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A HISTORY OF SPORT AND RECREATION FOR WOMEN IN GREAT BRITAIN, 1700 - 1850

The Ohio State University

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A HISTORY OF SPORT AND RECREATION FOR
WOMEN IN GREAT BRITAIN, 1700 - 1850

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Shirley Heather Maxwell Reekie, B.Ed.(Hons.), M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University

1982

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Adviser
Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation
To my parents, for always being interested and ready to help.
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PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Studies in History and Comparative Physical Education
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Studies in History and Comparative Education
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For as long as the human race has enjoyed leisure time, there is evidence that members of that race have engaged in play activity. While historians have recently begun to gather evidence relating to the nature of these activities, they have often concentrated on the play of men, giving but scant attention to the play of women. Women in most societies probably had at least some leisure, yet details of how they filled that time are often a matter for conjecture.

Such a situation occurs in many histories of sport and recreation about Great Britain. Since that country was the place where many sports extant today were first played or codified, much has been written about some of the sports of Great Britain. Usually, however, reference was made only to men, and specifically to those from the upper and middle classes, so that it has commonly been inferred that women rarely engaged in such activities until the last one hundred years, beginning in the mid-Victorian period. A close examination of historical
sources reveals that women participated in a range of physical activities before the mid-nineteenth century. The practice then declined, only to be revived in the later years of the same century. It was with the sports and physical recreations of women in Great Britain during the period 1700 to 1850 that this study was concerned.

The study began with the early eighteenth century because by investigating these years it was possible to determine how the country in general, and the countryside in particular, had existed for centuries with strong traditions and customs. The Industrial Revolution, with the attendant social, economic and political changes, caused the breakdown of much that was long established, including the pattern of sport and recreation.¹ Additionally, in the early 1700’s came the publication of the first magazines specifically for women, some of which were sources for this study. Women authors began to publish their writings from this time, giving feminine insight into the period.

Between 1700 and 1850, Britain endured the hardship of involvement in several foreign wars and the most rapid social change at home. In the early years of the eighteenth century the country was divided into two

distinct social classes, the lower and the upper; later, the middle class emerged, largely as a result of the Industrial Revolution. This study examined the sports and recreations of lower- and upper-class women (with some reference to the middle class) and made comparisons between them.

In the early 1700's, the common people's rural sports were still a vibrant force and working-class women participated in them freely and regularly. Upper-class ladies, confident in their social exclusiveness, also participated in sport and recreation although of different kinds. The start of the Victorian era in 1837 brought the beginnings of well-defined roles for the new middle class (and especially for the women), and etiquette, "do's" and "don't's"—and their faithful following—became of the greatest importance. Part of these beliefs entailed the firm conviction that femininity and the more vigorous sports could not comfortably mix, and physical recreation for middle- and upper-class women quickly became less popular. Working-class women, who would have been least affected by this phobia, also engaged in physical recreation much less frequently at this time, but this was because many had moved away from the comparatively leisurely pace of the countryside to the industrial towns where opportunities for their recreation were rare indeed.
Thus were many rural recreations for both men and women lost forever from that time.\(^2\)

The sports and recreations of all classes of women were examined in this study to determine the types of activities pursued, and the place and nature of the participation.\(^3\) In order to give a more complete view, some comparisons and references were made to the sports and recreations of men. Some activities were engaged in jointly by both sexes, and to omit reference to men would be to distort the picture in a similar way to previous writers who omitted reference to women.

Some sports in which women are known to have been active included cricket and bathing (for all classes although rarely at the same time or place); riding for pleasure, hunting, archery and angling (specifically for the upper class); running races, pugilism, golf and rowing (specifically for the working class). All groups are also known to have participated in the various forms of dancing.\(^4\)

---


\(^3\)As with much of history, the everyday usually went unrecorded, and this was especially true for working-class affairs. Thus it should be realized that everyday leisure went largely unreported and often only the special events were mentioned; see Malcolmson, op. cit., p. 16.

\(^4\)Dancing was included in this study since it was an important physical recreation for most women, but as there are already several histories of dancing in Great Britain, this activity was not here documented in great detail.
Where appropriate, sports and recreations of the different times were juxtaposed with general social, economic and political history so as to view the topic within its context.

**Statement of the Problem**

It was the purpose of this study to investigate, determine and examine the types of sports and physical recreations participated in by working-class women (in the country and in the towns), upper-class women (in the country and in the towns), together with passing reference to the emergent middle-class women, in Great Britain between the years 1700 and 1850. Where appropriate, mention was made both of the activities of men at similar times and places and to the general history of the period.

The study was undertaken with recognition of the following limitations: firstly, that any historical study is confined to the use of what has been preserved, so that what is presented cannot be a total picture even of women in sport and recreation at the time; secondly, the study was limited by the perceptions of the individuals who wrote at the time (although by comparing sources this limitation was partially overcome); and thirdly, when an

---

activity was mentioned it was sometimes difficult or impossible to determine the exact extent of the participation.

The delimitations for the study, 1700 to 1850, represent the period of change in Great Britain from a predominantly agricultural to a predominantly industrial society. In the early eighteenth century traditions remained strong and were the same as they had been for several centuries. Sport was thriving at both ends of the social scale. Women were beginning to be recognized as authors, and women's magazines were published and read widely by the upper sections of society.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the stern Victorian era had seen a decline in sport and physical recreation in all sectors of society (except among upper- and middle-class men) although for differing reasons. As the social changes were so great, a background chapter on the social history of the time was included against which sport was viewed.

In order to give specific guidance to the investigation, the following sub-problems were examined:

1) To investigate which particular activities were or were not participated in by women, and why.

2) To determine how women's participation was viewed by participants, spectators (if present) and other sections of society.
3) To compare participation between the different social classes to see if, or how, activities spread from one to the other.

4) To investigate how participation was related to the role of women in society or particular subculture.

5) To determine where and when participation took place.

6) To investigate how women's participation changed during the period under review and to determine why.

7) To relate the activities of women to those of men at comparable times and places.

**Need for the Study**

Although the profession of the writing of history dates back many thousands of years, it is relatively recently that historians have given serious study to sport. As late as 1964, Zeigler commented that contributions to the body of historical knowledge in physical education were still quite meagre. Several authors have worked actively to improve the situation, but many sport historians have included little evidence of women participants, perhaps because references are less frequent or more obscure.

---

Indeed, one author, Malcolmson, who studied English recreations (1700 - 1850) indexed only one reference to women's physical recreation in a book of nearly two hundred pages. Cunningham, having studied leisure in the Industrial Revolution, concluded that:

Despite the output of work in the last decade [on the history of leisure] there remain large gaps not just in the history of this or that leisure activity, but also in three more serious respects. First, nearly all the literature, and nearly all this [his] book, has been about male leisure....

Previous chroniclers of British sport history have concentrated on the post-1850 period, yet the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries represent an interesting period of social, economic and political change in which sport was caught up. Furthermore, there has often been little reference in histories to the sport of the poor. This study was undertaken, in part, to examine something of their sport and recreation, largely as far as the women were concerned.

7 Robert W. Malcolmson, Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700 - 1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).


Brailsford introduced his review of sport in Britain (1560 - 1714) with this comment:

What is lacking is any considerable body of enquiry into the sporting activities of the past in relation to the society in which they occurred.\(^\text{10}\)

The juxtaposition of sport and society was made in this study.

There are numerous references to women's participation in sport and recreation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which come from a variety of sources. As Malcolmson found in his study of popular recreations for the same one hundred and fifty year period, there are few primary sources of central importance but rather fragments here and there.\(^\text{11}\) To date, these fragments have not been assembled concerning women's sport. There was a real need to research, organize and collate the pieces of data to present a clear picture of the true nature and extent of women's participation. With the recent substantial increase in the numbers of women active in sport and recreation, there was added relevance in examining the historical background to this phenomenon.


\(^{11}\)Malcolmson, op. cit., p. 3.
Definition of Terms

The following terms were important in this study:

Great Britain: the countries of England, Scotland and Wales.

Sport: a game or physical contest which involved a reasonable degree of large muscle activity and was relatively organized.¹²

Recreation: a less organized form of physical activity than sport. When the term was used it always referred to physical recreation unless otherwise specified. Dancing was included under recreation.

Working or lower class: the section of society engaged in manual labour.

Upper class: the section of society not engaged in manual labour; the aristocracy and gentry.

¹²Eighteenth and nineteenth century definitions of sport include:

Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language (London: [n.n.], 1755) - "something that unbends the mind by turning it off from care."


Other writers used the term to mean only hunting, shooting and fishing.
Methods and Procedures

The historical method of research was used in this study to collect, analyze and present materials relating to the problem under investigation. Van Dalen enumerated the following procedures for historical research:

(1) formulating the problem; (2) collecting source materials; (3) criticizing source materials; (4) formulating hypotheses to explain events or conditions; and (5) interpreting and reporting the findings.13

These procedures were followed in this study, realizing that they are not necessarily separate or successive processes.

Woody cautioned the historical researcher to observe the following six points as far as possible: 1) establish the facts accurately; 2) be free from prejudice; 3) be sceptical; 4) use original sources; 5) subject primary sources to external criticism to establish authenticity; and 6) subject primary and secondary sources to internal criticism to establish accuracy.14

---


The following factors were considered in the attempt to establish accuracy: 1) the competence, integrity and knowledge of the author, and whether he wrote from personal observations; 2) possible bias, interest or motive of the author; 3) the time delay between observing and recording; and 4) the amount of agreement with other sources.¹⁵ This study attempted to follow all these guidelines.

The pertinent data gathered were presented in chronological order but were divided into the sports of the working class and of the upper class. (Some reference to the middle class was made in the latter section.) This division by class encouraged proper representation for both social extremes, in accordance with Schlesinger's comment that "history must embrace all sections of the population, poor as well as rich, women as well as men, the masses as well as the classes."¹⁶

A review of literature showed that there were no references dealing specifically with women's sport during the period under review. The book seemingly having the most relevance was Malcolmson's *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700 – 1850* but close inspection revealed

---


that there was very little reference to women's sport. As a result of the lack of highly relevant literature, data were collected from a variety of primary sources including national and local newspapers, diaries, journals, letters, magazines, manuals of sports, dictionaries, parish and other official records, advertisements and paintings, and also from various secondary sources. These secondary sources were used for four main purposes as stated by Gottschalk: 1) to derive the setting into which to fit the contemporary evidence; 2) to get leads to other data; 3) to acquire quotations, citations from other sources; and 4) to derive interpretations of, and hypotheses regarding, the problem.\footnote{Louis Gottschalk, \textit{Understanding History} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), p. 116.}

Relevant materials were housed in various libraries and archives in Great Britain, but principally at the British Library, the British Museum, Colindale Newspaper Library, the City of Westminster Library, the English Folk Dance and Song Society Library, the Folklore Society Library, the Lancashire Record Office, Lord's Cricket Ground Library and Museum, Manchester Central Reference Library, the Physical Education Association Library, John Rylands Library (Manchester), the U.K. Documentation Centre for Sport (Birmingham), and the libraries of the universities of Birmingham, Lancaster, Liverpool and
Manchester. Data were collected during two visits to Great Britain. Material also came from The Ohio State University Library. A complete list of sources appears in the bibliography.

When all the relevant materials and data had been collected, organized and analyzed, the findings were presented in an attempt to explain the problems stated on pages 5, 6 and 7. These findings were presented chronologically, using the descriptive method, in the following two categories:

1. The sports and recreations of working-class women, 1700 - 1850, in the countryside and in the towns.

2. The sports and recreations of upper-class women, 1700 - 1850, in the countryside and in the towns.

Various twentieth century writers have commented upon the rigid separation of the classes in the period under investigation. Haley, writing specifically about this phenomenon in sports, summed up the case for this form of presentation when he wrote:

There were few sports in the first half of the nineteenth century whose popularity extended to "clown" and gentleman alike.18

This method of representation thus attempted to reflect with accuracy the class divisions of the time.

---

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In order to gain a better understanding of the nature and place of sport in any society it is necessary to have some knowledge of underlying social conditions. In this chapter are contained details of circumstances and events which occurred in Great Britain in the one hundred and fifty years after 1700.

Whilst it would be quite wrong to judge eighteenth-century conditions by twentieth-century standards, it is certainly appropriate to make contemporary comparisons. Thus differences between the living conditions of the upper and working class, and between town and country dweller will be noted, especially since factors such as these indirectly affected the types of recreation and sport pursued.
The population of England (alone) in 1700 has been estimated at 5,475,000.\(^1\) The first official census in 1801 gave the figure for England as 9,160,000;\(^2\) for Great Britain and Ireland that same year the figure was 15,717,287.\(^3\) By 1851 the population of England and Wales was 17,928,000 and of the United Kingdom 22,259,000.\(^4\) These figures indicate that the population had roughly trebled in one hundred and fifty years.

In 1700 approximately 1,400,000, or twenty-five percent of England's population were estimated to have lived in towns.\(^5\) By 1850 over half the population were town dwellers.\(^6\)

Early in the eighteenth century, London was by far the largest town, having a population of about 500,000 (one tenth of England's total population). At the same

---


\(^2\) Ibid.


\(^5\) Bayne-Powell, op. cit., p. xi.

time, the only other cities of any size were Norwich and Bristol (each with a population of 30,000), then York and Exeter (each 10,000).\textsuperscript{7} No other city exceeded 10,000 in population.\textsuperscript{8}

These figures indicate one of the clear results of the Industrial Revolution—the move to the towns on an unprecedented scale. The revolution was a phenomenon which Trevelyan called "by far the most important movement in social history since the Saxon conquest."\textsuperscript{9} Hobsbawn, likewise, wrote that "the Industrial Revolution marks the most fundamental transformation of human life in the history of the world recorded in written documents."\textsuperscript{10}

What is referred to as "the Industrial Revolution" was of course not so much an event as a process, and as such it is impossible to say either when it began or when

\textsuperscript{7}See Appendix A for a map of Great Britain showing the major cities and all English counties. Since it was impossible to mark every small place mentioned in the text on the map, all references to towns and villages include the county so that the approximate location of each may be found. Where no county is given, the place itself is marked.


\textsuperscript{9}Trevelyan, op. cit., p. 371.

it ended. What can be stated is that in the early 1700's, Britain remained largely as it had been for several centuries:

England in the later seventeenth century was still in many ways the cheerfully boisterous, rough-mannered country it had been in Tudor times, and although standards were steadily rising, there were as yet many habits, even in the highest society, which would strike a very odd note in the world of today.\(^{11}\)

It should be added that by 1850 the most profound changes had taken place in almost every sphere of life, making the habits of 1850 seem much closer to those of 1950 than to those of 1750.

A most important point to note is that the so-called Industrial Revolution affected leisure quite as much as it did work.\(^{12}\) This fact has been ignored by most social historians but clearly major changes in the pattern of work would have caused equally fundamental changes in leisure habits.

In the 1700's Britain was a relatively prosperous country and the many foreign wars in which she engaged had little effect on most people at home. The various


Enclosure Acts\textsuperscript{13} passed throughout the period under review were of much more significance, so that

the middle of the eighteenth century is a turning point in the history of agriculture as of industry. Each was undergoing changes which were reacting on the other and on society at large...\textsuperscript{14}

Enclosure was brought about by economic necessity: the rapid population increase demanded more efficiency in the growing of food. However, through enclosure many subsistence farmers lost their rights to graze their animals and could no longer provide for their families. Many people were thereby driven to the towns.

Traill wrote that the first half of the eighteenth century was "on the whole a stationary era."\textsuperscript{15} The reigns of Queen Anne and King George I were years in which the "old way of life for peasant and craftsman was still carried on."\textsuperscript{16} Life was very "local" in emphasis since most roads were often impassable. Only tradesmen risked regular travel since highwaymen still existed in great

\textsuperscript{13}Enclosure was the practice of fencing-in public or common waste land or forest areas for agricultural purposes.


numbers and smuggling flourished around the coasts. It took two weeks to travel from London to Edinburgh by road, a distance of 390 miles.\textsuperscript{17} The village was thus the centre of most people's interest and the community was quite a self-contained unit producing enough for its own needs and having its own hierarchy from squire to peasant.

Most working-class people took their exercise as a matter of course during the day either in walking to their place of employment, or on the job itself, for example, in tilling the soil. Among the upper class, riding was the most common activity of the day.\textsuperscript{18}

Only in 1736 was the law repealed concerning the burning of witches but other "crimes" continued to be punished severely. For example, many people were hanged for petty theft, and public executions were commonplace. In 1722, the death penalty existed for such crimes as horse stealing, wounding cattle and unlawfully cutting down trees.\textsuperscript{19} Despite the above, the key to the age was peace in society.\textsuperscript{20} This is not to say that all was

\textsuperscript{18}Trevelyan, op. cit., p. 317.
\textsuperscript{19}Harris, op. cit., p. 211.
considered right with the country. Morals were poor and
drunkenness was widespread. For these reasons in
particular, a strong evangelical movement was begun by
Wesley in 1739, and in 1788 the Proclamation Society was
founded specifically to stamp out gambling, drinking,
course behaviour, cruelty and sabbath violations.21 It was
the beginning of the new morality of the later Victorian
era. The influence of the evangelicals came from the
upper class and spread to the working class. The country
"wakes"22 were seen by the evangelicals to be dens of
iniquity.23 There can be little doubt that the evangelical
movement helped to weaken many customs, such as wakes and
fairs for example, from the 1730's onwards. The influence
of this movement grew over the next one hundred years,
culminating in neo-Puritan sabbath strictness.24

Excessive drinking was caused, in part, because
ale was the most common drink of all classes and both

21 Harris, op. cit., p. 223.

22 Wakes were, and are, an annual community
festivity celebrated by much merry-making. They had a
religious foundation and were the occasion of a local
holiday. Often a fair was held.

23 R. Rees, "The Development of Physical Recreation
in Liverpool During the Nineteenth Century" (M.A. thesis,
University of Liverpool, 1968), p. 17.

24 Robert W. Malcolmson, Popular Recreations in
English Society, 1700 - 1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge
sexes, the water being generally unfit for human consumption. In this way the public houses of the villages became the centre of many activities, not the least of which were recreations. By 1834 there was estimated to be one public house for every twenty families.\textsuperscript{25} At this time, rum cost \( \frac{4}{3} \)d. a glass, as did gin, and beer was 5d. a quart.\textsuperscript{26} It was usual for men, women and children of the working classes to spend considerable time in the public houses. Indeed, workers often received their wages in such places thus further encouraging the public house to be the centre of many activities.\textsuperscript{27}

By the mid eighteenth century the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution were evident. Whole new industrial transport routes were built, such as the Bridgewater Canal, which was completed in 1759, connecting Worsley (Lancashire) and Manchester.

Despite the changes in many sectors of society, the London world of the 1760's and 1770's was one of


\textsuperscript{26}An old penny (d.) was one two-hundred-and-fortieth of a pound; now replaced by the decimal new penny (p.) one hundredth of a pound.

\textsuperscript{27}Allan, op. cit., pp. 65, 66.
perhaps surprising ignorance. There was only one daily paper, *The London Gazette*, and only one daily magazine, *The Spectator*. Only three thousand copies of the latter were ever printed daily.28

By the end of the eighteenth century, seventy-eight percent of the population still lived in the country but the movement to the towns had begun. Initially, the Industrial Revolution brought rejoicing amongst some of the working class for whom it brought a sudden increase in prosperity. Very soon, however, the squalor of the cities became apparent and their happiness was turned to misery and wretchedness on a greater scale than in their former agricultural lives. Living conditions for many poor town dwellers were back-to-back terraced houses, hastily erected, with several families living in one damp, windowless cellar. Since work usually began at 6 A.M., the family would rise at 4 or 5 A.M. and work did not cease for many until 8 P.M.29 In the 1820's and 1830's, many women and children worked a seventy-two hour week in the northern textile factories.30


29 Allan, op. cit., pp. 4, 13 and 14.

A beginning of the break down of law and order in cities led to the first official police force being formed in London in 1829. Around this time there was a succession of serious riots, brought on by poor harvests or by harsh working conditions.\textsuperscript{31}

By 1841, the average life expectancy (at birth) was forty years for men and forty-two years for women, although of course for a large section of the population it was much lower.\textsuperscript{32} Prevailing medical conditions were such that there was a constant threat of illness and this was greatest in the oppressive surroundings of the rapidly growing towns.\textsuperscript{33}

One of the results of the Industrial Revolution and the consequent improvements in communications was that the village was no longer the centre of most people's experience, and events such as sporting matches ceased to be of purely local significance.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31}For example, in 1816 the Luddites destroyed machinery at their places of work, attributing their misery to it. In 1819, in Manchester, the Peterloo massacre occurred when a large group of unemployed people demonstrated and were killed in a charge by the Hussars.


\textsuperscript{34}George M. Trevelyan, English Social History (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942), p. 503.
For the upper class, life and living conditions were naturally very different from the above. It had only been in the early 1700's that the influence of the royal Court had begun to decline. Dancing masters remained common amongst the so-called "leisured classes" for some time to come, reflecting a very different view of what was important in life from that held by the working class. Indeed dancing was one of the few activities that continued throughout the period under review, and it was popular with all classes, although rarely attended by them all at the same event.

Wealthy families would ostentatiously employ excessive numbers of servants, leaving even more leisure time to themselves. The really wealthy had both a town and a country house with much free time to be disposed of at each. In the towns, the "coffee house" era began for the upper class and news was spread through these meeting places. London had between two and three hundred such places at the opening of the eighteenth century.
For the upper class the eighteenth century was a period of art and elegance, it was the time of Handel and Wordworth, of Johnson, Turner and Hogarth—the age of the artist and the romantic:

If the England of the Eighteenth Century, under aristocratic leadership, was a land of art and elegance, its social and economic structure was assistent thereto. As yet there was no great development of factories, producing goods wholesale, ruining craftsmanship and taste, and rigidly dividing employers from employed.  

Possibly the greatest contrast of lifestyle was between that of upper- and lower-class women. The former was born to a life of leisure and ease: "for it was a status symbol for a man to be able to show off his wife's life of leisure, the work being done by a variety of servants." The latter were often engaged in very hard physical labour—a woman in domestic service, for example, would work twelve or more hours a day, for which £12 per annum was considered a good wage. John Ashton, a noted Victorian antiquary, wrote that the physical sturdiness of


37 Ibid., p. 43.
working-class women was considerable, such that more than a few disguised themselves and enlisted as soldiers or sailors. This physical make-up obviously had much effect on their recreation pursuits, making such activities perhaps more vigorous than might have been imagined. Indeed, one of the greatest differences between upper- and lower-class women, even more than between men, was their use of leisure time in sport and recreation activities.

In the 1830's, the new railways and turnpike roads began to alter the local nature of life for more people so that their experiences had wider boundaries. At the same time, this and the following decade were probably the darkest for the working class, for "in these decades an older, pre-industrial culture broke up, leaving amid its wreckage many of the people's traditional recreations." This social change brought about by the Industrial Revolution is probably the single most important reason for the apparently rapid decline in sport and recreation in mid century for both women and men of the working class. Later, in the 1860's and beyond, a new pattern of popular sport and recreation emerged. This pattern has been so well documented that there is a tendency today to call the

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sports developed in the later half of the century "traditional". If anything, however, the sports played before this time have a more just claim to being termed "traditional", having been played for several hundred years. It is sometimes thought that women (of the upper class) first participated in games and sports towards the end of the nineteenth century, whereas in reality they were the first to participate only in the new activities, and on a larger and more regular scale.

Between 1830 and 1840, a host of books were published on the topic of the place of women in society. This was probably because society had changed so quickly that there was room for considerable doubt in the matter. Additionally, with the rise of the new middle class came a group of women who were not born into homes where they assimilated their future role as ladies but who had, by their husbands' money, arrived at a level approaching gentility; these women both needed and wanted to be instructed in how to act in a manner appropriate to their

new social position. The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits, first published in 1838, was specifically written for middle-class women wanting to learn this.\textsuperscript{41} The role of men has generally been much more clear. The confusion over women's roles was doubtless another reason why their participation in sport was then at a very low level. After the end of the battle of Waterloo in 1815 the dangers of effeminacy for men were felt: participation in sport was offered to them as an antidote. This only applied to upper-class men who would otherwise have had virtually no strenuous activity. Hard physical work was as foreign to them as it was a fact of life to the working class.

For the working classes who had moved to the towns by the mid nineteenth century, the flexible timetable of the countryside had been replaced by a rigid work routine in which Sunday was the only day on which recreation was possible, and was also the only day on which recreation was forbidden due to the strict laws relating to the observance of the sabbath. (The Lord's Day Observance Society had been founded in 1831.) In case workers were tempted to play sports on Sundays, factory owners

patronized local Sunday schools. The owners hoped that these institutions would instill the virtues of punctuality, discipline, diligence, sobriety and thrift.\textsuperscript{42} The large number of feast and holy days, closely bound up with the agricultural calendar, had no relevance to an increasingly industrialized society and the number was steadily reduced, as the following figures indicate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of days per annum the Bank of England was closed for &quot;holidays&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1761</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1808</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only in the late 1840's did early closing on Saturdays bring back to some of the working class an opportunity for recreation and sport.\textsuperscript{43}


\textsuperscript{43}Kenneth Allan, "The Recreations and Amusements of the Industrial Working Class in the Second Quarter of the Nineteenth Century, with Special Reference to Lancashire" (M.A. thesis, University of Manchester, 1947), p. 23.
The role of women in society was one very much subservient to men and until quite late in the nineteenth century, women were seen as inferior to men in everything, including leisure.\textsuperscript{44} There were few women in any position of note until the end of the eighteenth century when women began to write and publish books and magazine articles, using their own names rather than male pseudonyms. Indeed, modern feminism is sometimes dated from the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's \textit{A Vindication of the Rights of Women} in 1792 but the work was soon forgotten.\textsuperscript{45} The first women's magazine was published in Britain in 1693--\textit{The Ladies' Mercury}--but not until the late 1700's did such magazines become commonplace, with over thirty-five different titles for women published during the century.\textsuperscript{46} This could not be called emancipation but it did show the recognition of a market.

The amount that women could participate in recreation and sport, and in which activities, was thus largely determined by two factors: class and dwelling

\textsuperscript{44} Philip M. Wadsworth, "Leisure Pursuits in Nineteenth Century Bath" (M.A. thesis, University of Kent, 1975), p. 42.

\textsuperscript{45} Mary Wollstonecraft, \textit{A Vindication of the Rights of Women}, J. Johnson (1792; rpt. London: Walter Scott, 1891).

place. Brailsford held the view that "if the educated gentlewoman could have a little physical activity, doubtless her untutored sister could have much more." 47 In the following chapters it is suggested that, for some women, there were several opportunities for sports participation, but that the degree was limited by class and place of abode. Rarely, if ever, did working-class and upper-class women mix for recreation, nor did they often even take part in the same activities. In this way sport and society mirrored one another. Before the Industrial Revolution it is likely that the working-class woman participated more regularly, and certainly more vigorously, than the upper-class lady. After this great social upheaval, however, the upper-class lady had more time to participate than women of the working class. Working-class women thus shared the same fate as did men in that the sport of both sexes virtually vanished as a result of the country's transformation. Sports participation among upper-class ladies declined at the same time, but this was due to the vagaries of fashion rather than to economic necessity.

CHAPTER III

THE SPORTS AND RECREATIONS OF WORKING-CLASS WOMEN,
1700 - 1850, IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AND IN THE TOWNS

The sports and recreations in which women of the working class were found to be active included cricket, stoolball, trapball, football, golf, foot races, contests of strength, dancing, pugilism, rowing and swimming. This chapter contains detailed references to each of these activities and ends with some conclusions about the sports and recreations of working-class women.

At the start of the eighteenth century society was rigidly divided into those of the working class and those of the upper class. The majority of the population belonged to the former and most of them lived in the country. Their sports and recreations were like much of their daily lives: traditional, physically demanding, ruled by the agricultural calendar and poorly organized.

Rural recreations were practised on holidays, at fairs and at wakes. Some typical activities from these occasions included football, wrestling, cricket, racing on
foot, dancing and stoolball.  

Every fair had its own special contests and the rules of each activity were very local. Gambling and drinking played a large part in many of the activities, most of which were for men, but women had some contests that were exclusively their own. Large crowds often attended these sporting events and there can be little doubt that at many their was an air of exhibitionism.

The working classes were excluded by law from taking part in some rural or "field" sports, notably from hunting in all its forms. There were various Game Laws enacted by Parliament, the purposes of which were to ensure that only the upper class participated. The act of 1671 declared that only the landed classes were permitted to hunt game and in 1692 the working classes were further excluded from all hunting, hawking, fishing and fowling.  

These laws were not abolished until 1831.

The places used by the working class for sport and recreation were not permanent but were set up for the fair or holiday on the village green or in a field. The

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1 Other common activities were the various types of animal baiting--cock fighting and bull running, for example. Although important to the total picture of rural recreation, they were not included in this study because they did not involve people in physical exertion.

organization of such events was carried on in oral tradition, so that there are relatively few written records. Thus it might seem that the activities could quickly be lost or swept away since there was so little of their organization that was tangible. In fact, the opposite was true and it was shown that the traditions living in the people's hearts died hard and resisted change. Few sports survived the journey to the towns, however, and it will be seen that most of the working-class recreations were essentially rural pastimes.

The remainder of this chapter contains an examination of the sports and recreations in which women of the working class engaged. The different activities are examined separately and chronologically within each sport or recreation type.

**Cricket**

The origins of the game of cricket are vague but a form of cricket is thought to have been played in 1300 by the prince who later became King Edward I. Despite this early aristocratic reference, Brookes divided his history of cricket into five stages, naming the pre-1660 game the folk game, and the 1660 - 1830 game that of the aristocracy and gentry.⁢ The women's game appeared to

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follow the same general pattern in that it was played first by the working class and later taken up by the upper class, but both these occurred at later dates respectively. Brookes also wrote that in the folk game era, cricket would sometimes be played by an entire community, women as well as men, the old as well as the young.

Cricket has always been organized on a county basis and the earliest record of a men's county match comes from 1728 when Kent beat Sussex. However, there are records of earlier, less organized, men's cricket matches. In 1745, only seventeen years later, and in the same week as Bonnie Prince Charlie landed in Scotland in his quest for the English throne, came the first women's cricket match to be recorded. In keeping with Brookes' hypothesis, the first known women's game was played by the working class, and ladies of the upper class did not begin to play until the late 1770's (see Chapter IV).

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On August 5, 1745, the following report appeared in a local newspaper:

The greatest cricket-match that ever was played in the South part of England was on Friday, the 26th of last month, on Gosden Common, near Guildford, in Surrey, between eleven maids of Bramley and eleven maids of Hambleton [Hambledon], dressed all in white. The Bramley maids had blue ribbons and the Hambleton maids red ribbons on their heads. The Bramley girls got 119 notches and the Hambleton girls 127. There was of bothe sexes the greatest number that ever was seen on such an occasion. The girls bowled, batted, ran and caught as well as most men could do in that game.  

A return match was scheduled for August 6, but no report of it is known to exist. From the above report it seems that such matches were probably not uncommon. Since the Hambledon club was the first known cricket club for men, it is not surprising that the first record of women playing should be from the same area. Although the men's club was controlled by wealthy patrons, the outstanding players were village craftsmen and small-holding farmers. The women's team was probably likewise drawn from the working class. The evidence for this comes from a consideration of the context in which the game was played, and also from the use of particular words in this, and other, reports. The players were usually referred to as


"women," "girls," "maids," "lasses" or "females." Only in the latter half of the century were there any reports of "ladies" playing. It seems from the number of spectators that this game met with general approval.

The relatively widespread nature of the phenomenon of women's cricket in mid century may be assumed from a 1747 reference to women's teams from the villages of Westdean and Chilgrove combined, and Charlton (all in Sussex) being invited to play at the famous Artillery Ground, Finnsbury, London (which is still in use). This ground was used for the most prestigious men's matches and the invitation would doubtless have been viewed as present-day women cricketers see the chance to play at Lord's: a rare honour. Entrance fees to men's matches there were 2d. but for this special match the cost was raised to 6d., perhaps because of the novelty of women playing there. All did not quite go according to plan, however, for the gambling element—so important at so many games of the

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period, men's cricket included—attracted a large mob which got out of hand. Things got so bad that:

the company broke in, so that it was impossible for the game to be played out, and some of them [the players] being very much frightened, and others hurt, it could not be finished till this morning....

The spectators were requested not to walk "within the ring," or onto the playing area but were allowed to see the conclusion of the match without further payment:

All gentlemen and ladies who have paid to see this match....shall have the liberty of the ground to see it finished, without any other charge. And in the afternoon they will play a second match in the same place, several large sums being depending. The women of the Hills of Sussex will be in orange, and those of the Dales in blue: wickets to be pitched at 1 o'clock, and begin at 2. Tickets to be had at Mr. Smith's.

Although special coloured clothes were worn, the fact that we are not told in any more detail about their apparel suggests it was that normally worn by the women of that time: full length skirts. Another point to be noted is that this game was played on a Monday and Tuesday, and the 1745 game on a Friday, indicating that the women could have time off from their labours to play.

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8General Advertiser, op. cit., p. 15.
9Ibid. Mr. Smith was the groundsman, organizer and opportunist entrepreneur.
From 1765 comes the following, typical account:

A few days since, a cricket match was played at Upham, Hants, by eleven married against eleven maiden women, for a large plum-cake, a barrel of ale and regale of tea, which was won by the latter. 10

It was typical because the idea of "married" against "single" was commonly used to divide both men's and women's teams, and the winners of both often received some sustenance as a reward. Simri noted that this arrangement of teams was common in several cultures and was connected with ancient fertility rites. 11

In 1768, by which time the above fixture had become an annual event, another encounter was a series of three games. The series was between women from Harting, Sussex, and Rogate, Sussex, and they "afforded infinite diversion to a numerous concourse of people, and performed their several parts with alacrity and courage." 12 The second match was watched by nearly two thousand spectators and the third by nearly three thousand although these figures should be treated as rough estimates. 13

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13 Ibid.
In 1772 further evidence of the ability of at least some female cricketers came from the poet laureate of the time, Robert Southey. He noted that eleven women from Hampshire would play twice the number of men for £500, and it was “not a little singular [that] the odds... are already considerable in favour of the female professors of that noble exercise.”

A six-a-side game was reported in 1775 as follows:

On August 3rd [a Thursday] an extraordinary match was played at Moulsey Hurst (Surrey) between six unmarried against the same number of married women; and was won by the former, though one of the latter ran seventeen notches. There were great bets depending.

One is left to wonder if it was the fact of women playing or the six-a-side nature of the game that was extraordinary.

Several more village women's cricket games were recorded in the 1770's. One notable feat was the first recorded century by a woman which was made by a Miss S. Norcross, who made 107 runs for the Maids of Surrey against the Married XI, on Friday, July 11, 1788.

Young girls of the working class played cricket as well as older women, and the following extract does

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much to illuminate the local nature of so much of life and sport in the eighteenth century:

A very curious match of cricket was played [in 1792] by eleven girls of Rotherby, Leics., against an equal number of Hoby, on Thursday on the feast week. The inhabitants of all the villages adjacent were eager spectators of this novel and interesting contest; when after a display of astonishing skill and activity, the palm of victory was obtained by the fair maids of Rotherby. There are about ten houses in Rotherby and near sixty in Hoby; so great a disproportion affords matter of exultation to the honest rustics of the first-named village. The bowlers of the conquering party were immediately placed in a sort of triumphant car, preceded by music and flying streamers and thus conducted home by the youth of Rotherby, amidst the acclamations of a numerous group of pleased spectators. 17

The spectacle of girls playing cricket was perhaps a new one to the writer of the article but since a player does not become skilful at the complex game of cricket without much practice it could not have been an uncommon event.

The women of Bury, Sussex were perhaps one exception to the parochiality of sport in general, and women's sport in particular. They issued many challenges to any team, male or female, and became famous over much of England. One measure of the extent of their fame, and also a contributor to it, can be found in no less a

17 Sporting Magazine (no date given) cited in Flint and Rheinberg, op. cit., p. 18.
national newspaper than *The Times*, in which was printed
the following report in 1793, the third year of the
newspaper's existence:

A match of cricket was played last week on Bury
Common...by females, the married women against the
maidens [italics in the original]; it was won by
the married women, who had 80 notches more than the
ymphs. So famous are the Bury women at this game,
that they have challenged all England.  

By the turn of the century the effects of the
Industrial Revolution were beginning to be felt by village
cricket, men's and women's. "Ladies" of the leisured
class began to play in private more than "women" of the
working class played in public, for the latter no longer
had the time. The decline of men's village cricket, which
occurred for the same reasons as in the women's game, was
mourned by Mary Mitford in a chapter devoted to "A Country
Cricket Match" in her book, *Our Village*. This delightful
vignette of the essential nature of the village game
recalls the intense pride the country people had in their
local heroes.  

Ashton mentioned that at this same time,
the turn of the century, many newspaper reports of men's
cricket revealed that playing for money, and betting
amongst the spectators had gained an importance greater
than the intrinsic value of the game.  

\[\text{\footnotesize 18} \] \text{The Times [London], June 20, 1793, p. 3, col. 1.}

\[\text{\footnotesize 19} \] \text{Mary R. Mitford, *Our Village: Sketches of Rural
Character and Scenery* (London: Bell and Daldry, 1865).}

\[\text{\footnotesize 20} \] \text{John Ashton, *England 100 Years Ago* (London:
T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), p. 317.}
little doubt that after 1800 came a growing trend towards "spectacle, exhibitionism and gambling."21

The rural game had not quite died, however. In 1811 was played a women's game, between Hampshire and Surrey, so celebrated that a well-known artist of the time, Rowlandson, depicted it (see Plate I), and the most famous sports writer of the time, Pierce Egan, wrote of it. A second, and slightly different report, in the Monthly Magazine and British Register, provides an opportunity for a comparison of sources, but it is likely that only Egan's is a primary source. Although he did not publish his account until 1832 (twenty-one years after the event), it seems reasonable to assume Egan witnessed the game since he lived in the vicinity, and it was his wont to attend a

variety of sporting events and record them. He wrote as follows:

**Extraordinary Female Cricket Match**

In a field belonging to Mr. Story, at the back of Newington Green, near Ball's Pond, Middlesex, on Wednesday, October 2, 1811, this singular performance, between the Hampshire and the Surrey Heroines (twenty-two females) commenced at eleven o'clock in the morning. It was made by two noblemen, for 500 guineas a side. The performers in this contest were of all ages and sizes, from fourteen to sixty [italics in the original], the young had shawls, and the old long cloaks. The Hampshire were distinguished by the colour of true blue, which was pinned in their bonnets, in the shape of the Prince's plume. The Surrey were equally as smart, their colours were blue, surmounted with orange. The latter eleven consisted of Ann Baker (sixty years of age, the best runner and bowler on that side)...

(The names of all players on each side are then listed.)

Very excellent play took place on Wednesday; one of the Hampshire lasses made forty-one innings [sic] before she was thrown out; and, at the conclusion of the day's sport, the Hampshire were 81 a-head. The unfavourableness of the weather prevented any more sport that day, though the ground was filled with spectators. On the following day, the Surrey lasses kept the field with great success; and on Monday, the 7th, being the last day to decide the contest, an unusual assemblage of elegant persons were on the ground. At three o'clock the match was won by the Hampshire lasses, who not being willing to leave the field at so early an hour, and having won by only two innings, they played a single game, in which they were also successful. Afterwards they marched in triumph to the Angel, Islington, where a handsome entertainment had been provided for them by the Noblemen that made the match.22

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PLATE I

RURAL SPORTS OR A CRICKET MATCH
EXTRAORDINARY — ROWLANDSON
The caption reads:
On Thursday October 3rd, 1811, a Singular Cricket Match took place at Balls Pond Newington. The Players on both sides were 22 Women, 11 Hampshire against 11 Surrey. The Match was made between Two Amateur Noblemen of the respective Counties for 500 Guineas a side. The Performers in the Contest were of all ages and sizes. The flag reads: Jolly Cricketers.
(By permission of Marylebone Cricket Club)
The Monthly Magazine and British Register's report differed in two respects: there was a slight discrepancy in the ages of the players, and the "combatants" wore "loose trowsers with short fringed petticoats descending to the knees and light flannel waistcoats with sashes round the waist."²³ Rowlandson's cartoon, on the other hand, depicts the players with their skirts tucked up to facilitate running, and players of the same team are wearing different coloured dresses. Perhaps there were variations in dress from day to day of this three-day match. Whatever the differences in minor details, this is the first recorded time that women represented their counties, and not just villages. To judge from the picture and the account, there were numerous spectators of both social classes, and both sexes. Although Egan referred to the event as "extraordinary" and "singular," the fact that this sports writer also commented upon the great skill of the players indicates that they were well practised, and therefore that this was no isolated event.

In 1822, another women's game was widely reported. The following extract came from a sporting journal published in the same year as the event which formed a part of the history of sport for that year. Reference was made to the fact that often sporting events were not

isolated but combined one with another, in this case, cricket and smock racing (see pages 60-66).

An extraordinary match, which excited considerable attraction, was played, on Wednesday, August 28, on Ganderstown, near Alresford [Hampshire]. Carriages of every description, and even wagons, were put in requisition on the occasion. The players on both sides were twenty-two women [italics in the original]—eleven single of Cheriton and Beauroth [both in Hampshire], and the like number of married women of Cheriton. The performers in the contest were of all ages and sizes, and were generally distinguished by the names of pinks and blues, the single wearing pink, and the married blue ribbons. Much good play was shown on both sides, and particularly by the pinks, who won the match by 118 runs....Certain prizes were afterwards given for girls to run for, which occasioned much mirth. The slippery state of the weather, no doubt, prevented many from attending, though it was supposed there were upwards of 1000 spectators at these sports....

A return match was held twelve days later, by which time the "report of this contest [had] spread far and wide, and excited such intense interest that the roads were literally crammed and covered with crowds hastening to the expected scene of enjoyment...." The heroines of the game were a Miss Budd and a Miss Stonen whose "scientific play and manly exertions [italics in the original]...have seldom been exceeded by many of the bolder sex!" The use of the word "manly" reveals perhaps something of a judgemental

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
attitude towards women playing, something not detected in earlier reports, but an attitude increasingly present from this time on as the moral tone of society changed. There are also indications that the sports had begun to descend to exhibitionism since the writer mentioned the "mirth occasioned among the spectators" and the "delight of the favoured swains." Once again, the single women won and challenged any eleven in Hampshire. The report concluded that close by there were "females of cricketing celebrity, who, if the festivities of harvest-home, and the lateness of the season did not prevent them, would fearlessly take up the challenge." This clearly shows that it was females of the working class—farm workers—who made up such teams.

In 1823 the "progress" of the Industrial Revolution can be detected in an account of a women's cricket match. Another "married" versus "single" encounter was played at Buckland, Kent, but what made it noteworthy was that it was between teams of women employed in the local paper mill. It could perhaps thus be termed the first match between women's industrial teams. As was usual, after the game

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28 Ibid.
29 Kentish Gazette [Canterbury], August 8, 1823, p. 4, col. 4.
the players adjourned to a public house for supper and dancing. This indicates that perhaps the game was played in the evening, after work, for it took place on a Monday. Such an explanation is more likely than the players having had time off from work. It is also possible that the women simply absented themselves from work; absenteeism was a major problem in the early days of industrialization. Nevertheless, there must have been few workers so situated that they were employed in industry yet able to play sports needing open space in the adjacent countryside.

From all these references it can be concluded that cricket matches for women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were not uncommon. They were seemingly truly competitive, with not a small degree of skill, and were good humoured affairs. Many spectators attended some of the matches, but by the early 1830's the reception given such events was no longer generally favourable, as the following report indicates:

"...last week, at Sileby [Nottinghamshire] feast, the women so far forgot themselves as to enter upon a game of cricket, and by their deportment, as well as their frequent applications to the tankard, they rendered themselves objects such as no husband, brother, parent or lover could contemplate with any degree of satisfaction." 30

The consumption of large quantities of alcohol at such matches was nothing new, but the tone in which the whole affair was greeted revealed the loftiness which "anticipated Victorian prurience and seemed an age away from the high spirits of earlier years."  

One or two further matches showed a tradition fighting to stay alive but these, too, reflected the changing society. In 1835, The Times reported a game at Walham, near London, between married and single women which "occasioned considerable amusement." The teams played for £10 and a hot supper. Play took place on the village green and was watched by "a vast assemblage of persons...amongst whom were a number of the most respectable inhabitants," as though this were something of a surprise. Perhaps the players showed more exhibitionism than skill, and that was why it was both amusing to the onlookers and shocking that "respectable" people attended.

In 1838, two teams of female hay-makers played the last game of cricket in which women are known to have participated for another fifty years. (When women again took up the game, at the close of the nineteenth century, it was played only by the leisured, upper-class ladies, and at first, not in public.) This game took place on a

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32 *The Times* [London], September 19, 1835, p. 2, col. 5.
Saturday at Eastmeon, Hampshire, and the teams represented their respective employers, which was a new turn. The teams were apparently well matched and "a deal of science was shown on both sides. The principal farmers and inhabitants attended..."33 The match ended in a tie and a rematch was scheduled, but this either went unreported or did not take place.

The fact that no women's games of cricket were found after 1838 indicates that the women of the working class who would have played such a protracted type of game no longer were given the time to do so, due to increasingly mechanically-based jobs, and profit-conscious employers. Nor was there any space for such a pursuit in the crowded industrial towns. Furthermore, the moral tone of the country, aided by the evangelical movement, had changed so that even working-class women doubtless felt the pressures against participation, had they had the time.

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Other Ball Games for Women
(stoolball, trapball, football and golf)

To judge by the number of references to it, cricket was certainly the most popular game by far amongst the rural working class for both women and men. There were, however, several other popular ball games including stoolball, trapball, football and golf.

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33 The Hampshire Independent, Isle of Wight and South of England Advertiser [Southampton], July 28, 1838, p. 3, col. 1.
Stoolball was played mostly in Sussex and the south-east of England. It was similar in form to cricket and was often played by women's or by mixed teams. The word "stool" was Sussex dialect for "stump" and a tree-stump sometimes represented the target. The object of the game was for the bowler to throw the ball underhand, trying to hit the target of a stool or a tree-stump. A batter defended the target, either bare-handed or with a short-handled bat. The player accumulating the most hits before being either caught out, or having her "stool" hit, was the winner. It was mostly played at Shrovetide (the days on and before Shrove Tuesday, therefore in late February/early March), as were many ball games, being somehow connected with the rites of spring and the approach of Lent. A custom associated with these games was the giving of "ball-money," which was defined in a 1676 dictionary as money "given by a new bride to her old Play-fellows," which indicates a tradition of young women participating in ball games. Three references to stoolball in the twenty-five years before the start of

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35 Carol Hackman, "Influential Factors in the Development of Sport for Women," *Physical Education Review, I* (Spring, 1978), 42.

the eighteenth century leave no doubt that it was a mixed activity. In 1677, this verse was published:

Young men and maids,
Now very brisk,
At barley-break and 37
Stool-ball frisk.

Barley-break was a running game in which the object was to tag other players.

In 1679 came another reference, and this not only indicated that both sexes played, but also that the season for play was Easter:

At stool-ball, Lucia, let us play,
For sugar, cakes, or wine.
Or for a tansy let us pay,
The loss be thine or mine.
If thou, my dear, a winner be
At trundling of the ball,
The wager thou shall have, and me
And my misfortunes all. 38

Tansy cakes contained bitter herbs and were eaten at Easter. Even the clergy joined in these games for tansy cakes. 39

38 Ibid.
39 Henry Bourne, Antiquitates Vulgares, or the Antiquities of the Common People (Newcastle: J. White, 1729), p. 197.
By 1694, the stoolball season appeared to have shifted to the summer, but it was clearly still a game for young country folk:

Down in a vale, on a summer's day,  
All the lads and lasses met to be merry;  
A match for kisses at stool-ball to play,  
And for cakes and ale, and cider and perry. 40

Unlike cricket, stoolball seems not to have been confined to the south of England at this time. In 1715, a man living a few miles north of Liverpool recorded the following in his journal:

The Young Folks of this Town had a Merry-Night ...the Young Weomen treated the Men with a Tandsey as they had lost to them at a game at [sic] Stoole Balle. (May 14, 1715)41

In 1740, stoolball and barley-break were still popular, and remained a feature of the English countryside that poets felt moved to describe:

Much time is wasted now away,  
At pigeon-holes, and nine-pin play,  
Whilst hob-nail Dick, and simp'ring Frances  
Trip it away in country dances;  
At stool-ball and at barley break,  
Wherewith they harmless pastime make. 42


It is interesting that most of the references found to stoolball should be in verse. They are perhaps rather idealised accounts which should not be taken too literally. What they do indicate is that stoolball was a favourite game amongst young people, perhaps because it was most often played with mixed teams. Unlike cricket, no bat was usually used, so that the village girls were wont to "gall their hands with stool-ball."  

Trapball was a ball and stick game in which the ball was projected into the air by means of a balance mechanism and hit on its descent. Fielders tried to catch the ball, while the batter attempted to run around the prescribed area. It was reported as an annual activity in Bury St. Edmund's, Suffolk. Like other ball games, it was played at specific religious festivals, in this case, Shrove Tuesday, Easter Monday and during Whitsuntide. The players of this match were twelve old women, six a side, who played with "the greatest spirit and vigour until sunset." One woman, named Gill, was over sixty years old. Since the players were all old, one may perhaps assume that this was the end of an old tradition, with probable religious significance, that was being played out.

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45 Hone, op. cit., p. 430.
Football was another game especially linked with Shrovetide. It was often played by huge teams, one village against another, in which men, women and children all joined. In Chester women had their own game, and in Scarborough a game was played on the sands by both sexes and all ages. Coloured balls, and sticks were used, the object being to kick or drive the ball into the sea, while the other team attempted to stop them.

Wales and Scotland both appear to have been strongholds of football. In many Welsh villages men played, but in South Cardiganshire women joined in. Around 1806, the population of this area, male, female, rich, poor, of opposing parishes turned out on Christmas Day to play vigorous football games. The parishes of Cellan and Pencarreg had particularly bitter conflicts, for there "the men threw off their coats and waistcoats and women their gowns, and sometimes their petticoats."

In Scotland, women played at Inveresk, near Edinburgh (and not at Inverness, as some historians have incorrectly copied). The players were fish-wives who were


used to heavy physical labour, for they often carried loads of up to 250 pounds. A contributor to a record book of the time thought that they had "singular" character and manners, which he attributed to the masculine nature of their work and play. Every Shrove Tuesday there was a "standing match at foot-ball, between the married and unmarried women, in which the former [were] always victorious." The fact that the married women always won suggests that it was perhaps not a sport in the truest sense, but rather a ritual, possibly, as Marples suggested, connected with fertility rites, in which the outcome was never in doubt.

These Scottish fisher-women also frequently played at golf (which was at that time still an exclusively Scottish game), as did the fish-wives at Musselburgh, close to Inveresk. Musselburgh Golf Club was in existence by 1774 and golf was clearly not the socially exclusive

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50 Ibid., p. 19.

game it later became in England. In the minutes of the club dated December 14, 1810, was the following entry:

The Club resolve to present by subscription a new Creel and Shawl to the best female golfer who plays on the annual occasion on 1st. Jan. next...to be intimated to the Fish Ladies by the Officer of the Club. Two of the best Barcelona silk handkerchiefs to be added to the above premium of the creel. (Alex. G. Hunter, C.)

There is evidence presented by Browning that "shawl" should read "skull", which is a small fish basket. A creel is also a type of fish basket. There can be no doubt that all the expected competitors would be fisher-women.

**Smock Races**

"Smock" races were foot races for young country women which were held at the numerous rural fairs and festivals. The word "smock" has been variously defined as being either an outer or an under garment for women. Brockett defined it as:

> the under linen of a female...There used to be frequently...smock races among the young country wenches in the North. The prize, a fine Holland chemise, was usually decorated with ribbons. The sport is still continued at Newburn, near Newcastle, on Ascension Day.

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Notes and Queries, on the other hand, defined a smock as an overall, particularly in the West Country. Presumably it was one of the many English words with considerable variation in meaning according to locality. Since many of the smock races, however, took place in the north of England, occasioned much mirth, and were considered a spectacle, it seems reasonable to assume that the women were running for some type of undergarment. They also usually ran in their underclothing. This seventeenth-century ballad describes a Yorkshire smock race:

Four Virgins that supposed were,  
A Race did run I now declare,  
Sure such a race was never seen  
As this at Temple Newsham Green:  
In half shirts, and Drawers these maids did run,  
But Bonny Nan the Race has won.  

The air of exhibitionism surrounding these races has already been alluded to, and Malcolmson was in no doubt as to the real reason for these races:

The smock races which were common at wakes and other rural gatherings could carry a sexual connotation, for the female competitors were often encouraged to come lightly clad.

The correspondent of The Spectator had the same opinion when he wrote that "nothing is more usual than for a nimble-footed Wench to get a Husband at the same time she wins a Smock." A poem published in 1714 on the subject of a smock race used the idea of the winner gaining both smock and husband, and this was the proclamation given to the crowd:

Ye virgins, that intend to try the race,
The swiftest wins a smock enrich'd with lace:
A cambrick kerchief shall the next adorn,
And kidden gloves shall by the third be worn...  

Final proof of the reason for perhaps most smock races is an undated description of a race at Maidenhead (Berkshire) which was entered by five women under the age of twenty; they were all "handsome in person, and chaste in principle; bandy legs and humped backs not being permitted to start." 

A burlesque poem about rural games in the Vale of Evesham (Worcestershire) in the mid 1700's contains a lengthy description of a smock race. The prize was a white, rich-laced smock, but the poet devoted more time to the appearance of the competitors than to the race itself.

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58 The Spectator [London], September 4, 1711, p. 2.
The race was clearly just a part of boisterous village festivities, for one of the contestants fell in a "mess of cyder and custard mix'd." It seems from the poem that the length of the race was about half a mile and there were spectators along much of the course.

In the only reference found to a smock race in a town, cricketing gentlemen in 1744 subscribed for a Holland smock of one guinea value which was to be run for in London

by two jolly wenches, one known by the name of The Little Bit of Blue (the Handsome Broom Girl) at the fag end of Kent Street, and the other, Black Bess, of the Mint. They are to run in drawers only, and there is excellent sport expected.

A smock race in the more usual setting of a village fair took place at Chesham, Buckinghamshire, in 1761, although since most of these events were celebrated annually, it should not be seen as an isolated incident. In the notice of the proceedings, alongside a cattle sale, and a men's wrestling contest, was a women's smock race for a Holland smock of half a guinea value.

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63 Northampton Mercury, July 20, 1761, p. 4, col. 1.
The distance run at these events evidently varied from about one mile to a few hundred yards. Smock races of the longer distances formed a regular part of the annual Cotswold Games (see pages 66–69). An undated reference to a shorter race of about one hundred yards describes an annual fair at Gooseberry, Essex. Another feature of this race was that only two young women ran at any one time. They ran stripped to their smocks, on the grass, for a new smock decorated with ribbons. 64

In contrast to those (male) writers who devoted so much time to the appearance of the competitors, the only reference to smock racing written by a woman (in around 1795) dismissed it simply as "women racing for under [italics in the original] garments." 65 This event was part of a rural fete at Monkton, Devon, and other "sports" included grinning through a horse's collar, sack races, catching a pig by the tail, and donkey races.

Some of the smock races were very keenly contested, as in 1822, at Wandsworth (London) fair. This race was over half a mile and it was the event to which the


reporter's "fancy was chiefly attracted." A loser "complained to the stewards of unfair play, and showed fight, but was dismissed." Another reference from the same sporting journal mentioned a damsel race for the villagers for an ornamental chemise which "afforded much amusement."

In Devonshire in the 1830's, the village fairs were attended by all classes of people, and one event was that in which "women ran for gowns, legs of mutton, and other prizes." Since this is the only reference to women running for "gowns" as distinct from "smocks," one may perhaps speculate that a change in the moral tone in this area caused the prize to be an outer, rather than an under, garment. Certainly, it was one of the avowed aims of the evangelical movement to close these village fairs and rid the country of such moral excesses. Another example of such an "excess" occurred around the same time in 1831 at Northfleet, Kent, where the winner of the smock was required to wear it publicly.

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66 The Annals of Sporting and Fancy Gazette, II (August 1, 1822), 125.
One final, undated reference mourned the passing of smock races, but left no doubt as to the reason why this had happened:

Smock racing was the practice, till very lately, in many parishes. Young girls in their teens, with nothing but a smock on, used to run a race of a hundred yards on turf, for a new one. It was a very pretty and merry sight; and the last in Kent was run only a few years ago at Chilham Castle, and was discontinued in compliance with the 'proprieties' of the age. 70

The Cotswold Games and Other Rural Games

The Cotswold Games were established, or more likely, re-established, in the early 1600's and continued until 1852, with a break during the (English) civil war era. They were (re)founded in 1611 by Robert Dover, attorney, showman and anti-Puritan, to celebrate the people's sports. The games were held annually on Whit Thursday in the Cotswold Hills, near Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire. 71

70 G. E., "Lady Smocks," Notes and Queries, 3d. series, Vol. IX (June 2, 1866), 454.

The competitors were rural, working-class people and the events were wrestling, cudgel-playing, leaping, pitching the bar, throwing the sledge and tossing the pike, plus dancing and smock racing for the women. In 1636, several poets wrote verses about the games which were published under the collective title, *Annalia Dubrensia*. Both women's smock racing and dancing were alluded to in these poems which were greatly in praise of the festival and its founder.

In 1772, Richard Graves gave details of the same gathering in later years. He recalled that:

> a proclamation was made that a Holland Shift, which was adorned with ribbons and displayed on a pole was to be run for, and six young women began to exhibit themselves before the whole assembly in a dress hardly reconcilable with the rules of decency...

Graves was actually present at these games on more than one occasion so that his account may be accepted as reasonably accurate. Many spectators attended these games, and such was also the case at the Cornish Games.

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73 *Annalia Dubrensia: Verses Upon the Yearly Celebration of Mr. R. Dover's Olimpick Games Upon Cotswold Hills* (London: Matthew Walbancke, 1636).

a similar series of games, held annually in July near Bodmin, Cornwall, which Strutt mentioned as being popular in 1750.  

Rural sports gatherings were also a feature of the English Lake District (comprised by parts of Cumberland, Westmorland and north Lancashire). Such assemblages were:

social as well as competitive. In an era of limited transport the occasional country gathering was very much of a 'day out', a meeting of a widely spread community bent upon making the most of a brief respite from toil.  

Although the most important events in these games were men's wrestling bouts of the Cumberland and Westmorland style, an advertisement for the Windermere Regatta of 1820 indicated that the following activities would be held, in addition to wrestling and boating:

A pig to be turned loose, and to be the property of him who takes it. A handsome bonnet to be run for by women. A hat to be got from the top of a pole.  

Perhaps women in these games in earlier years had run for smocks. This example of running for a less revealing article of clothing comes from but ten years before the Devonshire women ran for gowns (see p. 65).

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75 Strutt, op. cit., p. xx.  
In Scotland, the many Highland Games were attended by all classes. Men entered such events as tossing the caber, and throwing the weight, but there was no mention of any activity for women except dancing.78

Contests of Strength

Mention has already been made of the physical sturdiness of many working-class women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Much of this can be attributed to necessity in their jobs, but it was also a feature of a few of their sports.

There was a custom of "lifting" in the north of England, especially in Lancashire. On one day the men would literally lift the women, and on the next, the women lifted the men.79 This was another custom associated with a particular season—in this case with Easter—and it probably had more religious significance than sporting.

In the village of Ludlow, on the border between mid Wales and England, women regularly engaged in tugs-of-war which also are thought to have had symbolic meaning.80


Occasionally women participated in the rural sports usually reserved for men. In some places there was apparently little of the role conflict experienced today concerning women and exhibitions of strength, as the following extract shows:

The young maids...were themselves engaged in some Diversion; and upon my asking a Farmer's Son of my own Parish what he was gazing at with so much Attention, he told me That he was seeing Betty Welch, whom I knew to be his Sweet-heart, pitch a Bar.81

Pitching a bar involved throwing a long, heavy metal bar as far as possible.

Dancing

The rural working class of both sexes frequently indulged in country dancing. Usually these were purely social occasions, but sometimes other reasons were uppermost. The Maypole dancing of springtime was a traditional fertility ritual practised in all villages. The Maypole was often immensely tall, and girls and women performed circle dances around it.

81 The Spectator [London], September 4, 1711, p. 2.
Dancing was sometimes contested, as at the Cotswold Games. Smith mentioned that women dancing for prizes was quite a common feature of country festivals but gave no specific or dated examples.\textsuperscript{82}

In Scotland dancing was perhaps even more popular than in England, and "after the toils of a long day, young men and women [would] walk many miles to enjoy a dance."\textsuperscript{83}

One of the best sources for country dances is the novel, and those of Thomas Hardy are particularly rich in references. The women's club-walking and dancing in Tess of the D'Urbervilles and the many references in Under the Greenwood Tree show a way of life in which dancing for both sexes provided an important recreation and intrinsic part of life.

\textbf{Pugilism and Sword Fighting}

As the practice of duelling declined, pugilism took its place. In the early part of the eighteenth century there were no formal rules and the sport was not organized. Pugilism was one of the few sports which seemed to flourish in the towns and yet be virtually unheard of in the country.

\textsuperscript{82} Horatio Smith, Festivals, Games and Amusements, Ancient and Modern (London: Harper, 1831), p. 106.

\textsuperscript{83} Logan, op. cit., p. 303.
One of the first matters to be decided about pugilism was, according to Roberts, "which sex would dominate in the battle for the popularity the ring had to offer." An early reference to female pugilism was in London in 1722:

I, Elizabeth Wilkinson, of Clerkenwell [London], having had some words with Hannah Hyfield, and requiring satisfaction, do invite her to meet me on the stage, and box with me for three guineas, each woman holding half-a-crown in each hand, and the first woman that drops her money to lose the battle.

The answer to this challenge was:

I, Hannah Hyfield, of Newgate Market [London], hearing of the resoluteness of Elizabeth Wilkinson, will not fail, God willing, to give her more blows than words, desiring home blows, and from her no favour. She may expect a good thumping.

The contestants wore loose-fitting jackets, short petticoats, "holland drawers" and white stockings. Their fight was long and hard "to the general satisfaction of the spectators." The condition of holding the coin was presumably to preclude scratching and hair-pulling, and this was long before gloves were used.

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86 Ibid.
This fight was not an isolated event. In 1725, at Figg's Amphitheatre in Oxford Street, London (a centre for pugilism contests of all types) the male sword-fighting champion of Kent and a woman assistant together fought a pair of adversaries, with £40 to be given to the male and female who gave the most cuts with the sword, and £20 for the most blows with a quarterstaff. A ringside collection was also taken for the victors.

Women's pugilism was apparently popular enough for a champion to be announced, Mrs. Elizabeth Stokes. Roberts noted that the female champion was proclaimed at roughly the same time as the first men's champion. In 1727 the women's champion and her husband fought two Irish challengers in Islington Road, London. The weapons chosen were swords and the fight was billed as "the last time of Mrs. Stokes performing on the stage." The outcome is unknown but from the billing, the spectators were expecting to see a lot of blood flow and would have been disappointed at anything less.

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87 Warter, op. cit., p. 378.
88 Roberts, op. cit., p. 248.
89 Warter, op. cit., p. 378.
A report from *The Times* in 1805 shows that by then the sport had developed into a somewhat more organized affair. This fight took place in a ring set up in a public street in Bristol. One fighter was "Miss B****r [sic] sister to the renowned 'champion of England'"\(^90\), which implies that female pugilism was still quite commonplace. The fight was fair but severe, lasting upwards of fifty minutes. Miss B. was seconded by her mother, but lost the fight.

Only two years later another female fight was reported with some disgust. A series of men's matches took place one Sunday morning in London, and then came a women's bout. The contestants were Betty Dyson, a vender of sprats, and Mary Mahoney, a market woman. This fight was the one that "afforded the most disgust." The "Amazons" fought for over forty minutes and were both "hideously disfigured by hard blows. The contest was for five guineas."\(^91\)

The last references found to women's participation were from 1822. In London, in April, a great many people

\(^90\) *The Times* [London], September 25, 1805, p. 3, col. 2.

\(^91\) *The Times* [London], March 24, 1807, p. 3, col. 2.
went to see "Sal" and "Nan" fight over a lover. "The 'ladies' on coming up to the scratch displayed fine science, but were cautious."\textsuperscript{92} From this reference it can be seen that the women were following the accepted rules of their time. These were the Broughton Rules, which preceded the London Prize Ring Rules. Once a fighter was knocked down the round ended, and thirty seconds were then allowed for both fighters to "come up to scratch", in other words, to toe the scratch mark in the centre of the ring. Both fighters in this match had seconds and had their hair cut short just for the fight. Later in the same report came evidence of how the writer viewed the spectacle:

Round 3. This was a good manly—we beg our Readers' pardon, but we really had forgotten that we were speaking of the softer \textit{[italics in the original]} sex—a good womanly round, some tremendous blows were given and exchanged... \textsuperscript{93}

At one point, a twenty minute pause for refreshment was taken. In the twelfth round, Nancy got the upper hand, but the contest continued for six or eight more rounds until she was finally declared the winner. Both contestants then went to the local public house where they signed a treaty of peace.

\textsuperscript{92}Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle, April 7, 1822, p. 48.

\textsuperscript{93}Ibid.
Later in the same year, Martha Flaharty and Peg Carey fought for £17. 10s. in South London.\textsuperscript{94} The fight began at five-thirty A.M., presumably before work for both contestants and spectators. Flaharty had two seconds and consumed half a pint of gin before beginning to fight. The fighters were placed at the scratch mark by their seconds, and the fight lasted fourteen rounds, which took thirty-seven minutes. Peg was hit in the face and a bone was exposed, but she recovered and took the victory. Both were severely injured by the end of the fight.

Although women's pugilism met with general distaste in the nineteenth century, such events were clearly more accepted the previous century. To judge from the accounts of the fights, the times at which they took place (Sunday or early morning), and the injuries that were received, some women living in the towns were desperate for money and cared little how it was earned. In a decade when the worst ills of the Industrial Revolution were apparent in the working conditions in the towns, and many people barely made enough money to survive, "recreation" was seen as just another means to survival.

\textsuperscript{94}Pierce Egan, \textit{Anecdotes: Original and Selected of the Turf, the Chase, the Ring and the Stage} (London: Knight and Lacey, 1827), pp. 216-217.
Rowing

Only two references were found to women's rowing matches but such events were common among men who worked on the rivers. For example, the Doggett's Coat and Badge Race (named after Mr. Doggett, the founder) for male river workers dates from 1715 and is still held annually on the Thames in June.

In September, 1817, there was a female rowing match between Chelsea and Battersea, a distance of about two miles along the Thames. The competitors were six watermen's wives and the race was held in heats. The eventual winner was a mother of four, and her health was drunk amid general festivity.95

In September, 1833, a similar event was held—perhaps it was an annual occasion—by fishermen's wives and daughters. The Times reporter thought that he had never seen more people watch a rowing match ever (and by

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this time the Oxford–Cambridge University Boat Race was an annual event), but he was not in sympathy with the affair:

To attempt to describe the rowing, or to give the names of Sal This or Mary That, as they were bawled from the shore in a tone of encouragement, would be a gross insult to the understanding of our readers; but the 'lady' who wore a blue bow in her cap as large as a sunflower, and who had her garments tied round her legs by a rope, had the distinguished honour of being declared the victor. 96

Ironically it was but fifty years later that rowing was once again taken up by the female sex, this time at the other end of the social scale.

Swimming (and the Railways)

Just as the mass movement to the towns was a major factor in the decline of sport for both working-class men and women, so the means for the masses to get out of the towns was a major factor in its resurgence. In the early 1820's, for example, the seaside at Southport, Lancashire, became more easily accessible from Manchester when a canal was built. The working class of both sexes swam together there, at first, but in 1824, Southport introduced regulations governing bathing. 97 In 1825 the world's first

96The Times [London], September 4, 1833, p. 6, col. 1.

passenger railway was opened and only five years later the Liverpool and Manchester Railway opened. The first excursion to the seaside was run in 1844 from London to Brighton at Easter, and subsequently more excursion trains were run. As the price of excursion tickets dropped, increasing numbers of industrial workers began to take advantage of the opportunity to travel. This was perhaps most in evidence in the north of England. Thousands of industrial workers from the Manchester area were enabled to spend a day at the seaside, and the railways actively promoted their travel as a means to mass recreation (see Plate II). The fare of 2/6d. for men and 1/6d. for women from Manchester to Blackpool would have been affordable to most workers as an occasional treat, but until the advent of early closing, something only feasible on a Sunday. The handbill indicated that it was possible to bathe, attend a place of worship and then get the return train. Emphasising that the excursion was timed to allow for going to church before returning home doubtless somewhat lessened the wrath of the clergy over Sunday recreations.

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98 Early-closing day was, and is, the practice of shops closing for business around noon on one weekday per week so that employees had some free time. A whole town or village had the same early-closing day.
PLATE II

RAILWAY HANDBILL ADVERTISING SEA BATHING
FOR THE WORKING CLASSES, 1849
PLATE II

LANCASTHIRE & YORKSHIRE RAILWAY.

SEA BATHING FOR THE WORKING CLASSES,

ON AND AFTER SUNDAY MORNING NEXT, and on each succeeding Sunday until further notice, with a view of affording the benefit of

SEA BATHING,

A Train will leave the following Stations for FLEETWOOD AND BLACKPOOL.

FARES THERE AND BACK THE SAME DAY.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leave Manchester at</th>
<th>6 0</th>
<th>3d. Od.</th>
<th>1s. 6d.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolton at</td>
<td>6 30</td>
<td>2s. 6d.</td>
<td>1s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorley at</td>
<td>7 10</td>
<td>2s. Od.</td>
<td>1s. Od.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preston at</td>
<td>7 40</td>
<td>2s. Od.</td>
<td>1s. Od.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Arriving at Fleetwood at 9 a.m.

FROM SALFORD STATION.

MANCHESTER TO LIVERPOOL

FARES there and back same day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female &amp; Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2s. 6d.</td>
<td>1s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At 7 a.m.

BURY TO LIVERPOOL, BLACKPOOL, AND FLEETWOOD.

FARES there and back same day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female &amp; Children</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2s. 6d.</td>
<td>1s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At 6 20 a.m.

Parties availing themselves of these trains will be enabled to BATHE & REFRESH THEMSELVES in ample time to attend a Place of Worship.

These Trains will return punctually at 8 p.m., arriving at Manchester about 8 and 9 p.m.

The Tickets will take the Passenger to the above-named places for ONE FARE, but for the purpose of preventing any unnecessary confusion or BUSINESS ON THE SUNDAY, it is desirable that tickets be taken on SATURDAY EVENING.

Strickland and Blackhall, Printer, 47, Brown-street, Manchester.
Elsewhere, the London - Brighton excursion fare was five shillings in third class carriages. In this way, the working classes were able to swim in the same seaside resorts that the upper class had first patronised one hundred years earlier.

Conclusions

From the examples cited in this chapter it can be concluded that there was a range of activities in which some working-class women participated. It was not possible to determine how widespread women's involvement was but in some parts of the country much of society saw nothing unusual in some women's sports.

Most working-class women's--and men's--sports of the time were team games using a ball. Cricket was the most popular game for women by far, judging by the number of references to it. This is perhaps not surprising since it was also the most popular sport for men. It was the village game of the eighteenth century, hence virtually all villagers in certain regions would have had contact with the game. There was marked regional variation, however. The game began in the south and south-east of England and spread north quite slowly, following the same

pattern as the spread of the men's game. (See Appendix B for a map showing the spread of cricket.) Virtually all references to the game found in this study were from the counties of Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Middlesex and Hampshire.

The playing of stoolball was also concentrated in the south-east, but for much of the 1700 - 1850 period the two games were played at different times of year. Stoolball was an activity of Shrovetide while cricket was played all summer. Trapball and football were also particularly linked with Shrovetide. These three Shrovetide games eventually all showed a phenomenon noted by Hackman; that is, they were first played as a single, annual performance and the breaking away from this to a season of play was essential before women's sports could become more commonplace.  

The playing of ball games in the spring time is very old. Games have not always been played "just for fun"; they were often more important for some religious significance. Spring-time ball games thus probably date back to ancient Egyptian fertility festivals; later, they coincided with Christian festivals and were

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100 Carol Hackman, "Influential Factors in the Development of Sport for Women," Physical Education Review, I (Spring, 1978), 42.

101 Robert W. Henderson, Ball, Bat and Bishop (Detroit: Gale Research, 1974), p. 3.
incorporated by the Church into the Christian calendar, as happened with many well-established pagan rites.

After studying the religious significance of ball games, Simri concluded:

Although Shrovetide football and other seasonal games may be considered mostly as vestiges of ancient customs, the significance of which has been forgotten, there is still some evidence that the games were part of a fertility cult. Such evidence can be found in...Inverness and Musselburgh, as well as in the still existing practice which requires newlyweds to contribute balls for ball games.\(^{102}\)

Shrovetide celebrations in Britain can also be compared to Mardi Gras festivities elsewhere—a last outburst of frivolity before the solemnity of Lent.

Other games were also very regional. Golf was played only on the east coast of Scotland at several places around Edinburgh. Since golf was then only a coastal activity because it was played on "links" (rough, sandy ground found along the coast), it is not surprising that fish-wives were the earliest recorded female players. Smock racing was most commonly found in northern England although there were some examples from the south. Pugilism took place mostly in London, in an organized setting; rowing was found only in London.

Swimming in the sea occurred in the two main resort areas that had been developed by the upper class: Lancashire and the south coast. Participation in this activity was highly dependent on the development of public transport systems, and on the railways in particular.

Of almost as much interest as the references to activities in which working-class women did participate was the lack of references to other sports and recreations, indicating in which activities such women did not participate. There were three major reasons why they were not active in other sports. Firstly, there were strict laws forbidding the working class from participating in hunting activities. While there can be little doubt that these laws were broken, no reference was found to women’s participation. When the laws were repealed in 1831 there remained little threat of working-class participation in hunting because so many workers had moved to the towns. Legislation was no longer necessary to keep hunting an exclusively upper-class activity: the Industrial Revolution had dictated it.

Secondly, the poor were denied access to riding for pleasure, archery, skating, sailing and cycling because they could not afford the necessary equipment. No references to any working-class involvement in these activities were found.
Thirdly, the upper-class activities of climbing, walking, or using exercise machines were unlikely to be regarded as recreational by the working class since most were engaged in strenuous physical activity as a regular part of their daily lives.

One must assume that the women participated in the various activities because they wanted to and did not feel that it was out of place. The only possible exception to this was in pugilism which was clearly a means of financial survival for some.

Spectators at women's cricket matches were often quite numerous and some even paid on occasions. Both men and women watched the games; most were local villagers but sometimes the wealthy of both sexes attended, too. At virtually all games, men's and women's, a large section of the crowd was especially interested in the outcome as betting was very common. Towards the end of the eighteenth century and into the next, some games became more of a spectacle and less sport. Increasingly, the upper class was seen no more at such events. Eventually the tide of public opinion (at least in the higher echelons of society) turned against women's cricket and the sport was viewed unsympathetically. Spectators were either not mentioned, or were unimportant at other ball games.

The presence of (male) spectators at the smock races was clearly an integral part of the activity. It is difficult to conclude otherwise than that these races were
always of a somewhat dubious character, and that they became increasingly lewd as time went on, so much so that they were specific targets of the evangelical movement.

Spectators were very important to women's pugilism because these events were often staged in an amphitheatre where admission fees were charged. A sufficient number of fights were held to conclude that there was some public support for them, however this practice was viewed with growing disgust in the nineteenth century.

It is important to realize that the woman worker was not a product of the Industrial Revolution. Many women had worked, especially on the land, before then. It is sometimes believed that there was something idyllic about such a life but male and female agricultural workers had long, erratic hours at some seasons, involving heavy physical labour. There was some regional variation in the employment of women and Pinchbeck concluded that a higher proportion of women were employed in agricultural labour in the north and west than in the south. This helps to explain why more references were found to women's sport in the south: they generally had more leisure time.

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104 Ibid., p. 56.
Typical among the games played by working-class men in the early eighteenth century were football, wrestling, cudgel-playing, ninepins, shovelboard, cricket, stowball (probably another name for stoolball), quoits, pitching the bar and throwing at cocks. To this list should be added footracing, golf, swimming and dancing. No references were found to any women's involvement in wrestling, cudgel-playing, ninepins, shovelboard, quoits or throwing at cocks.

The development of women's cricket seems to have been closely akin to the men's game, using the same rules at comparable times, and having the same geographical spread. Both games also had irregularity in common. Sometimes several years would pass between games; there was nothing approaching the regularity of the present-day "fixture" system.

Only stoolball, swimming and dancing were regularly participated in on a mixed basis. Cricket was never a mixed sport perhaps because it was taken the most seriously by both sexes.


It was unusual for the classes to mix at women's sport activities. Three exceptions were cricket, where there is evidence that upper-class spectators were sometimes present (although there was much greater social mixing in men's cricket, even on the playing field); smock racing, where some upper-class men were occasionally present; and swimming, when towards the mid-nineteenth century there was some class mixing.

The legal barriers to the classes mixing in hunting had their unofficial counterparts in the cities. Since the population of England grew particularly fast between 1821 and 1831 (just the decade when the move to the towns was at its height) the working class was positively barred from many sports in the city by means of membership proposal and membership fees; otherwise there would not have been enough room for the upper class to participate.¹⁰⁷

Cunningham wrote in his historical analysis of leisure that "much...has been written on the assumption that what is new starts from high up the social scale and is diffused downwards."¹⁰⁸ He went on to conclude that the flow was rather in both directions. In this study only

three activities were found in which women of both classes participated—cricket, dancing and swimming—although their participation was rarely together. In the first mentioned, the working-class women played first (1745) and then the upper class (1777). In swimming, the upper-class ladies preceded the working class by about one hundred years. Dancing was practised by both classes together on very rare occasions. Since the women of different classes met infrequently, caution must be used in describing such changes as a "spread" of any women's activity. Whereas upper-class men undoubtedly played football after seeing the working class do so, the more sheltered upper-class women probably took up cricket after seeing their own men-folk play. No other working-class sport was ever played by upper-class ladies, being either too vigorous or too undignified for their needs. The women of the working class had largely their own activities, separate from the upper class.

Most of the activity in working-class women's sports was in the country and occurred in the years up to the 1830's, after which there was a rapid decline. Pinchbeck noted that in the early years of the reorganization of work patterns, many women lost their jobs and had much free time.109 This occurred around the 1780's. What

little women's sport did survive into the 1830's had mostly descended to spectacle and exhibitionism. The reasons for this decline in participation stemmed from the twin economic changes in agriculture and industry, and from the new code of moral values. More specifically, the Industrial Revolution destroyed the traditional country recreations. Whilst it is true that working-class sports were generally spontaneous and not well organized, they did need a time and a place to be played. The mass movement of the workers to the towns, and enclosure, changed the availability of these conditions.

Wadsworth gave four reasons for the "establishment" opposition to and hence the subsequent decline of working-class sport in the country, for both women and men: (1) large gatherings were seen as a source of idleness and sedition which the police were unable to deal with; (2) evangelicals taught people that they must work hard and not waste time in playing; (3) owners taught workers that time away from production was bad; and (4) leisure was often used for "evil" purposes such as gambling and exhibitionism. 110

The evangelical movement was a force in both Church of England and non-conformist churches, although it was generally stronger in the latter. Evangelicals spoke out against drunkenness, lasciviousness, cruelty and sabbath violations—among other "vices"—and worked particularly with the poor. For these reasons, the pastimes of the poor were especially attacked:

The change of feeling in the country towards worker's recreation was recorded by Hadleigh in 1844:

They [the working class] have no village green or common for active sports. Some thirty years ago ... they had a right to a playground in a particular field, at certain seasons of the year, and were then celebrated for their football; but somehow or other this right has been lost and the field is now under the plough...of late they have introduced a little cricketing and two or three of the farmers have very kindly allowed them [italics not in the original] to play in their fields.¹¹¹

Enclosure thus meant both the loss of grazing and recreation land to the working class.

Once the majority of the working class had moved to the towns, recreation and sport were no longer much in evidence. Fugilism and rowing were two exceptions to this. The primary reason for the dearth of working-class women's sports in the towns in the early nineteenth century was

that they had no time for it. A seventy-two hour working week for all, including women and children, was not uncommon in the 1820's and 1830's. Only in the 1850's did it drop to sixty hours per week.\textsuperscript{112} Factors such as these led Rees to conclude his study of recreation in Liverpool in the nineteenth century with the comment that during no other period in history did the working class have so little leisure time as in the early part of the century.\textsuperscript{113} Also of great importance in explaining the lack of working-class recreation, men's and women's, was the lack of space. Although London had green areas within the city (and some of the working class occasionally walked in Vauxhall or Ranelagh Gardens, for example\textsuperscript{114}), it was not until the 1840's that the great industrial cities of Manchester and Liverpool had parks laid out. Even then, activities were usually restricted so that ball games were not allowed, and the parks were at first closed on Sundays. The only other open spaces in towns were those belonging to the various sports clubs, particularly cricket clubs.


Membership fees were such that the working class could not join, had they otherwise been allowed.\footnote{115}{Kenneth Allan, "The Recreations and Amusements of the Industrial Working Class in the Second Quarter of the Nineteenth Century, with Special Reference to Lancashire" (M.A. thesis, University of Manchester, 1947), p. 43.}

The 1830's and 1840's were thus the low point of all working-class sport, men's and women's, rural and urban:

In these decades an older, pre-industrial culture broke up, leaving amid its wreckage many of the people's traditional recreations. Another culture formed, better adapted to the milieu of a modern urban industrial society, and by the last quarter of the century the British working class were settled into a new way of life which boasted a new range of popular recreations--music halls, association football, seaside holidays and the like--recreations which...have become so familiar to us that they have in turn come to be regarded as 'traditional'.\footnote{116}{Peter Bailey, Leisure and Class in Victorian England (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 1.}

In this study just the beginning of this "new recreation" with the growth of seaside visits and swimming for the working class has been shown.

The conditions of urban life also:

imposed a regularity of labour which was incompatible with the cyclical rhythms of the countryside. Consequently, as people migrated to the cities they were obliged to abandon those habits and practices which could not be transplanted into a radically different environment.\footnote{117}{Robert W. Malcolmson, Forular Recreations in English Society, 1700 - 1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 117.}
Unfortunately, the position in the countryside regarding women's sports was not much better because the new conservatism led to a redoubling of efforts to curb timewasting and its evils. Thus was written in 1831:

A spirit has lately arisen in the land...that instigated the magistracy and other high and influential persons, to curb, restrain and almost absolutely forbid the lowly, the humble of society from indulging in any pastimes whatsoever. 118

The decline of both men's and women's working-class sports and recreations were thus closely parallel in the nineteenth century. However, women's sport was especially badly hit because of the new morality, and also because women's sports were less commonplace than men's and their range of activities somewhat smaller to begin with. Many of the sports and recreations of working-class women were lost forever from that time except to recorded history.

CHAPTER IV

THE SPORTS AND RECREATIONS OF UPPER-CLASS WOMEN,
1700 - 1850, IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AND IN THE TOWNS

The sports and recreations in which women of the upper class were found to be active included riding, hunting, angling, shooting, archery, swimming, dancing, cricket, climbing, walking, sailing, battledore and using exercise machines. It is possible they also skated and bicycled. This chapter contains detailed references to each of these activities and ends with some conclusions about the sports and recreations of upper-class women.

Whilst it has generally been agreed that the upper-class woman was permitted fewer opportunities to engage in vigorous physical recreation than the working-class woman--because of social convention--it was also true that because she possessed both time and money, the upper-class woman could, and did, engage in a large range of socially sanctioned activities.

Many general historical sources reveal that the British upper class, for all they enjoyed the busy social round of the town, perhaps enjoyed their country life even more. It was certainly in the country that they pursued most of their sports and recreations. One measure of this enthusiasm for country activities was, and remains, the number of paintings and prints portraying the typical aristocratic rural sports of hunting, shooting and fishing. The social exclusiveness of these pastimes was preserved by the Game Laws of 1671 and 1692 which prevented the working class from taking part in any hunting, hawking, fishing or fowling.

A great number of books were published on "sport" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; they were virtually all British publications and dealt almost exclusively with men's field sports. Indeed, the word "sport" to such people had a very much more narrow

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meaning than it does now, encompassing only hunting, shooting, fishing and horse-racing. There were, additionally, numerous manuals which concentrated on the finer points of just one of these activities.

There were two major reasons why upper-class ladies had a somewhat limited involvement in sport and physical recreation: the restrictions of fashion and prevailing medical views about women's health. These two factors in turn gave rise to some widely held social conventions about what such ladies should and should not do, and could and could not do.

Ladies of the upper class were very fashion conscious between 1700 and 1850, so that one can say with some certainty that the fashions of the various times were quite generally worn. That being so, it is possible to look for direct relationships between which sports upper-class ladies participated in, and what activities the changing fashions permitted them. In the early 1700's, bustles and full skirts were in fashion. These gave way to even fuller skirts, with hoops, in mid century, and heeled and pointed-toed shoes. Neither of these fashions would permit much vigorous activity but towards the end of the century, hoops and stays were disregarded, giving much more freedom of movement. By the 1830's, however, full skirts and large hats returned to fashion and in the next few years skirts became even more full, with the crinoline
and "wasp-waist" being the height of fashion and immobility.\textsuperscript{4}

As this chapter indicates, participation in sport and physical recreation by upper-class ladies reached its zenith in the last quarter of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, exactly when fashions were at their least confining. It is not possible to determine which was the cause and which the effect, but the coincidence is too great to be overlooked.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was widespread ignorance about how the body, and in particular the female body, worked.\textsuperscript{5} There was much illness at both ends of the social scale, but at the upper end it was caused most often by inactivity. "Ladies" were considered fragile creatures despite the fact that working-class country women often had robust health which came about through the vigorous exertions of their daily living. Not all in the medical profession agreed with the prevailing view that ladies were inherently fragile. A journal article of 1833 (with no author acknowledged but which


appears to have been written on medical authority) stated three causes of ill-health in upper-class girls and ladies: (1) lack of sufficient exercise; (2) constrained postures; and (3) the use of stays.6 Whilst the 1830's probably represented these problems at their worst, they were present for much of the Georgian period. In the same article it was mentioned that these "evils" were worst among the middle class (for whom the pressures of social conformity were doubtless strongest as they tried to establish themselves in a not altogether welcoming social elite).

Several authors writing about young ladies at school commented upon the lack of opportunities for physical exertion, and highlighted the difference with most boys' schools in this matter.7 In the early nineteenth century girls' schools of the more fashionable type regarded physical exercise as "approaching the indecent."8


7 Erasmus Darwin, A Plan For the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools (Derby: J. Dewry, 1797) and Mary Wollstonecraft, Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (London: Johnson, 1787).

Girls of that time were taught that "horses sweat, gentlemen perspire, but ladies merely glow." The only physical activities at such schools were walking to church at a demure pace and performing exercises with a backboard, an instrument of neo-torture designed to alter the posture.

Although feelings against ladies' participation in some physical activities were strongest in the 1830 – 1850 period, traces of the same can be found throughout the period under review. Ladies were rarely encouraged to exercise (with the notable exception of dancing, in which it was the art and manners displayed that were more important than the exertion itself). In 1694, however, one author at least felt that "seasonable Recreation, moderately used, [was] proper..." but most games were forbidden to the "fair sex" on the grounds of unsuitability. Walker, in his book on exercises for ladies, considered running and leaping to be "not congenial to women" because of the "excessive shocks."

By the late eighteenth century some women were being censured for their involvement in physical activity.

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9 Percival, op. cit., p. 84.


This theme led Mary Wollstonecraft, whilst advocating the rights of women in general, to write:

From every quarter have I heard exclamations against masculine women, but where are they to be found? If by this appellation men mean to inveigh against their ardour in hunting, shooting and gaming, I shall most cordially join in the cry....\(^2\)

She nevertheless advocated moderate physical activity. It was all a question of where to "draw the line" between healthful activity and over-exertion. This dilemma caused problems not solved during the one hundred and fifty year period. Thus did a school inspector write in 1859:

We have a vague suspicion that to produce a robust physique is thought undesirable, that rude health and abundant vigour are considered somewhat plhebian [sic]; that a certain delicacy, a strength not competent to more than a mile or two's walk, an appetite fastidious and easily satisfied, joined with that timidity which commonly accompanies feebleness, are held more lady-like.\(^3\)

In the remainder of this chapter various activities engaged in by upper-class women are described. Many of the examples show something of the above-mentioned dichotomy of feeling concerning ladies' participation.

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Riding, Hunting, Angling and Shooting

These four "field sports" were by far the most usual types of physical recreation amongst upper-class women, with the probable exception of dancing.

Horse-riding was one of only two activities for which ladies wore special dress and this probably developed out of necessity since riding was the commonest form of travel, after walking. Riding habits for women were developed in the sixteenth century, and hunting and recreational riding were quite popular with ladies from that time. At least one lady knew of the health benefits of such activities but she remained unenthusiastic:

I've had a general Hunting Day last Tuesday, where we had 20 Ladys well dressd and mounted, and more Men. The Day was concluded with a Ball. I rid and danc'd with a view of Exercise, and that is all—how dull that is.  

It is difficult to determine how widespread ladies' hunting and recreational riding were. Several books published in the early eighteenth century on the subject of field sports made no mention of women participating. At the same time, there were occasional references in passing to women's involvement in a few sporting activities.

For example, as far back as 1725, a "ladies' plate was run for on the 14th. of September by female riders on Ripon Heath in Yorkshire." 15

Other sources which indicate that ladies were often engaged in field sports are the large number and variety of paintings, water colours and prints of the period, many of which feature ladies. A number of the most famous British artists—Hogarth and Stubbs, for example—depicted ladies hunting or angling. Hogarth's "A Fishing Party" (from c. 1730) shows a mother introducing her (female) child to angling, and Wootton's "Lady Henrietta Harley Hunting with Harriers" (from c. 1740) depicts the Lady hunting after the hare. 16 Some ladies apparently enjoyed virtual equality with men in sports in mid century. Trevelyan quoted a lady who claimed she could do everything with her father except "drink and shoot flying." 17 "Everything" included hunting and dancing. In those years she would have hunted deer, hare, badger, marten and squirrel.

15 Caroline Ramsden, Ladies in Racing, Sixteenth Century to the Present Day (London: Stanley Paul, 1973), p. 150. Unfortunately, the source of this is not given.


With the growth in the number of periodicals and newspapers from the mid 1700's there were more references to women's participation. An early periodical reference was to endurance riding by a lady who, in 1758, at Newmarket, attempted to ride a thousand miles in as many hours. She completed the feat in less than two-thirds of the time, or twenty-eight days.¹⁸ (In 1809, The Times pointed out that she had rested nightly and ridden several different horses in succession.)¹⁹

A reference to a poem of 1772 revealed that it was the habit of the Duchess of Atholl to go fishing, sometimes with Lady Wright, at Atholl House, near Perth.²⁰

Somewhat more substantial evidence of women's regular participation in field sports comes from the knowledge that the Marchioness of Salisbury occupied the position of "master" of the Hatfield (Hertfordshire) Hunt between 1775 and 1819, by which time she was seventy-eight years old.²¹ This was a famous hunt so that the position was quite prestigious.


¹⁹The Times [London], July 21, 1809, p. 3, col. 3.


Once it had become the fashion to visit the seaside (see this chapter, under "Swimming") both ladies and gentlemen lost no opportunity to display their riding skills across the sands in what was clearly recreational riding. 22

A picture by Keating from 1789 of "A Party Angling" shows a lady in a boat with three gentlemen. All have rods. 23 There are numerous other examples from the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the next which depict ladies angling. This was evidently the hey-day of ladies in field sports being depicted on canvas and was probably the time when such activities were most popular for women. It was also the time when fashions were at their least restricting and when Mary Wollstonecraft condemned some women for their masculinity (see p. 102). Such occurrences were clearly not coincidental. The fifty-year period between 1775 and 1825 was the time of greatest participation in sport by upper-class women until the newly-invented games of the 1860's and 1870's began another era of sport.


23 Walter S. Sparrow, Angling in British Art (London: John Lane, 1923), facing p. 175.
One lady famous for her riding and racing skills was Lady Laetitia Lade. She was painted by Stubbs (something akin to being on the cover of Vogue magazine today) and was ready to take on anyone in a fast gallop; lack of opponents seems to have been her main trouble, one challenge she made to race for eight miles on Newmarket Heath for a stake of 500 guineas was not taken up by the lady to whom she delivered it.24

She also not only attended, but kept up with, the King's (stag) Hunt for two hours and forty minutes on one occasion in George IV's reign.25

Around the close of the century ladies so much enjoyed hunting that they formed their own hunt in some places, as at Epping, Essex. This somewhat satirical account appeared in The Times in 1795:

The Ladies' Hunt at Epping was yesterday attended by thousands and ten thousands, from the metropolis. The people in the neighbourhood of Woodford also took their annual stare at the Stag and his followers...26

Four years later the paper reported that no ladies' hunt took place on Easter Monday when it had been held "for a number of years," but no reason was given.27 It was rescheduled for the following week.

25 Ibid.
26 The Times [London], April 7, 1795, p. 2, col. 2.
27 The Times [London], March 22, 1799, p. 3, col. 3.
An extraordinary event of female riding occurred in 1804 and was, by the attention it received, clearly most unusual. A Mrs. Thornton of Knaresborough, near Leeds, raced and easily beat her brother-in-law, Captain Flint, on their private estate. A match proper was then arranged for August 25, 1804, at York Racecourse between the same two competitors for a stake of five hundred guineas. The Times reported that over 100,000 people—a truly vast number for a sporting event of that time—watched the race so that a detachment of the 6th Light Dragoon Guards was detailed to police the racecourse. Betting was five and six to four on the lady. The race was over four miles and the "fair equestrian took the lead for upwards of three miles, in a very capital style." At this time, Captain Flint took the lead and held on to it, although Mrs. Thornton made "every possible exertion."

Mrs. Thornton, according to the opinion of the best judges, rode in a very superior style. Her dress was a leopard-coloured body, with blue sleeves, the rest buff, and a blue cap. Mr. Flint rode in white. The race was run in nine minutes and fifty-nine seconds....The oldest amateurs of the turf...acknowledged that Mrs. Thornton displayed a style of horsemanship, if we may be allowed the expression, and close-seated riding that was at least equal, if not superior, to anything they had seen from...other celebrated Jockies. Not less than 200,000l. [£] were supposed to be pending on this extraordinary match."

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29 Ibid.
The event was famous enough to be included by Egan in his sporting chronicle. A further challenge by Mrs. Thornton was declined by Captain Flint because the Thorntons had refused to pay up over the first. However, the following year, 1805, Mrs. Thornton rode against Francis Buckle, a five-time Derby winner and leading jockey. The prize was a seven hundred guinea gold cup and the distance was two miles at York. This time, Mrs. Thornton triumphed, again of course, riding side-saddle. Her achievement was described thus:

Mrs. Thornton's riding is of the first description. Her close seat, perfect management of her horse, and bold jockeyship on one of the most crowded courses ever seen, elicited the highest admiration. On winning she was greeted with deafening cheers.

We can, therefore, be reasonably sure that odd though this, and her other rides were, Mrs. Thornton was greeted with universal admiration by those present.

If a lack of references is a guide, there seems to have been a decline in female participation in most field sports for the next thirty or more years following

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31 Ramsden, op. cit., p. 151. Unfortunately, the source is not given; it was probably *The Morning Post*, [London], August 20, 1805.
Mrs. Thornton's exploits. An 1827 reference attests to the prior existence of ladies' races at Ripon, Yorkshire, a practice which was by then no longer continued:

There were for many years races upon Ripon Common for prizes of various value; and one called the Lady's Plate, of 15l. [£15] value, for horses etc, the best of heats, and twice round the common for a hunt, to be ridden by women.  

Although some ladies perhaps continued to hunt, it was on a reduced scale and the only other references to ladies in field sports up to 1850 were to two ladies who engaged in shooting, which required relatively little physical activity. The Marchioness of Hastings killed twelve brace in Scotland in 1838 and the Duchess of Marlborough shot eight head of game at Blenheim, Oxfordshire, in 1846. The gun had been used for game since about 1725, but perhaps ladies only turned to it one hundred years later because there were so few other sports in which they felt they could engage.

32 Nimrod [pseud], Sporting Magazine, XX, New Series (1827), 287.
33 The Times [London], August 28, 1838, p. 5, col. 3.
34 The Times [London], October 3, 1846, p. 2, col. 6.
Archery

The siege of Worcester in 1651 was the last time in which arrows were used in battle in England. Thereafter, their use became purely recreational, but no mention of women archers was found until the late eighteenth century. The Toxophilite Society was founded in 1781 and immediately became popular with ladies of the upper class.36 Other societies, such as the Royal Surrey Bowmen and over forty more founded in the 1790's, were exclusively upper-class institutions. However, the immense popularity of the sport (at least among men) was relatively short lived and only five archery societies survived for more than twenty-five years.37

For some reason not explained, North Wales was a stronghold of the sport. The membership of the Royal British Bowmen (Patron, the Prince of Wales) was composed mainly of ladies and gentlemen of North Wales, and they met every other week. The ladies used their bows with "grace and skill;"38 so much skill that at a meeting of the Society of Royal British Archers in Denbigshire, North


38 John Ashton, Men, Maidens and Manners a Hundred Years Ago (London: Field and Tuer, 1888), p. 85.
Wales, in 1794, the club insisted that ladies shot on equal terms with men. All societies required the wearing of regulation green uniforms when shooting.

Archery continued to be popular for ladies in the nineteenth century when few other sports except riding were socially sanctioned. Archery meets for ladies were held regularly and the prizes given leave no doubt about the social class of the intended recipients. An undated letter from Mrs. Josiah Wedgwood (grand-daughter of the pottery firm founder) mentioned of her daughter that:

Jessie really is uncommonly pretty. She went with us to the Archery and was much admired; and what is more, she got the first prize, a beautiful pair of earrings.

Prizes in a Derbyshire archery meeting in 1822 were a diamond brooch in the shape of an arrow, and a silver bugle. At this competition, the ladies' target was at sixty yards. Archery was recommended by the correspondent at the meeting because it was "of a truly British and healthful nature...not beyond the strength [of], and peculiarly adapted to the gracefulness of the female form."

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41 *The Annals of Sporting and Fancy Gazette*, II (October 1, 1822), 228-229.

42 Ibid.
Egan, however, gave another explanation for the general popularity of archery with ladies. He thought it was a sport

equally open to the fair sex, and has, for these last thirty years, been the favourite recreation of a great part of the female nobility, the only field diversion they can enjoy, without incurring the censure of being thought masculine.43

He added that the real aim of the lady archers was, in his opinion, the hearts of the gentlemen.

Clearly, archery meets were social occasions where whom one met and what one wore were of the greatest importance. The following popular song of the 1830's underlines this conclusion:

The archery meeting is fixed for the third;  
The fuss that it causes is truly absurd;  
I've bought summer bonnets for Rosa and Bess,  
And now I must buy each an archery dress,  
Without a green suit they would blush to be seen  
And poor little Rosa looks horrid in green!44

Donald Walker, in his book Games and Sports, included only one illustration of women participating in any activity and this was in archery.45 He also gave details that women's bows should be strung with 24 - 34


pound resistance (which is the same as specified in present day rules). Walker’s inclusion of archery for ladies in this work is the more surprising because in his earlier work, *Exercises for Ladies*, he condemned archery for women because it promoted one-sided development.\(^{46}\) He recommended light exercises as more suitable.

1844 was an important date in the history of archery in Great Britain, for in August of that year the First Grand National Archery Meeting was held, in York. (These championships have been held annually ever since.) No ladies shot in the opening year but in 1845 eleven ladies competed in the sixty-yard target. Ladies did not, however, attend in greater numbers until 1851, when “their shooting was considered to be very good.”\(^{47}\)

**Swimming**

Early references to swimming have been most carefully scrutinized because what was referred to as


"bathing" was sometimes only that, and no swimming took place. "Bathing" often meant bodily cleansing and for this reason, both men and women commonly bathed nude, a practice which both sexes continued into the early nineteenth century, by which time "swimming" was often meant by the term. Thus although from the context it appears that the following references meant actual swimming, it is not completely certain.

For years the upper classes patronized the various spa towns of Britain where they had both drunk, and bathed in, the waters. During the middle of the eighteenth century it became fashionable for ladies and gentlemen to visit the seaside to bathe. In 1732, at Scarborough, Yorkshire, it was the custom for both sexes to bathe in the open sea:

The gentlemen go out a little way in boats called cobbles, and jump in direct from them. The ladies have the convenience of dressing gowns and guides, and there are little houses on the shore for them to retire and dress in. 48

There were two female attendants with every lady in the water, probably to help her in case she got into difficulties. This reference to "little houses" or bathing machines is one of the earliest. Bathing machines were small wooden huts on wheels, with a door at each end. The

swimmer entered from the shore, fully dressed, changed into swimming clothes inside, and then a horse pulled the machine a little way out into the sea. In this way the swimmer could get under water immediately and never be seen in swimming clothes. Since it is known that many ladies bathed nude, the usefulness of such cubicles must have been limited. Perhaps it was the action of undressing or dressing that was thought to be immodest.

Where bathing was nude, as in the previous example, the sexes were separated by some means. Sometimes, as above, separation was by space and sometimes by time. If the bathers actually mixed together, they wore costumes. In Margate, Kent, in 1750, mixed, costumed bathing was already established.49

Perhaps the main reason for the popularity of sea-bathing was the supposed health benefit. After the publication in 1752 of Dr. Richard Russell's Dissertations on the Use of Sea Water in the Diseases of the Glands, the numbers engaging in this activity grew more rapidly.

Sea-bathing eventually became an activity of all classes but only the upper class could afford the sixpence charged for the use of a bathing machine and by this means the classes were kept apart. As the popularity of sea-bathing grew, the rules and organization did likewise, so

that in Blackpool by 1788 a system of bells controlled the separate times of bathing for each sex. If a gentleman was seen in the bathing area when it was the ladies' time, he forfeited a bottle of wine.\textsuperscript{50}

Evidence that swimming was being practised around the mid century also comes from the fact that in Liverpool in 1765 swimming baths were erected. There were separate pools for ladies and gentlemen, each measuring 33' x 30' x 6'.\textsuperscript{51} The depth of six feet indicated clearly that swimming was intended. Public baths of that time were very shallow.

Bathing was given royal patronage by King George III at Weymouth, Dorset, in 1789.\textsuperscript{52} It is probable that he actually swam but the source is not clear.


\textsuperscript{51}R. Rees, "The Development of Physical Recreation in Liverpool During the Nineteenth Century" (M.A. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1968), pp. 16-17.

\textsuperscript{52}Walvin, op. cit., facing p. 80.
In 1814 a lady at Margate, Kent was swimming regularly:

The wife of a respectable citizen has excited a good deal of curiosity at Margate. She bathes in a green dress without a cap; and attached to the shoulders of the dress is something resembling fins. She swims remarkably well, and the peculiarity of her paraphernalia, together with her long black hair, have occasioned many to believe that she was a mermaid.  

It seems likely that it was the apparel and not the act of swimming which was thought to be unusual.

By 1825, nude swimming for ladies was unthinkable. A lady walking alone along the shore at Llanddwyn, Anglesey, (who had climbed Snowdon alone, and often sailed and rowed) was prevented from swimming because she could have had to "take off all [her] cloaths."  

Fears over modesty grew fast in the early Victorian period, so that the "rules" at Blackpool for swimming became even more strict in 1837. Men and women were allocated different areas and times in which to swim, and nudity was forbidden within seventy yards of the shore.  

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Despite the growing "Victorian" feeling, swimming appeared to lose none of its popularity as might have been expected at such a conservative time. Indeed, quite the opposite happened. In 1847, Queen Victoria herself first bathed in the sea and noted it in her journal. She found the experience "delightful."\textsuperscript{56} This was in the privacy of her own estate, unlike the public baths her grandfather, George III, had taken. Thus privacy was the concession to modesty, not the cessation of the activity itself.

Visits to the seaside became a regular reality to the working class in the 1840's, with the growth of the railways, and thereafter the upper class found themselves forced by sheer numbers to mix in this activity.

\textbf{Dancing}

Since the Middle Ages the ability to dance had been an essential social accomplishment for true ladies and gentlemen. In the eighteenth century this skill was perhaps at its most needed because it was the era of the famous assembly rooms and society balls. The most well-known (and most often reprinted) book on dancing was

Playford's *Dancing Master*. In the introduction, dancing was referred to as an art, a "commendable and rare Quality, fit for Young Gentlemen and Ladies, if opportunely and civilly used." Some editions of the book contained over nine hundred dances. In 1694 *The Ladies Dictionary* mentioned dancing in great detail as being the most suitable recreation for ladies.

After the decline of the royal Court, fashionable society met in the many assembly rooms around the country. Assembly rooms were privately owned and often sumptuously decorated. They were to be found in London and in the fashionable spa towns, such as Bath. Balls were held there regularly, the "subscription" or entrance fee to which was around ten guineas, then a large sum. Good breeding, fine manners and immaculate clothing were requirements for admission which was strictly by ticket only. Here dancing of the very highest standard was demanded. Dances were mostly of the longways progressive variety (like country dances) and each year for the King's Birthday Ball just such a new dance was written, printed, distributed and taught by dancing masters.

country dances the other dances of the time were the minuet, bourée, passepied, rigadoon, gavotte and hornpipe.

The history of the country dance has puzzled many dance historians. If it was truly the dance of the country workers, how was it that new dances were first heard of at fashionable balls and only later in the country? The words "country dance" are perhaps a corruption of "contredanse," a type of dance popular in the later eighteenth century. Certainly many dances were performed by both classes of society, although very rarely together, and with a certain difference of character. Dancing masters thus instructed their clients that their dancing must not resemble the action and bustle of the common people's vigorous country dancing.\(^\text{60}\)

The one occasion on which the classes did meet and mix in dancing was in the large country houses at important festivities such as Christmas. Then ladies would dance with their servants as a special treat.\(^\text{61}\)

For the few young ladies who attended school, dancing was certain to figure largely in the curriculum.


Both Wollstonecraft and Darwin highly recommended dancing in their books about girls' schooling.\textsuperscript{62}

Assembly rooms had strict rules about the conduct of dances. No two ladies were permitted to dance together without the permission of the master of ceremonies; in the absence of ladies, gentlemen were sometimes allowed to form couples. During country dances, no lady or gentleman was to dance a reel, which was a dance of the common people.\textsuperscript{63}

By 1815 the waltz was the rage in England, along with the contredanse, cotillon and quadrille. Scottish dancing was also accepted by the fashionable world.\textsuperscript{64} Many of the above-mentioned dances required not a little energy, and an evening of dancing, even allowing for participants to "sit out" one or two, required stamina. What was always important, however, was not to dance with the abandon of the common people.

\section*{Cricket}

In contrast to the numerous accounts of working-class women playing cricket, it seems that relatively few

\textsuperscript{62} Mary Wollstonecraft, \textit{Thoughts on the Education of Daughters} (London: J. Johnson, 1787); and Erasmus Darwin, \textit{A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools} (Derby: J. Dewry, 1797).

\textsuperscript{63} Wilson, op. cit., pp. 190-191.

games of cricket were played (or at least reported) among upper-class ladies. Only two actual games are known with any certainty to have been played although it is both possible and likely that other matches were played by ladies in private, on the large estates owned by the upper class.

In 1777, a cricket match was played by the Countess of Derby and "some other ladies of quality and fashion" at the Oaks, a private estate in Surrey. A drawing, dated two years later, possibly by the Duke of Dorset, who was known to have been present at the match, shows that the ladies bowled underarm and used the two wickets and curved bat of that era. (See Plate III.) Fashions of that time allowed for quite a range of movement. However, only one of the fielders looks ready to move and the game must not be thought of as being exactly as it is today.

This same match was also watched by the Duke of Hamilton. It is perhaps because so many of the nobility were present that the game was reported. He fell in love with the top scorer, Elizabeth Burrell, and subsequently

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PLATE III

CRICKET MATCH PLAYED BY THE COUNTESS
OF DERBY AND OTHER LADIES, 1779

124
The caption reads:

Cricket match played by the Countess of Derby and other ladies, 1779, in Surrey.
Despite the caption, the game is thought to have been played in 1777.

(By permission of Marylebone Cricket Club)
married her. The Morning Post in 1778 recorded that the Duke fell in love with Miss Burrell at the cricket match at the Oaks last year...probably when she took bat in hand. Then her Diana-like air communicated an irresistible impression. She got more notches in the first and second innings than any lady in the game.66

The Duke of Dorset wrote a letter as a result of this cricket match and sent it to a number of ladies in his circle of friends, urging them to take up the game. He sent a copy of the drawing with the letter, an extract of which ran thus:

Though the gentlemen have long assumed to themselves the sole prerogative of being cricket players, yet the ladies have lately given in a specimen that they know how to handle the bat and ball with the best of us....Let your sex go on and assert their right to every pursuit that does not debase the mind. Go on, and attach yourselves to the athletic...67

Another drawing from about the same time was John Collet's "Miss Wicket and Miss Trigger." (See Plate IV.)


PLATE IV

MISS WICKET AND MISS TRIGGER
Miss Wicket and Miss Trigger, by John Collet, probably dating from 1778, despite the caption. The original was accompanied by these lines:

Miss Trigger, you see is an excellent shot
And forty five notches Miss Wicket's just got.

(By permission of Marylebone Cricket Club)
Despite the caption, it is thought to date from 1778 and the original was accompanied by the lines:

Miss Trigger, you see is an excellent shot
And forty five notches Miss Wicket's just got. 68

There is no evidence that "Miss Wicket" was supposed to represent Miss Burrell, but the date of the work and the subscript would fit together well. The painting is no evidence, either, that women actually took part in such activities as cricket and hunting. However, the fact that, if one looks very closely, Miss Trigger can be seen stepping on a handkerchief bearing the word "effeminacy" could perhaps indicate that the painting was Collet's way of registering his disapproval of ladies who participated in these recreations.

One, possibly apocryphal, story credited a lady with changing the whole nature of the game of cricket. In 1822, at Lord's, John Willes bowled overarm and was repeatedly no-balled for it, the first time that such bowling had been seen in a first class match. The story goes that when he practised at home, near Canterbury, Kent, his sister, Catherine, bowled to him. Since her

fashionable skirts were so voluminous she developed an overarm action which greatly impressed her brother. He henceforth adopted the style himself.\textsuperscript{69} What makes the story somewhat less credible is that exactly the same set of circumstances was claimed by Lillywhite and his daughters,\textsuperscript{70} and also by William Lambert and his wife.\textsuperscript{71}

Only one other game of cricket played by upper-class ladies was recorded. On July 30, 1838, a game was played between the ladies of Rochester, Kent, and the ladies of Maidstone, Kent. The game was recorded in a painting (see Plate V) in which the ladies are clearly seen to have continued to use the underarm style of bowling, although the overarm style was officially sanctioned for men in 1835. Curiously, no written report of this game was found.


\textsuperscript{71}Rachael Heyhoe Flint and Netta Rheinberg, \textit{Fair Play, the Story of Women's Cricket} (London: Angus and Robertson, 1976), pp. 21-22.
MATCH BETWEEN LADIES OF ROCHESTER
AND LADIES OF MAIDSTONE,
JULY 30, 1838
The caption reads:

Match between Ladies of Rochester and Ladies of Maidstone at Brown's Meadow, July 30th, 1838, L of R 75 - L of M 61.

(By permission of Marylebone Cricket Club)
Climbing, Walking and Sailing

The Romantic Period (generally taken to mean the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) brought with it some changes in upper-class recreations. "Romantic characteristics tended to be, negatively, fanaticism, crankiness, mysticism and egotism; and positively, insight, daring, grandeur, exploration and independence."73 With such a philosophy, an appreciation of the beauty of the countryside, especially the mountain areas, grew as the romantic movement grew. Hitherto such places had been regarded as being rather forbidding.

Perhaps because climbing, walking and sailing are non-competitive and usually carried on away from public gaze, all references found to these activities came from ladies' personal diaries and correspondences. For this reason, in this section the recreations are not


investigated by activity, but each diarist is taken separately.

Catherine Hutton (1756 - 1846) was the daughter of an eminent Birmingham historian. She led a "life of leisure" going to many society balls in London. She also visited much of the rest of the country, walking extensively at Aberystwyth and even running along the beach. She went to the spa towns of Blackpool (Lancashire), Scarborough (Yorkshire) and Buxton (Derbyshire), where she again did much walking and also bathed. Her most active life lasted an amazing ninety-one years, over twice the average life expectancy for a woman of that time.

Miss Heber (c. 1750 - 1809) and Miss Iremonger (c. 1750 - 1809), both of whom came from the nobility, conducted a regular correspondence. In 1789 one wrote to the other:

My friend Louisa Shipley [the daughter of a bishop] has had a bad relapse again of her Cold and Cough soon after she left the balsamic air and charming scenery of Bristol-Wells [Gloucestershire]. She has since been to the Sea-Side with her Mother, where she entirely recovered again by constantly Riding and Sailing, and gained such a look of Health as she never had before. 75


Sailing was mentioned several other times in passing as a recreation of some other (female) friend.

Elizabeth Ham kept a diary from 1783 - 1820 and made frequent references to her exertions.⁷⁶ She recorded that she saw the Royal Family, including the Queen and Princesses, go sailing regularly but that they looked as if they did not enjoy it. She herself walked seven or eight miles most evenings for pleasure, attended many balls and often went swimming. She recounted that she went for walks on Sundays and was at first called a "Sabbath breaker" but she persisted and was eventually joined by her former abuser.⁷⁷

The most detailed account of sports and recreations was by a governess, Ellen Weeton.⁷⁸ She followed her charges about the country but lived in Liverpool. She regularly swam in the sea there, but her chief delights were climbing, rowing and sailing. When away from Liverpool (around 1810), she wrote home asking to have her "blue duffil coat sent" because it would be very useful when sailing.⁷⁹

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⁷⁶Elizabeth Ham, Elizabeth Ham, By Herself (1783 – 1820, ed. Eric G. Gillett (London: Faber and Faber, 1945).

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 175-176.


One is perhaps tempted to think of a lady of her time not taking a very active part in such a recreation, but the following excerpt shows exactly what her sailing entailed:

"We had a very pleasant sail there, [to Newby Bridge, Windermere] but there came on so strong a wind as we were returning after dinner, that was exactly against us, that after tacking above thirty times in two miles, we were obliged at eleven o'clock at night, to put in at Bowness."

Miss Weeton also regularly rowed a small boat on the lake and was adept at handling the oars.

In 1811, she climbed Fairfield mountain, in the Lake District (around 3,000 feet) with three other ladies. They went along a steep road for five miles in a cart and then took two hours to ascend to the summit on foot. They all wore nailed boots and walked about ten miles in total. This was typical of many of her accounts. In 1826 she climbed Snowdon (3,560 feet) alone, without even a guide, and wrote that she was neither footsore nor stiff the next day. (At around the same time, other British female climbers were climbing abroad. In the 1820's and

81 Ibid., pp. 272-274.
1830's some ladies climbed several peaks in the Mont Blanc range, truly amazing feats, for they all wore the hooped skirts of the day, fastened slightly up from their boots.)\textsuperscript{82}

Miss Weeton had a scheme to walk the length of Wales unaccompanied (about 150 miles) but abandoned the idea when she "reflected on the many insults a female is liable to, if alone."\textsuperscript{83}

Although these ladies were clearly somewhat atypical, they do give a hint of great activity and stamina among some upper-class women.

Other Activities
(battledore, use of exercise machines, skating and bicycling)

Some ladies of the upper class engaged in a few other activities, but those that follow were not generally popular.

Battledore, an indoor racquet game similar to badminton, was the subject of a 1775 painting by Hayman. A lady and gentleman were shown playing indoors, hitting a shuttlecock to and fro. There was no net.\textsuperscript{84} The same game

\textsuperscript{82}Cicely Williams, Women on the Rope (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1973), pp. 20 and 29.


was one of those advocated by Darwin in his *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools*, published in 1797. 85 He was aware that much of a young lady's schooling was too sedentary and advocated that some hours should every day be appropriated to bodily exercises...playing at ball, at shuttlecock, swinging as they sit on a cord or cushion, and dancing in the open air in summer, and within doors in winter. 86 Darwin also advocated the use of light dumb-bells and callisthenic-type exercises. Wollstonecraft had five years earlier advocated the same. 87 She went further than Darwin in her vision of women's capabilities. She acknowledged the superior bodily strength of men but added that "were it not for mistaken notions of beauty, women would acquire sufficient [strength] to enable them to earn their own subsistence." 88 She was, of course, referring to women gaining enough strength to be able to work and support themselves, something most unusual in the late 1700's.

86 Ibid., pp. 68-69.
88 Ibid., p. 114.
An advertisement appeared in *The Morning Post* on February 20, 1810 promoting the following:

**PATENT GRAND EXERCISE FRAMES**
particularly intended for Young Ladies, the use of which will not only remove deformities, but will infallibly produce health, strength, symmetry, beauty and superior elegance of deportment. 89

This advertisement coincided with a time when ladies were wearing clothes without stays or very full skirts, so that they were able to exercise with more freedom. By 1835, when Walker's *Exercises for Ladies* was first published, ladies' fashions were once more very restricting. After presenting physiological evidence showing the need for exercise, Walker recommended dancing, light callisthenics, the use of dumb-bells and Indian sceptres. 90 Running, he considered, was "not congenial" to women and would certainly have been impossible in the fashions of the decade.

Darwin also mentioned some activities that he considered unsuitable for ladies but he clearly realized


that they were not unsuitable of themselves, but rather they were made so by social convention:

There are other modes of exertion [other than those mentioned on p. 138] which though graceful in themselves, are not allow'd to ladies by the fashion of this age and country; as skating on the ice in winter, swimming in summer, and funambulation or dancing on the straignt rope.\footnote{Erasmus Darwin, op. cit., p. 70.}

The (to us) strange idea that ice skating was not considered a suitable activity for ladies was questioned by Jones, who wrote the first known treatise on ice skating in English in 1772. He considered it odd that in spite of the example given by the Princess of Orange and other noble ladies a century or so before, skating in England in the late eighteenth century seemed to be an exclusively male occupation. He lamented the fact and saw no good reason why the ladies should be excluded.\footnote{Cited in Nigel Brown, Ice Skating: A History (London: Kaye, 1959), p. 42.} Other evidence, however, indicates that some ladies did skate, at least in the early years of the nineteenth century. Wymer included a print from the Picture Post of around 1810 which shows fashionable young men and women skating.\footnote{Norman Wymer, Sport in England (London: Harrap, 1949), facing p. 161.} However, when the skating club was founded in London in 1830 there was no mention of any female participation.\footnote{Brown, op. cit., p. 66.}
Skating became an increasingly fashionable activity of middle-class men from the 1830's onwards. Participation by ladies, however, was on a distinctly modified basis, at least in parts of the country:

Bowness. [Windermere] - Skating - On Thursday and Friday last week, the lovers of skating had a treat on Lake Windermere. The frost was so intense that the ice was firm from Bowness Bay to Curwen's Island [now called Belle Isle]. The greatest part of the ladies and gentlemen of Bowness and the vicinity were assembled. A chair was fitted up with skates for the accommodation of the ladies, who, being pushed along by the gentlemen, had the means of enjoying the sport.95

Perhaps the case of skating indicates that what was considered right and proper for ladies to do changed as rapidly and fundamentally as did ladies' clothing fashions. It certainly would have been most difficult to skate in a crinoline.

One further recreation almost became popular for ladies fifty years before its time actually came. In 1819, a London coachmaker named Denis Johnson developed a special hobby-horse bicycle to be used by ladies at his London riding school. This was the first ladies' bicycle ever built but since it weighed over sixty pounds, its usage must have been somewhat limited.96 There were

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PLATE VI

THE LADIES ACCELERATOR
apparently many advertisements bringing this invention to
the public's notice; none of these, nor reports of its use
were found, but a pen and ink drawing, dating from 1819
(the year the ladies' machine was invented) does exist.
(See Plate VI.) The lady sat astride the bicycle and
propelled it by pushing on the ground with alternate feet.
This necessitated a revolution in dress. It was presumably
too much of a change to be accepted at that time and the
bicycle was not a success. A year later, a three-wheeled
device was built on which the lady did not have to sit
astride. It is not known how much success this invention
had but no reports of its use were found, although another
drawing does exist.97 One must assume that both inventions
came at the wrong time for the growingly conservative mood
of the country.

Conclusions

It can be concluded from the examples cited in this
chapter that for much of the period under review there was
quite a range of activities in which some upper-class

97 Included in Phillis Cunnington and Alan Mansfield,
English Costume for Sports and Outdoor Recreation (London:
Adam and Charles Black, 1969), Plate 38. Also at the
British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, E.K.
"Sporting Print" No. 1917-13-8-4564.
ladies participated. More important than any other activities (apart from dancing) were those of riding and the various forms of hunting. These were also the most popular men's recreations; both sexes participated in them throughout Britain with little regional variation.

Although the riding habit dress code for women had been developed in order to help women travel on horseback, the same clothes were worn for recreational riding.\(^{98}\) The riding habit was thus one of only two items of dress which were in any way adapted for sport: in swimming there was also some modification of dress. For all other activities women wore the usual, every-day dress of the time.

Hunting in its various forms was protected by law as an exclusively upper-class activity which doubtless helped to maintain its "respectability" among the ladies.

Archery was also popular with upper-class ladies; this was especially true in North Wales, but the sport was carried on throughout the country.

A craze for swimming, especially in the sea, swept the upper class, women and men, in the mid eighteenth

\(^{98}\)Cunnington and Mansfield, op. cit., p. 99.
century. Some ladies had swum before then, but it became at that time a fashionable thing to do. The popularity of the activity was helped by frequent royal patronage and also by the view that swimming in the sea cured certain diseases. The main places for this were Lancashire, Scarborough and the south coast.

Dancing probably represented the single most frequent physical activity for women. "Society" balls were held in London and numerous other dances were held on country estates and in town houses.

Unlike working-class women, those of the upper class played few ball games. There was a little cricket played in southern England.

With the coming of the Romantic era, the activities of climbing, walking and sailing became popular with a few women but never achieved the widespread popularity of hunting, for example.

There were isolated references to other recreations such as battledore, skating, cycling and using exercise machines. However, considering the fashions of the time, it is perhaps more surprising that these activities were attempted at all than that they were not generally popular.

A young lady's manual of 1829 mentioned dancing, riding and archery as being the only physical activities suitable for a lady. Other pastimes recommended were
embroidery, painting and music. Young ladies were cautioned against being too good, or too vigorous in their dancing; archery was "an agreeable and healthy pastime;" riding was covered in great detail.  

Ladies of the upper class did not participate in any activity involving either a show of strength or any "impropriety" of dress. This severely limited the range of possible activities. No reference was found to any physical recreation in the towns. Since these ladies had easy access to the open spaces of the country this was no particular hardship to them and may partially explain why the upper class in general did so little to get sports going in the towns. When the new era of sport dawned in Britain in the 1860's, it was the middle class who did much of the founding and organizing.

A characteristic of most upper-class sport was that there were either no spectators, or it was made certain that none of the working class could be watching. For this reason, ladies usually engaged in their activities on private land. An example of this was in cricket, where it is known that ladies played on country estates. Possibly many more such games were played but went unreported because they were private. Some support for ladies playing cricket was given by the invited house guests who watched.

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Of all the activities likely to cause adverse reaction, swimming might be thought to be one. However, no evidence was found which condemned the practice; indeed the royal patronage given the activity indicates the opposite.

Ladies' archery was another sport which received almost universal support. The distance of the target and the power of the stringing were reduced to suit ladies' strengths, and it was considered to be a graceful and elegant pastime.

There was less than universal support for ladies who hunted. Some thought that their behaviour was masculine and improper. When Britain was at peace, after 1815, there were fears for the effeminacy of upper-class men who could no longer harden themselves on the fields of war.100 Hunting in particular, but later sport in general, were encouraged for men because they were thought to "counterbalance, in some degree, the proneness to effeminate degeneracy which a high state of civilization is so apt to produce."101 At the same time, ladies who continued to hunt were thought to be masculine.


The following "outburst", written by a noted English authority on hunting and frequent contributor to sporting magazines, clearly indicated the disfavour in which he held women who hunted or engaged in other "unfeminine" activities:

Next to ourselves, we hold the fair sex in unbounded estimation. But notwithstanding our regard, which in some instances amounts almost to idolatry, there are certain situations which we never view but with regret. In the first place, we have a peculiar antipathy to ladies in gigs.... Secondly, we nauseate all skating in the feminine gender.... Thirdly, we have an extraordinary aversion to ladies riding to hounds. We will permit them to go to the cover side to see the find, and to ride to the first hill to look at the chase--and much good may it do them! But after this they must canter off home immediately, or they forfeit all claim to our affection. We would not marry a downright, thoroughgoing, hurdle jumping, racing pace, fox hunting lady, if she had the planet, Jupiter, for her portion.102

At no time did ladies' dancing receive less than complete support with the proviso that it was performed in a gentille and sedate manner. It was considered most unladylike to dance vigorously as the common people did.

The role of the lady was much more clearly defined than the role of the working-class woman. The lady's role was to be conspicuously at leisure. Since

ladies were encouraged to attempt little, they were eventually unable to do anything but little. It has been suggested that the sickness which often seemed to come with inactivity was a convenient way to kill time: "sickness filled the gap of inactivity so effectively that it came to pervade...female culture." 103

In the 1840's, a growing value and importance were attached to etiquette and refinement. It was necessary to know what to do and what not to do. It may be imagined, for example, that the idea of cycling for ladies in the early nineteenth century could scarcely have come at a less opportune time.

Haley wrote that the 1855 edition of the Boy's Own Book mentioned under athletic sports the following: archery, gymnastics, fencing, driving and riding horses. 104 The only frequent university sports for men in the nineteenth century were cricket and rowing. 105 It is known that in addition to these activities men also engaged in dancing, swimming, skating, running, sailing, walking and

105 Ibid.
climbing. It was considered important not to take these activities too seriously, nor be too good. Cricket was the most popular game, but even it rarely drew large crowds. No references were found to any ladies' participation in gymnastics, fencing, driving horses, rowing or running. Of all the upper-class activities, the only ones in which the sexes mixed were riding, hunting and angling. Archery and swimming were often conducted simultaneously, but there were separate facilities.

McIntosh commented of men's sports that there were several attempts by the nobility to restrict various sports to themselves, but that "in a time of affluence sports had a way of crossing social boundaries." 106 The evidence gathered in this study does not support the same for women's sports. The women of each class had their own sports and there was almost no interchange.

The data collected in this study show that women of the upper class were less active in their sports than women of the lower class. Upper-class ladies' sport showed a marked decline in the 1820's and on into the mid century. Although this occurred at the same time as the decline in working-class women's sports, it was for different reasons. The working class discontinued their

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sports because they were no longer able to play much; the upper class stopped because they no longer thought it proper. Upper-class men's sports continued to gain in popularity at the same time.

Religious reasons do not seem to have been an important factor in the decline of upper-class women's sports—at least not directly. Some hunting activities were assuredly as "cruel" as some of the blood sports of the poor but it was "easier to suppress a recreation when there was little risk of encroaching on the interests of ladies and gentlemen."\textsuperscript{107}

In the conservative 1840's and 1850's, ladies were probably more protected and pampered by men than ever before or since. Nowhere was this more evident than among the new middle class, who were the most anxious to establish themselves on the society ladder. These ladies tried to represent the epitome of femininity; they learned to dance well and yet to have almost unbelievably constricted figures in over-tightly laced stays.\textsuperscript{108}

By the mid nineteenth century society had convinced itself that ladies were extremely fragile and sensitive


creatures. For this reason, ladies of the upper class lost their chance to be physically active. In fact, it is probably true that because of this attitude, ladies of the upper class were "often allowed more genuine freedom in the eighteenth century than they were to enjoy again until recent years."\textsuperscript{109}

Finally, it should be stated that women's sport was not the only outlet to be stifled around that time. The following extract indicates that the numbers of women engaged in business declined in the same pattern:

It is only necessary to contrast the vigorous life of the eighteenth century business woman, travelling about the country in her own interests, with the sheltered existence of the "Victorian woman, to realize how much the latter had lost in initiative and independence by being protected from all real contact with life.\textsuperscript{110}

Thus participation levels in sport and physical recreation among all classes of women were extremely low in the mid nineteenth century. From this unpromising base, women's sport developed along largely new lines in the 1860's and beyond.


CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary and Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate, determine and examine the types of sport and physical recreation participated in by working-class women (in the countryside and in the towns), upper-class women (in the countryside and in the towns), together with passing reference to the emergent middle-class women, in Great Britain between the years 1700 and 1850. Where appropriate, mention was made both of the activities of men at similar times and places and to the general history of the period.

In order to give specific guidance to the investigation, the following sub-problems were examined:

1) To investigate which particular activities were or were not participated in by women, and why.

2) To determine how women's participation was viewed by participants, spectators (if present) and other sections of society.

3) To compare participation between the different social classes to see if, or how, activities spread from one to the other.
4) To investigate how participation was related to the role of women in society or particular subculture.

5) To determine where and when participation took place.

6) To investigate how women's participation changed during the period under review and to determine why.

7) To relate the activities of women to those of men at comparable times and places.

Methodology

A detailed review of literature showed that there were no references dealing specifically with women's sport and physical recreation during the period under review. As a result of this lack of highly relevant literature, data were collected from a variety of primary and secondary sources including national and local newspapers, diaries, journals, letters, magazines, manuals of sport, dictionaries, parish and other official records, advertisements and paintings. The information came from a number of libraries, museums and archives, most of them in Great Britain.

The data were subjected, where appropriate, to internal and/or external criticism to determine accuracy and authenticity. Since sports and recreations were, and are, a product of society, it was felt necessary to make a detailed study of the social history of the time. It was also both necessary and relevant to study and make reference
to the sports and physical recreations of men of the same
time since men's and women's sports developed alongside
one another.

For the sake of clarity certain terms were precisely
defined, as they were to be used throughout the study.
They were as follows:

**Great Britain**: the countries of England, Scotland
and Wales.

**Sport**: a game or physical contest which involved a
reasonable degree of large muscle activity and was
relatively organized.

**Recreation**: a less organized form of physical
activity than sport. When the term was used it always
referred to physical recreation unless otherwise mentioned.
Dancing was included under recreation.

**Working or lower class**: the section of society
engaged in manual labour.

**Upper class**: the section of society not engaged in
manual labour; the aristocracy and gentry.

When all the relevant materials had been collected,
analyzed and organized, the data were presented
chronologically using the descriptive method, but divided
into the sports of the different classes.
Summary of Historical Data

In the early years of the eighteenth century approximately twenty-five percent of the population of England lived in towns. There were few towns of any size besides London; that city's population was one-tenth of the population of England. By 1850 over half the people in Great Britain were town dwellers.

The reasons behind this unprecedented move to the towns were the Industrial Revolution and the changes that this new form of work organization brought with it. Between 1700 and 1850 one of the most profound transformations in human existence had taken place. In 1700, Britain had been a rough-mannered, agricultural country; by 1850 it was a quite highly industrialized nation. These changes in the industrial and agricultural structure of the country affected leisure and leisure patterns quite as much as they did work.

One of the most notable changes to happen on the land came about through the various Enclosure Acts. The effect of these was to fence in public or common land and use it for private agricultural purposes. Many small-holding farmers who had grazed their livestock on such public land were forced to move to the towns and seek employment. Others left the countryside in search of secure employment and increased wages.
Communications were generally extremely poor in the eighteenth century. Travel was slow or impossible; highwaymen lurked on the land and smuggling flourished at sea. For these reasons, most villages were virtually self-sufficient.

The penal code was severe. Witches were burnt and the death penalty existed for crimes such as unlawfully cutting down trees. Although most people had enough to eat, drunkenness was a widespread problem and public houses were very numerous. To combat what were perceived as the evils of drink and the low moral tone of society, various evangelical movements were begun in the mid to late eighteenth century and they eventually gained considerable influence. An increasingly strict moral code was one of the most important outcomes of these organizations.

In the mid eighteenth century, new transport routes were opened in answer to industrial need. Despite such innovations most people remained ignorant of all but the most local of concerns. Shortly thereafter, however, the numbers of people moving to the towns began to show a rapid increase. This wholesale removal created squalor, misery, overcrowding, illness and increasing civil disorder.

The upper class lived under very different conditions. Most employed a number of servants and had much time to devote to the arts, which flourished at that time. The extreme differences in the living conditions
of the rich and of the poor could be seen particularly clearly by comparing the lives of women at each end of the social scale. At the upper end was a life of unconcerned leisure; at the lower end there was unceasing labour. Sometimes this labour was very demanding physically and working-class women had to be strong to survive.

After the first few years of the nineteenth century, the upper class worried about the role of ladies in their society because there was so little for them to do. Many books and magazine articles were written on this subject; they were especially aimed at guiding the nouveau riche of the middle class in such matters. Many working-class women and men found that they had exchanged the somewhat flexible timetable of the countryside for the rigid work routine of the towns. The new moral code had a controlling effect on their Sunday activities, too. The number of public holidays declined rapidly between the 1760's and the 1830's as more workers became independent of agricultural traditions. Factors such as these had significant effects on sport and recreation.
Summary of Sport and Recreation for Working-Class Women

Until the late eighteenth century most working-class people lived in the country and their sports and recreations were traditional, physically demanding, ruled by the agricultural calendar and poorly organized. Many sports for women and men were held at local fairs, or on some common area such as the village green, which was temporarily taken over for recreational purposes. The working class were forbidden by various Game Laws from taking part in hunting, hawking, fishing and fowling. Women were known to have taken part in the following activities.

Women were first known to have played cricket in 1745, and large numbers of spectators of all social classes and both sexes attended this, and subsequent matches, sometimes paying for the privilege. The players were farm workers who played when their jobs permitted it. Most of these games occurred in the south of England. A usual method of organizing the teams was to have the married women compete against the single women. This division of players was connected with ancient fertility rites. Often the teams played for a prize of a meal and refreshment. Wagers were commonly made on the outcome of such matches. After the 1820's, fewer games were played because many of the players had moved to the towns where there was neither the space nor the time to play. At the
same time, the practice of females playing cricket was viewed with increasing distaste by much of society.

Stoolball, often played by women and men together, was most common in southern England. The game was at first played only at and around Shrovetide but later the season was extended through the summer. The playing of ball games at Shrovetide was linked with ancient fertility rites.

Trapball was played in Suffolk and is thought to have had some religious significance, being played at Spring church festivals. Football, also linked with Shrovetide, was sometimes played by men, women and children together but at other times women had their own game. It was particularly popular in Wales and Scotland. Women employed as fish-wives regularly played at golf in various towns around Edinburgh.

Smock races, or races on foot for the prize of a new smock, were usually held at local fairs. The distances run varied from one hundred yards to over half a mile. Mostly younger women entered and they ran in their under-clothing. This activity was particularly popular in northern England but it was attacked by moralists because it had descended to often blatant exhibitionism by the early nineteenth century.

The Cotswold Games (1611 - 1852) were a series of rural events which included smock racing and dancing
competitions for women. Men competed in several fighting and strength activities. Similar games were held in Cornwall. The various Scottish Highland Games are not known to have included any activity for women except dancing.

A few instances of trials of strength such as lifting people, tugs-of-war, and pitching the bar were found in which women participated. They came mostly from northern England.

Dances were held either as purely social gatherings, or as part of rituals, or as competitions. Country dancing, with all its regional variations, was the dance of the working class.

Pugilism was an activity found in the towns, unlike almost all of the other sports and recreations. Women fought sometimes to settle an argument and sometimes fights were put on for money. Women's champions in pugilism existed and the activity was relatively organized. Although there was support from paying spectators for this in the eighteenth century, public disgust was shown for the sport in the nineteenth century. Some women fought in order to earn a living.

The female relatives of London river workers engaged in rowing matches along the Thames. Large crowds were reported to have watched from the banks and been vocal in their support.
The working class began to visit the seaside and swim in large numbers once cheap railway fares were available in the 1840's. The places visited for sea-bathing were the Lancashire and south coasts of England.

No references were found to any working-class women's involvement in any activity requiring expensive equipment. There were also several men's activities in which there is no record of women participating. There was almost no mixing of the classes and few sports or recreations were common to both classes of women. Very little women's sport was found to have existed in towns.

The reasons for the decline in working-class women's sports in the 1820's and beyond were a change in the moral values of society, and changes in patterns and places of work.

Summary of Sport and Recreation for Upper-Class Women

Women at the upper end of the social scale had the time and money to engage in many activities but they were confined by social convention to those of a less vigorous nature. Restricting fashions for many years gave such women an even more limited range of possible activities. Prevailing medical opinion was that women were fragile beings who ought not to over-exert themselves. The few girls who attended schools had little physical activity except walking and dancing. Around the turn of the
century, concern was voiced by some that women who engaged in sports and recreations were displaying masculine characteristics.

Riding for pleasure and hunting were the most frequently pursued outdoor activities by far. Riding habits were one of only two types of women's clothing to be especially adapted for physical activity (the other activity was swimming). Some women in northern England engaged in competitive horse-racing. A reflection of the frequency of women's involvement in hunting and other country pursuits was found in the number of portraits painted at that time which depicted women angling, or riding, for example.

Women archers were active from the late eighteenth century and the sport was thought to be particularly suitable for women because it was graceful in form. Women shot at targets sixty yards distant and valuable prizes were given to the winners of competitions.

Bathing, or immersion in spa water, gave way to active swimming around the middle of the eighteenth century for many upper-class women. They swam in the sea largely for health-related reasons. Bathing machines for dressing in were used, although some women bathed nude until the early nineteenth century. In many cases, the times and/or areas for swimming were separate for each sex. At least one swimming pool was built in a city specifically for the
use of women. Swimming received royal patronage on numerous occasions.

Dancing was probably the single most common physical activity for ladies. Ability in dancing was therefore a necessary social accomplishment. All dances were performed with great dignity by ladies. This meant that when country dances were executed they had a much less boisterous nature than when performed by the working class.

A few games of cricket were recorded but since they were always played in private on country estates it is probable that more games went unrecorded. Those that were played were greeted with enthusiasm by the only spectators present—other house guests. It is possible that women developed the overarm style of bowling because their voluminous skirts rendered the underarm style impossible.

Some examples of climbing, walking for pleasure, and sailing were found. They were all recorded in ladies' personal journals. They reveal high degrees of physical activity and endurance. Probably few women were so active.

Ladies of the upper class are also known to have participated in battledore, the use of exercise machines and dumb-bells, ice-skating and possibly cycling.

Upper-class ladies generally engaged in physical activity less than working-class women. They never took part in shows of strength, nor in activities requiring immodest dress. There were few or no spectators present at their recreations. There were several men's sports in
which ladies did not participate; the only activities in which the sexes participated together were riding, hunting and angling. Women of the upper class did not play any of the working-class women's sports.

Ladies' participation in physical activities grew much less frequent in the 1820's and beyond. A belief grew that it was improper for ladies to be at all active. Some hitherto ladies' activities were then thought to promote masculine characteristics. Between 1830 and 1850 ladies were probably less active than ever before or since. Only after that time did the new women's sports begin to develop.

Conclusions

As a result of the information gathered in this study, the following conclusions were made with respect to the seven sub-problems outlined for investigation.

1. The sports and recreations in which women of all social classes participated were cricket, dancing and swimming. In addition, working-class women also engaged in stoolball, trapball, football, golf, foot races, strength activities, pugilism, sword-fighting and rowing. Women of the upper class also engaged in battledore, riding for pleasure, hunting, angling, shooting, archery, climbing, long-distance walking, sailing, using exercise machines, skating and possibly cycling. The working-class sports were characterized by being spontaneous or easily organized,
close-at-hand, inexpensive and often vigorous. Upper-class sports were often of long duration, involved expensive equipment and large areas of land, and were "refined".

2. Spectators were not usually present at upper-class sports. This was due either to the wide-ranging nature of the activity, or that they were practised in private. Sometimes a few invited guests watched. Spectators at working-class sports were often numerous and they sometimes paid to watch. They came from all social classes and both sexes. Betting on the outcome was a frequent accompaniment to the sport. Towards the end of the period there was increasing censure of women's sports by much of society, led by those with strong religious convictions. Much of working-class sport had become exhibitionist and was condemned as being immoral. At the same time, some upper-class ladies were being labelled as masculine for taking part in their sports.

3. There were only three activities common to both social classes—cricket, dancing and swimming. None of the other activities crossed class barriers. Women of the different classes rarely mixed so that opportunities for the spread of sport were very limited. Although working-class women played cricket thirty years before there was any record of upper-class ladies doing so, there is no evidence that this activity spread directly. Upper-class women probably took up the game after they saw their
own men play. Country dancing apparently spread upwards but the upper classes were careful to perform the dances in a highly dignified manner, which altered the character of the dances. The practice of swimming in the sea spread downwards with the working classes engaging in the activity about one hundred years after the upper class. Only then did public transport at reasonable prices give them access to the sea. The places they visited were the same as those earlier frequented by the upper class.

4. The role of the upper-class woman was to be conspicuously at leisure. Most of her recreations were those involving a considerable expenditure of time, since there was little else for her to do. The ideal of leisure came, in time, to promote inactivity and sickness. Ladies were required to have an air of refinement at all times which prevented them from engaging in vigorous activities or exhibitions of strength. Working-class women often worked very hard physically and their recreations were likewise vigorous. Certain regional differences existed in the role of working-class women. Sports and recreations involving strength were generally accepted.

5. There were distinct regional variations in working-class sport, although little variation was found amongst the upper class. Cricket and stoolball were most common in southern England, and slowly spread north. Smock racing and exhibitions of strength were more common
in the north of England where it was more usual for women
to work, especially in hard physical labour. Golf was
found only in Scotland; pugilism and sword-fighting were
concentrated in London. Swimming occurred on the Lancashire
and south coasts.

Although there was evidence of sport and recreation
at every season, most games were played between February
and October, and especially between Shrovetide and Easter,
and during August.

6. Participation in physical activity was more
common amongst the working class than the upper class.
Only after the Industrial Revolution did upper-class women
participate relatively more, and this was because
opportunities for working-class recreations were fewer.
Amongst the working class the nature of sport tended
increasingly towards exhibitionism and spectacle until
the rapid decline in participation in the 1820's. This
decline was due to a change in moral values and to the
changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution in terms
of work and leisure patterns. The nature of upper-class
sport changed little during the period except that a wider
range of activities was permitted by the less restricting
fashions of the 1810 - 1820 period. The evangelical
movement contributed much more to the decline of working-
class sport than of upper-class sport. A sharp decline
in participation occurred in ladies sport from the 1830's
as sport was increasingly thought of as a male activity.
7. Among the working class, football, cricket, stoolball, pitching the bar, footracing, swimming and dancing were common to both sexes but with the exceptions of stoolball and dancing, were not conducted as mixed activities. There were many men's activities in which women did not participate, such as wrestling, cudgel-playing, and ninepins, for example, but there were no sports specifically for women only. Among the upper class, cricket, dancing, swimming, riding, hunting, angling, shooting, archery, climbing, sailing and skating were activities of both sexes. The sexes did not mix in cricket, swimming and archery. There were several men's activities in which ladies did not participate, such as rowing and fencing, for example, but there were no ladies' sports in which men did not participate. Women's sports in the working class followed a similar pattern to men's working-class sports, and upper-class sport for ladies followed a pattern similar to that of upper-class men's sport. Since the classes pursued largely different sports and recreations, class was a greater determining factor than sex in deciding in which activities a woman participated.
Recommendations for Further Research

This study has been an attempt to show the presence of various sports and recreations which were engaged in by women in Great Britain between 1700 and 1850. Together with this documentation, various influences were suggested as having been instrumental in effecting the changes in participation.

Further studies might investigate these changes in greater detail, specifically as they related to women's sports. For example, the influence of technological change, of urbanization, of religion, or of fashion could be examined.

Studies in depth of geographical regions, or of counties, would make possible much greater attention to detail, and researchers could avail themselves of the many local history associations, local archives, and regional newspaper collections. By building up many of these regional studies a historical "map" of sport—both women's and men's—could eventually be produced.

Other sources to be examined in more detail include novels, women's magazines, and paintings.

Finally, comparative studies of, for example, Great Britain and the United States, Canada, Australia or many other countries would yield information on how women's sports and recreations adapted to the different conditions of each country.
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APPENDIX A

MAP TO SHOW COUNTIES OF ENGLAND AND PLACES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT
APPENDIX B

MAP TO SHOW THE SPREAD OF CRICKET TO THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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The SPREAD of CRICKET to the end of the 18th Century

In Scotland by 1750

In Ireland (Dublin) by 1656

In Wales by 1763

American Colonies
Canada

France (St. Omer) 1478
Aleppo (Syria) 1676
India 1721
Italy 1792

Other counties last by 1829