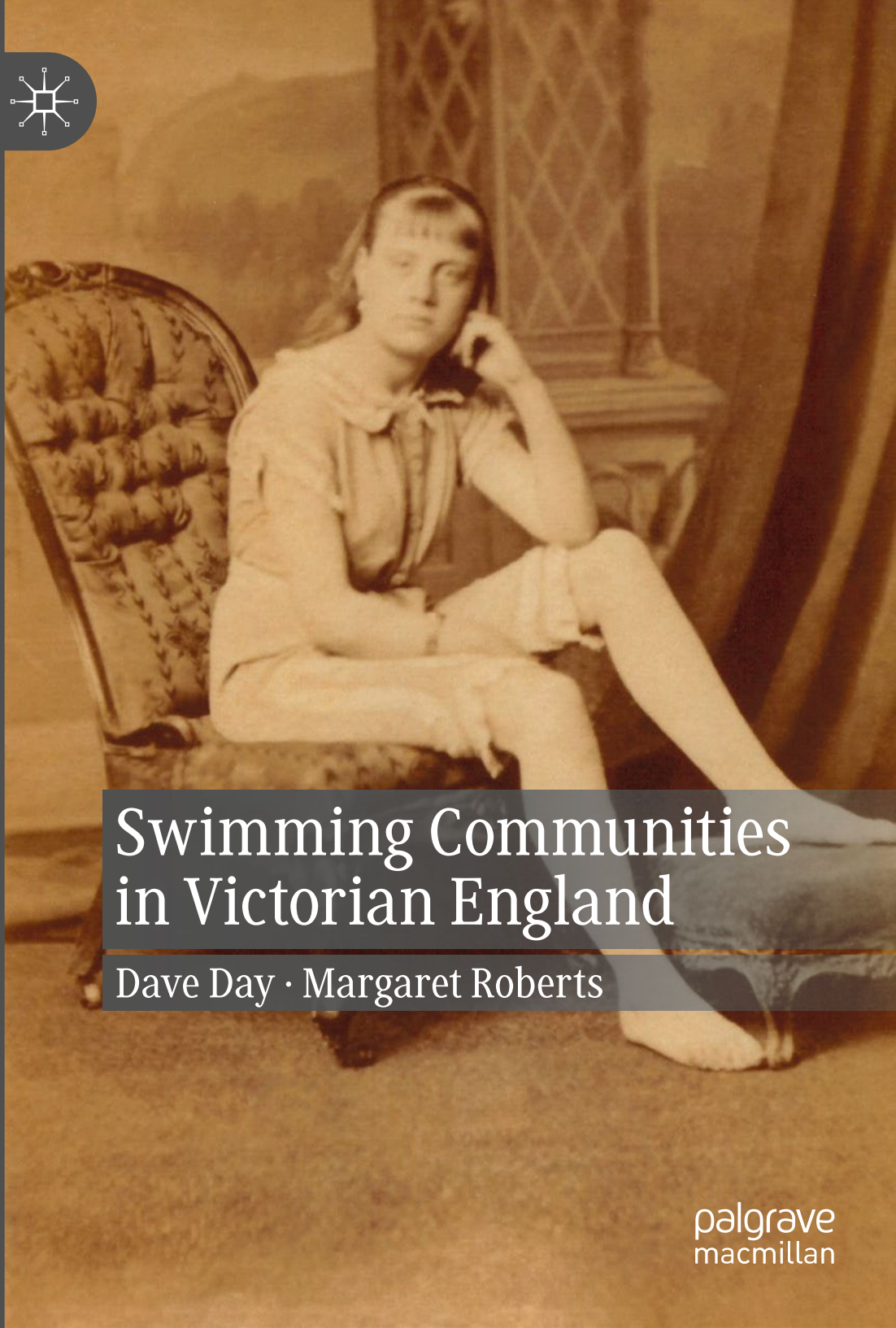

Swimming Communities in Victorian England

Dave Day · Margaret Roberts

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Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Everard Digby's *De Arte Natandi*, published in Latin in 1587 and translated into English eight years later, is generally considered the first English treatise on the practice of swimming.[1] At the time it was written, swimming was viewed as a utilitarian and participatory activity, and in a twenty-first-century society concerned with increasing levels of obesity and physical inactivity, these remain its important features with Sport England reporting that over 5 per cent of the population had participated in some form of swimming between 2015 and 2016.[2] However, swimming has also become an archetypal 'modern' sport, characterized by a high degree of regulatory control, disciplined body practices, and standardization. Swimmers from 190 countries contested in the 2015 World Championships, and the 209 Federations that form the Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA) competed in standardized pools on different strokes over distances ranging from 50 m to 1500 m, the rules for which have been enshrined in the 'laws'. In England, thousands of swimming competitions, classified by age group, gender, standard, or disability, take place annually, licensed by the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA), the National Governing Body (NGB) that controls the sport. County championships are followed by regional and national championships scheduled to dovetail with wider British and international competitions. ASA coaches are certificated at three levels and the ASA is supported financially by government quangos to develop an elite programme for national prestige

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alongside a participation programme intended to improve the health of the nation.

The transitioning of older activities like swimming into a modern sport form has been the subject of debate. While some have argued that modern sport emerged in Britain because of the industrial revolution, other scholars have suggested that sports did not develop spontaneously and that processes such as emergent capitalism, boundary making, standardization, codification, and specialization were already in evidence.[3] For many commentators, modern sports forms existed well before the eighteenth century and sport had become increasingly institutionalized from 1450 through the creation and codification of rules, the building of dedicated sport spaces, the existence of a European-wide trade in sports equipment, and the emergence of a professional class of athletes, coaches, and officials.[4] In rejecting the industrialization hypothesis, Guttmann viewed modern sport as a by-product of the scientific revolution of the European enlightenment and Szymanski sees this as a critical starting point, rooted in new forms of associativity.[5] McClelland and Kruger argued that athletic activities were displaying the characteristics of modern sport by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and Behringer conceptualized this period as a distinct epoch in the sports history, due to the high levels of institutionalization and standardization of sport in many Western European countries. Bhambra also considered this period important given the social, cultural, political, and economic changes that took place, mainly as an outcome of the emergence of industrial capitalism.[6]

In reviewing these different perspectives, Vamplew has observed that while its precursors might have originated before widespread industrialization, the institutionalization of sport required further stimuli and there tends to be less disagreement among scholars about the importance of the Victorian era as a period in which the modernization of sport accelerated. As the spatial and temporal parameters of leisure changed, and influenced by a combination of the evolution of a triadic model of class, changes in work patterns and religious beliefs, greater urbanization, and increasing societal control, sports became more regulated.[7] Alongside rule development and the growth of sports architecture, there was an expansion in the production of sporting goods and equipment, the numbers of specialized teachers, trainers, coaches, and sporting entrepreneurs, and the volume of sports reporting and advertisement.[8]

Strictly speaking, the Victorian era began in 1837 and ended with Queen Victoria's death in 1901, but distinctive cultural outlooks do not

suddenly emerge and disappear, and the period can be stretched to include the years roughly from the Napoleonic Wars until the outbreak of World War I in 1914.[9] This 'long' Victorian period provides a flexible framework marked by continuities, innovation, and diversity,[10] and the standard narrative surrounding the evolution of physical activities into global modernized sports during this period credits the English public school and university elites, who first combined to form national associations and then transported their amateur values and organizational structures around the world. In the case of swimming, for example, although some authors have explored its broader social context, most progress has been made in the historiography of the impact of the formation of the Amateur Swimming Association on the development of the sport.[11] The argument presented in this text, however, is that this discourse ignores the significant contributions made by individuals, such as swimming professors, a community of motivated entrepreneurial experts who were critical in initiating the modernization of the sport and in stimulating participation, especially among women. Although Carlile suggested that circumstance, climate, the availability of facilities, and prevailing social attitudes were important developmental influences,[12] individual practitioners, whether driven by altruism or by economic motives, were key to the changes that occurred in the swimming landscape. Their interventions drove the transition of 'bathing' into 'aquatics' well before the formation of the ASA and provided the foundations for the sport that were subsequently appropriated by the amateur-controlled NGB.

Carlile was right, however, to draw attention to the importance of social attitudes as a facilitating mechanism for the spread of swimming and professors would never have achieved the success that they did without a general middle-class consensus about the values of cleanliness, which underpinned the increasing provision of baths and washhouses. The Victorians were obsessed with health, in the pursuit of which they 'flocked to the seaside, tramped about in the Alps, or Cotswolds, dieted, took pills, sweated themselves in Turkish baths, adopted this "system" of medicine or that'.[13] An obsession with health encouraged experimentation. Vincenz Priessnitz developed a hydropathic establishment in Austria, which involved treatments such as lengthy cold water wraps, baths and showers, and regular consumption of water, and Captain Claridge brought back the fundamental principles to Britain leading to a craze for hydropathy and the building of 'hydros'.[14] The Turkish bath was also introduced in England in this period and its popularity grew rapidly amongst all sections

of the population, becoming a part of the commercialized leisure world by offering an array of services and amusements alongside medical treatments.[15]

For the middle classes, health depended on the cleanliness of the body and, while there were some concerns in the 1880s that even educated sections of the population still had 'very crude notions as to what constitutes personal cleanliness', it was generally assumed that these values should be imposed on the lower classes too.[16] According to its promoters, personal cleanliness went hand in hand with sober, industrious habits and a conscientious sense of domestic and social responsibility.[17] From the 1840s onwards, middle-class commentators, including several medical professionals, delivered lectures or wrote pamphlets and books, emphasizing the importance of personal cleanliness and, in 1844, their concerns were translated into action with the setting up of a National Commission for Baths and Washhouses to encourage the building of public baths. In 1846, a bill 'Promoting the Establishment of Baths and Wash-houses for the labouring classes' was passed and there was a widespread agreement that the public baths and washhouses created in subsequent years represented the greatest boon which 'modern civilization has yet given to the working classes'.[18] This lauding of the physical and moral properties of the new facilities was connected to a broader rational recreation movement concerned that the popular culture could potentially undermine societal values and keen to ensure that the lower classes subscribed to bourgeois ideals.

Swimming Communities

Before the provision of dedicated facilities in the form of these new baths, swimming took place in virtually any area in which water existed. In mid-Victorian Wolverhampton, the existing baths were only for the rich, while the poor used the canals and gravel pits. Even when more affordable access was provided, such as when the first real public baths in Wolverhampton were built by public subscription in 1850, these turned out not to be much better than the canals since the water was only changed monthly in 1851 and only weekly by 1875.[19] Nevertheless, as more of these kinds of amenities were built, swimming became a more regulated sport and several diverse swimming interests coalesced around the activity as the establishment of dedicated swimming baths facilitated the emergence of several communities of swimmers with different objectives and aspirations. The notion of communities takes different forms, although invariably a 'community'

involves people who 'share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis'.[20] This text deals with five such examples—the swimming professors and their families, female swimmers, workers at the baths, clubs and organizations, and the international swimming community.

The swimming professors, entrepreneurs who built on their personal reputations to create careers for themselves, were a critically important community in terms of the development of aquatic activities. These individuals, their families, and their personal networks had a major impact on the development of the activity of swimming throughout the long Victorian period and they were the driving force for the transition of the activity from bathing to a serious sport, well before the creation of the ASA. Professional swimmers, having established their swimming prowess by attaining a 'championship', used the symbolic capital they accrued to establish themselves as a 'Professor', thereby advertising their personal expertise, the fact that they earned their living through the activity and that they were available for instruction. What distinguished professors from other teachers of swimming was the breadth of their activities. In addition to teaching, they competed against each other, performed swimming feats for the public, promoted swimming events, and presented prizes. Oral traditions and experience provided them with their own body of specialist craft knowledge and their working lives replicated that of the artisans and craftsmen that lived around them. Unconstrained by formal education programmes, professors had the freedom to be as imaginative as they wished and their experimentation in applying emerging knowledge, particularly as commercial opportunities expanded, led to the creation of new ideas, concepts, and methods. Their craft knowledge was embedded within the informal communities of practice that surrounded them, which contained family, often involved from an early age, and others who were drawn into their swimming circle. Professors stimulated interest and coordinated interactions, and the communities they generated and sustained were central to their working lives. As teachers, inventors, promoters, and entrepreneurs, these men, and their female confederates, assumed responsibility for the progress of the sport, since their financial success depended on its expansion as an activity for both men and women.

In some cases, these swimming families became very well known at home and abroad and the Beckwith community is considered in detail in this text as an exemplar of the swimming professor's role in the development

of swimming. The commercial imperative that drove the working lives of swimming professors is illustrated by the life course of the central figure in this community, Professor Fred Beckwith, whose aquatic promotions, in baths, theatres, and aquaria, were prominent features in the sporting and entertainment landscape during the second half of the nineteenth century. His swimming knowledge, social networks, and entrepreneurial flair established him at the heart of the aquatic community, and he maintained his reputation as the leading swimming professor of the age throughout the latter stages of the long Victorian period. Over the course of his lifetime, virtually every member of his family, including his children, both his wives, and almost everyone in his extended family, was involved in some aspect of swimming, and his daughters, Agnes in particular, were particularly influential figures in stimulating the expansion of women's swimming.

Agnes was by no means the only female aquatic performer who emerged from the communities surrounding swimming professors. In the course of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, significant numbers of professional 'natationists' were performing as 'naiads' and 'mermaids' in front of all sections of society. They were as comfortable in the variety theatre as they were in the swimming pool and their range of activities incorporated performing tricks in crystal glass tanks, displaying their diving skills, and holding their breath underwater, as well as swimming in endurance events, racing for money, producing and performing in aquatic entertainments, and teaching swimming and lifesaving. Their activities stimulated a widespread interest in, and appreciation of, female swimming and it was in this phase of the long Victorian period that serious swimming, rather than just bathing, became increasingly acceptable for women of all social classes, leading to the creation of further swimming communities based on female participation. In addition to influencing participation levels, professional natationists also had an impact on the development of the costumes adopted by female swimmers. Given their focus on display and the need to attract crowds, natational dresses were always flamboyant in design and their desire for freedom of movement in the water demanded a costume that was much tighter to the body than the traditional bathing outfits. Although this costume stretched the limits of respectability, its emphasis on functionality was gradually replicated by the outfits adopted by female swimmers in the clubs and it had an influence on the standard costume that was agreed by the ASA at the end of the nineteenth century.

The significant increase in female participation witnessed during the latter stages of Victoria's reign had broader implications for women's employment. Given the social mores of the time, which increasingly insisted on the spatial segregation of the sexes, the new facilities that emerged as a result of the 1846 Act, and especially after the subsequent Act of 1878, required appropriate staffing and each swimming bath had its own community of staff, headed normally by a male superintendent and a female matron and including different categories of 'servants', such as washerwomen, stokers, and cashiers, in addition to male and female bath attendants and swimming teachers. Given the need for segregated spaces and same-sex teaching, the female swimming teacher, sometimes directly employed at the baths and sometimes working peripatetically, became a particularly key employee. Each bath, therefore, was distinguished by its own community of working people and a status hierarchy quickly evolved, with older, married matrons, for example, overseeing the working lives of supposedly less respectable colleagues such as baths attendants, laundresses, and washerwomen.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, another, ultimately powerful and dominant, community emerged in the form of middle-class amateur swimmers, who rejected the values and practices of the swimming professors in favour of their own principles of amateurism, central to which was the notion of sociability. A desire for competition led both men and women to create and organize clubs that were appropriate to their social status and this resulted in several diverse communities engaging in swimming at different levels. As club members looked outside of their immediate environment for further competitive opportunities, another swimming community was created in the form of a central organization to oversee their sport and to ensure that their amateur values and principles were kept at the forefront of the sport's development. In 1869, London swimming clubs formed the Metropolitan Swimming Club Association, which had evolved into the Swimming Association of Great Britain (SAGB) by 1874. The transformation of this essentially regional organization into the ASA in 1886 was not without friction but the newly formed NGB managed to consolidate its position and enforce its values relatively quickly, through the regulation and licencing of galas, and by rigidly applying exclusionary laws relating to professionalism.

For this swimming community, the value in sport lay not in its ability to make money but in its contribution to health and sociability and by

1908 the NGB was in total control. As organizers had intended, the establishment of the ASA resulted in the standardization of the sport, the exclusion of swimming professors from the positions of influence, and the purification of swimming into an amateur activity. Their main objective, which was to express a collective view of existing social norms and values within a well-organized environment, was achieved and within a relatively short period of time. In many respects, the professional swimming community contributed to their demise by failing to establish their own robust central organization. Although a Professional Swimming Association (PSA) was formed in 1881 to organize professional competitions and promote professional activity, it only lasted ten years, partly because it failed to establish a core focus for its membership in the same way that the ASA commanded collective agreement on enforcing amateur principles. This was not really a surprise since PSA members were all independent entrepreneurs committed to competing against each other for business rather than working in unison.

Following their marginalization by the ASA, the traditional swimming professors, and the communities that surrounded them, had all but disappeared from the British swimming scene by the outbreak of World War I. Although the purging of swimming professors and professional swimmers from their ranks was hailed as a victory by the amateur community, this turned out to be at the cost of the international competitiveness of British swimming. Many swimming professors took their expertise abroad and those who stayed in America, Australia, South Africa, and elsewhere subsequently generated their own swimming communities, which were much more pragmatic than their counterparts in Britain in seeing value in the swimming professor's expertise. The competitive motivation prevalent in the American society, for example, had its effect on American swimming, which became the world power in swimming towards the end of the long Victorian period. The rapid progress made by America can be attributed, at least partly, to the fact that the swimming professor, in the form of the swimming coach, emerged as an influential and respected figure in the private clubs and the colleges. The British professors involved in these developments, especially in the colleges, were following a long tradition of overseas travels by their predecessors who had been performing around the globe throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, stimulating imitation and participation wherever they went. It was their interventions, not the result of any ASA initiatives, that were responsible for

spreading swimming knowledge and establishing aquatic craft communities. The impact that they made abroad contributed to the fact that the lead that Britain had held in elite swimming performance at the end of the nineteenth century had disappeared by the time of the 1912 Olympic Games. British swimming, under the direction of the ASA, had moved into a phase of conservatism and stagnation as professional expertise was ignored and technical developments were discouraged by amateur intransigence.

Exploring Swimming Communities Through Biography

The five Victorian swimming communities identified are explored in this text by utilizing a combination of different biographical approaches. Hill argued that biographies could connect with several key aspects of the history of sport and popular culture,[21] and biographical research is commonly used to frame historical discussion and study broader and more complex historical developments. While much of the traditional discourse about biography assumed that the method is most useful when the lives of 'great' men and women are uncovered to act as exemplars for society, the approach is increasingly being applied to significantly contribute to the understanding of social processes by uncovering the hidden histories of those engaged at a much lower public level, such as the swimming professors, teachers, and baths employees who generally emerged from the artisan or lower middle classes. As Lemire has observed, 'The humble, ubiquitous practices that characterized plebeian lives are fertile ground for historical enquiry, mirroring in their collective daily acts the evolving expectations and aspirations of each generation'.[22] Reflecting the central argument proposed here that swimming professors and their communities were critical to the development of swimming during the nineteenth century, individual biographies that trace the life courses and career trajectories of practitioners form a substantial portion of every chapter in this text.

It should be remembered of course that biographies as a source of history have often been treated with suspicion. Channing described them as panegyrics and declared that no 'department of literature is so false as biography', while Bourdieu regarded biographies as illusions, arguing that the uncomplicated, one-dimensional life story could not exist and that lived lives were chaos. However, he also recognized that individual life

stories can be seen as the reflections of social structures and it is by exploring the lives of individuals that scholars can illuminate what C. Wright Mills called the 'historical push and shove' of society. Merely by existing, each person contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of society and to the course of its history, and, as E.P. Thompson pointed out, even less powerful groups, such as the Victorian working classes, were never merely the passive victims of historical processes but active agents who participated in shaping their world.[23]

It is true that the individual life course cannot, on its own, lead to any definitive conclusions about wider experiences relating, for example, to the issues of class and gender. In order to address this, an additional biographical method in the form of a prosopography was utilized here to investigate the female communities surrounding swimming baths and the life courses of female swimming teachers, as well as some aspects of natational backgrounds, to try to uncover class origins, familial connections, and marital status, and to trace career trajectories. The use of quantitative methods of biographical research such as prosopography has been stimulated by the expansion of online archives, which have increased the access to resources such as the census data that provided much of the raw material for the prosopographical databases constructed here. In taking this approach, individual life course details can be collated and combined to identify and analyse trends in the data, and this helps to contextualize historical processes and explain ideological or cultural change. This is especially useful when working on previously hidden sections of society, in that it can assist in identifying the interconnections that form social networks and the influence of family on life courses. Vamplew, for example, identified that the number of golf professionals significantly grew between 1907 and 1913 and that over 64 per cent of professionals shared their surname with at least one other professional, thereby uncovering the importance of kinship to this group.[24] Adopting a prosopographical approach to explore the communities here has proved useful in uncovering some common characteristics of female swimming groups, including their kinship and social networks, but any conclusions drawn always need to be treated with a degree of caution. Higgs stressed that quantitative data is not necessarily 'raw material' for an unbiased scientific analysis. It is also a human construct and if census collection and recording was itself a part of the process by which gender divisions were defined, it cannot be used uncritically to study these divisions in Victorian society. Without

knowledge of local economic and social conditions and a grasp of how census data collection changed, the historian could end up building 'elaborate quantitative mansions on shifting archival sands'.[25]

In contrast to the individual biographical approach, the quantifiable method can marginalize individual lives and deprive historical narrative of its richness, especially in the study of previously hidden lives. As an alternative, collective biographies can better enable individual experiences to be illuminated instead of being subsumed within the historical context and this approach can be adopted with limited numbers of individuals, if necessary. Malwina Kin-Gomola used census data and biographical material to explore how the small, but powerful, group of educated middle- and upper-class women who founded the Society of Trained Masseuses marginalized traditional practitioners by creating clear boundaries around the physiotherapy profession.[26] These kinds of small-scale collective studies are useful in combining a few complete biographies rather than numerous disjointed stories to identify themes and place them within the sociohistorical context. Consideration of the several individual biographies presented from different swimming communities throughout the succeeding chapters identifies, for example, the practices employed by swimming professors, together with the difficulties they faced, their importance in the development of swimming teaching, and the influence of patriarchy on female swimming careers.

Sources

The aim here has been to utilize diverse materials collated in different formats to produce what Jockers calls a 'blended approach'[27] in the exploration of Victorian swimming communities, but exposing the lives and practices of swimming professors and others involved in these communities has not been an easy task since so many nineteenth-century lives went almost completely unrecorded. Johnes observed that learning about the mundane is more difficult than investigating the extraordinary,[28] and little trace has remained of most professors, natationists, and baths employees, just as documentary records of tradesmen and artisans are sparse, compared with the biographic records left by the elite. Inevitably, this text draws on traditional sources, combining the use of a wide range of newspaper reports with contemporary texts, directories, and organizational records, to help provide an interpretation of what these lives might

have looked like and to assess the impact they made. However, a reliance on these sources alone would have left parts of the story surrounding swimming communities still hidden in the shadows. While prominent swimming professors and their families appeared regularly in newspaper reports, others did not, and, although swimming teachers might be mentioned in passing, they were rarely the focus of organizational records. As for the bath attendant, he or she really only emerges into the public view at coroner's reports into drownings at the baths.

The critical resources underpinning the construction of all the biographical narratives presented here include census data, birth, marriage and death records, probates, divorce records, and family material gathered through genealogical contacts. Dalton and Charnigo reported in 2002 that 94 per cent of 278 historians considered the archives, manuscripts, and special collections as important sources when conducting research, compared to only 23 per cent who valued genealogical resources,[29] reaffirming Pope's argument that non-academic literature, such as genealogical societies, were often marginalized within the scholarly community in the 1990s.[30] Perspectives have changed in the last 15 years, though, and research into sporting communities, such as that by Day on sports coaching,[31] has increasingly used census and other allied data. Without the use of census material, birth, marriage, and death records, and other genealogical documents, it would have been impossible in studying the swimming communities in this text to identify the key points in individual lives, construct prosopographical databases, triangulate other sources, and so on. Family historians and their networks have significantly contributed in informing this text, not least in providing primary written material alongside family photographs and stories, and their enthusiastic cooperation has filled in many of the gaps in the life courses presented here. Their contributions are no less valid than traditional archival material such as minutes of meetings or newspaper reports. Given that many sources are biased, or distort and filter the 'truth', all of them need interpretation and historians need to be careful and conscientious. Diverse interrogations and interpretations of the source material, presented through different modes of expression, will rarely, if ever, result in a consensus but they all add to the richness of the history landscape. The more sources are accessed, the more the researcher is able to identify what Bale refers to as the multiple 'layers of truth' that surround the individual lives and to challenge existing narratives.[32]

Summary

It is something of a cliché that winners write history but, unfortunately, for swimming professors, it was the amateurs who ultimately wrote the history of swimming and the critical role the communities created by swimming professors had played in establishing the foundations for the modern sport has been, at best, marginalized or forgotten. As the nature of British society changed during the nineteenth century, these swimming communities came under threat as the craft context of their workplace was replaced by organizational structures established by a different swimming community, made up of middle-class men with amateur values who were determined to constrain the activities of, and opportunities afforded to, professionals. What cannot be overlooked, however, is that without the efforts of these swimming professors, the amateur NGB would have had no foundations to build on and no traditions to develop. In the absence of any centralized organization, it had been through their efforts that the teaching of swimming and lifesaving had been initiated and sustained throughout the century. By combining these initiatives with their innovative use of technology, their creativity in the way they accessed both the sporting and entertainment environments, and their encouragement of the female swimmer, these aquatic craft communities demonstrated the way that their willingness to embrace modernity fundamentally altered attitudes to swimming and created the basis for the contemporary sport. All of these developments are covered in this text to highlight the long-term impact that they made.

As a final comment, it is worthwhile reminding the reader that no historian, whatever the focus of their work, starts with a clean slate. As Booth has pointed out, historians 'play creative roles in the production and presentation of history',[33] and E.H. Carr noted several years ago that histories will always reflect the predilections of authors. He advised readers to identify the 'bees in the bonnet' of the writer, 'When you read a work of history, always listen out for the buzzing. If you can detect none, either you are tone deaf or your historian is a dull dog.'[34] During the course of the research for this text, the authors have, inevitably, generated a degree of emotional engagement with the biographies of the individuals and communities presented here, but they have tried to maintain academic rigour and to avoid the tendency of some biographers to relate so closely to their subjects that they end up producing hagiographies, reproducing errors, or creating myths. The writing of history always involves a

degree of interpretation but, by combining different methodologies and carefully triangulating sources, the authors have achieved a degree of confidence in how those interpretations have been applied, although the reader is always free to disagree. No matter how detached the authors have tried to be, these interpretations can never be value free, so it is worth emphasizing that while arguing that the contribution made by swimming professors and female natationists to the development of swimming in the long Victorian period, at home and abroad, was highly significant, this is not intended as a valorization of their lives. They had the same shortcomings as the rest of humanity, and these are evident in many of their biographies. Their importance lies not in their uniqueness as some kind of special and different human being but in their normality and how the normal was important in generating and sustaining the wider social processes.

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CHAPTER 2

Swimming Professors and Entrepreneurs

During the long Victorian period, the number of individuals making a living from exploiting their athletic skills increased as the processes of internationalization, technological advances, and urbanization combined to offer more commercial opportunities. In swimming, a group of these entrepreneurs proved to be a powerful driving force for the transition of the activity from bathing to a serious sport, well before the creation of the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA). Professional swimmers, having established their swimming prowess by attaining a 'championship', a fluid term that encompassed events often created by the professors themselves, used the symbolic capital they accrued to establish themselves as a 'Professor', thereby advertising their personal expertise, the fact that they earned their living through the activity, and that they were available for instruction. In swimming, a need for tuition meant that there were always opportunities to establish a teaching career, especially as the number of facilities expanded, but what distinguished professors from other teachers was the breadth of their activities. In addition to teaching, they competed against each other, performed swimming feats for the public, promoted swimming events, and presented prizes. It should be noted here that the term 'Professor' was reserved almost exclusively for men. Although the preference for same-sex instruction meant that women could become swimming teachers, the significant number of female natationists who appeared regularly in contests, challenges, and aquatic entertainments were rarely referred to as professors. Professor Harry Parker and his sister, Emily

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Parker, 'Champion Lady Swimmer', regularly advertised themselves as being available for swimming entertainments at which they would demonstrate every conceivable style of swimming. During the 1870s, Parker taught at the Crown Baths, Kennington Oval, and at the Brixton Baths, where Emily taught a ladies class every Thursday, but, despite the similarity in their workloads, the 1881 census shows Harry as a professor of swimming and Emily as a teacher of swimming.[1] In 1875, one writer thought that Emily could be described as a professor of swimming because she had been teaching women alongside her mother Louisa for some time, as well as giving nationwide exhibitions of fast and ornamental swimming, but this was a minority view (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2).[2]

Oral traditions and experience provided professors with their own body of specialist craft knowledge and their working lives replicated that of the artisans and craftsmen that surrounded them. In conventional craft processes, the worker was presumed to be the master of a body of traditional knowledge, and the tacit nature of craft transmission involved the master modelling with the apprentice continually observing, a process described as 'stealing with the eyes'. It has been argued that this inhibited innovation, since the apprentice was taught only to copy, but craftsmen have also been constantly stimulated to experiment by competitors, commercialization, and emerging technologies. Unconstrained by formal

Fig. 2.1 Emily Parker. Source: Charles Newman, *Swimmers and Swimming or, The Swimmer's Album* (London: Henry Kemshead, 1899)

Fig. 2.2 Harry Parker. Source: Charles Newman, *Swimmers and Swimming or, The Swimmer's Album* (London: Henry Kemshead, 1899)

education programmes, swimming professors had the freedom to be as imaginative as they wished, and experimentation in applying emerging knowledge, particularly as commercial opportunities expanded, led to the creation of new ideas, concepts, and methods, which some professors disseminated by writing instructional manuals.

As in other crafts, a fundamental building block of their practice was 'organizational socialization' whereby swimming professors acquired knowledge and skills by interacting with others. Craft knowledge was embedded within the informal, often locally based and close-knit, communities of practice surrounding swimming professors who shared methodologies and a repertoire of resources, involving experiences, stories, and ways of addressing the recurring problems. These intimate circles contained family, often involved from an early age, and others who were drawn into their swimming circle by professors, who stimulated interest and coordinated interactions, and the communities they generated and sustained were central to their working lives. While the trajectory of each professor's career was dictated by their abilities as swimmer, teacher, entrepreneur, and publicist, it was also influenced by the spaces and facilities available. Several baths were created following the 1846 Baths and Wash-Houses Act and a subsequent Act in 1878 accelerated this building process, providing professors with further venues for their entrepreneurial

activities and opportunities for profiting from their teaching expertise. As facilities increased, the number of swimming clubs accelerated, with most of them engaging a professional to instruct and provide organizational support, often 'one of the baths attendants who teaches swimming to beginners and coaches aspirants after prizes'.[3] As teachers, inventors, promoters, and entrepreneurs, these men, and their female confederates, assumed responsibility for the progress of the sport, since their financial success depended on its expansion as an activity for men and women.

Professors

Compared to other career choices made during the Victorian period, professional swimming was essentially a minor and often intermittent activity and one that certainly lacked the career potential of music teachers, whose numbers almost doubled to 47,000 between 1881 and 1911.[4] In August 1878, a *Bicycle Swimming and Athletic Journal* update on the whereabouts of some of the leading swimming professionals included 7 women and 54 men; although it is clear from other sources that this actually represented a fraction of the men and women plying their trade as natationists.[5] Nevertheless, this group of professors, some of whose biographies are considered here, were influential in generating a demand for, and supporting the development of, swimming for sport and leisure among men and women. While continuities and similarities can be discerned between many of these lives, there was no standard template for what it meant to be a swimming professor. Every professor's life course reflected the context in which it was lived, and their expertise continuously evolved as individuals adapted to operate in ever-changing environments. This became especially important during the latter stages of the nineteenth century as the divide between their own versions of sport and that of the ASA became ever more accentuated.

Some professors managed to find accommodation within the new ASA structures by adapting their working practices to make them more restrained and less entrepreneurial. For most artisan professors, though, structural exclusion, combined with difficulties over arranging enough races, persuaded them to seek alternative ways of supplementing their income and they became a part of the broader entertainment industry by performing swimming feats and exhibitions in crystal tanks in theatres and aquaria. Professor Cottrell, for example, 'champion swimmer and diver', appeared at the World's Fair at the Royal Agricultural Hall in Islington in