

The Emergence and Development of Association Football: Influential Sociocultural Factors in Victorian Birmingham

This article explores the interdependent, complex socio-cultural factors that facilitated the emergence and diffusion of football in Birmingham. The focus is the development of football in the city, against the backdrop of the numerous social changes in Victorian Birmingham. The aim is to fill a gap in the existing literature which seemingly overlooked Birmingham as a significant footballing centre, and the 'ordinary and everyday' aspects of the game's early progression. Among other aspects, particular heed is paid to the working classes' involvement in football, as previous literature has often focused on the middle classes and their influence on and participation in organised sport. As the agency of the working classes along with their mass participation and central role in the game's development is unfolded, it is argued that far from being passive cultural beings, the working classes, from the beginnings, actively negotiated the development of their own emergent football culture.

Introduction

A range of academics have discussed extensively the emergence and development of football during the mid-to-late Victorian era, though arguably there has remained a tendency to become preoccupied with the 'search' for the 'origins of the modern game'.¹ As Kitching² contended, the attention given to the 'chimera' of searching for the origins and (the most prominent) rules of football has detracted and/or distracted from the continued engagement with exploring the emergence and development of the *playing* (and watching) of modern football. Therefore, in addition to re-centring our approach to exploring football (as opposed to the search for the origins), it is also pertinent to begin to fill in some gaps on the ever-expanding tapestry of football in England. A central aspect is to redress the conspicuous absence of football in Birmingham from the majority of academic discussions, which is still the case in spite of Birmingham (and the surrounding region) being a hotbed for early football; providing three members of the original football league (Aston Villa, West Bromwich Albion and Wolverhampton Wanderers), and also two members of the original football league division two (Small Heath (now Birmingham City) and Walsall), whilst being the adopted home of the 'founder' of the football league, William McGregor. Differently put, despite being England's second largest city and at the centre of both sport and industrial

development during the period considered here, there remains an academic lacuna around football development in Birmingham.

Therefore, the following socio-historical account is concerned with filling this gap by predominantly employing Raymond Williams' ³ value exchange cycle to explain and frame some of the complex developments and influences during the early spread of football. In recognising the complexity of social relations and challenging 'one-way, cause and effect relationships that disregard human agency in social transformations and social continuity' ⁴, appreciation will be given both to the middle-class inspired ⁵ organisation and influence upon football as well as to the working classes' involvement in processes of intra- and inter-class socio-cultural exchanges revolving around football in and around the city.

Foundations of Early Sports in Birmingham

Many of the complex, interdependent socio-historical elements explored here exhibit similarities to the development of the sport elsewhere in England. For instance, Lewis ⁶ outlined how the development and diffusion of association football in South and East Lancashire between 1879 and 1885 was influenced by a 'tradition of local rivalries, a developed, relatively high wage industrial economy, good transport networks, an interlocking network of towns and villages in a confined area, and a middle class willing to develop an innovation in a business fashion in open competition' – all of which were present in Birmingham (with Birmingham's population being considerably larger and denser). To this list Swain and Harvey ⁷ also added increased leisure time for working people and the rise of a predominantly working class culture – though Swain and Harvey felt that these same factors applied to Yorkshire (specifically Sheffield) possibly as early as the 1860s and 1870s. Again, these factors were both present and significant in Birmingham and, as shall be discussed, were influential in shaping the city's sporting culture.

Birmingham's population increased dramatically ⁸ before and during the industrial revolution, with people from all segments of the British Isles gravitating to the 'City of a Thousand Trades' ⁹ to join the working masses. This created a vortex of continuous and widespread influx of cultures, including pastimes and leisure activities. For instance, as early as the 16th century, businessman John Cooper introduced bull baiting – a bull chained to a stake in the middle of a ring, which was then attacked by dogs with the winner being the dog that withstood the bull's blows the longest – as a form of past time, creating the excitement of a 'flutter'. ¹⁰ Although initially accepted and popular, this practice was banned from the market place in 1773. ¹¹ The ban, however, did not immediately cease all blood sports and the

last officially recorded bull baiting in Birmingham was as late as 1838.¹² These activities were indeed some of the first ‘organised’ sports in the city, like cock fighting and bare-knuckle fighting in the mid-to-late 1700s, which were often centred on betting as much as on the spectacle itself.¹³ For this widespread gambling to take place at least some basic rules were required; for instance, agreement as to when a contest had been won or lost. Therefore, it can be suggested that early (mostly blood) ‘sports’ must have had some basic but formalised rules, which, arguably, were instrumental in the increased codification of a range of sporting pastimes to come. Moreover, along with the traditional view on the role of the middle-class with regard to introducing organised sports, the formative function of the working classes in Birmingham in the organisation of early sports, especially violent ‘blood sports’, should be acknowledged as they were instrumental in their development and were present in large numbers.¹⁴

The continuously growing number of Birmingham’s working population meant that public transportation became increasingly important. In addition to transporting teams and fans to fixtures, railway networks became vital to the spread of the emerging codification of sports. During the Victorian era, the railways promised dramatically new possibilities¹⁵ and were instrumental in promoting sporting activities and attracting spectators who were increasingly able to travel from further afield due to reduced cost and growing availability.¹⁶ The Grand Junction Railway began to operate through central Birmingham in 1837¹⁷, with stations opened in the areas that now surround the Birmingham City and Aston Villa grounds: in Bordesley (1855), Adderley Park (1860) and Small Heath (1863), and in Aston (1854) and Witton (1876), respectively. Urban development was on the rise, which, along with a number of other factors¹⁸, contributed to a rapid population growth in Aston from 922 in 1831 to 16,337 in 1861.¹⁹ The above stations have continued to serve players and fans of Aston Villa and Birmingham City for more than 130 years (though it is likely players have not travelled by rail for some time). Wigglesworth²⁰ observed that in the early days certain (leisure) activities would not have taken place without rail travel. For the working classes who were increasingly benefiting from reduced hours and higher wages²¹, cheap excursion trains²² allowed them to follow their local football and rugby teams throughout the north of England, whose league structure and fixture lists had grown as a direct result of rail extensions.²³ Fans often travelled in great numbers on the railways. An example being in 1897 when Aston Villa played Everton in the FA Cup final at Crystal Palace. Between seven and eight thousand Villa fans travelled down to London from Birmingham, as the train carriages were said to be ‘full of excitement and the team’s colours’.²⁴ The new transport links not only

enabled people to travel further and faster, they also meant that sports news and newspapers could travel more rapidly and regularly than ever before²⁵, which was integral to the developing popularity of sports and attracting spectators.²⁶

Relatively unique to Birmingham was the canal network. Initiated by engineer James Brindley and completed in 1772, the canals connected Birmingham to the coalfields of South Staffordshire, and more significantly to the ports of Liverpool, Bristol and Hull.²⁷ Birmingham went from land-locked to being the centre of the nation's waterways²⁸, including more miles of canal than Venice, Italy. Though not directly influencing football in terms of transporting individuals, the canal system was significant in Birmingham's industrial growth and in the development of transport links in the region²⁹, which, in turn, contributed to the increase of the population. In addition to the well documented middle-class impact on Birmingham's society (e.g., the planning and implementation of the transport systems³⁰), there was an undeniable middle-class influence on Birmingham's sport development (e.g., the creation and organisation of local football and cricket leagues³¹) during the Victorian era. With regard to football, Dunning et al.³² suggested that football 'may have been developed far more *for* the working class than it was developed *by* them', which, to some extent, could be observed in Birmingham as local businessmen were often key in aiding football clubs in their formative years.³³ Swain and Harvey³⁴ also emphasised the importance of the lower-middle class in Lancashire's football development – the teachers, clerks, accountants – who had the 'necessary social and cultural capital to administer and develop the emerging association football clubs in the late 1870s and early 1880s'. Molyneux added that they were proficient in the correspondence, administration and general organisation required to promote and develop a new club³⁵. The same could be said for clubs in Birmingham. For example, Birmingham City FC's (initially called Small Heath Alliance) first club captain, Billy Edmunds, was a successful local business man who was integral to the club's early development. Harry Morris, a former player, became a businessman and an influential director for the club, and was also credited with 'finding' St Andrews ground in 1906.³⁶ Many significant clubs during the 1870s and 1880s, which later went into decline and were disbanded (this is discussed elsewhere in more detail encompassing the United Kingdom, for instance, in Scotland³⁷), were also formed or heavily influenced by the middle classes; Calthorpe FC (originating from the Birmingham Clerks Association) and Wednesbury Old Athletic FC (founded by 'scholars' at St. John's night school) being good examples³⁸. George Ramsey, a significant captain and club secretary³⁹ in the early days of Aston Villa FC, was a clerk in the brass industry, which at that time would be considered at least lower-middle

class. Though it may be argued that most significant at this time was William McGregor, a Scottish draper who relocated to Birmingham and became a director at Aston Villa⁴⁰ and is widely celebrated as being the catalyst behind, and founder of, the Football League.⁴¹ However, in addition to specific individuals, there were a number of other socio-cultural factors influencing the emergence of football in Birmingham; cricket and religion being two of these.

The Founding of Clubs: The Influence of Cricket and Religion

The first recorded cricket match in Birmingham was as early as July 1751⁴² but the sport experienced an expansion only late in the nineteenth century⁴³, which was in line with the city's industrial development. To demonstrate this spurt: the number of cricket clubs increased from 69 in 1871 to 214 in 1880: 64 were church based, 16 were pub teams, 25 came from firms.⁴⁴ The founding members of both Aston Villa and Birmingham City football clubs were members of church-based cricket teams, and in both cases the players were in search of an activity to do outside the cricket season⁴⁵, which was not an uncommon practice during this period.⁴⁶ Other prominent local teams during the late 1800s were founded by established cricket clubs, including Aston Unity (their football club was disbanded in 1908, as players had continually 'defected' to Aston Villa; but they continue today as a cricket club and played cricket against the Aston Villa cricket team until the 1960s) and Walsall Town FC (who later amalgamated with Walsall Swifts FC and eventually became Walsall FC)⁴⁷. In the case of Aston Villa, the four founding members had watched a small group playing an informal game of football on a wasteland in Aston and decided that was what their cricket team could do to keep fit during the winter.⁴⁸ The connections between cricket and football helped football's early development as groups of men had already played sport together during the summer months, so it may have been a natural progression to play a different sport in the winter. However, in Birmingham, due to its swiftly increasing popularity, the less time-consuming and, arguably, faster-paced football became a rival to cricket, rather than complimenting it. Jack Hughes, one of the founders of Aston Villa FC, is purported to have said in 1876 (just two years after founding the football club) that football fever had taken over and they had lost interest in cricket.⁴⁹ Initially, cricket and football lived side-by-side in Birmingham's sporting calendar (as cricket was played April to September, and the football season was from October to March), but by the early 1880s the continued development of football had seen the season encroach into the summer months; meaning players had to choose one or the other, with football being the increasingly popular choice in the

city⁵⁰. Therefore, although it may have been an initial catalyst in forming football clubs, cricket's influence on football was relatively short-lived.

Religion is also frequently credited with influencing football at this time.⁵¹ The church and many church-ordained school masters used the notion of muscular Christianity in order to identify and develop qualities of good character – manliness, vigour, self-restraint and courage.⁵² Sport was used as a tool, or a means to an end, to produce young men who were 'muscular Christians' (strong in body, pure in heart, faithful to friends, family and country and knew their duty before God) and valued the importance of the Christian sport hero as a way of communicating the Christian message.⁵³ In many areas of England, 'organised football evolved as a Christian development to divert youths from gang fights and drunkenness as a method to instil finer qualities of character'.⁵⁴ Wolverhampton Wanderers, Everton, Burnley and Bolton are all professional teams that were established through religious groups and Sunday schools around this time. This was also the case in Birmingham, as 84 of the 218 football teams mentioned in the local press between 1876 and 1884 had connections with organised religion.⁵⁵ It has been claimed that both Aston Villa and Birmingham City had 'strong links' to organised religion. Aston Villa, as previously stated, were founded by four cricketers from Villa Cross Wesleyan Chapel cricket team in 1874⁵⁶, and Birmingham City were founded by members of the Holy Church cricket team in Bordesley Green a year later.⁵⁷ However, the top down view often implies that church authorities set teams up to influence the masses and that the church was actively involved in organising football clubs.⁵⁸ Examples, on the contrary, demonstrate that this may not have been the case in Birmingham. In fact, Holt⁵⁹ argued that most of the early sports initiatives came from the ordinary church members rather than from the clergy. Though a number of founding members may have attended church, in the case of both Aston Villa and Birmingham City, there appears to be little evidence that the founding of these clubs was directly 'church inspired' or part of the muscular Christianity movement in anything other than the loosest sense. For instance, Birley⁶⁰ claimed that Small Heath Alliance quickly outgrew its church links from Holy Trinity cricket and football club. Though the *dominant* cultural value system of the church and the notion of muscular Christianity had links with clubs all over the country, and possibly provided significant initial momentum within Birmingham, the religious connotation was lost (or had a limited affect) as the *emergent* working class football culture grew and the masses engaged with football for their own reasons.

Industrialisation and the Expansion of Mass Spectator Sports

In an industrial centre like Birmingham, the changes in working hours were significant, as workers gradually had more, and regular, time to engage with leisure and, subsequently, sport. Birley⁶¹ stated that 'it was obviously games of short duration that chiefly benefited from Saturday half-holidays, and football most of all', rather than, for example, cricket, which many saw as too time consuming. Across England, the origins of free Saturday afternoons were initially historical rather than innovative, as the wool industry of the southwest finished early due to the traditional medieval observance of the eve of holy days.⁶² In February 1846, London engineers secured a 4.00pm finish, and the 1850 Factory Act closed all textile mills at 2.00pm in order to reduce the excessive working hours.⁶³ The free Saturday movement gathered momentum across all industries and commerce, and in Birmingham engineering firms began to close at 1.00pm on Saturdays from around 1853, and eventually this became general practice in the area.⁶⁴ Therefore, in Birmingham, there was an exponential growth in mass spectator sports towards the end of the nineteenth century as workers had more regular free time, which meant that sporting and other leisure events could be scheduled in advance. Crowds of over 30,000 regularly attended ad hoc horse races at venues such as Olton, Moor Hall Park and Hall Green, and athletics at Aston Lower Grounds and the Portland Road Grounds.⁶⁵ Although most leisure activities experienced an increase in popularity, football emerged as the city's favourite sport, as 'in Birmingham the association game took off dramatically in the late 1870s and early 1880s'.⁶⁶

As watching games gradually became more attractive than playing them⁶⁷, football's social significance solidified and continued to grow. The number of football clubs rose exponentially, from one in 1874 to 20 just two years later and to 155 in 1880.⁶⁸ That is, Birmingham, a major industrial centre with a prosperous working class, could provide 'ill-educated workers with entertainment of a rare quality, combining excitement, amusement, and the opportunity to participate by encouraging or jeering the performers'.⁶⁹ Increasingly, working men of Birmingham chose to incorporate football in their weekly routine and spent their leisure time attending football matches after work. For example, workers would have left the old gas works in Aston, behind Villa Park (on the road south-east towards Nechells and Saltley) to watch their team.⁷⁰ Moreover, due to location, it is safe to assume workers from the old HP Sauce factory at Aston Cross would have also made their way to Villa Park⁷¹, joined by workers in the locality from Norton Motors Ltd, The Hercules Cycle and Motor Company and Dunlop Rubber Ltd.⁷² Similarly, as Small Heath and Deritend districts of Birmingham were increasingly industrialised in the latter part of the Victorian era, fans

would have travelled a short distance by foot to watch Birmingham City play after finishing work in a wide range of factories and companies operating in the area, including the Birmingham Small Arms Company⁷³, H. G. Turner Ltd⁷⁴ and Thornley and Knight Ltd.⁷⁵ As the two clubs are located just 2.36 miles (3.8 Km) from each other, it is evident how densely industrialised Small Heath⁷⁶ and Aston⁷⁷, and those areas of the city generally, have remained since the early 1800s, which was instrumental in the working classes' initial involvement in sport and leisure activities.

Increased Participation and Rational Recreation

Previous literature⁷⁸ has frequently suggested that the boom in the working classes' involvement in sport was predominantly centred around spectating, as many either had little energy for physical activity following work or wanted to preserve energy before returning to the factory. However, this may not be a comprehensive view of the working classes as information relating to Birmingham appears to be to the contrary. During the inaugural season of the Birmingham football Senior Cup⁷⁹ in 1876, there were a number of works teams involved; several of these were from the heavily industrial areas to the north and west of Birmingham in Wednesbury and the Black Country⁸⁰. Also nationally, industry and trade unions – or more accurately, the workers – were instrumental in founding clubs such as Manchester United, Arsenal and Coventry City⁸¹, which leaves claims such as workers being too exhausted or disinterested in playing open to further investigation. In addition to the commercially supported 'professional' teams, there is also evidence of amateur/works football in Birmingham around the turn of the twentieth century in great numbers. Though Dunning et al.⁸² claimed that data on amateur football was unavailable pre-First World War, Beauchampe and Inglis⁸³ revealed records that indicated that, of the 218 football teams mentioned in the Birmingham local press between 1876 and 1884, 20 were works teams; noteworthy works teams around this period included Salters FC (the works team of Salter's Springs Company), Mitchell St. Georges FC (workers from the Mitchell Breweries in Smethwick), and Unity Gas Works FC, from Saltley⁸⁴. Moreover, the Birmingham and District Works Amateur Football Association (BDWAFSA) was set up in 1905 with an aim to promote:

Wholesome recreation... fostering friendship and promoting goodwill, by healthy rivalry... to assist in the social unity between employers and employed... and to help

by recreation to fit men better for their daily task, and make them more contented workmen.⁸⁵

Beauchampe and Inglis compiled a list of all the works teams that participated in the leagues during this time, which demonstrated strong links between working classes and football in Birmingham, as between 1905 and 1955 677 companies, works and organisations belonged to the BDWFA. In 1955 there were still 254 members. That is, 'in a very real sense the BDWFA was one of the great social achievements of Birmingham's industrial age'⁸⁶, due to the structure and governance that enabled such a large and unprecedented number of football fixtures within the city.

As in other parts of the country, sport was used for functionalist purposes, to change values and mould behaviour. The BDWFA's endeavour to provide 'wholesome recreation' was in line with the wider 'rational recreation' movement, which, broadly speaking, aimed to develop a healthy, moral and orderly workforce under middle/upper class control in order to 'shape the values and behaviour of the next generation of [working] men'.⁸⁷ The working class boys were begun to be seen as a social issue⁸⁸ towards the end of the nineteenth century, so rational recreation aimed to direct their energies into socially acceptable channels.⁸⁹ One example in Birmingham was the founding of the Athenic Institute that was set up as early as 1844, which unsuccessfully attempted to interest working class men in 'cricket, quoits and other health inspiring sports'.⁹⁰ Football appeared more attractive to working class men and, thus, seemingly a more effective means for developing moral character, patriotism, and courage; to defend the 'underdog', to champion fairness, and to exercise self-control⁹¹. Through the BDWFA and support from the middle classes, football became a key player in social education.⁹² Essentially, the middle and upper classes aimed to 'educate' and civilise the working classes by instilling and perpetuating their own values, but for subtly different reasons and to various ends. The middle and upper classes' views appeared to differ on the social purpose of football. The gentlemanly-middle classes appeared to want football to improve the values and behaviour within the lower echelons of society⁹³, whereas the more commercially minded bourgeoisie appeared to view it more as essentially a socio-economic tool to provide good workmen, as well as a powerful opiate for the masses of skilled and unskilled workers.⁹⁴ These approaches were simultaneously combined with the religious views and values within society that aimed to create 'muscular Christians'⁹⁵ as well as an able workforce. The combination of these, sometimes conflicting, influences nevertheless helped football develop and diffuse across Birmingham.

Football and Class in Edwardian Birmingham

Even in the early twentieth century, football was not exclusively a working class sport in Birmingham. Dunning et al.⁹⁶, drawing on Taylor⁹⁷ and Mason⁹⁸, suggest that in the late 1890s and early 1900s crowds were mixed in terms of social class, age and also gender. William McGregor⁹⁹ wrote in 1907¹⁰⁰ that, in terms of spectators, football attracted men from the middle classes and the ‘respectable’ sections of the working classes. Though it is not clear what McGregor himself regarded as respectable, this counters the basic notion that football had become merely entertainment for the working classes. Dunning et al.¹⁰¹ further quoted McGregor at length:

My business premises are situated in a thoroughfare, which... cuts through some of the worst slums in Birmingham. The inhabitants of these courts do not patronise football. The game is principally supported by the middle classes and the working man, and the latter are more particular in regard to the wearing of clean collars, than they were 25 years ago. When I first came to Birmingham, the lower classes... were much more slovenly in their habits than they are today, and football has undoubtedly brightened them appreciably.

McGregor provided an interesting, business oriented snapshot of Birmingham at the time, and explicitly stated that football was enjoyed by a mix of middle and (respectable) working class individuals. It could be argued that McGregor’s extract provides a glimpse into the, somewhat skewed, *dominant* view¹⁰² of the time, as the commercially minded businessmen attempted to portray football as a preserve mainly of the middle classes, but open to the ‘respectable’ working class individuals who would pay for admission tickets, whilst still distancing themselves from the ‘slovenly’ lower sections of the community. This view appears to distinguish between ‘lower’ and ‘respectable’ working class identities¹⁰³, without making clear the differences between the two and claims that the city had been undergoing a predominantly football-driven civilising process. Further evidence, however, seems to suggest that football was actually popular amongst all (sub)sections of the working classes, not just ‘respectable’ ones¹⁰⁴, and that the middle class values initially inherent in football were not passively absorbed by the working classes.

Football was beginning to become part of the working class’s *emergent* popular cultural identity, as attendances soared from the 1890s onwards.¹⁰⁵ Matches between local

rivals Birmingham and Aston Villa were particularly popular. In 1907, a match between the two was spectated by over 50,000 fans, a number which exceeded the regular capacity of Birmingham's St Andrews ground. Spectators were scrambling over the railings from the overcrowded stands in order to see their team, but were said to have 'behaved splendidly'¹⁰⁶ despite the excessive numbers, as a local newspaper reported 'never before has such a scene been witnessed on a football ground in Birmingham'. Although McGregor chiefly credited football with improving the previously 'slovenly' people of Birmingham and their surroundings, his overly-positive functionalist view may be depriving Joseph Chamberlain (Mayor of Birmingham, 1873-76) and his progressive administration the credit they deserved as Birmingham was described the 'best governed city in the world' during this period.¹⁰⁷ For the people of Birmingham, the most significant action of this era was taken by Chamberlain via the programme of 'Municipal Development'. The three main features of this programme were the municipalisation, and subsequent central development, of gas and water services, and of the redevelopment of slums in the centre of the city.¹⁰⁸ These changes eventually led to improved living conditions as well as increased financial power for Birmingham's City Council which was used for further civic investment such as leisure and sport development.

In support of the 'masses', Baker¹⁰⁹ observed that the working classes had an interest in football and stated that in Birmingham supporters of the association game outnumbered those of the rival code (rugby) about five hundred to one:

Beginning early on Saturday afternoon, [workers] engaged in their own game of soccer for two hours, then went to the stadium to cheer their local Birmingham City club. For amateur and professional alike, football transcended the necessities of life.

Baker's quote further demonstrates the emergence of football and its interweaving with working class culture by highlighting the dual role of spectating as well as playing. In other words, there was an interdependent relationship between professional and popular football, which, Baker claimed, ran counter to the shallow assumption that the middle classes and professionalization created merely a spectator sport that was attended by the masses. In reality, 'by the second or third decades of the game, many of the spectators were themselves playing, or had played the game in their youth'.¹¹⁰

Development of a Working Class Football Culture

Baker¹¹¹ claimed that football provided a (brief) respite from factory life, and was a socially safe and acceptable arena for the working classes for social release. However, Baker also argued against this functionalist assessment of the links between football and the working classes, which tended to frame them as passive cultural agencies, conned by the social apparatus. Baker highlighted the importance of football in helping the establishment of a strong working class identity, both in terms of individuals and as a collective. Hence, football was certainly more than simple, cheap enjoyment for the skilled and unskilled masses:

For its working-class participants, soccer meant much more than a job. Unlike politics, higher education, and commerce, which were still reserved for the well-born or moneyed, football provided an opportunity to compete on even terms, to heighten the sense of self, to strive for heroic triumph... the game of soccer was one of the few avenues wherein a young man of working-class origins could have his claim for self-importance internally satisfied and publically recognised.¹¹²

So, in addition to engaging with football as an escape from work, actually playing football also became a symbolic field for (masculine) working class self-expression, as one of the (perhaps very) few opportunities of the time to raise self-esteem and compete and even socialise, on relatively even terms, with the more dominant middle classes. In addition to the health-related, psychological and social benefits involvement with sports teams¹¹³ was to provide for the working classes, they arguably acquired some unforeseen and unintended social cohesion. Social unity was not necessarily what the dominant middle classes had intended through their support of the rational recreation movement. Perhaps, one could argue, the last thing the bourgeoisie and the middle class would have wanted was to provide the proletariat with an opportunity to forge a solid class-conscious identity by competing on even terms, with the means to gain some collective power. In other words, the middle classes' intentional actions to impart their own values to the masses had unintentional consequences that manifested in the emergence and solidification of a working class social identity. This suggests that the working classes were not passive recipients of middle class propaganda and, when highlighting the interdependency between individuals and groups within changing societies¹¹⁴, it becomes evident that they were not passively socialised into the values and behaviours of the middle and upper classes through football. On the contrary, football gradually became a social platform to provide an avenue for the working classes to acquire (at least some degree of) power due to their involvement in high numbers. Behaviour deemed

uncouth and violent remained – and still remains – in the game for some time.¹¹⁵ Football has been accompanied by violence since the beginning of the association game¹¹⁶, though research has demonstrated violence at football has certainly not been limited to working class individuals.¹¹⁷ In Birmingham, there is evidence of fan violence, pitch invasions and attacks on players and referees involving both Aston Villa and Birmingham City as early as 1885. This tendency continued throughout the 1900s, at varying levels, and is still observably present in the game¹¹⁸, as is the continued struggle for power and dominance.

Concluding Thoughts: Hegemonic Class Relations in Football

As outlined in the foregoing sections, during the emergence and initial development of football there were a number of complex and interdependent attempts to use football as a tool to control and influence the working classes by the middle and upper classes, the commercially-minded bourgeoisie and the influential religious leaders. However, it has been argued here that these power relations were not based solely on ‘top-down’, unilateral domination and influence, as Hargreaves¹¹⁹ stated, power is far more complex than simply having winners and losers. Employing Gramsci’s concept of hegemony¹²⁰, it can be argued that all sides – dominant and subordinate – gain something from the process of struggle and accommodation.¹²¹ In this particular case, the working classes employed their counter-hegemonic agency to subvert, to some extent, the dominant values and practices of the upper and middle classes whereby bringing into being their own cultural value system. In the words of Gramsci (1971: 9), the individual ‘participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought’.¹²²

The social developments during the emergence of football could be explained further by employing Williams’¹²³ value exchange cycle of *dominant-residual-emergent*. Turner¹²⁴ summarised that these three cultural forces roughly correspond to, respectively, the present, the past and the future. The dominant represents the foremost forces and values within society at a given time, the emergent is new cultural forces, often in resistance to the dominant forces. The emergent may eventually become the ‘new’ dominant, which would see the ‘old’ dominant become residual (perhaps, archaic), a cultural force of the past. Through these concepts, Williams highlighted the importance of history, and how hegemonic power and domination are not static but are engaged in ever-evolving processes. The early influence of cricket and religion upon football in Birmingham soon faded away and became *residual*. Similarly, the rational recreation movement, muscular Christianity and the other *dominant*

views the middle and upper classes sought to instil through the introduction and development of more structured activities, e.g., association football¹²⁵, were only partially successful. Regardless of their efforts, football remained a somewhat violent and rough game long into the twentieth century.¹²⁶ Far from instilling upper/middle class values and appropriate behaviour in the working classes, the *emergent* working class football culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries embraced, and was often characterised by, the very behavioural qualities the ruling classes wanted to eradicate. With the emergence of the football culture of the masses, the dominant values of the ruling classes became increasingly *residual*. In fact, the ruling classes nostalgically looked back to the past when football was initially a preserve of the middle and upper classes¹²⁷ and their values: when it was for the gentlemen, was more exclusive and was hoped to be used as a means to instil gentlemanly, muscular Christian values.

The working classes demonstrated they had agency and in many regards resisted the dominant classes and their attempt to fully incorporate them into their hegemonic definition of 'right' character.¹²⁸ Workers exercised influence over the socio-cultural development of football as spectators, players and club members¹²⁹, and, if nothing else, gained power through their sheer weight of numbers. Furthermore, over time an *emergent* working class football culture developed, which not only provided them with numerous social benefits and an escape from the factory, but was also instrumental in enabling them to compete with the 'superior' members of society.¹³⁰ Once football became 'popular' and largely driven by working class values, middle and upper class interests gradually faded and moved on to the more class-appropriate amateur and exclusive sports¹³¹, such as rugby union or, for instance in Birmingham, lawn tennis within the exclusive middle class Edgbaston area.¹³² It could be argued that this adherence to the *residual* values by the middle and upper classes represented a form of resistance against the increasingly *dominant* working class culture of football. However, one might argue that the bourgeoisie remained in relative, subtle control of football through club ownership, league administration and corporate sponsorship. The bourgeoisie adapted the structure of football in order to socially pacify and financially exploit the emergent working class football culture as playing football continued to provide a pleasant distraction for many of the working masses from everyday drudgery and, later on with the ever increasing commercial significance of spectating, contemporary fans gradually became consumers.¹³³ Nevertheless, the combination of all the interdependent factors discussed here have shaped football in Birmingham, and during this time these factors resulted in strong

foundations for football in the city, large scale organisation and governance, and thousands of fanatical players and fans.

As previous literature has overlooked football in Birmingham, and arguably also tended to focus on the middle classes and their influence on organised sport, the main aims here have been to both begin and encourage the exploration of Birmingham's importance within the development of football, whilst also highlighting the agency of the working classes and their central role in, and mass participation during, football's early expansion. Through a discussion of the numerous complex and interdependent factors that influenced the sport, it was argued that, far from being passive cultural beings, the working classes developed their own emergent football culture in Birmingham. A culture which not only provided an escape from their factory life, but also produced individual and collective identity, social and psychological benefits and was instrumental in creating an alternative cultural value system to that of the dominant classes.

Notes

¹ For instance, see: Curry, 'The Trinity Connection'; Curry, 'Playing for Money'; Dunning and Curry, 'The Curate's Egg Scrambled Again'; Goulstone, 'Working Class Origins of Modern Football'; Harvey, *Football's First Hundred Years*; Harvey, 'An Epoch in the Annals of National Sport'; Harvey, 'Curate's Egg pursued by Red Herrings'; Lewis, 'Innovation not Invention'; Swain, 'Football in Nineteenth-century Lancashire'; and, Taylor, *History of British Football*.

² Kitching, 'Old' Football and the 'New' Codes', 1739.

³ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121. Discussed further by Ingham and Hardy, *Sports Studies through the Lens of Raymond Williams*.

⁴ Ingham and Hardy, 'Sport Studies through the Lens of Raymond Williams', 1.

⁵ See Morford and McIntosh 'Sport and the Victorian Gentleman'; Lowerson, *Sport and the English Middle-Classes*; and, Mangan's edited collection *A Sport-Loving Society*.

⁶ Lewis, 'Innovation not Invention', 486.

⁷ Swain and Harvey, 'Who Really Invented Modern Football?', 1439.

⁸ Barnsby, *Birmingham Working People*, 11, stated that 'between the English Revolution and the French Revolution the national population (of England) had doubled, but Birmingham's population had increased tenfold'.

⁹ Chinn, *Birmingham: The Great Working City*, 10.

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that the name of the largest shopping centre and landmark in the city centre, Bull Ring, is a reminder of this historical past-time

¹¹ Beauchampe and Inglis, *Played in Birmingham*, 9. The development of banning some blood sports can be explained using Norbert Elias' *Civilising Process*, 98. Specifically, it can be understood that the threshold of repugnance was advancing – or simply that previously activities and behaviour of this nature was allowed, but then it was not, as it became viewed

as uncivil, distasteful and/or embarrassing. This view would have been held initially by the courtly, upper classes, before it spread through society.

¹² Skipp, *The Making of Victorian Birmingham*, 34.

¹³ Beauchampe and Inglis, *Played in Birmingham*, 9.

¹⁴ Huggins, *The Victorians and Sport*, 3.

¹⁵ Birley, *Sport and the Making of Britain*, 183.

¹⁶ Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play the Game*, 81. The increasing number of routes and cheap fares for sporting occasions encouraged progressively more fans to travel by rail to support their team. So much so, that a journalist expressed surprise in 1899 that for an away game in Derby “only a thousand [Villa supporters] availed themselves of the cheap Midland Railway excursion”, *Sporting Star*, ‘Football News’, 845. For a thousand travelling fans to be a disappointment, this highlights the large numbers that were frequenting trains and football matches around the turn of the century.

¹⁷ Zuckerman and Eley, *Birmingham Heritage*, 22.

¹⁸ For instance, the increasing reputation of Birmingham as an industrial centre and the opportunities available to skilled and unskilled workers, in addition to the accessibility of Birmingham in the centre of the country, Chinn, *Birmingham: The Great Working City*, 10.

¹⁹ Beauchampe and Inglis, *Played in Birmingham*, 10.

²⁰ Wigglesworth, *Evolution of English Sport*, 67.

²¹ Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play the Game*, 48.

²² A good example of this is provided in *Sporting Star*, ‘Division Two football’, 827. In 1899, fans of Small Heath made use of the cheap excursion fare and travelled from Birmingham up to Middlesbrough to support their team. A journey of this sort would have been inconceivable without the development of the railways, in terms of both time and cost.

²³ Wigglesworth, *Evolution of English Sport*, 67.

²⁴ *Birmingham Daily Post*, ‘The English Cup: Final Tie’, 8.

²⁵ Local newspapers had large sports sections from the 1860s onwards, often focusing on horse racing and the associated betting, for example, the *Birmingham Daily Mail*, ‘Mr W G Grace’, 22. Newspapers devoted solely to sport were popular in Birmingham and the surrounding area as early as the 1890s, the *Sports Argus* and the *Sporting Star* being significant examples.

²⁶ Birley, *Sport and the Making of Britain*, 106.

²⁷ Barnsby, *Birmingham Working People*, 39.

²⁸ Leather, *A Brief History of Birmingham*, 28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁰ Dick, *Birmingham: A History of the City and its People*, 10.

³¹ Clives, *Birmingham County Football Association*, 30.

³² Dunning et al., *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 34, original emphasis.

³³ Russell, *Football and the English*, 12.

³⁴ Swain and Harvey, ‘Who Really Invented Modern Football’, 1439.

³⁵ Molyneux, *Physical Recreation in Birmingham*, 22.

³⁶ Matthews, *Birmingham City Football Club*, 9.

³⁷ For example, McDowell, *Association Football in Scotland*.

³⁸ Bradbury, *Lost Teams of the Midlands*, 373.

³⁹ Birmingham and District Football Association, *Birmingham and District Football Association Minute Book: 1887-1890*, 2.

⁴⁰ McGregor was also a committee member, and later vice-president, of the Birmingham & District and Counties Football Association (BDCFA), Campbell Orr, *Birmingham and District and Counties Football Association Handbook 1895-96*, 1.

- ⁴¹ Woodhall, *Aston Villa Miscellany*, 8.
- ⁴² Beauchampe and Inglis, *Played in Birmingham*, 9.
- ⁴³ There was interest not only in playing but also reading about cricket during this period. Local newspapers carried extensive sections from at least the 1870s onwards that focused on local cricket fixtures and results, and even national cricket news and comment – which suggested a high level of popularity and engagement with the sport by many within Birmingham. For example, see Birmingham Daily Mail, ‘Mr W G Grace’, 6.
- ⁴⁴ Holt, *Sport and the British*, 151.
- ⁴⁵ Gibbons, *Association Football in Victorian England*, 82.
- ⁴⁶ Football clubs emerging from existing cricket teams was common, for instance, in Sheffield, with Sheffield FC (world’s oldest football club) and Hallam FC both set up by cricket club members, see Curry, *Playing for Money*, 337. In addition to many football teams playing cricket in the summer, there were similarly rugby union teams that played cricket outside the rugby season, for example, at Harrow during the 1880s, see Collins, *A Social History of English Rugby Union*, 33.
- ⁴⁷ Bradbury, *Lost Teams of the Midlands*, 353.
- ⁴⁸ Woodhall, *Aston Villa Miscellany*, 1.
- ⁴⁹ Cited by Lerwill, *The Aston Villa Chronicles*, 3.
- ⁵⁰ Molyneux, *Physical Recreation in Birmingham*, 29.
- ⁵¹ Russell, *Football and the English*, 15.
- ⁵² Ingham and Hardy, *Sport Studies through the Lens of Raymond Williams*, 17.
- ⁵³ Morford and McIntosh, *Sport and the Victorian Gentleman*, 52.
- ⁵⁴ Lerwill, *The Aston Villa Chronicles*, 57.
- ⁵⁵ Holt, *Sport and the British*, 150.
- ⁵⁶ Woodhall, *Aston Villa Miscellany*, 1.
- ⁵⁷ Henry, *Today’s the Day: Birmingham City Football Club*, 34.
- ⁵⁸ Huggins, *The Victorians and Sport*, 73, or as Brailsford, *British Sport: A Social History*, 96, suggested ‘Frequently the leadership came from the same source [in the North and the West Midlands], often from clergymen’.
- ⁵⁹ Holt, *Sport and the British*, 138.
- ⁶⁰ Birley, *Sport and the Making of Britain*, 268.
- ⁶¹ Birley, *Sport and the Making of Britain*, 265.
- ⁶² Brailsford, *Sport, Time and Society*, 105.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 100.
- ⁶⁴ Birley, *Sport and the Making of Britain*, 264.
- ⁶⁵ Beauchampe and Inglis, *Played in Birmingham*, 12.
- ⁶⁶ Holt, *Sport and the British*, 150.
- ⁶⁷ Briggs, *History of Birmingham: Volume II*, 124.
- ⁶⁸ Birley, *Sport and the Making of Britain*, 265.
- ⁶⁹ Sutcliffe and Smith, *History of Birmingham: Volume III*, 319.
- ⁷⁰ Rudge and Houghton, *In and Around Aston*, 11.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ⁷² Price, *Aston Remembered*, 5.
- ⁷³ Jones, *Bordesley and Deritend*, 4.
- ⁷⁴ Marsden, *Small Heath and Bordesley Green: Past and Present*, 8.
- ⁷⁵ Marsden, *Small Heath Remembered*, 19.
- ⁷⁶ Jones, *Bordesley and Deritend*, 7; Marsden, *Small Heath and Bordesley Green: Past and Present*, 5.
- ⁷⁷ Price, *Aston Remembered*, 5.

- ⁷⁸ For example, Wigglesworth, *Evolution of English Sport*.
- ⁷⁹ Carr, *The History of the Birmingham Senior Cup*. Teams involved in inaugural Birmingham Senior Cup in 1876: Calthorpe FC, Aston Unity (also a cricket team), Wednesbury Town, Saltley College, St Georges, Tipton FC, West Bromwich (not WBA), Stafford Road FC, Birmingham (not BCFC), Wednesbury Old Athletic (winners of first cup), Cannock FC, Aston Villa, Walsall Town and Walsall Swifts. Only Cannock (until the 1930s), Villa and Walsall (two Walsall clubs combined in 1888) lasted past these formative years). Small Heath Alliance competed in this cup for the first time in 1878-79. Aston Villa won it 16 times before the war, including three in a row in 1882-83-84, so were allowed to keep the original trophy, which was a tradition.
- ⁸⁰ Carr, *History of the Birmingham Senior Cup*, 10.
- ⁸¹ Baker, 'Working-Class Football Culture', 243.
- ⁸² Dunning et al., *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 33.
- ⁸³ Beauchampe and Inglis, *Played in Birmingham*, 79-83.
- ⁸⁴ Bradbury, *Lost Teams of the Midlands*, 337.
- ⁸⁵ Beauchampe and Inglis, *Played in Birmingham*, 78.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.
- ⁸⁷ Holt, *Sport and the British*, 138.
- ⁸⁸ Though a broad generalisation, this was essentially due to their behaviour being perceived by the dominant groups within society to be rough and uncivilised, Brailsford, *British Sport*, 92.
- ⁸⁹ Holt, *Sport and the British*, 138.
- ⁹⁰ Beauchampe and Inglis, *Played in Birmingham*, 11.
- ⁹¹ Morford and McIntosh, *Sport and the Victorian Gentleman*, 53.
- ⁹² Russell, *Football and the English*, 74.
- ⁹³ Holt, *Sport and the British*, 138.
- ⁹⁴ Smith, 'The Noble Sports Fan Redux', 125.
- ⁹⁵ Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play the Game*, 51.
- ⁹⁶ Dunning et al., *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 34.
- ⁹⁷ Taylor, 'Football Mad'.
- ⁹⁸ Mason, *Association Football and English Society*.
- ⁹⁹ McGregor was a particularly significant figure within football locally – as vice-president of the Birmingham & District and Counties Football Association (BDCFA) and Director of Aston Villa – as well as nationally – as the President of the Football League and also the founder of the Football League in 1888, Clives, *The Birmingham County FA*, 115.
- ¹⁰⁰ Cited in Dunning et al., *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 40.
- ¹⁰¹ Dunning et al., *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 40.
- ¹⁰² Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121.
- ¹⁰³ Similar distinctions have often been made in terms of the skilled and un-skilled working classes, for instance, see Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain*, 35.
- ¹⁰⁴ Russell, *Football and the English*, 12.
- ¹⁰⁵ Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play the Game*, 63.
- ¹⁰⁶ Sporting Mail, 'Football News', 2.
- ¹⁰⁷ Leather, *A Brief History of Birmingham*, 42.
- ¹⁰⁸ Powell, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 39.
- ¹⁰⁹ Baker, 'Working-Class Football Culture', 247.
- ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 245.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*, 246-247.

- ¹¹³ Branscombe and Wann, 'The Positive Social and Self-concept Consequences of Sport Team Identification'; Wann and Weaver, 'Understanding the Relationship between Sport Team Identification and Dimensions of Social Well-being'.
- ¹¹⁴ Van Krieken, *Norbert Elias*, 152.
- ¹¹⁵ Dunning et al., *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 1-2.
- ¹¹⁶ Dunning et al., *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 1.
- ¹¹⁷ Armstrong, *Knowing the Score* 323-332; Spaaij, *Understanding Football Hooliganism*, 154-155.
- ¹¹⁸ Dunning et al., *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*; Ross, 'Mindless Thugs Have Shamed Our City Again', 55; Guardian, 'Fans Invade Pitch After Birmingham Derby', 54.
- ¹¹⁹ Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture*, 5.
- ¹²⁰ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. As Rowe, 'Antonio Gramsci: Sport, Hegemony and the National-Popular', 102, correctly stated the Gramscian perspective 'does not see the ruling class as being in total control of the working class, but instead as having to make important compromises with it'.
- ¹²¹ Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture*, 5.
- ¹²² Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 9.
- ¹²³ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121-3.
- ¹²⁴ Turner, *British Cultural Studies*, 55.
- ¹²⁵ Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play the Game*, 51.
- ¹²⁶ Dunning et al., *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, 1-2.
- ¹²⁷ Russell, *Football and the English*, 8-10.
- ¹²⁸ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 108-109.
- ¹²⁹ Russell, *Football and the English*, 11-14.
- ¹³⁰ Baker, 'Working-Class Football Culture', 246.
- ¹³¹ Birley, *Sport and the Making of Britain*, 311-318.
- ¹³² Beauchampe and Inglis, *Played in Birmingham*, 116.
- ¹³³ Crawford, *Consuming Sport*, 3.

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