a minority activity'.³⁹ However, the fundamental changes to the ways in which sport was played and promoted, ensured a significant increase in sports spectating and the emergence of the sports supporter. A few continuities from an earlier period remained, but sport at the end of the nineteenth century, bore little resemblance to sport as it had been played at the beginning of the century. Sport had become codified, institutionalised and commercialised and the most

³⁶ Tranter, N. 1998: p. 1

³⁷ Vamplew, W. 1988: p. 12.

³⁸ Figures for specific cities and for certain sports are given by several historians, in particular see Vamplew, W. 1988: p. 12 and Tranter, N. 1988: pp.13-15, but a national total, or percentage of either, participating or spectating in sport, at precise times, over the century are more difficult to estimate.

³⁹ Vamplew, W. 1988: p.12 and Tranter, N. 1998: p.13

significant reasons for this transformed sporting culture, can be attributed to the evolution of the urban environment.

Physical changes to towns and cities were a consequence of the modern industrial productive system, which demanded a new division of urban space. Urban land use grew highly specialized and as railway and other transport systems expanded, traditional areas which had been used for sporting recreation were lost to development. A response of many towns and cities, but not all, was to build public parks.⁴⁰ Provided by the municipal authorities, they were intended to provide a clean, healthy, recreational oasis for urban inhabitants. By reducing idle and disorderly activities, such as gambling in urban streets and by offering an alternative to the public house, the traditional leisure venue of the working-class. It was also hoped that whilst using the parks, the working classes would learn to conduct themselves in a 'respectable' manner and that the social training provided by the parks, would ensure that more disciplined working-class behaviour would continue, in their subsequent use of other public spaces.⁴¹ Little was provided specifically for recreation within the parks. Walking was often the only activity undertaken and many social commentators denounced the usefulness of the parks, as sites for healthy recreation, 'the parks are not enough; they are never used for games, and no man or woman past extreme youth can be seen in them

⁴⁰ Manchester led the way in municipal park provision, Birmingham soon followed with its 'civic gospel', and London already had ancient parks, heaths and commercial gardens, but Liverpool was one city which was especially blighted by its shortage of open space within the city. Walvin, J. 1978: p.89

⁴¹ Bramwell, B. 1991: p. 48 in Kearns, G. and Withers, C.W.J. (Eds) *Urbanising Britain*

indulging in anything but a sober walk'.⁴² Gradually, areas were set aside within the parks for ball games and sports pitches, but demand always far exceeded supply.⁴³ Along with the restrictions placed on behaviour, the geography of most municipal park provision, away from inner and central working class neighbourhoods, ensured that the initial impact of the parks on working-class recreation and sport was limited.⁴⁴

A second municipal facility provided within many towns and cities, from the 1840s and stemming from public welfare concerns, were public baths. The initial intention behind their provision, were for the utilitarian purposes of enabling the working classes to keep clean and healthy and as a site where correct social behaviour could be observed, away from the temptation of drink. Unlike many of the municipal parks however, public baths by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, were being used by all social classes, as sites for new forms of sport and recreation. Legislation was passed which actively sanctioned the use of swimming pools for sporting purposes and public baths became an important inner city venue for working-class sporting recreation.⁴⁵

Aside from the provision of specific recreational facilities, the physical change which did most to increase sporting opportunity, within and outside

⁴² *The English Woman's Journal*, Vol 1, May 1858: p. 157

⁴³ Holt, R. 1989: p. 151

⁴⁴ Bramwell, B. 1991: p.52

⁴⁵ The 1878 Public Baths and Washhouses Act, enabled local authorities to be build cover swimming pools designed specifically to swim in as opposed to wash and keep clean.

towns and cities, were the improvements made in transport. Railways were especially land hungry and took away many former recreational spaces, but they also provided cheap and rapid transport,⁴⁶ which widened the catchment area for spectators and enabled participants to compete nationally.⁴⁷ Sports leagues in football, cricket, athletics and bicycling for example, could not have developed at this time, without the infrastructure of the railways.⁴⁸ Few sports escaped the influence of transport improvements. Cricket and horse racing, were two sports which benefited particularly from the railways. Touring professional cricket teams from the late 1840s and 1850s, attracted large crowds around the country, with the players and spectators alike, transported via the railway system.⁴⁹ Whilst the wider mobility of horses, jockeys, officials and spectators with rail travel, 'led to racing becoming a genuine national sport'.⁵⁰ In other sports, easier travel saw an increase in the social and geographical range of participants. Foxhunting in particular benefited, as travel for the elite urban professional and business classes became easier. A further direct consequence of the extension of the railway network was the spread of the middle-class commuter belt, which gave rise to an increase in golf course construction.⁵¹ Within cities, it was the great strides made in cheap

⁴⁶ Meller, H. 1976: p. 226

⁴⁷ Vamplew, W. 1988: p.11

⁴⁸ Meller, H. 1976: p.226

⁴⁹ Vamplew, W. 1988: p.11

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Tranter, N. 1998: p. 34

inner-city transport, 'particularly the tram, which enabled thousands of spectators to be deposited at various stadiums on the edges of cities', which boosted mass spectator sport.⁵²

Although the changing physical structure of towns and cities had a influence in shaping sport, far more significant were the altered social relationships and emotional ties associated with living in large urban communities. One reaction to the overcrowding, disease, pollution, crime and alienation of city living was the creation of a positive sports ideology. Middle-class idealists adopted a sports creed, which advocated non violent, gambling free, team sports, to counter the perceived decline in the physical and moral condition of the people.⁵³ At its worst the modern urban environment was perceived to be impersonal and fragmented and to have 'lost all sense of community'.⁵⁴ Concern was expressed about the corroding effects of urban life. The lack of a replacement for the old stabilizing influences and control, found in former rural communities, of the church, family, and neighbourhood was considered the main cause of urban social decline. Clean, healthy sports were encouraged, as one way of reversing the perceived decline. They were promoted as physically healthy, as morally uplifting, as character building and as able to provide a positive community identity. Sanctioning this ideology

⁵² Walvin, J. 1978: p.90

⁵³ Reiss, S.A. 1989: p.3

⁵⁴ Hardy, S. 1982: p. 25

were bourgeois idealists, whose crusade for sport became known as the rational recreation movement.⁵⁵

Rational recreation as a moralizing force within adult working-class sport was however, a relative failure. The working-class was not one homogeneous group, but composed of different factions, each with their own ideals and values. A significant number of the urban working-class did not have the material resources to become involved in sport, at any level and for others, even when involvement in sport was affordable, it held no interest. Whilst those members of the working-class with the time, money and inclination to pursue sport, strongly resisted and resented any moral interference in their sporting culture. Evidence has suggested, that even within the many nineteenth century football and cricket clubs that had a religious connection, the initiative for setting up and the subsequent running of a club, generally came from the ordinary member, not the clergy or high minded evangelicals.⁵⁶ Although many sections of the working population undoubtedly pursued their recreations in a rational and respectable manner, their behaviour was influenced by their own values, not diffused downwards.

Rational recreation did have slightly more success within youth sport, through organizations such as the Boys Brigade, the Volunteer Force and the Young Men's Christian Association. The aim of these religious associations was to instil social discipline into the youth of Britain, who were increasingly

⁵⁵ Holt, R. 1989: p.136

⁵⁶ Ibid: p.138

seen as problem which needed to be controlled, particularly within urban areas. Sport and especially football, were used as a method of attracting members. The prospect of participating regularly in sport, was appealing to young boys, whose games of street football were increasingly forbidden and who had to contend with military drill in school. Despite the lure of sports participation, many young people resisted joining. Then from the 1890s, with the gradual introduction of team sports into the state schools, firstly on a voluntary, extra-curricular basis, but eventually as part of the curriculum, the main attraction of such groups, to urban working-class boys declined.

The introduction of a national school system from 1870, presented an ideal opportunity to introduce games and physical activity, to the young urban working classes. Initially, because of a lack of space and facilities, only military drill for boys and Swedish gymnastics for girls, were included as part of the elementary school curriculum. This remained the case in most urban elementary schools, until after the First World War, although a few schools did offer games of football to boys, out of school hours. Progress was slow, but gradually team games were introduced onto the curriculum within state schools. Whilst the only other activity to be provided, within many urban schools, for both boys and girls, was swimming. By the late 1890s, the provision of swimming pools within the majority of towns and cities, ensured that the inclusion of swimming on the school time table had become a practical possibility. Swimming instruction in school, was for many nineteenth

century schoolchildren and particularly girls, their only opportunity of sports participation.

On leaving school, certain urban workers were provided with sport through industrial recreation programmes. They were not very extensive, but some, such as Cadbury's in Birmingham, Rowntree's in York and Port Sunlight in Liverpool, were very ambitious projects and provided unprecedented facilities and opportunities. Yet once again, paternalistic provision of sport was met with caution from young working-class employees. Overall the contribution of socio-religious organizations, industrial philanthropists and moral idealists, to the development of working-class sport was negligible. Organized sport became very important in new the urban industrial culture, but it was to be organized and participated in by working men on their terms, not influenced by bourgeois values and ideals.

The urban environment may have disrupted and weakened the older forms of control exerted by rural communities, but towns and cities were themselves sites of new social relationships and a changed urban social structure. The formation of sports teams and clubs were an important means of sustaining new social relationships and of 're-creating something of the face-to-face intimacy and scale of village society'.⁵⁷ Team sports in particular football, provided many male urban inhabitants with 'a sense of belonging and a sense of pride'.⁵⁸ Progression from a childhood kick about in the street,

⁵⁷ Holt, R. 1989: p.154

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

often culminated in an organized team forming and adopting the name of a particular street.⁵⁹ Whilst the local pub was a further focus of team formation, with team members gathering to change and chat before and after a game.⁶⁰ Pubs became 'the central social institution of the adult male working-class and occupied a pivotal position in the world of sport'.⁶¹

Football, undoubtedly became the main male working-class sporting passion, and pubs 'a significant force in the rapid growth of football teams',⁶² but other sports too were part of pub culture. Boxing with gloves, continued the earlier tradition of prize fighting and many pubs became known for putting on boxing contests, although some contests were little more than 'regulated brawls'.⁶³ Whether it was discussing sport at the local pub, or friends from the same street forming a football team, the importance of 'neighbourhood' in working-class sporting culture was clearly evident and despite the vast changes in urban life, loyalty to a street or former parish remained deeply held.⁶⁴

Another focus in the social life of adult workers and a further site for the formation sports teams, were working-men's clubs. Many had started on a small scale, but grew to large organizations with several thousand members.

⁵⁹ Mason, T. (1980) lists the names of clubs in Blackburn which appeared to have spread from streets.

⁶⁰ Holt, R. 1988: p. 76 in Mangan, J.A. *Pleasure, Profit and Proselytism*

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Holt 1989: p. 150

⁶³ Ibid: p. 149

⁶⁴ Ibid p.150

In the process, their main attraction to urban workers as small, friendly institutions, where new social contacts could be developed, was lost. The formation of smaller sports clubs, within the wider organization, was one solution which helped to re-create the earlier intimacy and sociability for club members.⁶⁵ A wide variety of sports were organized by working-men's clubs, from rowing and cricket to billiards and boxing, but it was bowling, which became an extremely popular activity.⁶⁶ Bowling, both on the flat greens of the south and the 'crowned' surfaces of the north, offered 'an urban and a rural, an individual and collective aspect' and remained at the heart of popular working-class sporting culture.⁶⁷

The workplace itself, was another obvious location in the establishment of sports clubs. Works' teams were created by the employees themselves and although some benefited from the provision of facilities arranged through the management, they were distinctly separate from the workplace recreation schemes, established in several firms. Works' teams were run by the workers, for their own enjoyment and benefit and many of the works football clubs, developed into the professional sides of present day.⁶⁸

Football remained the most popular activity, but other major team games such as, rugby and cricket, were regularly played by working-class

⁶⁵ Holt, R. 1989: p.156

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Ibid p.157

⁶⁸ Walvin, J. 1978: p.88

enthusiasts. Rugby as a working-class game was very regionalized, confined largely to the valleys of south Wales and to northern England. In south Wales, it became the major team sport and provided for the working man, the same sense of place and community, that football gave to workers in the rest of Britain. The different valleys would contain several teams, made up of a mixture of work and street sides.⁶⁹ Whilst in northern England, the determination of working-class players to receive 'broken time' payment led to the establishment of the breakaway rugby league in 1895.⁷⁰ Based primarily in the north, Rugby League gave the northern urban inhabitant an 'intense sense of belonging', replicating the feelings of solidarity, which were provided elsewhere through football.⁷¹ Cricket too, offered many workers an opportunity to display fierce regional loyalty. It was difficult for many working-class players to participate in cricket, due to the expense of equipment and the restricted access to pitches. However, the introduction of local professional leagues, such as the Lancashire League, demonstrated both the ability of working-class players and the popularity of cricket, among the working-class, especially in the north.⁷²

The formation of sports clubs within working-class urban communities, was the work of the people themselves. Teams sports were the most popular,

⁶⁹ Holt, R. 1989: p.153

⁷⁰ Walvin, J. 1978: p.89

⁷¹ Holt, R. 1989: p.155

⁷² Ibid: p.176

but individual activities, conducted within the atmosphere of a club, such as swimming, were also common. Their purpose was more than an opportunity for healthy exercise. Sports clubs and teams were 'a way in which men created and sustained close knit groups in the context of unprecedented urban upheaval'.⁷³ Middle-class social reformers, however well intentioned, could not replicate the sense of belonging which representing your local club or team, instilled in urban inhabitants. Club membership 'both reflected and reinforced the building up of intimate communities within the city... and... helped humanize the industrial landscape'.⁷⁴

Sports participation was popular within urban working-class communities, but it was confined largely to the young male worker. For older urban inhabitants, whose playing days were over, spectating and supporting their local team, provided another means of sustaining social contacts and of demonstrating civic pride. Economic conditions, of shorter working hours and an increase in real incomes, plus the improved transport infrastructure and the rise of the popular press, all enabled mass spectator sport and especially football, to become commercially viable. However, economic considerations alone, do not fully explain why tens of thousands of working men, each week, voluntarily paid to support their local team. A phenomenon which the upper and middle classes found, 'at best confusing and at worst degrading'.⁷⁵

⁷³ Holt, R. 1989: p.153

⁷⁴ Holt, R. 1989: p.158-9

⁷⁵ Holt, R. 1988: p. 77 in Mangan, J.A. *Pleasure, Profit and Proselytism*

Professional football was essentially a big city phenomenon.⁷⁶ With the increase in scale and size of cities in the second half of the nineteenth century, the urban population was dispersed over a wider area and made up of many sub-communities. Many needed a 'cultural expression of their urbanism' beyond the identity of their street or immediate neighbourhood.⁷⁷ By supporting the team identified as representing a city, they could assert their membership of that city.⁷⁸ The professional football league provided the possibility of 'dual urban identity', with urban inhabitants affirming their identity through their immediate neighbourhood and also as citizens of the much larger and more diverse urban environment, the modern Victorian city.⁷⁹ In the largest cities, a single club was often insufficient to represent the cultural differences that existed within the population. Two professional sides would then compete for 'the sporting dominance of a particular city and derby games paradoxically strengthen rather than weaken civic pride'.⁸⁰ Regional pride and the sharp divide between the north and the south of England, was also clearly expressed through professional football. In England, before 1914, professional football was largely a northern game and bitter local northern rivalries were often suspended, if a despised southern club was defeated. Supporting your local Football League team, was a way of affirming your pride

⁷⁶ Holt, R. 1988: p.79. Only 2 of the original 12 clubs which formed the Football League came from towns of under 80,000.

⁷⁷ Holt, R. 1989: p. 167

⁷⁸ Ibid p.168

⁷⁹ Holt, R. 1988: p.79

⁸⁰ Ibid p.80

and sense of place within a particular city, and of displaying wider regional loyalty. Other sports, also provided similar opportunities of asserting membership of a city or region, but never on the same scale or intensity as football.

Cricket was popular among the working classes, in both the north and the south, but 'county cricket never quite made the conquest of the north that it did in the south'.⁸¹ County cricket in the north was not quite 'cricket' in the south.⁸² Two of the greatest county sides were from the north, Lancashire and Yorkshire. However, their loyal, fiercely territorial working-class supporters and players, played to win, unlike the southern sides, where the game itself remained more important than the result.⁸³ Although cricket was more difficult for the working classes to participate in and to spectate, due to the expense of equipment, restricted access to pitches and the mid-week timing of county matches, it remained a popular urban working-class interest. The introduction of local professional leagues, such as the Lancashire League, which were played on Saturday afternoons, catered for the needs of the factory worker and ensured cricket in these regions, was attempting to accommodate the urban inhabitant. However, League cricket was considered 'second class' by the amateur county players and spectators and it was the county game,

⁸¹ Holt, R. 1989: p.177

⁸² Ibid: p.175

⁸³ Ibid p.178

controlled by the MCC in the south, which dominated the game.⁸⁴ Few concessions were made for the working-class cricket supporter. Cricket grounds were sited close to large populations, for commercial reasons, but in the 'leafy suburbs of big cities'.⁸⁵ Whilst membership of county clubs would also have been prohibitive to a working-class cricket supporter, both in terms of cost and social status. The price of watching a days cricket may have remained the same as an afternoon football match, but many would have had to lose a days pay in process. Cricket therefore, for the working classes was 'partly a holiday entertainment whereas football provided the staple diet of popular sport for most of the year'.⁸⁶

Whilst sport, and particularly the formation of sports clubs, acted on one level, to bring together people with a shared interest, who did not know each other personally, there remained a limit to the extent of inter-class association within sport. Urban areas brought together an ever increasing heterogeneous population, and produced significant alterations in the form and function of social relationships.⁸⁷ Sport was never a class unifier and 'the different residential patterns, standards of living, and values among social classes had important implications for their athletic pleasures'.⁸⁸ Class structure strongly influenced the formation of all sports clubs.⁸⁹ The working-

⁸⁴ Holt, R. 1989: p.176

⁸⁵ Ibid p.178

⁸⁶ Ibid p.179

⁸⁷ Adelman, M. 1990: p.8

⁸⁸ Reiss, S. 1989: p.5

⁸⁹ Adelman, M. 1990: p.8

class, restricted by low pay, a lack of free time and access to playing space and facilities, had created their own sporting culture, located primarily within their immediate neighbourhood. Whilst rich urbanites participated in sport as a means of escaping, the crowded, unhealthy urban environment and participated in exclusive and prestigious activities, mainly cited in the suburbs. The middle classes justified their indulgence in sport through the adoption of a positive sports ideology, which claimed that participation in healthy sports would promote morality, build character, enhance public health and provide a substitute for the former stabilizing influences of smaller communities. Whilst this middle-class sports creed had failed to gain many working-class converts, it attracted significant numbers of middle-class adherents. The middle-class, like the working-class, could not though be considered as one monolithic group. However, the numerous and subtly separate groups, of which the middle-class was comprised, did unite behind many of the elements contained within this ideology and the sporting ideals of the middle classes profoundly influenced the development of sport.

The middle classes became a highly significant group within nineteenth century society. Their numbers increased sharply, but more importantly, their social position and influence rose in greater proportion to their total population.⁹⁰ However, many 'steadily withdrew themselves from life in the new industrial cities' and lived away from city centres, building houses in the

⁹⁰ Lowerson, J. 1995: p. 6 gives details of middle class population figures.

new suburbs and sending their children away to school.⁹¹ It was within the public schools that the sports ethos of fair play, team spirit and ultimately amateurism were initially formed. Public schools were influential in creating many new sports and in devising the competitive features of leagues, championships, cups and caps, which even today, remain an important part of most contemporary sports.⁹² Former public school boys and Oxbridge graduates, were also largely responsible for the organizations and bureaucracies, which were set up to control particular sports. Establishing clear rules and regulations, as it was hoped, a means of overseeing the evolution of sport and of maintaining the amateur ethos. Most sports governing bodies established in the second half of the nineteenth century, starting with the Football Association in 1863, were organized on strictly amateur principles. Yet paradoxically, it was the regulating of sport which led to increased competitiveness and professionalism within sport.

The codification of sport had been a response to the chaos of the urban transformation and a desire to bring order to all aspects of city life. Bringing a rational order to sport 'required the development of uniform rules and the creation of governing agencies to administer the sport and provide mechanisms for rational change'.⁹³ As a consequence, specialized roles, behaviours and new methods of training within each sport evolved, which led

⁹¹ Holt, R. 1988: p.78

⁹² Walvin, J. 1978: p.95

⁹³ Adelman, M. 1990: p. 9

to an increased ability and desire to demonstrate superiority.⁹⁴ Developing alongside the increased competitiveness within sport, was the notion of the appliance of mathematics and empiricism to many aspects of life, but particularly sport. The compiling of statistics, records and comparative information on sport, was a source of fascination to the amateur enthusiast and professional alike, but it led ultimately to the growth of professional sport.

The ability to directly compare performances also inspired the middle-class amateur to new heights of physical fitness and was a factor in an urban bourgeoisie obsession with health and physical condition. The pursuit of health through sport, was also advocated as an antidote to the mental stresses of a competitive commercial and industrial world.⁹⁵ The combination of these two factors, created an urban male middle-class driven to pursue the latest health regime. A healthy body was not the only concern. Bodily health was the pre-requisite for a healthy mind and the pursuit of total health or wholeness, was considered essential for the urban bourgeoisie. Many sports could offer these health benefits. Nevertheless, despite the rise in competitive team sports, it was the individual, less vigorous sports, which became popular for urban industrialists, who were past their youthful prime. Golf and tennis, were two new sports which contained all the essential qualities required of an urban recreation, for a sporting obsessed middle aged, middle-class. Both were healthy outdoor recreations, but less physically demanding than many

⁹⁴ Adelman, M. 1978: p.95

⁹⁵ Tranter, N. 1998: p. 58

team sports. They required exemplary conduct of sportsmanship and fair play, yet performances could be comparable and highly competitive, but most importantly, both activities were played within clubs or on private grounds, where social exclusivity could be guaranteed.

The sports club, was not an invention of the middle-class, but their contribution 'was to spread club organization outside town centres and pubs to an extensive suburban base'.⁹⁶ A club was formed ostensibly to provide facilities for a particular sport, although more significant, was their role as instruments of fine social differentiation and status reinforcement.⁹⁷ Restricted contact with social inferiors was achieved by explicit rules regarding occupation, blackballing systems of election to membership, or by excessively high entry or subscription levels.⁹⁸ Some clubs and sports did however, make attempts to recruit working-class members and were always socially mixed.⁹⁹ Many swimming clubs, for example, because of the relatively low social standing of the sport, were often run by middle-class committee men, but membership would include both middle and working-class enthusiasts.

Indeed the values ascribed to middle-class sport of fair play, respectability and amateurism, were 'adapted to the uses and desires of a range of groups with different end results and were responsive to changes in

⁹⁶ Lowerson, J. 1995: p.96

⁹⁷ Ibid p.98

⁹⁸ Wigglesworth, N. 1996

⁹⁹ Tranter, N. 1998: p.43

wider society'.¹⁰⁰ The middle-class itself was riven by divisions, from status and income, to attitude to sporting activities. Class identity was not the only means of affirming your place in urban Britain. People possessed a spectrum of collective identities, of neighbourhood, workplace, town, religion and nation and these could involve shared values which cut across class.¹⁰¹ Within urban Britain, a sense of regional and local identity was sometimes stronger than class identity. The amateur v professional debate, which consumed most sports at some point during the nineteenth century, was often a regional rather than a class divide. Sports governing bodies, were largely established by the professional middle classes, located in London and the south, among whom the ideology of amateurism was firmly upheld. Where as, attitudes to professionalism among the northern industrial middle classes were much more positive. The tensions between London and the provinces were often critical in the development of sport. Rugby was the most notable example, with its split into two codes. However, all sports, including swimming, struggled with the amateur v professional issue and many governing bodies were polarized along a north v south divide, much more than through class divisions.

The urban middle classes were not a single undifferentiated group with, as has often been portrayed, an unswerving loyalty to a positive sports ideology. Many viewed sport as irrelevant, whilst for others sport and the

¹⁰⁰ Huggins, M. 2000: p. 12

¹⁰¹ Joyce, P. 1991.

sports club, served simply as a site for sociability and enjoyment, in a changing urban landscape. However, for a significant number of an enthusiastic and industrious middle-class, sport defined social relationships and was 'a powerful cultural bond, moral metaphor, and political symbol'.¹⁰²

Determined efforts by middle-class idealists could not however, prevent sport from becoming a source of profit and commercial opportunity for many individuals and companies. The diversity of large urban populations, the majority of whom over the century, gradually benefited from reduced working hours, paid holidays and larger discretionary incomes, provided a greater pool of potential sports spectators and participants. The popularity and excitement of sport, along with a population already familiar with paying for their entertainment, encouraged entrepreneurs to invest in sport.¹⁰³ Professional sport had been popular from the eighteenth century, but as each sport developed uniform rules and governing bodies, the opportunity to demonstrate superiority and to compete further a field, saw an expansion in the commercialisation of sport.

Several sports now offered the chance of paid employment, or a profitable return on investments.¹⁰⁴ The possibility of substantial rewards from exhibitions, tournaments and individual staked contests, tempted many to try to make a living from professional boxing, cricket, soccer, or even swimming,

¹⁰² Huggins, M. 2000: p.1

¹⁰³ Reiss, S. 1989: p.4

¹⁰⁴ Tranter, N. 1998: p. 59

angling, crown green bowls, pedestrianism and quoiting.¹⁰⁵ Although the numbers who made significant sums from participating in professional sport were small and the career of a professional sportsman was both short and precarious, many continued to try their luck.

There were other, less physically taxing ways of personally profiting from sport. The expansion of urban society, provided many sports entrepreneurs with the opportunity to invest in sport. Publicans and hoteliers, as well as sports goods manufacturers, bookmakers, sports facility companies and promoters, all invested in sport with the desire and intention of personal profit maximization.¹⁰⁶ The expansion of sport within the urban environment also produced an increased desire and need for more information, which was both accurate and informative. The result was the emergence of a burgeoning sports press industry. Local and national newspapers, along with national sports journals, guidebooks and training manuals, serviced a population who were now more literate and knowledgeable on every aspect of sport. Even within relatively minor sports, like swimming, a thirst for the latest information on all aspects of the sport, enabled some entrepreneurs to make a living from swimming publications alone. Whilst another avenue for investing in sport, although it was unlikely to have been undertaken as a means of making money, was share investment in the local football team. Large shareholders in football clubs, seem not to have invested their money with the intention of

¹⁰⁵ Tranter, N. 1998: p.59

¹⁰⁶ Tranter, N. 1998: p. 60

financial gain, as few ever complained about the failure of their investment to yield a decent return.¹⁰⁷ Share investment within football, was a demonstration of loyalty to a club, rather than a considered profitable financial investment.

Share investment in sport may have produced minimal financial profit, but gambling on sport generally yielded even less. Most forms of betting remained illegal throughout the nineteenth century and attracted adverse criticism from social reformers. Although it was the aristocracy, as much as the working man, who squandered their money through gambling. Nevertheless, it was the fear that 'the railway, the telegraph and the popular press, would combine to cause an enormous increase in betting' which concerned middle-class society most of all.¹⁰⁸ Gambling took many forms, from race course betting to the football pools, but within a working-class culture that was 'more concerned with the present than the future', all forms of betting were both a source of amusement and a chance to acquire a small windfall.¹⁰⁹ Where as, for those 'imbued with the work ethic, gaining money without effort was wrong'.¹¹⁰ Most working-class sports and pastimes retained an element of gambling. Even activities which through their amateur governing bodies had adopted a high moral tone, such as athletics and swimming, continued a tradition of professional events, where gambling

¹⁰⁷ Tranter, N. 1998: p.61

¹⁰⁸ Holt, R. 1989: p. 180

¹⁰⁹ Ibid: p. 182

¹¹⁰ Ibid p.180

survived until the twentieth century.¹¹¹ Victorian reformers may have found betting 'perplexing and distasteful' but gambling and sport, were to remain inexorably linked and an important part of popular culture for the urban masses, throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.¹¹²

Despite the derisory financial rewards accrued by many small investors, the commercialisation of sport was a profitable experience for others and it became 'one of the economic success stories of late Victorian England'.¹¹³ Investment in the sports industry however, relied largely on private rather than public funding. Government and local authority investment in sport was minimal and the maintenance of low public expenditure, remained the philosophy of all nineteenth century governments. Independence from central government ensured that local authority spending and provision for sport varied and like the provision of basic public utilities, was often a consequence of civic pride, rather than public need. Public baths and parks were the first investments made by local authorities for recreation. Yet even these facilities had initially been provided for utilitarian purposes and stemmed from public health concerns, rather than a direct response to the sporting requirements of the urban population. Large government or local authority investment in sport was to be a feature of the twentieth, not the nineteenth century.

¹¹¹ Holt, R. 1989: pp 179 –194 details a number of sports and pastimes, where gambling was a vital ingredient, including horse racing, athletics, greyhound-racing, pigeon racing, bowls, billiards, snooker and darts.

¹¹² Holt, R. 1989: p.182

¹¹³ Vamplew, W. 1988: p.13

Sport within the nineteenth century urban environment had a profound effect on all aspects of life, but it remained a largely male concern. By the last decades of the century, a few middle-class women were beginning to participate in certain feminine appropriate sports. However, female participation remained dependent upon male approval. Working-class women had little energy, time or money to pursue sport. Whilst the cult of the family and the separate spheres philosophy restricted middle-class women's role to that of wives and mothers and prevented a majority from participating in sport. Women's reproductive health was paramount and anything which was considered damaging to her primary role of motherhood, whether it was education, work outside the home, or sports participation, was largely forbidden. There were vigorous protests against such restrictions, from men and women, but the view of the 'physically limited female was institutionalised in the scientific and medical establishment' and throughout wider society.¹¹⁴ Gradually, sports which appeared non-strenuous and were not overtly competitive were accepted as appropriately feminine. Swimming and cycling, were two activities, which were eventually deemed as acceptable for female participation. The urban conditions under which both sports expanded, were helpful in their promotion as appropriate and even beneficial activities for women to pursue. Swimming, because of its close association with cleanliness, health, safety and rational behaviour, plus the widespread provision of class and gender segregated municipal pools, enabled it to be

¹¹⁴ Fossey, N. 2000: p. 149 in Cox, R., Jarvie, G. and Vamplew, W. (Eds).

actively promoted as the first ideal urban sport for women. Whilst cycling for women became more than mere sport, but a political and social statement of women's emancipation. Originally, cycling too, was thought to be unladylike. Yet the freedom and enjoyment experienced by women whilst on a bicycle, of escaping the restrictions of the home, ensured that cycling by the 1890s, had become something of a national obsession.¹¹⁵

It was not only women who benefited from the cycling craze and the opportunities it provided for escaping from the confines of the city. 'Flight' from the urban environment for an increasing number of the urban masses, became a possibility, by the end of the century.¹¹⁶ Cycling, along with trips to the sea-side provided men, women and children with a chance to escape the unhealthy urban environment, if only for a brief period. Both were predominately for the middle classes initially. However, as the cost of bicycle manufacture reduced and rail travel became cheaper, the opportunity to get out of the city and cycle or sea bath for pleasure, was within the reach of an increasing number of the working population. Advances in bicycle manufacture, made cycling less hazardous and uncomfortable. Enthusiasts for the countryside could now quickly reach remote areas, by taking the train out of the town or city to a country station and then ride back through country

¹¹⁵ Holt, R. 1989: p.195

¹¹⁶ Ibid p.194

lanes.¹¹⁷ Whilst for those unable to afford the cost of a bicycle, the annual trip to the seaside offered the chance to hire a bike for a short spin.¹¹⁸

Seaside resorts reached the peak of their popularity, between 1870 and 1914 and ironically became substantial urban areas in their own right, as the ability of working-class people, to afford an annual trip to the seaside rose by the end of the century.¹¹⁹ A striking feature of many resorts was 'the degree to which they offered family-based entertainment for all social classes'.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, most resorts segregated the classes into different 'zones' through a complexity of factors, or else, resorts became socially distinct, catering predominately for one social class.¹²¹ Resorts that catered for all social tastes, offered a variety of attractions, but the simple pleasures of the beach were the most appealing. Beach life was relatively cheap and paddling particularly appealed to everyone, where as swimming, was more cumbersome and a little more expensive.¹²² For the working classes at least, physical recreation at the seaside, was less important than an all to rare opportunity, for relaxed social recreation with family and neighbours. The seaside excursion largely remained 'an escape from the physical environment' of the town or city 'rather than the human one, from the

¹¹⁷ Meller, H. 1976: p.227

¹¹⁸ Walvin, J. 1978: p.93

¹¹⁹ Walvin, J.1978: p.70

¹²⁰ Ibid p.77

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Ibid p. 78

neighbourhood rather than neighbours'.¹²³ Working people escaped the urban environment collectively, with entire streets at a time descending on the same resorts.¹²⁴ Whilst the urban bourgeoisie, did their best to ensure that on escaping the urban environment, they also escaped mixing with their social inferiors. Whatever their social position however, 'the English seemed united, almost obsessed in their summer rush to the sea' and their desire to escape the stifling urban environment.¹²⁵

Summary

Sport at the close of the nineteenth century, was fundamentally different from that at the beginning of the century. Sport had become codified, institutionalised and rationalised and had evolved to occupy a central place in the new urban industrial culture, although continuities from an earlier, traditional, rural inspired sporting culture had not evaporated completely. A combination of factors contributed to the transformation of sport, from better working conditions, increased wages, holidays with pay, improved nutrition and health and cheaper and easier travel, but as this chapter has identified, it was the continuous interrelated elements, of the urban environment's physical development, social organization and value system, with each other and with sport, which were responsible for the revolution in sport. Many sports

¹²³ Holt, R. 1989: p. 159

¹²⁴ Ibid

¹²⁵ Walvin, J. 1978: p.82

underwent this transformation, but as this thesis will examine, swimmings' development from a casual recreational pursuit, into a modern competitive sport, provides one of the best examples, of the impact of urbanization on the development of sport. The next chapter will explore the role that the development of swimming played in alleviating two of the greatest concerns within the nineteenth century urban environment, public health and social order.

CHAPTER THREE

IMPROVING THE 'CONDITION' OF THE PEOPLE 1840 - 1870

A major concern, of all British towns and cities, during the first half of the nineteenth century was the 'condition' of the people, physically, socially and morally. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the role that the provision of public baths and the promotion of swimming as a rational activity, played in alleviating the twin concerns of public health and social order.

Disease epidemics, continual poor health and general squalor, awakened many to the negative consequences of urbanization and industrialization.¹ This led to a wide ranging debate about public health and social order. There were many strands to the debate, but two of the most pressing, were firstly, the inability of the urban population to keep themselves physically clean and healthy, and secondly, the desire of the middle classes, to foster improvement in working-class social habits and values. The provision of public baths, enabling the masses, to wash themselves and their clothes more regularly, was one measure, in the drive to improve physical cleanliness. Whilst, the reform of popular recreations, were promoted as a

¹ Haley, B. 1978: p.6 Through the 1830s & 1840s there were 3 massive waves of contagious disease.

constructive contribution, to the social amelioration or 'improvement' of the population.² The fear amongst middle-class social reformers, was that the plight of the urban poor, would lead to a breakdown in social order. Social order, it was believed, could only be maintained and improved by educating the working classes into middle-class social habits and values.

The habit of personal cleanliness was believed to be an indicator of good social behaviour. As a consequence, social reformers lobbied hard to initiate changes, attempting to persuade both national and local government, that better basic civic amenities and sanitation provision would improve public and private health.³ Initially, government were slow to respond, but eventually, a number of measures were undertaken to address these concerns.⁴ One of these was the 1846 Baths and Wash-Houses Act - permissive legislation which enabled local authorities, who wished to adopt the Act, the opportunity to build baths and wash-houses. The 1846 Act was only applicable to England and it was to be 1892 before Scotland had similar legislation, although the earlier 1867 Public Health (Scotland) Act, had contained sections relating to the provision of water for bathing.⁵ Municipal public baths were not built in Scotland until 1878,⁶ evidence on the municipal provision of baths up to the 1870s, is therefore given only for England, but evidence is drawn from

² Bailey, P. 1978: p. 35

³ Chadwick, E (1842) *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain, Royal Commission Reports (1844 and 1845) Health of Towns and Populous Places,*

⁴ 1846 Public Baths and Wash-houses Act, 1848 Public Health Act

⁵ Campbell 1918 p.5. The later Act enabled Scotland to benefit, as this later legislation promoted the provision of swimming pools to swim in, not baths for washing.

Scotland on public baths provided by private baths companies and in examining other issues, as the negative consequences of urbanization and industrialization had a similar impact on all British towns and cities.

To analyse the role that the development of swimming, played in addressing the issues of public health and social order, the chapter has been divided into five main sections, (i) an overview of health, hygiene and the sanitary reform process in Victorian Britain; (ii) an analysis of a number of towns and cities which used the permissive legislation, to provide public baths and wash-houses and an assessment of their effectiveness; iii) a description of the facilities provided within public baths; iv) an examination of the promotion of swimming as a rational activity, through the establishment of swimming clubs and private baths clubs; v) illustrates a separate strand of swimming development, with an overview of seaside bathing, as 'flight' from the city, and an opportunity for the masses to 're-create' themselves at the seaside.⁷ The chapter concludes, with an assessment of the extent to which, the provision of public baths and the promotion of swimming as a rational activity, encouraged habits of cleanliness and social amelioration, amongst the urban poor and so improved the 'condition' of the people.

Health, Hygiene and the Sanitary Reform Process.

Health and hygiene became an increasingly important issue in Victorian

⁶ Glasgow however, did have a significant number of private baths clubs built from the 1870s.

⁷ Holt, R. 1989: p.194

Britain.⁸ Health, as Haley stated, in his key text on Victorian culture,

*... obsessed the Victorians.... No topic more occupied the Victorian mind than health.... In the name of health, Victorians flocked to the seaside tramped about in the Alps, or Cotswolds, dieted, took pills, sweated themselves in Turkish baths, adopted this 'system' of medicine or that.*⁹

The quest for health, 'guided Victorian living habits, shaped educational goals, and sanctioned a mania for athletic sports'.¹⁰ The pursuit of health and enthusiasm for athletic sports only became popular however, within upper and middle-class society, where time and money were plentiful. The dominant concept for the Victorian intellectual, was total health or wholeness – *mens sana in corpore sano* – harmony of the mind and body.¹¹ The urban poor were more directly affected by urban squalor, disease and poor health, than their wealthier neighbours. However, for the majority of the working classes, time and money were scarce resources, spent on the struggle for survival, not on the pursuit of an elusive concept of health. The middle classes however, were determined to educate the working man on the benefits of good health. Good health could not be achieved without personal cleanliness. With improved personal hygiene there was also a chance that there may be an improvement in moral behaviour. One was an indicator of the other, and social reformers

⁸ Haley, B. 1978 and Newsome, D. 1961 are the 2 key texts.

⁹ Haley, B.1978: p.3

¹⁰ Haley, B.1978: fly cover

¹¹ Haley, B. 1978: p.4

believed implicitly that cleanliness was next to godliness. Edwin Chadwick, one of the most prominent social reformers, subscribed to this belief,

*The removal of noxious physical circumstances, and the promotion of civic, household and personal cleanliness, are necessary to the improvement of the moral condition of the population; for that sound morality and refinement in manners and health are not long found co-existent with filthy habits amongst any class of the community.*¹²

However, the negative consequences of the progress towards industrialisation and urbanisation were experienced by rich and poor alike. The rapid expansion of towns and cities, meant houses were built quickly without thought to basic hygiene requirements.¹³ The new urban environment for most inhabitants, meant poor housing, polluted air, open sewers and contaminated drinking water. In a description of the conditions existing in many new towns Haley states,

*During the first decades of Victoria's reign, baths were virtually unknown in the poorer districts and uncommon anywhere. Most house holds of all economic classes still used 'privy-pails'; water closets were rare. Sewers had flat bottoms and because drains were made of stone, seepage was considerable. If, as was often the case in towns, streets were unpaved, they might remain ankle deep in mud for weeks. For new middle class homes in the growing manufacturing towns, elevated sites were usually chosen, with the result that sewage filtered or flowed down into the lower areas where the labouring populations dwelt.*¹⁴

¹² Flinn M.W. 1965: p.424

¹³ The 1851 census for England revealed population equally divided between town and country dwellers.

¹⁴ Haley, B. 1978: p.9

Standards of hygiene were understandably poor in such conditions. The supply of clean water to many towns was irregular. Even the more prosperous middle-class homes could not guarantee clean water at all times and sewage and drinking water were often mixed. Disease spread rapidly without the regular provision of uncontaminated drinking water and the means to keep clean. Nobody was certain of immunity. Deaths from contagious diseases were never far from most homes, with several major epidemics of cholera and typhus during the second quarter of the century.¹⁵ However, as Flinn states, 'so inured were the men of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century to the toll of disease, to the shortness of the span of urban human life' that any slight rise in death rate made little impact, but with each new epidemic the pressure for sanitation reforms grew.¹⁶

The process of sanitary reform was however, not an easy one and government was initially slow to act. The first effective action was taken by the Poor Law Commissioners who, in May 1838, forwarded a memorandum to the Home Secretary pointing out the need for a code of health in towns and cities. A commission of enquiry was instituted by government to examine the causes of disease among the labouring classes across Britain. Its report, written by Edwin Chadwick,¹⁷ led to the enactment of the 1848 Public Health Act by which,

¹⁵ See Haley, B. 1978: pp 6 – 8.

¹⁶ Flinn M.W.1965: p.17

¹⁷ The report was called, *Report of Inquiry into the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain 1842'*

For the first time, the British Government charged itself with a measure of responsibility for safeguarding the health of the population. Although an unconscionable time elapsed between the presentation of the Report and the passing of the Act,.....and though the early history of state action in the sphere of public health was to be chequered, to say the least, a beginning had been made.¹⁸

The chequered history of state action in sanitary reform saw the Government seeking a second judgement on Chadwick's' findings. A Royal Commission of Inquiry into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts was set up in 1843, and two reports were produced in 1844 and 1845. The key recommendation from all these sanitary reform reports, was that new sewage and clean water supplies were an essential prerequisite of improved public health. These were prohibitively expensive to install, and many in government were fearful of supporting a Bill that would result in an increase in the rates. Consequently, the debate then focused on whether such key provision could be made by private companies. Ultimately, the laissez-faire attitude of the Government towards public health ensured delay to most improvement schemes.

Both Chadwick's and the Royal Commission's Reports also mentioned the importance of providing washing and bathing facilities for the poor. It had not though, been a major recommendation in either, as the cost of providing these facilities were also seen as prohibitively expensive and not as

¹⁸ Flinn M.W. 1965: p.1

pressing as the need for improved sewage and water supplies. However, the idea of providing public baths had been sown, and in 1846 a *Public Baths and Wash-houses Act* was passed. Despite the 1846 Act not being seen as significant, in terms of public health reform, as the latter 1848 Public Health Act, it did enable local authorities to provide facilities to improve personal hygiene standards and help relieve some urban squalor.¹⁹ The Act enabled local councils to erect public baths and wash-houses. From the outset it was expected that the baths should pay for themselves. Loans were available from the Treasury to assist with the initial outlay, but this had to be repaid through the rates if insufficient income came from the baths themselves.²⁰ Water for the baths, it was maintained could be supplied at a cheap rate or free from local gas works' managers.²¹ However, this proved rarely to be the case and as a maximum charge of four pence for admission to the baths was also restricted on councils by the Act, it effectively ensured that most baths were never able to cover their running costs.²² Later on, power was given to councils to make a higher charge for baths of a superior kind, but the frequency of use of such baths, could never defray the whole cost of upkeep for the remaining baths.²³ Consequently, the number of local councils

¹⁹ The 1846 Public Baths and Wash-houses Act is rarely mentioned in histories of public health.

²⁰ Davies, B. 1987: p.187

²¹ Campbell, A. 1918: p.3

²² Bunce, J.T. 1885 p: 189

²³ Ibid

prepared to take up the ample powers provided within the Act were initially few in number. By 1852 just eight towns and cities had used the Act to build baths, London, Liverpool, Preston, Tynemouth, Bristol, Nottingham, Hull and Birmingham.²⁴

Provision of Public Baths and Washhouses

The precise date and location of the first public baths have not been conclusively identified. Several towns clearly had some form of public bathing facilities before the 1846 Act.²⁵ Many contemporary reports often claimed their baths were the first,²⁶ but these baths were often owned and run by private companies.²⁷ One example of baths clearly having been provided long before government legislation, is given in the 1816 Annals of Glasgow,

*..it becomes desirable if not necessary in the interests of health, comfort and cleanliness that public baths should be established for the use of the operative classes of the community as well as the for the affluent.*²⁸

Also, in 1844, baths had been built at Glasshouse Yard near the docks in London. They had been promoted by the society entitled 'Association for

²⁴ Campbell 1918 p.4

²⁵ Liverpool, Manchester, London and Glasgow all had some form of public baths before the 1846 Act.

²⁶ Manchester Evening News 16th March 1983, had report which claimed Collier Street Baths , Salford were the first public baths.

²⁷ Manchester had a public bath and wash-house from at least 1846, run by a private company which the council considered leasing in 1848 (Council Proceedings 1847-8). The Manchester and Salford Baths and Laundries Company also ran 2 public baths and wash-house establishments in 1876 (Council Proceedings 1876 p 373).

²⁸ Campbell 1918 p.3

Promoting Cleanliness among the People'.²⁹ Birmingham too endeavoured by voluntary effort to establish baths before the passing of the Act. In 1844 an association was formed for the promotion of baths and parks and the sum of £4000 was raised, but in the hope of legislation taking place, the proceedings were suspended, although the subscription went on until it reached £6000.³⁰ Manchester also had public baths in 1845, after 'a grand fancy dress ball held in the Free Trade Hall raised £440 and helped to provide Public Baths and Wash-houses in Miller Street'.³¹ The object of the baths was, 'to provide the poorer classes with the means of bathing themselves in tepid water'.³² However, most late nineteenth century historians³³ support the later view of Payne, who states 'the first public baths erected by a corporate body were those at St. George's Pier Head in Liverpool in 1828'.³⁴ However, as Ellison and Howe state,

*The building was built on treacherous foundations which in the long run was to cost the Corporation a great deal of money to maintain. On completion the baths were managed by a bath keeper and assistants.*³⁵

Then during the 1850s the first borough engineer for Liverpool, James Newlands, was forced to comment on the state of the baths, 'the Pier Head

²⁹ Campbell 1918 p.3

³⁰ Bunce 1885 p.188

³¹ *Manchester Guardian* 16 February 1966 titled 'Looking Back' By Harold Howarth.

³² Ibid.

³³ Nineteenth century historians such as Sinclair, A. and Henry, W.1893 and Bunce J.T.1885.

³⁴ Payne 1912 p.1

³⁵ Ellison and Howe 1997 p.19

Baths scarcely deserve the title public baths...having fallen into disrepair'.³⁶ Despite their poor construction and lack of maintenance, these Liverpool baths are generally acknowledged, as being the first public municipal baths built in Britain. A more significant factor, for the passing of the 1846 Act, was however, the first provision of clothes washing facilities for the poor. These facilities were also credited with having been provided in Liverpool first, initially by a labourers wife, Kitty Wilkinson, who in the late eighteenth century lent 'her copper for laundry work and her backyard for drying, out of sympathy for those worse off than herself'.³⁷ A provident society recognized the value of the work she had initiated and undertook to carry it on, but on a more extensive scale, as Campbell states,

*So eagerly did women avail themselves of the accommodation provided, that in 1842 the corporation of Liverpool took the matter in hand and erected the first public wash-house in the United Kingdom.*³⁸

These first joint public baths and wash-houses were at Frederick Street in Liverpool,

*They were opened on the 28 May 1842. However, by October 1842 the Council realized that the facilities were too small and that Upper Frederick baths would have to be extended or rebuilt to cope with the demand.*³⁹

³⁶ Ellison and Howe 1997 p.19

³⁷ Campbell 1918 p.3

³⁸ Campbell 1918 p.3

³⁹ Ellison and Howe 1997: p. 25

Their success ensured two further premises were opened in quick succession in Liverpool, the Paul Street Baths in 1846 and the Cornwallis Street Baths in 1851.⁴⁰ The public baths of Liverpool, according to the nineteenth century journalist Hugh Shimmin writing for the *Liverpool Mercury* in 1856,

*...reflected great honour on the town, bestow abundant credit on the council, are model sanitary purifiers and are hourly bestowing blessings, cheap, pure and healthful, on the toiling masses of this great community.*⁴¹

He supported his statement by claiming that in one week nearly 25,000 people bathed at the public baths at a cost to them of more than £500.⁴² Although Liverpool was the first to recognize the value of providing such premises, other places were not far behind. London as already noted, had instituted a voluntary association for promoting the building of baths. Its efforts resulted not only in the building of several establishments in London, but of also extending its influence to encourage Parliament to pass the 1846 Act. The example of the Frederick Street Baths in Liverpool, was given by the London Association to Parliament, as a successful way of providing financially, self supporting facilities. The fact that the baths were not self supporting, even when the prices charged for entry varied from 1d to 6d, with the cheap rate

⁴⁰ Walton and Wilcox 1991: p. 211

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

being too expensive for the very poorest of society, was overlooked by the London Association. They gave the impression that baths could be self supporting, even when charging low prices.⁴³ Despite the financial implications for local authorities, the number of towns and cities using the legislation to build baths, grew steadily with forty nine public baths built in England and Wales between 1846 and 1870.⁴⁴ Sinclair and Henry stated later in 1893, 'The advantages of the Act are now fully recognized and public baths are springing up in almost every town'.⁴⁵ Among the first erected were those at Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Maidstone, Bilston, Norwich, Hull, Oxford, Wolverhampton, Macclesfield, Nottingham, Bolton, Worcester, York, Hereford, Chester, Plymouth, Sunderland, Newcastle, Carlisle, Coventry, Belfast and Waterford.⁴⁶

Many cities and towns, despite the desirability and obvious need for baths and wash-houses, rejected the whole idea of providing such facilities on financial grounds. Some also took so long to come to a decision, that the costs had escalated beyond the reach of many smaller towns, in particular. The lack of direct financial support from government, meant some towns looked to other means of providing similar facilities. Bilsborough, in an examination of five northern towns, identified four key methods by which

⁴³ Bilsborough, P. 1977: pp. 21-5

⁴⁴ Campbell, A. 1918: p. 4 (diagram)

⁴⁵ Sinclair and Henry, 1893: p.414

⁴⁶ Sinclair and Henry 1893: p.414

towns, quite independently decided to build public baths.⁴⁷ The relative success of each method was analysed, in terms of how quickly facilities were provided, how cost effective they were and for how long each town was able to benefit from the baths construction.

Public subscription was perhaps the most successful method. Macclesfield used this method in 1850 to build an adequate set of baths and wash-houses with a minimum of delay and unnecessary expense. Birmingham, as already noted was also able to institute the provision of baths in 1844 via public subscription. The voluntary association had raised enough money to purchase land in Kent Street in 1846, but with the implementation of the Baths and Wash-houses Act the land was transferred to the Corporation. The first stone was laid in 1849, with the baths open to the public on 12 May 1851.⁴⁸

The least successful method proved to be through provision by private individuals. Warrington experienced the pleasure of their own baths during the 1840s and 1850s, but they were of poor quality and by 1860 the baths were closed for good, due to the financial drain of the upkeep on just a few individuals. This one example cannot be used to condemn all provision by private individuals but as Bilsborough concludes, 'providing public baths by

⁴⁷ Bilsborough, P. 1977

⁴⁸ Bunce, J.T. 1885: p.189

private means appears to have delayed the initiative of the town councils to build public baths'.⁴⁹

A third initially successful method was through the setting up of private baths companies. Glasgow had three public baths provided by the Eastern Public Baths Company, from 1853 to 1870. All three baths were built well before any municipal public baths were provided in Scotland. Although low admission charges were offered, to encourage the working classes to use the baths, they were poorly supported. There was insufficient income to meet running costs and satisfy shareholders and as a result by 1884 all three had closed.⁵⁰ Another example of this method of provision was the Bridgeman Street Baths and Assembly Rooms in Bolton. They were opened in May 1847 at a cost of £6,000. These facilities were used as the name suggests, not only for bathing, but for balls and dances. The cost of maintaining such impressive buildings were considerable, even with the added income from the assembly rooms.⁵¹ The company tried to sell the baths to Bolton Corporation in 1886, but they declined and it was 1902 before Bolton corporation opened its own baths.⁵² The private baths companies that did prosper were those that maintained an exclusive middle-class clientele and could accordingly charge higher prices to cover the high cost of upkeep. To maintain their exclusivity many became a type of gentleman's club. This was particularly the case in

⁴⁹ Bilsborough, P. 1977: p.82

⁵⁰ Bilsborough, P. 1983: p.314.

⁵¹ Bilsborough, P. 1977: p. 69.

⁵² Bilsborough, P. 1977: p.68.

Glasgow, which by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, had five successful private baths clubs in the city.⁵³

The most popular method of public bath provision, and in the long term the most successful, were baths built by town councils using parliamentary legislation. The facilities built by this method were generally of a higher standard and the prices for admission were set to enable even some of the poorest citizens access. One disadvantage was the time some councils took in coming to a decision on whether or not to build. However, this became less of a problem, when the number of towns and cities with public baths increased, as any neighbouring towns without baths would endeavour to improve their towns local amenities, for the notion of 'civic pride' was a forceful incentive in mid-Victorian Britain. Manchester Corporation was, for example, quite late in providing municipal baths. But when the Manchester Baths and Wash-houses Committee of 1876 reported that Birmingham, Sheffield and Liverpool were all planning to add to their existing baths, despite the baths in all three cities incurring an annual loss to the city funds, Manchester quickly undertook measures to provide baths and wash-houses for its citizens. In March 1878 the council had approved the building of baths in New Islington, Manchester.⁵⁴

Some councils though were still reluctant to invest in public baths as the legislation only enabled councils to borrow money from government and

⁵³ Mann, W.M. 1990: p. 11. These private clubs were Arlington 1870, Western 1876, Victoria 1878, Pollokshields 1883, Dennistoun 1884.

⁵⁴ Manchester Council Proceedings 1876 p.373 and 1877 p.160.

the Act specified that whatever number of baths were built, two thirds were to be of the cheapest class.⁵⁵ Fearful of not being able to repay the loan or the upkeep of baths, with admission money alone and reluctant to raise the rates, some councils were still cautious of 'taking the plunge'. Although in Birmingham, the Baths and Parks Committee of 1885 noted,

In twelve of the fourteen years from 1851 to 1864 the baths yielded a small profit, if interest on the capital outlay is left out of the account.

But they went onto state,

The fees paid by bathers have long since ceased to cover the maintenance charges and if the total expenditure is taken, the average annual loss for the last ten years is more than £3,500. Practically the rate payers give away 21/4d.⁵⁶

However, in a number of cases after pressure from local people, often via the pages of the local press, public meetings were usually held, resulting in a baths committee being established to research the feasibility of such a venture. At these initial meetings local dignitaries, doctors and clergy voiced the strongly held opinions and beliefs of the day, chief of which was that cleanliness was next to godliness. The medical profession, particularly the first appointed Medical Officers of Health (MOH), had significant influence.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Campbell, A. 1918: p.3

⁵⁶ Bunce, J.T. 1902: p. 152

⁵⁷ The first MOH's were appointed in Liverpool in 1847 and London in 1848.

Their belief in the benefits to all, of being able to keep clean, were often enough to spur most councils into action. Manchester Baths and Wash-houses Committee in 1876, for example, sought the opinion of both Manchester's and Liverpool's Medical Officers of Health, on the provision of public baths. The MOH for Liverpool, Dr. J. Stopford Taylor stated,

Among the many sanitary measures which have had an important influence in reducing the death rate, the promotion of personal cleanliness by means of these establishments must have had some considerable effect,.... by degrees they acquire habits, which will not only benefit them immediately, but be of advantage to the whole community, in making men and women clean and healthy, and better able to resist those epidemic influences which at certain periods are sure to affect the dense populations of our towns.

The Manchester MOH, Dr. John Leigh, also believed in the great benefits to public health with the provision of public baths. His opinions extended, like many social reformers of the time, to a belief, that the opportunity to improve personal habits of cleanliness, enabled an improvement in social and moral behaviour to take place. He stated to the committee,

I have long been of opinion that the intemperate habits of the people have been much influenced by their social surroundings, and by their domestic condition. The old saying that 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness' is true in every sense. If the home and person be clean, the mind rises to the improved condition. Cleanliness produces self respect; with purer air and clean surroundings, the mind is less depressed, and seeks less the excitement of drink. I should expect that greater temperance would follow on greater cleanliness – that higher mental cultivation would be sought, and that improvement in physical and sanitary condition, however, slow, which it

must always be, whatever social or sanitary measures are adopted, would inevitably attend the fulfilment of the benevolent object in view. In my official capacity as Medical Officer of Health for the city, I desire to express myself strongly in favour of the movement'.⁵⁸

The opinions of respected middle-class social reformers, such as the MOH, were often enough to persuade councils to build baths. However, from a first meeting, agreeing in principle, to the actual opening of baths often took several years. Kent Street Baths in Birmingham, for example, from an association being formed to the opening of the baths, took seven years (1844 to 1851) - this despite strong local support and some money having already been raised. Large cities though, after having seen the benefits of one facility often set about providing several more in the most needy districts. Like the earlier example from Liverpool, this often happened in quick succession. Birmingham after the success of the Kent Street Baths in 1851, built baths in Woodcock Street in 1860 and Northwood Street in 1862.⁵⁹ The success of the baths was evident by the number of bathers who used them. In 1851 when the first baths were opened in Birmingham, 78,715 people used the baths, at a time when the population of Birmingham borough stood at about 220,000.⁶⁰ By 1862 when Birmingham had three public baths, 167,646 bathers were recorded as having used the facilities. 1862 was however, the first year that

⁵⁸ Manchester Council proceedings 1875-6 p. 371 – Baths and Washhouse Committee Report 27 September 1876.

⁵⁹ Bunce, J.T. 1885: p.189

⁶⁰ Bunce, J.T. 1878: p.303

Birmingham recorded a significant loss, of £356, in the running of the baths.⁶¹ A breakdown of the number of bathers, in terms of which baths they used, to provide some idea of class usage, the age or sex of the bathers is not given for these years. However, from the following descriptions of public baths, it is evident that the most popular facility was the cheapest bath for working class men. Women were poorly catered for, both in terms of individual private baths and access to swimming baths or plunge pools.

Description of Public Bathing Facilities

The reasoning behind the provision of public baths was essentially to provide facilities for the most needy. From the outset however, it was realized that the revenue raised from providing just the basic amenities would not be enough to sustain even these facilities. The baths and wash-houses built in the mid-nineteenth century were quite extensive buildings, catering for both middle-class as well as working-class clientele, for whom separate facilities had to be provided. As the sexes also needed to be segregated, most public baths built at this time had at least a first and second class plunge pool, first and second class individual private baths, for men and women and then a separate wash-house area for cleaning clothes. Many also provided a third class plunge pool for boys. Access for women to the first and second class plunge pools was severely restricted. Many baths set aside just a few hours

⁶¹ Bunce, J.T. 1885: p.190

per week for women, usually during the daytime and not at weekends.⁶² The following table, gives some idea of the type of bathing facilities that were provided by local authorities, up to the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

FACILITIES IN THE 3 PUBLIC BATHS IN BIRMINGHAM UP TO 1874

Private Baths					Swimming Baths		Plunge Baths		
Men		Women		Jewish	Men		Men	Women	
1 st Class	2 nd Class	1 st Class	2 nd Class		1 st Class	2 nd Class			
30	24	6	7	2	1	1	1	1	Kent St.
16	16	6	8	-	1	1	-	1	Woodcock St.
12	13	6	6	-	1	1	-	-	Northwood St.

Source: Drawn from data in Bunce, J.T. 1885: p.190

A very vivid description of a public bath and wash-house in the 1850s, is provided by the writings of the nineteenth century Liverpool journalist Hugh Shimmin. In his article for the *Liverpool Mercury* in 1856, he describes the Cornwallis Street Baths as,

..the largest, most modern, best frequented and contain the most recent improvements consisting of three large plunge baths - first, second and third class; sixty private warm baths of similar classes; together with shower,

⁶² Bunce 1885 p.193. This situation was to continue for many decades. In 1882 the Birmingham Baths Committee noted the lack of separate accommodation for women and proposed an increase to 3 evenings per week. And a year later even proposed building a separate baths for women, but the proposal was deferred and not raised again.

*vapour and sitz baths; the whole being under the management of Mr. Andrew Clarke, the superintendent...The first thing that strikes the visitor to these baths is the scrupulous cleanliness everywhere observable, the order and regularity with which business is transacted...*⁶³

He goes on to describe the third class plunge pool which was mainly used by young boys and commonly called the 'two penny'. It was forty one feet long by twenty seven feet wide and five feet deep at one end, two and a half at the other, with floor of asphalt and sides of stone. At the deep end was a springboard to 'assist the lads in diving'. Around the edge of the pool were twenty four rooms or receiving boxes, none of which had doors on them. In these the bathers placed what clothes they had, as Shimmin noted,

*...as many as ten or twelve boys at one time deposit their habiliments in one of these boxesPoor little fellows! their clothes in most cases occupy little room... The scene on entering this pool on a Saturday night is quite stupifying with upwards of a hundred boys, most of them in a state of nudity, ducking, diving, floundering, plunging, dousing, sousing, rolling, sprawling, tossing and tumbling in the water.*⁶⁴

Many of these boys, because they did not have regular employment stayed in the baths for two to three hours at a time, occasionally going into their box to eat a little food and then back into the water. Most were apparently very expert swimmers and divers and often provided amusement

⁶³ Walton and Wilcox 1991 p.212

⁶⁴ Ibid

to the wealthier visitors to the baths and members of the councils bath committee, who would throw coins into the pool for the boys to dive after.⁶⁵

The four penny plunge bath was similar in appearance to the 'two penny', but according to Shimmin, as it was not used as much 'the place does not have such a dingy appearance'.⁶⁶ With the bath frequented more by middle aged and young men 'who find it hard to stand the rollicking fun of the boys and therefore pay the additional two pence for the additional comfort'.⁶⁷

The first class plunge bath is described by Shimmin as,

*a very beautiful building, with the bath being fifty seven feet long by forty one feet wide and three feet deep at one end and seven at the other, the sides are of tiles and the floor Yorkshire flagstone. The bath is emptied and the floor thoroughly scoured with sandstone twice a week, giving the water a beautifully clean appearance. In the centre of the bath stands a fountain, in the form of a vase, from the edge of which the jets send forth the water. There are thirty three dressing rooms round the bath, but the bath is not frequented as much as expected, and mainly by young or middle aged men. A separate part of the building is devoted to private warm baths, where a first class bath costs one shilling, second class six pence and third class two pence. In addition private cold shower baths may be had in the third class for one penny.*⁶⁸

The descriptive accounts by Shimmin, provides some evidence of how and when public baths and wash-houses were used and by who, in the middle

⁶⁵ Walton and Wilcox 1991 pp. 213-4

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Walton and Wilcox 1991: p. 214

⁶⁸ Walton and Wilcox 1991 pp. 216-7

years of the nineteenth century. Evidence from one establishment cannot give a complete picture and the Cornwallis Street Baths in Liverpool were unique, in that from their opening they only provided bathing and swimming facilities, not a wash-house area. A wash-house had originally been planned and built but, it was never opened and when the swimming pools proved so popular, the Baths Committee agreed to convert the wash house space into an additional bathing area.⁶⁹ However, from Shimmins' descriptions and the Baths and Wash-house Committee Reports of other cities, it is evident that the most popular facility within the baths was the swimming or plunge pools. These provided a new recreational opportunity for the population, enabling swimming to take place for the first time, in warm, relatively comfortable surroundings, in comparison to a dirty and cold river, lake or the sea, and created, as Cunningham later stated,

..huge demand for swimming, and the public baths and wash-houses which were built to improve the health of the working class also had the effect of providing them with relatively cheap recreation.⁷⁰

Individual private baths, provided at the public baths, also continued to be popular, until well into the twentieth century, when some private homes began to have bathrooms. The wash-house however, gradually became seen as a separate facility and was later often built away from any new baths.⁷¹ The provision of wash-houses was, according to Campbell, 'much less widespread

⁶⁹ Ellison and Howe 1997: p.27.

⁷⁰ Cunningham 1980: p.155.

than the provision of public baths...attributed in part to the fact that wash-houses are essentially for the benefit of housewives, who are often intensely conservative'.⁷² When an amendment was made to the Baths and Wash-Houses Act in 1878, which empowered local authorities to provide covered swimming baths,⁷³ the provision of public baths as a recreational facility for swimming was finally established.

Overall the provision of public baths and wash-houses, was only a minor part of nineteenth century health reform, but they helped improve the personal cleanliness and physical health of many urban inhabitants. Of equal concern, for middle-class social reformers, was however, the social and moral condition of the masses and the perceived necessity of improving their recreational activities.

Swimming as a Rational Activity

A major part of the debate, surrounding the social 'improvement' of the masses, focused on the desirability of reforming popular recreations, by providing rational alternatives. Rational recreation had 'proceeded from a basic humanitarian sympathy with the plight of the urban masses',⁷⁴ and an agreement that more recreational amenities were needed within cities, to an

⁷¹ Jones 1940: p. 427

⁷² Campbell, A. 1918: p.47.

⁷³ Campbell, A. 1918: p.4

⁷⁴ Bailey, P. 1978: p. 35

acceptance that 'example setting by the superior classes',⁷⁵ was the best way to progress. In following this strategy it was hoped that,

*new amenities would divert the working man from the pub and provide the proper environment for his exposure to the superior example, whose values would ultimately be internalised.*⁷⁶

The strategy however, had limited success. Yet the concept of 'improving' the working man, by reforming his recreational activities and through his observation of correct social behaviour, persisted. Attempts were made to improve many activities, but sport became a focus of the rational recreation movement.

Sport, from the 1860s, became considered as the best method, of achieving the ideal of a reformed working-class, with the qualities imbued within the 'gentleman amateur' being upheld as the desired model. However, even amongst the middle classes themselves, there was not united support for their ideals of the gentleman amateur, ensuring that the implementation of rational recreation through sport, would at the very least, be fragmented and inconsistent. Middle-class control of working-class sport, through the amateur ethos never materialized and amateurism did not become part of working-class sporting culture. Whilst, a further hindrance in the reform of working-class sport, was that middle-class gentlemen, largely came to control the newly established governing bodies of sport. Yet they made few consistent attempts to promote their sports amongst the working classes and instead

⁷⁵ Bailey, P.1978: p. 39

increasingly directed their efforts to protecting their sport from lower class infiltration.⁷⁷ In addition, for urban authorities, promotion of modern sport amongst the working classes, was too expensive and not a priority for towns and cities, more concerned with civic pride. Education was perceived as the best way to implement the ideals of rational recreation, yet even within state schools, there was little encouragement or provision of sport, for working-class children.⁷⁸ Finally, the greatest drawback, in the effectiveness of the rational recreation movement, whether through sport or other pastimes, was the desire of the middle-class to retain their distance from their social inferiors. Reforming the morals of the working classes, for the middle classes, as a group, became secondary to their concerns about their own social position. Plus, the working classes themselves, had little interest in following middle-class ideology. Their reluctance to accept direction from above and the development of their own sporting ideals, based on a working-class culture of respectability, 'a respectability born out of a strive for personal dignity in the face of adverse circumstances', ensured a rejection or transformation, of any middle-class ideologies surrounding sport.⁷⁹

The promotion and success of swimming as a rational activity, to improve and educate the working classes with the social habits and manners of the middle classes, was much more diffuse, than the provision of facilities.

⁷⁶ Bailey, P. 1978: p.41

⁷⁷ Bilsborough, P. 2001: p.55 in Galligan, F. (Ed) *Sports History*.

⁷⁸ More detail of state school provision of swimming and the impact of the ideology of rational recreation, will be given in chapter 6.

The obvious benefits to health and cleanliness through swimming, were advantageous for the promotion of swimming as a rational activity, but the whole concept of rational recreation proved more difficult to implement and its overall effect on working-class recreations and sport was minimal. Working-class sports and recreations retained their own identity, often practised and pursued entirely separately from the middle classes. Initially swimming too developed in this way. The provision of public baths had provided an alternative venue for working-class recreation and municipal pools had also become sites for the expanding recreations of the middle classes. Yet, inter-class sociability within swimming, as in other sports and recreations, was limited. The design of municipal baths, with separate classes of baths and a differentiated price structure, had ensured admission to the baths on a regular basis, was affordable for the more prosperous working classes. The financial difficulties encountered by most municipal baths, however, indicates that frequent use of the baths by a majority of the working classes, was not as consistent as anticipated. Although, for those members of the urban masses, especially young male workers, who could afford to attend regularly, the baths were considered as places for working-class sociability and enjoyment. Shimmin's articles from Liverpool, clearly illustrates, the different ways in which the separate classes of baths were used, by each section of society, but that inter class association, between the different status of bathers, rarely

⁷⁹ Bilborough, P. 2001: p.56

took place.⁸⁰ Class segregation at the baths, also ensured that observation, by the working classes, of the 'superior' habits of the bourgeoisie, using the first class baths, rarely occurred. Recreational swimming at public baths, therefore proved not to be a place for the social training of the masses.

Although public baths never became the most popular venue for respectable middle-class recreation and remained associated, as places for cleansing the great unwashed, class segregation at public baths, did enable the class conscious urban professional, an opportunity to frequent the public baths, without entirely comprising their social position. Swimming could be considered a respectable, if minor, bourgeoisie recreation. Its obvious health benefits and the ability of people able to swim, to save life, meant the activity did develop advocates amongst the professional middle classes. A promotional brochure for the formation of a London Swimming Club written in 1861, indicated that the status of swimming was rising among the urban middle classes, when it stated its objectives were, 'to promote this most healthy pastime and place it amongst the first of our national recreations'.⁸¹ It went on to claim that although the club was still in its infancy,

*...a great national good is expected to arise from it, from the love of swimming which the gentlemen at present comprising its members are known to bear. We think that the art of swimming is a most noble one, and deserving of our best attention.*⁸²

⁸⁰ A full extract of H. Shimmin's article on the Cornwallis Street Baths is given in Walton, J.K. and Wilcox, A. 1991.

⁸¹ Leverell, W.H. 1861: p. 8

⁸² Ibid

The growing support for swimming, from many sections of the urban middle classes, saw the establishment of a number of swimming clubs, during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.⁸³ For the majority of these gentlemen clubs, their aim was to 'raise the art of swimming to its former standing' and to increase the number of 'gentlemen promoters of the art and respectable persons attracted to swimming'.⁸⁴ To ensure the lower classes would be prevented from joining, subscriptions and entry costs were relatively high and payable in advance. The London Swimming Club, set their entrance fee to 'five shillings, and the subscription ten shillings per annum, payable quarterly in advance'.⁸⁵ Whilst to further restrict admission to only, 'respectable' members, the London Swimming Club was typical in stating within its rules that, 'All gentlemen desirous of becoming Members must be proposed to the committee and carried by a majority' and that 'The committee shall have the power of expelling any member for ungentlemanly conduct'.⁸⁶ Many swimming clubs, using the local municipal baths, also tried to maintain their standards, by for example only using the 1st class baths. The Otter SC, London, which was initially called the Leander SC, was founded when 'a number of young men using the first class baths' of St. Marylebone Public Baths met to form a swimming club in 1869.⁸⁷

⁸³ Smith, W. 1885, *The Swimming Club Directory*, details the establishment of clubs during the second half of the nineteenth century.

⁸⁴ Smith, W. 1885: p.26

⁸⁵ Smith, W. 1885: p.42

⁸⁶ Ibid p. 43

⁸⁷ *A History of the Otter Swimming Club* (1969): p.9

However, there is evidence that not all members, of swimming clubs at municipal pools were from the prosperous middle classes, but included sections of the working-class. A number of members of the newly formed London Swimming Club of 1861, were for example, also members of the London Unity Rowing Club, 'the first tradesmen's club that started, and is the only club which has kept its stand from that time, and is now in a flourishing state'.⁸⁸ Whilst, the first nomination in the entry book of the Leeds Swimming Club in 1881, was from James Denham, (silversmith).⁸⁹ From the outset, other swimming clubs, formed by the regular customers of public baths, intentionally attracted the broadest mix of the social classes as possible to their membership. Cost of membership prevented the very poorest from joining, but fees were kept to a minimum. Warrington Swimming Club at its inaugural meeting in 1879, proposed a 'nominal entrance fee of a shilling and an annual subscription of 2/6d would be charged'.⁹⁰ The fees included instruction in swimming and the founder members enthusiastically hoped,

*...that the formation of a club will have a tendency to encourage the art, and act as an incentive to those who desire to learn; but apart from that, that it will stimulate a spirit of friendly intercourse and intimacy among the members of the club, and prove a source of enjoyment which would not otherwise be aroused.*⁹¹

⁸⁸ *A History of the Otter Swimming Club* (1969): p.20

⁸⁹ *Swimming Times*, April 1881, p.16 *A 100 Years for Leeds Swimming Club*.

⁹⁰ *Warrington Guardian*, 1 March 1879, col 3, p.14

⁹¹ *Warrington Guardian*, 19 February 1879, col 3, p.11

Whatever the social class of their members, swimming clubs attached to municipal pools served the function, of providing sociability for the respectable urban gentleman or worker, in the often unfriendly urban environment. Swimming clubs at municipal baths, although not as prestigious or comfortable as private baths clubs, did provide a warm and friendly place in which to participate, in a healthy, purposeful recreation for an affordable sum. Most offered, in addition to weekly swimming instruction and practice, an opportunity to learn the techniques of life saving, plus many other social events and excursions.⁹²

Swimming clubs, were also formed by associations concerned primarily with reforming working-class recreation, such as church groups, youth organizations, work place schemes and neighbourhood groups. Swimming clubs, formed from within these associations were often an adjunct to their main activities, and were generally used as a method of attracting more members. A Salvation Army booklet promoting swimming, although printed at the turn of the century, expressed some typical opinions, held about swimming, from among middle-class reformers of the mid- nineteenth century,

Proficiency in swimming and diving, is valuable to us as Salvationists, since it will enable us to save life, as many of our comrades have already proved.

Swimming is also an excellent recreation, teaching at the same time valuable lessons of courage, endurance, and judgment, and is a valuable and healthful method of enjoyment.⁹³

⁹² More detail of swimming club activities will be given in chapter 4.

⁹³ Gilks, W. 1916: p. 1

Whilst, Birmingham's Kent Street Baths, in the 1880s, had 7 swimming clubs using the facilities on different evenings of the week, and included a Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) SC, Telegraph Clerks SC and Severn Street Class No 17 SC, in addition to city and district swimming clubs, such as, Birmingham SC, Birmingham Ladies SC, Wycliffe SC and Cygnet SC.⁹⁴ Club members ranged in number, from just over 30 to in excess of 100, and for many of the smaller clubs, the cost of hiring the facilities proved too expensive.⁹⁵ Swimming clubs, for purely recreational purposes, were also part of industrial works recreation and school programmes, but again, the expense of hiring or maintaining a swimming pool by the company, often proved too costly.⁹⁶ The practice of swimming, solely as a rational recreation, however valuable and wholesome middle-class reformers perceived it to be, proved largely unviable on economic grounds. Swimming clubs, often only became sustainable, once a larger number of club members had become attracted to the sport, and this did not occur until a regular amateur competitive calendar, had been established, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Whilst many town and city clubs, formed from the regular users of the municipal baths, did try to foster and maintain a relatively mixed social class

⁹⁴ City of Birmingham 1897: p.62

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ Many works recreation programmes established swimming clubs – Cadburys, Rowntrees and Port Sunlight, for example, but like clubs in the wider community most developed into clubs for competitive racing, rather than for pure recreational swimming. Chapter 6 will give more detail on the development of schools swimming.

membership. The prospect of such intimate inter-class association, was too much for some of the professional middle classes. The possibility of having to regularly rub shoulders with their social inferiors and the continued stigma of municipal baths, as places for the great unwashed, saw urban middle-class gentlemen, with an enthusiasm for swimming, establishing their own private baths clubs.

Private baths clubs were a feature of several towns and cities of the nineteenth century. Bathing and swimming facilities owned and run by individuals and private companies, had opened in certain towns at the beginning of the century,⁹⁷ while other towns had bathing establishments, that had been part of the earlier spa movement.⁹⁸ A few survived, but many found in order to cover the cost of maintaining their facilities, they had had to charge fees that only a limited number of wealthy citizens could afford and within small towns, there were not enough customers to sustain the baths, resulting in the closure of many premises. Private baths clubs of the later nineteenth century, became mainly confined to large cities, where a greater proportion of wealthy citizens resided and also in locations where the local authority had been slow to respond to the 1846 Baths and Wash-houses Act. Scotland, because of its later legislation for the provision of public baths, had several

⁹⁷ Coventry for example had a 'substantial bathing establishment, built in 1820, provided by private enterprise' according to the *Victoria County History of Warwickshire* p.282. Glasgow also had swimming pool, built in 1808, by entrepreneur William Harley, from Bilsborough (1983).

⁹⁸ Hembry, P. 1997 in her book on British Spas lists 31 spas which were developed between 1820 – 1839, with a further 19 spas being improved from existing spas during this period.

private bathing establishments. Glasgow, in particular, could boast of five private baths clubs during the 1870s,⁹⁹ and Edinburgh one in 1887.¹⁰⁰ In London, evidence remains of at least one private baths club, called *The Bath Club*.¹⁰¹ Whilst, several swimming clubs, established in London in the mid 1800s, initially used premises that were privately owned, but were later taken over by the local authority.¹⁰²

The common feature of the nineteenth century private baths clubs, were their desire to remain as exclusive middle-class establishments. Many became like a Gentleman's Club and provided much more than a pool for swimming, but like *The Bath Club* of London, also included,

*... social, dinning, card, smoking, billiard and drawing rooms, also a very complete library, all beautifully decorated and furnished with every modern comfort, over which there are several rackets courts and a shooting gallery.*¹⁰³

While the pool area included 'a splendidly equipped swimming bath, with diving boards, trapezes, rings and ropes above it, gymnasium and adjacent electric, hot air, steam, douche and shower baths'.¹⁰⁴ Not only were the facilities far superior than at municipal baths, but they were also cleaner, with 'a baths master on hand to keep the pool clean and tidy and attend to

⁹⁹ Mann, W.M. 1990: p.11. Glasgow Private Baths Clubs included – Arlington 1870, Western in 1876, Victoria 1878, Pollokshields 1883 and Dennistoun 1884.

¹⁰⁰ Gilmour, J. 1990: p. 9. Edinburgh's Private Baths were the Warrender Private Baths of 1886.

¹⁰¹ *The Swimming Magazine*, April 1915: p.6

¹⁰² Smith, W. 1885: pp 20 - 37

¹⁰³ *The Swimming Magazine*, April 1915: p.6

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

members' at all times.¹⁰⁵ However, while facilities were important attractions, exclusivity was the major draw, and as Mann, explains in his history of the Western Baths, Glasgow,

*Like some other types of sporting clubs, baths clubs were also important social centres for business and professional men to meet in pleasant and informal surroundings, far from the gaze of other groups.*¹⁰⁶

While *The Bath Club* of London, could claim Royalty among its members, 'it was in this bath that the Royal children were taught to swim, and one of the most constant visitors when in town, is the Prince of Wales.'¹⁰⁷ Membership of other private baths clubs, remained associated with the leading professional and business men of the city,¹⁰⁸ who were prepared to pay the relatively high subscription and entry fees,¹⁰⁹ for the exclusivity and social opportunities that the clubs provided. Depending on a small number of wealthy clientele however, proved risky. Clubs flourished when business and industry were prospering, but struggled during economic down turns. Despite their often fragile economic state, the exclusive private baths clubs of the late nineteenth century, had helped to improve the status of swimming and its acceptance as a respectable recreation among the urban elite.

¹⁰⁵ Mann, W.M. 1990: p.11

¹⁰⁶ Mann, W.M. 1990: p.11

¹⁰⁷ *The Swimming Magazine*, April 1915: p. 6

¹⁰⁸ Mann, W. M. 1990: p.10

¹⁰⁹ Mann, W.M. 1990: p. 25 – gives the subscription costs for ordinary members of the Western Baths in 1888 as £1 10s 0d and £1 1s 0d entry money.

Overall, the promotion of swimming as a rational recreation was only partly successful. The cost of hiring or maintaining facilities, proved too expensive for most middle-class social reformers to continue to promote swimming, either at municipal pools or through works recreation programmes. Swimming, was more successful than many other sports, in attracting both middle and working-class participants, but it was rare for the classes to participate together, which prevented observation of the 'superior' habits of the middle classes, by the masses from taking place. For a number of the middle classes, swimming, especially in municipal pools was less than respectable, while for the working classes, swimming was associated with middle-class prescription of cleanliness. However, swimming slowly attracted enough enthusiasts, from all sections of society, who were prepared to overlook their own class expectations. Amongst the middle classes in particular, it was the growing complexity of modern urban life, which made it increasingly difficult to participate in recreations that were informal and casual, so in order to promote and facilitate such activities, clubs began to be formed. Consequently, in most towns and cities throughout Britain, swimming clubs were established. Whether the club members met at the municipal baths or in the exclusive surroundings of a private baths club, 'the formal structures of the club were in response to modern society's need for order' and their common feature was of providing sociability and intimacy, to overcome the anomie of the city.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Adelman, M. 1990: p.266

Seaside Bathing as 'Flight' From the Urban Environment

A further strand in the promotion of swimming as a rational activity and in the development of swimming as a sport, was the increasing popularity, throughout the century, of sea bathing. The history and development of the seaside holiday and seaside resorts have been extensively researched.¹¹¹ The purpose within this chapter, is to discuss briefly, from the literature, how a trip to the seaside was used to escape the confines of the urban interior and an opportunity for the inhabitants of Britain's towns and cities, to 're-create' themselves.¹¹²

The tradition of swimming, to cool off, in the local river, canal, lake or the sea, was a common occurrence during the first half of the nineteenth century. In many towns, safe spots for swimming were improved and by mid-century, an expanding river and sea swimming club calendar developed.¹¹³ The advance of industrialization and urbanization however, resulted in many former safe bathing places, being lost to the progress of shipping traffic and industrial pollution. Whilst the reform of morals among the middle classes and their desire for respectability, saw the prosecution of many bathers, who had

¹¹¹ The two key texts on the development of the seaside are: Walvin, J. (1978) *Beside the Seaside: A Social History of the Seaside Holiday* and Walton, J.K. (1983) *The English Seaside Resort: A Social History 1750-1914*.

¹¹² Holt, R. 1989: p. 194

¹¹³ Bilsborough, P. 2000: p. 229 in Jarvie, G. and Burnett, J. *Sport, Scotland and the Scots*.

been in the habit of swimming naked. Casual recreational swimming, within the immediate locality of the industrial city, declined for most citizens, but a separate opportunity to swim or bathe, became increasingly accessible for many urban dwellers, with the advent of the seaside holiday.

A switch in medical opinion, led by Dr Russell of Brighton, in the late eighteenth century, saw sea bathing over take the spas, as the most beneficial way to improve health.¹¹⁴ Improved roads and shipping lines down the Thames, aided aristocratic and eventually middle-class patients, who would have previously sought the comforts of the inland spa, to turn their attention to the newly developing seaside resorts. Socially and architecturally the seaside resorts mirrored those of the spa towns and offered similar facilities – hotels, apartments, gaming and assembly rooms, musical soirees, library and dining facilities.¹¹⁵ Social distinctions between resorts developed, with some like Brighton and Weymouth, claiming royal and aristocratic patronage, whilst others evolved to cater for middle-class clientele. The greatest differences in the social tone and style of resorts however, occurred in the 1840s, with the revolution in the railway system. Economic changes, aided by the railway system 'enabled growing numbers of working people, organized through their Sunday schools, factories or other institutions, to afford a trip to the coast'.¹¹⁶ The opportunity of a trip to the seaside increased

¹¹⁴ Walvin, J. 1984: p. 153

¹¹⁵ Ibid

for the whole population, throughout the century and the resorts developed rapidly, to cater for the increasing, if generally transient population. By the 1870s, the resorts had become 'substantial urban areas in their own right'¹¹⁷ and were 'pre-eminently playgrounds of the working-class.' However, 'compared to the inland industrial areas, the resorts seemed a triumph for good order and taste'¹¹⁸ and 'contemporary observers gave the seaside holiday its share of credit for the decline in drunkenness and violence over the period'.¹¹⁹

Trips to the seaside were used as a counter attraction to the popular recreations of the industrial towns, with Sunday Schools, temperance societies and paternalistic employers, all advocating the health and educative benefits of a seaside excursion.¹²⁰ Even for the most thrifty and respectable of the working classes, the appeal of the seaside holiday, was that it could be justified, as both healthy and mind broadening.¹²¹ Participation in a trip to the seaside became the norm in tightly knit urban neighbourhoods, organized at the level of the street, the Sunday School, the pub or the sports club. Within the Lancashire textile districts, 'neighbours and relatives would colonize the same boarding houses in Blackpool, Rhyl and New Brighton and whole towns

¹¹⁶ Walvin, J. 1984: p.154

¹¹⁷ Walvin, J.1984: p.154. Between 1801 and 1851 the eleven largest resorts recorded a population growth of an astonishing 214 per cent.

¹¹⁸ Walvin, J 1978a: p. 70

¹¹⁹ Walton, J.K. 1981: p.257

¹²⁰ Ibid p.249

¹²¹ Ibid p.257

would have a deserted appearance during the Wakes'.¹²² Moreover, as trips became more affordable, especially after the 1840s, when railway companies began providing excursion trains, they also became popular amongst the less respectable of the working classes. Working people soon imposed on the seaside holiday, even if it was only for a day, 'their own distinctive style and taste'¹²³ and 'it afforded a welcome, pleasurable, though all too brief escape for a day or two from an unhealthy industrial atmosphere'.¹²⁴

The striking feature of the seaside holiday, compared to most other recreations, was that it was often a family affair, enjoyed by adults and children together.¹²⁵ The simple pleasures of the beach, paddling at the water's edge, playing in the sand, were the main attractions. Gradually entrepreneurs saw the opportunity the resorts offered and provided amusements and attractions for poorer visitors. Yet ultimately, despite the commercialisation of resorts, the appeal of the seaside remained, the relatively cheap and carefree enjoyments found on the sea shore.

Beach life too appealed to the middle classes, although opening up the resorts to the lower orders, was resented, as it denied them their former exclusive pleasure. Segregation into socially different 'zones' within a resort or between resorts occurred.¹²⁶ Certain resorts attempted to cater for all classes,

¹²² Walton, J.K. 1981: p.257

¹²³ Walvin, J. 1984: p.155

¹²⁴ Walvin, J. 1978a: p.74

¹²⁵ Walvin, J. 1978b: p.85

¹²⁶ Walvin, J. 1978a: p. 77

others openly appealed to the mass market, whilst resorts to which the railway had not yet extended, remained the preserve of the social elite. For the middle classes and their superiors, the resorts provided 'either a suburb by the sea or a peaceful retreat into retirement and, with luck, better health'.¹²⁷ Sea water had first been recommended for improving health, then from the 1860s, medical opinion advocated sea air, as being of greater benefit to health and such recommendations were enough for the middle classes to continue to populate the resorts. Despite a decline in enthusiasm for sea bathing, the seaside continued to attract significant numbers of the middle classes and from mid-century, alongside the all important health benefits, a fascination for marine biology and conchology propagated among the middle classes, in their trips to the coast.¹²⁸

Despite the inducements or recommendations not to swim, the sea itself also remained an attraction ¹²⁹ and whenever the middle or upper classes visited the coast, 'they headed for the water, often before breakfast'.¹³⁰ Swimming from the beach however, became increasingly cumbersome. Public bathing 'touched a number of Victorian sensitivities about morality and personal conduct'.¹³¹ Until bathing costumes were mass produced at the end of the century, swimmers, especially male swimmers,

¹²⁷ Walvin, J. 1978a: p. 74

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Walvin, J. 1978b: p.69

¹³⁰ Ibid p.85

¹³¹ Ibid p.69

swam in the nude. To exert control over some of the 'shameful' conduct, local authorities introduced bathing regulations. Beaches were segregated for swimming, preventing families from bathing together. While bathing machines and swimming costumes, decreased the exposure of naked flesh, they added to the expense and inconvenience of swimming in the sea and deterred many. To appeal to this group and to improve their local amenities, resorts began to build swimming baths, from the 1860s.¹³² The baths often used sea water, but offered swimmers a more comfortable form of recreation. Swimming clubs were soon established at the principal resorts and swimming galas and entertainments became a popular spectator sport for visitors and locals.¹³³

Swimming baths were one attraction, among many that were on offer in a trip to the seaside. By the turn of the century, 'some resorts had developed a unique, often plebeian, character which seemed to cast aside the conventional inhibitions'.¹³⁴ Increased controls concerning behaviour on the beach, could not prevent the seaside 'resorts from posing a number of dilemmas for morally sensitive Victorians'.¹³⁵ Recreation and leisure which provided 'breathing and exercise space for city dwellers' were on the one hand acknowledged 'as vital for improving the condition of the people'.¹³⁶ Yet the conduct of people from all social classes, but especially the masses, when

¹³² Walvin, J.1978b: p.85

¹³³ Durie, A.J. and Huggins, M.J. 1998: p.178

¹³⁴ Walvin, J. 1978b: p.73

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ Ibid p.72

arriving at the seaside was perplexing. To escape the invasion, many of the wealthier sections of society fled to the Continent, but they could not prevent 'the wave of lower class day trippers which cascaded on the shoreline at weekends and throughout the summer season'.¹³⁷

Access to the coast, if only for a day, was no longer a problem, except for the very poorest, in urban and industrial Britain by the end of the century. Working people were able to 'emulate their social betters' and 'escape the grime of the cities, for the fun and fresh air of the coast'.¹³⁸ A trip to the seaside 'appealed to a whole spectrum of popular attitudes to leisure, from the narrow dedication of the pursuit of physical, intellectual and moral health and improvement, to the more diffused desire to "have a spree" away from the depressing constraints of the working environment'.¹³⁹ Sea bathing itself remained popular, particularly among the middle classes, but for the masses the inconvenience and expense of bathing attire and segregation, meant paddling at the waters edge often had to suffice. Whilst the seaside did provide an alternative venue for working-class recreation, bathing or swimming was never the sole attraction. The cult of swimming grew enormously over the century, but it was the provision of municipal baths rather than 'the flight to the sea' which initiated the enthusiasm.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Walvin, J. 1978b: p.88

¹³⁸ Walvin, J. 1978b: p.89

¹³⁹ Walton, J.K. 1981:p. 249

¹⁴⁰ Walvin, J. 1978b: p.86

Summary

Improving the physical, social and moral condition of the population was a continual concern for nineteenth century Britain. The purpose of this chapter has been to assess whether the provision of public baths and promotion of swimming as a rational activity were successful in alleviating these concerns. Evidence available suggests, that the nature of public baths provision was patchy. Some councils responded vigorously to the opportunity to provide public baths, for example Birmingham, which had built three baths by 1852. While other councils responded half heartedly and were reluctant to commit to building such expensive facilities, until in many cases, civic pride, a strong motivating force in Victorian Britain, would prompt a council into action, as was the case in Manchester. Where public baths were provided, it did enable a significant number of urban inhabitants, to wash themselves and their clothes, on a more regular basis than had previously been possible, with a consequent improvement in personal health.

Whilst the evidence also suggests, that any improvement in social or moral behaviour was not as a consequence of either public baths provision or the promotion of swimming as a rational recreation. The class segregated facilities at the baths ensured there was little class sociability and public baths, almost from the beginning, were adopted by the working classes, as places for recreation and enjoyment, not as places to observe correct social behaviour. Whilst the middle and upper classes, often established their own private baths clubs to further segregate themselves from their social inferiors.

Despite some evidence supporting the popularity of the baths by the working classes, many baths experienced severe financial difficulties and could only continue on receiving significant subsidies.

Provision of municipal baths, initially tainted the status of swimming, as a pursuit for the masses and whilst social reformers had limited success in promoting swimming as a rational activity, amongst the adult working-class, it gradually became accepted as relatively respectable activity for the urban bourgeoisie. The establishment of swimming clubs, primarily by middle-class gentlemen, helped improve the position of swimming. However, the main and continued attraction of swimming clubs, were the opportunities they provided for sociability and enjoyment, within the complex urban environment. Private Baths clubs in particular served this vital function, but swimming clubs at municipal baths also fulfilled this need and often included sections of the respectable working classes amongst their members.

Seaside bathing was a separate and essentially different strand in the development of swimming. It was an important element in the justification of a trip to the seaside, for most of the health conscious middle classes. Whilst for the masses, sea bathing itself, was generally only a minor consideration in the attractions provided by a trip to the coast. The seaside excursion became an important part of working-class recreation, linked to the development of a new leisure, as opposed to, sporting culture. Whole families, neighbours or streets would escape the city or town together and the seaside holiday was a 'flight' from the urban environment, not from the social community.

Overall the provision of public baths and the promotion of swimming as a rational activity, were only partially successful in alleviating the twin concerns of public health and social order. The initial association of the baths, with cleansing and improving the masses, ensured that swimming retained a reputation as a plebeian pursuit. Nevertheless, public baths did provide a safer and warmer environment for swimming and were essential, for the 'cult of swimming', which grew enormously over the century.¹⁴¹ An important strand, in this cult of swimming, was the rise and development of the competitive side of swimming and this will be the focus of the next chapter.

¹⁴¹ Walvin, J. 1978b: p.85

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RISE OF COMPETITIVE SWIMMING 1840 to 1880

This chapter examines the development of swimming from 1840 to 1880, the period that marked the beginning of a change in emphasis for swimming, as a rational, enjoyable, sociable activity to the emergence of swimming as a modern competitive sport. The development of sports during the nineteenth century did not occur in a social, cultural or political vacuum.¹ The objective here is to examine the impact of creeping urbanization on the modernization of swimming. The primary and secondary material examined, confirms that competitive swimming underwent a number of significant changes, but also that there were continuities from an earlier period and that both the changes and continuities, were influenced by the process of urbanization. The analysis in this chapter is focused principally on i) the 'modernization' model of sport advocated by Melvin Adelman and ii) the wider influences of urban society, on the changes and continuities, which occurred in swimming throughout the nineteenth century.

In order to examine, the changing nature of competitive swimming from the early to the late nineteenth century, the chapter will be divided into six sections. Section one provides a brief review of the characteristics of 'modern' sport, in particular the typology proposed by Melvin Adelman.

¹ Holt, R. 1989: p.3

Section two considers the activities and races of early nineteenth century swimmers, most of whom were professional and their influence on the modernization of the sport. Section three is an overview of the formation of the first national swimming organizations, with an explanation for their ultimate decline. Sections four and five, consider the changing attitude towards swimming, by both government and social reformers, which resulted in the promotion of swimming as a sport. With section four tracing the establishment of a specialized swimming press, while section five concentrates upon the impact of the 1878 Baths and Wash-houses Act, on the progression of swimming, which enabled local authorities to build covered swimming pools as opposed to public baths and wash-houses. Section six examines the development of swimming clubs, including the role of the professional in their formation and explores the overall influence of clubs, on the transformation of swimming from a 'pre-modern' to a 'modern' state. The chapter concludes with an assessment of whether swimming, by 1880, could claim to have become a modern sport. Three questions lie at the heart of this analysis: How had swimming changed by 1880? In what ways had it become a modern sport? and how influential were the wider processes of urbanization on the transformation of swimming into a modern sport?

The Characteristics of 'Modern' Sport

The transformation of sport from a 'rational' or pre-modern to a 'modern' state is frequently analysed using Allen Guttmann seven characteristics in his

'From Ritual to Record' typology.² Other typologies have also been developed to classify the features of modern sport, most used the concept of modernization to offer valuable, but broadly similar classifications,³ and all have characterised the gulf between 'traditional' and 'modern' sports as being the formal codification and national administration of sport.⁴ 'Modernization' models have however, been criticized as too simplistic to explain the complexity of the transformation of sport and that they neglect the many continuities, as opposed to changes which occurred in sport, during both the early and late nineteenth century.⁵ Nevertheless, they provide a framework to inform an examination of the changing nature of a sport during this period, whilst also allowing the many other 'subtle influences and interesting problems' to be examined.⁶

Melvin Adelman's work *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics 1820 – 70*, used modernization as a framework and identified six characteristics with which to classify 'modern' sport,⁷ while his study also explored the relationship between sport and the urban environment. Adelman's characteristics are therefore more relevant to this

² Guttman, 1978, p54

³ Adelman, M. (1990) acknowledges that his typology was influenced by the classifications of modern sport devised by Eric Dunning (1973) 'The Structural-Functional Properties of Folk Games and modern Sport' in *Sportwissenschaft* 3, pp.215-32 and Alan, G. Ingham (1979) 'Methodology in the Sociology of Sport: from Symptoms of Malaise to Weber for a Cure' *Quest* 31, pp.198-212. Whilst Dunning and Sheard (1979) *Barbarians, Gentleman and Players* also drew up a typology of the structural properties of folk Games and Modern Sports.

⁴ Holt, R. 1989: p.2

⁵ *Ibid* p.12

⁶ *Ibid* p.3

⁷ The six characteristics are listed on the following page.

analysis of swimming, which is essentially a study of the changing nature of towns and cities and the transformation of swimming from a casual recreational pursuit to a 'modern' sport. His work also provides an important missing link in the analysis of modern sport - 'the need to establish rational order', which will form part of this analysis of swimming.⁸

While the modern city was both a setting and a stimulant for the transformation of sport, each sport developed and modernized at its own rate, dependent in part, by the combined effects of the internal growth, competition and commercialisation within each sport.⁹ In the case of British swimming, all of the following six characteristics of Adelman's 'modern' sport, had to some degree, begun to be implemented, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Whilst this chapter will not examine in detail, each of Adelman's six characteristics in relation to the development of swimming, it will use Adelman's typology to inform an examination of the changing nature of competitive swimming, from the early to the late nineteenth century and to explore the relationship between swimming and the urban community.

Table 1. The Characteristics of Modern Ideal Sporting Types

1. *Organization* – formal; institutionally differentiated at the local, regional and national levels.
2. *Rules* – formal, standardized and written; rationally and pragmatically worked out and legitimated by organizational means.

⁸ Adelman, 1990: p.3 and 5.

⁹ Adelman, 1990: p.5

3. *Competition* – national and international, superimposed on local contests; chance to establish national and international reputations.
4. *Role Differentiation* – high; emergence of specialists (professionals) and strict distinctions between playing and spectating.
5. *Public Information* – reported on a regular basis in local newspapers as well as national sports journals; appearance of specialized magazines, guidebooks etc.
6. *Statistics and Records* – kept and published on a regular basis; considered measures of achievement; records sanctioned by national associations.

(Source: Adelman, 1990: 6)

Professional Swimming

Swimming races whether for enjoyment or monetary reward, were not new activities, which began in the nineteenth century, although new to the nineteenth century was the emergence of the job title professional swimmer or more usually 'professor' of swimming. Competitive swimming had been part of both Greek and Roman empires, but the popularity of swimming had 'waxed and waned', until the early decades of the nineteenth century in Britain, when an increase in the number and frequency of competitive swimming races occurred.¹⁰ The extent of the swimming revival in Britain was such that 'the English became acknowledged as the best swimmers in the world, with London looked upon as the capital of world swimming'.¹¹ The reasons for this renewed interest in nineteenth century competitive swimming, in Britain, were

¹⁰ Sprawson, C. 1992: p. 45

¹¹ Ibid: p.19

complex and varied and will be focused upon throughout this chapter. Whatever the mixture of reasons behind the ascendancy of swimming in Britain, it cannot be attributed solely to the 'mixture of Nordic and Roman strains in their character', which was the claim on one twentieth century writer.¹² Nevertheless, the phenomenal rise in Britain's premier place in world swimming, did enable some of the population, for the first time, to make a living from swimming and one of the first characteristics of a modern sport to occur in swimming, was that of role differentiation, with the development and organization of the professional swimmer.

The opportunity to earn a living as a professional swimming teacher and racer was a direct result of the increasing number of public and private baths that were built in the first half of the nineteenth century. Many of the professionals were employed by the baths as bath supervisors or superintendents and to supplement their basic income, most also gave swimming lessons, promoted and gave displays at swimming galas, swam in specifically organized challenges for prize money and wrote books and articles. The desire by the public to learn to swim and to spectate at swimming galas, was also a consequence of the building of baths, which made swimming safer, cleaner and for urban dwellers, a convenient leisure activity. All these factors enabled an initially small, but growing number of predominately men and very occasionally women, to find regular employment as swimming professionals.

¹² Sprawson, C. 1992: p.45

Many of the first swimming professionals had originally been river workers. Even before the building of indoor baths, a few men had found employment as 'watermen' at public schools such as Eton and Harrow,¹³ or as swimming masters who taught the military to swim.¹⁴ The river workers or 'watermen' often supplemented their meagre incomes by racing. Initially and more usually these were rowing and sculling races, but some also took part in swimming challenges.¹⁵ The early swimming races or challenges were significant occasions and drew large crowds and provided much public interest and press coverage. One of the earliest documented swimming challenges took place 10 July 1827 and for a while swimming became headline news and produced some of the sports first star personalities. The race was between the rival Mancunians 'Dr' Issac Bedale and Mathew Vipond, the challenge was to swim eighteen miles of the Mersey, from Liverpool to Runcorn, 'Dr' Bedale was the winner reaching Runcorn in 3 hours and 35 minutes.¹⁶

However, as industrialization and urbanization made many rivers polluted and so unpleasant or even dangerous to swim in and with the building of indoor swimming facilities, the attraction of river races quickly declined. The new bathing establishments did though provide employment for some of the original 'watermen', but there was also a new breed of swimming

¹³ McIntosh, P.1952: p.59

¹⁴ Terret, T. 1995: p.18

¹⁵ Halladay, E. 1990.

¹⁶ *The Manchester Guardian, Notes and Queries*, 1 November 1875.

professional who had no connection with the river working tradition. One example was Frederick Beckwith, born in Ramsgate in 1821, not only was he not from a river working background, but he managed to earn a good living from swimming, despite never being a particularly good swimmer. His reputation as a professional was due to exceptional self-publicity and secret agreements or more accurately fixing of races.¹⁷ His whole family were involved in the swimming world, with his daughter Agnes Beckwith, in particular becoming one of the most well known professional swimmers. The public acceptance of female professionals is evidence of how far professional swimming had moved away from its riverside origins and as chapter seven will demonstrate, swimming's almost unique status in being approved of and actively promoted as a suitable sport for women in the late nineteenth century.

The term professional swimmer or Professor of swimming, referred to many activities, as previously mentioned, for most it was their sole full time occupation. The title of professional swimmer was also used by men who had employment outside of their swimming activities, but owing to their success in possibly only one or two races, promoted themselves as 'champion swimmer' and then advertised their prowess and suitability to teach swimming. 'Dr' Bedale success in his race down the Mersey in 1827, enabled him to advertise his ability to teach swimming from his 'surgery' in Manchester, as well as continuing his main occupation, that of professing to cure most

¹⁷ Terret, T. 1995: p.19

illnesses.¹⁸ A few professionals had no other interest in swimming apart from competing in races and winning prize money, plus placing a bet on the outcome of a race. Although several were also professionals in other sports. Mathew Vipond for example, was also a successful prize fighter.¹⁹ Whilst an even smaller number at this time, did not compete for prize money, but solely for the status and prestige that winning brought. However, as the ability of the swimmers increased, the need to train regularly became essential and the policy of most baths in only permitting the bath supervisor to teach swimming, meant many professionals found that their only option, if they wished to continue to compete and teach successfully, was to find employment as a bath supervisor.

The pay and working conditions of the bath supervisor or superintendent during the second half of the nineteenth century, has been clearly documented for Liverpool.²⁰ The weekly wage of a bath supervisor in 1856 was 40 shillings and for a male bath attendant it was 24 shillings, but many were laid off during the winter months when the baths were closed, indicating that the wages cannot have been much greater than the average manual wage at the time.²¹ The ability to earn extra through competing in and promoting swimming galas or 'aquatic shows was though a profitable business, not only on account of the admission fees but also because of the

¹⁸ *The Manchester Guardian, Notes and Queries*, 1 November 1875

¹⁹ *The Manchester Guardian, Notes and Queries*, 1 November 1875

²⁰ *Annals of the Liverpool Corporate Baths Dept.*, 1952

²¹ *ibid.* p. 29

bets placed by spectators'.²² With evidence of thousands turning out to watch aquatic shows, such as the 4000 people who crowded into the Mount Street baths in London in 1840.²³

The necessity to offer the paying and betting public something over and above straightforward swimming races, resulted in ever increasing bizarre feats being attempted in swimming pools.²⁴ To also attract the public, children often formed part of the entertainment, as was the case with the children of the Beckwith family, where Agnes and Charles were part of their father's aquatic shows from a young age. Whilst Emily Parker the eleven year old sister of Harry Parker, the supervisor at the Barbican Baths, London, was also often included in the programme of his aquatic entertainments.²⁵

The ability to keep staging ever spectacular shows, to hold the paying public's interest, against competition from an increasing variety of new urban entertainments, led many professional swimmers to seek their fortunes abroad, most went either to America or Australia.²⁶ One of the best known and pivotal figures in the swimming world, Captain Mathew Webb, followed this route. He attempted to revive his swimming career with a final spectacular feat, of crossing the Niagara Falls in America in 1883. Webb's earlier

²² Terret, T. 1995: p. 24

²³ Goulstone, 1999, p. 35

²⁴ Terret, 1995, p. 21. Many programmes advertising aquatic entertainments gave details of attempted feats in water such as, cooking, dressing and undressing, flying kites, staying under water, performing 'rescues' and so on.

²⁵ Kiel and Wix, 1996, p.6

²⁶ Cavill family went to Australia, Capt. Mathew Webb, Channel swimmer went to USA.

swimming career had also mirrored that of most of the professional swimmers of the nineteenth century. Although his place in natational history was secured, when he made the first successful crossing of the Channel in 1875. The effects of this swim, in raising the profile of swimming were however, exceptional and made Webb a national hero.

One of twelve children of a doctor, Mathew Webb was born on the 19 January 1848 and he learnt to swim in the River Severn below Ironbridge.²⁷ At the age of twelve, he joined the mercantile training ship the *Conway*, where his staying power in water was admired²⁸ and he carried out several acts of life saving and received medals for his bravery.²⁹ After reading in a newspaper of an unsuccessful attempt on crossing the Channel, Webb left his career in shipping in order to concentrate on swimming the Channel.³⁰ The unthinkable feat of crossing the Channel, was a great opportunity to immediately acquire a reputation among professional swimmers and potentially to earn money from the endeavour.³¹ The English Channel as it is known, had long held a fascination for swimmers and as *The Standard*, 26 August 1875 reported,

The idea of swimming the Channel, and showing practically, as it were what a very narrow 'silver streak divides us from our neighbours, has for many years

²⁷ Watson, K. 2000: p.12

²⁸ Sprawson, C. 1992: p.36

²⁹ Terret, T. 1995: p. 27

³⁰ Sprawson, C. 1992: p.37

³¹ Terret, T. 1995: p.28

*exercised the minds of those who have devoted themselves to the art of natation and attained great proficiency in it.*³²

It was this 'mysterious, frightening, ancient piece of England' that had consumed Webb's imagination from childhood. He trained solidly by swimming long distances of the Thames, along the south coast and at the Lambeth Baths in London, under the watchful eye of Professor Beckwith.³³ He also enlisted the support of the main swimming journalist and business man of the time Robert Watson.³⁴ A first attempt to swim the Channel, on 12 August 1875, was abandoned after over twelve hours in the water, due to the extremely stormy and choppy seas and 'in consideration for those in the boat rather than himself'.³⁵ Advance publicity and pressure to complete the swim had forced Webb into this first attempt, when the weather and tides were not favourable. Twelve days later, the weather was good, the sea calm and on the afternoon of Tuesday 24 August 1875, Webb entered the Channel off Admiralty Pier, Dover.³⁶ The next day, after 21 hours and 45 minutes of ponderous breaststroke swimming, Webb reached Calais, exhausted and delirious.³⁷

³² Watson, K. 2000: p.87

³³ Ibid p. 98

³⁴ Sprawson, C. 1992: p. 37

³⁵ Ibid p. 37

³⁶ Watson, K. 2000: p.121

³⁷ Ibid p.134

A Channel crossing today rarely makes the news, but in 1875, it made Webb 'more than merely famous, it re-cast him in heroic mould'.³⁸ He was portrayed as evidence of the great Victorian goal of progress, 'with better diet and better living conditions, creating better bodies'.³⁹ Whilst his swim was also acclaimed as having been possible, only with the advances made in greater scientific knowledge, 'as we advance in knowledge we get to understand better the elements requisite to ensure success. Our power over nature thus becomes more complete; when we try we can accomplish more'.⁴⁰ His crossing also gave swimming an enormous boost, transforming swimming almost overnight into one of the most popular participation sports in the country.⁴¹ His fame spread abroad and a report in the *New York Times* claimed,

*Captain Webb has achieved a vast ocean of good by giving an impulse to swimming throughout the country. The London baths are crowded; each village pond and running stream contains youthful worshippers at the shrine of Webb, and even along the banks of the river, regardless of the terrors of the Thames police, swarms of naked urchins ply their limbs, each probably determining that he one day will be another Captain Webb.*⁴²

The status and popularity of Mathew Webb, in the years immediately following his Channel crossing, appear on a par with the hero worship of

³⁸ Watson, K.2000: p.134

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid p.138

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² *New York Times*, 3 October 1875.

football players of the present. Swimming's popularity rose considerably. The number of swimming clubs grew to over 200, by the late 1870s and three times the number of 'how to swim' books were published between 1875 and 1899, as there had been in the 25 years preceding his crossing.⁴³

For over three years Webb was able to live off the success of his swim, by embarking on lecture tours, writing books and patenting a 'water bicycle'.⁴⁴ He had the reputation however, of being generous to a fault and by 1878, lack of funds had forced him back into the water. He took part in what had become a feature of the time, feats of super endurance in water, for example, swimming for six days in a pool for fourteen hours a day and floating for sixty hours in a whale tank, in front of queuing spectators at the Royal Aquarium, Westminster.⁴⁵ By now, he also had a young family to provide for and needing to recoup his losses, he went in 1879, to the United States, determined to make his fortune with one last extraordinary exploit.⁴⁶ It proved to be one feat too far and in July 1883 he drowned, in his attempt to swim to across the lower rapids of the Niagara Falls.⁴⁷

Webb's career as a professional swimmer although exceptional, was overall not vastly different from the other hundred or more, professional swimmers, who tried to make their living from swimming in the second half of

⁴³ Watson, K. 2000: p. 138

⁴⁴ Terret, T. 1995: p. 29

⁴⁵ Sprawson, C. 1992: p.40

⁴⁶ Ibid p. 40

⁴⁷ Terret, T. 1995: p.29

the nineteenth century. Very few professional swimmers were able to make a fortune from their sport and those who made a living from swimming, did so through regular employment at municipal baths, rather than from swimming feats. Professional swimmers as a group were though, very influential in the profile and progress that swimming achieved throughout the nineteenth century.

In common with other forms of popular entertainment, swimming became a popular urban spectator sport, a product of two dynamic forces - urbanization and economic expansion - which were transforming and modernizing British life. Betting on the outcome of contests and feats, was all part of the entertainment, despite the growing distaste for gambling among the middle classes. While the not insubstantial amount of money that could be made from success in races and exploits, resulted in the swimmers considering more seriously their preparation for events. Increased scientific knowledge made important breakthroughs and was eagerly digested amongst many in Victorian society, with many professional sportsmen putting the new understandings towards improved methods of training and racing. To enhance their profile and maintain the popularity of swimming entertainments, publicity was sought at every opportunity. Regular reporting in the local, national and international press and the emergence of a specialized swimming press, were evidence of the modernization of swimming, which had begun as a result of the need for publicity by the professional swimmers. Firstly however, the professional needed to legitimate his claim to be the 'champion' swimmer,

before an increasingly knowledgeable public. This gave the impetus to the professional swimmers to organize their races and activities on a more structured basis and was the first step towards a formal organization of swimming and another characteristic of a modern sport, which was initiated by the professional swimmers.

First Swimming Organizations

The first body claiming to represent the activities of swimming nationally, for which there is documentary evidence -was the National Swimming Society (NSS), which was founded on 30 June 1837 by John Strachan.⁴⁸ Strachan's reasons for forming the society are not clear, for he was not a professional swimmer himself, but according to Strachan the NSS was formed for 'teaching and promoting swimming throughout the empire'.⁴⁹ With this objective he approached the professional swimmers of the time and 'devised a federal framework for races, as well as a model calendar of events'.⁵⁰ The first report of a race organized by the NSS appears in Bell's Life in August 1837, by 1839 12 local committees had been established to organize races in each locality, with each geographical region then sending its winning representative to London to compete for the 'National' title. In 1840 the winner was reported as a Mr. Hounslow who swam the 400 yard river race

⁴⁸ Reference to the NSS appears in Sinclair and Henry, 1893.

⁴⁹ Kiel and Wix, 1996: p.8

⁵⁰ Terret, T. 1995: p. 21

in 7 minutes 9 seconds.⁵¹ The significance of this race was not the actual time achieved but, that a measured pre-set distance had been covered and a time recorded, for it illustrates a new preoccupation of comparing swimmers by time had become important and is further evidence of the increasing modernization of the sport.

By the mid 1840s, most of the races organized by the NSS were held in pools, where distances could be more easily standardized and the external factors of tides, currents and weeds could be neutralized. Holding the races at swimming baths also enabled the NSS society to have some control over the commercial aspect of the sport, by restricting entry to those spectators who were prepared to pay. However, the increasing cost of organizing these events and the weakness of the central administration, with just Strachan in control, ultimately led to the collapse of the society.⁵² A possible further reason for the NSS decline was that a second society the British Swimming Society (BSS), had been formed in 1840, its objectives were 'to promote health and cleanliness by encouraging swimming and gratuitously giving instruction in the art'.⁵³ Although both societies had different objectives, both tried to claim legitimate representation of swimming nationally and it was this that 'probably diminished their validity and impact on swimming and on public opinion'.⁵⁴ A third attempt was also made to organize swimming nationally,

⁵¹ Terret, T. 1995: p. 22

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Kiel and Wix, 1996: p.8

⁵⁴ Keil and Wix, 1996: p.9

with the formation of the National Swimming Association (NSA). This however, never had the same recognition as the NSS. It was founded by the swimming professional and baths supervisor at the Lavender Bay Baths, London, Frederick Cavill and was considered more as a quest for publicity than a serious attempt to organize swimming on a national basis.⁵⁵

Although all three organizations had claimed to represent swimming throughout Britain, all of the events they organized and most of the professional swimmers who competed in them were from England. Despite the fact that Scotland by the last quarter of the nineteenth century had a significant number of swimming clubs and professional swimmers, who competed in a variety of races. The need to organize and legitimate national championship races in Scotland came to a head in the summer of 1873. During that season clubs from Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen had all promoted their own 'Quarter Mile Championship of Scotland'. To clear up the confusion, a meeting of all Scottish clubs took place in Perth in February 1875. They agreed to establish a national organization, called the Associated Swimming Clubs of Scotland (ASCS) in order to regulate Scottish Championships.⁵⁶ The demise of the ASCS occurred in 1881 when it had failed to expand its membership, due to conflict with amateur swimmers and to therefore maintain sufficient funds.

⁵⁵ Terret, T. 1995: p. 23

⁵⁶ Bilsborough, P. 1988: p. 3

The failure of all these early swimming associations, in both England and Scotland, to maintain their membership and keep control of their organization, was largely due to the changed moral climate of society. For by the 1870s a distinction was being made between amateur and professional swimmers and the dominance in these early associations had been from professional swimmers. When amateur swimmers began to extend their power and influence, conflict was inevitable. One last attempt to create an efficient national professional organization was made in 1881 with the Professional Swimming Association,⁵⁷ but the continuing struggle for control of the sport by amateur swimmers had, by this time, resulted in the formation of the Swimming Association of Great Britain (SAGB) in 1869, which was to become the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) in 1886 and the inauguration of the Scottish Amateur Swimming Association (SASA) in 1888.

The debate surrounding amateur v professional status continued to dominate the sport for many decades, but it did not cause a decline in the popularity of swimming. Professional swimmers had failed to create an efficient national organization partly due to the moral climate and disdain for the professional sportsman. However, they had been responsible for beginning the process of formally instituting a national governing body for swimming. Once again, it was the professional swimmers who initiated a change in the organization of swimming and the move towards further modernization of the sport. Amateur swimmers would complete the process

⁵⁷ Terret, T. 1995: p.30

and establish a modern national organization for swimming, but in the meantime, other factors were ensuring that the modernization of all sport was taking place. A change in emphasis from government and social reformers, now endorsed the value and benefits of sport for its own sake, which resulted in greater demand for knowledge and information on all sporting activities. This created a renewed enthusiasm for swimming and by the last quarter of the nineteenth century it was sufficient to create a specialized swimming press.

Swimming Press

The public's appetite for information on all forms of sport increased markedly throughout the nineteenth century. The introduction of compulsory education from the 1870s, raised the literacy rates among the population and further fuelled the demand for a sporting press. Whilst the expansion of towns and cities, with a more literate, knowledgeable and eager population, provided a commercial market for a wide variety of sporting journals. Nonetheless, the sporting press was blamed for encouraging the social evil of gambling and the corruption of sport that, it was thought, inevitably accompanied it. Whilst the sports press also,

... pandered to the worst manifestation of win-at-any-price professionalism, and far from encouraging participation in sport and therefore the attendant physical and moral benefits, was a prime factor in producing a race of narrow-chested,

*foul mouthed spectators.*⁵⁸

Despite such fears the expansion of the sporting press and the development of sport fed off each other. General newspapers increasingly reported on sporting events and specialist sporting dailies emerged and as each sport modernized, their rate of progress could invariably be gauged by the appearance and number of specialist journals within the sport.

A specialist swimming press was claimed to have been initiated with the swimming paper '*The Swimming, Rowing and Athletic Record*' published by Robert Watson in 1873. Watson was a journalist and writer, who specialized in criminals and swimmers. His memoirs describe how swimming was his favourite pastime, to which he 'devoted pretty well every evening to the exercise. To swimming I attribute wholly and solely my entry into the world of sport as a journalist'.⁵⁹ Watson's passion for swimming had begun in his native Manchester and his memoirs fondly record the Leaf Street Baths, which were the centre of the Manchester swimming fraternity. He would stand among the swimming celebrities of the day,

*... as near to them as circumstances would permit without being considered rude, and listening with greedy rapture to all they said. It was the proudest moment of my life when I received a reply from any one of them; indeed it was considered a great condescension for these celebrated people, whom I venerated, to speak and speak so nicely, to a strange, inquisitive reporter.*⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Mason, T 1986: p. 168 in Harris, M and Lee, A. (Eds)

⁵⁹ *Memoirs of Robert Patrick Watson* 1899: p.37

⁶⁰ *Memoirs of Robert Patrick Watson* 1899: p. 24

Watson swam in handicap races against many of these swimmers, but with little success and at the age of twenty one, he moved to London to seek employment, although not as a vet, despite having spent the previous few years at veterinary college. He joined the Serpentine Swimming Club and then the St. Pancras Swimming Club, but had to resign from both, after being installed as a public handicapper for swimming races and was consequently considered a professional and therefore not eligible for membership of any amateur swimming clubs.⁶¹

In his reporting as a swimming journalist, Watson attempted to cover all aspects of the sport and to equally promote both professional and amateur events, although his editorials clearly supported the professional swimmer, at a time when their popularity and numbers were declining.⁶² His first publication, *The Swimming, Rowing and Athletic Record*, was promoted mainly to Londoners and was only marginally successful, by the third edition the paper had changed its title to *The Swimming Record and Chronicle of Sporting Events* and was a weekly publication. This was not enough to make it a success, Watson's continued open support of the professional ranks possibly alienated the greater number of amateur swimming readers, so with insufficient subscribers Watson was forced to cease publication in May 1874. He however, continued in his quest to edit a specialist swimming paper and

⁶¹ *Memoirs of Robert Patrick Watson* 1899: p.38

⁶² The editorials written by Watson in *The Swimming Record and Chronicle of Sporting Events*, in 1873/4 and titled 'A Retrospect' are particularly in favour of professional swimmers.

went on to change the title of his swimming paper a further 5 times over the next 13 years, but when in 1886 his last publication failed he had to admit defeat, and wrote, 'strange though it may appear, swimmers would not support a journal devoted to their own pastime, and finally I became alive to the fact, after loss of valuable time, as well as money'.⁶³ Watson's obvious passion for all aspects of swimming, amateur and professional and the individual nature of his publishing venture, were ultimately the cause of the demise of a swimming journal. Although, his launch of a specialist swimming publication possibly occurred several years too early, as the inability to maintain a specialized swimming press at this time, was not a lack of potential readers, but more to do with the failure among swimmers, professional and amateur, to agree on a national structure for the sport.

Swimming races, up to the 1880s, were generally isolated events both in time and space. No formal calendar of events or championships were yet in place, with 'the country having at this time, as many "official" champions of England as it had swimming baths'.⁶⁴ Press coverage was an advantage primarily for the professional, but there were insufficient numbers to sustain a weekly journal. The failure of Watson's venture was not the end of a specialized swimming press. In 1895 the weekly magazine *Swimming* was published, but again it was clearly aimed mostly at the London public⁶⁵, and then in February 1910 the weekly, *Athletic Field and Swimming World* made a

⁶³ *Memoirs of Robert Patrick Watson 1899*: p.112

⁶⁴ Terret, T. 1995: p.25

brief appearance, but was discontinued by the May of 1910.⁶⁶ Ultimately, a specific swimming press was only sustainable once national swimming organizations were in place. The formation of a national governing body for swimming, which will be the focus of the next chapter, symbolized the transformation of swimming into a modern sport, and with it the long term viability of a specialized swimming press. Once magazines were produced as official organs of an association, such as the 1914 *Swimming Magazine* of the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS), then a specialized swimming press had a more assured future.⁶⁷

The 1878 Baths and Washhouses Act

The demise of a specialist swimming press in the 1880s, actually coincided with an increase in the popularity of swimming with the consequences of Mathew Webb's swim still helping to maintain the popular profile of swimming. Whilst, at the same time, improved economic and social conditions were enabling a greater proportion of the population to take part in sport. Government and social reformers had also changed their attitude and were by this time, actively promoting sport. In swimming the effects were mainly felt through the amended 1878 Public Baths and Wash-houses Act. An earlier amendment had been made to the 1846 Public Baths and

⁶⁵ Keil and Wix, 1996, p.271

⁶⁶ Copies of most of the specialist swimming papers can be found at the British Newspaper Library, Colindale, London.

⁶⁷ Copies available at the ASA Library, Loughborough.

Washhouses Act in 1847, but it was the amendments made in 1878, which signalled a change in government attitude towards recreational and sporting provision.

Previously public baths had been built for the utilitarian purpose of enabling the masses to keep clean and healthy. The facilities provided in the early establishments generally consisted of individual private baths plus a small plunge bath, which were not designed for swimming. However, with the permissive legislation of 1878, government enabled and encouraged local authorities to build covered swimming pools. This was a clear indication that public baths were now considered as places for physical recreation and sport. Initially many towns could not afford to take advantage of the Act, by either updating their existing baths or building new ones. The situation soon changed and by 1880 we see a rapid increase in the number of swimming baths being built. With just 83 public baths in existence in England in 1880 this rises to over 343 by 1915.⁶⁸

The 1878 Act continued to stipulate that entry charges for the baths were to be kept to a minimum, with eight pence being the highest charge for the first class baths and two pence for the third class baths.⁶⁹ Keeping prices low, whilst at the same time providing better facilities which were more amenable for sport and recreation, was further indication of the government's

⁶⁸ Campbell, A. 1918: p.4

⁶⁹ Campbell, A. 1918: p. 252 The appendix in Campbell's report gives full texts of each piece of legislation.

policy of encouraging sport and recreation, for the whole population. Whilst the Act enabled the provision of improved swimming facilities, it also allowed any covered or open air swimming baths to close during the winter months, from November to March. The closure of baths during the winter months was however, intended to enable local authorities to provide other recreational opportunities for urban residents. The Act encouraged councils to 'establish a gymnasium or such other means of healthful recreation as they see fit' whilst the baths were closed, 'provided no covered or open swimming bath when closed may be used for music and dancing'.⁷⁰ Councils who converted the baths, into gymnasiums or other recreational facility, during the winter months, were also encouraged to appoint managers or superintendents for those facilities, with reasonable wages and conditions.⁷¹ Again this demonstrates the changed priority that was now being given to sport and recreational amenities for the working population, with supervision and instruction also being provided within municipal facilities.

In Scotland the 1878 Act was not applicable and neither had been the earlier 1846 Public Baths and Washhouses Act. It was 1892 with the Burgh Police (Scotland) Act before Scotland had similar legislation, so Scottish local authorities were relatively late in building public baths. This however, was of

⁷⁰ Campbell, A. 1918: p.252

⁷¹ Ibid

benefit to Scottish swimming and also to the English towns which used the later 1878 Act, because from the outset these towns had public baths which made ample provision for swimming.⁷²

The 1878 Act had clearly confirmed a more enlightened national attitude to the provision of public swimming facilities.⁷³ Many small towns by 1880, had or were in the process of providing a swimming bath, whilst the major cities often had several establishments. A detailed study on the provision of public baths and wash-houses was undertaken in 1918, its author stating, 'it is evident that there has been a steady rise in bath building which was being maintained up to the outbreak of war'.⁷⁴ The Public Baths, like the Town Hall or Public Library, became a common feature within the Victorian urban environment. A visible sign of the progress towards modernization, not only of cities or towns, but of sport itself and swimming in particular. With these improved facilities came an increase in the number of swimmers and subsequently the development of competitive swimming, with the rapid formation of numerous swimming clubs.

Early Competitive Swimming Clubs.

New facilities undoubtedly encouraged the development and popularity of swimming and with it the formation of swimming clubs. The formation of

⁷² Bilsborough, P. 1988: p.5

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Campbell, A. 1918: p.5

clubs was however, far more than a reaction to the provision of better facilities. Voluntary sporting associations were at the heart of a modern sports structure and they were the response of an urban population, attempting to make sense of their rapidly changing environment. Demographic increments, changes in the nature of social relations, shifts in the urban social structure, the creation of new concepts of class and the erosion of the former basis of status, all stimulated the emergence of organized and rational sports clubs.⁷⁵ The sports club provided an important integrative function in the impersonal and fragmented city, by promoting an activity among individuals who shared a common interest, but who did not know each other on a personal basis.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, class structure strongly influence the formation of all sports clubs. The middle classes provided the initial impetus to form many of the urban sports clubs, often in order to disassociate themselves from the masses and to affirm their social status. It was the middle classes who were most fearful of the perceived decline in the physical, social and moral condition of the urban population. Sport and particularly membership of a sports club, the middle classes asserted 'helped combat the problems created by the city in three specific, interrelated ways: by promoting good health, by encouraging morality and by instilling positive character values'.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Adelman, M. 1990: p.8

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Ibid p.9

The formation of swimming clubs from the 1860s, were no different from other sporting activities and were largely the product of new urban relationships. Yet paradoxically, for swimming it was the professional swimmer, rather than members of the urban bourgeoisie, who had the most influence on the initial development of clubs. From their position teaching local people to swim and as bath supervisors they often suggested forming a swimming club and generally became promoted to the position of club coach, for which they were paid.⁷⁸ This trend even began with the very first river based clubs, in Scotland for example the first swimming clubs developed around the popular local river swimming sites. Bon-Accord swimming club in Aberdeen began in 1862, from the 'Pottie' on the River Dee, when Archie McFarlane the 'Rescue' at Aberdeen beach suggested to the young men he had taught to swim that they should form a club.⁷⁹ The clubs initially enabled local men, with the time and money to swim on Saturday afternoons and weekday evenings the opportunity to improve their swimming and diving skill, with instruction from a 'professional'.⁸⁰ As club members became more proficient, intra club races took place and eventually an annual programme of events were established. With the improvements made in transportation and communication from the mid-1860s inter-club and 'All-Comers' races also become popular.⁸¹ The river based clubs and competitions continued to thrive

⁷⁸ Terret, T. 1995: p.23

⁷⁹ Bilsborough, P. 1988: p.2

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Ibid. p.3.

in Scotland for many years, until the pleasures of swimming in the rivers became significantly diminished with the increase in shipping and pollution from the expanding industrial sites along the river banks of the major cities.

In England river based clubs were also in existence during the first half of the nineteenth century and at certain locations river, lake and sea swimming clubs remained popular throughout the nineteenth century.⁸² However, with the much earlier provision of municipal baths in England, the establishment of swimming clubs from these facilities occurred from the 1820s. The precise date of the first swimming club is difficult to verify, although there is some evidence of the Huddersfield and Lockwood SC in 1825.⁸³ Documentary evidence exists of a swimming club at the first municipally owned baths the St. George's Baths at the Pier Head in Liverpool, with the club forming in the same year that the baths were opened 1828.⁸⁴

Swimming club formation really began however, from the 1860s. Many of these early clubs, as has been stated, were instigated by the professional at the municipal baths. Others were formed by middle-class gentlemen, out of a desire for sociability, to create a sense of community and as a refuge from urban life. Once established, the swimming ability of members rapidly improved, either under the tuition of a professional or a competent club member and the desire to test themselves competitively against each other

⁸² Some examples would be the Serpentine Club , London and Belle Vue Lake, Manchester.

⁸³ Keil and Wix, 1996: p.5

⁸⁴ Ibid

and outside clubs quickly grew. The advances made in scientific and technological knowledge had made the measuring, timing and recording of all sporting events simpler and more accurate. Swimmers from different regions, swimming in different size baths, were now able to compare times more reliably and establish records and championship tables.

With more reliable and efficient means of conducting their events, the biggest source of revenue for most clubs became the annual swimming gala, which if it was sufficiently attractive and well promoted could attract several thousand paying spectators. The annual gala took on a fairly standard format for all clubs and generally consisted of different length races, for the various ages and abilities of club members, an all-comers race open to visitors and non-members, various demonstrations of aquatic tricks, diving and life saving techniques, and the finale was usually a water polo match.⁸⁵

Inter-club and then regional or national championships also began to adopt a more standardized and rational format.⁸⁶ For the most promising swimmers, regional and national events became something to aspire to and train for. Many clubs became justifiably proud of their own particular 'champion' swimmer, or promoted heavily the arrival of a champion to their baths, particularly if they were attempting to break a particular record. Tyldesley SC, in Warrington hailed the arrival of Frank E. Beaurepraise of Australia, world amateur champion at all distances up to one mile. He made

⁸⁵ The Swimming Press provides numerous accounts of annual swimming galas and championship events.

⁸⁶ Details of the expansion of events will be provided in chapter 5.

an attempt to beat the quarter mile record, accompanied on his swim by the Tyldesley Swimming Club Champion. Beaurepraise defeated the Tyldesley swimmer by two lengths, but missed the record by two fifths of a second.⁸⁷

Within a club, the annual race for the club captaincy created the greatest interest. To participate, clubs often stipulated a residency rule, Tyldesley SC, for example, required captaincy competitors to have been resident for three years within a certain radius of the baths, before being eligible to compete.⁸⁸ The distance swum and the rules of the race, varied from club to club, with the Otter Club, London holding their captaincy race over a thousand yards at the Welsh Harp, in October each year and then after 1896, over a mile at Surbiton.⁸⁹ The practice of staging a race to decide on a club captain, began to decline as clubs became larger organizations, for as the Otter Club stated, 'on occasions the best long distance man was not necessarily a good captain, the practice was abandoned in 1905'.⁹⁰

As well as increasing their competitive activities, clubs also catered for those members more interested in the recreational and social opportunities provided within clubs. By the 1880s, the nature of health concerns had subtly shifted away from issues of cleanliness, to promoting involvement in healthier outdoor recreations. Government, social reformers and other agencies, were now actively encouraging the urban population to improve and maintain a

⁸⁷ *Tyldesley Amateur Swimming Club 1876- 1996 – 120 Years*

⁸⁸ *ibid*

⁸⁹ *Otter Swimming Club Centenary 1869-1969 (Otter SC, London)*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

healthier lifestyle. Swimming clubs along with other sports clubs, began to organize additional physical recreations, alongside their main sport. Regular rambling excursions, outings with the local cycling or athletic club or particularly in the case of swimming clubs, trips to the seaside, all became an established part of a clubs social calendar. Brighton SC, in its club history, commented on its annual festival as having,

... always been a source of much pleasure to the members and the public, but those in 1877 were particularly attractive as they were held at Swiss Gardens, Shoreham. On this occasion, not only did the club hold swimming galas, but also provided other sports and in addition, 'alfresco' concerts. Subsequent festivals were held at Sheffield Park, Tunbridge Wells and Hastings.⁹¹

Whilst, less physically demanding social events also sustained club membership and were attractive features to promote to prospective members. The annual club dinner often became 'the most important social occasion for club members'.⁹² The guest of honour was often a local dignitary or perhaps 'a sportsman of national repute who has made his name in some other sport than swimming'.⁹³

Aside from all the additional activities offered, the continuation of a swimming club was still dependent upon two essential requirements, good organization and funding. Swimming clubs were in competition with numerous other urban leisure activities and club members often belonged to

⁹¹ A History of Brighton Swimming Club 1860-1960, p.6

⁹² Otter Swimming Club Centenary 1869-1969:p.10

⁹³ Ibid

several other sporting and leisure organizations. Those clubs that secured a generous patron or the backing of a successful local business were the ones more likely to survive. However, once most towns had a municipal bath and particularly after the 1878 Public Baths and Wash-houses Act, Public Baths Committees were encouraged to give assistance to swimming clubs and make price concessions for the use of the facilities.⁹⁴ Consequently, membership of the local swimming club was financially and locally accessible and was popular for a relatively wide section of the urban population. Swimming pools often had several clubs using their facilities on each weekday evening, with the clubs having been formed around a variety of agencies - the work place, churches, political associations and neighbourhood groups – all enthusiastically taking part in what became a fairly standardized form of aquatic participation. By the 1890s a regular competitive swimming season had been established that began in April and continued until early August.⁹⁵

The widespread growth and success of urban swimming clubs, was due in part to the improvement in swimming facilities, but clubs were more than a facility or providers of swimming instruction. The weekly club night the annual galas, dinners and countless other social outings, all helped to develop a sense of cohesion and sociability among members. In addition, the advances made in scientific knowledge and the desire to pursue healthy

⁹⁴ Ellison and Howe, 1997: p.32

⁹⁵ Bilsborough, P.1988: p.9

recreations within urban society, had all impinged on sporting practice and on the expansion of swimming clubs by the 1880s. Whilst at the same time, once club members were competent swimmers, competitive activities were regularly arranged and the organization within and between clubs to devise a regular pattern of local, regional and then national events were major factors in the expansion of clubs and the overall development of swimming. Swimming clubs undoubtedly played a pivotal role in the transformation of swimming into a modern sport.

Summary

This chapter has explored the development of swimming from 1840 to 1880. More specifically it has address the impact of urbanization on the modernization of swimming and used Adelman's typology to inform an assessment of the extent of swimming's progress towards a modern state.

Prior to 1840, swimming was a pre-modern sport. The sport was unorganised, attracted limited public attention and possessed no permanent records. By 1880, competitive swimming in Britain was firmly established, with all six of Adelman's characteristics having begun to be applied.

The urban environment played a significant part in the modernization of swimming. The sport took place most often in purpose built indoor facilities, where the standardization of conditions and recording of results, could more easily be controlled. Scientific and technological improvements, had provided

increased knowledge in training methods and in the organization of competitions. A specialized press had emerged, to publicize results and fixtures, but it was unable to maintain a regular loyal readership and therefore proved unsustainable at this time.

Professional swimmers were enormously influential in raising the profile of swimming. They were initially responsible for both, establishing swimming as a viable commercial urban entertainment and in the development of swimming clubs. A variety of agencies and social groups however, also formed swimming clubs, particularly after 1860. All of them fulfilled similar essential functions for urban dwellers. They provided a sense of community and stability, amid the fast pace of urban life, they regulated competitive opportunities for their members and catered for the shifting health concerns of urban inhabitants, by providing opportunities for healthy recreation. Attempts to form a national organization and structure in swimming had also been initiated by professional swimmers, but disdain for the professional has resulted in the failure of an effective national body. Whilst agreement on the rules, regulations and organization of competitive swimming, had not been agreed by everyone, nonetheless, by 1880 competitive swimming in Britain had progressed sufficiently to be classified as a 'modern' sport. Further modernization and the institutionalisation of swimming was now dependent on resolving two important issues, the vexed questions of amateur and professional status in swimming and the

confirmation of national and international fixtures. It is these issues that will be addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF SWIMMING 1869 – 1914.

The character and development of swimming, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was determined by the institutionalisation of the sport. The formation of district, national and international swimming competitions and organizations, were a prominent feature in the development of swimming and a further indication of the modernization of the sport. The institutionalisation of sport, did not though occur in isolation and was a consequence of the wider changes taking place within urban industrial society. Two changes in particular had significant impact on the institutionalisation of sport. Firstly, the growing emphasis on competition in the work place, was reflected in the increasing prominence of competitive sport - creating a desire to demonstrate superiority, among individuals who did not know each other personally - and was one reason behind the adoption of rules and the standardization of competition in sport. Secondly, the need to establish rational order, within the changing urban environment, also extended to sporting culture and was manifested in the adoption of rules and regulations and in the formation of sports governing bodies. Whilst, more importantly, for many of the urban bourgeoisie, establishing rational order within sport, also meant clearly defining amateur status.

The objective in this chapter is to consider the issues which surrounded the institutionalisation of swimming from 1869 to 1914. The primary and secondary material examined confirms, that the issue which caused the most contentious debate within the formation of a national governing body of swimming, was amateurism. In order to explore the institutionalisation of swimming and in particular the vexed question of amateur and professional status within the sport, the chapter will be organized into the following five sections:

- i) Amateurism and sport;
- i) Amateurism and the formation of a governing body of swimming;
- ii) Formation of the Scottish Amateur Swimming Association and district bodies in England;
- iii) National and international swimming competitions;
- iv) Development of swimming strokes.

Amateurism and Sport

Amateurism involved not only the prohibition of payment but also, the banning of gambling, the creation of disciplinary codes, the setting up of organizing bodies and the encouragement of 'sportsmanship' and 'fair play'.¹

¹ Holt, R. *Amateurism and Professionalism* in Cox, R., Jarvie, G., and Vamplew, W. (2000): p.6

Amateurism was a fiercely debated and contested topic within sport, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Sports clubs began to be formed at a time when the emergence of an industrial society had 'slowly purged the people of their pre-industrial foibles and weaknesses. Urban life was now 'ordered as never before and the games which in late nineteenth century became the major recreations,were as ordered as urban life itself.'² Along with this 'civilizing' process, industrialization and urbanization created many other benefits. By the 1870s, Acts of Parliament, had enabled more of the population to experience the positive benefits of higher wages, shorter working hours, improved housing and better health, which in turn allowed many more citizens, to participate in the increased leisure and pleasure opportunities which towns and cities provided.³

The extent of the benefits that occurred for the ordinary citizen and the image of general material improvement for the great bulk of the population, is however, probably deceptive. Many working-class citizens lives continued to be harsh and unremitting and even for those who experienced periods of increased prosperity, there was also undoubtedly periods of extreme poverty. The image of general material improvement for many, alongside continued poverty and social deprivation for others, is though not a contradiction, as Walvin explains, 'Material improvement came the way of many people, eluded

² Walvin, J. 1978 :p. 96

³ For example the Ten Hours Act of 1847 and the Public Health Act of 1875.

many completely, and often came, but later disappeared, for others'.⁴ In spite of industrialism providing undoubted improvement in real wages, it was also the case that 'the transitional gap in income distribution between rich and poor was at its widest in the mid-Victorian age'.⁵

The widening gap between rich and poor did nothing to ease the class and inter-class antagonism, that developed within British society and particularly within urban society. It was not only material inequality which created class tensions, of greater significance was the fear of burgeoning socialism and the ideals and beliefs to which each class subscribed. To 'respectable' society socialism spelt disaster and with the continued social, political and educational reforms, which took place during the middle years of the century, this trend in general advancement of the working classes, caused consternation amongst the middle classes in particular.⁶ It was from the growing ranks of the middle classes, whose power and influence, economically, politically and socially were expanding, who were most determined to preserve their separation and distinction from the working classes.

The concept of amateurism in sport, was an important and a very successful means through which the middle classes succeeded in maintaining their class exclusivity. For the sporting revolution 'was a phenomenon of class division, not conciliation and, between as well as within individual sports, of

⁴ Walvin, J. 1987: p.15

⁵ Perkin, H. 1969:p.418

widening rather than narrowing division'.⁷ Class antagonism was evident in all aspects of nineteenth century life and within sport many measures were adopted to create a clear division between the elite and the masses. Sports club membership could only be achieved for example, by adhering to certain forms of language, behaviour and dress and subscriptions were usually set at a level to keep out the lower paid worker. All amateur clubs also operated a black ball system, where by potential new members needed to be nominated and voted in by existing members before gaining entry. Any members who subsequently displayed 'ungentlemanly' behaviour were excluded.

Conforming to the amateur ethic required many other subtle standards of behaviour to be observed and as Holt observes, 'Amateurism was many things... and analysing it shows how complex it was, there were differing discourses depending on who was talking; the gentry patron, the local politician or the imperial civil servant and so on'.⁸ The different interpretations of amateurism depending on the social status of the individuals involved, created deep divisions in some sports.⁹ In particular, the very different interpretation from among the middle classes, or more precisely as Holt stated, 'between the southern public school amateur group with strong links to the liberal professions and old money, and the northern industrial

⁶ Wigglesworth, N. 1996: p.87

⁷ Tranter, N. 1998: p.41

⁸ Holt, R. 1992: p.29-30.

⁹ Rugby in particular was divided, as identified in the work of Collins, T. (1998) and Dunning, E. and Sheard, K. 1979.

groupings.... Far from uniting the middle classes, sport helped to split them socially and geographically into two camps'.¹⁰

It was not only at club level that the amateur ethic prevailed, sports governing bodies were all established on firm amateur principles.¹¹ The initial objective of these organizations was to oversee the development of their sport. To establish clear rules and to set in place regional and national competitions. However, most national governing bodies of sport became consumed in the amateur v professional debate. Preventing the professional and the even more despised pseudo-amateur, who may or may not have received payment for playing, but who was clearly socially inferior, from high-level competition became a moral crusade.

Amateurism became a distinguishing feature of late Victorian culture and had greater meaning than as simply a tool to categories sport and sportsmen. It was an important and distinctive element in the ideology of the British elite, where the 'gentleman amateur' reigned supreme.¹² For many establishment figures amateurism,

...became a moral crusade with much being made of the 'cleanliness' of amateur sport and its encouragement of self-control, self-reliance and good fellowship, moral qualities alongside which were often ranged more pragmatic considerations, such as the advantages to be gained in the 'work of life' by an involvement in sport.¹³

¹⁰ Holt, R. 1992: p.24

¹¹ Holt, R. 1989: p.104

¹² Holt, R 1989: p. 116

¹³ Wigglesworth, N. (1992) p: 119

Amateurism and the Formation of a Governing Body of Swimming

The early years of competitive swimming had been dominated by the professional, races for prize money and stakes, were the events which drew the press and public interest. Swimming was considered an individualistic record breaking pursuit and had 'somewhat of a freakish image, which told heavily against it as a moral force'.¹⁴ Partly because of this perception, competitive swimming was never a major sport at the public schools and few former public school or university graduates were involved in the initial formation of a governing body of swimming.¹⁵ Due to this lack of privileged support, the few middle-class enthusiasts of swimming needed to demonstrate high standards of amateurism and 'respectability' above all else, as a consequence, the battle for control of swimming and need to remove the professional element, was fierce.¹⁶

An enforceable definition of an amateur swimmer was a major concern of the governing body of swimming throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century and almost caused its collapse on several occasions.¹⁷ Prior to 1869, there was very little if indeed any distinction between amateur and professional swimmers, the few clubs that did exist all swam to their own

¹⁴ Birley, D.1993: p 309

¹⁵ Chapter 6 details swimming in the public schools and this chapter looks at the people initially involved in formation of a national governing body for swimming.

¹⁶ Birley, D 1993: p.309

¹⁷ The records and minutes of the ASA and its predecessors are constantly detailing issues concerning the amateur status of swimmers.

rules, with few common features to competitions. From the late 1860s, amateur swimming clubs in towns and cities began to be formed, attracting some of the new urban middle classes as members. Although initially few in number, the middle-class supporters of swimming, especially from the London based clubs, became increasingly keen to establish a separate form of amateur swimming competition, distinct from the murky promotions of the professional swimmer. As a result an advertisement appeared on 31 October 1868 in *Bell's Life* calling for a 'swimming congress' to be formed to control amateur swimming competition, subsequently a meeting was held on the 14 November at which it was decided 'that a code of laws should be established to decide all questions and disputes respecting amateur races'.¹⁸ No name was given to this new association until the following year, when on 7 January 1869, at the German Gymnasium, Kings Cross, London, under the presidency of Mr. E. G. Ravenstein, it was proposed that an association composed of the various London clubs should be formed to promote and encourage the art of swimming and to be called Associated Metropolitan Swimming Club (AMSC).¹⁹

Several name changes to the association took place over the next few months. In June 1869 its title changed to the London Swimming Association (LSA), and shortly after in January 1870 it became the Metropolitan

¹⁸ Thomas, R. 1904: p.314

¹⁹ Sinclair A. and Henry W. (1893): p. 335 (The German Gymnasium Baths were considered the superior baths in London, and were used by the professional and business men of London as a social as well swimming club)

Swimming Association (MSA).²⁰ Apart from a change in title no differences within these bodies are apparent. ²¹ One reason for the frequent name change was possibly to try and broaden the appeal of the association to clubs outside of London, because at this early stage the body was severely hampered by lack of funds. A greater drawback though, to the early progress of a body to regulate amateur swimming, was 'the frequent and apparently interminable discussions on the vexed question as to what actually constituted a professional swimmer' and possibly more crucially, to agree upon an enforceable definition of an amateur.²² The MSA had drawn up the first rules relating to amateur status, which were:

- 1. Persons who have competed for money prizes, or wagers, for public or admission money, or who have otherwise made the art of swimming a pecuniary profit, shall not be allowed to compete as amateurs.*

- 2. Any amateur competing against a professional swimmer shall be disqualified from all future Amateur contests.*²³

However, the MSA seemed unable or unwilling to enforce its own rules on amateur status consistently. There were frequent examples of amateurs swimming against professionals, and of amateurs competing against each other and placing bets on the result. However, the inconsistent and arbitrary

²⁰ Sinclair and Henry 1893: p.314

²¹ Unfortunately the original minutes of these first Associations have not survived, so many of the early decisions can only be speculated upon. The following nineteenth century swimming texts do contain brief accounts of the initial meetings; Sinclair and Henry (1893), Thomas (1904) and Sachs (1912).

²² Sinclair A. and Henry W. (1893): p. 336

²³ *The Swimming Record and Chronicle of Sporting Events*, 22 November 1873: p.4

nature of the association, in ignoring some transgressions but not others, even when the rules had blatantly been broken, ensured the London dominated association lost much of its credibility as a governing body. Letters printed in the swimming press of 1873, demonstrate the unpopularity of the association at this time,

Having noticed in your paper several challenges made by amateurs offering to swim each other for a prize and make a bet on the result... the prize money having been staked at 'Bells Life' office, I should be glad if a member of the MSA would inform me what qualifications necessarily constitutes a professional.... Considering the stringent rules with reference to amateurs swimming against professional's I think the MSA ought to give some general information as to how far the limits of the former extend.

...It would be more satisfactory if the laws of amateur swimming were better known through your columns... Let the laws be known, and the framers of such laws also, that country bumpkins may consider whether to respect them or not; and if such laws are only applicable to the Metropolitan district, and not universal, then let a geographical line be drawn, outside of which they have no power, where country men will make their own laws and interpret them, without the interference of any self-constituted hierarchy.²⁴

The failure of the Association in London, to listen to or take account of swimmers from outside the capital, especially from the north, increased over the next two decades and caused a division of the body in the late 1880s. Although in December 1873, the association was sufficiently aware of the

²⁴ *The Swimming Record and Chronicle of Sporting Events*, 13 September 1873: p 2

unrest from swimmers outside the capital, to agree a further change of name, to the Swimming Association of Great Britain (SAGB), and to include all clubs in the country.²⁵ In 1874 there were however, no clubs outside London affiliated to the SAGB, and a change of title did not convince everyone that a more effective governing body would result, as one swimmer wrote, '...if it is absolutely necessary to have a governing body, for goodness sake let it be a competent one, and one with the energy and power to enforce the laws it makes'.²⁶ The first act of the newly titled Association, did nothing to improve its reputation, when the unanimous decision was taken on 19 January 1874, to allow an amateur to race against a professional 'for a prize or honour only'.²⁷ It was a decision which brought swimming into bitter conflict with other amateur sports bodies and alienated the sympathies of many of the best supporters of the association.²⁸ The decision created anger and confusion among many swimmers and the position of the association became so untenable that on 10 January 1876, it was deemed necessary to call a special meeting of all swimmers to discuss the operation of the laws relating to amateur swimming.

Resolutions were passed at this and subsequent meetings 'but none were put into operation and gradually the association sank into a state of

²⁵ SAGB Minute Book No 2. 1873 –1880.

²⁶ *Chronicle of Sporting Events*, 24 January 1874: p.3

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.4

²⁸ Sinclair A. and Henry, W. (1893): p. 336

collapse and bankruptcy'.²⁹ Clubs affiliated to the association at this time numbered only ten, eight from London and two, Brighton and Portsmouth from the provinces, the association managed to limp along and very gradually clubs from outside London began to join the association, Tyldesley Club, Manchester joined in April, 1878 and Birmingham in July, 1878 for example.³⁰ However, the numbers were not sufficient and the amateur question still dogged all the associations meetings and the inability of swimming to clearly separate amateurs from professionals in all competitions, meant the sport failed to attract the support of the people and clubs it needed to keep it afloat. By 1880 the situation was so severe that no delegates attended the monthly meetings of February, March or April,³¹ and the annual report of the SAGB admitted, 'Several clubs which had hitherto supported the Association have seceded, and it appeared probable that the Association would be an institution of the past'.³²

However, in June 1880 the Otter Club, joined the Association, this prestigious London club composed of 'respectable' middle-class men, was to have a confrontational relationship with the SAGB, but on this occasion it was influential in calling for an open meeting of all swimmers, to debate the amateur question.³³ Five adjournments to the meeting in June 1880, were

²⁹ Sinclair and Henry 1893: p. 337

³⁰ SAGB minutes, 1878

³¹ SAGB minutes, 1880

³² SAGB Report of the Committee 1880

³³ The Otter club membership for example was made up predominately of ex public school boys.

necessary before a satisfactory definition was agreed. The new definition again proved unenforceable or as the committee stated, 'The laws have on the whole worked well, but not, of course, without some dissentients. It is proposed by the Association to open the question again next April,' so a year later, another open meeting was called.³⁴ Again an adjournment was necessary, but this time it was to give the provisional clubs an opportunity to consider the new proposal. Finally, with one hundred and four delegates present, a definition was agreed which prevented mixed racing (amateurs v professionals) from taking place;³⁵

*An amateur is one who has never taught, pursued, or assisted in the practice of swimming or any other athletic exercise as a means of pecuniary gain, and who has never competed for a money prize or with a professional or professionals.*³⁶

With the new definition in place the governing body tried to put the struggles of the previous decade, concerning amateur status, behind them. Interest in joining the Association, particularly from clubs outside the capital had been minimal, but as travel and communication around the country improved and the competence of the Association itself improved, the benefits of belonging to the governing body were seen as essential to club members,

³⁴ SAGB Minutes 1880

³⁵ SAGB Minutes 1881

³⁶ SAGB Minutes 1881 and Sinclair and Henry 1893: p. 339

who wished to confirm their own and their clubs amateur status. With greater influence and more support from its delegates the governing body attempted to take a firmer line with individuals who transgressed the amateur laws. Previously a 'Black Book' had been instituted to keep a record of banned individuals, but swimmers often successfully appealed against their ban and were reinstated. Continuity in enforcing the laws was though difficult, due to the frequent change of committee members. It was now decided that a 'vigilance committee' should be appointed to oversee and keep a new 'reference book, in which shall be enrolled the names of all such persons as are proved to have violated any of the Association's laws of amateur swimming, or to have acted dishonestly towards any of the affiliated clubs'.³⁷

The determination of SAGB to rid the sport of unsuitable individuals and a demonstration of its increased competence, was illustrated when the Association took out a private prosecution against two swimmers, Larner and Binns, who had entered an event by means of forged letters. The Committee considered 'that an example should be made, to put a stop to such practices for the future ... the result (of the prosecution) being that Larner was found guilty and sentenced to one month's imprisonment, while Binns returned the cup won by him and publicly apologized'.³⁸ An indication of the increased and more united support towards the Association, was then shown by the number of clubs and individuals, who liberally subscribed to the special fund set up to

³⁷ SAGB Minutes May 1881.

³⁸ SAGB Report of the Committee 1880: p.2 The expense of the prosecution was however too much for the association funds, so a special fund was set up to which many clubs and individuals subscribed.

pay for the prosecution, as the Association's funds were inadequate to cover it at the time.³⁹ Further widespread support was also demonstrated, by the agreement which was reached in October 1882, between the SAGB and the British Cycling Union (BCU) and the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA).⁴⁰ The close association between these three bodies was to continue for many years and during this initial conference, it was agreed that all suspensions and disqualifications passed by one body, would be binding upon the other two. Each body produced a list of amateurs they had suspended, which in March 1883, named eleven AAA members, ten BCU members and six SAGB members, who had all transgressed the amateur laws of their respective governing body.

Unanimous support of the SAGB was however, only temporary, and in 1883 a dispute between the Association and two London clubs, the St. Pancras Club and the Amateur Club ensued. The dispute would illustrate the difficulties the SAGB would now have to encounter in its attempts to enforce its authority as a national governing body. In 1881, the SAGB had revised its amateur definition and had added an amendment to its law, which allowed the Association to reserve the right for the best amateurs to meet the best professionals, so long as their permission had been obtained (a similar law was at the time in force with the BCU also). Up to 1883, the amendment had only been used once, when Mr. E. C. Daniels of the North London Club, was

³⁹ SAGB Report of the Committee 1880: p.2

⁴⁰ SAGB Minutes, March 1883.

given permission to race Prof. Beckwith for a 500yd Champion cup, but he decided not take advantage of the amendment and the race never took place.

The St. Pancras Club, a small London club, who were not affiliated to the SAGB, had instituted in the late 1870s, a challenge cup, to be swum for five times. It had been started prior to the 1881 rule change, under the former SAGB rules, which allowed amateurs to compete with professionals for a prize. Four challenge cups had been competed for, when the new rule came into effect, which therefore required the club to make an application to the SAGB, to enable their members to compete with a professional for the fifth challenge cup. Unlike the application from the North London Swimmer, the St. Pancras request was refused. Despite the refusal, the club went ahead with the final challenge cup race, on 7 July 1881. Four swimmers from the club were subsequently declared professionals, for having raced against a known professional Bray. Although, initially the identity of the four swimmers was unknown to the SAGB, and as a consequence the whole club was excluded from amateur competitions.

In June 1882, the St. Pancras club revealed the identity of the four offenders and stated the four had abstained from all club competitions and the club 'now acknowledged the power they had formerly defied and insulted'.⁴¹ A majority of SAGB delegates then agreed with a motion 'that the whole club should be suspended for three months', but no agreement was reached on

⁴¹ *Sporting Life*, 15 January 1883 – copy stored in SAGB Minute Book 1883.

whether the four swimmers should continue to be declared professionals.⁴² Later on 11 December 1882, the SAGB delegates decided there were extenuating circumstances concerning the four swimmers, and all four should be suspended for twelve months only, after which they would be considered amateurs. The decision caused mixed reactions among SAGB delegates, member clubs and in the swimming press. Some like Mr. George H. Rope, Honorary Secretary of the prestigious Otter Club, London supported the decision, as he felt there were extenuating circumstances and that 'justice has been tempered with mercy'.⁴³ Whilst, others backed another prestigious London club, the Amateur Club, which promptly seceded from the SAGB, as they considered the laws of amateur swimming had been breached and the governing body 'insulted and defied' with the result that 'professionals were being whitewashed into amateurs'.⁴⁴ For some the whole saga had involved 'too much personal feeling being imported into the case' and instead of acting in a prompt and decisive manner the SAGB had 'proved weak where it ought to be strong, and brought ridicule on the most noble and useful of all sports'.⁴⁵

The whole incident damaged the credibility of the Association, but also highlighted the opposing, but strongly held views of many 'gentlemen amateurs' to the whole question of amateur status and the very complexity of the issue during this period. Almost immediately the Association, was once

⁴² SAGB Minutes, January 1883.

⁴³ *Sporting Life*, 6 February, 1883.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 14 February, 1883

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 15 January 1883.

again confronted with a similar dilemma and yet again it failed to be consistent in the enforcement of its amateur rules, making a decision which alienated many of the 'respectable' middle-class swimmers and angered other governing bodies. In 1884, *The Sunday Times*, commenting on the latest episode in the SAGB development stated,

*Whilst the Amateur Athletic and Football Associations are doing all in their power to purify the sports over which they have jurisdiction, it is reserved for the Swimming Association of Great Britain to adopt a diametrically opposite course.*⁴⁶

The incident which created such comment and again threatened the continuance of the governing body, involved the Otter Club, London. Some large influential clubs in London, had refrained from joining the SAGB, as they considered this would lower their social standing, so 'they held themselves aloof' one of these clubs had been the Otter Club, but in 1880, 'with large heartedness threw in its lot with the general body'.⁴⁷ Despite some obvious ill feeling towards these clubs, which considered themselves superior to the general mass of swimmers, no problems arose until a 'gentleman' of the Otter Club, Mr. Blew-Jones was beaten, by a couple of feet in the 220yd Amateur Championship, by Mr. Thomas Cairns from Liverpool. Cairns it was discovered later was employed as a bath attendant, by Liverpool Corporation, which as the protest from the Otter Club made clear, meant it was impossible

⁴⁶ *The Sunday Times* 10 February 1884: p. 4, col 3.

⁴⁷ *The Sunday Times* 10 April 1884: p.4, col. 3.

for him to compete as an amateur.⁴⁸ Prior to submitting their objection, the Otter Club had sought the opinion of the governing bodies of rowing, athletics, and cycling and all had agreed that, in their terms, a bath attendant could not rank as an amateur.⁴⁹

Despite such backing for the Otter Club's case, the SAGB decided, by an overwhelming majority (22 to 1), that Cairns was still an amateur.⁵⁰ The SAGB's decision to back the northern swimmer, who was evidently from a lower social class than most of the SAGB delegates and who earned his living through swimming instruction, is difficult to understand and certainly did not conform to the usual or expected behaviour of an amateur governing body of the time. The real reason behind the decision, may have had more to do with a personal or factional rivalry and as the press stated, '...a feeling of jealousy sprang up...and for proof of it I only have to mention the prolonged cheering - quite unprecedented on such an occasion - which greeted the Liverpool swimmer, T. Cairns'.⁵¹

Although the decision may also have been taken in an attempt to appease and include the less 'superior' clubs, and particularly clubs from outside London. The decision clearly did not mirror the attitude of other

⁴⁸ SAGB Minutes, 7 April 1884. Cairns remained an amateur and went on to win the 220yd Amateur Championships 3 years in succession, and became possessor of the silver cup (SAGB Annual Report 1885)

⁴⁹ Similarities were provided from rowing that watermen's apprentice would be considered professionals and in athletics grounds men would similarly not be considered amateurs, by their respective governing bodies.

⁵⁰ The one vote against the motion was from Mr. G. H. Rope another Otter Club member.

⁵¹ *The Sunday Times*, 10 February 1884: p.4

governing bodies, or the wider concept of amateurism, and ironically only months later the SAGB itself decided, 'bath attendants, i.e., those who are in active personal attendance in a swimming bath, will be considered a professional'.⁵² Later, in September 1884 the SAGB, possibly acutely aware of the difficulties it had created by acting against the beliefs of other amateur sports governing bodies, sought the opinion and support of the Cyclists Union and the Amateur Athletic Association, before deciding on the eligibility as amateurs of school board teachers who taught swimming, the decision of the meeting was unanimous, that they should be considered professional.⁵³

However, it was the dispute between Cairns and Blew-Jones which created a clear division among swimmers, and culminated in the Otter Club resigning from the Association on 7 April 1884, along with a prominent officer of the SAGB, the former President, Mr. Horace Davenport, who was also a member of the Otter Club.⁵⁴ However, another Otter member and secretary of the SAGB, Dr. Hunter-Baron, resigned from the Otter Club rather than forgo his place on the SAGB. The background and position of Dr. Hunter-Baron as a London born, Edinburgh University educated doctor, who practised in Finchley, should have indicated his alliance with his fellow London 'gentlemen' of the Otter Club.⁵⁵ Once again such actions possibly indicate,

⁵² SAGB Minutes, May 1884.

⁵³ SAGB Minutes, September 1884.

⁵⁴ Dr Hunter- Baron remained a delegate of the SAGB, despite having been an Otter Club member. He resigned as Secretary of the SAGB, and was immediately voted as president representing the Portsmouth Swimming Club. *Swimming News* 12 April 1884 : p.5.

⁵⁵ Thomas, R. 1904: p.363

that decisions were often made at a personal level, rather than following class expectations. He immediately became a delegate for the Portsmouth Club and was voted President of the SAGB at the next meeting.⁵⁶

Several other leading clubs followed the Otter Club and resigned from the SAGB to form a rival body the Amateur Swimming Union (ASU),⁵⁷ with the intention of raising swimming 'from its present low condition'.⁵⁸ Neither body was able to gain total jurisdiction over all amateur swimmers and disputes between the merits of the two institutions rumbled on for two years.⁵⁹ Although the wealthier body, and therefore presumably the one which had attracted the greater number of middle-class members, appeared to have been the ASU.⁶⁰

The lengths to which each body went to gain supremacy, today appear extreme, but it was an indication of how important amateur status and gaining power to control their organizations were to the middle-class Victorian sportsman.⁶¹ Opinion of swimmers who had little interest in the in-fighting between the two governing bodies was summed up by the swimming press,

⁵⁶ SAGB Minutes, April 1884..

⁵⁷ Two of the clubs who joined the ASU were the Otter and Cygnus.

⁵⁸ *Swimming Notes and Record*, 7 June 1884: p.1

⁵⁹ Sinclair, A and Henry W. 1893: p.342

⁶⁰ Sinclair and Henry, 1885: p.1

⁶¹ One example of many, was the banning of swimmers by the SAGB, who had swam against Horace Davenport, who was considered not to be an amateur, after his resignation from the presidency of the SAGB. And yet months later the same SAGB was awarding Horace Davenport a gold medal for a courageous sea swim. SAGB Minutes, 1884 and 1885.

when it claimed, 'Respecting the SAGB and the ASU... ultimately they will be likened to the Kilkenny cats, who fought until nothing was left but their tails'.⁶²

Finally, the leaders of each body did agree to discuss the key issues which divided them. The individual who has been given the credit for bringing the two associations together, 'by the exercise of tact and wise negotiation' was Mr. Henry Benjamin, a member of another prominent London club the Cygnus, who later also became president of the ASA in 1900.⁶³ While the minutes of the SAGB simply recorded that 'a communication be sent to the Honorary Secretary of the ASU inviting that body to send delegates to meet those appointed by the SAGB in order that a re-organization of the governing body of swimming may be effected'.⁶⁴ Ultimately a meeting of the two bodies took place on 3 March 1886, where a decision to form a new association titled the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) was agreed, with the constitution and laws based upon those of the AAA, NCU, and SAGB, thus the ASA was formally inaugurated on 12 April 1886.⁶⁵ No fewer than 135 rules were adopted by the ASA, but the main rule concerning amateur status now stated,

An amateur is one who has never competed for prize money, declared wager, or staked a bet; who has never taught, pursued, or assisted in the practice of swimming, or any other athletic exercise, as a means of pecuniary gain; and who has not, knowingly, or without protest, taken

⁶² Swimming Notes and Record, 18 July 1885: p 1

⁶³ Otter Swimming Club Centenary 1869–1969 : p.49

⁶⁴ SAGB Minutes, 8 March 1886. 6 delegates were to be from the ASU, 6 from the SAGB and 6 gentlemen not connected to either body.

⁶⁵ Sinclair and Henry 1893: p.343

*part in any competition or exhibition with anyone who is not an amateur.*⁶⁶

This new definition conformed with the definition of most amateur sports governing bodies and enabled the close association between the ASA, the AAA and BCU to continue, with all three bodies again agreeing that if an individual was declared to have broken the amateur laws of one association, he would be denied amateur status immediately by the other two. In an age when men often belonged and participated regularly in more than one sport, this could prove to be a very prohibitive agreement.

Despite falling more into line, and its amateur laws being more compatible with other sports, swimming once again felt the necessity to add an exception to its rule, which undermined much of its increased credibility. Amateur swimmers, the exemption stated, 'would not lose their amateur status if they competed with or against professional footballers in club matches, if no prizes were given, or in cup competitions permitted by the Football Association or Rugby Union'.⁶⁷ Exemptions of this nature appear incompatible, compared to the severity with which the rules were applied to school teachers, who taught swimming as part of their school duty and were then denied amateur status. It once again demonstrated the difficulty swimming had in trying to accommodate all its members from across the social spectrum. Swimming however, was not alone in this respect. Cycling

⁶⁶ Sinclair and Henry 1893: p. 344

⁶⁷ Sinclair and Henry 1893: p.334

and athletics had also encountered similar problems and the strong alliance between the three sports, was enhanced during their separate battles to rid each sport of the undesirable elements of professionalism. Their close co-operation was demonstrated at a conference held on 29 March 1889, to discuss the question of open betting at race meetings. Delegates from the AAA, BCU and ASA, agreed that no attempt should be made to deal with private bets, but that open betting 'as carried on at many race meetings, was a scandal, and tended to prevent the more respectable members of the community from taking personal part or interest in many competitions'.⁶⁸ To prohibit open betting it was decided that at meetings where betting was expected, bills should be produced stating that offenders would be expelled and that 'the utmost vigilance should be exercised' over competitors suspected of being in league with bookmakers.⁶⁹ Whether these measures were enough to stop all betting was unlikely, but at least swimming was seen to be addressing one of the most distasteful practices of the professional and acknowledging that betting was 'the greatest curse of amateur sport'.⁷⁰

Establishing an enforceable definition of an amateur swimmer had occupied a majority of the governing bodies time since its initial inception in 1869. However, by the last decade of the nineteenth century the issued had

⁶⁸ Sinclair, A. and Henry, W. 1893: p.348

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Ibid

been resolved sufficiently to enable the governing body of swimming to concentrate on other matters. One matter which surfaced almost immediately, was the Association's authority over swimming in Scotland. Quickly followed by open revolt from swimmers in the north of England and dissent among southern and midland swimmers, to the eligibility and desirability of one governing body controlling swimming throughout the UK.

Formation of the Scottish Amateur Swimming Association and District Bodies in England.

Competitive swimming in Scotland had largely been centred on Glasgow, due to the greater number of public baths and private swimming clubs which had developed in the city. Public baths had begun to be built in Scotland, in the 1870s, two decades later than in England, as a consequence, the formation of clubs, the development of a competitive swimming structure and a national governing body, did not become a matter of consideration for Scotland until the late 1870s. The first reference to a national association for Scotland appears in the SAGB's minutes of 1878, when a telegram from Mr. William Wilson, Glasgow was read to the meeting stating that the Scottish Swimming Association 'was desirous of amalgamating with the SAGB'.⁷¹

Two months later, a further letter from the Scottish Swimming Association, regarding the proposed amalgamation and containing the rules and bye laws of the Scottish Association, were sent to the SAGB meeting. In

⁷¹ SAGB Minutes, 9 September 1878.

response the SAGB delegates decided that, 'in the absence of further information.... no steps were to be taken on the matter', but it was proposed that 'a copy of the rules of the Association and laws of amateur swimming be sent in return'.⁷² No other references are made to a Scottish Swimming Association in SAGB minutes, until 1884.

Elsewhere, in Scottish swimming archives for example, there is no record of this early body, with the first formally constituted body to govern swimming in Scotland being given as 1884.⁷³ The dismissive attitude shown to Scottish swimmers by the English Association, explains the subsequent initial caution and unenthusiastic response from Scottish swimming clubs, to a resolution passed by the SAGB on 1 September 1884. This informed every club, 'that after 1 January 1885, any amateur swimmer in Scotland competing in a mixed race would lose his status as such; but that amateur swimmers in Scotland who have competed against professionals prior to that date, but have not swum for money or otherwise infringed the Laws of Amateur Swimming, will still be considered amateurs'.⁷⁴ The resolution was arrived at, after the SAGB in September 1884, had decided that a special committee needed to be appointed to look at 'the present state of amateur swimming in

⁷² SAGB Minutes, 11 November 1878.

⁷³ I can find no other records of this 1878 Scottish Swimming Association. The formation of a governing body for swimming in Scotland is given in Bilsborough's book on Scottish Swimming as 1884. It can only be assumed that this first body titled itself the Scottish Swimming Association, but was possibly a body formed by a few clubs in Glasgow, with the prominent Scottish swimmer William Wilson in charge. With no positive response to amalgamation from the SAGB, it continued on its own for a number of years.

⁷⁴ SAGB Annual Report, 1884: p.2 and Bilsborough, P. 1988: p.10

Scotland... and the application of the SAGB laws to Scottish swimmers clearly defined'.⁷⁵

The reaction to this directorate, from the leading clubs in Glasgow, was one of careful consideration, but also the realization that defining the status of swimmers in Scotland and a definite settlement on the amateur question was now necessary.⁷⁶ Very few money prizes had been offered at open events by clubs in Glasgow and the 'purity' of amateur swimming in Scotland was considered beyond reproach. The only possible transgression, being the few Glasgow swimmers who accepted travelling expenses from east coast clubs, but this was a rare occurrence.⁷⁷ Consequently, the six leading clubs in Glasgow, agreed without dissent, to the principle of a national body constituted on amateur lines. Because the small number of clubs out with Glasgow had not been asked to deliberate, the new association adopted the title Associated Swimming Clubs of Glasgow (ASCG).⁷⁸

By 1887, sufficient development had taken place outside Glasgow to necessitate the need for a national governing body, and on 28 June 1887, a meeting took place, 'which was the largest and most representative ever held in Scotland' to agree the formation of a national association.⁷⁹ Unlike the damaging debates in England, regarding the definition of an amateur, the

⁷⁵ SAGB Minutes, 8 September 1884.

⁷⁶ Bilsborough, P. 1988: p. 10

⁷⁷ Ibid p.11

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 12

Scottish delegates agreed unanimously to accept the rule previously agreed by the SAGB and ASCG, the only minor dissent was the date of its implementation, but it was eventually decided that the existing date of 1 January 1885, should remain. A constitution and rules were subsequently drawn up, by delegates from the ASCG, and on the 28 January 1888 the Scottish Amateur Swimming Association was formally constituted.⁸⁰

All the evidence available, points to a smooth formation of the SASA, with no difficulties appearing to have been encountered by either the ASA or the Scottish delegates. Despite the authoritarian wording of the proposal sent by the English Association, and the snub to the Scottish Association with their first appeal for amalgamation, Scottish swimmers appeared to be at ease, with the assistance offered by the ASA to help form their national governing body. From the Scottish perspective, the wholehearted backing of all clubs to the amateur code and the support and experience of the ASA, which was now viewed more highly, provided the Association with the authority and autonomy to run the new body on more democratic principles and to be in harmony, but distinct from the English governing body.

From its inception, the SASA had decided to run its affairs by means of local centres, these initially were based on Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee. In contrast the ASA was still a very centralized, London dominated body. Provincial clubs, particularly in northern England, had for many years tolerated the decisions of the ASA, but many felt it was undemocratic and did

⁸⁰ Bilsborough, P. 1988: p. 13

not truly represent swimmers outside of the capital. The creation of a north v south divide in swimming, reflected wider social changes that were occurring in British society and also the situation in other sports.

Mid - Victorian Britain was influenced by a wave of liberalism, the new generation of administrators wished to create a more open elite. Sport at the national level also wanted to appear to be run along democratic lines, although this was rarely the case and only those individuals with the time, money and organizational experience could hope to do so. In practice this meant gentlemen from the liberal, professional middle classes, but at least the former situation, of private clubs and noble patronage controlling British sport had gone. What was still important however, for those who aspired to be involved in sports administration, were the right 'connections'. This for the upper middle-class gentlemen, was achieved through a public school education, with the beneficiaries of this system being the southern members of the liberal professions, rather than northern business men.⁸¹

Far from being run by the middle-class, late Victorian Britain 'split the middle classes into an educated elite that was merged with the land, and a business class, which received little in the way of official approval'.⁸² The divide within middle-class society was keenly felt by many northern industrialists, who craved the prominence and respect to which they thought their wealth entitled them. Within swimming, two specific situations finally

⁸¹ Holt, R. 1989: p. 114

⁸² Ibid.

drove northern swimmers to challenge the authority of the southern controlled, liberal profession dominated ASA. The two incidents were the enforcement of the permit laws and the suspension of two swimmers from Manchester.

Professionals had continued to give displays at amateur galas throughout the years of debate over the amateur question. A clause had been added to the amateur definition in 1880, which allowed a professional to participate in amateur events, so long as the event had the expressed sanction of the Association.⁸³ To keep control of those professional swimmers who had been granted permission, permits were issued, initially permits were only issued on payment of a fee, but this was abolished by 1885.⁸⁴ By the late 1880s professional swimming was in decline, to boost their income and as a mark of appreciation from clubs and swimmers, who had benefited from a professionals instruction, benefit galas were often held.

One example was the benefit gala for the highly regarded Manchester professional J.J. Collier. On this occasion no permit was apparently issued, so all amateur swimmers who had swum in the gala on the 16 April 1889, were declared professionals by the ASA. Earlier on the 11 April 1889, at the Mayfield Club Gala, two Manchester swimmers had also been suspended by the ASA.⁸⁵ These latest suspensions were the final straw for many northern

⁸³ Sinclair, A. and Henry, W. 1893: p. 339

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.347.

⁸⁵ NCASA Minutes 23 April 1889. The minutes do not state which ASA law these swimmers had broken.

swimmers, who had, for a number of years, felt overlooked by the ASA. A circular was immediately sent out by Mr. R. M. Whitehead, the Baths Manager of the Salford Corporation Baths, to all northern amateur swimming clubs and titled '*Union in Strength*', calling for the formation of a Northern Counties Amateur Swimming Association (NCASA).⁸⁶ Other grievances towards the ASA were included, which explained the deep resentment of the northern clubs,

*..during the years the Association has been in existence, little or no interest has been taken in the numerous swimming entertainments in the north of England, particularly Lancashire, that all the Championships under the Association have been held in the vicinity of London, competed for and won by Northern swimmers, at great personal expense, and the London swimmers being put to little or no expense.*⁸⁷

The response of northern swimming clubs was overwhelming and at an enthusiastic meeting, on 27 April 1889, in Manchester, over seventy individuals, representative of twenty eight clubs, agreed to the formation of a NCASA, which would be entirely separate from, and rival the ASA.⁸⁸ Letters of sympathy with the meeting were also read from swimmers from southern England, one Mr. Harvey W. Fisk of the Portsmouth swimming club, was a prominent member of the ASA, but he had for many years proposed to the Association, that amateur Championships should occasionally be held outside

⁸⁶ NCASA Minutes, 23 April 1889

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 27 April 1889.

London.⁸⁹ On the same day of the NCASA's first meeting, the ASA also met. Obviously aware of the feelings they had aroused in the north, the ASA sent a telegram to the NCASA, in which the ASA offered to send three delegates to meet the northern swimmers, 'with a view to arriving at an amicable arrangement'.⁹⁰ In response, the northern swimmers, realizing they had gained the attention of the ASA, launched a NCASA on the motion,

That we as amateur swimmers assembled here this evening knowing the necessity of a governing body more central to the north of England and whatever shape it should take it shall not be formed in antagonism but in harmony with the ASA.

At the subsequent meeting of the NCASA, on 18 May 1889, the three delegate deputation from the ASA were granted one hour to state their case.⁹¹ The ASA had possibly already realized the difficulty of maintaining the existing centralized system and 'the advantages of districts taking responsibility for their own affairs where local or regional factors had importance' and came very well prepared, armed with a proposition titled '*Proposed Scheme for the Better Management of Swimming*', the key proposals of which were:

- 1. The present body known as the ASA to have jurisdiction south of an imaginary straight line drawn across England at 53 Degrees N. Latitude (until such time as a Midland Counties ASA be formed).
The Northern ASA to have jurisdiction over all parts of England north of 53 Degrees.*

⁸⁹ NCASA Minutes, 27 April 1889. Also see ASA minutes, detailing Mr. Fisk's continual efforts to hold Championships outside the capital.

⁹⁰ NCASA Minutes, 27 April 1889.

⁹¹ NCASA Minutes, 18 May 1889. The three delegates were Mr. C. Val Hunter (Bristol Leander), Mr. A. Sinclair (Ranelagh Harriers) and Mr. W. Henry (Zephyr SC, London)

2. *Each Association to have the sole government of the sport in its district.*
3. *The Laws of swimming and constitution Rules to be the same for each body, and not to be altered except at the Annual general Meeting of the ASA.*
4. *The National Championships to be managed by each Association on the following lines, or in some similar Manner (Proposal divided the Championship for each different distance between the associations).⁹²*

A scheme which met all the grievances of northern swimmers, had probably not been expected and must have stunned many of the delegates. The northern committee swiftly agreed with 'a hearty vote of thanks' to the 'scheme proposed by the delegates from London as a basis for settlement of the matters in dispute'.⁹³ The suspensions of the banned swimmers, which had ignited the dispute, were all overturned and the swimmers immediately reinstated as amateurs. Induced by the success of the northern swimmers, the Midland Aquatic Polo Association immediately requested being placed on a similar footing.⁹⁴ They were subsequently invited to take part in a conference, in November 1889, in London, at which representatives of the three bodies were present. Following the conference, the existing ASA was disbanded and in its place three divisions of the ASA were created, the Northern Counties ASA, the Midland Counties ASA and the Southern Counties ASA. The first general meeting of the ASA, under its new

⁹² NCASA Minutes, May 1889.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Sinclair, A. and Henry, W. 1893: p. 351

constitution took place in London, on 12 April 1890.⁹⁵ In 1890, the ASA consisted of 135 clubs, 78 from the southern region, 39 northern and 18 from the midlands. By 1900, over 700 clubs had affiliated to the governing body and a further division of the Association into five regions, was now considered necessary to oversee the efficient organization of swimming. A Commission on the Constitution of Swimming had been set up by the ASA, and in September 1900, it agreed to the formation of a western and north-eastern district, in addition to the other three.⁹⁶

The establishment of a governing body for swimming in Scotland and the devolution of power to regional bodies in England, plus the vexed question of amateur status, were the issues which had occupied a large proportion of the Association's time throughout the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, other more mundane, less newsworthy matters had also been undertaken by the Association, to ensure the organization, structure and laws of swimming had kept pace with the modernization of the sport. A key aim of the Association throughout, had been to oversee a workable calendar of national and international competitions.

⁹⁵ Sinclair and Henry 1893: p. 352

⁹⁶ Keil, I. and Wix, D. 1996: p. 18

National and International Swimming Competitions.

There had been a number of national 'championship' events prior to 1869, but with no regulatory body to oversee or control them, each one had been conducted under different rules and conditions. Regulating and standardizing events around the country was a major objective of the new governing body and the first event it attempted to control was the one mile national championship. The mile championship had always been considered the premier event of the racing calendar, as it was thought to be 'the best test of speed and stamina combined'.⁹⁷ It was first competed for in 1869 on the River Thames, but due to the great variance in conditions, with tides and wind, the event was moved to inland open still water in 1873. Then in 1881, for the first time it took place at a location outside London, at Edgbaston Reservoir, in Birmingham.

The popularity and prestige of open water events was though declining. There were fewer and fewer open water specialist swimmers competing and with the increase and improvement in indoor facilities, the National Championship event which then gained the greatest prominence was the 100 yards. From 1878 until 1889, this event was promoted by the South East London Club, but the management was then taken over by the ASA.

The need for one body to control national events was demonstrated by the earlier attempts at running a 100 yard Championship. In 1872, no fewer

⁹⁷ Sinclair, A. and Henry, W. 1893: p.419

than three races were held for a championship at this distance.⁹⁸ Once the improved regulation of events had occurred, record performances could also be created and recognized. The first official record performance ratified by the MSA, was Winston Cole's 1:15.0 in the 100 yard distance of 1871. The progress of competitive swimmers was exemplified further, when in 1902 in Leicester, England, Frederick Lane became the first man to swim 100 yards in under one minute, with his winning time of 59.6 seconds.⁹⁹ By 1900, the ASA ran six National Championship events. Ranging in distances from 100 yards to a long distance five to six mile event. They also ran a separate salt water championship, plus a plunging and water polo event. By 1920, the number of championship events organized by the Association had risen to twenty one and included championship events for women, schoolboys and teams.¹⁰⁰

Achieving the title of national champion was the ultimate aim of most talented swimmers in the late nineteenth century. However, National Championships events had always been open to overseas swimmers and on several occasions competitors from Australia had won titles.¹⁰¹ The impact of observing overseas competitors, undoubtedly influenced the standard, and as will be discussed, the style of British swimming. It also contributed to the desire, among Britain's best swimmers, to test themselves in international competition. Cost of travel and subsistence for competitors was though

⁹⁸ Sinclair and Henry 1893: p. 421

⁹⁹ Oppenheim, F. 1970: p. 5

¹⁰⁰ Keil, I. and Wix, D. 1996: p.30-1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

initially very prohibitive. Even when a few swimming events were included at the first modern Olympics in Greece in 1896, no British team took part. However, by the second Olympiad in Paris in 1900, the importance of international events began to be a focus for British swimming. The swimming events were held in the River Seine, and Britain's John Jarvis (Leicester SC) won three of the events, 100 meters, 1000 metres and 4000 meters. Other events included an obstacle race and an underwater endurance swimming contest and Britain also won the water polo competition, represented by a team from Osborne Swimming Club, Manchester.¹⁰²

Distance and cost though, again prevented British swimmers from attending the 1904 Games in St. Louis, for 'the expectations of 'Olympians' in the early years of the movement, reflected the spirit of amateurism where participants paid for their own sport largely from their own pockets'.¹⁰³ Although at the supplementary Games in Athens in 1906, held largely because the 1904 Games had not included some of the swimming events, the British Olympic Committee (BOC) and the ASA, both contributed towards the expenses of the four swimmers who represented Britain.¹⁰⁴

It was the 1908 Olympic Games held in London, where international swimming came of age. Here the need for uniformity to the Olympic swimming programme was recognized and the establishment of an international

¹⁰² Jarvie, G. and Burnett, J. 2000: p. 239; Keil I. and Wix, D. 1996: p.33; and Bancroft, J.W. 1993: p. 39.

¹⁰³ Keil, I. and Wix, D. 1993: p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

governing body for swimming was instigated. The formation of the Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur (FINA), as the international governing body of swimming became known, 'came about more by accident than intention', according to George Fearn the then President of the ASA and subsequent Honorary Secretary of FINA.¹⁰⁵ With the representatives of all the swimming nations in London for the Olympics, George Fearn suggested 'it would be a good opportunity to talk over the vexed question of amateurism, and to endeavour to compile a list of World Records made under similar conditions and under proper supervision'.¹⁰⁶ A meeting was convened by the ASA and held on 19 July 1908, at the Manchester Hotel, London, with eight countries represented. Agreement on an international policy for swimming was not easy, 'the laws of swimming were in many countries non-existent even in England there was considerable opposition to FINA and few gave anything but half-hearted support'.¹⁰⁷ These initial difficulties were quickly overcome and the new federation held its second meeting in August 1909, in Paris, at which a more complete constitution and set of rules were approved, with the principle aims of FINA being,

1. To establish rules for swimming events at all international competitions.
2. To keep a list of world records and to verify whether performances were established in compliance with the rules (In swimming pools with still water, non handicapped races)

¹⁰⁵ FINA Bulletin Officiel, October 1938, IV, p.8.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

3. To organize the swimming competitions of Olympic Games.¹⁰⁸

Future Olympic Games retained the programme of six swimming events, plus a water polo and plunging competition, used in the 1908 London Games, until the 1956 Olympics, demonstrating the influence of British swimming on international matters at this time.¹⁰⁹

The 1908 Games had also proved to be a watershed for British swimmers in terms of medal success. The team won five of the eight events, with Henry Taylor (Chadderton SC) winning three gold medals and the water polo team also winning the Olympic title.¹¹⁰ This level of success was never repeated. In the last Games before the outbreak of the First World War, held in Stockholm in 1912, no British swimmer won an individual title. Although the water polo team did manage to retain their title and British women won the first Olympic team event for women.¹¹¹

The comparatively poor results at these Olympics were disappointing and reflected the declining status and power of British swimming, which would continue throughout the twentieth century. However, it was not the first time that swimming in Britain had had to concede to the superior knowledge and

¹⁰⁸ FINA Bulletin Officiel, Oct.1938: p.2 and Oppenheim, F. 1970: p. 7

¹⁰⁹ Oppenheim , F. 1970 :p. 7. Olympic events were 100m, 400m and 1500m Freestyle, 100m Backstroke, 200m Breaststroke and 4x200m Freestyle relay.

¹¹⁰ Bilsborough, P. 2000: p. 240 in Jarvie, G. and Bennet, J.

¹¹¹ Keil ,I and Wix, D. 1996: p.36

performance of overseas swimmers. Within the evolution and development of swimming strokes, many of the major advances in technique, were a result of improvements by swimmers from outside Britain.

The Development of Swimming Strokes

Throughout most of the nineteenth century the predominant stroke swum in Britain, was breaststroke. Whether swimmers were swimming for speed or distance, the breaststroke provided stability and enabled the head to be held high in rough or polluted water. The dominance of the stroke in endurance feats, was best illustrated, in the achievement of Captain Webb in the first successful crossing of the English Channel in 1875. He completed the entire crossing using the breaststroke, in twenty one hours and forty five minutes and highlighted the endurance capabilities of the stroke. Much earlier in 1844, the speed qualities of the stroke were also demonstrated, when the English breaststroke swimmer Kenworthy beat 'with the greatest of ease' two North American Indians, over one lap of forty three yards. The Indian's style of swimming was described as totally un-European, 'They lash the water violently with their arms like the sails of a windmill and beat downward with their feet with force'.¹¹² As a consequence of Kenworthy's easy victory, for several decades, little notice was taken of what appeared to be the 'freak' over arm swimming of the Indians.¹¹³

¹¹² *The Times*, 22 April 1844.

¹¹³ Carlile, F. 1963: p. 126

In a quest for greater speed the horizontal breaststroke gave way to the sidestroke, in the 1840s. It was characterized, apart from its position on the side, by an alternate action of the arms, always under the surface of the water, and by the introduction of the scissor kick instead of the breaststroke kick.¹¹⁴ In 1855, in London, the Australian C.W. Wallis, demonstrated a new stroke to Professor Fred Beckwith. Wallis had observed aborigines in Sydney gliding through the water, by bringing one arm forward over the water.¹¹⁵ Four years later in 1859, after mastering the new stroke, Fred Beckwith, became the champion of England, using the single over arm side stroke. For the next 46 years it remained the dominant stroke in all distances of competitive swimming.¹¹⁶

In the meantime, over very short distances, different styles were being experimented with, but the style which made most impact, came to be known as the 'Trudgen'. On 11 August 1873, at the Lambeth Baths, London, John Trudgen won a handicap race by bringing both arms alternately over the water. Trudgen claimed he had learned his stroke from South African Kaffirs. He accompanied his arm action, with a breaststroke kick and the stroke aroused much discussion. It was considered fast, but too hard to swim over

¹¹⁴ Carlile, F. 1963: p. 95

¹¹⁵ Carlile, F. 1963: p. 127

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

distances of more than a 100 yards and for a long time, the trudgen was used only by specialists in 50 yard events and by water polo players.¹¹⁷

However, it was the front crawl stroke which was to become the fastest swimming stroke over all distances. In 1890, some Australian swimmers had adopted the trudgen arm action, but instead of using the breaststroke leg kick, adopted a scissor kick. The naming of the stroke 'the crawl' had many different claimants, but it was two Australian swimming families, the Wickham's and the Cavill's, who between them, developed the stroke further, into the recognizable front crawl stroke of the present and who introduced the stroke to Europe and America.¹¹⁸ For many years the 'Australian crawl', as it became known, was considered useable only in sprint events and it was the 1920s, before it was used for the longer distance events at the Olympics. However, in 1926, when American, Gertrude Ederle, swam the Channel over seven hours faster than Webb's crossing, swimming the entire distance front crawl, the efficiency of the stroke in marathon and sprint events was confirmed.¹¹⁹ The arrival of the crawl stroke from the 1900s, into competitive swimming, coincided with an era of intense technical analysis and experimentation in swimming. Despite many frustrations and set backs, the techniques required to swim efficiently were unravelled and understood. It

¹¹⁷ Oppenheim, F. 1970: p. 95

¹¹⁸ The Cavill family were though originally from England.

¹¹⁹ Oppenheim, F. 1970: p. 99 and Kiphuth, R.J.H. 1949: p. 9

was from the coaches and enthusiasts of the early twentieth century, that the foundations of the four contemporary competitive swimming strokes were laid.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine the key issues which shaped and moulded the institutionalisation of swimming between 1869 and 1914. A number of issues were prominent in the formation of a national governing body of swimming during this period, but the overriding issue within swimming, as in many other sports, was amateurism. The amateur issue severely tested the competence of the early governing body of swimming and nearly caused its collapse on a number of occasions. However, once the establishment of a competent national governing body was in place, its chief objectives were, to oversee the organization of district, national and international competitions, to continue to enforce the agreed definition of an amateur swimmer, to monitor and regulate upon the development of swimming strokes and to outlaw all forms of gambling. Eventually, by the end of the nineteenth century, these objectives had been achieved.

Where swimming differed to many other sports however, were the decisions the governing body took, at several stages in its evolution. The ASA supported and firmly endorsed the working-class swimmer, over the middle-class gentlemen amateur, on a number of occasions. This clearly alienated many supporters of swimming and directly opposed the amateur code. A key difficulty for a national governing body of swimming, remained its attempts to

please its majority participants, the lower middle classes, whilst also maintaining its respectability as a pure amateur sport. In this respect, swimming had a notable alliance with the sports of cycling and athletics and the close association between the three bodies, helped each of them to eventually pursue more vigorously the principles of amateurism.

The issue of amateurism dominated the development of swimming and the ASA, but after its hesitant beginnings, the competence and authority of the governing body had progressed sufficiently for it to oversee the expansion of national and international competitions and for British swimming to be the instigator of an international governing body for the sport. By the beginning of the twentieth century, competitive swimming was unrecognisable, in the style of strokes swum, the number and manner of competitions and in the status and respectability of the sport, from half a century earlier.

CHAPTER SIX

SWIMMING AND EDUCATION

The popularity of swimming and the opportunity to swim in urban Britain, had increased throughout the nineteenth century. Despite this, the swimming ability of many remained poor, as was evident by the increasing number of deaths from drowning.¹ The teaching of swimming therefore, particularly to young people, became a prominent feature and priority for many educational agencies, from state schools to voluntary organizations. The purpose of this chapter is to consider the provision of swimming, within the education system of nineteenth century Britain, in the context of the growing concerns for the health and welfare of urban Victorian youth.

Victorian Britain was a very young society and by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, concern was being expressed about the negative effects that urbanization and industrialization was having on the youth of Britain. Social reformers and the governing classes expressed many worries about boys and girls of all social classes. Concerns ranged from the physical and moral health of urban working-class youth to related fears about the effects that a protracted secondary education was creating in young men from the middle and upper classes. To counter many of these problems, there was a widespread perception that the main requirement was the provision of

¹ Death by drowning remained high throughout the nineteenth century, in 1878 there were 3,659 deaths in England and Wales, the highest in 20 years.

constructive and morally appropriate physical exercise within school and challenging rational recreations outside formal education. The concept of rational recreation had largely been found to be unworkable for the urban adult masses, but many still felt it was possible to inculcate respectability and self-reliance to young people. Education was seen as the best method of achieving these aims and formal education became available to rising numbers of young people from the 1870s.²

A number of historians have examined the provision and use of sport for moral education, within both the public schools and the state schools of nineteenth century Britain.³ None however, have explored the promotion of swimming and life saving as challenging, morally appropriate activities for the youth of nineteenth century Britain. The objective in this chapter is to look at, not only the provision, but also the value placed on swimming and life saving, by a variety of educational agencies. More specifically it will explore how these agencies shaped swimming to meet their own needs. In order to do this, the chapter is divided into five sections. Section one looks at the provision and value placed on swimming in 'elite' education, namely public schools, private girls schools and universities. Section two examines swimming provision in state schools and in particular the struggle to ensure swimming's inclusion in the school curriculum. Section three considers the various methods that were

² Holt, R. 1989: pp. 136-142

³ Mangan, J.A. 1981 *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* ; Chandler, T. 1988, *The Development of a Sporting Tradition at Oxbridge: 1800-60*; McCrone, K.E. 1987, *Play up! Play up! And Play the Game Sport at the late Victorian girls' public schools* in Mangan, J.A. and Park, R.J. 1987; Warren, A. 1993 *Sport Youth and Gender in Britain 1880 – 1940*.

adopted to teach swimming and the developments made in the training of swimming teachers. Section four explores the wider provision of swimming instruction and reflects upon the emphasis given to swimming by voluntary organizations and work place schemes. Section five examines the formation of the Royal Life Saving Society, as a response to the annual rise in deaths from drowning. The chapter concludes with an assessment of whether swimming and life saving, were deemed as valuable and vital activities to the youth of all social classes in late nineteenth century Britain.

Public Schools, Private Girls Schools and University Swimming

The most remarkable feature of public schools of the nineteenth century was the changing status of games and the increasing importance and significance of sport within these establishments.⁴ Sport became so prominent within elite education that the cult of public school games became a significant social phenomenon and influenced the development of all sport.⁵ However, the same value and significance was not attached to every sport. Each public school, applied local variations and attached differing degrees of importance to specific sports. Although no public school would have condescended, or have been able to survive, if it did not make a significant investment in at least, one of the major games.

⁴ Holt, R. 1989: p.74

⁵ Mangan, J. 1981

Swimming never achieved the status of any of the major team games. Most boys learnt to swim, as a means to an end, in order to be eligible for membership of the boat club. Nevertheless, there was wide variation in the provision of swimming facilities and the place and importance of swimming instruction in public schools. Whilst the influence of various lobby groups, such as government enquiries and medical commissions, also played an important part in the provision and status of swimming at public schools.

Harrow School was one of the major public schools which elevated swimming within its curriculum. Every boy was compelled to learn to swim, unless exempt for medical reasons. Swimming took place in an open air swimming pond, termed the 'duck-pond'. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the swimming pond had been little more than a large oblong pond fed by a local ditch, with the sides of earth and the bottom of mud. Over the years it deteriorated to the extent that the boys, 'preferred the cleaner waters of the canal and Brent'.⁶ Then in 1851, under the headship of Dr. Vaughan, the pond was renovated and 'the sides and bottom were paved, the top of the banks were slated over, dressing sheds were erected and the water was supplied from an artisan well'.⁷ Further evidence of swimming's importance, under Dr. Vaughan, was the appointment of a senior master to be superintendent of the baths and the setting aside of an annual budget for the upkeep of the baths. Also in 1881, the bath was enlarged, 'to an impressive

⁶ Sinclair A. and Henry W. 1893:p. 368

⁷ Ibid

500 feet in length and a maximum 100 feet wide, a total water area of 31,000 square feet, with the water supply obtained from the town waterworks'.⁸ Most boys at Harrow learnt to swim in their first year and passed the 70 yard swimming test. Above this there was a voluntary 'Dolphin' test, which consisted, of a half mile swim in 19 minutes, plus a demonstration of proficiency in breast, side and back strokes and of entry to the water with a good header.⁹ Greater prestige was however, given to life saving and the boy who 'exhibited the best knowledge of the methods of life saving was awarded the Royal Humane Societies medal, and appeared above the 'Dolphins' on the annual swimming list of honour'.¹⁰

Harrow School placed a high priority on swimming, but the public school which did most to foster the development of swimming and specifically life saving was Rugby School. It is credited with the provision of the first indoor school swimming pool, which in 1876 was a gift of the Headmaster, Dr. Jex-Blake.¹¹ By 1893, four other minor public schools had also built covered baths.¹² The move to the provision of such expensive facilities, was no doubt a move by the lesser schools, to ape the provision of one of the top schools, Rugby.¹³ Swimming at Rugby School was influenced by a powerful lobby of

⁸ Sinclair, A. and Henry, W. 1893: p.368

⁹ *The Swimming Magazine*, Feb 1915, Vol 1, 9, p. 11

¹⁰ Sinclair, A. and Henry, W. 1893: p. 372

¹¹ James, T.M. 1977: p. 28

¹² These were Cheltenham College 1880, Uppingham School 1883, Charterhouse School 1883 and St Cuthbert's College, Ushaw 1893. From James. M.A. 1977:p. 31

¹³ Rugby School along with the 8 other schools mentioned in the Clarendon Commission Report of 1864, were considered the top public schools of the day.

the time, the medical profession. Dr Clement Dukes was a senior physician at the St Cross Hospital in Rugby, a noted advocate of physical exercise and eminent writer on health. He was also employed at Rugby School. In 1887 he published his work on *Health at School*, in which he stated,

I lay special stress also upon the value of the swimming bath and bathing. Every school that can possibly manage it should have a place in which the boys can learn and practice swimming. If there be a river, it may be utilized with advantage for summer bathing; but it is not as good as bathing under cover, the water of which can be warmed and thus used all year round. Swimming should be taught, if necessary, though as a general rule nearly every boy will learn by himself or from his school fellows.¹⁴

As a member of the Royal College of Physicians, his opinions reflected those expressed by many of the medical profession of the time. Although his statement was subsequent to the provision of an indoor pool at Rugby, such powerful advocacy, from one of their own, would have influenced the continued prominence of swimming at Rugby. Swimming though, was not compulsory at Rugby, boys were encouraged to learn and a swimming instructor was employed at the baths, but it was never part of the formal curriculum. Perhaps because of this, swimming was very popular. It was enjoyed year round, in the indoor pool, unlike most other schools at the time and the school swimming club had 'sole use of the bath, 3 evenings per week'.¹⁵

¹⁴ Dr. Dukes, 1887: p.332

¹⁵ Sinclair, A. and Henry, W. 1893: p. 374

Rugby School also took the lead in the development of life saving and again Dr. Dukes was the main instigator. In 1882, with the support of the Royal Humane Society (RHS), he established a series of medal competitions for life saving at Public Schools. Resuscitation methods were not part of the competition, as it was considered outside the province of the RHS to organize such a competition. Nevertheless, the importance of such skills were thought desirable by Dr Dukes, who stated, 'While these rescues by swimming restore the victim to land, I should like to see him restored to life'.¹⁶ Consequently he presented to Rugby School a challenge cup for the best practice in the resuscitation of the apparently drowned.¹⁷

Most of the other eminent public schools took only a passing interest in swimming, during this period. At Eton, swimming took place on the River Thames at five specially adapted bathing places but, 'the teaching of life saving as a technical subject is not taken up, the boys are taught to swim, and headers are a special feature'.¹⁸ Whilst at Westminster School, 'there is no life saving taught and the teaching of swimming appears to be more or less unofficial. Yet close to the school are the splendid City of Westminster Baths, especially fitted for the teaching of the young'.¹⁹

¹⁶ Dr. Dukes, C. 1887.

¹⁷ Sinclair, A. and Henry, W. 1893: p. 373

¹⁸ *The Swimming Magazine*, 1915, vol 1, 9, p.12

¹⁹ Ibid

Even by the beginning of the twentieth century, the attitude of Westminster School to the teaching of swimming, reflected more accurately the position of most public schools. Which was, 'that despite the easy availability of very good or at least adequate facilities, pupils learnt to swim mainly to enable them to enjoy the pleasure of a swim in the open, during a hot summer spell, or to be eligible for boat club membership'.²⁰ Little systematic instruction or promotion of swimming was carried out. Schools would maybe highlight their provision of swimming, in the increasingly competitive battle to entice prospective pupils, with comments in their prospectus, such as, 'In the summer term arrangements are made for regular visits to the swimming bath, and swimming lessons take the place of some gymnastics classes', or that the location of the school ensured 'the sea bathing is excellent and safe'.²¹

It was though the lack of coherent and proper instruction at most of the public schools which alarmed those within the swimming world. Many blamed 'the want of proper and combined teaching at our chief schools and a more general desire to make swimming a regular subject of instruction' for the general lowly perception and lack of urgency to learn to swim by many in elite society.²² Gradually, some public schools did begin to compete against each

²⁰ *The Swimming Magazine*, 1915, vol 1, 9, p.12

²¹ From James, T. M. 1977: p. 81. These statements were refering to several minor public schools in Yorkshire at the turn of the 20th century.

²² *The Swimming Magazine*, 1915, vol. 1, 9, p.11

other and against certain local town clubs of the right calibre. By the early years of the twentieth century, several top public schools were regularly competing against the Otter Club, the premier London club, Harrow in 1907 and Rugby in 1908. Then in 1910, the Bath Club, another prestigious London club, composed exclusively of upper and middle-class families, invited a number of public schools to take part in an annual free style relay for the challenge cup.²³

Swimming at the public schools though, never attained the prestige of team games. It was not sufficiently socially exclusive, the costly provision of private swimming facilities was prohibitive and the reputation of swimming as a sport for the masses 'told heavily against it'.²⁴ Its status as a minor activity within public schools, partially explains the comment made in 1914, by the editor of *The Swimming Magazine*, which claimed, '...the great majority of those migrating from public schools are notoriously deficient swimmers'.²⁵

By contrast, swimming in private girls schools was more acceptable, although again it was not a priority. Private girls schools were beginning to develop in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Compared to the boys schools they were few in number and were generally much smaller establishments. The provision of expensive sporting facilities, such as a swimming pool, was therefore generally beyond their means. However, to

²³ Otter Swimming Club Centenary 1869-1969: p.27. The public schools' Bath Club Cup continued to be organised by the Bath Club until 1959, when the Otter club took over, after the Bath Club realised there was no likelihood of their bath being rebuilt.

²⁴ Birley, D. 1993: p.309

²⁵ *The Swimming Magazine*, 1915, Feb. Vol 1, 9: p.16

investigate the true take up of swimming within these schools is extremely difficult, due to a lack of source material, mainly because 'the recording of the early days (of these schools) tended to concentrate on the personality and qualities of the early headmistresses, teachers and benefactors and not on the facilities available at the school'.²⁶ Although there has been detailed research on the development of games playing within these establishments, only brief mention is made to swimming, generally in the form of a list of activities that were undertaken within the curriculum.²⁷ There can be little doubt however, that where local facilities were available, then swimming for girls would have been encouraged. For, as the next chapter will emphasize, swimming was one activity which was considered feminine appropriate and aside from the healthy, physical exercise that could be derived from swimming, the issue of safety and prospect of saving life, would have ensured the inclusion of swimming instruction if at all feasible.

Indications from the small amount of evidence available, points to the activity at least being undertaken as an enjoyable recreation, 'The girls derive great benefit from the excellent sea water swimming bath'.²⁸ Yet it is also evident, that girls' private schools, followed the model laid down by the boys' schools, with games playing forming the most prominent part of the physical

²⁶ James, T.M. 1977:p. 92

²⁷ For example, McCrone, K.E. 1987 *Play Up! Play Up! And Play the Game! Sport and the late Victorian Girls' Public School* in Mangan J. A. and Park R. J. From 'Fair Sex' To Feminism.

²⁸ Ibid p. 81

education curriculum and swimming only included as and when it was possible, which essentially meant swimming in open water, during the brief summer months. Although, as the work on sport at women's universities and colleges indicates,²⁹ swimming must have been undertaken more seriously within girls' private schools than boys' public schools, for on arriving at university, many women could swim well and the formation of competitive swimming clubs within the female colleges was initially more extensive than within male colleges.³⁰

Swimming at university for men, during the later years of the nineteenth century was a minor activity, which attracted little in the way of provision of facilities or support from students. The lack of interest in swimming by university graduates was demonstrated during the turbulent years of the formation of the ASA, when unlike the formation of the AAA, the swimming association was deprived of 'University Men', in its early years.³¹ The principle reasons behind the poor take-up of swimming, was firstly, as has been examined, the classifying by most public schools, of swimming as a fun, recreational activity, compared to more serious and important team games. Consequently, when public schoolboys arrived at university, the demand for good competitive swimming facilities was not a priority, ensuring any swimming which did take place continued primarily as a recreational activity in

²⁹ McCrone, K. 1986 and 1990.

³⁰ See McCrone, K. 1990 in particular.

³¹ Sinclair, A. and Henry, W. 1893; p. 355

the nearby river. Secondly, river bathing was only practical from May and the university term finished in mid-June, which left little chance for inter-university competitive swimming to prosper. Although a possible further explanation for the unpopularity of swimming amongst university students, was because 'strenuous swimming has the undeserved reputation of being bad for those in training for rowing or any athletic event'.³²

Despite its minority attraction, Cambridge University had formed a swimming club by 1855. However, with no baths in Cambridge in the nineteenth century, the students swam from a bathing shed on the Granta, which had been built with the aid of public subscription.³³ Various intra-college races took place every May, but the University club did not compete against other universities, until the advent of water polo brought about the first match with Oxford University in 1891 at the Crown Baths in Kensington.³⁴ Oxford University SC had been formed just months earlier and the significance of the event was that it took the development of an aquatic team game, with all the social, moral and character benefits that were ascribed to team sports, before competitive swimming became a regular feature at University level. In 1892, the second inter-varsity water polo match also included swimming events and the two universities then went on to compete regularly against each other and some of the 'better class' and prominent clubs of the time, such as the Otter

³² Sachs, F. 1912: p.34

³³ Ibid p.357

³⁴ Cambridge University did have an annual swim match against Otter SC, which began in 1887. The match was always held on a Saturday in June, the last of the 'May' races on the Cam. From 'Otter Swimming Club Centenary 1869-1969' p.24

SC and Nautilus SC. But again it was 'water polo which was primarily responsible for this' and without the attraction of 'aquatic football' it is possible that competitive swimming would have remained outside the inter-varsity competitive calendar for several more decades.³⁵ Even with the advent of water polo, it remained 'the unwelcome fact that swimming is not popular at either university and is confined to the keen enthusiast'.³⁶ Whether life saving added to the attraction of the activity or was practised by the university clubs before the early years of the twentieth century is unclear. With no source material to indicate that it did flourish, it must be assumed, that life saving too remained a minority pursuit at university level.

In contrast, women's colleges placed greater emphasis on swimming and competed regularly in the latter years of the nineteenth century. Although again it was Oxbridge colleges which showed the least interest and the London University women's colleges who instigated many of the clubs and competitions. McCrone in her article on the development of women's sport at the University of London, clearly indicates the prestige of swimming, when she describes the rapid prominence of sport in student life at Royal Holloway College, 'with lawn tennis, hockey, boating and swimming becoming the four 'great' sports'.³⁷ Further indication of the importance of swimming for the women at Royal Holloway College, was the provision of a heated pool in 1894

³⁵ Sachs, F. 1912: p.361

³⁶ Sachs, F. 1912:p. 34 and 36

³⁷ McCrone, K.E. 1990: p. 214

and 'for the next several years a teacher gave regular instruction in swimming and life saving and was listed with the college staff', a situation which did not occur within the male colleges for several years.³⁸

Several of the other London colleges are also listed as having formed a swimming club in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries: Bedford in 1897, Royal Holloway in 1900, and King's College in 1907. The clubs would generally use the nearby baths and 'from a small initial membership would grow rapidly and arrange life saving classes, swimming sports days, and competitions in swimming and diving against high schools and other colleges'.³⁹

Swimming for women at Oxbridge was pursued, but with less enthusiasm and often like their male contemporaries, only as a means to membership of the boat club. An indication of the standard and place of swimming for women at Oxbridge, is provided by the situation at Somerville, where 'the river proved widely appealing, and before long, despite increasingly exacting swimming tests that initially prevented some of the best athletes from joining, the boat club boasted a large membership'.⁴⁰ Each individual college however, placed subtle differences on certain sports and competitive swimming, whilst never the most popular or prestigious activity amongst women at either Oxford or Cambridge, was better organized and more developed than for Oxbridge men.

³⁸ McCrone, K.E. 1990: p 216

³⁹ McCrone, K.E. 1990: p. 209

London University, must though take most of the credit for the organization and active promotion of competitive swimming for women at university during this time. Possibly because of 'its large and mainly non-residential and urban student population from somewhat lower rungs of the middle-class ladder', swimming was 'more keenly pursued and used to help unite the geographically separated colleges and promote a corporate identity for the London University colleges'.⁴¹ In 1910, a London University women's swimming team was formed, with representatives from nine of the London colleges and by 1912, the London University team defeated Cambridge for the first time.⁴²

Despite the interest in competitive swimming for women at London University, the rather insular approach ensured the standard of swimming achieved was not exceptional. By 1915, the editor of *The Swimming Magazine* reflected that whilst the competition for championships was very keen, 'the standard of swimming is not so high as it could be, if colleges could be induced sometimes to swim with the local clubs. They have rather run into a groove, and though they all swim in a very average way, they are not really much better than the younger girls at school'.⁴³ Swimming and life saving within all branches of elite nineteenth century education remained a minority activity. However, the situation was to be different within state education. The

⁴⁰ McCrone, K.E. 1986: p. 205

⁴¹ McCrone, K.E. 1990: p. 223

⁴² Ibid p.209

⁴³ *The Swimming Magazine*, 1915, March, Vol 1, 10,p.13

subsequent promotion of swimming in state schools ensured that amongst the working classes, the popularity and standard of swimming was high. Yet this effectively sealed the fate of swimming, as a activity primarily for the masses and not the elite.

Swimming in State Schools

Until the start of the twentieth century, there was little interest in the physical education needs of working-class children. Swimming however, was one of the first physical activities to be provided by state schools. Nevertheless, swimming opportunities for the majority of young people in Britain, whether at school or in work, remained limited during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With such attitudes prevailing, the struggle to include swimming instruction in state schools became a long and contentious debate between the ASA and the Board of Education. The Forster Education Act of 1870 had extended elementary schooling to all children in England and Wales, but attendance was not compulsory until 1880 and only free from 1891, with the majority of children leaving at the minimum age of twelve years.⁴⁴

Participation in physical exercise for the overwhelming majority of school children consisted of 'drill on military lines fleshed out with some more general exercise'.⁴⁵ Limited money, space and time ensured physical drill

⁴⁴ Warren, A. 1993: p.58

⁴⁵ Holt, R. 1989: p.139

fitted the requirement of providing basic physical exercise to large numbers of children and more importantly, it also served the purpose of instilling discipline into the ranks, especially among working-class boys. Working-class girls fared a little better. The relatively progressive London School Board, introduced Swedish gymnastics to all the London Board's girls' schools and departments in the 1880s and gradually the Swedish System took over the physical education of all elementary school girls.⁴⁶

By the turn of the century, the provision of military drill to boys and Swedish gymnastics to girls, remained the main form of physical exercise provided by state schools. The 1902 Education Act did recommend a wider programme of physical education and many boys' departments had moved steadily towards the introduction of elements of the Swedish system into their programmes.⁴⁷ Also, from the 1890s, team games for boys had been encouraged by school inspectors and taken on by volunteer male teachers, out of school hours. Then in 1900, games were encouraged by the Board of Education as a suitable alternative to drill or Swedish exercise, but 'the reality was that games were impractical in most urban elementary schools because of lack of space and facilities'.⁴⁸ Even with a new *Syllabus of Physical Exercise* in 1904 and 1909, it remained the case that 'far too little continued to be done to care for the bodies of the children of the masses' and physical

⁴⁶ McCrone, K.E. 1991: p.161. For information on the development of physical education in elementary schools see P.C. McIntosh (1952) *Physical Education in England Since 1800*.

⁴⁷ Holt, R. 1989: p. 139

⁴⁸ McCrone, K.E. 1991: p. 163

education provision remained 'mechanistic, with no systematic provision made for games'.⁴⁹

Against this background, the ASA had since the early 1880s, pressed the government to include swimming within the teaching code, along with military drill. By this date, some progressive education authorities had already introduced swimming into their elementary schools. Facilities for swimming in British towns and cities had steadily increased since mid-century, but many towns and even cities, remained without any or sufficient swimming baths for the population they served. However, by the late 1890s, in an increasing number of schools it became a practical possibility to introduce swimming into the curriculum. Several towns and cities went further and placed a high priority on swimming instruction, and along with the ASA, consistently lobbied the Board of Education to include swimming, as a formal part of the Code of Education.

One of the primary objects of the ASA from its inception had been 'to encourage swimming teaching to school children' and it had advocated three special reasons for its inclusion in the physical education curriculum:

1. *It is unequalled as a method of attaining physical perfection.*
2. *It inculcates a love of cleanliness, which is the foundation of good health, (and as Wesley said, is next to Godliness).*
3. *It is a means of saving human life.*⁵⁰

⁴⁹ McCrone, K.E. 1991: p. 164

⁵⁰ Fern, H.E. et al 1912: p.1

With the objective of seeing instruction in swimming becoming an established part of all elementary schools, the ASA, with the support of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), first approached the Board of Education in 1880. The government response was one of acknowledgement of the desirability of such a proposal and consequently it enabled school boards to cover part of the cost of swimming teaching from its rates income, but it refused to provide a special grant to cover all costs.⁵¹

Despite the lack of financial support from government, many individuals and local authorities, went ahead and provided swimming instruction and regular access to swimming baths to significant numbers of school children often free of charge or for a nominal amount. One individual pioneer was Mr. H.J. Johnson of the Leander Club, Birmingham, who gave free swimming lessons at the Northwood Street Baths. He subsequently moved to Leeds and continued his swimming teaching at Leeds Swimming Club. His reputation was such, that the Leeds School Board appointed him to advise its staffing committee on the suitability of applicants for posts of swimming teacher.⁵² Enthusiastic individuals from other clubs up and down the country were also giving similar opportunities to children with many clubs waiving the subscription to junior members who wished to learn to swim.⁵³

⁵¹ Keil, I. and Wix, D. 1996: p. 24

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Sinclair, A and Henry, W. 1893: p. 377. They highlighted the debt many communities owed to the 'public spirited gentlemen amateurs who have for years undertaken the teaching of school children'. And there are many examples written about in the swimming press, of individuals who voluntarily taught swimming to school children, for years without any recognition.

Local authorities also played their part in encouraging swimming amongst school children by providing free or reduced entrance rates to the baths at certain times.⁵⁴ By the 1890s, the ASA, sensitive to the demand in many areas for competent swimming teachers for children, offered the services of members, who were competent to teach swimming, free of charge to the Board of Education. Continued pressure from the ASA resulted in the Board of Education amending its Code of Education to include swimming. The success of the ASA was only partial, as the application of the code was not prescriptive and many school boards chose not to spend their funds on swimming instruction.

London School Board was one which did set aside some funds for school swimming, and in 1891, it also accepted the ASA offer of free swimming teachers.⁵⁵ Yet London, as Sinclair and Henry stated, 'is really far behind some other cities in general instruction to children'.⁵⁶ Nottingham Education Committee in 1895, 'expressed the desire for swimming instruction to be included in the instruction of all senior schools'.⁵⁷ By 1914, up to 30,000 children in Nottingham had learnt to swim and attendance at the baths was free during school hours.

⁵⁴ All of the Baths and Wash-houses Committee reports agree to a reduction of rates for baths entrance to school children and many provide free entry.

⁵⁵ Keil, I. and Wix, D. 1996: p. 24

⁵⁶ Sinclair, A. and Henry, W. 1893: p. 377

⁵⁷ *The Swimming Magazine* 1914, Dec, Vol 1, 7; p. 16

Birmingham authorities were also keen to enable as many school children as possible access to the baths. As early as 1874, the Mayor, Joseph Chamberlin, 'suggested the desirability of issuing tickets for admission to the second class baths at reduced rates for the exclusive use of children attending the Board and other Elementary schools of the town'.⁵⁸ Chamberlin's suggestion was subsequently carried out and 1d and 1/2d tickets were issued to schools and children could attend the baths at fixed times and dates accompanied by a teacher.⁵⁹ The popularity of the scheme was shown by the 11,658 1/2d tickets that were issued during 1875. This number rose to 58,400 in 1884, and all Birmingham's baths were open to school children from 8am to 1pm each Tuesday and Friday morning. School girls were included in the proposal, but only 350 girls attended, during the special rate times in 1886, despite the Birmingham School Board having engaged the services of a swimming mistress in 1885 to give lessons to any teachers who would be subsequently teaching swimming to the girls. This extra provision was not enough to encourage more girls to attend the baths and by 1897, no girls attended at the reduced rate. A further set back to the scheme occurred in 1892, when the Birmingham School Board, decided not to sanction the attendance of school children, between the hours of 10am and 12pm on the Tuesday and Friday mornings. Why the Board decided to reduce the hours it sanctioned is unclear, but probably abuse of the system by school

⁵⁸ City of Birmingham Public Baths, 1897: p.69

⁵⁹ City of Birmingham Public Baths, 1897: p.69

boys was one reason, or possibly the Board felt too much school time was being taken up with swimming. Despite the reduced number of hours, 56 schools altogether used the various baths and in the summer of 1893, to continue encouraging the boys, the Baths and Parks Committee offered a free ticket to the second class bath, to each boy who managed to swim one length (30 yards) at the annual competition in October, held at the Kent Street Baths. In all, 403 boys succeeded and obtained their free pass.⁶⁰

Liverpool Baths Committee also encouraged school children to use the baths, by making price concessions for entry. In 1858, the Baths Committee charged 1d per child, for entry to the Cornwallis Street 3rd class plunge pool and instructed the Surveyor to report on the possible building of a cheap plunge bath for schools.⁶¹ No further mention is made to a schools bath, so the cost of provision must have proved prohibitive. The Committee continued though to charge just 1d for school children and extended the scheme to the Margaret Street and Paul Street baths by 1867, with the Margaret Street Bath recording an average weekly attendance of 100 children over the summer of 1867.⁶² In 1888, boys attending day schools were charged 2d entry, but they now had access to the first class plunge pool and specific classes were provided for girls at the Pier Head Baths.⁶³ Free school swimming had also

⁶⁰ City of Birmingham Public Baths, 1897: p.72

⁶¹ Annals of the Liverpool Corporation Baths Department 1952: p.33

⁶² Ibid p. 55

⁶³ Ibid p.121

been provided during the summer months at the open air Burrough Gardens, although some schools had ceased to use the facility due to sickness amongst the children and one Headmaster wrote to the Baths Committee requesting that something should be done to stop school children attending the open air baths during school hours.⁶⁴ In 1896, the provision of free school swimming was extended to include 3 indoor baths during the winter season, as well as the open air baths in the summer.⁶⁵

Nottingham, Birmingham and Liverpool authorities, provide examples, of the measures that were put in place, to enable school children regular access to swimming. They were not unique and many other towns and cities in England, such as, Manchester, Leeds, Leicester, and Bradford all operated similar schemes. *The Municipal Journal*, in 1904, emphasized that, by the early years of the twentieth century, many towns were offering very reduced or even free passes to the baths for school children, as they had done for a number of years. Several authorities had also appointed specialist swimming teachers, whose wages were paid either by the Education or Baths Committee and some towns seemed to have been far more successful than Birmingham, in including and encouraging girls, to participate in their schemes.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Annals of Liverpool Corporation Baths Department, 1952: p.151.

⁶⁵ Annals of Liverpool Corporation Baths Department, 1952: p. 147

⁶⁶ *The Municipal Journal*, 15 April 1904: p. 304

In Scotland, the provision of physical education to children attending the public board schools, followed a similar pattern to England, where until the end of the nineteenth century, drill was the main and often only form of physical exercise offered to children. Progressive opinion within Glasgow and Govan School Boards, ensured that after 1877, elementary school children within these catchments areas, were also given swimming instruction.⁶⁷ Glasgow Corporation initially offered free use of the public swimming baths to children attending the public schools in 1888. By 1894, 2,148 pupils from 48 schools were using the baths. Children followed a systematic course of instruction, given by specialist instructors which lasted from May to October.⁶⁸ Glasgow's efforts to provide swimming instruction were very successful, but it was Govan School Board which set a precedent and elevated the position of swimming within the school curriculum.

Govan initiated a programme to build swimming pools in a number of strategically placed schools in 1887 and by 1906, seven Govan schools had swimming pools.⁶⁹ These pools acted as centres of swimming for other local schools and significantly increased the number of pupils receiving formal swimming lessons, with over 5,300 pupils receiving swimming lessons by 1907.⁷⁰ Through sound teaching many pupils became extremely proficient

⁶⁷ Bilsborough, 1983: p. 130

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid p. 137

swimmers, and as well as supplying local clubs with talented young sportsmen, the development of a competitive swimming structure within schools began to flourish and provided children from all social classes, with the opportunity to compete in events from inter-class to national championships.⁷¹

Schools swimming competition was one of the earliest sports to be organized by state schools, when it developed throughout Britain in the latter years of the nineteenth century.⁷² A motivating factor in the early formation of well organized, state school swimming competitions, may have been civic pride. Many towns were clearly keen to demonstrate the swimming ability of pupils in their schools and in England school competitions were often promoted by the new, rapidly forming Schools Swimming Associations. London School Swimming Association was one of the first to be instituted in 1891, but several towns and cities soon followed, for example Nottingham in 1891 and Sheffield in 1895. The main aim of the School Swimming Associations was to 'devote attention to the teaching of swimming and life saving in Public Elementary Schools',⁷³ and as the London Association claimed, 'to promote collective ability and general efficiency'.⁷⁴

Providing competitive opportunities, became an important function for School Swimming Associations, although most of the competitions were team

⁷¹ Bilsborough, P.1983: p.138

⁷² Football competitions were possibly organised earlier, but well organised state school swimming competitions were a feature of the late nineteenth century.

⁷³ *Swimming Magazine*, October 1916: p.115

and not individual events. School swimming events became very popular occasions, with for example, over 1,000 people present at a schoolboys competition in Liverpool in 1888, with the gala raising a record sum for a swimming entertainment.⁷⁵ Many swimming clubs also saw the opportunity of boosting their numbers, through junior members, and the inclusion of swimming events for schools was a common feature at club galas. Nottingham Swimming Club in 1894, claimed that the distinctive feature of its programme was 'the number of events set apart for juveniles'.⁷⁶ Eight Public Elementary Schools had entered the team Championship, and 'the length race for boys attending the National or Board Schools had reached the final stage after numerous earlier rounds'.⁷⁷ Competitive events were a natural extension of school swimming, once large numbers of children had been taught to swim, but teaching swimming and the methods of life saving, remained the main function of all the Schools Swimming Associations. They also became forceful lobby groups, in attempting to ensure the inclusion of swimming in the curriculum and in persuading the authorities to build school pools.

Despite the efforts of the Schools Swimming Associations, the ASA, the National Union of Teachers and individual clubs, the elevation of swimming onto the school curriculum and the provision of adequate swimming

⁷⁴ *Swimming Magazine*, July 1915: p. 39

⁷⁵ *Annals of Liverpool Corporation Baths Department* 1952: p.122

⁷⁶ *Nottingham Daily*, September 1894: p. 7

⁷⁷ *Nottingham Daily*, September 1894: p.7

facilities remained an unfulfilled ambition. A special sub-committee had been appointed by the ASA in March 1914, to investigate the matter of swimming teaching in elementary schools. Before approaching the Board of Education the committee had decided to enlist the support of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and subsequently a conference was held between the two bodies in September 1914, with the conclusion that representatives from the NUT and the ASA, should approach the Board of Education with the following 4 resolutions;

- 1) *The encouragement of local education authorities in the provision of swimming facilities.*
- 2) *Where facilities are provided, the time taken up by swimming should be considered part of the time devoted to physical exercises.*
- 3) *Land exercises for teaching swimming and life saving be included in the number of 'free' exercises in the drill course.*
- 4) *The Code of Education issued in 1905, should include the suggestion that where public baths are available, swimming and life saving should be taught.⁷⁸*

Despite strong representations from the NUT, in their support for the inclusion of swimming into an already overcrowded curriculum and from the ASA and medical experts on the health, cleanliness and life saving benefits of swimming, the deputation only partially succeeded in its aims. By 1914, swimming could be counted, as part of the time required for physical exercise, and land drills for swimming and life saving, could be taught in the time taken for physical exercises.⁷⁹ However, little change had been secured from previous attempts and the intervention of the war prevented any further

⁷⁸ ASA Handbook 1919 p. 174

⁷⁹ Ibid p. 187

progress, ensuring the mandatory inclusion of swimming instruction in schools would have to wait.

Swimming Teaching

The ASA may have failed to secure the inclusion of swimming in the physical education curriculum, but it continued to work strenuously to improve the status and qualifications of swimming teachers. Swimming teaching, whether in schools, in clubs or by 'professionals' had largely been undertaken by individuals, with little or no training. Each teacher, and particularly the 'professional' swimmer, would often claim to have developed the quickest and easiest method of learning to swim. Swimming was considered by some, to be an activity that could only be taught individually, and to teach it to large groups of children was impossible.⁸⁰

Further difficulties in teaching swimming, especially to classes of school children, were the small and inadequate facilities that were made available, with often only a small section of the pool shallow enough for learners. There was wide variation in how children were taught, and who they were taught by, ranging from the class teacher, Head teacher, bath attendant, bath superintendent, to specialist swimming instructors appointed by the

⁸⁰ Brooke, C. 1896: p. 9

Education Department. Many other children, had no formal instruction, with the class teacher accompanying the pupils, primarily to supervise behaviour on the poolside. The numbers of children in the pool, and the numbers of teachers present, also influenced the amount of teaching that was possible. Wide variations seem to have occurred, with some authorities allowing 15 to 25 pupils per teacher, whilst others claimed up to 100 boys and 50 girls attended at one time, or in the case of Nottingham that 24 girls could attend at a time, but the number of boys was not limited.⁸¹

To overcome the problem of teaching large numbers of children, in inadequate space, with few competent teachers available, land swimming drill was adopted in schools. Land swimming drill was claimed to have been introduced in England in 1876, from an adapted version of systems used by the French and German armies, and the method was initially ridiculed by club swimmers.⁸²

However, various land drill methods began to be used by schools, as the children could be taught the basic movements of swimming, during the winter months, when many baths were closed. Claims were made that after a course of land drill instruction, children were 'able to swim across the bath within ten minutes of entering the water'.⁸³ The reliability of such claims was debatable, but land drill did give many children a basic idea of the swimming stroke, even if it was not always so easily transferable to the water.

⁸¹ *The Municipal Journal*, 15 April 1904: p.304

⁸² Sinclair, A. and Henry, W. 1893:p. 55-6

A number of different land drills existed, and from these the RLSS drew up a set of exercises, which became commonly used in schools. In this scheme, all the exercises were performed standing up, as lying across benches or chairs, was considered to put too much pressure on the abdomen.⁸⁴ Although later illustrations, depicted pupils lying over the backs of another pupil on all fours, to enable the exercises to be practiced horizontally and in a more realistic way.

The tone and methods of instruction for land swimming drill, bore many similarities to the former military drill, with children standing in 'ranks' and being 'dressed' and all the movements being done to the count.⁸⁵ In 1915, a *Text Book of Land Swimming Drill* was published, in which the exercises were performed to music and to the following chorus,

*If you want to be a man and play a useful part,
To the credit and the glory of the nation,
You must understand the greatest sport of all,
And learn about the art that's called natation.
You thus will be ready to save another's life,
You'll know at the call how to do so,
Then you may some day place your name
On the endless roll of fame
That's intended to denote a British hero.*⁸⁶

The addition of music to the drill, was intended to make the activity more enjoyable, and swimming drill could claim, to be more educationally sound than military drill. However, the overriding reason for its inclusion in

⁸³ *The Municipal Journal*, 17 June 1904: p. 482

⁸⁴ Sinclair, A and Henry, W. 1893: p. 55

⁸⁵ *Swimming for Health, Exercise and Pleasure*, 1906, by Experts, p. 10

⁸⁶ Newman, C. 1915: p.10

schools, was another form of economical exercise for the urban school population and a further means to instil discipline into young working-class boys, but disguised as swimming teaching. Introducing children to swimming, using land drills, continued well into the twentieth century. The ASA, as late as 1922 claimed, 'land exercises allowed the preparation of numbers of children during the winter months, with a view to taking full advantage of the bathing season, and would ensure the most economical use of the existing accommodation'.⁸⁷

Despite its similarities to military drill, and its repetitive monotony, land swimming drill, did provided children with at least the basic mechanics of swimming. By the turn of the century, the importance of teaching all children to swim, was also being acknowledged by most sections of society. However, the provision of suitable pools, especially for learners, prevented many schools from including swimming on the time table, land drill therefore continued to retain its prominence. A proposal initiated by the ASA, and endorsed by the Education Act of 1918, empowered Local Authorities to build school swimming baths, to alleviate the shortage of suitable swimming facilities.⁸⁸ Once again, the Act was not mandatory, and the cost and upkeep, of even small learner pools was too prohibitive for most Local Authorities at this time. Despite these difficulties the teaching of swimming to school children did progress, due largely to the efforts of the ASA.

⁸⁷ Baxter, F. 1922: p. 11

The ASA had from its inception, placed a high priority on the teaching of swimming, and specifically on the training of swimming teachers. It proved to be a powerful governing body in this respect and was one of the first sports bodies to develop a systematic programme for the training of teachers in its own sport. The statement in the ASA's 1904 Handbook is evidence of this commitment,

*The aim of the ASA is to raise the status of professional teachers and to bring under the notice of Schools, Institutions, and Bathing Authorities the importance of having a properly qualified and properly paid teacher in future.*⁸⁹

Payment to swimming teachers caused difficulties for some swimmers, with regard to their amateur status, as the previous chapter has discussed. However, the need to establish a recognized professional qualification, in order to increase the number of people who were taught to swim correctly, ensured the institution by the ASA, of a Professional Certificate in 1899. By the 31 December 1900, the ASA, had awarded 26 Professional Certificates to male and female candidates.⁹⁰ No practical or theoretical tests had to be passed in order to gain the certificate. Applicants had only to satisfy the district executive committee where they lived, 'of their character and antecedents, and ability as a professional teacher'.⁹¹ To control more tightly

⁸⁸ School Swimming Baths 1918: p. 2

⁸⁹ ASA Handbook, 1904.

⁹⁰ Keil, I and Wix, D. 1996: p. 25

⁹¹ Ibid.

the quality of candidates awarded the certificate, it was revised in 1910, to include both a theoretical and practical examination. A demonstration of teaching the breast stroke, back stroke and breathing, were the elements in the theory test, and a demonstration of the style, rather than speed of various strokes, formed the practical test. All candidates also had to possess the bronze medallion of the RLSS. The more stringent tests, did not deter applicants and by the end of 1913, the total number of Professional Certificates awarded had risen to 383.⁹²

Establishing a reputable qualification, by which competent swimming teachers were recognized, helped elevate the position of the teachers themselves and must have improved the quality of much of the swimming instruction, but proportionally, the numbers of qualified teachers remained very small. Nonetheless, the work of the ASA had ensured a more systematic and standard form of teaching was now in place and for those who sought the help of a qualified teacher, at their local baths or swimming club, their chance of receiving competent instruction was now greatly increased.

Throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century and into the early years of the twentieth century, provision of swimming education to young people varied widely. Public School provision was largely dependent on the interest of individual headmasters. With some public schools placing a high priority on swimming teaching, whilst the majority relegated swimming to a

⁹² Keil and Wix, 1996: p.25

minor recreational activity. Middle-class pupils, the majority of whom attended private boarding and day schools, were catered for the least, due to the prohibitive cost of providing swimming facilities. Although pupils attending the private girls schools, were given more encouragement to swim, as swimming was promoted for safety and health and was also considered a feminine appropriate activity. State school pupils, whose schools were close to a local authority pool, were given the best opportunity of learning to swim. Through an increasingly systematic and controlled education system, swimming lessons were provided to a large number of school children, both boys and girls. However, despite a wider acknowledgement of the importance, desirability and beneficial consequences of teaching young people to swim, only a minority received swimming lessons whilst at school. For significant numbers of youths their only access to swimming instruction was from the commendable provision of the voluntary sector or through the few worked based schemes.

Voluntary Organizations and Work Place Schemes

A significant number of young people, even after the introduction of free elementary education in 1891, spent only a brief period of their youth at school, and for many their adolescent years were spent within the work force. Opportunity to participate in any form of physical exercise, inside or outside of school, was often limited by inadequate provision within school and

dependent on either voluntary provision, communal self help or the very few work based programmes.

The impact of voluntary organizations to improve and enhance the lives of young people between 1880 and 1914, is a confused one.⁹³ Although many, were the only agencies providing structured leisure activities to the young of Britain's towns and cities, the precise number of young people who regularly took advantage of such provision has not been quantified. Whether swimming or life saving instruction, played a significant part in the efforts of voluntary bodies is even harder to ascertain. Voluntary organizations were formed to direct the energies of inner- city working-class boys, into acceptable channels and in the case of denomination organizations to bolster church attendance.⁹⁴ They consisted primarily of paramilitary and religious groups such as the Volunteer Force, the Boys Brigade, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Salvation Army and the Church Lad's Brigade, plus an infinite number of associations, attached to local church and community groups. Later in the first decade of the twentieth century, the most successful youth movement numerically, the Boy Scouts was founded, followed three years later, in 1910 by a parallel movement for girls.⁹⁵

All of them aimed to lure boys, and to a lesser extent girls, off the streets, and were 'drawn into the use of sport as an instrument of social

⁹³ Warren, A. 1993: p.58-9.

⁹¹ Holt, R. 1989: p. 138

⁹⁵ Warren, A. 1993: p. 60

discipline and a source of recruits'.⁹⁶ The opportunity to participate in sport, especially football, was an incentive to children who had primarily only experienced drill in school. Other sports were also offered, such as cricket, but football was the biggest attraction. Also the systematic pursuit of team games, apart from football, was essentially prevented, due to a lack of pitches and changing facilities, in towns and cities, where most of these organizations flourished and because of the prohibitive cost of equipment and travel. Therefore, not surprisingly 'it was the more individualistic sports that flourished in the club and brigade world'.⁹⁷ Boxing, athletics and gymnastics were the main individual sports, as they cost little to organize on club premises. Swimming and life saving, did not have the appeal of football, but the opportunity to be refreshed and clean, if only during summer months, must have enticed many. Also, although swimming involved some expense, for groups in close proximity to a public baths, reduce entrance charges, kept costs to a minimum. The autonomous and individualistic nature of most of these groups, meant the mix of activities varied locally, but swimming and life saving were offered within many of them.

Several of the youth movements produced a weekly or monthly magazine for their recruits, and from these it is possible to establish how swimming was promoted, and how significant it was within these movements. *The Young Soldier* was a weekly magazine for children and young people of The

⁹⁶ Holt, R. 1989: p.138

⁹⁷ Warren, A. 1993: p.60

Salvation Army. In it a series of articles on swimming and life saving appeared, written by Major William Gilks, who was a member of the RLSS and holder of the Bronze Medallion. The first article began by stating,

*Along with St. Paul, The Salvation Army believes that bodily exercise is profitable and the exercise of swimming is certainly profitable to the highest degree.*⁹⁸

Swimming was also promoted as an excellent recreation, because it taught the essential lessons of 'courage, endurance and judgment' and was a valuable and healthful method of enjoyment.⁹⁹ However, the greatest value in being able to swim proficiently for Salvationists was that 'it will enable us to save life, as many of our comrades have proved'.¹⁰⁰ The importance of swimming and life saving within The Salvation Army and particularly for young recruits, was reflected in the call for 'every Young People's Legion to have a swimming and life saving class'. Two requirements were considered necessary for forming a class, an efficient teacher and a suitable bathing place. Both were thought easily attainable, as 'already within our ranks a number of Local Officers and Bandsmen hold the certificate of the RLSS, and are therefore in a position to give the young people full training'.¹⁰¹

Access to suitable bathing places was not considered a problem either, for in towns and cities possessing public baths 'special terms can be obtained

⁹⁸ Gilks, W. 1916: p. 1

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Gilks, W. 1916: p.1

¹⁰¹ Ibid

on application to the Baths' Superintendent'.¹⁰² Once significant numbers of recruits had learnt to swim, competitive events were encouraged, to maintain the boys interest. In the programme of a musical swimming gala, given by the Salvation Army, events included, 'The Salvation Army Club Championship', which was won by a junior of thirteen, exhibitions of diving, back swimming by lime light, and life saving methods and resuscitation, plus a humorous sketch to conclude.¹⁰³ All giving an indication of the proficiency and level of swimming that had been achieved by young recruits of the Salvation Army, at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Boys Brigade which was established in 1883 in Glasgow, also showed a keen interest in swimming. After 1891 the Glasgow Battalion arranged swimming lessons which were taught by a qualified instructor.¹⁰⁴ Quickly followed in 1889, by the first Battalion Gala, which included a selection of swimming races, and by the second gala water polo was also played.¹⁰⁵ Although swimming was never the most popular sport within the Boys Brigade, their monthly magazine *The Brigadier* also contained regular articles on swimming and life saving, written by Scotland's most famous swimming professional and author William Wilson.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Gilks, W. 1916: p.1

¹⁰³ Ibid, p.16

¹⁰⁴ Bilsborough, P. 1983: p. 145

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas, R. 1904: p.415

Independent church and youth groups also placed a high value on swimming and life saving instruction, with some forming a separate club for the purpose. The St. Paul's, Bennett Street Sunday School in Manchester, formed the Band of Hope swimming club in 1893 and affiliated immediately to the RLSS. Members of the Sunday School were encouraged to join the club, which had been established 'with the object of teaching and cultivating the art of swimming and the best method of resuscitation and of saving persons from drowning'.¹⁰⁷ The club met on Tuesday and Thursday evenings during the summer months and cards of membership entitled the holders to reduce entrance to the Osbourne Street Baths, Manchester at certain other times.¹⁰⁸

From the 1890s, the style and assumptions of voluntary youth organizations began to subtly change, 'creating greater diversity and individualism' and leading to 'a growing desire on the part of voluntary leaders and the young themselves to get out of the city'.¹⁰⁹ Now the club or brigade camp, which often involved trips to the sea side, became an important feature of each unit. It was the Boy Scouts movement, and a little later the Girl Guides, formed by Baden-Powell, which clearly demonstrated the changed emphasis towards outdoor activities. Although swimming specifically, was not a strong feature within either movement, being able to swim and life save, were part of the greater emphasis on individual and outdoor activities that were now encouraged for the young.

¹⁰⁷ Miscellaneous item – Manchester Public Library

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Outside of formal education, the voluntary youth organizations provided many urban young people, with the chance to participate in several forms of sporting activity. Swimming could not compete with the popularity of football, but swimming and especially life saving, were encouraged and within some voluntary organizations, they developed into popular and well organized spheres of activity. Yet for a majority of young people, after negligible sporting opportunity in school and limited provision from voluntary organizations, their entry into the work force in their early adolescent years, would have ensured a further decline in their sporting opportunity. Although, by 1900, a few large companies were developing a new company culture, that included a recognition of education and recreation as significant to the performance of workers.

Three of the major companies who adopted such a policy were Cadbury's in Birmingham, Rowntree's in York and Lever's in Liverpool. Swimming within all of these companies was widely encouraged and provided for all workers, male and female. All three companies, provided extensive opportunities to participate and were convinced that participation in sport advanced their workers moral, social and physical well being. As a consequence it was hope that this would improve their performance at work and the companies productivity.¹¹⁰ Cadbury's and Lever's also built model villages, for their workforce, at Bournville and Port Sunlight respectively, which

¹⁰⁹ Warren, A. 1993: p.61

¹¹⁰ McCrone, K. 1991: p.173

as well as providing cottages, gardens, acres of parks and sports grounds, also included the provision of swimming pools. Whilst Rowntrees had less extensive on-site facilities and so made use of local facilities, with workers given many opportunities to use the local baths. The open air pool at Port Sunlight was opened in July 1902, measuring 100ft by 70ft and supplied with heated water from the factory.¹¹¹ In 1905, Cadbury's provided a large indoor swimming bath for female workers, along with the outdoor pool already built for male workers, then in 1911 a separate indoor pool was built for men.¹¹²

In addition to providing facilities, all the companies employed instructors to teach swimming to their employees. For younger workers, at Cadbury's, swimming classes were compulsory, given during work hours, whilst older workers were urged to attend evening classes.¹¹³ Swimming classes for women at Rowntree's, appeared however, to have been poorly attended, for the works magazine, 'occasionally lamented that not enough girls availed themselves of the opportunity to learn to swim', despite instructors being especially hired for the purpose.¹¹⁴

Many employees, men and women, must have taken the opportunity provided of learning to swim, for swimming competitions, both internal company galas and against other companies and then local swimming clubs, began to take place from the early 1900s. Swimming clubs thrived within the

¹¹¹ Details from display at Port Sunlight Museum.

¹¹² McCrone, K. 1991: p.174-5

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p.178

companies, with affiliation to the ASA and RLSS quickly taking place, and workers going onto compete in county and national championship events.¹¹⁵

Most information on all sporting opportunity provided by these companies, was detailed in the company magazines and was therefore almost universally positive and presented a view of things from the top down.¹¹⁶ However, the opportunities and facilities provided for swimming, to the employees of all three companies, demonstrated that swimming, was considered a healthy, positive and worthwhile activity. Workers within these companies were given greater opportunities to learn to swim and compete, than most other working-class employees of the early twentieth century. For despite increased provision for swimming, from the last decade of the nineteenth century, whether in schools, voluntary organizations, or company based schemes, many people reached adulthood unable to swim. Deaths by drowning remained high throughout the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century, with for example 3,659 deaths from drowning in England and Wales in 1878, which was the highest death toll of the previous twenty years.¹¹⁷ In 1893 the figure still stood at 2,747 and by 1910 it had only dropped to 2,258.¹¹⁸ Many of these deaths would have been children, but a significant number were adults.

¹¹⁵ McCrone, K.E. 1991: p.175

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.178

¹¹⁷ Sachs, 1912, p.101

¹¹⁸ Fearn, H.E. 1912: p.9

The Royal Life Saving Society

The number of deaths through drowning was high, primarily because of the poor swimming ability amongst the majority of the population, but also due to the many superstitions that for decades had surrounded the rescue of a drowning person. It was widely believed, and particularly among fishing communities, that it was unlucky to 'rescue and much more so to revive the drowned'.¹¹⁹ Attempting to resuscitate a person was considered, even by physicians, to be pointless and such attempts were 'placed nearly upon a level with professing to raise the dead'.¹²⁰ Removing the body before the inquest was also widely believed to be unlawful.¹²¹

Despite these beliefs, many rescues and resuscitations were successfully carried out. Dr. Hawes, was one individual who had since the 1770s been engaged in the work of resuscitation.¹²² He initially tried to overcome superstition, by paying a reward for every apparently drowned body, between London and Westminster Bridge, brought to him for resuscitation.¹²³ His interest and concern over the number of deaths from drowning, led him to form the Royal Humane Society in 1774.¹²⁴ The society was responsible for placing boatmen on duty, at many of the popular parks and bathing places

¹¹⁹ Thomas, R. 1904: p. 193

¹²⁰ Sachs, F. 1912: p. 102

¹²¹ Thomas, R. 1904: p. 193

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Sinclair A. and Henry W. 1893: p.226

¹²⁴ Thomas, R. 1904: p. 192

throughout London and their presence helped to save many lives. The RHS also presented silver and bronze medals and certificates, to people who rescued or attempted to rescue a drowning person and from 1874 the Stanhope Medal was awarded each year by the society, to the rescue judged to be the most gallant.¹²⁵ An award from the RHS was received with great pride, and the society continued throughout the nineteenth century to draw attention to the unacceptable number of deaths from drowning.

The reputation of the RHS however, declined considerably when the resuscitation methods they used and advocated, were proved to be harmful. In 1856, Dr. Marshall Hall demonstrated a new method, which the medical profession and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution both adopted, but the RHS chose to ignore and continued with its old methods. Subsequently other methods of resuscitation, such as the Dr. Silvester method were also promoted. Confusion over the best and safest method of resuscitation continued, but the RHS did nothing to clarify the situation.

With the number of drownings continuing to rise, concern from swimmers led to the formation of a club, 'to encourage the saving of life from drowning' in 1891.¹²⁶ Titled initially the Swimmer's Life Saving Society, approaches had originally been made in 1887 to the RHS, to instigate classes in the most approved methods of life saving, but they declined to help.¹²⁷ Then in 1889, the ASA was asked to consider the establishment of life saving

¹²⁵ Sachs, F. 1912: p.102 and Sinclair A. and Henry W. 1893: p. 186

¹²⁶ Sachs, F. 1912: p. 102 and Sinclair and Henry 1893: p. 233

classes. It appointed a committee and made several recommendations, but again no action was taken.¹²⁸

Convinced of the necessity for an organization to oversee the teaching of the correct methods of life saving, two prominent swimmers of the day, Mr. William Henry and Mr. Archibald Sinclair, called a meeting in January 1891. Sixty delegates attended, and resulted in the institution of the Life Saving Society.¹²⁹ Different methods of rescue and resuscitation were experimented with and a committee appointed, to develop a simple drill, which could be taught easily to schools and clubs. At the same time, a series of articles had appeared in the Scottish press, detailing a life saving drill, developed by William Wilson of Glasgow and practiced by the South Side Club of Glasgow, over the previous twelve months. Mr. Wilson forwarded a copy of the drill to the Life Saving Society and 'kindly offered the drill to the society ' and 'in recognition of his most valuable services to the cause... he was elected the first life governor of the society'.¹³⁰

With a better understanding and unanimous agreement on the safest methods of release, rescue and resuscitation the influence and progress of the LSS grew considerably. It acquired Royal patronage from King Edward VII, increasing the prestige and recognition of the society and adding 'Royal' to its title. Members of the medical profession were consulted and asked to

¹²⁷ Thomas, R. 1904: p. 379 and Sinclair, A. and Henry, W. 1893: p. 232

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Thomas, R. 1904:p. 380

¹³⁰ Sinclair, A. and Henry, W 1893:p. 236

examine and correct the medical aspects of the societies work.¹³¹ Whilst the largest part of the societies work consisted of giving public lectures and demonstrations, with nearly 100 demonstrations taking place in 1892.¹³²

With public interest in the societies methods increasing and many schools and swimming clubs practicing the updated techniques, a national competition for teams of four, was inaugurated in 1892. A shield for the event was presented by Lever Brothers of Liverpool, and 24 teams competed in its first year.¹³³ Other events were also promoted by the society, such as, The King's Cup and The Challenge Cup, but the greater part of the RLSS work, became and remains, the certificates and medallions awarded to individuals, on the successful completion of tests in the proficiency of life saving. Updated and adapted over the years, the gaining of an award from the RLSS, became recognized as a demonstration of ability in life saving, with the Bronze Medallion, still in existence today.

Swimming clubs throughout the country began to practice life saving and many even formed separate clubs to cater for the interest in this branch of the sport. The RLSS also sent members of its executive abroad and branches of the society were formed 'throughout the Empire, in continental and other foreign countries'.¹³⁴ Unlike the earlier Humane Society the RLSS

¹³¹ Sachs, F. 1912: p.125

¹³² Ibid

¹³³ Sinclair and Henry 1893: p. 236

¹³⁴ Sachs, F. 1912: p. 116

also kept in touch with the latest medical and scientific understandings. Resulting in the adoption of the new Dr. Schafer method of resuscitation, in the first decade of the twentieth century. This proved to be a simpler, more effective method than the Silvester technique, which had been used successfully by the RLSS from its inception.¹³⁵

Despite the activities and promotion of swimming and life saving by organizations such as the RHS, RLSS and the ASA, fear of water and a reluctance to learn to swim, especially among adults, remained common. Even within sections of society, where a persons livelihood was largely conducted on water, such as fishermen and sailors. Superstition and respect for the power of the sea, had led many to believe that, if their boat sank at sea an ability to swim was futile and 'the sooner their struggles were over the better – swimming only prolonged the agony'.¹³⁶

By the outbreak of the First World War, the situation in the navy, remained little different. The *Swimming Magazine* of 1915 commented, 'in the recent sad navy casualty lists the killed enormously outnumber the wounded and missing; but these gallant fellows were not killed strictly speaking, they were drowned most of them'.¹³⁷ Many young recruits to the army and navy were unable to swim, and although the Board of Admiralty by 1914, regulated that naval cadets were not allowed to pass out of the training establishments,

¹³⁵ Sachs, F. 1912: p.126

¹³⁶ *Swimming Magazine*, January 1915, 1, 8: p.9

¹³⁷ *Ibid*

until they could swim 100 yards with clothes on, for many this basic requirement was all that they achieved.¹³⁸ Despite more encouragement, stricter regulations and regular inspection of a ships record of instruction in swimming, many sailor's aboard ship remained unable to swim.¹³⁹

Poor swimming ability was not confined to men who worked at sea.

The precise number of the population who could swim and swim well by the early twentieth century is difficult to quantify. Evidence from the swimming press indicated that 'thousands join the army completely ignorant of the art', and when the Stoke-on-Trent police force formed a swimming club, the authorities perceived that, 'the value of this training cannot be overstated'.¹⁴⁰ Aware of this lack of swimming ability, the RHS and the later RLSS, both drew attention to the high death toll from drowning and tried to implement schemes to instruct the public on the best methods of rescue and resuscitation. The RLSS proved more successful in this than the RHS, and the RLSS went on to promote and instruct new life saving methods throughout Britain and world wide. Nevertheless, knowledge and ability in rescue and resuscitation, although increasing, remained a minority skill.

¹³⁸ *Swimming Magazine* May 1915, 1, 12: p.17

¹³⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁰ *Swimming Magazine*, January 1915, 1, 8 : p.14

Summary

This chapter has examined the provision and status of swimming education in late nineteenth century Britain within the context of the changing urban environment. Evidence indicates that swimming and life saving were both viewed as valuable and vital activities by many educational agencies, with the healthy and challenging nature of the activities being considered particularly important for the youth of urban Britain. An exception, was the elite educational world, which viewed swimming as a minority, low status activity – as a means to an end not an end in itself. It was participated in for fun, as a means to boat club membership or as a secondary competitive pastime. Elite education however, was the exception. Other educational agencies, state schools, voluntary associations, work place schemes and the ASA all promoted swimming and life saving as healthy, sound and rational activities. Swimming, for children attending state schools, within Britain's towns and cities, was considered beneficial to their physical health, cleanliness and moral training. Consequently, many progressive local authorities heavily subsidized swimming instruction for school children. Nevertheless, despite the perceived benefits, actual swimming within many state schools, was regularly supplement for land swimming drill. It was cheaper and easier, but it was also believed to instil into working-class children discipline and obedience. Voluntary organizations too, promoted swimming and life saving and they were developed into well-organized and attractive features of many voluntary youth associations. Whilst the agency

which did the most to improve the provision and status of swimming was the ASA, and by the turn of the century it had evolved into a powerful national governing body of sport. Although by 1914, it had not achieved its aim of having swimming included on the school curriculum, it consistently lobbied government on the value and benefits of swimming for school children and it was one of the first sports governing bodies to develop a programme to train teachers, in its own sport. Despite or perhaps because of such advocacy, swimming remained associated as an urban working class pursuit. This however, as the next chapter will examine, was to be of benefit for the development of women's swimming.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE BODY, WOMEN AND SWIMMING.

The nineteenth century history of swimming has been predominately portrayed as the history of male participation. This chapter will attempt to redress this imbalance, by tracing the progress of the sport for women. More specifically it will explore how the unique qualities of swimming, enabled it to develop into arguably the first modern, urban sport for women. The analysis will focus principally upon two ideologies which surrounded the female body and health, in nineteenth century Britain. Firstly, the ideology of female bodily incapacity and secondly, the socially constructed ideology of correct feminine behaviour. The key questions to be addressed in this analysis will be: Did the rise of women's competitive and recreational swimming help to break down the ideology of the weak, frail female body and contribute to women's physical emancipation? Why was the emergence of the female competitive spirit acceptable in the sport of swimming? Where as other sportswomen, such as athletes, hockey players and cyclists were condemned as 'masculine abominations'.¹

In order to answer these questions a brief overview of the changing perceptions towards the body and health for women in Victorian Britain, will

¹ Raszeja, V. 1992:12.

firstly be undertaken. An exploration of how these perceptions influenced the overall development of sport for women in the nineteenth century will then be briefly discussed. The chapter will then consider the development of swimming for women, by looking at: i) female bathing costumes; ii) the promotion of swimming for women; iii) female professional swimmers; iv) female competitive swimming. The conclusion will draw together, the key reasons for swimming being considered by many in the nineteenth century, as the 'ideal' sport for women.

The Female Body and Health in Victorian Britain.

... the body is the most potent metaphor of society.²

The body is an emblem of society and the ritual practices governing its usage symbolize and uphold fundamental Social relationships and bind individuals to the social order.³

The social significance of 'the body', is central to any analysis of society and within the fields of social science and cultural studies interest in the body since the 1980s has mushroomed.⁴ Fang Hong has claimed that, 'the study of the body offers a useful starting point for the historical and contemporary investigation of our culture and society'.⁵ Yet, within the social

² Turner, B.S. 1984

³ Douglas, M. 1973

⁴ Hong, F. 2001: p.1

⁵ *ibid.*

history of sport there has been a scarcity of attempts to place the body as a starting point for investigation.⁶ This is despite the fact that sport is concerned principally with the body and its attributes – strength, speed, skill, endurance, grace, style shape and general appearance and how these are tested and displayed.⁷ Within the field of women's studies the situation is no different, as Ann Hall points out, 'female bodies have always been central to feminism, but sporting bodies have not'.⁸ Yet histories of women's sport should essentially be, 'a history of women's struggle to free their bodies over the past centuries'.⁹ This chapter adds to our understanding of the female body and sport and demonstrates how one sport, swimming, was crucial in both liberating women's bodies and in reproducing patriarchal power over the female body.

Within nineteenth century society the female body was not only a site of physical repression and male power, but also a means by which women attempted to regain control over their physical world. As Hargreaves points out, 'the physical body was a fundamental symbol of power relations between men and women and moulded the development of women's sport for years to come'.¹⁰ The physical and social limitations placed upon the nineteenth century female body were repressive, from the wearing of restrictive clothing

⁶ Blake, A. 1996: p.23 *The Body Language: The Meaning of Modern Sport* clearly states that 'the body' has been a neglected as a focus within histories of sport.

⁷ Hargreaves, J. 1987

⁸ Hall, M.A. 1996: p.50

⁹ Hong, F. 2001:p.2

¹⁰ Hargreaves, J. 1994: p.3

to the advocating of avoidance of physical exercise. The established social order strictly defined separate male and female roles and effectively confined middle-class women to the home, thus curtailing their physical freedoms.

The situation did not however remain static. Many of the physical limitations placed on the female body were broken, when Victorian understanding of the body and as a consequence health and fitness, began to dominate social thinking. The Victorian obsession with the body and health, emerged from a number of disparate but collectively significant developments. The first was the new scientific enquiries on evolution and the doctrines of scientists, such as Spencer and Darwin, which led to the creation of the eugenics movement and openly challenged the Churches teachings of divine creation.¹¹ Initially these new scientific theories provided some consideration of the female body, due to the importance of the female body and health for producing healthy children. They also highlighted the differences between men and women, not only in their anatomy and physiology but also in temperament and intellect. The medical profession backed by nineteenth century scientific 'evidence' maintained that the female body needed very different care and treatment to the male body. Women's reproductive systems were believed to be the main cause of female ill health. This form of biological reductionism informed the understanding behind an ideology of female bodily incapacity and as Hargreaves states,

¹¹ Crunden, C. 1975:17

Throughout the nineteenth century, the concept of the 'nature of women' was integrated into people's attitudes and behaviour so that it became a material reality.... sustained by the practices and attitudes of women themselves.¹²

Such an interpretation of the nineteenth century female body was undoubtedly correct for a significant majority of women, but it ignores 'the efforts and intentions of countless women who battled male dominated medical power by a variety of banners'.¹³ It fails to acknowledge the issue of class in its interpretation and that for a majority of nineteenth century working-class women the notion of a weak, frail, inactive body was patently not a reality. A reinterpretation of this ideology has continued, although 'there is now a broad recognition that late nineteenth century medical and scientific discourses were neither uniform in their effects nor unified in content'.¹⁴ Many women did succumb to the dominant bodily incapacity ideology, but equally many women either resisted or because of the experience of their daily lives, could not comprehend such an existence. Medical and scientific discoveries continued though to inform and influence Victorian life, for the whole population, not only through new perceptions about the body, but also through the application of science to industry and agriculture and as a consequence everyday life.

¹² Hargreaves, J. 1994: p.47

¹³ Vertinsky, P. 1994: p.150

¹⁴ *ibid*: p.151

Advances in science altered peoples' attitudes towards their own bodies and also gradually changed the material aspects of their lives. Urbanization and industrialization, helped and sustained by the new scientific discoveries, created a large gap between the middle and working classes and materially the position of women in society.¹⁵ Technological developments meant specialization of labour and created new jobs at low wages for working-class women, whilst middle-class women became more affluent and more leisured.¹⁶ The gap between the prosperous middle classes and the urban poor became a prominent issue. Social reformers shocked by the condition of the urban working-class lobbied for legislative change. One prominent social reformer, Charles Kingsley indirectly influenced the health of women. He was the main proponent of Muscular Christianity, but he was also concerned for the physical well being of women. Whilst a Professor at Queen's College in London, he lectured on the benefits of physical exercise for women and denounced the ill effects of corsets and female dress. Two of his students at the time were Miss Beale and Miss Buss, later to become headmistresses of the North London Collegiate College and Cheltenham Ladies College respectively, and who ardently supported Kingsley's belief in the benefits of exercise and dress reform to improve women's health and they subsequently passed on these beliefs to their female pupils.¹⁷

¹⁵ Hargreaves, J. 1994: p.50

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Crunden, C. 1981: p.16-17.

The need for girls schools, such as those run by Miss Beale and Miss Buss, were not thought to be necessary in the first half of the nineteenth century. Education beyond elementary schooling was considered to be potentially damaging to female health. Biological differences between the male and female body had also included discussion about the female brain. Because the female brain was smaller, it was concluded that female intellectual inferiority must be a consequence and doctors claimed that education would be useless in enhancing a brain power determined by nature.¹⁸ Intellectual stimulation was also thought to be harmful for women, because of the theory of 'finite energy', which proposed that everybody had only a limited amount of energy available to them. With women their vital energy was needed to fuel their reproductive process and this process would be harmed if energy was wasted on education or physical exercise. Belief in the finite energy theory and constitutional overstrain curtailed female opportunity for higher education, but it was not a theory upheld by everyone. Many liberal reformers argued from the 1860s, that women were as capable as men of sustained intellectual power. But it was economic factors and belief in the new sentiment of '*mens sana in corpore sano*' (a healthy mind in a healthy body) which ultimately enabled women to continue their education, to pursue a career outside the home and to participate in sport.

¹⁸ Vertinsky, P. 1994: p.161

Economic necessity forced many middle-class women into employment, or to seek professional training, as a safeguard to their future fulfilment, when the expanding ranks of the middle classes saw a surplus of women, estimated at between 26 and 28 per cent.¹⁹ Also, throughout the late Victorian period, the belief in a healthy mind in a healthy body, was a major educational and social theme, advocated primarily through muscular Christianity in boys public schools.²⁰ Whilst the social reformer Charles Kingsley, advocated that the education of girls should be patterned after that of boys, with his vision of 'educated' girls possessing a 'Hellenic healthfulness'. He did much to dispel the fears of the middle classes concerning the education of women and as Hargreaves suggests, 'The middle classes who had displayed a lack of interest in female education in the 1850s, had become almost obsessed about their daughters schooling by the 1870s'.²¹ The interest shown by the middle classes in their daughters education, was a significant step in the emancipation of women and as subsequent discussion will highlight, was a prerequisite for the development of female sport. For within the new private girls' schools and womens' colleges, it was possible for women to participate in a variety of sports, with minimal male opposition.

A final significant development which illustrated the changing attitudes towards the female body, was through the proliferation of texts on health, diet,

¹⁹ Hargreaves, J. 1994: p.50

²⁰ *ibid*: p.60

exercise and eventually, by the late 1890s sport.²² Many of these publications were aimed specifically at women and through their pages women were encouraged by advertisements, editorials and articles to question and challenge many of the 'scientific' theories relating to the female body, health and exercise.²³

Purchased and read by middle-class women, they clearly supported many of the ideals of reform movements, such as the anti-corset league and dress reform society. More significantly they played an important part in developing a new social climate in which women were encouraged to have control over the physical and mental health of their bodies. With increased control over the physical state of their bodies, a small but growing number of women took their first tentative steps into the male dominated world of sport. Late Victorian literature soon began to reflect the growing public acceptance of women's sport. Positive images of the female sportswoman, was an indicator of the extent to which the sports woman, had become accepted, as an integrated part of Victorian society. The gradual social acceptance of female participation in sport was not universal, and there were as many critics as there were supporters. Toleration of female sport, throughout the nineteenth century, was dependent upon the nature of the sport that was pursued and the manner in which it was participated. Only a limited number of

²¹ Hargreaves, J. 1994: p.60

²² See White, Cynthia L. (1970) *Women's Magazines 1693-1968* London: Michael Joseph

²³ According to Parrat, C.M. (1989: p.143) '48 new journals for women were launched between 1880 and 1900 alone'. With the magazine *Womanhood* being fleeting among them, but which had frequent articles on swimming and bathing for women.

sports qualified as being acceptable. Nevertheless, the emergence of women into sport, despite the limited range available to them in the late nineteenth century, was a clear indicator that society had begun to accept some forms of female physical activity. Whilst women themselves, through a process of reproduction and change, had redefined their bodily capabilities and physical image.

Women and Sport in the Nineteenth Century.

Social ideologies and scientific theories continued to effectively curtail female involvement in sport for most of the nineteenth century, and as Tranter states,

....the Victorian and Edwardian 'revolution' in sport was predominately a male phenomenon, in which females, and working class females especially, had relatively little part.²⁴

For the nineteenth century working-class women, industrialization and urbanization had left little space, energy or time for physical recreation and as Raszeja also explores, 'the bourgeois ideologies attendant on the rise of industrial capitalism had also restrained her middle-class sister.'²⁵ However, by no means did all middle-class women succumb to the dominant ideology of 'ideal' womanhood. Some were prepared to participate in many forms of sport despite persistent opposition and as Hargreaves points out,

... ideology is part of a process of reproduction and change

²⁴ Tranter, N. 1998: p.78

²⁵ Raszeja, V. 1992:p.14

*which is inscribed in social practice... and by the end of the century the biologically determined stereotype of the 'delicate' female came to coexist with the more vigorous model of the sporting woman.*²⁶

The opportunities for involvement in sport were limited, especially for working-class women, who were restrained not so much by ideology, but by the circumstances of their everyday lives, which required them to work for long hours with little pay, to be subservient to their fathers and husbands. Also, with little tradition of sport during their brief period of formal schooling, most working-class women had no time, money or inclination to participate. A final obstacle, to working-class female sporting participation was the lack of encouragement from their middle-class sisters, who as Tranter states, 'were reluctant to share their leisure activities with their social inferiors and, on balance, preferred to oppose rather than encourage (working-class women's) efforts to become involved'.²⁷

For women of the upper and middle classes the situation was a little different, but the result the same, with only a minority of women prepared to participate in organized sport. Sport and particularly competitive sport had not been considered compatible with 'refined' womanhood or for the vital role of raising healthy children. Moderate exercise was advised and acceptable, but competitive sport was considered unhealthy, unnatural and certainly not beneficial to women. The female 'sphere' was within the home, and this

²⁶ Hargreaves, J. 1994:p.111

²⁷ Tranter, N. 1998:p.80

ideology required women to display the 'feminine' characteristics of gentleness, patience and respectability, not the 'masculine' qualities of aggressive, decisive and competitive behaviour, imbued by sport. Nonetheless, from the mid-nineteenth century, elite female participation in sport slowly, but significantly began to increase.

The first participants originated in the private girls schools and colleges, where sport became if not an essential part, a common part of these establishments.²⁸ Women who attended these institutions had the opportunity to take part in a wide variety of sports in competitive situations. Outside of the female schools and colleges, female involvement in sport from the 1870s, also began to change. More women continued to participate into adulthood, for the majority this meant prior to marriage, but a small number even continued after marriage and motherhood. The nature of female sporting involvement also changed, away from largely pleasurable, recreational pastimes to more organized, competitive and physically exerting pursuits, possibly because of their exposure to competitive sport in school. The precise numbers involved and the extent to which these changes occurred is difficult to verify, but the reasons behind the shift in social attitude towards a tolerance of increased female physical exertion and competitiveness is more easily explained.

²⁸ Tranter, N. 1998: p.81

The primary reason was the concern for the continuation of the British people. Middle-class female physical fitness was seen as vital for the continuation of a healthy population, especially as a decline in middle-class fertility threatened to destabilize the social fabric of the country. Increased female physical activity was also seen as a counter to the mental strain that many elite women were presumed to be experiencing with their expansion into formal education.

Emerging along with these changes was a redefinition of femininity. Although the fundamental social order remained intact and appropriate female behaviour still required women to display genteel, restrained and ladylike characteristics, a certain degree of physical fitness was now viewed as enhancing femininity.²⁹ However, female physical fitness could only be attained via appropriate sporting channels. To overtly display strenuous, competitive, masculine qualities was not the nineteenth century route to female physical fitness or social acceptance of the female sportswoman. Generally, as Tranter points out, 'women found it easier to break into sports of a more individual, gentle and less confrontational type; ...segregated from that of men or, where integrated, always subordinate to men's control and priorities ... and concerned more with the pursuit of health, social intercourse and courtship than with honing competitive instincts'.³⁰

²⁹ Tranter, N. 1998: p. 86

³⁰ *ibid*, p. 87-8

It could therefore be argued, that there were more continuities than changes to female sporting development in the nineteenth century, but despite such gradual progress, by 1914, there were more women involved in sport, whether as participants, spectators or administrators, than had been the case a century earlier. It was these small, but significant changes to the world of female sport that enabled swimming to develop largely unchallenged, into the 'ideal' sport for women. Swimming became acceptable because it, '...was neither fashionable nor frivolous, nor did it present a threat to the established social order, or to the charm of refined womanhood'.³¹

Women and Swimming in the Nineteenth Century.

*Women's swimming, the graceful, 'respectable' sport, was the first acceptable – and indeed recommended – urban sport for women.*³²

There is little disagreement that a significantly smaller number of women participated in sport, compared to men in the nineteenth century. Swimming however, was arguably the one sport in which women did begin to participate in greater numbers. Its innate qualities, did not overtly challenge the ideals of femininity and it quietly became socially acceptable. Women were however, still not free to participate when and where they wished, for as Horwood states, '... the activity of swimming was far more than merely a leisure activity and the places where it was performed became testing

³¹ Raszeja, V. 1992: p.25

³² *ibid*, p.2.

grounds for issues of dress, sexuality, gender and emancipation'.³³ The first major obstacle to female participation, was a reluctance to provide adequate facilities for female swimmers.

Public baths were built initially to enable the masses to keep clean and healthy. Nineteenth century patriarchal society however, ensured that it was the male masses that were catered for in terms of access to public baths. Women were never barred completely from the public baths and the provision and use of the individual private baths for women, within these establishments, was comparable to that provided for men. For example, the Woodcock Street Baths, Birmingham had 32 private baths for men and 14 private baths for women.³⁴ The availability and condition of the plunge pool facilities accessible to women, enabling women to swim, as opposed to wash, was significantly inferior to the provision for men. Victorian social mores dictated it unthinkable that the same bathing facilities could be used by men and women, at the same time, and many local authorities even provided separate entrances to the baths to maintain separation of the sexes.³⁵ From their initial opening and throughout most of the nineteenth century, baths committees usually set aside one or occasionally two days per week, for a few hours at a time, when a plunge pool could be used by women only. The times allocated

³³ Horwood, C. 2000: p.655

³⁴ City of Birmingham Public Baths, 1897:133

³⁵ The Woodcock Street Baths, Birmingham for example had 3 entrances, one for the men's first class bath, one for the men's second class baths and a separate central entrance to the women's department. City of Birmingham Public Baths their Acquisition, Cost and Annual Maintenance, 1897 : p.81.

to women were generally the least popular opening times of the pool, during weekday working hours, or from very early in the morning. In many cases the women's pool time was also just prior to the pool water being changed, resulting in the pool being at its dirtiest and least inviting. The more popular evening and weekend times were generally reserved for male use only. In most cases it was the smaller, second class plunge pool, not the larger first class pool, that was set aside for female use.

Within Local Authorities provision for female swimmers varied significantly. Initially, the authority which gave the least encouragement to female swimmers was Liverpool. The much earlier provision of public baths in Liverpool, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, when female participation in sport was particularly frowned upon, may explain the initial reluctance to provide for female swimmers. Although the only Liverpool Baths that allowed women to use the plunge pool, until the 1880s, was the Pier Head Baths, the first municipal baths in Britain.³⁶ All the other Liverpool corporation baths did not allocate times for women in their plunge pools, until 1886, when the Cornwallis Street Baths allowed women to use the salt water plunge pool on Tuesdays and Fridays from 10am to 1pm.³⁷ When the new Margaret Street Baths in Liverpool were opened in June 1863, the 10 private baths and the one plunge pool was for male use only.³⁸

³⁶ Annals of Liverpool 1952: p.25 and 43

³⁷ Annals of Liverpool p 114 &116.

³⁸ Ibid p.40.

Birmingham women, almost from the initial opening of the baths, were catered for significantly better, with the Baths Committee in 1867 reserving the first class Kent Street pool for the exclusive use of ladies from 9am to 12pm on Wednesdays. The Committee later reported that such an arrangement had been satisfactory, as on average fifty ladies used the pool during that time, as opposed to an average of twenty men.³⁹ By the end of the century three of Birmingham's first class plunge pools were set aside for female use, one afternoon and evening per week and for two hours on Saturday mornings.⁴⁰ Birmingham Baths and Parks Committee by 1884, were sufficiently concerned about the provision of facilities for women, to consider a proposal that had been submitted by the Birmingham School Board and the inhabitants of Edgbaston, to build a swimming pool solely for women.⁴¹ Although the Committee demonstrated its true concern, when it reported that such a bath had indeed become a necessity, '...not only to provide adequate accommodation for female bathers, but also to prevent the exclusion of many male bathers during the time the baths are reserved for women'.⁴² Plans were drawn up and two sites were seriously considered, but the Town Council

³⁹ City of Birmingham Public Baths their Acquisition, Cost and Annual Maintenance, 1897:p.67

⁴⁰ Ibid p.12

⁴¹ Ibid p.67

⁴² Ibid. It was shown that one afternoon in May 150 persons applied for tickets of admission to the Monument Road Baths during the time the bath was reserved for women and large numbers (of men) were continually turned away.

vetoed the proposal as too costly to build and maintain, and no further consideration was given to the matter of Baths for women.⁴³

Most Local Authorities throughout the nineteenth century, maintained a system where by the pool opening times for women were very limited and inconvenient, essentially ensuring that working-class women in particular, who were in paid employment had little or no opportunity to swim and use the plunge pools. Restricted access to the smallest pool, when the water and surroundings were at their dirtiest and the offering of price concessions to use the pool at this time, did nothing to encourage the use of the plunge pool facilities by middle-class women. Despite the restrictions and lack of encouragement to use the public baths, the number of women who did so, steadily increased throughout the nineteenth century. The women who did make use of the baths, were well catered for in terms of bath personnel. All baths that allowed female swimmers, had female bath attendants and in most baths, the bath superintendents wife was also employed by the local authority to supervise, primarily at women only pool times.

With the rise in the number of female swimmers, Baths Committees were frequently asked to provided more time for women bathers and towards the end of the century to even consider mixed bathing. The requests mainly came from female bathers, although other prominent figures, predominately doctors, often petitioned local authorities to increase the access for women, on the grounds of the health benefits of swimming for women. When requests

⁴³ City of Birmingham Public Baths, 1887: p.67

to the Baths Committee failed, letters to the editors of local and national newspapers was another means by which women tried to increase and improve their opportunity to swim. Whether such methods were ever directly successful is difficult to prove, but towards the end of the century there were more baths providing more opportunity at convenient times for women to swim. The increasing popularity of swimming for women however, posed a serious problem for respectable Victorian society – how much of the female body could decently be exposed in public?

Female Bathing Costumes.

There is no activity where the body is so overtly exposed than when bathing in public...Thus the swimming costume itself is the physical embodiment of a story which gradually unravels to reveal more of the female body than had ever been seen in public before.⁴⁴

Female body imagery and emancipation throughout the nineteenth century was tested and reflected quite clearly through female swimwear. Until respectability and decency became watchwords of the Victorian era, men and women would have swam naked, although most often in separate venues. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, expectations had changed. There was now a general awareness and uneasiness about the public display of the body, as a consequence, to maintain her modesty, the female bather had to

⁴⁴ Horwood, C. 2000:p.655

be covered from head to toe. Support for the covering of bodies came from people with a variety of motives, but respectable society became offended by nakedness or near nudity, as it was thought to arouse lust or vicious desires.⁴⁵

The early 'bathing dresses' that women were required to wear, were literally that, a long sleeved full length dress and hat and as Thomas noted, 'it seems hardly worthwhile undressing'.⁴⁶ Such clothing would have limited movement considerably and been too heavy and cumbersome in water, to enable anything but a few strokes of swimming and was therefore potentially hazardous. To further ensure female modesty when swimming in the sea, entry and exit to and from the water would have been via bathing machines, which ensured that no part of the female body could be accidentally exposed to passers by of the opposite sex. Most beaches also tried to maintain strict segregation of the sexes, by passing bylaws which prevented female swimmers from 'approach within one hundred yards of which any person of the male sex may be set down for the purpose of bathing'.⁴⁷ Such regulations tried to maintain respectability and decorum at the sea side, but prevented families from swimming together and more importantly restricted many women from receiving swimming instruction.

⁴⁵ Keil and Wix, 1996:p.184

⁴⁶ Thomas, R. 1904:110

⁴⁷ Lowestoff's Bylaws quoted in Howard, C. 2000: p.56. Powers to regulate bathing stem from the Public Health Act, 1875. Section 60 of Town Clauses Act 1847 also gave District Councils powers to control stands or bathing machine son shore and the limits within which persons of either sex shall be set down for bathing and prevent indecent exposure.

It was therefore, only within the sex segregated confinement of the public baths that female swimwear really began to change. A gradual change to the wearing of suitable costumes for female swimmers occurred when women began to swim more regularly, at female only times within public baths. Confident that male eyes would not see them, women began to reveal more of their bodies and wore costumes that allowed free unrestricted movement. By the middle decades of the century most, but not all public baths were also stipulating that men, as well as women, had to swim in what were termed bathing drawers.

In 1864, all the Liverpool Public Baths were required to display notices in their establishments, recommending the use of bathing drawers by bathers, even though all the plunge pools were for male use only, with the exception of the one female plunge pool at the Pier Head Baths.⁴⁸ To ensure that costumes were worn in the public baths, bathing costumes could be hired. This practice continued throughout the nineteenth century, with all the Birmingham municipal baths in 1897 charging 1d for the hire of men's bathing drawers and 3d for the hire of a ladies bathing dress. Private costumes and bathing dresses could also be washed and taken care of at a charge of 2d.⁴⁹ The price difference between hiring a men's or a ladies bathing costume, undoubtedly reflected the large, cumbersome nature of female swimwear, compared to the unrestrictive shape and weight of male swimming costumes.

⁴⁸ Annals of Liverpool 1952: p.43

⁴⁹ City of Birmingham Public Baths 1897:p.11

Eventually, the practicality of women also being able to swim, unhindered by large heavy clothing, was judged to be necessary for safety and female swimming costumes became almost identical to male costumes. Along with the issue of safety, swimming began to be promoted as healthy for women, specifically because it did enable them to move freely, without the burden of restrictive dress and it signalled further progress in female bodily emancipation. Debate and interest surrounding female swim wear continued though to cause comment and consternation, as the following late nineteenth century extracts from the swimming press, clearly illustrates,

All were dressed in swimming costume as nearly alike as possible in white dresses with red ribbons; while Miss Cole had on a loose fitting habit, which looked as though it would absorb a considerable of water and thus restrict her freedom.⁵⁰

What is this I hear of ladies so anxious to cultivate speed that they have determined to wear the thinnest possible costumes, which are so gauze-like that an instantaneous glance reveals to the privileged spectator the fact as to whether the lady is dark or fair.⁵¹

Whilst female swimwear also became sufficiently notable and worthy for prizes to be awarded, as was the case at the 1895, City of London Swimming Association Testimonial Gala, where an umbrella, was awarded for the 'Neatest and Prettiest Costume'.⁵²

⁵⁰ *The Bicycle, Swimming and Athletic Journal*, 9 October 1878: p.2

⁵¹ *Swimming Notes*, 8 March 1884: p.4

⁵² *Swimming (Supplement)* 31 October 1895: p.3

The formation of the ASA in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, also helped to bring about more appropriate and efficient female swim wear. Like most amateur sporting bodies of the nineteenth century, the ASA wanted to demonstrate its authority and respectability as an organization. As soon as men's events, organized by the ASA, were held in front of mixed audiences, the wearing of decent costumes by male competitors, became essential. When female swimmers began to compete, they did so initially in front of women only. Subsequently, the only men allowed to watch at ladies swimming events, were the fathers of competitors, then later this also included husbands.⁵³ With the inclusion of female competitors in ASA events from 1899 in front of mixed audiences, further regulations were passed concerning female costumes. The ASA regulations for female swim costumes required that a one piece suit 'with a three inch sleeve, cut straight around the neck and extended three inches above the knee', must be worn by female competitors.⁵⁴ The colour of the costume under the ASA laws of 1901, had to be either black or dark blue, prior to this red had also been acceptable, but was subsequently considered to be too flamboyant to ensure modesty and decorum. This was the minimum that women were expected to wear and some women chose to swim in tights as well, particularly once mixed audiences were allowed to spectate at swimming races.

⁵³ Southern Counties ASA Centenary Brochure 1989:p.6

⁵⁴ Southern Counties ASA Centenary Brochure 1989: p.111

Precisely when and why female swimming costumes changed over the nineteenth century is difficult to verify conclusively. Virtually no contemporary pictorial evidence was made or survives. It is impossible to be certain whether practicality, fashion or respectability had the most influence on the changing styles of female Victorian swimwear. Early swimming texts had illustrations of male bathers, but never female bathers. The illustrations had the swimmer unclothed in publications from the first half of the century, but by the end of the century no text would have been produced unless the male swimmers were depicted wearing a costume. One of the earliest nineteenth century swimming texts to have an illustration of a female swimmer was in 1870, and the drawing shows a woman standing in a short sleeved, collared top. Illustrations of actual swimming in the text are all of a male swimmer in striped shorts. Imagery of women in swimming costumes during this period was rare and as Horwood states were 'confined to 'pin-up' postcards'.⁵⁵ Pictorial imagery of female professional swimmers was also surprisingly very rare. A caricature line drawing of Miss Agnes Beckwith on the cover of *Swimming Notes*, February 1884 is one of the few images that was produced and has survived. Thomas in his 1904 text, *Swimming*, included a photograph of a group of amateur lady swimmers with the comment, 'It is very difficult to get photographs of amateur ladies in swimming costume' and added the 'professional instructress is at the top in her professional costume – tights'.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Horwood, C. 2000 'Girls who arouse Dangerous Passions': Women and Bathing 1900-39 in *Women's History Review* 2000 9, 4:pp 653-673.

⁵⁶ Thomas, R. 1904:p.112

The specialized swimming press of the 1870s and 1880s, had numerous articles on female swimmers, but illustrations or photographs of female swimmers did not appear amongst the pages until the 1890s, when the photographs were always of female swimmers in their everyday clothes. By the early 1900s, occasional photographs of young teenage girl swimmers in bathing costumes would be used to illustrate an article, but older female swimmers would still be photographed fully clothed. The later nineteenth century swimming texts, began to have illustrations of female swimmers, such as Sinclair and Henry's *Swimming* of 1893, which had a line drawing of some female sea bathers. It was the 1904 publication of *Swimming* by Thomas, which was possibly the first text to use illustrations and photographs of women in bathing costumes. The book was also unique in its promotion of female swimming and as Horwood stated,

There is no doubt that the imagery itself was designed by Thomas to encourage women to feel that swimming was an activity they could take part in. Taken with purely practical rather than sexual motivation, these photographs are among the earliest to present women as equal to men in swimming imagery.⁵⁷

By the turn of the century, women swimmers had clearly gained significantly in terms of bodily emancipation. In comparison to fifty years

⁵⁷ Horwood, C. 2000: p.57

earlier, women swam in practical and for the first time revealing costumes, in front of men, that in any other setting would have been regarded as indecent. Although the wearing in public of such revealing costumes was still rare and confined almost exclusively to young competitive swimmers. Recreational and older swimmers, often chose to swim in costumes with most of their body covered, to avoid adverse comment. With the tentative trials of mixed public bathing, the problem of how much of the female body could decently be revealed, continued to be a concern into the twentieth century.

Promotion of Swimming for Women

Female swimmers of the mid-nineteenth century may have had difficulty in securing regular, convenient access to public baths and their swimming costumes may have been restrictive and cumbersome, but the opportunity to swim was never completely denied to them. By the last quarter of the century, it was a physical activity that men not only tolerated women undertaking, but in many cases actively and publically promoted for women. It was also a physical activity that many women themselves felt they could undertake without social stigma.

The three key reasons for this acceptance of female swimmers, were firstly, that swimming was endorsed by many as beneficial to female health. Secondly, swimming was a necessary skill in saving life, the women's own as well as possibly being able to save others. Thirdly, even competitive female swimmers were generally condoned by male society, due to the unique

qualities of swimming. Swimming was a competitive sport participated in by men, but it was an activity that many felt did not develop male traits. The activity was graceful and aesthetically pleasing, with the effort of swimming largely hidden by the water and even for women who trained regularly, there was no unsightly muscle development. All these 'qualities' of swimming, enabled women to participate in a healthy physical activity or sport, without the fear of damaging or tainting their feminine image.

The acknowledge benefits of swimming for women, generally outweighed the unease that some in society still felt about any female physical activity. The key supporters of swimming for women were the medical profession, but social reformers, members of baths committees, editors of sports papers and possibly more importantly middle-class women themselves, all publically promoted swimming as beneficial and socially acceptable. A typical contemporary comment from the medical profession appeared in *The Lancet*, in 1878,

Swimming is an exercise admirably suited for women, giving free play to all the muscles of the body, without throwing a strain on any one set, whilst its general adoption will greatly diminish the tole of deaths from boat accidents with which we are now annually distressed.... To say nothing of the influence habits of cleanliness thus acquired will have on the purity and morals of the poorer class and their households.⁵⁸

The benefits of swimming for female health had initially been advocated, from mid-century, when the middle-class popularity for sea

⁵⁸ From the *Bicycle, Swimming and Athletic Journal*, 13 November 1878 and taken from 'The Lancet'.

bathing was at its height. However, the necessity of using seaside bathing machines and of wearing voluminous bathing costumes, to conceal the female body, had diminished the popularity of sea bathing for many women. Yet, the freedom, enjoyment and health benefits, experienced by the few women who did overcome these restrictions when sea bathing, ensured it was continually advocated as an invigorating and appropriate female physical recreation. One young woman's account in the magazine *Womanhood* of 1899, clearly describes her enjoyment of bathing,

the delightful sensation, once realized, of being thoroughly at home in the water.... While disporting oneself at ease in the deep, one is apt to cast back a look of regret at the spectacle of the bathers in shore bobbing up and down in the belief that they are enjoying themselves and to wish that everyone of them would but teach herself to swim, and thus enjoy the real pleasure of bathing.⁵⁹

Swimming as a healthy female physical recreation had its strongest advocates amongst the medical profession. The health benefits that the medical profession claimed could to be derived from swimming were often spurious and wide ranging, but they were firmly believed, despite little proven medical evidence. One example was an address *Swimming and its Relation to the Health of Women* given by Mrs. Hoggan, M.D. to the Women's Union Swimming Club in 1879. She began her talk by stating,

I propose to consider the influence of swimming on the health of women, and I hope to be able to

⁵⁹ Quoted in Parratt, C.M. 1989: p. 150 *Journal of Sports History*, Vol. 16, No. 2.

show that, so far from being of less value to women than it is to men, it is, if possible, more necessary to them as a counterpoise to their more sedentary employments and physically less active life.⁶⁰

The address claimed the main benefits of swimming were that it,

...calls into exercise muscles which the usual feminine occupations (sewing and light manual labour).... leave for the most part at rest; ... that the muscles of inspiration are brought into vigorous action; ... and the rest to the back which swimming gives.⁶¹

In identifying six advantages of swimming for female health, the overriding benefit was claimed to be that it was 'exercise which need not be violent, and which is taken in a buoyant medium like water'.⁶² The paper also drew attention to some of the dangers of swimming and warned against swimming immediately after eating, or on an empty stomach and cautioned against some women bathing in cold water, particularly straight after vigorous exercise. The address went on to advocate that 'because of the less stable equilibrium of their nervous system, women are as a rule extremely sensitive to the tonic influence of bathing in cool or cold water, and anything which promotes this habit in them ought to be especially encouraged'.⁶³ Demonstrating that even among the female medical profession, the common

⁶⁰ Hoggan, Mrs. 'Swimming and its Relation to the Health of Women' paper read before the Women's Union Swimming Club, at 36 Great Queen Street, London on 21 April 1879.

⁶¹ Hogan, Mrs. M.D. 1879.

⁶² Hogan, Mrs. M.D. 1879

⁶³ Ibid

assumption was that women were weak, frail and highly strung and measures were needed to calm their excitable natures.

The advantages of swimming for female health were many and varied, but possibly the most beneficial was the simple aspect of enabling women to move their bodies freely, without restrictive clothing, for as the paper concluded swimming 'is an exercise which women take in a sensible dress, and they thus get rid for a short space of time of the drag of heavy skirts, tight strings and other hindrances to free breathing and locomotion'.⁶⁴ Swimming undoubtedly helped to give some women the opportunity to improve their health and general well being. In many cases, simply from the chance to exercise gently, free from restrictive forms of dress and male supervision. The health benefits of swimming were not though the main reason for the acceptance of female swimming. Of greater influence was the issue of safety and danger of drowning.

The number of drowning tragedies and the reporting of these events in the national press, increasingly drew attention to the importance of being able to swim in the nineteenth century. In particular, because the fatalities were often women and children, the provision of swimming instruction for women and children became a prominent concern. Death by drowning had always been a major hazard of open water swimming, but with the advent of national, local and a sporting press, these incidents became more widely known and discussed. The tragedy which drew most attention to the importance of

⁶⁴ Hogan, Mrs. M.D 1879

women being able to swim, was the sinking of the pleasure boat the *Princess Alice* in the Irish Sea, on 3 September 1878. Over 700 men, women and children were drowned in a few minutes, and of the 339 women on board only one, a Miss Thorpe survived by being 'able to make the number of strokes necessary to enable her to reach a place of safety'.⁶⁵ *The Daily Telegraph* reporting on the tragedy noted that, Miss Thorpe who was eighteen and her two brothers who were aged seventeen and nine also survived 'the brothers swimming until rescued, but the sister swam to the bank'.⁶⁶ The paper went on to state that it, 'greatly deploras the fact that in the minds of a great number of our English mothers, there exists a very strong prejudice against their daughters learning or being taught to swim'.⁶⁷

Such tragedies possibly highlighted the overall poor swimming ability of women at the time, although a further reason for the high death toll in this instance, men and women, may have been that many were 'poisoned by the foul water', rather than an indication of general swimming ability at the time.⁶⁸ There were though, many drowning tragedies in the sea, rivers, canals, lakes and even public baths, with one statistic for 1877, giving the number of 'lives lost in England and Wales by drowning in inland waters as 2,622'.⁶⁹ The report of another drowning tragedy, this time in the River Thames in 1878,

⁶⁵ Thomas, R. 1904:p. 347

⁶⁶ *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 September 1878: p.2, col. 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Thomas, R. 1904:p.103

⁶⁹ *The Bicycle, Swimming and Athletic Journal*, 20 November 1878: p.3.

'when a mother and one of her children drowned, with her two other children being rescued',⁷⁰ prompted the wife of Mr. William Wilson, the supervisor at the Victoria Baths, Glasgow to write to the *Glasgow Evening Citizen* in September, 1878 offering free swimming lessons to women. The article stated that Mr. Wilson's wife,

*...has been so exercised by the recent sad calamity on the Thames, that she will be glad, and is now ready to undertake the teaching of the art to one hundred women and girls free, if the authorities will grant her permission to do so, in the women's pond in the Gateshead Baths, for 4 hours during 2 or 3 days in the week.*⁷¹

A number of women must have taken up the offer, because by October 1878 the swimming press reported that 'upwards of 40 (ladies) had been taught to swim by the respected club master Mr. Wilson and his wife'.⁷² The advantages of being able to swim and the need for more women in particular, learning to swim was prominent after major tragedies. However, the problem for nineteenth century society was that this would generally entail men viewing or even being in the water with women, dressed only in bathing costumes.

Of the women who could swim in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, most were self taught and had learnt by sheer determination or trial and error. With a few having possibly been taught by their fathers or husbands in private locations. Most swimming teachers were men and

⁷⁰ *The Bicycle, Swimming and Athletic Journal*, 11 September 1878.

⁷¹ *The Bicycle, Swimming and Athletic Journal*, 18 September 1878: p 6.

⁷² *The Bicycle, Swimming and Athletic Journal* 9 October 1878: p.2

although male professionals had been allowed to teach women, there was still a reluctance from middle-class women to be taught by men. Not until swimming instruction for girls was adopted in schools did a majority of females learn to swim.

Male swimming professionals had advertised their availability to teach women from at least the 1860s. When professionals such as John Leahy, opened his *Ladies Swimming and Bathing Saloon*, on The Thames, at Windsor. His establishment adhered to social convention and tried to attract and calm the concerns of middle-class women, by advertising that 'the bathing place was five hundred yards distance from the nearest male bathing place' and that it was 'patronized by ladies from Eton College, which is a guarantee of the propriety of his conduct as a teacher of swimming'.⁷³ The claim by John Leahy that in one year he had taught 7 ladies to swim, is however, an indication of just how few middle-class women were prepared to learn to swim, especially in open water or to be taught by a male teacher.

The opportunity of learning to swim within the warmer and more private confines of a swimming pool, must have been more attractive to women, although again swimming instruction was generally given by men. Frederick Cavill, when advertising his *South Kensington Crystal Swimming Bath and School* made clear that he taught ladies 'Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays

⁷³ Leahy, Srg. 'The Art of Swimming in the Eton Style' 1875 appendix (*Ladies Swimming and Bathing Saloon*, John Leahy)

from 9am to 3pm throughout the year, with the water regulated at a temperature of from 80 to 85 degrees'.⁷⁴ Apart from adverts in the swimming press and texts, it is difficult to quantify the opportunities that were available for women to be taught swimming, or how common female teachers like Mrs. William Wilson in Glasgow, were becoming by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. What was widely discussed and became an important concern as a result of the demand for female swimming instruction, was the issue of mixed bathing.

The issue of mixed bathing, in public pools and in other open water public places, was a fiercely debated issue until well into the twentieth century. There were many vociferous opponents to it and the need to preserve nineteenth century decency and decorum ensured that it was only tentatively tried in a few establishments. Nevertheless, regular appeals for mixed bathing, to allow women to be taught to swim, appeared in the swimming press, such as the 1895 editorial in the *Swimming* magazine,

It is monstrous that a man and wife are not allowed to go for their swim together, and that a father is prevented from teaching his daughter the art simply because the local greengrocer and other itinerants decree that the two sexes shall be divided...⁷⁵

Public Baths Committees were however, very reluctant to allow mixed bathing. In 1892, a request was put before the Liverpool Baths Committee by an un-named man, to use the ladies bath at the Pier Head, so that he could

⁷⁴ *The Swimming, Rowing and Chronicle of Sporting Events*, 26 July 1873: p.1, col.2.

⁷⁵ *Swimming*, 29 August 1895: p.313.

teach his wife to swim, but his request was declined.⁷⁶ By 1914, the issue was still causing debate in Manchester. Here a member of the Baths Committee proposed that an experimental trial of mixed bathing, at the Withington Public Baths, should be considered. Prior to this date, in 1912, Manchester had made enquiries amongst other towns public baths, with regard to mixed bathing. The enquiry found that in 18 cases, replies were favourable to mixed bathing, but 26 were against it and that, 'those favourable to the practice were from the London area'.⁷⁷ Debate continued amongst the Manchester Bath Committee members, with Councillor Margaret Ashton, pointing out that,

*...there were great difficulties in girls obtaining swimming instruction and that no one was so suitable for teaching them as their fathers or other relatives. She did not think prudery should come into the matter, for women would learn to swim far better by this means than any other.*⁷⁸

Other members though disagreed and felt that as far as Manchester was concerned they had the finest facilities for women bathers, with well trained female instructors.⁷⁹

The issue was one that would not be easily resolved when the prevalent attitude, as expressed by a lady from Herne Bay, in a letter to *Swimming* in 1895, pleaded that bathing,

⁷⁶ Annals of Liverpool, 1952, p.137

⁷⁷ A report of the mixed bathing issue of 1914 in Manchester appeared in *The Guardian* 12 May 1994.

⁷⁸ *The Guardian* 12 May 1994

⁷⁹ Ibid.

...is simply an innocent and healthful recreation, and should have nothing to do with flirtation, affectation, or such other so called woman's weaknesses, as are endangered only by the presence of the opposite sex.... All your like minded lady readers would be horror struck at the idea of our hitherto well preserved sanctity being intruded upon by any Saturday to Monday cad that chooses to favour us with his society in the water.⁸⁰

The ban on mixed bathing at public baths and the disapproval of such practices at the seaside, prevented fathers or husbands from teaching their daughters or wives to swim. Whilst, the acceptance of women being taught to swim by professional male swimmers and the subsequent practice of women competing in front of men, created less controversy and quietly became socially acceptable. One reason for this quiet, unheralded entrance of female competitive swimmers, into the public domain, may have been the positive press coverage and public profile of female professional swimmers.

Female Professional Swimmers.

The number of professional female swimmers was never great, with the swimming press of 1878 listing the number of female professionals as 7, as opposed to 61 male professional swimmers.⁸¹ Their races, endurance feats and aquatic displays were though frequently reported upon in the swimming press and even the national and international newspapers. The first reliable references to female professionals occurs from 1870s, although there was possibly some prior to this date, where as reports of the activities of male

⁸⁰ *Swimming Magazine*, 12 September 1895: p.346

professional swimmers had appeared from the early decades of the nineteenth century. Many of these first female professionals were young girls and often daughters or sisters of an established male professional and were originally included in the programme of an aquatic entertainment for their novelty value, to draw in the crowds. They performed feats and tricks in the water designed to enhance their 'feminine' qualities and the diminutive size and stature of these young girl swimmers was often remarked upon in coverage of the event. Typical of the comments, were the following two extracts from the swimming press of 1873,

*... this little lady certainly deserves an exceptional notice, for whether laying motionless, swimming, executing her hoop trick in conjunction with other amazingly difficult feats, she still preserves that ease and equanimity which denotes a masterly knowledge.*⁸²

...an additional attraction was provided on this occasion in the appearance of Miss Emily Parker, aged eleven years, a sister and pupil of Harry's who two months back was unable to swim... performed every feat gracefully and with exact precision'.⁸³

The need to continue to attract the public to aquatic entertainments and to raise the public profile of female professional swimmers, ensured that increasingly more difficult endurance feats had to be attempted. The challenge in the beginning was to be the first, either to swim a new record distance, or to swim for the longest time unaided. This led to keen rivalries

⁸¹ *The Bicycle Journal, Swimming and General Athletic and Pedestrian Recorder*, 21 August 1878: p.7.

⁸² *Swimming, Rowing and Athletic Record*, 1873 and cited in Keil and Wix 1996: p.6

⁸³ *Ibid*

developing. One of the keenest rivalries was between Agnes Beckwith and Emily Parker. Because of their nearness in age and comparable swimming ability, they were continually attempting to out perform one another and they became two of the most well known female professionals. In September, 1875 when they were both just fourteen, they each proposed to swim six miles of the River Thames, from London Bridge to Greenwich. Agnes Beckwith attempted to swim the distance first and succeeded, so a few days later Emily Parker swam seven miles, a mile further on, to Blackwell. Both feats were reported in the national and international press ⁸⁴ and were evidently quite significant and popular occasions with, '...many thousands assembled; the river was alive with small craft and the decks and rigging of all the vessels within sight were covered with clusters of eager onlookers'.⁸⁵ All the reports were however, keen to stress the feminine qualities of the swimmers and the ease with which each swim was achieved,

*Miss Parker swims with remarkable ease, using a vigorous breaststroke. At no point of her journey did she exhibit the slightest sign of fatigue, but on the contrary appeared rather to relish the excitement.*⁸⁶

Once the feats of female professional swimmers had been recognized, accepted and become almost common place with public audiences, more demanding feats had to be tried. The female professionals endeavoured to continue having their accomplishments reported in the press and to attract

⁸⁴ *The London Standard and The New York Times.*

⁸⁵ *New York Times*, 20 September 1875: p.2, col.2

even larger live audiences, by attempting swimming feats comparable to those undertaken by male professionals. In 1880 for example, Agnes Beckwith swam continuously in the whale tank at the Royal Aquarium, Westminster for 30 hours. Whereas previously, Capt. Webb, had swam at the Aquarium for 60 hours and as the report highlighted, Webb had 'generally adopted a slow stroke and frequently floated in a recumbent position, Miss Beckwith used a quicker method of progression, and varied the monotony of her proceedings by several displays of clever evolutions.'⁸⁷ In accomplishing such a feat, Miss Beckwith was reported as possessing powers of endurance comparable to a man. Nevertheless, the press also stressed the 'feminine' qualities of Miss Beckwith and found it necessary to comment on the costume she had worn for the swim.⁸⁸ The popularity of watching and betting on the outcome of ever more difficult feats continued until the last decade of the nineteenth century. A report from 1885, claiming that 'fully 20,000 people watched Miss Minna Wookey, swim half a mile of the River Avon at Bristol', with her hands and feet tied and 'there were several bets lost and won over this feat, as the general public thought it was impossible for her to do it.'⁸⁹

All the achievements of these young female professional swimmers, helped to demonstrate that the female body was capable of prolonged

⁸⁶ *New York Times*, 20 September 1875: P.2, col.2.

⁸⁷ *New York Times*, 22 May 1880: p.2, col.3.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Cited in Keil, I. and Wix, D. 1996: p.21

physical exertion, without any adverse effects and consequently to identify swimming as a suitable physical activity for women. In the reporting of all professional female swimming activities there was never any attempt to condemn their achievements as 'unfeminine', or to question the character or reputation of the women involved. In fact the reports generally went out of their way to stress the ladylike, graceful and aesthetic nature of their achievements, this was clearly not the case in the reporting of other female professional sporting activities and in particular pedestrians.

Female pedestriennes were often portrayed as women of questionable reputations. Their activities were considered as popular and vulgar entertainment, despite many of the athletic performances being highly skilled.⁹⁰ Although some pedestriennes, for a time, did manage to popularise and gain positive coverage of their efforts and fuelled a walking craze for women in the late 1870s, in America.⁹¹

The different attitudes towards, and reporting of female swimming and pedestrianism, was as a consequence of a number of different factors. The age, marital status and bodily appearance of the female professional performer affected the type of coverage she would receive in the press, but the visible effort required in performing the activity, had most impact upon the perception and acceptance of an activity. Successful female pedestriennes, were often middle aged, previously married and depicted as muscular women,

⁹⁰ Shaulis, Dahn, 'Pedestriennes: Newsworthy but Controversial Women in Sporting Entertainment' *Journal of Sports History*, Spring 1999, pp. 29-50.

⁹¹ *ibid*

whereas, professional female swimmers were generally, unmarried, teenage girls and described as, slim and slight. The effort involved in swimming, was always hidden by the water and spectators rarely got close enough, to ever see a swimmer in any discomfort or distress. Once they emerged from the water, usually smiling, they may have been glowing, but no sweat, bulging muscles or signs of distress were visible. Whilst endurance pedestrian events were described as 'brutal exhibitions' and of pedestriennes as 'walking in agony'.⁹²

The gradual decline in female professional swimming, by the end of the nineteenth century, was paralleled with the decline in male professional swimming, due in fact to the rise in legitimacy and newsworthiness of amateur sport and a general distaste for the professional. However, the positive body image that the female professional swimmer had created and the popularity and success they had enjoyed, undoubtedly influenced the development of all female competitive swimming.

Female Competitive Swimming.

Female swimming professionals had influenced the general perception of the physical capabilities of the female body and had helped to dispel the myth of female frailty. Although their feats were often portrayed as unique and most middle-class women would not have wished to emulate them, the

⁹² Shaulis, D. 1999: p.41

gracefulness and lack of exertion that was witnessed, enabled swimming to become accepted as a uniquely feminine appropriate sport. It was a sport that was promoted, not only as a healthy and enjoyable female physical recreation, but one that could be undertaken regularly and quite seriously, without the danger of developing masculine traits. The qualities displayed by female swimmers, firstly by the female professionals and then later by the first amateur female swimmers, of feminine gracefulness and effortlessness, were qualities which undoubtedly helped female competitive swimming to thrive. Yet, to progress almost unhindered, without male decent and to be popular and acceptable amongst middle-class women, swimming also had to continue to heed the standards of respectable Victorian society, with regard to female modesty and decorum, which meant initially that women's swimming clubs and races were completely separate from men.

Female competitive swimming developed along similar lines to that of male competitive swimming, albeit several decades later. Like male swimmers, once women had learnt to swim, many then wished to challenge themselves further and a few began to take part in small competitive races, generally organized by the professional, who had initially taught the women to swim. Establishing a swimming club would often quickly follow. Women's swimming clubs, although never as numerous as male clubs, were by the end of the nineteenth century quite a common feature at public baths and at coastal towns. Certainly by the last decade of the nineteenth century, more women had the opportunity to compete and to join a swimming club, than has

previously been acknowledged. It was not the case, as Hargreaves states that, 'there were few opportunities for organized or competitive swimming except in schools and colleges',⁹³ but as the following evidence will show, it was more likely, as Parrat suggests that by the mid-1890s, 'there was quite an extensive circuit and one which indicates that there were sufficient numbers of competitive female swimmers to warrant its existence'.⁹⁴

The exact date of the first female swimming club is difficult to determine, although it is unlikely that there were many or even any, in existence before the 1870s. Some Universities and Women's Colleges had swimming clubs by the 1880s, but they were only accessible to the privileged few women who continued into higher education. By the turn of the century, a few working-class women, who worked for companies such as Cadburys' and Rowntrees', also had the opportunity to belong to a swimming club, but again, the number of women involved would not have been numerous.⁹⁵

Of greater significance, to the overall development of women's competitive swimming and of more relevance to this thesis, were the opportunities open to the ordinary female inhabitants of Britain's nineteenth century towns and cities. Evidence from the swimming press, suggests several female swimming clubs were established in, or just prior to 1878. One of the first, was possibly, Derby ladies swimming club, which according to

⁹³ Hargreaves, J. 1994:p.102

⁹⁴ Parrat, C.M. 1989 'Athletic' Womanhood": Exploring Sources for Female Sport in Victorian and Edwardian England', in *Journal of Sports History*, Vol 16, no.2, p149.

⁹⁵ See, McCrone, K.E. *Class, Gender and English Women's Sport 1890-1914* in *Journal of Sports History* 1991:pp 159-182 for details of female swimming at Cadbury's and Rowntree's.

'*The Bicycle, Swimming and Athletic Journal*' of 1878, closed its second season, with a series of races in November 1878.⁹⁶

Another female club, with reports in the swimming press of October 1878, was the ladies club of The Victoria Baths, Glasgow, whose members, according to the report, 'had not had the opportunity before of any competitions. But, on this first occasion, instead of racing for prizes, the proceedings took the form of a display'.⁹⁷ Within Glasgow, there was also a ladies club at the Arlington Baths.⁹⁸ Both of these were private baths clubs, with a strictly upper and middle-class membership, where the female members were firstly encouraged to swim for safety and health. Only later were the female members allowed to compete. Also, as the report of the exhibition at the Victoria Baths claimed,

*a large and select audience of ladies and gentlemen numbering about thirteen hundred, assembled in the galleries and balconies to watch the swimming entertainment... The prospect of swimming in front of men, would have dissuaded a number of women from participating, even though all were neatly attired in university costume.*⁹⁹

The reluctance and difficulty for women, in breaking the mould and being prepared to race, particularly in front of men at this time, is also evident

⁹⁶ *The Bicycle, Swimming and Athletic Journal*, 27 November 1878: p3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 9 October 1878: p.2.

⁹⁸ *The Bicycle, Swimming and Athletic Journal* 6 November 1878: p.3

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 9 October 1878: p.2. University costume was regulation costume that all competitive swimmers were required to wear when the ASA and SASA, began to control competitive swimming.

from the report of a one length race between the ladies of St. Alban's in 1878, which noted,

*This event excited considerable interest, it being the first time that ladies have ventured to exhibit their skills in St. Albans. There were only three entries... All the ladies deserve commendation for their spirit in making this public appearance.*¹⁰⁰

Gradually more women did begin to join clubs and to participate in races and within Birmingham by 1897, there were three ladies swimming clubs associated with the various bathing establishments of the city. The first ladies club in Birmingham was established in 1884, when the first class pool at the Kent Street Baths, was reserved exclusively for their use on Wednesday evenings, and by 1896, there was a membership of 48 women.¹⁰¹ The number of female members of this ladies swimming club compared well with the membership of the male clubs, that also practiced on different evenings at the Kent Street Baths, with for example, the men's Birmingham SC, having 57 members and the Cygnet SC, claiming 38 members in 1896.¹⁰²

The establishment of a ladies swimming club, helped to boost the general attendance of female bathers to a public baths. Evidence from the Northwood Street Baths was typical of this reaction. In 1894, the number of female bathers to the first class pool was 296, but rose to 572 in 1895, after the Handsworth SC for women had been formed in 1895, with a membership

¹⁰⁰ *The Bicycle, Swimming and Athletic Journal*, 9 October 1878: p.2

¹⁰¹ City of Birmingham Public Baths, 1897, p.62

¹⁰² *Ibid*

of 54 women.¹⁰³ The third Birmingham Swimming club for women was the Severn St. Class, which was also formed in 1895 and met at the cities Monument Road Baths, each Tuesday evening. The membership of this club was 43 women in 1896, which was a larger membership than any of the 3 male clubs, which also used the Monument Road Baths.¹⁰⁴ Although the membership of all 3 ladies swimming clubs in Birmingham, compared equally with the membership of the male clubs, there were 15 men's clubs compared to 3 women's clubs in 1896. The total yearly attendances of all the ladies clubs was always significantly smaller than for the men's clubs. Indicating that although many women were keen to join a club, regular attendance for some was difficult and undoubtedly prevented by home and family duties.

The age and social class of the members of these first women's swimming clubs appears, from the evidence available, to have been mixed. Reports and articles in the press point to a predominance of young teenage girls being the active members, in terms of actually competing in events, with the reports often noting the young age and slight appearance of the successful competitors. The majority of competitors of whatever age, were usually unmarried, as only rarely did the title Mrs. appear in lists of competitors.

¹⁰³ City of Birmingham Public Baths, 1897: pp.91-2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p.107

Committee members were also generally unmarried young women of the middle classes, who had the time and money to devote to administrative duties of their chosen club. Although unusually, one of the earliest women's clubs, the South Norwood Ladies SC, London, which was established in 1883, re-elected to its 10 member committee in 1895, 8 married women.¹⁰⁵ A report in *Swimming* of 1895, also listed some married women as being, 'holders of the proficiency medallion' and having passed the exam, 'as instructresses of Life-Saving'.¹⁰⁶ Indicating that a number of married women were able and possibly encouraged by their husbands to actively pursue involvement in a swimming club, because of the safety value, in being able to swim and save lives. Ladies sections of male clubs were also established and many swimming clubs became an attractive opportunity for family recreation, with husbands, wives and children all involved in club life.¹⁰⁷ The male and female sections of clubs however, were run completely separately. Once a ladies section of a swimming club had been formed, the running of the club was given over entirely to the female committee members. Although, priority for securing adequate and more convenient pool time, was still dependent upon the male baths committee members and as a consequence many women's clubs were prevented from expanding.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ *Swimming*, 23 May 1895: p.116

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁷ *Swimming* 2 May 1895: p.79 gives a report of the Bosanquet family and their involvement in the Leander SC, Birmingham.

¹⁰⁸ Brighton Ladies SC for example, had expanded the membership of their club with the opening of new corporation baths, but were then limited by the corporation to use of the pool on three afternoons per

The female members of swimming clubs were essentially middle-class, as indicated by the tone of appeals for members when advertising the formation of a new club, such as, 'I ask all members to do their best to promote swimming among the ladies of St. Helen's'.¹⁰⁹ Clubs were also formed to cater for particular groups within society, which ensured the respectable social standing of the club, as was the case in Liverpool, where a club 'composed entirely of lady teachers from the various board schools in the city' was promoted in 1895.¹¹⁰ Liverpool had though continued its reluctance to promote swimming for women. In addition to initially severely restricting access to the public baths, Liverpool Baths Committee, as late as 1883, also refused to allow female professional swimmers to be part of swimming entertainments at their baths, despite several requests.¹¹¹ By 1887, the committee relented and sanctioned the first ladies gala at the Cornwallis Street Baths, on the condition that, 'only male parents and elderly friends of competitors be admitted'.¹¹² The following year the tone of the committee had softened further and at a subsequent ladies gala, at the Pier Head Baths, male spectators were admitted.¹¹³

week, which were 'at the most inconvenient time of the day, but they were thankful for small mercies' from *'Swimming'*, 27 June 1895: p. 182.

¹⁰⁹ *Swimming*, 9 May 1895: p.1

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Annals of Liverpool*, 1952: p. 92 and 105

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.118

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.120

The concern within society, of men and women mixing together at swimming baths, continued to pose problems and was only acceptable in certain situations. St. Margaret's Ladies SC, Liverpool were for example refused permission to employ a male swimming teacher, because as the Chief Superintendent of the baths pointed out to the Baths Committee, the ladies club did not have 'exclusive' use of the plunge pool.¹¹⁴ The restrictions placed before women in forming a swimming club, did not however, prevent a significant number from being established or in them continuing to thrive, as the numerous reports of the activities of female swimming clubs in the swimming press of the late 1890s clearly indicates.¹¹⁵ Female swimming clubs had been initially acceptable, because they were entirely separate from men's clubs. Yet, as the sport progressed the feasibility of maintaining this strict segregation became impossible. The problem which now loomed large in the development of female competitive swimming, was the issue of women competing in front of men and the role of the ASA and SASA in sanctioning this practice.

Swimming races for women were conducted initially with only women present. Female committee members of clubs organized and at most galas also officiated, with the races taking place in front of a female only audience. The use of male officials at ladies swimming galas remained a cause for comment in the swimming press up to the 1890s, with for example, a report in

¹¹⁴ Annals of Liverpool, 1952: p.137

¹¹⁵ 'Swimming' magazine of 1895, for example had a weekly section titled 'Our Ladies Corner'.

Swimming, in 1895, questioning the need for male officials, at the Norwood Ladies SC, annual festival.¹¹⁶ Reports of female swimming events generally listed, not only the competitors, but also the officials and in the majority of cases women were in sole charge. This complete separation from men did not though continue. The first relaxation was to lift the restriction on male spectators, to the husbands and fathers of competitors. Once events became bigger and the need to generate sufficient funds from the annual gala became important to the survival of women's clubs, most began to allow male spectators. Then gradually as inter-club, regional and finally national events for women began to take place, the scale and complexity of maintaining strict segregation of the sexes, became unfeasible and eventually women and men began to compete together.

Many women however, still expressed unease at competing in front of men, especially in open water events. When an indoor and an open water national ladies championship were proposed, women were in agreement that for the open water amateur championship race, 'no gentlemen should be admitted.'¹¹⁷ Progression from strictly female only, to mixed events, was not readily accepted by everyone, especially by some women. The initial separation of female competitive swimming had enabled women to compete seriously, often for the first time, unhampered by the need to behave in a 'ladylike' manner. Female only events however, did decline and the relaxed

¹¹⁶ *Swimming*, 1 August 1895: p. 255

attitude towards the appearance of female competitors, at previously all male events, enabled women's competitive swimming to develop more rapidly and to be largely free of the constraints of behaviour and dress, placed on other public sports. Yet women's swimming still had to tread cautiously, to conform not just to the expectations of middle-class society, but also to the control of the ASA and SASA, the two governing bodies of amateur swimming.

The ASA had accepted, though somewhat anxiously, the rise of women's swimming clubs. It had largely assumed that the arrangements of separate facilities and times were a matter for each local authority or private baths company, therefore the ASA, had no official policy on female swimming events.¹¹⁸ Initially the only official stance, that the ASA took to the issue of both men and women competing in front of the opposite sex, was to regulate the type of costume that was required to be worn by anyone racing under ASA laws. The hesitation of the ASA towards female competition in the 1890s, was illustrated by the reluctance of the Association to establish a swimming championship for ladies. The ASA in 1895, had sought the opinion of women's swimming clubs on the proposal of such an event. The replies, quite understandably were all in favour of a championship, with most requesting two events, an open water and a swimming pool race. Despite the unanimous response in favour of a ladies championship the ASA decided to

¹¹⁷ *Swimming*, 6 June 1895: p.139

¹¹⁸ Keil, I and Wix, D. 1996: p.22

let the matter 'lie on the table' and a National event for women in England did not take place until 1901.¹¹⁹

In Scotland, for a variety of reasons, female competitive swimming had progressed more rapidly. Scotland could perhaps claim 'the world's first national women's swimming championship' in 1892.¹²⁰ The reasons behind the more rapid progress of the sport in Scotland, were possibly due to the later building of public baths, from the 1870s, by which time the appearance of female competitors had already become more socially acceptable. More importantly perhaps, was the larger number of private baths clubs. These clubs were almost exclusively confined to Glasgow and Edinburgh. They enabled middle-class men and women to compete against each other in a socially exclusive and supportive atmosphere, with the first competitive endeavours of female swimmers receiving positive praise.

National championship races for women, in both England and Scotland, consisted initially of just one race, incorporated within larger events for men. The Ladies Championship of Scotland, in 1895, claimed to be 'the principal part of an elaborate programme for the gala of the Glasgow Northern Club' and consisted of a two hundred yard race with five entrants.¹²¹ Despite both countries restricting National Championships Events for women to one race, female competitive swimming was far in advance of other sports. In the more public sports of golf, tennis, athletics, hockey and cycling, adhering to

¹¹⁹ *Swimming*, 6 June 1895: p. 135

¹²⁰ Raszeja, V. 1992: p.41

socially acceptable feminine behaviour and fashion, largely prevented women from truly competing. Whilst in swimming, the female competitive spirit had been allowed to develop separately and when it did begin to emerge on general public view, swimming had a great advantage over all other sports, because as Raszeja states,

...the effort required to be seriously competitive, to strive to win, was hidden. No matter how hard the competitors pushed themselves, the watery medium minimized the outward appearance of effort and exertion... In women's competitive swimming, the speed, power and endurance required were hidden, thus ensuring that the late Victorian image of ideal womanhood remained unthreatened.¹²²

The official sanctioning of women's competitive swimming was finally achieved with its inclusion in the 1912 Olympic Games, held in Stockholm. Along with tennis, it was the only sport to be part of the Olympic programme for women that year, although in the previous three Olympic Games, golf, archery and skating, had been included for women. The limitation to two swimming events for women, the 100 metres individual freestyle and a 4 x 100 metres freestyle relay, in which Britain were the gold medal winners, plus the fact, that there were 2,491 male swimmers and just 55 women, is an indication of the token nature to the inclusion of women's events at the

¹²¹ *Swimming*, 15 August 1895: p.1

¹²² Raszeja, V. 1992:p.42

Olympics.¹²³ The women's events in 1912, took place outside the official programme and the IOC was only persuaded to include these events because they were viewed as 'feminine – appropriate'.¹²⁴ The advances made by women within the Olympic programme, was 'slow and contested', but swimming can claim to be the first and only sport, in which women have been continuously allowed to compete at the Games.¹²⁵ By 1914, women's competitive swimming, was an acceptable and popular sport. The numerous clubs, the inclusion of events for women at national championships and the inclusion of swimming races for women into the Olympic Games, all testify how far women's swimming had progressed, from its hidden, female only beginnings into the first public, socially acceptable female competitive sport, with little adverse comment or restriction.

Summary

Women's swimming epitomized the contradictions and ambivalences surrounding the development of nineteenth century women's sport and female physical emancipation.¹²⁶ The emergence of an industrial, urban society for women, was previously thought to have confined women to the home and private sphere. Which along with medical and scientific evidence, had helped to create the ideology of bodily incapacity and the 'delicate female'. Many

¹²³ Hargeaves, J. 1994: p.219

¹²⁴ Ibid p.210

¹²⁵ Ibid

¹²⁶ Raszeja, V. 1992: p.82

women did not conform to such ideals, but the progression of women into the world of sport, was for patriarchal Victorian society, a step too far and posed many contradictions. In order to be socially acceptable the Victorian sportswoman had 'to project an image of moderation and becoming femininity'.¹²⁷ This chapter has argued, that it was precisely these requirements, which enabled swimming and particularly competitive swimming, to be promoted as the 'ideal' sport for women.

The evidence has also indicated that initially, many other factors helped female swimmers to overcome restrictive ideologies and to gain social acceptance. Firstly, the basic need to be able to swim to save life, was a major advantage, in the acceptance and promotion of female swimming, no other sport could claim such a utilitarian purpose. Secondly, the nineteenth century obsession with the body and health, ultimately focused on the requirement of better female health, for producing healthy children. Swimming could again demonstrate its superiority over most other sports, as it provided mild, beneficial exercise, that could be carried out in a separate female only environment. Nevertheless, it was the arrival of women into the competitive swimming arena, which was the greatest challenge for the sport and for the ideals surrounding the place of women in society.

¹²⁷ Raszeja, V.1992: p.143

Other competitive sports for women were emerging in the late nineteenth century, but non had the same level of 'accessibility, acceptability or encouragement that swimming did'.¹²⁸ Competitive swimming for women was able to develop initially because it was 'hidden' and private, so the constraints placed on female behaviour, in other more public sports, were not applicable to swimming. Women were free to conduct the sport in their own way and adopted the wearing of appropriate swimming costumes and the spirit of competition, unhampered by social convention. Gradually, women's competitive swimming did begin to take place on a more public stage and when it did so, despite its 'incorporation of the masculine qualities of stamina, endurance and striving for physical excellence', its great advantage was that it was conducted in a 'cool aquatic environment' and women could retain an image of 'feminine gracefulness and non-exertion'.¹²⁹

The acceptance of the female competitive spirit within swimming, undoubtedly helped demonstrate that women could compete and retain their 'femininity'. Competitive and recreational swimming also served to break down the ideology of female bodily incapacity, but its place in advancing female physical emancipation is a little more ambivalent. Swimming was only acceptable because it did not challenge the established social order and constant reinforcement highlighted the aesthetically pleasing and hidden effort of the sport. Nevertheless, the early success and development of women's

¹²⁸ Raszeja, V. 1992: p.6

¹²⁹ Ibid:p.82

swimming, without doubt, helped wrest for women the option to be physically active and competitive and for swimming to be considered as the first modern urban sport for women.

CONCLUSIONS

This study does not claim to provide a comprehensive historical analysis or a complete discussion of the development of swimming from 1840 to 1914. At a much more modest level this thesis has been concerned with:

i) providing a narrative focused and empirically grounded investigation of swimming; ii) locating an analysis of swimming to the wider process of Victorian and Edwardian social change; iii) establishing a contribution to an analysis of the impact of urbanization on the development of swimming. Perhaps the relative strength and weakness of this work, is that it has attempted to address the interrelated nature of all these issues.

The research has attempted to illustrate throughout this study that the development of swimming did not occur in isolation. That swimming was facilitated by and did itself influence, the urban environment, as well as the many other social, economic and cultural changes taking place in nineteenth century Britain. The text has encompassed some of the most basic questions that might be asked concerning the inter-relationship between, the modernization of swimming and nineteenth century urbanization. How did swimming contribute to an improvement in the physical, social and moral condition of the people? Was swimming successfully promoted as a rational recreation? How did the masses 're-create' themselves at the seaside and was sea bathing an important aspect of recreational swimming? Why and when did swimming move from a traditional to a modern sport? What was the

significance of creeping urbanization on the formation of swimming clubs and who was involved in their formation? Did social class influence participation in swimming? Was amateurism a dominant factor in the modernization of swimming? Were the features of swimming and life saving, promoted by educational agencies, as valuable to the youth of nineteenth century urban society? Why was swimming able to develop into the first modern, urban sport for women?

Such questions have provided a basis for developing an analysis of swimming, which has revolved around four separate, yet interrelated themes. The first theme examined recreational swimming and the 'condition' of the people of urban Britain from 1840 to 1880. The research has attempted to show that swimming facilitated an improvement in the physical, social and moral condition of urban inhabitants. The evidence indicates that the 1846 Baths and Wash-houses Act enabled a number of towns and cities to provide public baths and that these facilities, did help the urban masses to improve their cleanliness and physical health. Promoting swimming as a rational activity to improve the social and moral condition of the people was much more diffuse than the provision of facilities. The establishment of swimming clubs by middle-class gentlemen, helped to raise the social position of swimming. However, the class segregated facilities at public baths and the formation of exclusive private baths clubs, ensured that the masses were largely prevented from observing or mixing, with their social 'superiors', whilst social segregation also pervaded the increasingly popular seaside excursion.

Overall, swimming played an ambivalent role in improving the physical, social and moral health of the population, but the provision of better swimming facilities, significantly enhanced the activity of swimming for pleasure and recreational swimming became a popular nineteenth century leisure activity.

Theme two considered the rise of competitive swimming, and its transformation from a pre-modern to a modern state. Using the modernization typology of Melvin Adelman, the evidence gathered confirmed that all the characteristics of a 'modern' sport were in place for swimming by 1914. The professional swimmer was initially the most influential in raising the profile of competitive swimming, by staging races and entertainments, by instigating the formation of swimming clubs, by providing a specialized swimming press and by attempting to form a national organization of swimming. One professional, Captain Mathew Webb, was especially instrumental in awakening public interest in swimming. In 1875, he successfully swam the English Channel and for a time swimming achieved almost cult status. The early influence of the professional swimmer however, did not last. Disdain for the professional grew as amateurism came to dominate British sporting culture. The amateur v professional debate, posed many problems for the newly formed governing body of swimming, almost causing its collapse on a number of occasions and creating a schism between northern and southern swimmers. For whilst the professional and working-class origins of swimming, meant that the decisions taken by the governing body with regard to amateurism, often directly opposed the trend set by other sports, its low status, also meant that in order

to achieve respectability, swimming had to demonstrate that it had matured into a serious, 'pure' amateur sport. Therefore, from the 1880s, it was amateur swimmers, who took control of the sport and formed regional, national and international competitions and organizations, all of which adhered to the principles of amateurism.

The third theme explored education and swimming. Educational agencies, from state schools, voluntary associations, and work place schemes, to the ASA and RLSS, all promoted swimming and life-saving as sound, healthy and rational activities. The ASA in particular, became a well organized governing body, which consistently lobbied government, on the benefits of including swimming in the education of young people. Primarily because of the advocacy of these agencies, elite education viewed swimming as a minority sport, lacking in social exclusivity, but a useful skill for saving life or more importantly for gaining boat club membership. Whereas among the population as a whole, increasing concern about the rising number of deaths from drowning, saw swimming receiving a higher profile, which culminated in the establishment of the RLSS. Formed to educate the population on the best methods of rescue and resuscitation, the RLSS had to break down long held superstitions and ignorance concerning the rescue of a drowning person. Nevertheless, despite the tireless work of members of the RLSS in educating children and adults on correct life saving techniques, life saving remained a minority skill. Whereas, the foundations laid by the ASA, of establishing a comprehensive scheme for the teaching of swimming, ensured that swimming

was taught throughout Britain, under guidelines approved of by the ASA and swimming skills improved accordingly.

The last theme considered the development of female swimming. Victorian sportswomen were largely restricted in their sporting endeavours, by the ideologies of female bodily incapacity and the socially constructed ideal of appropriate feminine behaviour. Recreational and competitive swimming were however, not only tolerated, but actively promoted as beneficial for women. Three specific qualities helped in the social acceptance of female swimming. Firstly, swimming had a utilitarian function. It was a mild, gentle exercise, which improved female health, but more importantly, the ability to swim, could save a women from drowning. Secondly, swimming could be undertaken in private. Recreational and competitive swimming for women was able to flourish unhindered by patriarchal social convention, in female segregated pools and women only contests. Lastly, swimming took place in a cool aquatic environment. This prevented the masculine qualities of strength and endurance, which were required by female competitors, from being observed by spectators. Female swimmers were able to retain an image of feminine gracefulness and non-exertion. All three qualities, were crucial in the rapid acceptance of female swimmers, for the breakdown of ideologies associated with the female body and in the classification of swimming, as the first modern urban sport for women.

I should like to finish by highlighting a number of crucial points which have been central to the thinking throughout this thesis. The process of

urbanization, the physical, social and emotional characteristics of urbanization, both positive and negative, had profound impacts on the development of swimming. Whilst, they were all inter-related, three consequences in particular, shaped the structure of swimming. Firstly, there was the provision of municipal baths. Built as a reaction to the dirt and disease, which accompanied the massing together of large populations in towns and cities, they became a dominant feature of the urban landscape and were a major element in the civic pride of many towns and cities. Yet initially, they were considered as places for improving the cleanliness and health of the urban population. However, price concessions imposed on local authorities, who had built baths under the 1846 Baths and Wash-Houses Act, meant the baths were affordable for a large number of urban inhabitants and the municipal baths were quickly adopted as sites for urban recreation, sport and entertainment. Professional swimmers were the first to promote regular contests and shows at public baths. Staged in the middle of the week, in order not to clash with the more popular week-end football fixture, the swimming gala, became an opportunity for the urban population to meet, socialize and gamble, in warm, relatively comfortable surroundings. The use of baths, as places for urban recreation and sport, was also acknowledged by government. The amended Public Baths and Wash-houses Act of 1878, enabled local authorities to build larger, indoor facilities specifically for swimming and with improved facilities, the popularity of swimming, among the urban population was further enhanced. In addition, the new baths also facilitated the

modernization of swimming, enabling competitions to take place in a regulated, standardized and controlled environment.

Secondly, although the provision of facilities was crucial to the development of swimming, of equal importance were the changing social relationships and emotional ties of living in large urban communities. Urban communities became the natural location for the emergence of an urban class consciousness. No class was homogeneous, but the expanding middle-class became the dominant and most influential group, both within the expanding urban environment and within a developing sports culture. Swimming, because of its early association with cleansing the great unwashed, was not an activity which naturally attracted many middle-class participants. Nevertheless, there were some middle-class enthusiasts and the formation of swimming clubs from the 1860s, by respectable, if predominately, lower middle-class gentlemen, helped to improve the social standing of swimming. Membership of a sports club, was a way of sustaining new social relationships within the anonymity of the urban environment and was equally important for both middle and working-class urban inhabitants. Swimming clubs, became one of the few urban activities, where a relatively mixed social class membership, was encouraged and sustained. Swimming was able to be endorsed across the social spectrum, because of its benefits to health and the ability of people able to swim to prevent drowning and save life. Swimming's appeal and utility, for all social classes, ages and gender, meant that it

retained a populist rather than exclusive following, but as an activity it has remained the most popular physical recreation in Britain.¹

Lastly, the provision of an elementary education to the working-class youth of Victorian Britain, was to be an important influence on the progress of swimming. Compulsory education was introduced into Britain from the 1870s, in an attempt to control the growing number of illiterate and unruly young people. Schools and voluntary agencies believed sport and physical exercise were important elements for instilling respectability and self-reliance into the young. Yet within state schools, military drill was the only form of physical exercise provided for children. The majority of towns and cities by the 1880s, had however, built at least one municipal swimming pool and several progressive education authorities began to provide swimming lessons, as an alternative to military drill. Swimming provision was viable because facilities were already in place, the activity could be provided to large numbers at reasonable expense, with the added advantage that swimming also improved the cleanliness, as well the health of school children. The economic viability and beneficial effects, of swimming for school children, ensured that swimming was recommended for inclusion on the school curriculum. Although this had not been achieved by 1914, swimming provision for school children continued to increase and the systematic teaching of swimming resulted in many more children learning to swim.

¹ Sports Council surveys have regularly placed swimming as the most popular physical recreation in Britain

Swimming in 1840, bore little resemblance to the activity as it was practised by 1914. In 1840, swimming was a spontaneous, casual, unorganised recreative pursuit, which generally took place in open water. A few swimming competitions were staged by professionals, but they took the form of one-off, spectacular feats. There was little formal swimming instruction and most swimmers were self-taught. In contrast, by 1914, swimming took place most often in indoor heated pools, that were built to standard, uniform dimensions. As a competitive sport it had become codified and institutionalised. Swimming lessons were given by qualified teachers, in a systematic way and overseen by the ASA. There remained however, the opportunity to participate in swimming in a spontaneous and recreative way and swimming in rivers, lakes and especially at the seaside, remained a popular pursuit during the summer months. The significant changes that swimming underwent, during this seventy four year period, cannot be fully explained by the process of urbanization. Nevertheless, historians have concluded, that as a general rule, the greater the urbanization, the more developed and 'modern' sport became.² Therefore, to test this hypotheses with evidence from the sport of swimming, has provided valuable insights into aspects of nineteenth century British sport and urbanization. This study has not only explored the development of a previously under researched sport, it has provided a critical view of the relationship between swimming and urbanization. It has shown that swimming was not merely a recreational and

² Tranter, N. 1998: p.29 and Holt, R. 1989

competitive pursuit, that happened to take place largely within the urban environment, but was an activity that was shaped and reshaped and further moulded by the interplay of the elements comprising the process of urbanization.³ The many issues that such an approach encompasses need not lead to generality and universalism, since in this instance it has helped to make a unique and original contribution to our understanding of swimming and urbanization in Britain between 1840 and 1914.

³ Reiss, S. 1989: p.259

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