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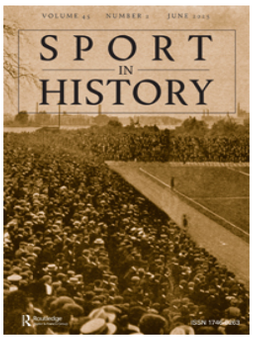

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Drill, physical exercises, and outdoor games in English elementary schools, c.1870–1902, with particular reference to Birmingham

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the development of physical education, broadly defined, for children in elementary schools in the late nineteenth century, with particular reference to the city of Birmingham, England. From 1871, schools were encouraged to incorporate military drill into the taught curriculum for children aged three to thirteen. Later, other forms of physical exercise were permitted and these were actively developed and promoted by the Birmingham School Board. In addition, from the 1880s, gymnastics, swimming, and outdoor games, especially team games, were increasingly available as extra-curricular activities. While extending the possibilities of physical education, these activities remained heavily dependent on external providers, such as the Physical Exercises Committee and the Birmingham Athletic Institute, and the voluntary efforts of teachers working out of school hours. Birmingham's experience is set within the wider context of curricular change in elementary schools across England and Wales more generally. The discussion is informed and shaped by recent doctoral research (Felstead, 2023) on the pursuit of moral objectives in elementary education, especially the idea that children should acquire the habit of cheerful obedience which would serve them well in school and in adult life.

KEYWORDS Drill; games; physical education; schools; Birmingham; England

By 1891, after fifteen years as chair of the Birmingham School Board (BSB), George Dixon was inclined to reflect positively on its achievements. These included the introduction of a 'complete system of school drill' undertaken daily in BSB schools. Twenty minutes at the start of each afternoon session were now allocated to these 'yard exercises' and a 'Superintendent Teacher' had been appointed to instruct 'all the adult teachers' in 'the proper execution of the drill'. Dixon also drew attention to the work of a 'Physical

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Exercises Committee' (PEC), formed in 1881 'for the purpose of organising Athletic Competitions among the boys attending the schools of the Board'.[1] This voluntary body worked alongside the BSB to support the development of out-of-school-hours activities that went beyond curriculum requirements. Provision in other towns and cities was developing along similar lines but Dixon was not alone in regarding Birmingham's arrangements in this respect as progressive. A few years later, John ('Jack') Adams, head of the BSB's City Road school and secretary of the Birmingham Athletic Institute (BAI), was as positive as Dixon had been about 'the regular and systematic physical exercises carried on in all the Board and most of the denominational schools of the city'. He also highlighted the 'very comprehensive scheme [that] exists for the encouragement, promotion and control of outdoor sports and pastimes'.[2] Such comments, in their own way, underpinned the comforting notion that Birmingham, England, was 'the best-governed city in the world', an accolade famously bestowed on it by an American journalist a few years earlier, which some locals were inclined to doubt.[3]

In reality, the story was more complicated. The Elementary Education Act of 1870 marked the beginning of a thirty-year period during which education for children between the ages of three and thirteen in England and Wales was expanded and transformed.[4] Provision before 1870 was mainly in schools operated by voluntary bodies associated with the churches, primarily the National Schools Society (Anglican) and the British and Foreign Schools Society (Nonconformist), each aided by an annual grant from the state.[5] By the 1860s significant gaps were apparent, especially where provision had failed to keep pace with population growth. The 1870 Act enabled locally elected school boards to address this problem by supplying new elementary schools where they were needed. The BSB's first challenge was to create an estimated 16,553 new places, Birmingham's population having grown by about fifty per cent over the previous forty years.[6] It was envisaged that the new board schools would supplement the work of the existing voluntary schools but they became 'the most important providers of working-class education'.[7] After only a year, a new pattern was already emerging. Though there were fifty-two voluntary schools linked to various denominations in the BSB's territory in 1871, twenty-six board schools were already up and running. By 1891, they outnumbered the voluntary schools by fifty-six to fifty-one.[8] That these schools were designated 'elementary' rather than 'primary' indicated that progression from Standard I at the age of six to Standard VI at thirteen was deemed sufficient for most pupils rather than as a route to 'secondary' education of some kind. At first, parents were encouraged rather than compelled to send their children to school and fees were still charged, though there was some local discretion. By 1902, when a new Education Act introduced a different framework of governance, elementary education was compulsory (from 1880) and free (from 1891).[9]

Before the 1870 Act, most children in state-inspected schools were under ten years of age and only a third stayed for three years or more. 'Birmingham children, even more than their contemporaries elsewhere, worked from a young age', sometimes from six years old.[10] From 1870, however, not only were children more likely to attend school but they were more likely to stay there longer. By the end of the 1880s some boards, Birmingham included, were offering 'higher' elementary education beyond Standard VI to a minority of pupils up to the age of fourteen. Board schools were funded partly by a local property tax ('the rates') and partly by an annual grant administered by the Education Department in London which was calculated on a *per capita* basis related to attendance and performance. At the start of the twentieth century, though voluntary schools in England and Wales (14,294) still outnumbered board schools (5,857), it was clear that the expansion of elementary education post-1870 had been largely driven by the school boards, especially in urban areas. Despite the marked disparity in numbers of schools, there were almost as many scholars registered at board schools (2,721,173) as at voluntary schools (3,041,673).[11] In Birmingham, it was noted, board schools 'could be built on a scale and to a standard with which voluntary schools found it very difficult to compete'.[12]

To qualify for grant support, schools were at first required to teach only reading, writing, and arithmetic, plus needlework for girls, with other subjects offered at their discretion.[13] This basic curriculum was expanded piecemeal over the next thirty years mainly via revisions to the Education Department's code of regulations, the statutory instrument which effectively determined the conditions under which state-funded schools operated and what they could teach. An early amendment in 1871 permitted the introduction of 'military drill' delivered by army-trained drill sergeants for up to two hours a week and twenty weeks in the year. Schools were not compelled to take this up but were incentivised in that attendance at drill instruction could be classified as 'attendance for grant purposes', though this applied only to boys.[14] That the Franco-Prussian War had broken out in 1870, it has been suggested, 'may have been partly responsible for the strong military flavour of the [revised] regulations'.[15]

It has been suggested that drill and games developed 'in tandem'.[16] This may have been so in the long run but the initial advantage conferred on military drill and the extent to which other forms of physical exercise lagged behind should not be discounted. There were many advocates for military drill and 972 elementary schools in England and Wales took it up in 1872, though it appears to have grown relatively slowly thereafter with only 1,277 of the 17,525 schools inspected in 1880 including it in the curriculum.[17] By 1891, however, board schools were more likely to favour the type of provision that Dixon had spoken of in his address to the BSB cited above. What was referred to as 'Swedish drill' or 'school drill', or simply

'physical exercises', gained ground rapidly, especially after further code revisions in the 1890s effectively assigned equal status to 'military drill' (for boys only) and 'physical exercises' (for boys and girls). From 1895, a higher grant payable for discipline and organisation was available only to schools making satisfactory provision for 'Swedish or other drill'. These developments were accompanied by an expansion of opportunities for schoolchildren to engage in various activities outside school hours. 'There are many things which cannot be included in the Code for elementary schools, but which may be introduced with great benefit to the schools and the scholars', observed J.A. Langford, one of Dixon's BSB allies in 1885.[18] These activities – which included swimming, gymnastics, cricket, and football – were highly dependent on charitable donations, on teachers giving freely of their time, and on the goodwill of bodies such as the Birmingham Athletic Club (BAC) to provide expertise and facilities.

The intention here, having briefly reviewed the published research bearing most directly on the theme, is to trace the development of physical education in England's elementary schools in the late nineteenth century, with a particular emphasis on Birmingham. As Alan Penn has noted, there was a tendency for contemporaries to use the terms 'drill', 'physical exercises', 'physical instruction', 'physical training', and 'physical education' rather loosely and often interchangeably. This causes some difficulties, though it is usually possible to discern meaning in relation to the particular contexts in which the terms were deployed.[19] The discussion will focus first on military drill as permitted from 1871 and then on the physical exercises which became part of the curriculum in many elementary schools following code amendments in 1875, 1890, and 1891. This will be followed by a discussion of 'Things not in the Code', such as those referred to by Langford. These developments are interpreted primarily with reference to the 1875 code amendment which specified that schools, in order to satisfy the inspectorate regarding discipline, should take 'all reasonable care … to impress upon the children the importance of cheerful obedience to duty, of consideration and respect for others, and of honour and truthfulness in word and act'.[20]

Historiographic context

The problem of maintaining discipline was very much to the fore as the new school boards went about their business. There was a tendency, even among social reformers, to regard the urban poor as 'a race apart', hopelessly mired in physical and moral squalor. This raised practical concerns for those charged with schooling the previously unschooled, 'the unbroken youth of our country', as *The Schoolmaster* referred to them in 1872.[21] Drill in its various forms was seen as a way of addressing these concerns, not only by helping to instil discipline in school but also in ensuring that children

acquired the habit of obedience which employers valued so highly. In this sense its primary purpose was to underpin moral education, though it is sometimes argued that this had wider implications related to ideas of nation and empire. Heathorn's concept of 'an evolving hegemonic national ideology' becoming firmly embedded in the curriculum by the end of the century is important here.[22] So, too, is Yeandle's 'enlightened patriotism'.[23] They provide ways of explaining how children, schooled in obedience, might transition seamlessly into useful citizens while simultaneously internalising a patriotic and imperial identity. Recent doctoral research has highlighted the significance of the circular issued in 1878 by Viscount Sandon, the minister responsible for education policy in Disraeli's government, which indicated that schools should ensure not only that moral training was 'fully provided for' but that children developed 'patriotic regard for their country and its place in the world'.[24] It marked the beginning of an elision of moral, patriotic, and imperial objectives in elementary education.[25] Drill, physical exercises, and physical education generally had a part to play here; so, too, did team sports, and other out-of-school activities.

Historians of British sport who have shown interest in the development of physical education in elementary schools have focused primarily on extra-curricular activities, on games rather than drill. Much attention has been devoted to the ideology of athleticism filtering downwards via graduates of teacher training colleges and manifesting itself in elementary schools in modified form. Discussion has focused mainly on football (soccer), the teachers who promoted it and the extent to which they were driven by athleticism with its emphasis on the perceived character-building value of sport. Kerrigan downplayed the role of athleticism in the development of school soccer in London; he had 'seen this element, but [also] elements of lots of other motivations, several of them equally worthy of serious consideration'.[26] For Hickey, however, it remained 'a potent and pervasive educational ideology', its prevalence explaining the introduction of soccer and other outdoor games in the elementary schools of late-Victorian and Edwardian England.[27] Reviewing this debate and summing up in Hickey's favour, Finn argued that active promoters of football in schools were indeed 'true believers' in athleticism.[28] A few years later, in the course of a powerful restatement of his case, Hickey indicated that he shared some common ground with Kerrigan. Athleticism was not the only factor to be taken into account. The idea that games provided healthy exercise and might improve attendance, discipline, and pupil–teacher relations may also have encouraged schools to take them up.[29] These were important practical considerations.

It is also important to recognise the difficulties historians experience in drawing general conclusions regarding the development of elementary education in England and Wales in the late nineteenth century. Though in many respects a significant milestone, the Elementary Education Act of 1870 was

an 'awkward compromise' between national, local, and sectional interests. It ushered in a highly devolved patchwork of provision rather than a centralised system. If some kind of unity on a national scale was discernible by the turn of the century, it had emerged by accident rather than design. Decisions made locally, it has been argued, 'formed the seed bed from which the elementary school system grew'; moreover, 'the localities in which these decisions were made varied greatly … from one rural parish and one urban situation to another'.[30] Birmingham was a large industrial town of almost 350,000 people in 1871. When city status was achieved in 1889 its population had grown to around 400,000. Its political significance, especially in the 1870s and 1880s – and especially in the field of education – was widely recognised. The Birmingham Education League, founded in 1867, had spearheaded the agitation for free, secular, elementary education. 'This was the time', as Richard Vinen has recently observed, 'when the city had a distinctive civic culture … and it was also a period when some believed that Birmingham incarnated a different kind of society—one that was often held up in contrast to the social divisions of large-scale capitalism seen in Manchester'.[31] It was, in short, a city that punched above its weight so that decisions made at the local level by the town council and the BSB acquired a wider significance. 'We are glad to learn that the authorities in board schools in some large towns and cities are now giving their attention to the physical as well as the mental training of the children under their charge', noted the *British Medical Journal* in 1883.[32] Birmingham merits attention because of its important role in this wider movement but also because initiatives in elementary education were so often rooted in priorities generated locally, not least in the classrooms and playgrounds of its board schools.

Drill, physical exercises, and the elementary school

Though the Education Act of 1870 provided an opportunity for advocates of military drill to make their case, the first years of the new dispensation were dominated by other, more urgent considerations. School boards, when not engaged in intense controversy regarding religious education, were preoccupied with bricks-and-mortar practicalities. In Birmingham, Joseph Chamberlain, chair of the BSB from 1873 to 1876, on stepping down to take a seat in parliament, could point to 13 new schools already built and another 14 planned, enough to accommodate 25,000 children.[33] By the mid-1870s, however, the specific issue of physical education was again attracting attention. A leading article in *The Field* in January 1875, drew attention to a recent noticeable increase in 'the attention bestowed upon physical training and culture'. While anxious to keep state intervention in check, the self-styled 'country gentleman's newspaper' expressed concern

that gymnastics in Britain was 'an optional affair' rather than 'a recognised department of school business', as it was in many other countries, notably in Germany.[34] Despite the incentive offered in 1871, elementary schools had not committed themselves to military drill in huge numbers. Indeed, for many it would have been impractical, given limitations of space, difficulties in recruiting instructors, and other constraints.[35] Reflecting on the situation prevailing in Birmingham at the start of his teaching career in the mid-1870s, Samuel Bott, the BSB's Superintendent Teacher of Physical Exercises, was to recall that drill at Bristol Street School often comprised no more than a few arm exercises, 'the object of which was to arouse flagging attention to the lesson in hand rather than to develop physique'.[36]

From the late 1860s, the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Commerce and Manufactures had maintained an active propaganda in favour of military drill. By 1875, however, its attention was focused principally on the London School Board (LSB).[37] In Birmingham, there was much enthusiasm for gymnastics and physical culture more generally. This is evident from the positive responses to a long essay, 'Physical Education in Board Schools: A Plea for the Children', published in the *Birmingham Daily Mail* in February 1875. The author, who remained anonymous, was especially concerned with the inadequacy of school playgrounds as places of 'amusement and healthy recreation for those who cannot find it elsewhere'. The article made a strong case for extensive playgrounds equipped with horizontal and parallel bars and 'leaping stands', and recommended that the BSB appoint 'competent instructors' to deliver a programme of physical exercises for children aged seven to thirteen. This would include some marching and wheeling but would also involve 'free exercises'. It was proposed that, at the end of each session, children [would] 'be allowed to do for half-an-hour exactly as they pleased'. For the author, who seemed much influenced by Christian Socialist arguments about the relationship between a healthy body and a healthy mind, this would address the problem of a physically feeble population whose brains 'cannot be trusted to do good work'. It was 'physical deterioration' leading to 'intellectual weakness' that had caused the decline of Rome and other ancient empires.[38]

The published correspondence that this generated indicates that there was a significant body of opinion in and around Birmingham sympathetic to such arguments. 'An Ex-Pupil Teacher' who believed that physical education in schools should be compulsory and given equal status to 'mental training' agreed that playgrounds were inadequate: 'Very many schools either have no playground, or possess a miserably inadequate one, which is nearly always laid with that perfect pest, gravel.'[39] An advocate of 'judiciously taught gymnastics', who argued that physical education was as essential for girls as it was for boys, agreed that every school should be supplied with the requisite equipment, thereby achieving significant benefits 'at a comparatively

insignificant cost'.[40] There were also voluntary institutions on hand with relevant expertise, notably the BAC with its gymnasium at Bingley Hall. One correspondent, identifying himself as 'STRONG AND FREE' (the club's motto) was especially optimistic about what could be achieved:

> Birmingham has started many good things. Why not this? No town in England has better opportunities. I know personally many of the gentlemen forming the committee of the Birmingham Gymnasium, and they, there is no doubt, would afford every facility in starting such a movement.[41]

This pointed towards the collaboration between the BSB and voluntary organisations that was to characterise the provision of physical education in the city's elementary schools from the 1880s and into the early-twentieth century. Perhaps the most intriguing letter was from W.W. Brookes, relaying the contents of correspondence with William Penny Brookes, pioneer of the Olympic movement and founder in 1850 of the Much Wenlock Games, who suggested that copies of the *Mail's* article be sent to all school boards.[42] Birmingham's teachers and gymnasts were being drawn into a wider movement.

For elementary schools generally, the most significant development in 1875 with implications for physical education was the introduction of an additional payment of one shilling per pupil if discipline and organisation were deemed satisfactory on inspection. The disciplinary value of military drill was 'widely recognised', not least because it helped teachers to manage large groups of children as they moved in and around schools. In London, the LSB had anticipated this development by appointing a Regimental Sergeant-Major as Drill Master in 1872 and instituting formal training for its teachers. The LSB's commitment was signalled by an amendment to its own regulatory code stipulating that military drill should be taught 'in every school during part of the time devoted to actual instruction' (i.e. during normal school hours). The Sergeant-Major remained in post until 1888, though there had by then been some developments in the capital city which suggested that the military influence was weakening. A decision in 1877 to install gymnastic apparatus in eighteen school playgrounds and to appoint a 'Lady Superintendent of Physical Education' indicated the direction of travel. Later, under the direction of Martina Osterman between 1881 and 1888, drills were introduced based on principles identified by Per-Henrik Ling in Sweden earlier in the century. These comprised free-standing exercises designed to develop a harmonious and healthy relationship with the body.[43] The LSB, however, like its Birmingham counterpart, though sometimes supplying a lead in physical education, was not necessarily representative of developments elsewhere, which moved at their own pace and were shaped by local conditions.

In June 1880, the log book for Birmingham's Moseley Road Board School recorded that a meeting had been held at the home of George Dixon 'relative

to the systematic introduction of gymnastics etc. into the schools and the encouragement of superintendence of games out of school'.[44] Dixon had been signalling his intention to shift BSB policy in this direction for some time, notably in a lecture delivered to the Birmingham Teachers' Association in October 1879 which had pointed to the advantages 'of games, gymnastics and drill in the promotion of health and formation of character'.[45] Not surprisingly, perhaps, given the way in which elementary education was funded, Dixon made a connection between physical education and school attendance.

> The greatest difficulty which all elementary schools have to encounter is irregularity of attendance. A wise introduction of physical exercises and games would aim a great blow at this evil by making the schools more attractive to the children. Our assistant masters might organise and take an active part in these amusements, and thus promote their own enjoyment and increase their own influence over the pupils.[46]

That Dixon chose to favour a body representing Birmingham's teachers with these thoughts was significant. What he was proposing was an extension of provision beyond the BSB's statutory obligations which could not be funded under current arrangements and would thus be reliant on other means of support, not the least important of which would be the voluntary efforts of teachers.

Such practical considerations helped to shape the way in which physical education was organised in Birmingham's elementary schools in the 1880s and beyond. Even before the PEC was established in 1881, some teachers had received 'a considerable amount of training in gymnastics and drill' and were 'introducing similar exercises amongst the children', an arrangement made possible by 'the kindness of the Committee of the Birmingham Athletic Club'. Operating outside the structures of the BSB, but with its approval, the PEC's work was funded by private donations. Dixon himself donated £100 and other 'ladies and gentlemen of the town' came forward. Funds were used to purchase equipment such as dumb-bells and staves, and to help to meet expenses relating to out-of-school activities.[47] The PEC's enthusiasm for physical exercises was also apparent. It staged a display at Oozells Street School in February 1883 designed to provide 'practical illustration in physical exercises by children from the different Board Schools in the town'. Boys demonstrated their proficiency in 'squad work' and on the horizontal and parallel bars; girls, directed by Miss Walton of the Dixon Road Schools, showcased skipping, dumb-bell and stave exercises, all executed 'in a manner which evoked frequent applause'. More attention was now being paid to physical exercises for girls and it was reported that the BAC's Professor Hubbard had devised a set of free and stave exercises specifically for use in girls' schools.[48]

PEC chair George Kenrick, a local industrialist and city councillor, took pride in its achievements relating to activities both in and out of school, observing after the display that 'they would have liked to have shown what they were doing in all the departments of physical exercises, but to do that would have required one of the Corporation Baths and a large park'.[49] It seems likely, however, that the PEC soon overreached itself, exposing the limitations of its voluntary funding model. While claiming in May 1884 that 'great progress' had been made over the previous twelve months, activities had been 'somewhat crippled for want of funds'.[50] These difficulties notwithstanding, the movement in favour of physical exercises had by now gained significant momentum and was favourably regarded by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMIs), one of whom 'had spoken in strong terms of approval of the manner in which physical exercises were conducted at Smith Street School'.[51] In December 1885 the BSB acted to ratify the changes that were already under way. 'So much has been accomplished in many of the Board Schools in physical exercises that the Board has been induced to adopt a scheme for that kind of instruction in all the Board Schools', it explained later.[52] The implications were apparent from the start. 'What is aimed at now', the *Mail* reported, 'is to encourage … the sort of gymnastics which may be practised in school time'. This would be 'something different from mere military drill'.[53]

The BSB's intentions were embodied in a set of local regulations specifying that twenty minutes of each school day should be devoted to physical exercises. Schools were advised that this arrangement was not intended to replace 'the run between lessons' – a feature of the daily routine for many – and also that teachers 'must understand that it is quite distinct from recreation'. The twenty-minute sessions, later reduced to fifteen minutes, would 'chiefly consist of formation, marching, running, the maze, free, dumb-bell and stave exercises'. The key to ensuring that this was rolled out was 'a Special Teacher thoroughly versed both in the practice and theory of the subject' who would be responsible for teacher education and general supervision across schools.[54] Samuel Bott began his work as Superintendent Teacher in 1886 and was soon actively promoting the BSB's scheme of physical exercises via a gymnastic display before 'a large attendance of spectators' at the Town Hall.[55] The PEC continued to meet and was soon commenting favourably on the 'abundant evidence of sound and painstaking teaching', attributing it to 'the enhanced importance given to the work by the regulations of the Board, which included [physical exercises] in the ordinary work of the schools'.[56] It seems likely that the BSB initiative was one of several being promoted across the country by the end of the 1880s. The *British Medical Journal* was 'glad to note that physical education is receiving attention from the LSB, *as from other similar bodies*'.[57]

In 1898, Bott – by then regarded as an expert witness – supplied the Education Department in London with a summary of the progress made in Birmingham since 1886. His role, he explained, embraced teacher training, assisting newly appointed teachers, visiting schools to give specimen lessons, and helping to organise yard exercises. Every class in every school was inspected annually 'for the purpose of seeing that the exercises have been properly taught'. The syllabus had been calibrated for boys and girls in different age groups and the emphasis throughout was on 'healthy physical development of the whole body and a high level of all-round physical efficiency'. There was much emphasis on marching for both boys and girls and it was only after they had reached the level of proficiency required at Standard I that they were introduced at Standard II to more difficult drills including turning, wheeling, and forming pairs, fours, and eights. This drill-based regime was then supplemented by exercises involving 'free body movements', which involved 'forward, backward and lateral movement of legs, arms, trunk and head' and could be performed in the classroom when the playground was unavailable. From Standard III lessons were enlivened by the use of dumb-bells and staves with exercises ranging from 'simple arm movements to difficult combinations of arm and body movements'. Indian clubs added another layer of complexity at Standard VI, where exercises were 'graceful and useful, but more difficult to teach and to explain'.[58]

Significantly, Bott concluded his report by referring to 'the moral effect' of physical exercises and, in particular, the idea that children would thereby acquire the habit of obedience. Through physical exercises under the instruction of trained teachers, they learned 'to recognise from their earliest years that there is a right way and a wrong way of doing even the simplest things'; moreover, they would 'develop the habit of doing what they are told to do, and doing it promptly—a habit that becomes strengthened by use'. According to Bott, teachers and pupils agreed that 'there is no more popular subject taken in the schools than physical exercises'.[59] If this was so, then the BSB would seem to have found a way of delivering the 'cheerful obedience to duty' which the Committee of Council on Education had been seeking as far back as 1875. Yet, it may not have been so, and it seems unlikely that every teacher and every child would have viewed the BSB's physical exercise regime as a positive experience. That the BSB retained an element of compulsion – all newly appointed teachers were required to undertake the relevant in-service training 'as a condition of employment' and annual salary increments could be withheld 'if a drill certificate be not obtained' – suggests that some may have been less than enthusiastic.[60]

Bott was entitled to make the most of his achievements. The Birmingham scheme was highly regarded by HMIs and attracted the attention of other school boards. In 1888 the Bradford board, having made relevant inquiries, concluded 'that the system of physical training in force under the

Birmingham School Board was certainly amongst the best'. Bott was invited to Bradford so as to give them 'a notion of it' and the Birmingham system was subsequently adopted.[61] Three years later it was reported that the Leeds, Leicester, and Sheffield boards had followed Bradford's example, that London was showing interest, and that managers of voluntary schools were making 'vigorous efforts in the same direction'.[62] Yet, though Bott made a big impact, caution is required when evaluating his essentially top-down account. It seems unlikely, for example, given significant local variations, that a smooth transition to the new programme was always achievable. Even within a relatively small area of Birmingham, elementary schools, at no great distance from each other, might differ significantly on account of their particular location and the social status of families in the neighbourhood. Carl Chinn's invaluable study of the Birmingham suburb of Sparkbrook argues that schooling there 'accentuated social division and perpetuated the plethora of disadvantages which afflicted the poor'.[63] It seems probable that this would have impacted differentially on what it was possible to achieve in local schools.

School log books, despite the 'gaps' and 'sparse entries' that frustrate historians of education, provide some useful indicators, revealing significant differences between individual schools.[64] Staniforth Street, designated a 'free order school' in the 1880s, catered for boys from extremely poor and often migratory families deemed by visiting officers as 'not fit to be introduced amongst children of decent working people attending ordinary schools until their physical condition had improved'.[65] Its log book reveals that HMIs responded sympathetically to its particular circumstances, allowing 'considerable leeway in the curriculum without reducing its grants' and encouraging teachers to focus their efforts on whatever was likely 'to interest the boys in school life', with 'physical exercises' featuring alongside singing and object lessons involving 'interesting animals', deemed likely to have the desired effect on behaviour.[66] This emphasis on physical exercises points to the prevailing orthodoxy regarding their moralising potential and also to recognition of Staniforth Street as a special case quite unlike other BSB schools. It stands out especially because drill and physical exercises were probably under-reported in school log books elsewhere.[67]

Log books also help to highlight differences between voluntary schools and board schools. The log book for Moseley Church of England School is especially instructive in this respect. Unlike Birmingham's board schools, it was overseen by the inspectors (HMIs) for neighbouring Worcestershire, who favoured military drill. Their reports, copied into its log books, indicate that it was taught there throughout the 1880s and into the 1890s, just as Bott's system was being rolled out across the city. The primary concern of HMIs was that it should impact positively on school discipline, reported in 1885 to be 'by no means lax', even though boys 'do not always display the

smart precision which is looked for in a school in which military Drill is taught'. Later, though some concerns regarding discipline persisted, drill was 'well taught'. What was looked for when inspecting military drill was 'smartness and precision', such qualities indicating that the habit of obedience, on which school discipline and good citizenship rested, had been acquired.[68] Recent research suggests that military drill was more likely to feature in schools operated by the National Schools Society than in those operated by school boards. This helps to explain why it was more popular in Worcestershire, where its schools predominated, than in Birmingham.[69] Log books and HMI reports may not tell the whole story but such local variations have to be taken into account in any assessment of the role of physical education in late-Victorian elementary schools.

Moreover, the possibility that Bott's account of the virtues of his scheme and its inexorable progress underestimates the continuing importance of military drill in elementary schools should not be discounted. BSB schools were, indeed, increasingly inclined to favour a more varied programme of physical exercises. This tendency was accentuated after the code was amended in 1891 so that inspectors could take them into account when assessing discipline and organisation. 'Under the competition of other systems', one HMI noted a year later, 'military drill has become less prominent' and by the late 1890s elementary schools favouring physical exercises outnumbered schools favouring military drill by almost four to one.[70] Yet military drill proved remarkably resilient. By 1899 it was being taught in more schools across England and Wales (2,659) than it had been in 1891 (1,265), much of this increase occurring from the mid-1890s as tensions between rival imperial powers intensified.[71] Moreover, there was always a military aspect to Bott's prescribed regimes of physical exercises. His BSB syllabus included marching for both boys and girls from the youngest at Standard I ('March in step') to the oldest at Standard VI ('Change step and do the right about-turn on the march').[72] Valued by teachers because it 'effectively assembled and dispersed large numbers of children in school playgrounds and buildings' and brought relief from 'static classroom activities', it could also be justified as a way of preparing civilians to fight for Queen and country.[73] With the approach of war from the mid-1890s this imperative grew more insistent, gathering strength especially when it coincided with growing concerns regarding the condition of the urban poor. For elementary schools, the most important manifestation of these anxieties was a further amendment to the code in 1895 specifying that the highest *per capita* grant to schools for discipline and organisation would be awarded only if some form of drill was taught.[74]

The militaristic, patriotic and social imperialist values associated specifically with drill were more apparent in some places than others but 'this was a time when there was a perceived need to prepare the young, physically

and psychologically … for an imperial war'.[75] Military influences in Birmingham may have been relatively weak but it was Joseph Chamberlain's political base and the South African War (1899–1902) was often characterised as 'Chamberlain's war', its one-time radical mayor having morphed into the Colonial Secretary in a Conservative and Liberal Unionist government. In these circumstances, the pressure on schools was palpable. In January 1900, the *Birmingham Daily Mail*, a newspaper that leaned towards the Liberal opposition, observed ominously:

> One outcome of the war fever which has seized upon the nation will probably be seen in the Germanising of the upbringing of our youth. Militarism will become a stronger element than it has ever been in this country. Next year's code issued by the Education Department for the regulation of elementary education will, perhaps, provide for military drill as a portion of the education to be given to every boy attending elementary schools.[76]

Nine months later it was reporting that 'various detachments of children from board schools' had participated in an exhibition at the Bingley Hall at which twenty-four six-and-seven-year-olds from the City Road school 'gave a picturesque flag drill under the direction of Miss Wilmott'.[77]

'Things outside the code': swimming, gymnastics, and team games

In the late nineteenth century, drill and physical exercises were progressively accommodated within the curriculum. Many other activities, even though they helped to define the elementary school experience for an increasing number of teachers and pupils, remained unrecognised under the Education Department's regulatory code. Significantly, Dixon, in his lecture to Birmingham's teachers in 1879, had turned first to 'the knowledge and practice of the art of swimming', when elaborating ways in which extra-curricular activities might be pursued for the benefit of children and society generally.[78] Perhaps it came to mind so readily because it was already happening. An arrangement had been in place in Birmingham since 1875 enabling elementary schools to purchase blocks of halfpenny tickets so that children, under the supervision of a teacher, could use public baths after school up to 5.30pm.[79] The LSB had lobbied unsuccessfully in 1872–1873 that school boards should be allowed to allocate funds for the teaching of swimming and its continuing efforts in this direction attracted sympathetic attention in Birmingham. 'Not more than one person out of every forty is able to swim', noted the *Daily Post*, 'and yet records of fatal accidents … show us how necessary this knowledge is'.[80] Referring to the Birmingham scheme, Dixon spoke of the benefits of public baths generally: 'If the School Boards will teach the value of water, and the Town Council will supply the apparatus necessary for its full use, I am of the opinion that the cost will be far more

than repaid by the moral and physical results that will follow.' The link between cleanliness and godliness was well established; children would swim their way to good health and good citizenship. There were, however, 'no grants for swimming, and the teacher who provides it for his pupils will have to do so by extra work outside school hours'.[81]

The main change impacting on swimming and other voluntary activities in Birmingham during the school board era came when the work previously undertaken by the PEC was taken up by the newly created Birmingham Athletic Institute (BAI) in 1891. Significantly, the remit of the BAI – effectively a continuation of the city's long-established and prestigious Athletic Club – 'would not be confined to Board Schools' but would extend to 'every elementary school in the city'.[82] Kenrick, as PEC chair, and Dr A.H. Carter, president of the BAC, were primarily responsible for driving the scheme forward. The projected institute was an opportunity to refocus fund-raising activities while providing the BAC with new headquarters in the city centre, the club's tenancy at Bingley Hall having become increasingly problematic as it often had to make way for agricultural shows. The prospect of a new gymnasium was probably sufficient in itself to persuade the BAC's members but Carter also spoke of the institute bringing 'great benefit to the community at large'. It was designed, he explained, 'to undertake very important duties with regard to the physical education and physical interest of the children *as they left* public elementary schools, and it would be a centre of instruction for all classes'.[83] Thus, the BAI would continue the work of the PEC in elementary schools while providing opportunities for school leavers and young adults to exercise at evening classes, some of which would be held on board school premises.

Speaking at the official opening ceremony, Kenrick, who had donated most of the funds required to build and equip the new gymnasium, referred primarily to its potentially beneficial impact on public health. 'Proper physical training', he claimed, 'would do more 'to empty the hospitals of Birmingham … than all the drugs that were stored in the city'.[84] Yet, especially in relation to drill and physical exercises in elementary schools, continuity prevailed. Bott had already been in post for five years by the time the PEC gave way to the BAI and his system was already in use. The BAI's main contribution to elementary education in the 1890s was to extend and formalise teacher training, focusing at first on a course of instruction for 'pupil-teachers (girls)'. By 1898, it could offer a course leading to the award of an Elementary Teachers Physical Training Certificate, a professional qualification recognised by the Education Department. 'Physical training', it was explained in an appendix to Bott's report, was by then 'part of the general education' of all BSB pupil-teachers who were expected to attend a weekly class at the BAI.[85] When interviewed by the press, Jack Adams, 'practical schoolmaster' and BAI secretary, elaborated on these details, adding that

an extra class 'open to all elementary school teachers regardless of sex, position or locality' was now running on Saturdays and attracting students not only from Birmingham but from the neighbouring Black Country. 'In this as in other movements for popularising physical culture', the *Sports Argus* concluded, 'Birmingham is in the forefront, and it only remains for other localities to follow her example.'[86]

Though drill and physical exercises were increasingly accommodated within the code in the 1880s and 1890s, 'athletics', including team games, gymnastics and swimming remained out-of-school activities, funded by voluntary donations and reliant on teacher goodwill. As Dixon had realised in 1879, engaging the active support of teachers for these extra-curricular activities was critical: it was 'upon the broad and self-sacrificing view which they may take of the duties of their profession will depend the future greatness of England'.[87] If this suggested that the BSB's chairman was a true-believer in the public-school ideology of athleticism, this was confirmed by a later passage in his lecture when, referring to problems arising when children migrated from one school to another, Dixon advocated inter-school sporting competition as a solution.

> Our children would grow up, not only to like going to school, but to prefer going always to the same school … It may sound strange to talk of an elementary scholar having that kind of feeling for Jenkins Street School or Moseley Road School that a public schoolboy has for Harrow or Rugby? But why should it not be so?

Pupils who learned to love 'the school of their childhood', he claimed, were more likely to become model citizens.[88] A virtuous link with athletic pursuits was thus established. There were certainly Birmingham teachers who would have received this message sympathetically, notably those who had been exposed to the cult of athleticism while training at St Peter's College, Saltley, on the edge of the city.[89] These included City Road's Jack Adams, a footballer with Walsall Town in his youth, a top referee and treasurer of the Birmingham and District Football Association in addition to his duties at the BAI.[90] Saltley graduate, Frederick Hackwood, at Dudley Road School, a goalkeeper for Wednesbury Strollers in the 1870s and someone who 'took a great interest in sport', was probably another true believer.[91] Yet, while acknowledging the potent influence of athleticism, there were also practical reasons why a teacher in an elementary school in an English industrial city at the turn of the century might be favourably disposed towards sport. As one 'Old Salt' explained, sport was 'a valuable asset'. Teaching boys to 'play the game' helped a teacher to 'get a grip on his scholars'.[92]

While recognising the encouragement given to extra-curricular activities by Birmingham's PEC, it is important not to overestimate its achievements.

It actively promoted physical exercises in-school along with gymnastics, swimming, cricket, and football out-of-school, but struggled to raise the funds required to support this aspect of its work. In 1886, it was 'no longer in a position to present prizes to children … public subscriptions having dwindled down to zero'.[93] That school sport established itself owed much to the enthusiasm of teachers and the capacity of schools to provide the necessary equipment. In 1890, the girls at Norton Street donated the proceeds from a performance of *Cinderella* to the boys at Dudley Road, who 'are poor and have not the means to provide funds for their athletic club'.[94] Sometimes other organisations in the city provided practical support. Newspaper reports of gymnastics displays routinely acknowledged the assistance of the BAC's Professor Hubbard. The Birmingham and District Football Association was also supportive, providing a shield for an annual schools knock-out competition (under-13s) in 1884 and ten guineas 'for the furtherance of juvenile football' in 1888. Two years later, Aston Villa Football Club, having won the Birmingham Senior Cup, were praised in the sporting press for donating the trophy so that it could be awarded to the winners of a knock-out competition for senior boys (under-14s).[95]

Athleticism undoubtedly predisposed some teachers to favour team sports. Yet this movement was also driven by other factors. 'The advance that football has made in public favour, more particularly among the working classes, during the last few years is simply marvellous', the *Birmingham Daily Mail* reported in the late 1880s.[96] When volunteering to supervise soccer out of school, teachers – whether true believers in athleticism or not—were often responding to the enthusiasm of pupils for a game that boys already played in the street, watched from the touchlines, or read about at home on Saturday evenings in the *Sports Argus*. In Birmingham, it was the professional rather than the public school game that fed into this sporting sub-culture as Aston Villa rose to national prominence in the 1880s and 1890s with a run of league and cup successes.[97] For some boys it was an all-consuming passion. One who attended the Royal Jubilee celebrations in the city centre in 1897 recalled as an adult that, as far as he was concerned, the principal attraction had been the float carrying the Villa team celebrating its recent league and cup double.[98] Nor should we overlook the possibility of child agency in this context. Working-class boys were relatively free to express themselves through football and some had ways of playing which owed little to athleticism and its associated code of gentlemanly behaviour. A disappointed correspondent, identifying himself as 'Assistant Master', complained that Cromwell Street had played an 'unsportsmanlike game' when defeating St George's, Edgbaston, in the semi-final of the Schools Shield competition in 1901. Defending a 2–1 lead, 'they deliberately kicked the ball out of play on every occasion'.[99] A triumph for pragmatism over athleticism, perhaps, but it also suggests that Cromwell Street's boys had both 'a

capacity to shape events' and an ability 'to self-edit the messages they received'.[100]

Towards the end of the 1890s, at the invitation of the Education Department, George Sharples, a Manchester headteacher and also a key figure in the organisation of English schoolboy soccer, compiled a report on games currently supervised on a voluntary basis by elementary school teachers. Sensing, perhaps, a half-open door, Sharples set out to make a compelling case. While acknowledging 'that physical exercises had been more and more introduced into the schools', he asserted that these were 'of an extremely limited character, and very often of doubtful utility'.[101] He went on to use reports solicited from teachers, highlighting comments which emphasised the positive impact of organised games on pupil behaviour and school discipline. The secretary of the West London Schools Football Association was quoted at length. Playing football was a healthy activity for boys and also had 'an important moral effect, teaching them, as it must, to restrain and control at all times their tempers and passions'.[102] Though the emphasis was very much on boys, Sharples pointed out that in many places an annual 'sports day' was organised with various races included 'to bring the girls into active participation'.[103] Athleticism, as Dixon had grasped twenty years earlier, could be usefully modified to promote cheerful obedience.

The idea that such activities should be taught within normal school hours was becoming harder to resist, not least because it was already happening. In Leeds, by the late 1890s, timetables had been adjusted so that swimming was now 'one of the ordinary subjects of instruction'.[104] Adams, who supplied Sharples with information on Birmingham, simply asserted that 'a very comprehensive scheme existed for the encouragement, promotion and control of outdoor sports and pastimes' which was 'fathered and financed' by the BAI. He suggested that inter-school competitions, organised according to BAI protocols, 'inculcated a love [for *alma mater*] and *esprit de corps* not excelled by that of our public schools' with contests 'conducted in an honourable and sportsmanlike manner'.[105] The Docker Cricket Shield, awarded to the champion school, exemplified both the generosity of the local cricketing celebrities who had presented the trophy and also the extent to which the BAI could rely on the support of Warwickshire County Cricket Club. Not only was the final played on its ground at Edgbaston but the club rewarded the finalists with medals and free passes to home matches for the following season.[106] Though not named, the city's 'leading athletic clubs' were praised for 'fostering and supporting those for whom they are particularly concerned'.[107] Yet the voluntary efforts of teachers were not mentioned, nor were the organisations that they had set up themselves, such as the Birmingham Schools Football Association, founded in 1891. Adams seemed content to survey the situation from the BAI's lofty organisational perspective. The view from below was sometimes rather different.

A problem with many extra-curricular activities, particularly those involving team sports, was that they did not engage all children. Bott's counterpart in Leeds could point to a successful soccer league organised on very similar lines to Birmingham's. Yet, as he noted, 'only a chosen team of strong lads from each school takes part in Football Contests, whereas one great advantage of Physical Training is that the strong and the weak, girls and boys, can participate and derive great benefit from the exercise'.[108] The BAI seemed aware of this, especially in relation to gymnastics where competitions were structured to provide incentives for 'the many' as well as the few, but Adams's report glossed over local difficulties, not least in relation to swimming, at the time the focus of much critical comment in the Birmingham press regarding inadequate provision. 'Birmingham has for years', complained the *Argus* in 1898, 'been dropping behind in the matter of bath accommodation' and some swimming clubs, a valuable source of relevant expertise, had relocated beyond the city's boundaries.[109] Four years later, even though provision was still made for 'Halfpenny Dippers', significant gaps remained. 'Good work is being done for the boys', the *Mail* conceded, while comparing Birmingham unfavourably with Liverpool in its provision for 'water babies', before adding, 'some day, perhaps, the girls will be encouraged to swim'.[110] As for playing fields, essential for team games, there was a perennial supply-side problem. 'Very much more could be done', the BAI admitted in 1901, 'if we had more open spaces'.[111]

Made in Birmingham?

The years between the Education Acts of 1870 and 1902 mark a distinct phase in the history of elementary education in England and Wales. Even at the end of this period, however, there was 'no "national" system of state education'.[112] In this context, though the *British Medical Journal* in the early 1880s was pleased that some school boards were taking physical education seriously, the most that could realistically be expected was that 'the good practice to which we refer may soon become general through the whole of the country'.[113] According to Osmund Airy, a Birmingham-based HMI, speaking at a prize distribution organised by the Elementary Schools Section of the BAI in 1901, 'the system under which the physical exercises and sports in the schools were managed in Birmingham [was] absolutely unique' in that it rested on extensive collaboration between local government and voluntary agencies operating under the umbrella of the BAI.[114] If, as Airy claimed, Birmingham was truly unique in this respect, then any suggestion that developments in the city were in some way typical of a broader pattern of provision nationwide should be set aside. Yet, though policy and practice were very much 'made in Birmingham' and shaped by local conditions, this did not mean that the city was an island unto itself. As we have

seen, the Education Department, which published Bott's report, and school boards in some other industrial cities looked to Birmingham as an example of 'good practice'. It supplied a template which could be adopted wholesale or modified according to particular circumstances.

As the regulatory code for elementary schools evolved after 1870, military drill, initially favoured, tended to give way to more varied schemes of physical exercise deemed suitable for both boys and girls. A scheme such as that devised for the BSB, even though it involved marching and drill-related activities, offered school boards and other providers a useful degree of flexibility. It had its uses for those teaching 'the little mites in the infants department … toddling into school at three years of age' and could be followed through systematically until children left school at twelve or thirteen.[115] Such schemes allowed elementary schools to cater for girls more effectively, sometimes developing 'an aesthetic element', akin to dance.[116] As we have seen, they might still feature a good deal of marching, turning and wheeling, so that a link with the military tradition and the positive behavioural outcomes associated with it was maintained. Significantly, however, extra-curricular activities, especially organised team sports, could be justified in the same way. Outdoor games, if properly supervised, according to a Cardiff teacher cited by Sharples, encouraged 'promptness, courtesy, unselfishness, good humour, and, in general, ability to discriminate between "right" and "wrong"'.[117] This was a view which would have resonated strongly in Birmingham, not least with Adams and other advocates of modified athleticism.

Some caution, nevertheless, is required when evaluating the city's record of achievement. In particular, we should not be distracted by reports of girls from the Graham Street Dissenting Charity School performing their 'graceful evolutions' at BAI prize-giving events around the turn of the century.[118] Birmingham's schoolgirls were less likely to be included in out-of-school activities than boys. Moreover, leading figures in the physical education movement were relentlessly positive and historians have probably been too ready to accept that 'systems' and 'schemes' were rolled out smoothly and implemented in line with assurances given at the time by their well-intentioned authors and other interested parties.[119] Civic leaders liked to promote Birmingham as an efficiently-run city whose inhabitants were more fortunate than their counterparts elsewhere. Readers of 'Scenes in Slumland', published in instalments by the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* in 1901, were invited to draw different conclusions. One correspondent 'could not help feeling very much humiliated to think that I am an inhabitant and large ratepayer of this best-governed city in the world'.[120] Children living in appalling conditions could be difficult to reach as well as difficult to teach and sensitivity to gaps between rhetoric and reality is required when evaluating evidence derived from official and quasi-official sources.

Moreover, the particular circumstances of individual schools undoubtedly impacted on children's experience of physical education. In 1902, when 700 boys attended Kent Street Baths to take the one-length test required to be awarded a free pass, there was an observable difference between suburban schools whose well-taught pupils could demonstrate 'a beautifully clean stroke' and 'slum school' swimmers performing the 'cut stroke', described as 'a method peculiar to those who take a dip in the noisome water of our canals'. Boys from Gem Street, the only Birmingham elementary school with its own pool, performed noticeably better than others, only seven out of forty-five failing the test.[121] As for Birmingham's girls, even two years later, they were 'almost entirely neglected in this matter', whereas in neighbouring Aston, as critics pointed out, this was not the case.[122] This suggests that future research in this area should focus more on the experience of teachers who delivered physical education and the children who received it rather than on the schemes of those who organised it.

It is also important to note that the partnership between the BSB and the BAI that Airy had praised in 1901 was probably less secure than it seemed at the time. By 1904, the BAI was reported to be running at a loss and facing the prospect of closing 'within the next three years'.[123] It had, however, overseen the introduction of physical exercises and an expanding programme of school sports, albeit still highly dependent on the voluntary co-operation of teachers. Arguably, this had served a useful purpose, assisting board schools and an increasing number of voluntary schools in their efforts to ensure that scholars were manageable, dutiful, and cheerfully obedient, qualities which it was hoped they would carry into adult life. Elementary schools in the late nineteenth century often chose topics or used textbooks and 'readers' designed to inculcate a preferred set of values. Yet the process by which values were transmitted 'through the mundane, banally repetitive events of the normal school day' merits serious attention.[124] Samuel Bott's 'complete system of physical exercises', experienced daily in Birmingham's board schools and elsewhere were a part of that process. So, too, were the activities in which children participated out of school hours.

Notes

1. Birmingham Archive and Heritage Service [BAHS]: LA 639B7D622, *An Address Delivered to the Birmingham School Board by the Chairman, George Dixon, Esq., M.P., November 5th 1891*, 14.
2. Cited in George Sharples, 'The Organisation of Games Out of School for the Children Attending Public Elementary Schools in the Large Industrial Centres, as Voluntarily Undertaken by the Teachers', Parliamentary Papers [PP], Cmd. 8943, XXIV (1898), *Education Department: Special Reports on Educational Subjects*, Vol. 2, 167. For Adams see Colm Hickey, '"A Potent and

Pervasive Ideology": Athleticism and the English Elementary School', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, no. 13 (2011): 1882, fn. 7.

3. See Richard Vinen, *Second City: Birmingham and the Forging of Modern Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 2022), 69–72; also Eric Hopkins, *Birmingham: The Making of the Second City 1850–1939* (Stroud: Tempus, 2001), 50; Roger Ward, *The Chamberlains: Joseph, Austen and Neville 1836–1940* (Stroud: Fonthill Media, 2015), 22.
4. Elementary education in Scotland, where conditions were different to England and Wales, was shaped by separate legislation in the form of the Education (Scotland) Act of 1872. See Martin Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1851–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 496–7.
5. The Anglican (Church of England) and the Nonconformist churches represent the two principal strands of English Protestantism which emerged after the breach with Roman Catholicism in the mid-seventeenth century. The term 'Nonconformist' covered those denominations (Baptist, Congregationalists, Methodists, Unitarians, and others) which refused to acknowledge the primacy of the Church of England.
6. J.A. Mangan and Frank Galligan, 'Militarism, Drill and Elementary Education: Birmingham Nonconformist Responses to Conformist Responses to the Teutonic Threat prior to the Great War', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, nos. 3–4 (2011): 585. Birmingham's population grew from 233,841 (1831) to 343,787 (1871), see Hopkins, *Birmingham*, 98.
7. See Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare*, 492–8, for an overview of the development of elementary education between 1870 and 1902. By 1900 board school pupils in Birmingham outnumbered those in voluntary schools by 57,665 to 31,392 and the gap was growing; see Mangan and Galligan, 'Militarism, Drill and Elementary Education', 587.
8. See Ruth Felstead, 'Teaching "Cheerful Obedience to Duty": Moral, Patriotic and Imperial Education in Birmingham and Worcestershire Elementary Schools, c.1880–1902' (PhD diss., Liverpool Hope University, 2023), 96–7, tables 1 and 2. The Church of England, with thirty-nine schools in 1871 and thirty-eight in 1891 was the principal voluntary provider, followed by the Roman Catholic Church and the Nonconformists with eight and four schools respectively in 1871; ten and three in 1891.
9. See John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (London: Methuen & Co., 1973), 321–2.
10. Vinen, *Second City*, 134–5; Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare*, 495.
11. 'Elementary Education Statistics', *The Times*, 23 June 1902, 12, summarising the statistical summary recently made available for the year 1901.
12. Margaret Worsley, 'Roman Catholic Education in Nineteenth Century Birmingham', *Birmingham Historian*, 24 August 2003, 33.
13. Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare*, 494–4; also Felstead, 'Teaching Cheerful Obedience', 109–11.
14. Alan Penn, *Targeting Schools: Drill, Militarism and Imperialism* (London: Woburn Press, 1999), 19–24. The 'twenty weeks' requirement was changed to 'not more than forty hours in the year' in 1873.
15. Peter C. McIntosh, *Physical Education in England since 1800* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1968), 107–8; Penn, *Targeting Schools*, 19–22.

16. J.A. Mangan and Colm Hickey, 'English Elementary Education Revisited and Revised: Drill and Athleticism in Tandem', *European Sports History Review* 1 (1999): 89.
17. McIntosh, *Physical Education in England since 1800*, 110–11; see also Penn, *Targeting Schools*, 36.
18. J.A. Langford, 'Things Not in the Code', *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 2 January 1885, 2.
19. Penn, *Targeting Schools*, 29.
20. Committee of Council for Education, England and Wales, *New Code of Education (as modified by Minute of 5 April, 1875) with an appendix of new articles and of all articles modified* (London: HMSO, 1875), 6.
21. See Susannah Wright, 'The Work of Teachers and Others in and around a Birmingham Slum School 1891–1920', *History of Education* 38, no. 6 (2009): 731–2; *The Schoolmaster*, 17 December 1872, cited in Hopkins, *Birmingham*, 119.
22. Stephen Heathorn, *For Home, Country and Race: Constructing, Gender, Class and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 211.
23. Peter Yeandle, *Citizenship, Nation and Empire: The Politics of History Teaching in England, 1870–1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 41.
24. Committee of Council on Education, England and Wales, *Circular of General Instructions to Her Majesty's Inspectors, Report with Appendix* (London: HMSO, 1878), 335. Sandon was Vice-President of the Committee of Council on Education.
25. Felstead, 'Teaching Cheerful Obedience', 57–9, 250.
26. See Colm Kerrigan, *Teachers and Football: Schoolboy Association Football in England, 1885–1915* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2005), 184–5; Colm Kerrigan, '"Sweet Analytics": Athleticism and Elementary-School Football Associations', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 18 (2012): 2500–31.
27. Hickey, 'A Potent and Pervasive Ideology', 1852–90.
28. Gerry P.T. Finn, 'Reappraising Athleticism', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, no. 13 (2011): 1891–901.
29. Colm Hickey, 'A Flock of Swallows: Athleticism in Elementary Schools, 1870–1914—A Necessary Corrective', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 33, nos. 6–7 (2016): 739.
30. Robert J. Hind, 'Elementary Schools in Nineteenth-Century England: Their Social and Historiographical Contexts', *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 11, no. 2 (1984): 190. See also Lawson and Silver, *A Social History of Education in England*, 370–1.
31. Vinen, *Second City*, xvii–xviii.
32. 'Board School Gymnasts', *British Medical Journal* 1, no. 1158, 10 March 1883, 468.
33. Roger Ward, *City-State and Nation: Birmingham's Political History c.1830–1940* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), 67. Between 1870 and 1902, the BSB built a total of fifty-one new schools in the city. These are listed in Roy Thornton, 'The Board Schools of Birmingham', *The Birmingham Historian*, 21 February 2002, 8–9.
34. 'The Utility of Physical Culture', *The Field*, 30 January 1875, 93–4.
35. See Penn, *Targeting Schools*, 24–5. For an indication of the extreme pressures to which the BSB was subjected in its early years, especially in relation to

accommodation and staffing, see the report of its meeting in the *Birmingham Daily Post*, 28 March 1874, 7.

36. Samuel Bott, 'Physical Training of the Scholars in Birmingham Board Schools', PP, Cmd. 8943, XXIV, (1898), *Education Department: Special Reports on Educational Subjects* (London: HMSO, 1898), vol. 2, 207.
37. Penn, *Targeting Schools*, 43–50; for Birmingham and the gymnastic movement see Mangan and Galligan, 'Militarism, Drill and Elementary Education', 570.
38. 'Physical Education in Board Schools: A Plea for the Children' *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 8 February 1875, 4.
39. *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 12 February 1875, 2, letter from 'An Ex-Pupil Teacher'.
40. Ibid., 15 February 1875, 2, letter from Joseph M. Hubbard, usually known as 'Professor Hubbard'.
41. Ibid., 15 February 1875, 2, letter from 'Strong and Free'.
42. Ibid., 16 February 1875, 2, letter from W.W. Brookes. It seems very likely from references in the letter from William Penny Brookes as cited that W.W. Brooks was the author of the original article.
43. Penn, *Targeting Schools*, 53–60; McIntosh, *Physical Education in England since 1800*, 113–15; for Ling's system see Suzanne Lundvall, 'From Ling Gymnastics to Sports Science: The Swedish School of Sport and Health Science, GIH, from 1813 to 2023', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 6 (2015): 790–1.
44. BAHS: S45/3/1, Moseley Road School Board School Boys Department, log book, 1 June 1880, cited in Felstead, 'Cheerful Obedience', 124.
45. BAHS: L48.06 124183, *Lecture on Elementary Education in the Birmingham Board Schools delivered to the Birmingham Teachers' Association by George Dixon, Chairman of the Birmingham School Board, October 7th, 1879*, 20–1.
46. Ibid.
47. For physical exercises in Birmingham schools generally at this time see Mangan and Galligan, 'Militarism, Drill and Elementary Education', 586–7.
48. *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 23 February 1883, 2.
49. Ibid., 23 February 1883, 2.
50. Ibid., 3 May 1884, 2.
51. Ibid., 5 February 1885, 3.
52. BAHS: L48.21 3129, Birmingham School Board [BSB], *Report Showing the Work Accomplished by the Board during the year ended November 28, 1886* (Birmingham: Birmingham School Board, 1886), 45.
53. *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 4 December 1885, 2.
54. Bott, 'Physical Training of the Scholars in Birmingham', 207–8.
55. *Birmingham Daily Mail,* 3 May 1887, 4.
56. Ibid., 25 June 1887, 3.
57. 'Physical Education in Board Schools', *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 1489 (13 July 1889): 86, *authors' italics*.
58. Bott, 'Physical Training of the Scholars in Birmingham', 208–11.
59. Ibid., 213–14.
60. Ibid., 208–9.
61. *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 16 April 1888, 3; *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 12 May 1888, 2.
62. *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 12 March 1891, 2.

63. Carl Chinn, 'Was Separate Schooling a Means of Class Segregation in Late Victorian and Edwardian Birmingham?', *Midland History* 13 (1988): 109–10.
64. See Susannah Wright, 'Teachers, Family and Community in the Urban Elementary School: Evidence from English School Log Books c.1880-1918', *History of Education* 41, no. 2 (2012): 159; see also Mangan and Hickey, 'English Elementary Education Revisited', 73.
65. BAHS: L.48.21 3129, BSB, *Report of Work Accomplished*, 20.
66. Felstead, 'Teaching Cheerful Obedience', 156–8, citing BAHS: S186/1, Staniforth Street Board School log book, 19 March 1886.
67. Ibid., 122–3.
68. Ibid., 129, citing BAHS: S273/2/2-3, Moseley Church of England School log books, October 1885, October 1887.
69. Ibid., 121–2.
70. See Penn, *Targeting Schools,* 35–6.
71. Ibid.
72. Bott, 'Physical Training of the Scholars in Birmingham', 209; 211–12.
73. Ann Bloomfield, 'Drill and Dance as Symbols of Imperialism', in *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialisation and British Imperialism*, ed. J.A. Mangan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 82.
74. See Penn, *Targeting Schools*, 37–8.
75. See Felstead, 'Teaching Cheerful Obedience', 132–3.
76. *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 24 January 1900, 2. This anticipated the attempt by the Board of Education, the successor to the Education Department, to promote a new War Office approved 'Model Course of Physical Training' at the end of the war. For Birmingham and the South African War see Ward, *City-State and Nation*, 139–42.
77. Ibid., 17 Octobers 1901, 2.
78. BAHS: LA48.06 124183, Dixon, *Lecture on Elementary Education*, 20.
79. See Dave Day and Margaret Roberts, 'Swimming Beyond the Metropolis: The Kent Street Baths in Victorian Birmingham', *Midland History* 46, no.2 (2021): 202. For details of the scheme see also the advertisement placed by Birmingham Borough Council in local newspapers; for example, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 March 1875, 1.
80. *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6 August 1875, 4. For the London School Board and swimming see Christopher Love, 'State Schools, Swimming and Physical Training', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 24, no. 5 (2007): 655–8.
81. BAHS: L48.06, 124183, *Lecture on Elementary Education*, 20.
82. *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 17 December 1891, 2.
83. Ibid., 22 January 1890, 2; our italics. For a prospectus of the scheme see BAHS: L25.1 114827, Circular issued in October 1889 by a Special Committee of the Birmingham Athletic Club, 1–16.
84. *Birmingham Daily Post*, 29 February 1892, 5.
85. See Bott, 'Physical Training of the Scholars in Birmingham', Appendix, 215–17. This section of Bott's report was authored by John Adams as BAI secretary. For pupil-teachers, effectively serving a five-year apprenticeship before qualifying as teachers, see David A. Coppock, 'Respectability as a Prerequisite of Moral Character: The Social and Occupational Mobility of Pupil Teachers in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *History of Education* 26, no. 2 (1997): 169–70.
86. *Sports Argus* (Birmingham), 29 January 1898, 1.

87. BAHS: L48.06 124183, Dixon, *Lecture on Elementary Education*, 18.
88. Ibid., 21.
89. See Tony Mason, *Association Football in England 1863–1915*, new ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), 71–2; first published in 1980. For the importance of sport, especially football, at Saltley see W.R. Middleton, 'Sport and Sportsmen', in *Saltley College Centenary 1850–1950*, ed. John Osborne (Birmingham: Saltley College, 1950), 135–9.
90. See Adams' obituary, *Walsall Observer*, 23 October 1926, 9.
91. See Hackwood's obituary, *Dudley Chronicle*, 16 December 1926, 2. Hackwood was also a prolific author. His *Notes for Lessons on Moral Subjects: A Handbook for Teachers in Elementary Schools* (1883) was widely used in BSB schools; see Felstead, 'Teaching Cheerful Obedience', 188.
92. 'The Schoolmaster in Sport: Reminiscences of Saltley College', *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 16 December 1903, 5.
93. Ibid., 4 December 1886, 2.
94. Ibid., 4 December 1886, 2; 18 February 1890, 2.
95. See Colm Kerrigan, *A History of the English Schools Football Association 1904–2004* (Yore Publications/ESFA: Harefield, 2004), 8–9; BAHS: MS 519/2, Minutes of the Birmingham and District Football Association, 11 April 1888; 'Midland Notes', *Athletic News*, 15 June 1886, 3.
96. *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 4 April 1887, 2.
97. For the rise of Manchester City FC and the enthusiasm of working-class boys for soccer, see Gary James, 'The Origins of School Football Associations: Manchester as a Case Study', *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics* 23, no. 8 (2020): 1381–2.
98. Felstead, 'Teaching Cheerful Obedience', 243.
99. *Sports Argus*, 9 March 1901, 3; letter from 'Assistant Master'.
100. See the comments on agency in Felstead, 'Teaching Cheerful Obedience', 247.
101. Sharples, 'Organisation of Games Out of School', 159. For Sharples see James, 'Origins of School Football Associations', 1371–2.
102. Sharples, 'Organisation of Games Out of School', 164.
103. Ibid., 168. What Sharples had in mind here were primarily egg-and-spoon races and races with skipping ropes. In Manchester, however, by the mid-1890s, girls were encouraged to play a non-contact team game called 'Captain Ball'; see James. 'Origins of School Football Associations', 1373.
104. R.E. Thomas, 'Physical Training under the Leeds School Board', PP (UK), Cmd. 8943, XXIV, *Education Department: Special Reports on Educational Subjects* (1898), vol. 2, 221–2.
105. Sharples, 'Organisation of Games Out of School', 168.
106. Ibid.; for the Docker brothers as patrons of elementary school sport see Hickey, 'A Potent and Pervasive Ideology', 1887–8.
107. Sharples, 'Organisation of Games Out of School', 168.
108. Thomas, 'Physical Training under the Leeds School Board', 223.
109. *Sports Argus*, 26 March 1898, 4.
110. 'Birmingham's Water Babies', *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 26 September 1902, 2.
111. *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 6 December 1901, 5.
112. Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–51* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 206; see also Lawson and Silver, *Social History of English Education*, 370–1.
113. *British Medical Journal* 1, no. 1158 (10 March 1883): 468.

114. *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 6 December 1901, 5. For Airy, see Felstead, 'Teaching Cheerful Obedience', 106–7.
115. *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 17 December 1891, 2.
116. Bloomfield, 'Drill and Dance', 81–2.
117. Sharples, 'Organisation of Games Out of School', 165.
118. *Birmingham Daily Post*, 5 December 1902, 10.
119. See, for example, Mangan and Galligan, 'Militarism, Drill and Elementary Education', 595; 'especially the claim that the BSB and the agencies with which it worked 'created a comprehensive system of physical training that was in time adopted by the whole nation'.
120. *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 22 April 1901, 4; letter from 'AGENT'; see also Chinn, 'Separate Schooling', 109.
121. *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 26 September 1902, 2.
122. Ibid., 20 July 1904, 2; 2 December 1904, 2.
123. BAHS: L25.1 114828, BAI, report and balance sheet for 1903, 5; also *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 13 April 1904, 2.
124. See Felstead, 'Teaching Cheerful Obedience', 262–3.

Disclosure statement

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