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The Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937; its contribution to the provision of services for physical training and recreation between 1937 and 1960.

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**Submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts by Research.**

December 2018

**York St. John University.
School of Humanities, Religion and Philosophy.**

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

The Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937 was a modest piece of legislation permitting Local Authorities to provide and run facilities for people's leisure time such as community centres and camp-sites. The Act established a National Fitness Council to promote healthful recreation, and offer grant aid to statutory and voluntary organisations. The Fitness Council lasted a mere two years and the Act was suspended on the outbreak of war.

The wider significance of the Act lies in the complex interaction of underlying issues that led to the determination that 'something must be done' to improve the health and physique of the nation

Three factors pushed Government towards action. Chief among these was a long standing fear of the physical deterioration of the 'race' and the implication this held for Britain as an imperial power. Mass unemployment in the 1920s and 1930s raised fears of a loss of social cohesion. Physical training and recreation was used as a measure to occupy and divert the unemployed. The stereotype of the 'hungry 30s' hid the emergence of a new prosperity for those in work. A leisure 'industry' emerged during the period, and Government, sensing a populist opportunity, used the Act as a response.

The Act faltered between 1937 and 1939 due to inadequate funding, poor administration and the adoption of a narrow definition of fitness that took no account of wider social issues such as malnutrition, working conditions and housing. This led to the Act being characterised as a tokenistic measure by the Left and sections of the medical profession.

Despite the failure of the Act between 1937 and 1939, it influenced the provision of services for physical training and recreation, during the war, and, the post-war period of austerity and reconstruction. The legislation also helped shape the tone and content of the 1960 Wolfenden report that laid the foundations of future physical training and recreation policy.

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List of abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CCPR	Central Council for Physical Recreation
CCRPT	Central Council for Recreative Physical Training
LAC	Local Area Committee
LFC	Local Fitness Committee
LNER	London and North Eastern Railway
MP	Member of Parliament
NA	National Archives
NAC	National Advisory Council
NFC	National Fitness Committee
NPFA	National Playing Fields Association
TUC	Trades Union Congress
WLHB	Women's League of Health and Beauty

The Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937; its contribution to the provision of services and facilities for physical training and recreation between 1937 and 1960. ¹

Introduction. The purpose and structure of the study

Closing the 1937 parliamentary session, George VI made particular reference to the Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937 (hereafter the Act).

The provision of facilities for recreation and healthy outdoor activity, more especially for the young has always been a matter of special interest to me. It was therefore with particular pleasure I gave my assent to the Physical Training and Recreation Act. It is hoped the fullest use will be made of this contribution to the physical wellbeing and through it the happiness of the nation.²

In the same year, in his first public broadcast since becoming Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain announced, ‘a great national campaign to bring home the need for increased physical fitness’.³ Addressing a rally of Conservative party supporters earlier in the year Chamberlain explained his motivation. ‘We are falling behind other countries in the attention given to physique’. ‘I thought it was time we did something about it’.⁴ Physical fitness was elevated to a position of considerable importance at a time when many other issues pressed on Government. The economy had started to recover from the depression, but was still fragile with more than one million people unemployed. German rearmament and aggression threatened peace and stability, and the abdication of Edward VIII had provoked a profound constitutional crisis. These and other issues such as evidence of the extent of malnutrition and poverty seem to be of far greater significance than a piece of legislation enabling and supporting the provision of; swimming pools, community centres, campsites and the like.⁵

(1) Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937. 1 Edw. and 1 Geo. 6. Ch. 46.

(2) Hansard. Parl. 37. Ses. 2. October 22nd. 1937.

(3) *Manchester Guardian*. September 7th. 1937. p.19.

(4) *Yorkshire Post*. July 19th. 1937. p.8.

(5) Ingrid Jeacle. ‘The diet of the nation’. *Critical perspectives in accounting*. 38. 2016. p.p. 54-68.

The National Government's interest in recreation was all the more surprising given the very low priority afforded to the question by successive governments. The last piece of legislation relating directly to physical training and recreation for adults was the 1891 Museums and Gymnasiums Act.⁶ Since then the matter had been left entirely to the discretion of local authorities and the efforts of voluntary organisations. The study will explore this paradox and seek to provide an explanation of motives underlying the Act and assess its impact on recreation provision at national and local level.

The study starts with a discussion of methods of enquiry and sources of data. This is then linked to a review of relevant literature. A number of what appear to be significant underlying issues are identified. A key proposition for the study is that if one is to make sense of legislation such as the Act, its antecedents must be fully explored. Legislation does not arise in a vacuum but as the result of issues that emerge over time, resonate with opinion formers, legislators and the public until pressure that 'something be done' builds a critical mass for action. It will be argued that three issues led directly to the national fitness campaign, fear of physical deterioration and its impact on national strength, the effects of mass unemployment and the emergence of a modernist leisure concept. These are explored in chapters two, three, four and five.

The structure, implementation and eventual failure of the Act between 1937 and 1939 is discussed in chapter six. The following chapter examines the impact of the Act at local level using case studies of York and Leeds. The Act has attracted the interest of a number of authors but most analyses end with the outbreak of war in 1939 when it was suspended. It is argued in chapters eight and nine that although the Act was in abeyance, its influence continued to be felt, and when peace returned, and the Act was restored, it played a role in the reconstruction of Britain during an age of austerity. The 1960 Wolfenden report discussed in chapter nine marks the final demise of the Act. The study concludes with a critical evaluation of the impact of the Act on physical training and recreation in Britain and concludes it exerted a significant influence on policy and practice. Suggestions for further research on the matter are also offered.

(6) Museums and Gymnasiums Act 1891. 54 and 55. Vict. c. 22.

Chapter One. Methods of enquiry, sources of data and literature review.

Sports history is no longer a marginal academic subject. [...] Correctly practiced sports history is a counter to nostalgia, myth and invented tradition. Vamplew. 2016. ¹

This study examines a minor piece of legislation that sought to promote the popularity and practice of physical training and recreational pursuits in the 1930s. As such the work is grounded to a significant extent in the historiography of leisure time and activities. However, the thesis also explores areas that are beyond the study of leisure and recreation as discrete activities. The legislation and its outcomes are set in a wider politico-economic context and key issues of the period such as poverty and preparation for war.

In trying to capture this breadth of factors a wide range of primary and secondary data are employed. Significant use is made of relevant primary data which allows the work to develop a strong narrative style and impetus. This helps link the various stages of a study that span more than one hundred years. The primary sources are reinforced by a wide range of secondary data. Primary data are immediate, vivid and powerful but are relatively unfiltered and need the leavening of sound secondary data to contextualise and validate key arguments. Throughout the study there is an interplay between these data. This blended approach is a key feature of significant studies in leisure history such as Holt's analysis of working class community sports ² and Walvin's work on the development of Association Football in the late 19th and early 20th Century. ³

The thesis has three main elements. A number of 'wider' issues were formative in the movement towards the Act. These include a long standing fear of physical deterioration, the corrosive effects of mass unemployment, and, the emergence of modernist ideas and lifestyles. In the more specific matter of physical training and recreation there was a distinctive approach to its development and use in Britain which needs to be explored. The final element is the Act itself, in conception and execution.

(1) Wray Vamplew (Ed.) *Sports History*. Vol. 1. (London: Sage UK. 2016) p.ii.

(2) Richard Holt (Ed.) *Sport and the working class in modern Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press. 1990).

(3) James Walvin. *The people's game: the history of football revisited* (Edinburgh: Mainstream. 2000).

There are abundant primary and secondary data available on all these elements. Indicative examples are offered below.

The idea that there was long term and progressive deterioration of the British 'race' and that this posed a threat to the British Empire can be seen from the 1860s in the popular press and periodicals of the day ⁴ The issue was given formal weight through Parliamentary debates, discussions in cabinet and numerous enquiries and Royal Commissions. ⁵

This issue of physical and social deterioration and its impact on the strength of the nation was a powerful influence leading to the the Act and has attracted the interest of historians and social scientists. For example, Heggie revisited the debate on the alleged deterioration of recruits to the army and navy and demonstrated that whilst there was cause for concern, the issue may have been overstated. ⁶ Bentley explored the idea of national fitness in the context of perceived challenges to Britain's imperial power and suggests this was an important factor in the drive for national efficiency. ⁷ Of all the elements underpinning the study there is stronger temporal continuity and consistency around the idea of deterioration than any other issue. This emerges time and again to influence the debate on national preparedness and the need for national fitness, through for example, the work of Winter ⁸, in his study of national fitness and the Great War and Lawrence's analysis of post First World War social stress and disorder ⁹

- (4) For example Lord Meath a passionate advocate of compulsory physical training and national service wrote regularly for popular journals and magazines such as, the *National Review* and the *Fortnightly Review*.
- (5) Enquiries such as the Royal Commission on Physical Training (Scotland) 1903 (London: HMSO. Cd. 1507. 1904) are explored in chapter two.
- (6) Vanessa Heggie. 'Lies, damn lies and Manchester's recruiting statistics'. *J.Hist.Med.Allied.Sci.* 2007.63.2.p.p.178-216.
- (7) Gilbert Bentley. 'Health and Politics: The British Physical Deterioration Report 1904'. *Bulletin of the the History of Medicine*. Jan 1. 1965. 39. P 140-154.
- (8) John Winter. 'Military fitness and civilian health in Britain during the first world war'. *Journal of contemporary history*. Series 2. Vol. 15. 1980.p.p. 211-255.
- (9) Jon Lawrence. 'Forging a peaceable kingdom. War, violence and fear of brutalisation in post-first world war Britain'. *Journal of modern history*. 75. 3. September 2011.

Long term structural and cyclical unemployment in the 1920s and 1930s is closely linked to the idea of physical and social deterioration. This study, uses and builds on the work of Field and Olechnowicz, tracing the link between schemes to ‘recondition’ or occupy the unemployed, which involved significant use of physical training and recreation, and were a powerful influence leading to the Act.^{10. 11}

As with the deterioration question the idea that unemployment was a causal factor leading to the Act is explored using a wide range of primary data such as the minutes of meetings between various Government Ministers, and representatives the Trades Union Congress.¹² Reports from the Special Areas most affected by unemployment are of particular importance to the study as they make great play of the importance of promoting physical fitness and recreational activities.¹³

A key proposition explored throughout the study is that the stereotype of the ‘hungry 30s’ needs to be clarified and refined. The idea of two nations ‘Jarrow or Harrow’, one with unemployment rates approaching 80% with lives blighted by ‘transference, the means test and the brute facts of poverty and ill health’, the other with rising levels of prosperity fuelling a boom in leisure and recreational activities.¹⁴ The proposition of a two speed economy advanced by economic historians such as Capie, and, Aldcroft highlights the growth of the service sector of which leisure and recreation was an important and rapidly growing part.^{15. 16.}

(10) John Field. *Learning through labour. Training unemployment and the State.:1830-1939.* (Leeds: Leeds University School of Education. 1991).

(11) Andrzej Olechnowicz. ‘Unemployed workers, enforced leisure and education in Britain in the 1930s’. *Labour History Review.* Vol 70. No. 1. 2005. p.p. 27-52.

(12) Minutes of meeting between the Prime Minister, Andrew Bonar Law and representatives of the Trades Union Congress. March 31st.1923. National Archives CAB/24/158.

(13) Report of the Commissioner for Special Areas in England and Wales (London: HMSO. 1937).

(14) Olechnowicz. Op. cit.

(15) Forrest Capie. Michael Collins. ‘The extent of British Economic recovery in the 1930s’. *Journal of the Economy and History.* Vol. 23. 1980. Issue 1. p.p. 40-60.

(16) Derek Aldcroft. *The British Economy: 1870-1939* (London: Palgrave. 1960).

Although this study focuses on physical training and recreation it is important to recognise and acknowledge that these activities were part of a wider move towards a more leisured society, a tangible manifestation of modernism.¹⁷ These ideas are explored in chapter seven using primary data gathered in local case studies of two very contrasting cities, York and Leeds.

Until recently The Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937 has tended to warrant little more than a minor footnote in works on the evolution of school physical education and the development of municipal leisure services.^{18 19} McIntosh argues that by the late 1920s school physical education was an important part of the school curriculum, but when most young people left education at fourteen, few opportunities for healthy exercise were available and this left 70% of young people as ‘physical illiterates’.²⁰

The direction of leisure policy, planning and provision in Britain runs counter to that followed in many other countries in the 1930s. That decade saw the rise of ‘mass’ compulsory participation in physical training and recreation in Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union.²¹ In Scandinavia, although the element of compulsion was absent, there was a long tradition of state funding and promotion of sport and physical fitness.²²

In Britain the voluntarist tradition was paramount. What little legislation was in place to promote physical training and recreation was purely permissive and devolved to local authorities and voluntary bodies.²³ As later chapters of the study demonstrate, this legacy of nineteenth century laissez-faire non intervention was to both to shape and compromise the Act.

(17) Robert James. *Popular Culture and working class taste 1930-1939: A round of cheap diversions?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2010).

(18) David Smith. *Stretching their bodies: A history of Physical Education* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles) 1984.

(19) Ian Henry. *The Politics of Leisure Policy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan) 2001.

(20) Peter McIntosh. *Physical Education in England since 1800* (London: Bell and Hyman) p.219.

(21) Julia Timpe. *Nazi organised recreation and entertainment in the Third Reich* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2017).

(22) Alan Bairner. ‘What’s Scandinavian about Scandinavian Sport?’ *Journal of Sport in Society*. Vol. 13. 2010. Issue 4. [Accessed online February 3rd 2019].

(23) Anthony Power. *The role of the Baths and Washhouses Act 1846 in the development of public bathing facilities: 1846-1914*. Unpublished MA by research thesis. University of Leeds. 2015.

Until recently the Act has attracted little academic interest, perhaps because of the significance and gravity of ‘wider’ issues dominating the social, political and economic landscape of the time. Two recent works have however focussed on the issue of national fitness as a symbol of national strength and linked this to the purpose and significance of the Act. Zweiniger-Bargielowska offers a broad analysis of the development of physical culture in Britain between 1880 and 1939.²⁴ She explores the politics of physical exercise and in particular the thesis that the Act was both a reflection of the growing popularity of sport and recreation, but also a way of avoiding the difficult and costly need to address poverty and malnutrition. These important ideas are taken forward in chapters four five and six making extensive use of primary data held by the National Archive. These data include Cabinet and Board of Education memoranda and discussion papers generated in the planning, operation and demise of the Act. In addition the Archive holds the minutes of meetings of the National Fitness Committee and associated correspondence.

Charlotte Macdonald places the Act in the wider context of the development of physical training and recreation across the white dominions and suggests this was a conscious part of the drive to craft a distinctive model of national fitness based on voluntarism.²⁵ Both authors identify the importance of community based and managed approaches to national fitness that underpinned the Act. These range from provision for and by workers, the village hall and community centre movement, and the work of ‘mass’ organisations such as the Women's Institute and Girl Guides. In practice the Act gave equal standing to bodies as diverse as the English Folk Dance Society and the Amateur Athletic Association. This theme is explored further in chapters seven and eleven.

The Physical Training and Recreation Act was suspended on the outbreak of war in 1939 and the National Fitness Council dissolved. The authors mentioned above end their analysis of the Act at this stage. This study offers a range of evidence to suggest that the influence of the Act can be seen during the war, the period of post war austerity, and in the recommendations of the 1960 Wolfenden report that laid the foundations of Public sport and recreation policies in the 1970s, the ‘leisure decade’.

(24) Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska. *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Britain, 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2010).

(25) Charlotte Macdonald. *Strong, Beautiful and Modern. National Fitness in Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, 1935-1960.* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia).

All the data used in the study are in the public domain and more than fifty years old. As such there are no issues of confidentiality or ethical approval to be managed.

Chapter Two. Physical Deterioration

‘A whisper came across the water that England had entered upon her decadence [...] the race was dwindling’. George Sala. 1861.¹

This chapter will demonstrate that the idea of the deterioration of the British ‘race’ and the effect this might have on national strength became deeply rooted in the national psyche. Physical training came to be seen as an important measure to counter this deterioration.

Fear of deterioration coincides with the rapid urbanisation of Britain in the nineteenth century and a growing realisation that the ‘workshop of the world’ was in reality an unhealthy and dangerous place. The great sanitary enquiries of the 1840s gathered a mass of evidence describing squalor and ill-health that posed a threat to the whole community. ‘In the midst of an opulent and flourishing community [...] such a vast multitude of our poorer fellow subjects are placed in situations where it is almost impracticable to keep themselves from moral and physical contamination’.² Healthful recreation, one remedy for this ‘contamination’ was provided through benevolent paternalism rather than state intervention. The Playground and General Recreation Society formed in 1858 was active in campaigning for and providing public open spaces in urban areas. From its inception the link between recreation and the wider needs of the state was clear. Charles Dickens presiding at the Society's annual dinner in 1859 asserted; ‘it was impossible to develop the physical powers of youth without the means of recreation and healthy exercise and to recruit to the army and efficiently man the navy’.³

Other sources of evidence and opinion emerged to fuel the debate including the work of Charles Darwin and his followers; and, data on the physical fitness of the army and navy.

(1) George Sala. ‘Soldiers and Volunteers’, *Temple Bar*, vol.1. 1861. p.103.

(2) *Report from the Select Committee on the Health of Towns*
(London: House of Commons. 1840) p.384.

(3) *Observer*. May 23rd 1859. p.3.

Darwin's work on the origin of species and competitive natural selection captured the imagination of the public but was soon subject to forms of crude reductionism that conflated ideas of selection with notions of racial and national supremacy.

For example, Dr Creighton-Brown the Lord Chancellor's Visitor in Lunacy reporting to the House of Commons in 1884 declaimed, 'It is the fierceness of competition [...] and the neglect of recreation that reinforce so liberally our battalions of lunatics'.⁴ The eugenics movement sought to apply Darwin's work to human populations. Francis Galton, standard bearer of the call for selective breeding to strengthen the race, acknowledged the causal link between urban living conditions and deterioration. 'Reports of the health of our factory towns disclose a terrible proportion of bad constitutions and invalidism. [...] We have therefore to bestir ourselves to resist the serious deterioration that threatens our race'.⁵

The debate took on a sharper focus in the 1880s and 1890s with the publication of data on the fitness of the armed services. Sir Thomas Crawford, Head of Medical Services for the Army, addressing the British Medical Association in 1887, compared a rejection rate for potential recruits of 37% between 1860 and 1884 with that of 41% for the period 1882 to 1886.⁶ A similar problem was noted in the Navy with an increased rate of discharge due to invalidism.⁷ This manpower crisis occurred during a period of imperial expansion and a growing threat from emerging powers such as Germany

whose army and young people were seen as models of efficiency and physical fitness, 'well prepared [...] for the fatigues of war'.⁸

(4) Dr Crichton-Brown. *Return to two addresses to the Honourable House of Commons*, (London: Hansard. 1884) p.28.

(5) Francis Galton. 'Hereditary improvement', *Fraser's magazine*. series 7. vol.37. 1873. pp. 116-130.

(6) *York Herald*. August 16th. 1887. p.6.

(7) *Statistical report on the Health of the Navy. 1900* (London: HMSO. 1901).

(8) Walter Montague. 'The Physique of European Armies'. *Fortnightly Review*. April 1890. p.p. 566-585.

The preceding material, a small sample of that generated by the deterioration debate, engaged policy makers and the public in considering what should be done to address the problem.⁹ Two distinct views emerged. One focussed on strengthening the nation through forms of 'drill', physical training and the introduction of compulsory military service,¹⁰ the other, on addressing underlying social conditions.¹¹ The tension between these views was played out in two major enquiries that focussed on the issue of deterioration.

The relative failure of the largest military force assembled by the British Empire since the Crimea to overcome determined but irregular Boer 'rebels' between 1899 and 1902 sent shock waves through the nation.¹² Two enquiries in the aftermath of the war relate directly to this study. The Royal Commission on Physical Training (Scotland) 1903, a nominally Scottish enquiry, was charged with the task of investigating how physical training might 'contribute to the sources of national strength'.¹³ The Commission did not confine its enquiries to Scotland and drew on the growing body of anthropometric data to demonstrate the enervating effects of urban living on the height, weight and health of boys and young men.

Whilst the Commission acknowledged the role of environmental factors such as housing and nutrition, its focus was firmly on ensuring that systematic physical training in the form of drill become an integral part of the school curriculum. Overt expressions of militarism such as the use of carbines for drill by boys under fourteen years of age were

deprecated, but it was suggested that schools form cadet corps, or that the Boys Brigade be expanded.

- (9) Michael Rose. 'Poverty and self- help. Britain in the 19th and 20th Centuries'. *Recent findings in Economic and Social History*. Autumn. 11. 1990. p.p.1-4.
- (10) Lord Meath, 'Physical Education', *The National Review*. vol. 20. 1892. p.462.
- (11) Lord Brabazon, *The Standard*. London. July 31st. 1886. p.3.
- (12) Thomas Pakenham. *The Boer War*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979).
- (13) *Royal Commission on Physical Training (Scotland) 1903* (London: HMSO. Cd. 1507. 1904) p.2.

Drill and forms of military training were also seen as means of promoting patriotism and obedience and as an antidote to 'rowdyism'. Games, part of the British tradition, were also to be promoted as 'foreign countries envy us for the splendid moral discipline of the cricket or football field'.¹⁴ The impact of the Commission on policy and practice

was immediate. In 1905 the Board of Education issued guidelines that made physical training an integral part of the school curriculum.¹⁵

Plate 1. Pupils of Burdett-Coutts School London at drill 1916. ¹⁶



The second enquiry, the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration 1904 examined the hypothesis that deterioration might be transmissible from generation to generation, weakening the national stock in a progressive, ‘Darwinian’ manner.¹⁷

(14) Ibid. para. 85.

(15) Board of Education. *Suggestions for the consideration of teachers*. (London: Wyman and Sons. 1905).

(16) www.communitytribesports.com [accessed online November 24th 2017].

(17) *Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration 1904* (London: HMSO. Cd. 2175. 1904) .

The Committee gathered a wide range of evidence, much of it redolent of earlier enquiries. ‘It is a vast pity the physique of the recruit giving class is as poor as it is’.¹⁸ Despite the tone of much of the evidence deprecating the ‘laziness, want of thrift, [...] and drunkenness’ of the poorer classes, the work of the Committee marked a turning

point as it gave greater weight to the role poverty and ignorance played in determining the health and physique of the nation.¹⁹ 'A large proportion of the population [...] it must be reckoned in millions do not have enough money to get food'.²⁰ The report of the Committee made a clear link between the conditions in the slums and national security. 'National efficiency became the topic of the day'.²¹

The Committee found insufficient evidence to support the progressive deterioration hypothesis and made wide ranging social welfare recommendations, some of which, such as the medical inspection of schoolchildren and the introduction of school meals were included in the Liberal welfare reform programme. The issue of physical training and recreation was addressed. It was proposed that compulsory continuation classes for young adults in recreative physical exercises for girls, and drill for 'lads' be organised.²² The use of the term recreative in the context of a physical training programme, and the idea that young people who were no longer at school should be compelled to exercise, were novel. These themes were to re-emerge in the 1920s and 1930s and influence the debate around the 1937 Act.

One outcome of the war, the reports that flowed from it, and, the general sense of unease at the physical and moral fitness of the young, was the formation of youth associations such as the Boy Scouts. Although Baden Powell eschewed overt militarism, the core principles of scouting were, patriotism, discipline, and, physical fitness.

(18) Ibid. para. 163. Maj. Gen. Borrett. Inspector General of Army Recruiting.

(19) Ibid. para. 73.

(20) Ibid. para. 5039.

(21) Gilbert Bentley. 'Health and Politics' *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*. Vol.39. 1965. p.144

(22) Interdepartmental Committee. paras. 308-380.

Another outcome, a reaction to the 'welfarist' tone of the report was the formation of the Eugenics Education Society. This small but influential group campaigned for the biological improvement of the nation through, encouraging the fittest to reproduce, and,

preventing those with undesirable characteristics from breeding. Neville Chamberlain, the architect and promoter of the 1937 Act was an active member.²³

This chapter has focussed primarily on formal and legislative responses to the deterioration debate. Health, fitness and physical training also engaged the interest of the general public and became fashionable. A thriving commercial sector offered a wide range of programmes and equipment promising health and strength. Eugen Sandow was perhaps the best known fitness entrepreneur. A Prussian immigrant, Sandow came to London in 1889 and established huge following, demonstrating feats of strength that filled the Albert Hall. He subsequently opened Institutes of Physical Culture in major British cities and went on to be instructor in physical culture to George V.²⁴

Sandow, a skilled publicist, used the idea of deterioration and the need for national strength to promote his system of exercise and sell a range of fitness apparatus and foodstuffs.²⁵ He offered his services to the British Government at the outbreak of war in 1914, but perhaps because of anti-German feeling was not employed. The vast manpower requirements of a new type of warfare exposed the fragility of British health and physique once again.²⁶ Speaking in 1918 as the war drew to a close, Lloyd George reflected on the number of men classed as grade B or C and the estimate by the Ministry of National Service that, had the physique and health of conscripts been better, at least one million additional men could have been put into the field. 'If we had only had that million, this war would have ended triumphantly'.²⁷ The Minister for National Service until August 1917 was Neville Chamberlain, the architect and promoter of the 1937 Act.

(23) Eugenics Education Society. Records and Programme: 1908-1914. Wellcome Library. ref. SAEUG/A/84. [accessed online 29th November 2016].

(24) David Chapman. *Sandow the magnificent* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 1994).

(25) David Waller. *The Perfect Man; the muscular life and times of Eugen Sandow* (London: Victorian Secrets. 2011).

(26) J. Winter. 'Military Fitness and Civilian Health in Britain during the First World War'. *Journal of contemporary history*. Series 2, Vol. 15.1980. p.p. 211-244.

(27) *The Times*. September 13th. 1918. p4.

Concern over of the fitness of recruits carried over into the immediate post war period and culminated in the 1918 report, *The Physical Examination of Men of Military Age*. 'War is a stern taskmaster'. 'It has compelled us to take stock of the health and physique

of our manhood'.²⁸ The report based on what was the largest anthropometric study carried out in Britain revealed an alarming picture of incapacity. Only 36% of those examined were classed as grade one, fit for active military service overseas. Interest in the deterioration question re-emerged in the 1930s as Germany re-armed, fear of war grew and the League of Nations faltered.

In 1933 after the British athletics team was trounced by Germany in London, *The Observer* commented, 'the chief advantage of the Germans on track and field was their superior physical power'.²⁹ Reporting on a visit to Germany in 1934 where he spent time with the Hitler Youth, the Conservative MP Sir Arnold Wilson found them to be, 'incredibly tough [...] There was life and vigour such as I would fain to see elsewhere'.³⁰

In a House of Lords' debate on the nation's physique in 1936, the poor state of British youth was compared with that of Germany. 'An unbelievably fine body of young men'. 'You could not see anything among the youth of this country to compare to it'.³¹ Commenting on the latest rejection rate for potential recruits to the army of 47%, Lord Horder stressed the need for human as well as material rearmament. 'If we are unfit in regards to mechanised defence there is surely no reason why we should be unready in regards to personal fitness'.³²

(28) Ministry of National Service. *Report on the Physical Examination of Men of Military Age*, (London: HMSO. Cd.504. 1918) p.6. The 1918 report introduced a new grading system to replace the A1 to C3 categories used previously.

(29) *Observer*. August 20th 1933. p.18.

(30) Arnold Wilson. 'Germany in May', *English Review*, June 1934. p.695.

(31) Hansard House of Lords. October 2nd. 1936. c. 51.

(32) *Ibid*. 69.

This chapter has explored the origins, persistence and significance of the idea of physical deterioration on British attitudes and policy. The question seems inextricably linked to; the defence of the realm, the idea of national strength, and the maintenance of

order. Bargielowska suggests, ‘this endeavour (the 1937 Act) clearly had military implications and can be traced back to the call for fit men to defend Britain and the Empire’.³³ It will be argued in later chapters that given the likelihood of war, this view is credible, but many other factors influenced the government of the day. The next section of the study explores national fitness and physical training in the context of the post war depression and the impact of long-term unemployment on the social fabric and political stability of Britain.

(33) Bargielowska. *op. cit.*

Chapter Three. Unemployment. ‘The intractable million’. John Field.¹

**Plate 2. The Prince of Wales meeting
the finalists in the London
unemployed football league final.
Wembley 1932.²**



Between 1921 and 1939 successive governments struggled with the issue of unemployment. A number of schemes and initiatives were launched, some of which are of importance to this study as they involved the use of physical training and recreation to achieve wider social objectives, and as such contributed to the formation of the 1937 Act.

After a short post-war boom many developed economies entered a deep depression in 1921. In Britain the transition from a command economy back to market and export led production proved difficult. Unemployment amongst those insured, never fell below ‘the intractable million’ until 1939. It was feared that a hard core of long term unemployed men and women would lose the will and ability to work.

(1) John Field. Learning Through Labour. Training, Unemployment and the State: 1830-1939 (Leeds: Leeds University School of Education. 1991) p.6.

(2) www.BritishPathe.com/video-a-real-tonic.28/11/1932. [accessed online December 12th 2017].

The post war depression was accompanied by, widespread industrial unrest, significant public disorder in the major cities and fear of Bolshevism.³ This was a time of social and economic stress and uncertainty.

In 1923 a deputation from the Trades Union Congress met the Prime Minister, Andrew Bonar Law to press the case for Government intervention and the recall of Parliament. Robert Smillie, President of the Miners Federation of Great Britain summarised the TUC view. 'The effects of unemployment were sapping the nation's vigour'. 'We are not providing for the mental and physical strength of our future people'.⁴ The first response by Government in that year was a targeted initiative for the 200,000 young people between fourteen and eighteen years, many of them former munitions workers, who were unemployed. The *Manchester Guardian* described them as 'running wild' and suggested, 'To leave them in this state courts disaster'.⁵

The Ministry of Labour and the Board of Education established Juvenile Employment Committees in areas of high unemployment and funded centres offering a programme of physical training, games, lectures and debates. For those between fourteen and sixteen attendance was voluntary, but for those beyond sixteen it was a condition of receiving benefit. £20,000 was allocated for this work in 1924.⁶

The effects of the very rapid increase in unemployment were exacerbated by the large number of ex-servicemen needing resettlement and employment. Speaking in 1920 the Prince of Wales declaimed, 'The debt of honour will not be fully paid until all the men, alas many of them disabled, have been given a proper chance of making good'.⁷ In the first instance it was hoped that ex-servicemen might be retrained and absorbed into an expanding post-war economy.

(3) Jon Lawrence. 'Forging a peaceable kingdom: War, violence and fear of brutalization in post-first world war Britain'. *Journal of Modern History*, 75, 3, September 2011.

(4) Minutes of meeting between the Prime Minister and a TUC deputation March 31st 1923. National Archives, CAB/24/158. (Hereafter NA).

(5) *Manchester Guardian*. December 24th. 1922. p.7.

(6) *Manchester Guardian*. September 5th. 1924. p.10.

(7) *Manchester Guardian*. November 6th 1920. p.6.

As levels of unemployment stayed stubbornly high, the retraining strategy was extended to the 'civilian' unemployed in the depressed areas through the aegis of the Industrial Transference Board. It was hoped that up to 200,000 'surplus' workers, former miners, steelworkers and the like, could be retrained and find work in parts of the country such as the Midlands and the South East where demand for labour was growing.⁸ The vehicle for retraining were Transfer Instructional Centres. Men could be referred on a voluntary basis for an 8 to 12 week course of retraining. The schemes had little impact on the level of unemployment and limited success in transference.

In 1932, as the 'slump' entered its fourth year, Government changed course and developed a two pronged strategy to tackle unemployment. Transference centres were given a new purpose, as Instructional Centres. Underlying the rhetoric of instruction was the 'work hardening' ideology. *The Ministry of Labour Annual Report for 1929* held that, 'prolonged unemployment has robbed many men of the physical fitness and attitude which would enable them to undertake heavy work'⁹ The new work camps were designed to 'recondition' men. The instructional centres, no longer voluntary after 1934, were often residential and in remote locations. The aim was to make trainees; 'physically fit, inculcate comradeship and the corporate spirit'.¹⁰ To that end, heavy manual labour on projects such as forestry and road building was supplemented by physical training, sports and games.¹¹ The camps became a focus for agitation by the National Unemployed Workers Movement whose leader Wal Hannington portrayed their aim as; 'producing a race of compliant, docile slaves'.¹²

(8) John Field. *Able bodies: Work camps and the training of the unemployed in Britain before 1939*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education, 2009).

(9) Ministry of Labour. Annual report 1929 (London: HMSO, 1929) p.37.

(10) Royal Institute for International Affairs, Annual Report 1935 (London: RIIA. 1935) p.417.

(11) My Father, Patrick Power MBE. was employed as a physical training instructor at a camp in Scotland between 1934 and 1936. He had been discharged from the Army due to cuts in public spending in 1933. I recall him talking of the militaristic regime of the camp and the resentment of many of the trainees who attended, rather than lose unemployment benefit.

(12) Wal Hannington. *The problem of distressed areas* (London: Victor Gollancz. 1937) p.212

Speaking at a Cabinet meeting in 1936 the Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin voiced his concern not just at growing opposition to the camps but to the general plight of the areas worst affected by unemployment and, ‘the danger that they would think no one cared about them, and this would provide fertile soil for communism’. ¹³

The second strand of policy that ran concurrently with work hardening was more subtle. In 1932 the Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald established a Cabinet Committee with the brief of finding the unemployed jobs *and* occupation. This implied a tacit acceptance that in many areas there were simply not enough jobs, however much pressure was applied to the unemployed to find work.

Occupation became a key policy objective and to that end, many partnerships with the voluntary sector were forged and community infrastructure projects grant aided. This approach was to be central to the operation of the 1937 Act. The Committee agreed that, ‘physical training and voluntary work schemes offer the most valuable results’. ‘Physical training meets a very real need of the younger men in the industrial areas’. ¹⁴

The new pragmatism was widely reported and generally accepted. The *Manchester Guardian* commented:

Unquestionably the occupational centres have filled many hours of leisure by providing interesting occupation and good fellowship. Most of them have organised games and physical training and the gentle hardening of the unemployed must have helped produce a greater buoyancy. ¹⁵

The work of the Committee culminated in the formation of the Special Areas Programme covering regions most affected by unemployment such as, South Wales, Tyneside, West Cumberland and parts of Scotland. Between 1934 and 1938. Government invested £8.5 million in the programme. ¹⁶

(13) Cabinet Minutes. October 14th. 1936. NA. 57.36.

(14) Cabinet Unemployment Committee. Interim report 1932. NA.CAB 24/233.

(15) *Manchester Guardian*. December 28th. 1934. p.9.

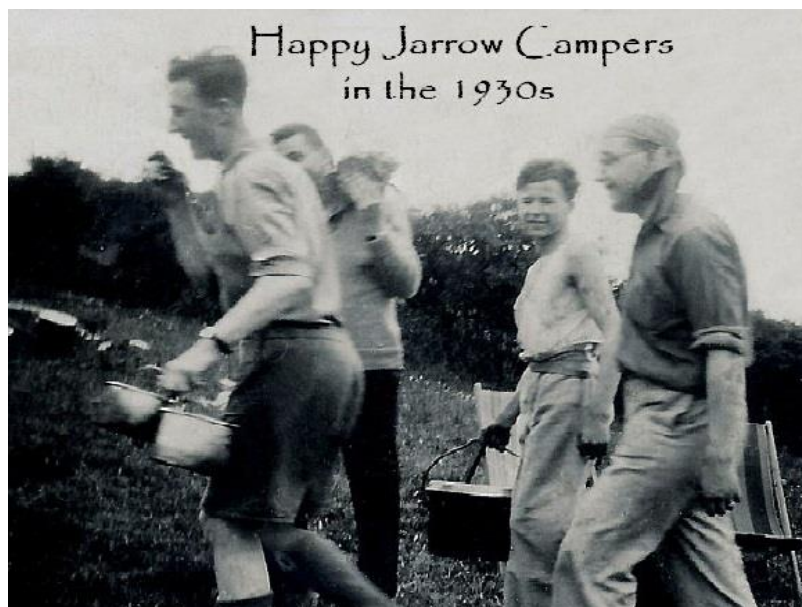
(16) Report of the Commissioner for Special Areas in England and Wales 1937 (London : HMSO, 1937).

The scheme had two broad aims, to encourage inward investment, and, creating a fuller life for those whose lives were blighted by unemployment. The fuller life concept took many forms. For example, the Society of Friends was given a grant to establish 2,800 community allotments for the unemployed. The Commissioners who administered the Act in each area supported Educational Settlements that offered wide ranging cultural and educational programmes.

Voluntary work schemes to improve community amenities included projects such as rebuilding the Monkton Sports Stadium in Jarrow. Other schemes, often joint initiatives with local authorities included the provision of swimming pools, running and cycle tracks. Many projects drew on the tradition of labour solidarity and trades union organisation and were planned and managed by committees of the unemployed.

The growth of interest in tourism and outdoor recreation is discussed in chapter four. In every Special Area, significant investment in visitor amenities was made, such as, the waterfront lido at Tynemouth, camping facilities and youth hostels. Summer camps for children and young adults such as that shown in plate 3 below were supported.

Plate 3. Jarrow Summer Camp 1930s.¹⁷



(17) www.dunn247.co.uk. Date unknown. [accessed online November 5th 2016].

More conventional physical training programmes were also promoted in the Special Areas. 'Great importance should be attached to physical training and recreation as one of the measures most likely to improve the physique and morale of the unemployed'. In 1936 men's physical training classes were held in 43 centres, and women in the Special Areas were quick to take advantage of the new keep fit craze. 5,400 women in the north east attended classes organised by local authorities or the National Council of Social Service in that year.¹⁸

Outside the Special Areas the recreational needs of the unemployed were accorded lower priority by Government. A limited attempt was made to redress the balance in 1936 through the publication of *Circular 1445* by the Board of Education. The circular reminded local authorities and other providers that 'there is a specially strong case for helping the unemployed to maintain and develop their physique'.¹⁹ To facilitate this objective the circular recommended the use of Local Authority Physical Education Organisers to work with voluntary organisations to develop programmes and activities for the unemployed in addition to their core work of school based physical education. The Special Areas programme established a number of important principles that were to influence the design and operation of the 1937 Act. Physical training may have been used as a tool to occupy, divert or control the unemployed, but where it was well organised there is evidence from the reports of Special Areas Commissioners that it was genuinely popular. The need to cater for adolescents not in education was recognised and was to become a key objective of Government, particularly during the war.

The work camps were compulsory, whereas fitness initiatives remained voluntary and this perhaps went some way towards rebutting the charge that physical training was linked to militarisation and compulsion. Despite this, suspicion remained that Special Area schemes and other initiatives to manage the unemployed were a cynical attempt to divert attention from deeper class issues of; 'transference, the means test, and the brute facts of poverty and ill-health'.²⁰

(18) Special Areas Report 1937. paras. 497-504.

(19) Board of Education. *Circular 1445: Physical Education* (London: HMSO. 1936) p.4.

(20) Andrzej Olechnowicz, 'Unemployed workers, enforced leisure and education in Britain in the 1930s' *Labour History Review*, Vol. 70, No.1, April 2005, p.p.27-52.

Whether the use of physical training and recreation was a rational intervention to promote well-being and a fuller life for the unemployed, or, a propagandist cost saving alternative to systematic welfare reform was to become an issue that divided opinion during the first two years of the operation of the Act. When Neville Chamberlain acceded to the post of Prime Minister in 1937 he clearly held to the former view and gave the matter of national fitness a degree of priority that surprised many of his cabinet colleagues. 'It must be four years since the idea first occurred to me'. 'I got precious little support from my colleagues'.²¹

The next chapter will challenge the stereotype of the 'hungry thirties' by examining the impact of rising living standards for those in work, on ways of living, and, the emergence of a leisure culture.

(21) Robert Self (Ed.). *The Neville Chamberlain diary letters. Vol.4* (Aldershot: Ashgate. 2005) p.233.

Chapter Four. 'Make it new'. Ezra Pound. 1935.¹

Plate 4. Advertising poster. Butlin's Holiday Camp, Clacton-on-Sea 1938.²



This chapter will explore the influence of modernism and the new prosperity on the life and leisure of the British people in the 1930s. Earlier chapters have demonstrated physical training and recreation as important elements of Victorian and Edwardian society, and later, as a measure to manage unemployment. In the 1930s these activities developed a new freer form; influenced by modernism, relative prosperity, and, fashion. The tension between Government's wish to promote its own fitness agenda is contrasted with the public's demand for leisure products, an expression of the new consumerism.

Modernism, a broad philosophical concept and way of thinking exerted a profound influence on art, design and literature during the interwar period, and also contributed to the development of popular culture which included aspects of sport and recreation. Pound's exhortation in 1935 to 'make it new' is easily seen in the art and architecture of the decade. However, the substance of this study is more prosaic, the leisure and pastimes of 'ordinary' people. Modernist values may have formed the cultural backdrop to the period but it was increasing prosperity for many that stoked the demand for an ever wider range of leisure activities and thus added pressure on the National Government to respond with initiatives such as the 1937 Act as a populist measure.

(1) Ezra Pound. *Make it New* (New Haven. USA: Yale University Press. 1935).

(2) www.kingandmcgraw/butlins-holiday-camp-clacton-on-sea
[accessed online November 17th 2016].

The previous chapter discussed the collapse of work in traditional industries and the Special Areas. After 1932 the economy grew as vehicle manufacture, and electricals expanded. Construction, particularly housebuilding also flourished. In 1920, 21.3% of the workforce was employed in these sectors. By 1938 this had risen to 33.4%.³ One of the largest absolute increases in employment occurred in entertainment, sport, catering and hotels.⁴ In 1920, 101,700 people were employed in entertainment and sport. By 1938 this had risen to 247,900.⁵

Figure 1. Economic Growth in the United Kingdom 1929 to 1939. ⁶

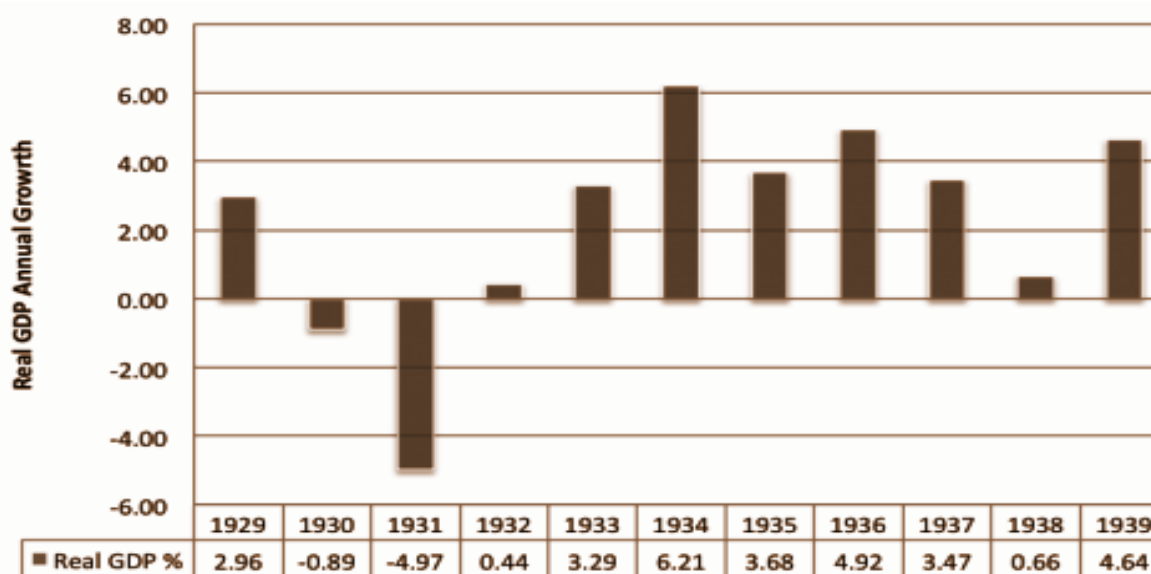


Figure 2 overleaf demonstrates that from 1926 wages fell and did not recover that level again until 1936. However, prices and the cost of living fell even more sharply leading to a rise in real wages and disposable income. This, allied to a reduction in average hours worked and the introduction of holidays with pay for some employees served as a powerful stimulus for the service, recreation and entertainment sectors.⁷

(3) Peter Scott. et.al. *British working-class household composition, labour supply and commercial leisure participation during the 1930s*. Henley Business School Discussion paper IBH-2014-03. 2014.

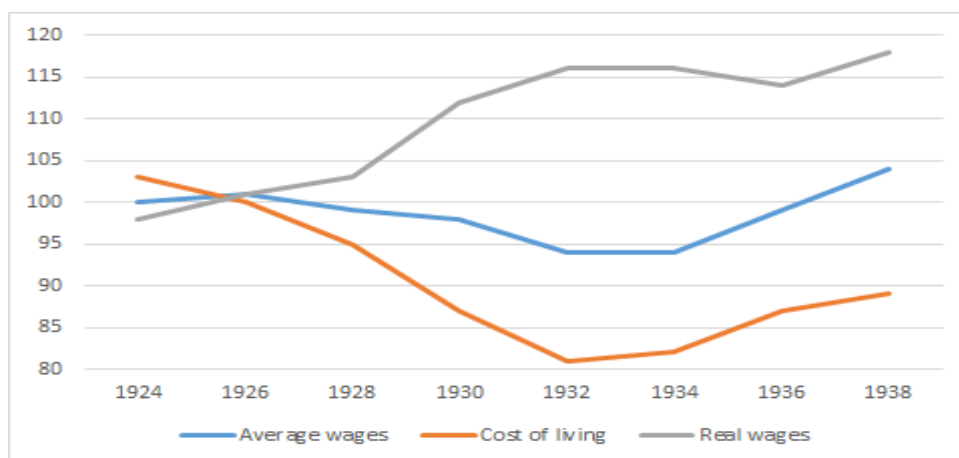
(4) Derek Aldcroft. *The inter-war economy: Britain 1919-1939* (London: Batsford, 1973) p.p.181-182.

(5) Ibid. p.238.

(6) Tejvan Pettifer. *The UK economy in the 1930s*. www.economicshelp.org/economics. [accessed online 23rd. November 2016].

(7) J. Kay et.al. *The regulation of retail trading hours* (Oxford: Parchment, 1984).

**Figure 2. Wages cost of living and real wage data:
United Kingdom 1924 to 1938: 1924=100.⁸**



The new spending power and sense of freedom that came with it found expression in many forms. For example, the wish to enjoy the coast and countryside did not start in the 1930s, but wider ownership of private cars and motorcycles made access far easier. In 1921 there were 243,000 private cars registered. By 1939 this had risen to 1,944,000.⁹ Coast and countryside also attracted cyclists and ramblers in record numbers. R.H. Randall writing in the *London and North Eastern Railway* magazine in 1937 reported, ‘an explosion of holiday camps, chalets and bungalows along the Suffolk coast’.¹⁰

Images of people enjoying the freedom of the countryside to cycle, walk, swim, climb and camp are emblematic of a wider mass movement, heirs to the rational recreation crusade of the Victorian era. These ‘healthful’ activities stood in direct contrast to other fashionable but more passive and commercialised mass entertainments that gained in popularity in the 1930s such as, cinema, professional football, and, the resort or lido.

(8) Adapted from. Brian Mitchell. *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1962) p.345. Average wages are based on weekly money wage rates. Real wages are for fully employed workers.

(9) Ibid. p.230.

(10) R. H Randall. *LNER Magazine*. May 1937. p.272.

The perceived dangers of ‘cheap thrills’ arising from commercial leisure products and their impact on the values and behaviour of the young resonate across the period. The 1936 British Medical Association report on Physical Education commented:

In the vicinity of the new housing estates, crowds of young children may be seen attending cinemas on Saturday mornings, even in bright sunny weather. This practice is not in the best interests of health and physical development.¹¹

The 1937 Act was, in part, a response to the growing interest in outdoor pursuits. Local authorities were, for the first time, enabled and encouraged to provide campsites. The newly formed Youth Hostels Association had already benefitted from government financial assistance in the Special Areas and once the 1937 Act was in operation, capital grants were made to build and upgrade hostels and other rural amenities. The upsurge of interest in outdoor recreation was not solely a British phenomenon. A similar picture was seen across Europe and North America. The fascist organisations, Strength Through Joy in Germany and the Dopolavoro movement in Italy rekindled an interest in ‘Lebensreform’ (life-reform), a movement that had flourished before the Great War. Activities such as hiking, sunbathing, physical fitness and a healthy diet were central to this idea.¹²

Campbell¹³, and Bargielowska¹⁴ have commented on the mass nature of many recreation activities and events which ranged from Scout and Guide jamborees to the serried ranks of the Women's League of Health and Beauty. Images of the mass event such as those shown overleaf are symbolic of the 1930s and may signify a cultural shift towards collectivism and collective recreation. One must however be cautious in this analysis. Advertising, propaganda and reportage also developed rapidly in the 1930s and it may be their impact on the historical record that has cemented this idea.

(11) British Medical Association, *Report of the Physical Education Committee* (London: British Medical Association 1936) p.22.

(12) Paul Weindling, *Health, race and German politics: 1870-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1993).

(13) Campbell. op.cit.

(14) Bargielowska. op.cit.

This interesting hypothesis is worthy of further study, but is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The use of sport and sporting events for wider social and political purposes is however relevant to this thesis.

Plate 5. Berlin Olympiad, opening ceremony: 1936. ¹⁵



Plate 6. Women's League of Health and Beauty mass rally Olympia London: 1936. ¹⁶



For example, the 1936 Berlin Olympiad was a strikingly modern event in terms of its bold architecture, use of film and other media to project an image of a virile nation on the move. Addressing the Conservative Party conference in 1936, Neville Chamberlain opined:

Nothing made a stronger impression upon visitors to the Olympic Games in Germany this year than the splendid condition of German youth [...] and though our methods are different from theirs in accordance with our national characters and traditions I see no reason why we should not be equally successful.¹⁷

Bolz and others have suggested the relative failure of the British team at the Berlin Games as another factor pressing on government to 'do something' about national fitness. ¹⁸

(15) www.blogs.sapiens/lorigen-nazi-de-la-roxa-olympia [accessed online 19th December 2016].

(16) www.flashbak.com/the-women's-league-of-health-and-beauty-4580 [accessed online 20th December 2016].

(17) *The Times*. October 3rd. 1936. p.12.

(18) Daphne Bolz. 'Reversing the influence: Anglo-German relations and British Fitness policy in the 1930s'. *Sport in History*. 2014, Vol.34. No.4., p.p. 569-594.

The evidence for this is mixed. As the nation that gave the world sport in its modern form, there was certainly an element of pride and expectation in the performance of British athletes. A letter to *The Times* immediately after the 1936 Games typifies this view. ‘The lesson of the Olympic Games is that England should encourage the younger generation to acquit them in a manner worthy of the greatest sporting nation in world’.¹⁹

Other commentaries were far more critical of international sport and participating in the Olympic movement, citing the growing professionalism of competitors and the subversion of sport for political purposes.²⁰ A leading article in the *Observer* by a ‘special correspondent’ went further.²¹

The Olympic Games have really outlived their usefulness and are definitely fading. The time has come to reduce our sporting commitments with foreigners to a minimum and quit the Olympic Games altogether.

The Olympic question was also raised in both Houses of Parliament on numerous occasions between 1935 and 1937. For example Geoffrey Mander, a Liberal MP asked the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden for assurances that the Government would use its influence to ensure the Games would not be used for political or military purposes and that the persecution of Jews would not recommence when the Games were over. Eden’s reply was a terse; ‘no sir’.²² The Government seems to have shown little interest in international sport and the Olympics evidenced by its support for the British Olympic Association’s decision to withdraw its bid to stage the 1940 Olympiad.²³

(19) D. Barrington-Hudson. *The Times*. August 26th. 1936. p.8.

(20) Bruce Turnbull. *The Times*. August 29th. 1936. p.6. Turnbull was a former Inspector of Army Physical Training

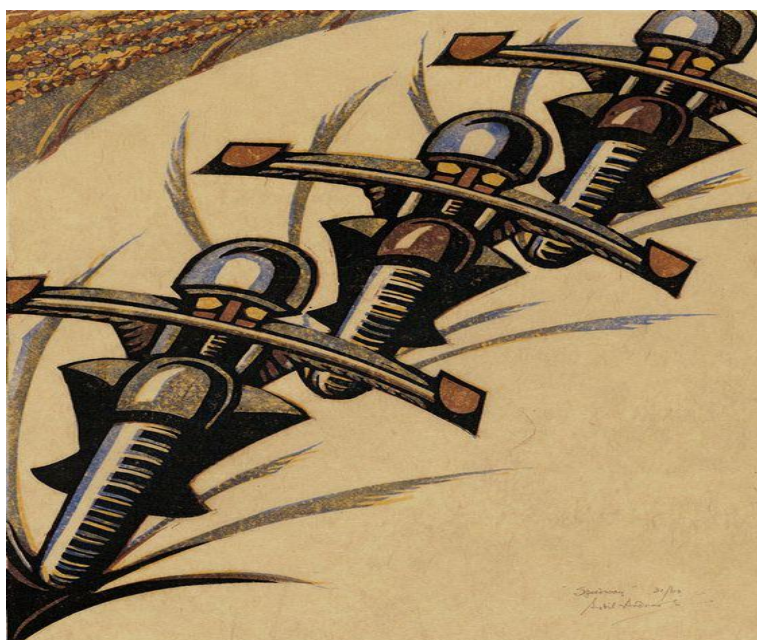
(21) *The Observer*. May 29th. 1936. p.27.

(22) Hansard. House of Commons. July 22nd. 1936. c. 417.

(23) Matthew Llewellyn. ‘The Empire Savers’. *International Journal of the History of Sport*. Vol.28. April 2011. Issue 5. p.p.730-750.

As Britain increasingly withdrew resources and energies from the quadrennial athletic festival, the domestic leisure industry flourished; driven by a degree of fad and fashion.²⁴ The offerings of this dynamic sector ranged from the keep fit 'craze', to Billy Butlin's promise of, a 'week's holiday for a week's pay'.²⁵ The surge of interest in leisure and recreation took many forms. Activities such as, motor racing, speedway, greyhound racing and flying all increased in popularity in the 1930s. The dynamically modern nature of many of these activities excited futurist and vorticist painters whose work reflected a sense of speed and restless change. An example is shown below.

Plate 7. Speedway: 1934.²⁶



(24) Matthew Llewellyn. 'Epilogue: Britannia overruled'. *International Journal of the History of Sport*. April 2011. vol.28. issue 5, p.p. 817-829. p.817.

(25) *Daily Mirror*. 30th April 2011. Lifestyle supplement.

(26) Sybil Andrews. *Speedway*. 1934 (New York: Museum of Modern Art). www.moma.org. [accessed online 10th December 2016].

This chapter has traced the development of a leisure culture in the 1930s; the product of increasing prosperity, more free time, and the influence of modernist ideas. The preceding two chapters argued that Government's interest in the national physique was driven by more instrumental concerns; fear of deterioration and a wish to maintain social cohesion. The growth of the leisure industry in the 1930s added another element to that equation.

The terms leisure and recreation, often used interchangeably, start to appear in parliamentary debates from the early 1930s, often in the context of unemployment, but increasingly in recognition of the idea that as a society Britain was moving away from 'living to work'. There are some seventy references to recreation and leisure in the Commons between 1934 and 1936. For example, in a debate on the betting industry in 1934 Edward Cadogan a Conservative MP asserted, 'there has been the most amazing revolution in the provision of facilities for recreation for the young and middle aged alike'.²⁷

With shorter working hours and increased prosperity, leisure was increasingly being portrayed as a problem, and, 'a matter of enormous importance'.²⁸ Ministers who participated in and replied to these debates would have been aware of recreation and leisure as an area that could strike a chord with the public. The National Government had weathered the depression by imposing severe cuts in public spending that impacted heavily on public services, public sector pay and unemployment benefit. With a recovery in train, the Government would certainly have wished to appear responsive to the aspirations of the people for better times, despite, or even perhaps because of, the costly race to re-arm and the growing threat of war that stirred so many painful memories. Introducing a paper at Cabinet in 1936, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Neville Chamberlain suggested his idea for a national campaign to improve the physique of the nation was a genuinely popular measure that had 'caught the imagination of the public'.²⁹

(27) Hansard, House of Commons. June 27th. 1934. c. 118. Cadogan was to become a member of the National Fitness Council and serve in that role from 1937 to 1939

(28) Hansard, House of Commons. March 18th. 1936. c 1283.

(29) Cabinet Minutes. October 14th. 1936. NA/CAB/23/85. .

Chapter Five. 1933 to 1936: The pace quickens.

‘Ten years ago the term community centre was hardly known, and now [...] it is on everybody's lips’. *Spectator*. 1936.¹

The previous three chapters have demonstrated the growth of interest in physical training and recreation. One legacy of the experience of mass unemployment and the work of the Special Areas programme was recognition of the importance of ‘community’. Between 1919 and 1937 three million families were rehoused, often on estates on the outskirts of towns and cities. The 1930 Housing Act imposed a duty on Local Authorities to clear slums, but placed no requirement to include recreational, social or welfare facilities. In 1928 the National Council for Social Service formed the New Estates Community Committee to press for every estate to have a community association housed in a community centre.² A number of Councils and agencies did respond, and in doing so influenced the direction of the 1937 Act. This chapter will examine a number of these initiatives.

Plate 8. Slough Social Centre 1936.³



(1) *Spectator*. March 19th. 1936. p.511.

(2) Andrzej Olechnowicz. *Working class housing in England between the wars* (Wotton-Under-Edge: Clarendon Press. 1997).

(3) www.sloughhistoryonline.co.uk. [Accessed online February 27th. 2017].

One of the largest and well-appointed community recreation facilities of the period was the Slough Social Centre, provided as an expression of benevolent paternalism by the owners of the Slough Trading Estate. The facility, opened by the Queen in 1937, cost £45,000. Slough was an archetypal ‘boom’ town that drew in workers from the depressed areas to the new industries.

The social centre, housed in five factory units shown in plate 8 above comprised an 800 seat hall, Olympic size pool, was home to 150 groups and societies and was also the base for the Slough Council of Social Services the coordinating body for voluntary organisations in the area.⁴ The opening ceremony for the centre generated substantial positive publicity for the idea of community centres in the national press.

**Plate 9. Pioneer Health Centre
Peckham.⁵**



The Pioneer Health Centre in Peckham opened in 1935. Established as a contributory health insurance scheme by a group of socialist doctors in a working class area of London, it excited the interest of MP's who were locked in debate at the time on whether the Government's plan for a fitter nation should include initiatives on nutrition and health care, as well as exercise.

(4) British Medical Journal. *The Slough Social Centre*. January 29th. 1938. p.246.

(5) Socialist Health Association newsletter. March 15th. 1943. p.1.

Peckham combined health services, recreation and social amenities in one modernist building. During the second reading of the Physical Training and Recreation Bill a number of MPs who had visited the project praised the centre. ‘There, can be found the model for the kind of centre which is to be set up under the Bill’.⁶

Although Slough and Peckham attracted much publicity, the more typical form of community provision between 1934 and 1936 was far more prosaic, small neighbourhood halls, parks or recreation grounds of the type shown below. Local Authorities may have wished to provide more facilities, but cuts to Local Authority budgets made this difficult. Some financial assistance was available from the Carnegie Trust, George Vth Jubilee Fund, and, the National Playing Fields Association, but these schemes usually required matching funding or significant capital input from the local authority or community.⁷ Publicity generated in the run up to the 1937 Bill and Act raised expectations that financial support for recreation facilities would, at last, be forthcoming.

Plate 10. Low Hill Community Centre Wolverhampton. Opened 1936.⁸

Plate 11. Entrance to a typical ‘George Vth’ recreation ground. Bell Farm Estate York. Opened 1936.⁹



(6) Vyvyan Adams MP. Hansard. House of Commons. April 7th. 1937. c. 258.

(7) Douglas White et.al. *Finding and protecting the Carnegie Playing Fields* (Dunfermline: Carnegie Trust. 2015).

(8) <http://municipaldreams.com/1930s/page/3> [accessed online 2nd March 2017].

(9) Photograph by the author. March 3rd. 2017.

In 1933 the Board of Education published a new syllabus of physical training for schools. This influential document sounded the death knell for militaristic ‘drill’ exercises and signposted the way to the Act. It identified physical training and recreation not merely as a matter for schoolchildren, but a lifelong pursuit that was ‘vital for the health of the people as a whole’ and ‘even the survival of the race’.¹⁰

The final link in the chain of demand for better recreation facilities came from the formation of the Central Council for Recreative Physical Training (CCRPT) in 1935. The CCRPT was an umbrella organisation representing; governing bodies of sport, youth organisations, education authorities and physical education colleges. The Council campaigned for more and better facilities and improving the availability of well trained teachers, coaches and organisers.¹¹

By 1936 The Government had determined its approach to the question of improving national physique. Despite objections from the Left and the British Medical Association that poverty was the central social issue to be faced, a White Paper was published outlining a National Fitness Programme. The following chapter will explore the political context in which the Act was introduced and problems associated with its operation between 1937 and 1939.

(10) Board of Education. *Syllabus of Physical Training for Schools* (London: HMSO. 1933) p.p.5 and 8

(11) McIntosh. Op.cit.

Chapter six. National Fitness 1936 to 1939.

The New Year finds us on the threshold of an important development for the creation of a fitter Britain. The aim of the Government is to give a special and better place in our health provision to physical education. Sir Kingsley Wood. Minister of Health 1937.¹

In 1935 Stanley Baldwin replaced Ramsay MacDonald as Prime Minister in the National Government and laid plans to go to the country to seek a stronger mandate. The power behind the throne was Chancellor of the Exchequer Neville Chamberlain, architect of recovery from the depression, an advocate of strict monetary control and austerity.

As ‘virtual’ prime minister, Chamberlain crafted a domestic manifesto around the better organisation, use and promotion of social and health services, and, his ‘big idea’, a national fitness campaign.² Chapter two described Chamberlain’s long standing interest in improving the national physique. He was finally in a position to take action. The idea was tested in a speech to the Annual Conference of the Conservative Party in 1936. *The Times* reported, ‘Mr Chamberlain struck the right note [...] to the two questions, the defence of our country, and, the defence of our health’. ‘These are by far the most important questions of the hour’.³

Less than a month later, Chamberlain raised the matter in Cabinet, suggesting, ‘the idea had caught the attention of the public’.⁴ Within two months Chamberlain presented a draft White Paper to Cabinet outlining detailed proposals for a Physical Training and Recreation Bill.⁵ The rationale of the White Paper was simple. It was argued significant progress had been made in school physical education provision and practice, but, services for adolescents and adults were ‘sporadic and incomplete’.

(1) *Manchester Guardian*. January 1st. 1937. p. 5.

(2) Michael James. *Neville Chamberlain’s Domestic Policies* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen. 2010).

(3) *The Times* October 3rd. 1936. p. 13.

(4) Cabinet Minutes October 14th 1936. p.31. NA/CAB/23/85.

(5) Cabinet draft White Paper. January 1937. NA/CAB/24/267.

Many statutory and voluntary organisations had an interest in physical training but there was little coordination of policy or effort. Local Authorities had a number of permissive powers granted under past legislation to provide facilities as diverse as swimming pools or youth centres, but many lacked the impetus to do so. The large voluntary organisations such as the National Playing Fields Association and the Central Council for Recreative Physical Training did important work, but once more, a lack of coordination hampered their efforts.

A national scheme was required, based on three guiding principles, voluntarism, state funding, but not state control, and, a broad and inclusive definition of activities that recognised the social importance of physical exercise.

The scheme would be run at arm's length from Government through a National Advisory Council (NAC) which would in turn appoint Local Area Committees (LAC) to determine local need and sift grant applications. A separate, much smaller, grants committee would attend and support the work of the NAC, but would make its recommendations for grant aid direct to the responsible minister. Grants would be primarily for capital projects with the appellant organisations expected to make a contribution and bear all running costs. The exception would be the CCRPT training and leadership programmes. A National College was to be established to promote the education of leaders, organisers and coaches.

The estimate for capital grant aid for three years to March 1940, and establishing the National College, was £2 million, with around £150,000 of recurring costs. It is unclear how this estimate was arrived at. The White Paper acknowledged, 'any reliable forecast of the expenditure involved [...] is impossible', yet, when the scheme was launched the actual operating budget was almost identical to the preliminary estimate.⁶ This 'guesstimate' was to have serious implications that would compromise the initiative less than two years later. The draft White Paper was published unamended by the Cabinet for public consultation.⁷

(6) Physical Training and Recreation Bill 1937. 1.Edw.8 & 1.Geo.6. Financial memorandum.

The budget agreed by Parliament for the scheme was £2.4 million capital and £170,000 revenue.

(7) Physical Training and Recreation explanatory memorandum (London. HMSO. Cd. 5364. 1937).

If there was little discussion in Cabinet on the White Paper, a number of representations from other bodies were received. Herbert Morrison MP. Leader of London County Council voiced the fears of the Left, that a physical training act was a veiled manifestation of militarisation. Morrison also feared the growth of bureaucracy. 'I rather dread the thought of having another official body to deal with'.⁸ A number of Organisations such as; the National Association of Boys Clubs, and the King George Vth Memorial Fund expressed fears that centralisation and Government interference would inhibit voluntarism.⁹ Replying to these concerns the President of the Board of Education stressed the uniquely British nature of the scheme that bore no resemblance to those running in Germany and Italy.

The Government moved quickly to lay the foundations for the Act by establishing the NAC for England and Wales. Scotland was to have its own Council. The Physical Training and Recreation Bill started its passage through Parliament in March 1937. The Bill was entirely permissive in that it allowed but did not require statutory or voluntary bodies to implement the legislation. This approach was in keeping with all previous Acts relating to physical training and recreation.

The first paragraph made specific reference to the 'establishment of centres for social activities'. This built on the experience of community development in the Special Areas over the past five years. The intention was to go beyond a narrow promotion of physical activity towards a more inclusive recreative philosophy. The indicative list of the type of services that might be provided under the Act reinforced this point. In addition to the expected 'gymnasiums and playing fields' were, 'holiday camps and camping sites'. Similarly, any premises provided by local authorities under the Act might be used for concerts and entertainment. The Bill amended the 1921 Education Act to allow local authorities, for the first time, to provide 'social and physical training' for those over 18 years of age whether or not they were attending education institutions.

(8) Herbert Morrison MP. Letter to the President of the Board of Education. January 23rd 1937. NA/ED/136/74.

(9) Representations to the Board of Education on Physical Training and Recreation 1937. NA/136/74.

At first sight, the modest tone, content and resourcing of the Bill seems somewhat removed from the idea of a ‘great national campaign’ designed to ‘give our people a new joy in life, and, make them better citizens’. ¹⁰ A number of factors may explain this. Chamberlain, the cautious Chancellor made a notional and very limited allocation of funds, having no idea of demand. He was soon to become Prime Minister, and thus forced to wrestle with far bigger issues such as the escalating costs of rearmament and a rapidly deteriorating international situation. Responsibility for the project passed to the Board of Education. As later sections of the study demonstrate senior civil servants at the Board, Treasury and Ministry of Health did not share Chamberlain’s open enthusiasm for the scheme.

The proposal for a ‘fitter Britain’ was by no means universally popular. In its passage through Parliament a number of fundamental concerns were raised and repeated. When the Bill was introduced in the Commons, Oliver Stanley Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education opened the session with the confident assertion, ‘the matter carries no party issues whatever’. ¹¹

The following extracts from speeches give a flavour of the Bill’s hostile reception. Labour members expressed concern at the way in which the Bill was framed and in particular the lack of any reference to measures to improve nutrition or working conditions. ‘Until the problem of nutrition is solved, proposals which are merely for physical training will be built on a foundation of feebleness, anaemia and debility’. ¹² ‘There is evidence from the distressed areas that adolescents are not fit subjects for physical training. If money is spent it would be a waste because it would do more harm than good’. ¹³ ‘What is to be the physical training for a boy who is deformed through working eight hours a day in a 12 inch seam’? ¹⁴ ‘To suggest physical training to a man who for seven and half hours a day is performing herculean tasks (as a miner) is to talk utter rubbish’. ¹⁵

(10) *Yorkshire Post*. July 19th. 1937. p.8.

(11) Hansard. House of Commons. February 8th. 1937. c.74.

(12) Hastings Lees-Smith. Labour. Keighley. Ibid. c. 82.

(13) James Chuter-Ede. Labour. South Shields. Ibid. c. 109.

(14) George Hardie. Labour. Glasgow Springburn. Ibid. c.121.

(15) Aneurin Bevan. Labour. Ebbw Vale. Hansard House of Commons. April 7th. 1937. c.253.

Labour members also expressed concern at the perceived bias of the Bill, suggesting the scheme was designed primarily for the benefit of the 'clerical and commercial class' and that there was little in the proposals for those working in 'mill, factory or mine'.¹⁶ James Maxton, Independent Labour MP for Glasgow Bridgeton, referred to the esoteric nature of some of the activities mentioned in the Bill. 'The young men I represent don't want morris dancing'.

Not all criticism came from the Labour benches. Samuel Chapman, Scottish Unionist MP for Edinburgh South, commented on the composition of the NAC. 'We want the Council to be composed not entirely of gentlemen with titles [...] but to include someone who goes among the decent working chaps'.¹⁸ Francis Acland, Liberal MP for Cornwall North, challenged the whole assumption on which the scheme was founded; the National and Local Advisory Councils. He felt existing organisations such as the CCRPT and the NPFA had all the expertise required to promote national fitness. He predicted the new initiative would lead to duplication, inefficiency and delay. 'The Bill is poorly thought out and rushed as an issue to appeal to the electorate'.¹⁹

During the second reading of the Bill more members spoke in support of the measure but for many the sticking point remained the question of nutrition, and the failure to link this to the campaign for a fitter Britain. This issue aroused passionate feelings. For example, in 1933, the death through starvation of a London woman, Annie Weaving became a cause celebre'. She had gone without food to feed her seven children.²⁰ A Report in 1936 by Professor Boyd-Orr of the Rowett Institute concluded around 20% of children were chronically ill-nourished.²¹ In 1937 the Nutrition Committee of the British Medical Association set basic nutritional standards and demonstrated that meeting these cost more than poor families could afford.²² The Ministry of Health commissioned its own studies to refute this evidence, but there remained a belief in a 'hungry Britain'

(16) Hastings Lees-Smith. Labour Keighley. Hansard. House of Commons. February 8th. 1937 .c.79.

(17) Ibid.c.118.

(18) Ibid. c.114.

(19) Ibid .c.84.

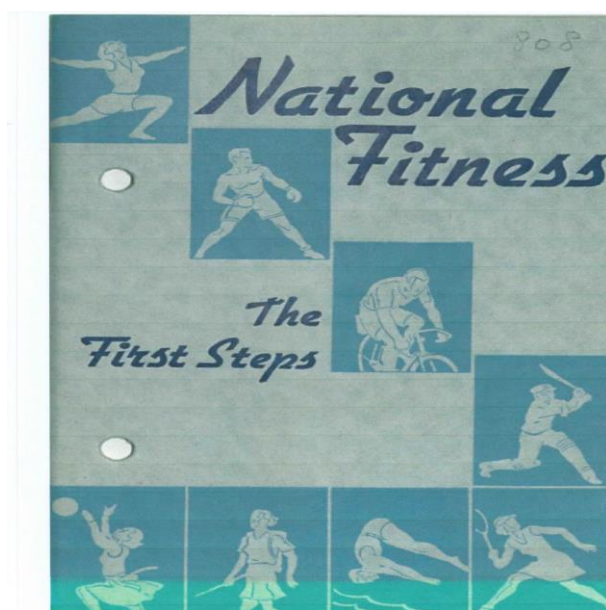
(20) *Daily Express*. January 28th. 1933. p.9.

(21) John Boyd-Orr. *Food Health and Income* (London: MacMillan. 1936).

(22) H. Seiler. 'Diet and Nutrition'. *British Food Journal*. June 1937. p.p.55-61.

Replying to the second reading debate, Geoffrey Shakespeare, Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education dismissed concern over nutrition as ‘moonshine’ and derided the idea that people were ‘so enfeebled by lack of nourishment that they cannot stand up, let alone take recreation’. ²³ Whatever the level of disquiet or opposition, the Government, was secure in its 248 seat majority. The Bill was given Royal Assent in July 1937.

Plate 12. The National Fitness Manifesto 1937. ²⁴



The 34 members of the renamed National Fitness Committee met first in March 1937 to lay the groundwork for implementing the Act.²⁵ They were a varied group, including well known figures such as Lord Burghley and Philip Noel-Baker MP, former Olympic medallists, and, Prunella Stack ‘pin-up’ girl of the Women’s League of Health and Beauty. The others were mainly long serving representatives of voluntary organisations and local government. Few, with the exception of Stanley Rous of the Football Association and Harold Fern of the Amateur Swimming Association had any experience of planning and organising sport and recreation at national level.

(23) Hansard. House of Commons. April 7th. 1937 .c.277.

(24) National Advisory Council for Physical Training and Recreation. *National Fitness the First Steps*. (London: HMSO. 1937).

(25) Once the NAC started work it adopted the title, the National Fitness Committee, hereafter NFC. The Local Committees were similarly renamed Local Fitness Committees, hereafter LFC.

The Chairman, Lord Aberdare was a former county cricketer and real tennis champion. Sir Henry Pelham, former Permanent Secretary at the Board of Education was appointed Chairman of the Grants Committee. To this disparate group fell the daunting task of delivering a national fitness campaign to an expectant public. The composition of the Council led to repeated criticism that it was out of touch, and in particular had no members representing, or understanding the needs of 'ordinary' people, youth, or organised labour.

The National Fitness Council is composed of well-meaning pugilists, sloggers and beauty queens. These magnificent specimens are not the people who have devoted a very large part of their lives to thinking about the problems of the mill girl, to whom this Act ought to be specially directed.²⁶

Similar criticism was levelled at the Local Fitness Committees. Unsurprisingly the *Daily Worker* dismissed these bodies as being composed of 'big-wigs'.²⁷ However, even the *Yorkshire Post*, an enthusiastic supporter of the Act, stressed the need for more youth role models to promote the scheme.²⁸ Lord Aberdare worked hard to win the support of the trades union movement, meeting Walter Citrine the General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress on several occasions. The minutes of these meetings reflect Citrine's suspicion that the Act was an expression of 'militarism, mass habits and mass minds, rather than individual responsibility and initiative'.²⁹

Notwithstanding these reservations the National and Area Committees applied themselves to the complex task of designing and delivering a national fitness programme within their three year tenure. The range of objectives and activities the Committee set for itself may be viewed as either; extremely ambitious, or, completely unrealistic.³⁰

(26) Hastings Lees-Smith MP. Hansard. House of Commons. June 20th. 1938. c.751.

(27) *Daily Worker*. December 9th. 1937. p.7.

(28) *Yorkshire Post*. April 8th. 1937. p.9.

(29) Minutes of meetings between Lord Aberdare NFC and Sir Walter Citrine TUC, 1937 and 1938. Warwick.ac.uk/records/TUC/A/10/800/57/1 [accessed online 04/07/2017].

(30) Minutes of the National Fitness Committee. March 3rd 1937 to May 2nd 1939. NA / ED/113/48.

In addition to establishing a Local Committee in every area, setting up the National College and developing the work of the large voluntary organisations, the NFC planned to launch a national propaganda campaign using the BBC and mass advertising channels. To support the campaign a range of publications and films was to be produced including a new syllabus of physical training for men and women..At every meeting of the NFC new ideas emerged and were added to the agenda. For example the National College was to become a centre of excellence for sport and exercise physiology. The work of the College was to be further developed by running sports medicine courses for medical graduates.

The College was also to offer scholarships to ‘outstanding youths from modest backgrounds who have demonstrated leadership potential’. ³¹ The intention was to form a cadre of community leaders, an idea popular with the Hitler Youth. To advance these ideas, sub-committees were formed, three at first; local liaison, technical and propaganda, but increasing to six with the addition of juvenile, medical, and, sports and games committees. It is difficult to see how the 34 members of the NFC, all part-time volunteers with limited professional support, could pursue such a range of issues simultaneously.

Some progress was made in the first six months. The booklet shown in Plate 12, ‘National Fitness, the First Steps’ was distributed widely. It explained the purpose of the Act and the resources and support available to clubs and organisations. The first grants were awarded, to larger governing bodies and specialist organisations such as the Amateur Rowing Association, the Amateur Athletic Association, and the English Folk Dance Society, to appoint national coaches and organisers. More controversial was the £200,000, (10% of the total budget) given to the University Grants Committee to improve sports facilities for students ‘in order that they might take exercise in a spare half-hour between lectures’. ³²

(31) Ibid. N.A. ED/113/48/37/5.

(32) Ibid. NA/ED/113/48/37/6.

Given the number of applications flowing in from the Special Areas for basic community recreation provision, this award contributed further to the view that the scheme was biased in favour of the better off. The Labour MP Hastings Lees-Smith, a fierce critic of the Act argued; 'the grant system is not well thought out' 'The Committee have followed the line of least resistance'. 'Grants are being slopped around'.³³ The sense of urgency that imbued the NFC did not seem to extend to the Grants Committee. The Committee, led by a former senior Board of Education civil servant reporting to the President of the Board of Education, was taking up to 12 months to sign off successful applications for smaller schemes such as community centres.³⁴ Whether this was evidence of diligence, or, an attempt to rein in the perceived profligacy of the NFC is a matter for debate.

There is however evidence that senior civil servants of the Board of Education and Ministry of Health were unwilling to cooperate with the NFC. Whenever local surveys of recreational needs and wants were undertaken, swimming baths scored highly. By March 1938, 53% of the grants awarded were for swimming pools.³⁵ The NFC maintained, 'If baths and instruction were available, very large numbers would avail themselves of this means to keep fit'.³⁶ Rather than cede responsibility for this matter to the NFC, the Ministry of Health set up a special committee to consider how many, and where, new baths should be built.³⁷

The division of powers between the NFC and the Board of Education was also to prove increasingly problematic, not just in the area of grant allocation. The NFC was charged with establishing the National College, but it was the responsibility of the Board to secure a suitable location. A site in Surrey was identified, but fears over the escalating cost of the scheme led to delay. The initial estimate, made in 1936 was for £237,000 capital expenditure, and £22,000 per annum running costs, for 300 student places and research facilities. By the end of 1937 this estimate had risen to £700,000.³⁸

(33) Hansard. House of Commons. June 20th 1938. c. 742.

(34) NFC Minutes. NA/ED/113/48/38/1.

(35) Treasury Minute. December 23rd. 1938. NA/E/1403.

(36) *National Fitness. The First Steps*. p.p. 7-8.

(37) NFC minutes. May 1937. NA/113/48/37.5.

(38) Board of Education minute. May 1938. NA/136/78.

A Board of Education Office Committee with Treasury support was established to consider alternative options.³⁹ There was no NFC representation on this working group. A number of slimmed down schemes were modelled, the most favoured being one for 150 places with no research facilities, at an estimated £450.000. By the start of 1939 the grants element of the national campaign was in crisis and it seems likely that the Board of Education found ways to delay plans for the National College until the scheduled remit of the NFC ran out in March 1940.

The grants crisis.

‘We get constant complaints that grants made under the Act have been much too generous and that projects on too lavish a scale have been encouraged’. Sir Alan Barlow. Under Secretary H.M. Treasury. 1939.⁴⁰

The Manifesto of the NFC ‘The First Steps’ was a rallying call for national fitness. ‘Demand exceeds supply’. ‘Supply will be greatly facilitated [...] by the powers conferred on Local Authorities, and, the new funds that are now available’. The availability of grant aid was given emphasis in the document including a commitment that; ‘grants will be highest in places such are found in the Special Areas where local resources have been largely exhausted by prolonged industrial depression’.⁴¹

It is unsurprising therefore; the Act having been given such extensive publicity, that applications flowed in. By September 1938 requests for £3.55 million had been received. The Local Committees of the NFC estimated that a further £3.0 million of applications were in the ‘pipeline’.⁴²

(39) Board of Education Office Committee minutes *1938-1939*. NA/ED/136/78.

(40) Memorandum to the Cabinet Office from HM. Treasury. July 27th. 1939. NA/E1403.

(41) *National Fitness the First Steps*. p.14.

(42) Board of Education minute September 1938. NA/E/1403.

The Earl De La Warr who had recently taken post as President of the Board of Education was clearly alarmed and wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir John Simon requesting an additional £3.0 million.⁴³

The fitness campaign was one of the major contributions by Government towards national wellbeing. It has received great publicity and expectations have been aroused. If the Government were to say the amount promised up to 1940 had already been earmarked, it would be held up to ridicule.

There followed a series of acrimonious letters, and meetings that drew other members of the Cabinet into the debate and led to a searching review of the NFC and the National Fitness Campaign. The Chancellor's reply described the matter as 'very grave' and reminded De La Warr of the overriding need to fund rearmament. His fundamental criticism of the scheme and the NFC was its concentration on 'bricks and mortar' rather than 'promoting and stimulating interest in a desire to take part in healthy exercise'. Despite these reservations the Chancellor made a final offer of an additional £1.2 million of capital funding.⁴⁴

De La Warr restated his case in the strongest manner describing the grants situation as 'nothing short of a disaster'. 'The prestige of the Government is in question'.⁴⁵ He did however promise stringent economy measures whilst continuing to press for the additional £3.0 million. The Chancellor was unmoved. 'The NFC and the Grants Committee have not seriously addressed themselves to the problem of cutting their coat according to their cloth'.⁴⁶ The matter was referred to the next meeting of Cabinet.

(43) Letter from the President of the Board of Education to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. November 2nd. 1938 NA/E/1403.

(44) Treasury minutes. December 23rd. 1938. NA/E/1403.

(45) Board of Education memorandum to the Cabinet Office. December 14th. 1938. NA/E/1403.

(46) Treasury memorandum to the Cabinet Office. December 23rd. 1938. NA/E/1403.

A groundswell of critical opinion was developing that added to pressure on the Board of Education to resolve the crisis. The report of the Select Committee on Estimates for 1938-1939, 'doubted whether the results so far justify the expenditure'. 'A review of the working of the scheme is needed'.⁴⁷ The Conservative backbench 1922 Committee expressed concern at 'the ever growing demand for swimming baths and sports grounds. 'This requires careful scrutiny'.⁴⁸ The matter was embarrassing the Government. The Prime Minister made his displeasure clear.

The Prime Minister was alarmed that all capital funds were already mortgaged. It was clear that money was being spent in quite different ways to those which he had contemplated. The matter should be examined afresh.⁴⁹

The day before the Cabinet meeting at which the matter was to be discussed, the Chancellor met the Minister of Health and the President of the Board of Education to hammer out an agreement. The Chancellor offered an increase in capital funding from the original £2.4 to £4.0 million.⁵⁰ De La Warr accepted reluctantly knowing that the additional funds would be completely inadequate to meet demand. A new strategy was required to rescue the idea of a National Fitness Campaign.

The demise of the National Fitness Committee.

'If we are to avoid widespread disillusion and resentment we should announce future policy as soon as possible'. Board of Education Cabinet memorandum 1939. ⁵¹

(47) Civil estimates for revenue departments.. House of Commons paper 70. 1939.

(48) Conservative Party 1922 Committee (Economy Sub-Committee) December 14th. 1938. NA/E/1403.

(49) Cabinet Minutes. December 14th. 1938. NA/CAB/23/96.

(50) Memorandum from the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the President of the Board of Education November 28th. 1938. NA/E/1403.

(51) Board of Education Cabinet memorandum July 20th. 1939. NA/E/1403.

The President of the Board of Education met the Prime Minister in June 1939 to discuss the future of the national fitness scheme. Three options were discussed, wind up the NFC and repeal the Act, continue the campaign as constituted with significant additional funding, or, adopt a new scheme within the framework of the Act, with or without the NFC.⁵² Given the Prime Minister's personal interest in the project, option one, repealing the Act, was unlikely to win his support. The Treasury had made clear its opposition to further funding, which left option three, a cost effective, campaign aimed primarily at young people between the age of 14 and 20. The chair of the NFC was not involved in this meeting.

Other than a wish to recover financial control, a number of other factors were pushing the Government towards a programme for young adults. Surveys by the Local Area Committees had demonstrated that the greatest unmet need for physical training and recreation was amongst young people.⁵³ 'During this key developmental period the majority of young people are completely untouched by any public or voluntary effort'.⁵⁴ The Military Training Act 1939 introduced a form of conscription that required men age 20 to 21 to undertake six months military training before transfer to a reserve militia. The War Office was concerned that if the mass of young people were not engaged in healthful recreation this would reduce the effectiveness of the Military Training Act. They wished to promote a form of 'badge' or physical proficiency award that would prepare young men for service.⁵⁵ There was however reluctance to promote this directly as it might be seen as a form of militarisation of the young. It was hoped the scheme could be run as part of the National Fitness Campaign, by the NFC, or, the Board of Education. The NFC was enthusiastic about running a 'badge' scheme, sensing a *raison d'être* that might improve its standing.⁵⁶

(52) Briefing note from the President of the Board of Education to the Prime Minister June 20th. 1939. NA/ED/136/94.

(53) Board of Education Briefing Paper 12th. May 1939. NA/ED/136/94.

(54) Ibid..

(55) Cabinet paper. NA/CP/165/39.

(56) NFC minutes. NA/113/48/NAC. 39.11.

There was a clear financial imperative pushing the national campaign towards a youth focus, but it was also an area where the Board of Education had considerable expertise and had been developing its own initiatives in the field of post-school physical training and recreation, through for example, circular 1445 in 1936 described in chapter five. This work had continued after the formation of the NFC.

In 1937 the Board issued two key documents; ‘Recreation and Physical Fitness for Youths and Men’, and, a separate publication for girls and women. These books were the first detailed syllabi of recreative physical training for adolescents and adults. The philosophy underpinning both programmes was that recreation should contribute not only to physical fitness, but to ‘the formation of friendships, cooperative effort and discipline’.⁵⁷

None of the measures described above were inherently problematic from an organisational perspective. The fundamental political issue remained the ever increasing number of grant applications. The Treasury made its views clear in a memorandum to the Board of Education. ‘The Grants Committee should refuse grants wherever there can be a reasonable justification’ ‘There are many who would welcome the termination of capital grants under the scheme’.⁵⁸ It was accepted this approach would be unpopular. An economy drive based on two changes to policy was introduced. Larger urban local authorities would in future receive no grant aid, and, swimming pool construction, would be discouraged by tighter planning specifications. The aim was to direct modest sums of aid to youth projects, by helping organisations such as the National Association of Boys Clubs, train and deploy physical education coaches and leaders in order that better use might be made of existing facilities.⁵⁹

(57) Board of Education. *Recreation and Physical Fitness for Youths and Men*. (London: HMSO. 1937) p.5.

(58) Memorandum from Sir Richard Hopkins. Principal Private Secretary to the Treasury, to the Board of Education July 27th. 1939. NA/E/1403

(59) Board of Education Memorandum July 20th. 1939. NA/E/1403.

The new strategy, concentrating on youth, introducing a 'badge' scheme, and, funding activity rather than buildings posed the question, what, if any, was the future role of the NFC? Its reputation was tarnished. A Cabinet memorandum in July 1939 shows Government losing patience.

If additional funds were given to the NFC to administer a 'badge' scheme, this might justify the indefinite continuance of the NFC and LAC's who seem to regard their main purpose to stimulate demands for works of a capital nature. So long as these Committees are in existence there will be continual pressure on Government to make further grants'.⁶⁰

At the outbreak of war the Act was suspended and the NFC dissolved. The Board of Education moved quickly to implement the youth strategy. Circular 1486 'In the Service of Youth' established new priorities and structures. 'The blackout, the strain of war and the disorganisation of family life [...] constitute a menace to youth'.⁶¹ National and Local Youth Committees were formed to provide 'guidance and leadership'. Unlike the NFC these bodies had very limited executive power and existed to support the Board of Education's strategy at national and local level. Grant aid was disbursed by the Board and not the Committees. The CCRPT was singled out for grant aid as an organisation capable of producing the large number of youth leaders and sports coaches required to deliver the ambitious programme of reopening and running facilities that had been requisitioned by the military on the outbreak of war. Some of these were now to be released back for use as youth centres. The National Fitness Campaign was to continue but in a very different form, responding to the particular needs and challenges of a war economy. National fitness in a time of war is explored in Chapter eight.

This chapter has examined the rise and fall of the National Fitness Committee between 1937 and 1939. The Committee followed what was essentially a demand based approach to recreation planning. The press gave the National Fitness Campaign generous publicity and with that raised an expectation that funds were available to provide much needed facilities.

(60) Cabinet Memorandum. NA/CP/163.39. July 1939.

(61) Board of Education circular 1486. *In the Service of Youth* (London: HMSO. 1939).

The Local Fitness Committees stoked demand further by surveying their areas to identify what aspects of recreation provision were lacking and encouraging local authorities and community groups to apply. The result was an avalanche of grant applications that far exceeded the funds available. This more than any other factor led to the failure of the campaign and the demise of the NFC

The final part of the thesis will examine this issue in greater depth. The following chapter, based on case studies of York and Leeds examines the Act and its impact on the development of physical training and recreation in a local context.

Chapter Seven. The Act in a local context.

‘History is in a sense a story, a narrative of adventure and vision’.

Peter Ackroyd.¹

The previous chapter explored the Act in a national context. It is also important to understand how it operated at local level and to explore the extent to which it touched the lives of ‘ordinary’ people. There have been a number of references, particularly in chapter five, ‘the pace quickens’, to local initiatives. These suggest an uneven pattern. This chapter will examine the experience of two very contrasting cities, York and Leeds in their approach to the Physical Training and Recreation Act. A major factor in both was the role played by ‘works’ sports provision; the recreation facilities provided by some employers for their staff.

York: Chocolate and railways.

York City Council responded to the passing of the Act in 1937 by setting up a joint sub-committee of the Parks, and Education committees to consider how best to respond to the legislation.² There is however no record of this committee meeting or reporting back. Immediately prior to the Act the Council had taken action to promote physical training. In 1936 the Education Committee responded to Board of Education Circular 1445 by appointing a physical education organiser and sending 105 teachers on training courses. Three specialist physical education teachers were recruited in the same year and given a budget of £600 for equipment and clothing.³

The Housing Committee included a community centre on the new Water Lane estate.⁴ Between 1930 and 1936 the Parks Committee was less active in promoting recreation doing little more than offering concessionary rates for bowls and allotments to unemployed people.

(1) Peter Ackroyd. www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/8722559. [accessed online April 29th 2017].

(2) City of York Council (hereafter York Council). Minutes. September 9th. 1937.

(3) York Council. Education Committee annual report 1936-1937.

(4) York Council. Housing Committee minutes February 10th. 1937.

Immediately following the Act, the Parks Committee laid plans for a new swimming pool and applied to the recently formed NFC for a £15,000 capital grant which was provisionally approved. In 1938 the NFC withdrew its offer, presumably because of the funding crisis which was described in chapter six.⁵ No further applications for grants were made. The initiative for organising physical training and recreation returned to the Education Committee. In 1938, 68 keep fit teachers were trained and 24 keep-fit classes a week organised.⁶ At the outbreak of war keep-fit classes continued, ‘to prevent the social consequences likely to result from the absence of any occupation for young people after their day’s work’.⁷

The Council in York did repond to the Act, but in a rather limited manner. This is most likely due to the dominant position in the city of Rowntree’s Cocoa Works and, the London and North Eastern Railway whose headquarters were in York. These two enterprises employed more than 40% of the working population of the city.⁸ Both companies made provision for the leisure time of their workers and their families that went far beyond the scope of the Act.

By the late 1920s Rowntree's Cocoa Works employed more than 7,000 people at its York factory. This rose to more than 9,000 by 1939.⁹ The company, founded on Quaker principles was influenced by the social research of Seebohm Rowntree whose evidence to various Royal Commissions and enquiries since 1904 was an important factor shaping the Liberal pre-war welfare reform programme. His philosophy of leisure was that it was the ‘growing time for the human spirit’.¹⁰

(5) York Council. Parks and Allotments Committee. January 6th. 1938.

(6) York Council. Education Committee annual report 1938-1939.

(7) York Council. Higher Education sub-committee minutes. September 29th. 1939. p.183.

(8) P. Tillott (Ed.). *A history of the County of York: the City of York* (London: Victoria County History. 1961).

(9) Judith Burg. *A guide to the Rowntree and Mackintosh company archives 1862-1969* (York: University of York. 1997).

(10) Seebohm Rowntree. *Rowntree, Cocoa Works Magazine* . December 1935. p5. (Borthwick Archives University of York).

Speaking after the launch of the National Fitness Campaign in 1937, Arnold Rowntree the company Chairman commented;

In the last two years there has been a drive for fitness. Women took up this drive on their own. I hope we shall soon see similar keenness for preserving and improving mental health, which is closely linked up with leisure activities'.¹¹

The *Cocoa Works Magazine*, Rowntree's house journal, gives a useful insight into the way the company carried through these principles into recreation, welfare and education opportunities for employees.¹² By the 1920s the York factory had a gymnasium, library, playing fields and club rooms for young workers. In addition, the works social committee owned a barge and static railway carriages for short break holidays. In 1935 the 450 seat theatre shown in plate 23 opened.

Leisure and recreation activities included; lunchtime and evening clubs for younger workers, gymnastic and keep fit classes, craft groups, drama, singing, dancing, fell walking and traditional outdoor team games for men and women. All activities carried a cost to participants, but for regular classes these were nominal. An extensive programme of holidays organised by the Social Committee ranged from weekend and summer camps in Yorkshire for young workers, to, week long visits to London and Cornwall for adults.

More remarkable, given that the Holidays with Pay Act did not reach the statute book till 1938 were the group holidays to France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland and Norway that took place throughout the 1930s. It is ironic that a group of employees from this Quaker enterprise toured southern Germany in 1935 at a time when members of the Nazi 'Strength Through Joy' organisation were travelling throughout Europe on subsidised package holidays.¹³

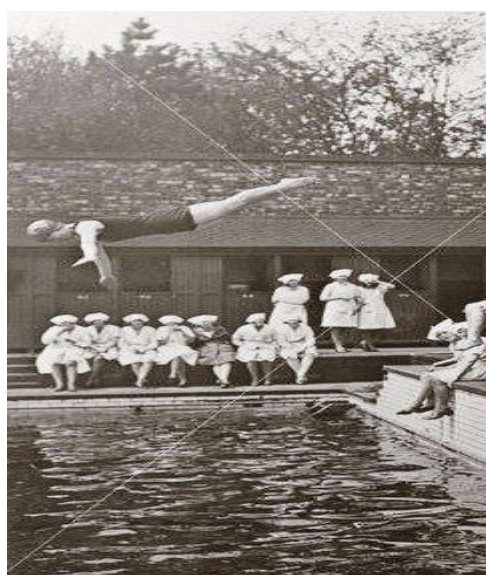
(11) Arnold Rowntree. *Cocoa Works Magazine*. York. July 1937. p. 9.

(12) *Cocoa Works Magazine*. 1923 to 1938.

(13) Hasso Spode. 'Fordism, mass tourism and the Third Reich'. *Journal of Social History*. v.38. No.1. 2004. p.p 127-140.

The recreation activities described above, ran alongside other elements of the welfare programme which included continuation classes for fourteen to eighteen year old employees in English, maths, physical training, and, domestic economy for girls. There was also free medical and dental care. In addition, the company gifted the City of York Yearsley Baths, a photograph of which is shown on below, and, Rowntree Park and Lido.

Plate 13. Rowntree workers on lunch break at Yearsley Baths. ¹⁴



The works sports and social movement was also central to the operation of the large railway companies; an expression of benevolent paternalism, and the drive for rational self-improvement. The Railway Institute in York was typical of this approach, and was a prototype for the large municipal leisure centres that became common in the 1970s and 1980s. The Institute, founded by the North Eastern Railway, subsequently the London and North Eastern Railway (hereafter LNER) opened in 1889 in purpose-built premises. The focus in the early years was on the library, reading room and the lecture programme. There were no physical training facilities. This changed after the Great War with recognition of the need to provide ‘the sorts of recreation that would give pleasure’.¹⁵

(14) www.facebook.com/memories-of-york. Date unknown [accessed online 9th March 2017]
The baths are adjacent to the factory and still in use.

(15) Hugh Murray. *The history of the York Railway Institute 1889 to 1989* (York: Sessions. 1989).

In 1919, a nine hole golf course opened, and in 1926 a redundant engine shed was converted into a very large gymnasium. Demand for physical training classes was strong. Boxing, gymnastics basketball, badminton and fencing were supervised by former army warrant officer instructors. Playing fields were laid and the swimming group used the nearby river Ouse. Membership was open to railway employees and their families for a five shilling a year subscription. By 1945 membership of the institute has risen to 3,959.¹⁶

Plate 14. York Railway Institute Gymnasium prepared for a boxing event.¹⁷

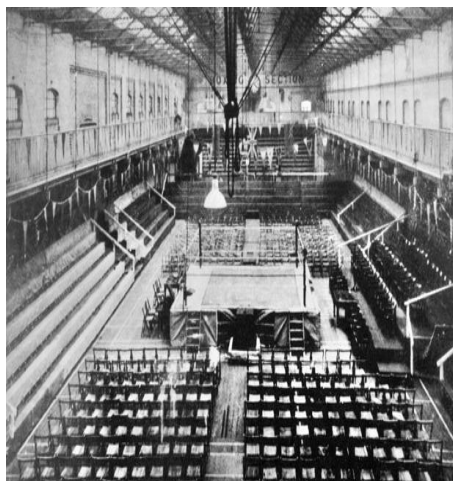


Plate 15. York Railway Institute women's gymnastics team 1931.¹⁸



There is no mention of the Act in the LNER journal or Railway Institute annual reports. Given the comprehensive level of provision available to railway employees and their families this is perhaps unsurprising. However, in 1938 a sports festival was organised by the Institute which attracted more than 300 participants. Many such festivals were staged between 1937 and 1939 to publicise the National Fitness Campaign.

(16) *York Railway Institute annual report 1945* (Nottingham: Stafford. 1945).

(17) www.google.york+railway+gymnasium. [accessed online 21st March 2017].
Date unknown. The balcony around the circumference of the gymnasium formed a running track 176 yards long.

(18) *LNER magazine*. August 1931. p.419.

The study of York demonstrates once again that the 1930s was a complex decade that challenges the simple stereotype of the 'hungry thirties'. Workers at Rowntree's and the LNER were not immune from the effects of the depression, but those who kept their jobs enjoyed a level of provision for their free time that by today's standards looks lavish.

Chapter three explored the links between the depression, unemployment and physical training. The LNER and Rowntree's were both active in this area to a far greater extent than the local authority. Rowntree's organised a social and recreational programme for young women on short time.¹⁹ The Railway Institute gymnasium was made available, free of charge, for use by the unemployed, three afternoons a week. The Prince of Wales visited in 1933 on a tour of projects set up in response to his call that 'something be done' to help the unemployed.²⁰

Leeds: a 'well suited' city.

Leeds was an archetype of unplanned urban development in the nineteenth century. Rapid population growth and an ineffective local authority created a raft of housing, health and social problems that led to the city being described by the Medical Officer to the Privy Council in 1874 as, 'the worst that has come to the knowledge of this department'.²¹ By the 1920s a much stronger civic culture prevailed and the usual municipal services for recreation such as, baths, parks, libraries, art galleries, and, museums were in place, managed by discrete committees.

Unemployment became a significant issue in Leeds as the number of people out of work rose from 12,403 in 1928 to 31,907 in 1931.²² The diversity of industry helped keep the unemployment rate below the national average, but one effect of the depression was to bring about a shift from manufacturing towards services. Clothing was the exception.

(18) *Cocoa Works Magazine*. July 1933.

(19) *Daily Mirror*. December 14th. 1933. p.1. .

(20) Brian Barber. *Municipal Government in Leeds: 1835-1914* (New York: Leicester University Press. 1962) p. 67.

(21) City of Leeds Council (Hereafter Leeds Council) Public Assistance Committee report 1931-1932. p.31.

Men's tailoring made firms such as Burton and Hepworth household names. By the late 1930's around 40,000 people worked in clothing manufacture, making this the largest employment sector.²²

The response of the local authority to unemployment was uneven. An unforeseen boost to the demand for recreation services came from an 87% increase in the number of library books borrowed between 1928 and 1932. The Library Committee viewed this more a problem than an opportunity, given cuts in their book buying budget.²³

The Parks Committee found casual work for 324 men claiming outdoor relief in 1931 but did nothing by way of organising cheap or free events for the unemployed and their families. The Education Committee was more proactive, running play-schemes in the poorer parts of the City in the evenings, weekends and holidays, making use of school premises. The Education Committee also ran a Junior Instructional Centre for unemployed young people that registered 50,480 visits in 1931. It was reported that young people attending the centre 'had no great liking for training' and the programme was subsequently adapted to meet the 'social interest of youth'.²⁴

It is against the background of this somewhat reticent approach to the question of physical training and recreation that the Council faced the introduction of the 1937 Act. It had an immediate effect. The Baths Committee responded with a 'propaganda campaign' to encourage people to 'swim and keep fit'. 2,500 posters were displayed in public places. This approach was very much in keeping with the ethos of the Act, which made ready use of advertising and media channels.²⁵

(22) Katrina Honeyman. *Well suited: A history of the Leeds clothing industry 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2000).

(23) Leeds Council. Libraries and Arts Committee annual report 1931-1932. p. 4-5.

(24) Leeds Council. Annual report of the Education Committees 1931-1932.

(25) Leeds Council. Annual report of the Baths Committee 1937.

The annual report of the School Medical Officer in 1937 gave the matter of fitness, priority.

If we are to improve the national physique, the science of proper living must be observed in every detail. The time is coming when the medical profession [...] will prescribe suitable exercise.²⁶

The School Medical Officer's report concluded that whilst physical fitness, exercise and games were vitally important, 'huge organised displays' of the type seen on the continent were an anathema and not part of the national characteristic. Fear of regimentation and 'mass society' ran through the debate on the Act at every level and was a powerful force maintaining the principle of voluntarism. Another issue raised in the report was the shortage of outdoor recreation facilities in the City, with 'clubs going out of existence for lack of playing space'. The question of outdoor facilities seems to have been particularly acute in Leeds. The Education Committee owned no playing fields.²⁷ One of the largest works sports clubs, for Post Office employees, owned no premises or pitches.²⁸ The shortage of playing fields was perhaps another consequence of unplanned growth. The housing stock of Leeds in the inner urban areas contained a concentration of densely packed 'back-to-back' housing with very limited public open space.

The immediate response by the Council to the Act was to host a meeting at the Civic Hall to allow members of the Area Committee of the NFC to explain its role to local sporting organisations. Three months after the Act reached the statute book, the Parks Committee applied through the Area Committee for a grant to provide changing and shower accommodation on some of its sports grounds.²⁹ In 1938 the Area Committee of the NFC approved and passed on to the National Fitness Council an application for a capital grant for two neighbourhood swimming pools and requested further information on the application to assist the funding of the new Central Baths.³⁰

(26) Leeds Council. Annual report of the School Medical Officer December 31st. 1937. p.14.

(27) Leeds Council. Education Committee Annual report 1931-1932.. p.68.

(28) Leeds Post Office Employees Sports Club Annual Report 1934. Leeds City Archives, ref. LP383.4.

(29) Leeds Council. Parks and Allotments Committee. November 15th. 1937.

(30) Leeds Council Baths and Property Committee. December 19th. 1938.

In both York and Leeds the prospect of capital grant aid for new recreation projects was appealing, but short lived. None of the applications were granted and as it became clear that the NFC had run out of funds, no further applications were made.

The Act did however have one long lasting impact on recreation provision in Leeds. Throughout the 1930s the Housing Committee engaged in a massive public housing construction programme. In 1938 it agreed a policy of providing a community centre on every new estate. The larger developments were also to have youth centres run by the Education Department, the first of which opened on the Gipton estate in 1939.³¹

Leeds' positive engagement with the Act owes a good deal to the role played by the *Yorkshire Post*, and, the Leeds Carnegie Physical Training College. The *Yorkshire Post*, a regional newspaper based in Leeds, offered strong support to the National Government and given that the Conservatives had a substantial majority on Leeds Council there was a clear community of interest. The Act was mentioned in the *Yorkshire Post* on forty eight occasions between 1937 and 1938, with some full column and half page stories.³² The following extracts from the paper give an idea of the papers unstinting support for the Act. 'The Government's idea is not merely a scheme for strengthening weak muscles but a far-seeing measure of social reform to turn out well equipped modern citizens'.³³ 'The scheme is in no way military and must be enjoyable to prepare the young for hobbies and physical recreation'.³⁴ 'There is no intention to train us into a nation of muscle bound robots'. 'Our system is voluntary and depends on the motivation of the individual'.³⁵ The Leeds Carnegie Physical Education College (hereafter Carnegie) opened in 1933 and was the only higher education institution producing male physical education graduates in England.

(31) Leeds Council. Housing Committee. Annual report 1938-1939. p.16.

(32) www.ukpressonline.com Newspaper database of *Yorkshire Post*.
Search conducted using key words; physical training and recreation and/or national physique.

(33) *Yorkshire Post*. March 3rd. 1937. p.10.

(34) *Yorkshire Post*. September 9th. 1937. p.11.

(35) *Yorkshire Post*. March 28th. 1938. p.4.

Carnegie students were given practical experience of teaching and organising with local boys clubs and community groups in Leeds during their training . The College was also an important hub for the training and retraining of sports leaders, coaches and physical training organisers.³⁶ An extension to the College, funded by the Carnegie foundation, was opened in 1938 by Kenneth Lindsey, Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education, and Lord Aberdare, President of the NFC.³⁷ The Act made specific reference to the foundation of a national college for physical training. Carnegie was regarded by its trustees as a template for this, but, the NFC had always determined its national facility would be in the South of England. It made no financial contribution to the new developments at Carnegie and as chapter six explained, plans for the national college were deferred.

The study of York in this chapter established a connection between works sports' provision by its two largest employers and the council's level of engagement with the Act. The situation in Leeds is less clear. Several of the large tailoring firms did introduce welfare programmes during the inter-war years to improve labour retention and increase productivity, but in many cases these did not go beyond basic amenities such as washrooms and subsidised canteens.³⁸ The exception was Montague Burton; with 10,000 staff, the largest employer in Leeds. Burton's approach to employee welfare was generous and has been described by Honeyman as 'grandiose'.³⁹

(36) Peter McIntosh. *Landmarks in the history of physical education* (London: Routledge. 1981) p.214.

(37) *Yorkshire Post*. June 4th. 1938. p.7.

(38) West Yorkshire Archives (Hereafter WYA) ref. WYL/434/4046/7. D27.13. L77.58.

Two of the larger clothing manufacturers; Barran, and, Hepworth employed more than 8,000 between them in their Leeds factories in the 1930s. Their records show that beyond the provision of catering, subsidised meals and restrooms there was little in the way of recreation provision, other than works outings and annual dinners.

(39) Honeyman. op.cit. p.140.

Plate 16. Burton employees enjoying the Solarium 1936.⁴⁰



Burton's approach to welfare was similar to that of Rowntree's. Staff were encouraged to participate in subsidised activities. A three pence per week contributory health scheme gave employees access to an on-site doctor, dentist and chiropodist, along with subsidised milk and orange juice. The works sports organisation, managed by the Welfare Department, but run by employees had facilities that included ten acres of playing fields, a gymnasium, solarium and social club. Activities included, keep fit, badminton and boxing, but non sporting activities such as craft groups, drama and operatics were well supported. The breadth of activity was just that envisaged by the Act and went beyond traditional competitive British games into pastimes such as; rambling, angling and gardening. Membership of the Sports and Social Club was three pence per week.

Plate 17. Burton swimming gala Programme. 1934.⁴¹



(40) WYA. WYL /951/193.

(41) WYA. WYL/951/219. The swimming section of Burton Sports and Social Club had over 1,000 members in 1934 and hired Council swimming pools four evenings a week.

None of the other large clothing firms followed Burton's example of providing comprehensive staff recreation facilities. The clothing sector was affected by the depression but many firms remained profitable and could arguably have afforded more modest sports and social facilities. For example John Barran and Co., one of the larger manufacturers declared a dividend of between 3% and 5% in every year between 1929 and 1932 but made no recreational provision.⁴²

Joyce has argued that by the 1930s the tradition of benevolent paternalism established in the nineteenth century by Titus Salt and the like, was in decline as firms struggled to adapt to post war changes and workers developed a taste for the freedom of commodified leisure away from their occupational communities.⁴³ In addition, half the 40,000 clothing workers in Leeds were employed by around 200 smaller clothing companies, or as 'outworkers', where concepts of welfare or recreation were largely unrecognised.⁴⁴

Despite Montague Burton's personal and costly commitment to staff welfare, his Leeds factory experienced a number of major industrial disputes in the 1930s with attendant adverse publicity. The communist newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, suggested that the welfare programme was a cynical tool for obscuring a 'ruthless speeding up of production'.⁴⁵ Whatever the case, Montague was certainly aware of the need to promote a positive image of his company and to that end was an early exponent of making use of the fashionable appeal of sport and recreation as a marketing tool. Many of the larger Burton high street stores had billiard halls above the business to turn retailing into a leisure 'experience'. Burton also donated hundreds of challenge trophies to community clubs and organisations. A 'Burton cup' would be competed for annually in activities that ranged from rifle shooting to 'best in show' at country fairs, with the resultant publicity displayed in local newspapers.⁴⁶

(42) John Barran and Co. Directors minute book 1929-1932. WYA. YWL/434/4047/7.

(43) Patrick Joyce. *Work, Society and Politics* (London: Taylor and Francis. 1980).

(44) Eric Sigsworth. *Montague Burton. The tailor of taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1990).

(45) *Daily Worker*. March 3rd 1933. p.3.

(46) WYA. WYL/951/128. WYL. 951/120.

This chapter has explored the impact of the Act in a local setting. Both York and Leeds responded immediately to the Act by making applications for capital grants, but these were unsuccessful. Despite this, other measures were taken by the local authorities to promote the aims of the National Fitness Campaign and in doing so the profile of physical training and recreation at local level was raised. York Council was less proactive than Leeds. This is likely due to the works sports provision made by Rowntree's and the LNER that brought excellent facilities within reach, not just of employees, but their families.

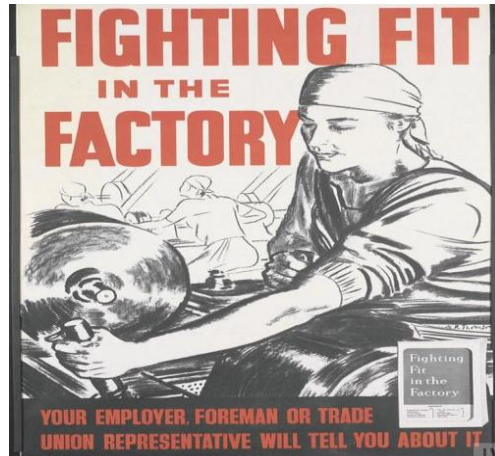
In Leeds, despite Burton's example, the impact of works sports' was less evident and the local authority and voluntary sports clubs became the main providers of non-commercial recreation services. The role played by works sports' has formed a major element of this chapter. The works sports' movement in the 1930s has not been the subject of detailed study and would benefit from further research. The examples of comprehensive works sports' provision described in this chapter are perhaps exemplars of best practice and as such, not typical. Many companies did however invest in modest recreation facilities for their employees. The Act was framed entirely around enabling and encouraging local authorities and the voluntary sector and specifically excluded financial assistance to commercial enterprises, unlike Germany and the Soviet Union where the workplace was the focal point for sport and recreation in the community, and supported accordingly.

Chapters six and seven examined the operation of the Act up to its suspension in 1939. There is scant reference to it in the public record until 1945 when the task of reconstruction began and the concept of planned communities with integrated recreation facilities gained ground. In the next chapter it will be argued that although the Act was formally suspended during the war, its influence can be seen in a number of areas.

Chapter Eight. Fitness in a time of war.

‘Our country is in a crisis of its history and the strength and endurance of its whole manpower [...] is vital to victory’. Viscount Dawson of Penn. 1940.¹

Plate 18. Propaganda poster 1941.²



Chapter six explored the operation of the Act up to its suspension in 1939. Although the legislation was in abeyance, the national fitness campaign continued and developed a number of new features that were to shape the pattern of post-war physical training and recreation when the Act was restored. One aspect of the debate on fitness and citizenship that continued throughout the war was the question of compulsion. The demands of total war challenged the voluntary principle that was central to the Act and the National Fitness Campaign. In 1941 the Cabinet discussed compulsory youth conscription to engage 14 to 16 year old boys in social service and civil defence activities, including the manning of anti-aircraft defences.³ Sir Robert Woods, Advisor to the Ministry of Health called for the introduction of statutory breaks for young factory workers, during which they would be compelled to do physical training. He advanced the view; ‘we are living in an age of compulsion, but the exercises need not be military in nature’.⁴

(1) Viscount Dawson of Penn. Hansard. House of Lords. July 17th. 1940. c.1005. Dawson was a member of the National Fitness Committee from 1937 to 1939.

(2) *Fighting Fit in the Factory* (London: HMSO. Weiner. 1941).

(3) Cabinet minutes November 28th. 1941. NA/CAB/65/20/14.

(4) *Daily Express*. January 8th. 1943. p.3.

These proposals were not implemented and determined opposition to compulsion or the militarisation of the civilian population continued. In 1940 the Board of Education issued Circular 1529 to promote healthy exercise for young workers as an adjunct to adequate sleep, nutrition and fresh air.⁵ The Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations responded, expressing concern that; 'any scheme should not develop along military lines and that facilities for physical recreation should be available during working hours to avoid fatigue'.⁶ Even in the uniformed services the voluntary principle was defended. By 1940 there were 40,000 full and part-time women firefighters. A national fitness campaign was launched for women carrying out this demanding work. However, the Chief Fire Officer stressed, 'there is nothing of a commando nature about our scheme'. 'The exercises are entirely voluntary'.⁷

The demise of the NFC in 1939 did not spell the end of fitness initiatives for adults. The 'keep-fit' movement for women and men continued to flourish, but qualified and experienced leaders were among the first to be called up. The loss of fitness clubs and classes was a potential blow to morale. In December 1939 the Government funded a scheme to be run by the Central Council for Recreative Physical Training to plan, deliver and coordinate training and refresher courses for keep-fit teachers, and administer a register of those qualified in each of the eleven Civil Defence regions.⁸ This initiative was accompanied by a memorandum of agreement between the Board of Education and the War Office to defer the call up of experienced leaders in special cases, and for military physical training instructors to offer assistance to the civil community.⁹ In this and other ways that will be explored in this chapter the CCRPT became the de-facto replacement for the NFC and by the end of the war strengthened its case to be the voice of physical training and recreation.

(5) Board of Education Circular 1529. *Youth Physical Recreation and Service* (London: HMSO. 1940).

(6) Letter to the Board of Education. NA/124/4.

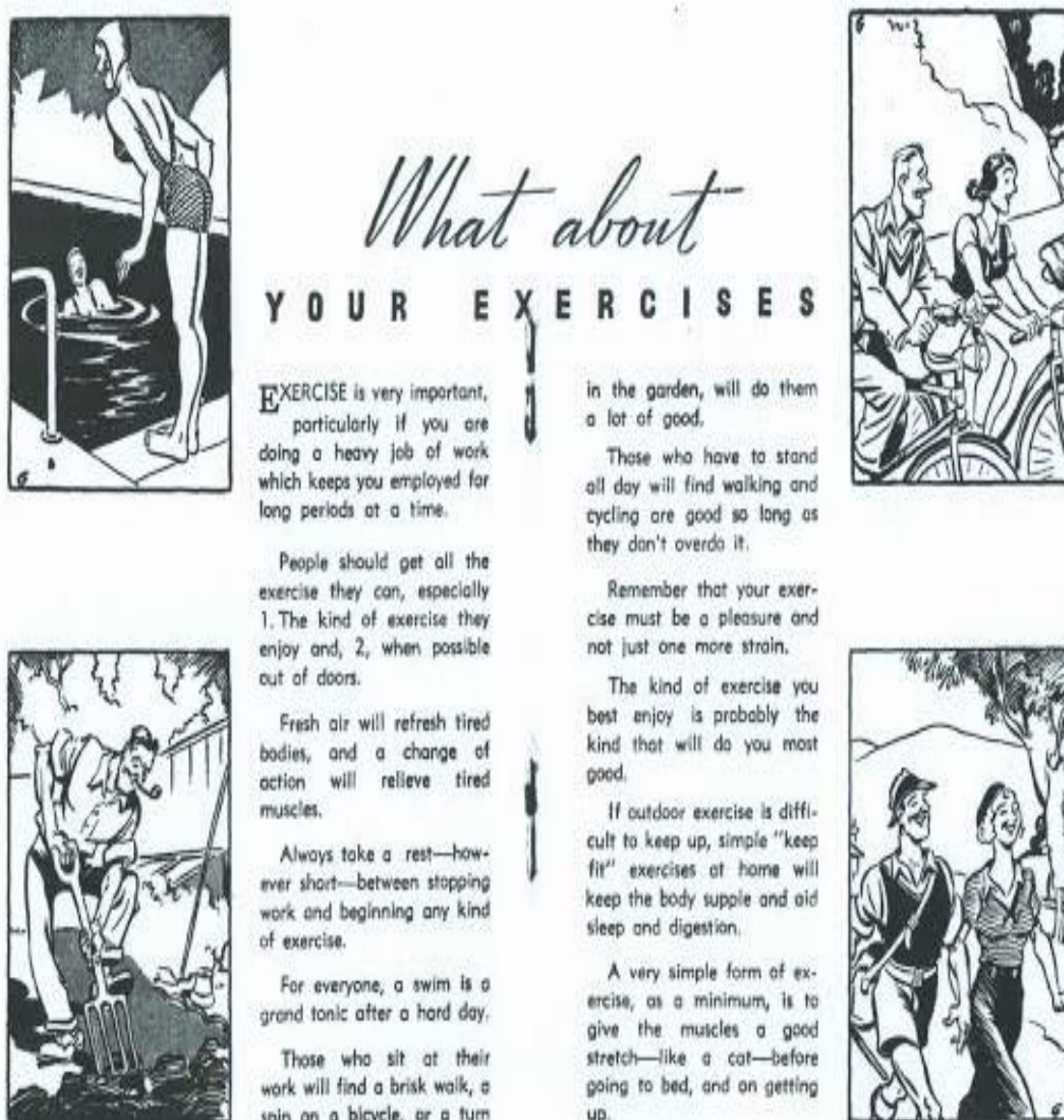
(7) *Yorkshire Post*. November 25th. 1940. p.1.

(8) *Yorkshire Post*. December 21st 1939. p.8.

(9) Board of Education Memorandum. NA/ED/124/4.

The propaganda work around fitness started by the NFC was continued by other public agencies. The BBC Home Service broadcast two ten-minute keep-fit classes each weekday, one for 'younger' women, the other for 'older' men.¹⁰ This initiative was followed by the Ministry of Labour's 'Fighting Fit in the Factory' campaign. Workers were given advice on a wide range of issues such as; sleep, diet, posture, and, exercise. The tone and content of the leaflet, shown below, epitomised the recreational approach to fitness and wellbeing promoted by the Act.

Plate 19. Fighting Fit in the Factory booklet 1941. ¹¹



(10) *Daily Mirror*. May 2nd. 1940. p.15.

(11) Ministry of Labour. *Fighting Fit in the Factory* (London: HMSO. 1941).

The 'Factory Fitness' campaign was reinforced by Board of Education memoranda and grant regulations that pressed Local Youth Committees to take 'immediate steps to respond to the recreational needs of young factory workers', many of whom were living away from home for the first time.¹²

In addition to the programmes described above, other mass campaigns were launched. One of the most successful, the 'Fit to Serve' programme ran from 1939 to 1941. Men waiting to be called up were invited to voluntary fitness sessions held at Football League grounds. Physical training, games and some basic military training were offered. Some 140 centres staffed by instructors from the CCRPT and the Army attracted around 30,000 young men within a month of opening. The success of this initiative was seen as powerful evidence supporting the voluntary principle.¹³

In a completely different vein, but sharing the same objective, 'fighting fitness', the Young Communist League launched a campaign in 1942 to open gymnasia and recruit 1,000 amateur footballers in London to form teams to enter the preliminary rounds of the Football League Cup. The response of the *Daily Worker* to the Act and the National Fitness Campaign in 1937 had been hostile, describing it as a 'so-called fitness campaign', and suggesting, 'now, only when the Army needs men does the Government show concern'.¹⁴ By 1942 the Soviet Union had entered the war and the Communist Party had become enthusiastic supporters of national fitness. 'We want to encourage workers to keep fit in order that they can play, work and fight better'.¹⁵

Reference was made in chapter six to the idea of a fitness 'badge' or proficiency scheme. This was looked at once again by the National Youth Committee in 1940 but not taken forward.¹⁶ The CCRPT sensing an opportunity, launched its own award; the 'National Test for Leaders', to validate the skills and achievement of coaches, leaders and organisers.

(12) Board of Education. Grant Regulation No.13 1939. Amended 1940.
Board of Education Administrative Memorandum. 2311940. NA/ED/262/58.

(13) *Yorkshire Post*. June 20th. 1940. p.2.

(14) *Daily Worker*. November 25th. 1937. p.7.

(15) *Daily Worker*. December 9th. 1942. p.4.

(16) National Youth Committee. Paper 71. November 1940. NA/124/4.

This was not a ‘mass’ scheme but some 600 men and women received the award by 1945.¹⁷ The CCRPT continued to innovate and fill the vacuum left by the demise of the NFC. Its primary focus remained developing the youth recreation strategy, but as the war proceeded, other initiatives were developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour.

CCRPT leaders ran fitness schemes for essential workers that went beyond keep-fit classes to promote; ‘positive health, reduce strain, monotony, and reduce accidents and injury’. This pioneering factory based occupational health work cost little. The personnel manager of an armaments factory commented, ‘We feel sure the female staff have definitely benefitted both in health and fitness for their rather arduous duties’.¹⁸

Other parts of this study have examined the link between war and national fitness with particular reference to the number of men graded fit for combat duties. The basic training of soldiers has always involved a hardening process of, parade ground drill, route marches and ‘physical jerks’. From the start of the war these measures were supplemented with more rounded and flexible measures designed to avoid the recruitment crises of the Boer and Great Wars. Efforts were made to improve the health and functional ability of conscripts, rather than merely grade them unfit for frontline duties. This shift in emphasis was not primarily a legacy of the Act and the National Fitness Campaign, but its influence can be seen in the recognition of the value of the recreative approach to fitness and training to lessen physical and mental breakdown and to assist with the rehabilitation of the injured soldier.¹⁹ Similarly, the 1943 pre-service training syllabus for Army senior cadets made few references to drill and formal physical training, advocating in their place, ‘natural movements and actions that must be practiced under natural conditions’. The manual stressed the need for ‘enjoyment and a sense of achievement’ during training.²⁰

(17) CCRPT Memorandum. NA/FD/1/3986.

(18) *Purposeful Physical Training in the Factory*. (London: Central Council for Recreative Physical Training. 1944) p.2. NA/M/921.

(19) F. Crew. *Army Medical Services*. Vol.1. (London: HMSO. 1953) p.338.

(20) *Pre-service Physical Training and Recreation for Army Cadets* (London: HMSO. 1943) p.5.

A radical experiment in the physical training of recruits was devised by the Command School of Physical Training in York. Rather than use the traditional military drill based approach, 'purposeful training using only improvised equipment was employed to give the soldier; strength, dexterity, mobility and endurance'.²¹

In 1943 this concept was extended by the introduction of a 'recreation in battle' course aimed at the restoration of physical and psychological wellbeing of injured troops. The 'York' approach reached a wider, civilian audience in 1943 when the national conference of Physical Education Organisers and Inspectors of Physical Education was held in York. Delegates were given a demonstration of classes using simple, improvised apparatus that was adventurous and encouraged freedom of movement. A number of those attending took these ideas back to their education authorities and incorporated them into the physical education curriculum.²² The evolution of the physical training of recruits to the armed services has not been studied in any depth and would benefit from further research.

This chapter has demonstrated that despite the demise of the NFC and the suspension of the Act, measures to improve the fitness of the nation progressed during the war. The challenge of recovery from war and the role that physical training and recreation might play became a matter for debate and policy development as early as November 1940 when Lord Reith, Director General of the BBC was charged with the task of planning post-war reconstruction. His preliminary objectives included 'balanced development that should include the planning of amenities for open spaces and recreation'.²³ The following chapter will trace the development of the planning approach for sport, recreation and cultural facilities, and the problems faced in implementing those plans during a time of austerity.

(21) Lt. Col. E. Oldfield. *History of the Army Physical Training Corps* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden. 1955) p.87.

(22) Peter McIntosh. *Physical Education in England since 1800* (London: Bell and Hyman. 1979) p.257.

(23) Board of Education memorandum on post-war reconstruction. 1941. NA/ED/10/62.

Chapter Nine. Recreation in an age of austerity.

The war has given us a great opportunity and by the destruction of so many acres of buildings has made easier the realisation of our dreams. Lord Latham. Leader, London County Council. 1943.¹

This chapter will examine the development of, and problems associated with, the planning approach to Physical Training and Recreation that started during the war. This marks a clear departure from the demand led approach adopted by the NFC between 1937 and 1939. A case study of Hull demonstrates that generous provision for people's free time was at the heart of the idea of planned post-war communities but that these plans failed to be implemented to any significant extent. The Act returned to the statute book in 1944, but the parlous state of the economy and Labour's ambivalence towards a piece of legislation it had characterised in the 1930s as a distraction from the need to tackle social inequality, meant its impact was limited.² What few resources were available for recreation provision were directed to dealing with the 'youth problem'.

The vision for post-war reconstruction was not viewed simply as the process of replacing what had been destroyed, but one of finding new approaches to solving the social problems, the legacy of the 1920s and 1930s. In terms of the development of physical training and recreation, the question of facilities was of fundamental importance. The National Fitness Campaign between 1937 and 1939 foundered largely on the question of grants to provide new amenities. Whenever the NFC and its local committees carried out surveys of need, there was clear evidence that a lack of basic facilities was the main barrier to promoting a fitter Britain. Having opposed the perceived extravagance of the NFC, the Board of Education became converts to the idea of a comprehensive national plan for recreation facility provision. The Act remained the enabling mechanism for any such programme, but a fresh approach to implementation was required.

(1) J. Forshaw. P. Abercrombie. *County of London Plan*. (London: Macmillan. 1943) p.2.

(2) The Act was amended by the 1944 Education Act. All reference to National and Local Advisory Committees were removed. Other than this and minor modifications to the application of the Act in Scotland, the legislation remained largely unchanged.

In 1941 the Board established the 'Educational Theory Panel' to explore a policy framework for post-war recreation provision.³ The Panel was impressed with the 'continental' system and in particular by Copenhagen, a city with six multi-use sports centres. A planning model based on population size determined that large towns and cities should have multi-use centres, one for every 100,000 of the population. These centres which were estimated to cost £50,000 included a range of facilities such as, gymnasia, swimming pools, outdoor courts and pitches, lecture and arts spaces, a library, health centre and restaurant. The estimate of £50,000 for such large and complex facilities seems a significant underestimate as the nearest comparator in Britain, the Pioneer Health Centre in Peckham described earlier, cost more than £35,000, and was on a much more modest scale, with few outdoor facilities.

In large towns the multi-use centres were to be supplemented by neighbourhood facilities, one for every 10,000 of the population. These centres were to cost an estimated £30,000 and in smaller towns would form the sole recreation provision. No attempt was made to calculate the national cost of this two-tier programme.

The Central Council for Recreative Physical Training renamed the Central Council for Physical Recreation in 1944 (hereafter. CCPR) took steps to consolidate the progress it had made since 1939. 'During the war the value of leisure time physical recreation in sustaining national morale [...] has been widely recognised, not least by Government departments'. 'The first years of peace will be an even more testing time'.⁴

The CCPR contribution to the planning approach was the formulation of a five year plan for sport and recreation.⁵ The key aims of the plan included reviving the idea of national fitness campaigns for adults, extending the occupational health initiative it had tested during the war as a measure to improve wellbeing and increase industrial productivity, and, an international role, supporting the work of the British Council.

(3) Board of Education minute. March 7th. 1941. NA/10/62.

(4) CCPR Annual Report 1945. p.3. NA/FD/1/3986.

(5) CCPR memorandum to the Board of Education on post-war planning for sport and recreation. 1944. NA/M/931.

In addition to these high profile activities, the CCPR saw its role as the specialist advisor and training provider on matters sporting, to central and local government and national governing bodies of sport. The idea of national centres was revisited with a proposal to launch two centres for outdoor recreation. The plan was not costed.

Planning for recreation was but one minor facet of a change in attitude to the relationship between central and local government and the individual citizen. The reports of the various commissions of enquiry such as those by Barlow, Scott and Uthwait all proposed a stronger role for national planning in areas as diverse as agriculture and land use, urban development and the location of industry.

The reconstruction plans for war damaged cities such as Hull, Plymouth and London epitomise this planning based approach. All gave community development and the provision of recreation facilities high priority. Despite this and the other policy initiatives described above, physical training and recreation played an insignificant role in Labour's post-war welfare reform programme. This may be due to financial stricture, but also to political and philosophical reservations that were a legacy of the National Government's fitter Britain campaign. The second Beveridge Report, 'Voluntary Action, Methods of Social Advance' throws some light on the issue.

The report acknowledged the need for a more interventionist role for the state but pondered the effect this might have on the voluntary sector, the main providers of recreational opportunity such as sports clubs and youth organisations. Whilst recognising the importance of recreation in a society where many people were now relieved from the 'extreme burden of toil', Beveridge made clear his view on the place of leisure in society.

There are certain things which should be in no circumstances left to the state. One is the use of leisure. We shall reach the last stages of totalitarianism when all our use of leisure is dictated to us by the state. The use of leisure is essentially a matter for the individual.⁶

(6) William Beveridge. *Voluntary Action. A Report on Methods of Social Advance*. (London: Allen and Unwin. 1948) p.93.

Whilst the Government did not include sport and recreation in its welfare reform programme, the Act had returned to the statute book and was made use of, albeit in a limited manner. Capital grants for recreation projects such as the building of village halls or community centres resumed from 1946. The assessment and awarding of grants under the Act was now an in-house function of the Board of Education. In the financial year 1946-1947 grants of £340,000 were made.⁷ This comparatively generous level of assistance was soon cut as the full extent of the economic crisis facing Britain became evident and stringent economy measures were implemented.

By 1949 any work improving or building community facilities was halted.⁸ The amount available for grants under the Act fell in every year until by 1953-1954 only £43,806 was disbursed.⁹ Any available funds were earmarked for youth projects to respond to the perceived rise in juvenile delinquency. Whenever a Member of Parliament pressed the case for recreation facilities in their constituency, a stock reply was offered. 'The temporary restriction of grants causes disappointment, but these schemes cannot be treated differently'.¹⁰

In an attempt to make additional funds available for physical training and recreation, the Act was amended in 1958 to allow loans to be made in place of grants, in the hope of balancing capital outflows with an incoming revenue stream as loans were repaid.¹¹ The screw was tightened further by the Local Government Act 1958 that subsumed support given under the Act to Local Authorities into their block grant. In future it would no longer be possible for local authorities to apply to the Board of Education for grant aid for special projects. By stages, the Act was being weakened and losing the limited impact it had once possessed.

(7) Hansard. House of Commons. June 17th. 1948. c.78.

(8) Ibid. December 15th. 1949. c.318.

(9) Ibid. April 8th. 1954. c.c. 75-76.

(10) Ibid. December 18th. 1956. c.135.

(11) Ibid. March 12th. 1958. c.429.

The Youth Problem

The pale thwarted teddy boys, the hangers on around public houses, the gangs of youths on Sunday afternoons throwing bricks through windows for want of something better to do. Duke of Sutherland. 1956.¹²

Plate 20. Film Poster 1953.¹³



Osgerby has argued a distinctive youth culture did not suddenly appear in 1950s Britain amid ‘an explosion of Elvis Presley records and Brylcreemed quiffs’.¹⁴ He suggests that during periods when demand for youth labour was buoyant, young people gained a new status as consumers and with that, a sense of freedom and identity. This study has confirmed that view. For example, during the 1930s many young workers were attracted into relatively well paid employment in the new industries. This gave them a level of disposable income that helped fuel the leisure industry and the emergence of a distinct and valuable youth market.

The portrayal of youth as a problem group has been a recurring theme throughout this study, seen in the reports on the state of the nation following the Boer War, or, the plight of former young munitions workers ‘running wild’ after the Great War. Physical training and recreation formed part of the prescription to ensure the compliance of youth as citizens, workers and potential recruits to the armed services. This continued after 1945.

(12) Hansard. House of Lords. May 29th. 1956. c.c.552-580.

(13) www.imdb/title/tt0044515/media.index [accessed online August 7th 2017].

(14) Bill Osgerby. *Youth Culture*. In. *A Companion to Contemporary Britain*. Ed. Paul Harrison and Harriet Jones (Oxford: Blackwell. 2005) p.146.

After the war the popular press was alive with stories of youth crime and delinquency. The *Daily Mirror* reported a nation, 'shocked by the rising tide of youth crime including cowardly attacks on women'. 'People in Britain are asking, what is being done'? 'The answer is nothing'.¹⁵ A mass of opinion was generated on the likely causes of the problem which included the effects of, American 'gangster' movies and comics, amusement arcades, 'jitter-bugging', poor parenting, and, 'moral laxity'.¹⁶ The House of Commons debated juvenile delinquency as early as November 1945. The Labour MP. Herschel Austin offered the view that delinquency was an unwelcome but predictable sequel to war during which fathers had been absent, mothers were engaged in war work, and, young workers had become used to 'abnormally high rates of pay'.¹⁷ When the question was debated in the Lords a more alarmist tone was evident. 'The average householder is almost afraid to answer the doorbell in case he is hit over the head with a cosh'.¹⁸ There was strong support for the return of corporal punishment for young offenders, suggesting a simple choice between the 'cat' or the 'cosh'.¹⁹

Contrary to the *Daily Mirror's* assertion that 'nothing was being done' the Ministry of Education had been active in formulating a plan for youth.

The disturbed times we must expect after the war will open to them (adolescents) an even greater opportunity if they bring to the problems of reconstruction the same spirit they have shown in meeting the demands of war.²⁰

This prospectus for youth was a worthy but wordy statement of principles and philosophy, which lacked any plan for implementation. The provision of facilities for

(15) *Daily Mirror*. March 3rd. 1950. p.1.

(16) *Report of the Departmental Committee on Children and the Cinema* (London: HMSO. Cd.7945. 1950).

(17) Hansard. House of Commons. November 2nd. 1945. c.c.807-840.

(18) Hansard. House of Lords. March 21st. 1950. c.313.

(19) Ibid. March 21st. 1950. c.323.

(20) Ministry of Education. *The Purpose and Content of Youth Services* (London. HMSO. 1945) p.5. The Board of Education became the Ministry of Education after the 1944 Education Act.

young people's recreation was identified as a fundamental issue, but how this was to be achieved was unclear other than an anodyne plea that 'it is an urgent duty of the appropriate authorities to make available the buildings and equipment that are needed'.²¹ Given that Government's political and public spending priorities lay with creating the welfare state, other demands for attention and funding, such as those associated with the youth problem were likely to receive lower priority. Nowhere in the plan for youth services is the Act mentioned as a potential source of support for the development of youth recreation services.

The return of a Conservative administration in 1951 was marked by more rhetoric on the youth problem, but no real change in funding or organisation. Various ideas were lauded such as the test cricketer Rev. David Shepherd's work with teddy boys, 'turning gangs into teams'. The Duke of Edinburgh, President of the National Playing Fields Association promoted the idea of floodlit playing fields in urban areas and 'adventure' playgrounds, but these costly schemes were few and far between.²² Funding available under the Act rose by only £11,000 to £180,000 between 1956/7 and 1957/8. Applicants for grant aid were reminded; 'There is a credit squeeze and there can be no guarantees'.²³ Youth services were to receive little further attention until the fundamental review offered by the Albemarle Report in 1960.

Hull. A vision for a 'fair and noble' city, or, a utopian dream?

When the fury of an enemy's assault was loosed upon our city, we saw our heritage shattered. Out of the ashes of the old will arise, phoenix-like, a fairer and nobler city than we have ever known. Alderman J.L Shultz. Chairman Hull Reconstruction Committee. 1945.²⁴

(21) Ibid. p.20.

(22) Hansard. House of Lords. May 29th 1956. c.c.52-80.

(23) Hansard. House of Commons. December 18th 1957. c.c.75-77.

(24) Edwin Lutyens. Patrick Abercrombie. *A Plan for the City and County of Kingston Upon Hull* (London: Brown. 1945) p.1. (Hereafter. Lutyens).

This chapter has explored the development of, and problems associated with the planning approach to physical training and recreation after the war. The experience of the City of Hull throws these issues into a sharp relief. Hull the ‘North-East coast town’ mentioned so often in wartime news bulletins was bombed 82 times between 1940 and 1942 killing 1,458 people.²⁵ Damage to property left 10% of the population homeless.²⁶ In 1942 the Council formed a re-construction sub-committee to formulate a plan for the renaissance of the City.²⁷

The Committee appointed the eminent architect, Edwin Lutyens, and Patrick Abercrombie, Professor of Town Planning at University College London, to prepare the plan. Lutyens died in 1944. Abercrombie who also oversaw the schemes for Plymouth and London completed the work. He proposed a phased regeneration over four, five-year periods. His approach to planning was conceptual and bold, proposing the zoning of the city into industrial, shopping and retail areas. It is beyond the scope of this study to explore the plan in detail but the central features that are relevant to this thesis, include the idea of an ideal size for a communities and neighbourhoods; 60,000 and 10,000 respectively. Each neighbourhood unit would have a fully integrated range of community services for health, education, recreation and shopping. The community centre was the sum of all these services grouped together, whose purpose was to provide;

Gathering places to discuss topics and domestic affairs, to make the sense of right and wrong seem real to the individual and provide tutelage against violation of its social standards or ‘slumdom’, the cause of delinquency.²⁸

Abercrombie's choice of a cluster of community facilities for neighbourhoods of 10,000 is very similar that of the ‘Educational Theory Panel’ described earlier in this chapter. So too was the blueprint for the Youth and Sports Centre shown overleaf which was designed to serve the wider community. The proposed centre, similar to those in Copenhagen included, a large assembly hall capable of seating 4,000, ice rink,

(25) *Yorkshire Post* February 22nd. 2014.

(26) www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-blitz-around-Britain. [accessed online August 14th. 2017].

(27) Hull City Council. Minutes of the reconstruction sub-committee 1942 to 1946. (Hereafter, Hull minutes).

(28) Lutyens. Op.cit. p.68.

swimming pool, 10 squash courts, two gymnasias, club rooms, outdoor stadium, pitches and, a restaurant and lounge. The Plan for Hull also envisaged generous outdoor recreation amenity spaces, parks, playgrounds and playing fields, with ‘greenways’ separating and linking the zones. Abercrombie estimated pre-war outdoor amenity space at 1.6 acres per thousand of the population. The plan set a target of 7 acres per thousand.

Neither the published Plan for Hull, nor Abercrombie's presentations to the Council contained any estimate of cost. Abercrombie was dismissive of any questioning of the resources required to implement the plan. ‘This is a question frequently asked by those who consider themselves practical and who have a confirmed objection or inability to look ahead.’²⁹ This view was shared by the Town Clerk of Hull E.H. Bullock. ‘The best plans should be prepared unhampered by financial considerations’.³⁰

Plate 21. Proposed Youth and Sports Centre for Hull. 1945.³¹



(29) Lutyens. Op.cit. p.81.

(30) E. H. Bullock. Planning Tomorrow's Britain (London: Muller. 1944) p.xiii.

(31) Lutyens. Op.cit. p.60.

Abercrombie's planning philosophy and the two years it took to prepare the final draft of the scheme exasperated the Committee and alienated powerful local interests in the shipping, manufacturing and retail sectors who wanted a rapid return to 'business as usual'. The needs of business and the central area of the City, dominated debate to the extent that the formation of communities and neighbourhoods, with their attendant recreational services were rarely mentioned.

None of the Abercrombie schemes, or the various approaches to recreation planning described in this chapter were implemented to any significant extent between 1945 and 1960. Big problems do call for big solutions but the realpolitik of post-war Britain required serious attention be given to the implementation of plans as well as their formulation. This inevitably linked to the resourcing of schemes.³⁴ These early examples of planned communities and services, paid scant regard to the views of residents or users, unlike the earlier approach of the NFC which was rooted in assessing the needs, wants and particularities of localities.

As late as 1949, 2,525 families in Hull were living in makeshift accommodation such as converted army huts.³⁵ Dealing with the pressing needs of people such as these assumed a far higher priority than the 'fairer and nobler' city envisaged by Alderman Shultz. The vision of the plan faded.

The planning approach to community and leisure facility development did re-emerge in the late 1960s. The Sports Council promoted the idea of a hierarchy of provision similar to that proposed by the Education Theory Panel in 1941.³⁶ In the 1980s Hull City Council embarked on a major programme of building community centres in each neighbourhood, and large leisure centres serving the wider community, one of which, the Ennerdale Centre, opened in 1986, occupies the site of the proposed Youth and Sports Centre shown in plate 36.

(34) Peter Luckham. *The post-war reconstruction planning of London*. (Birmingham: Birmingham City University, working paper series no.8. 2011).

(35) Hull minutes. September 26th. 1949.

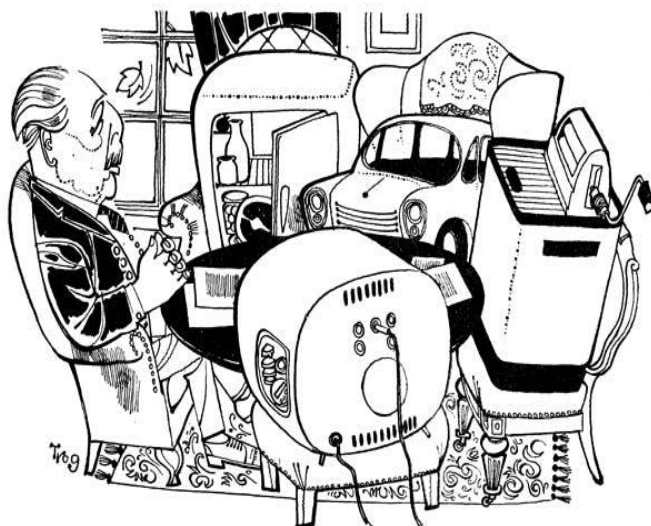
(36) Sports Council. *Planning for Sport* (London: Sports Council. 1968).

This chapter has demonstrated that during the post war period of austerity the Act fulfilled a limited role in the face of difficult conditions. The provision of Physical training and recreation services was seen as important tool for addressing the youth problem, but few resources were available to achieve this objective. As the economy recovered the case for state intervention in providing services for people's leisure time re-emerged. The next chapter will explore the debate on forging a new agenda for physical training and recreation.

Chapter Ten. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. Alphonse Karr. 1849.¹

'You've never had it so good'. Harold Macmillan 1957.²

Plate 22. Cartoon. *Spectator*. 1959.³



Just as the 1930s is often portrayed as the decade of depression, the late 1940s and early 1950s summon up images of bleak austerity, but both periods were more complex than these stereotypes suggest. Hardship was an essential element of the dialectic that contributed to a revolution of rising expectation feeding the demand for more and better facilities for leisure and recreation services. This demand was further boosted in the late 1950s by the 'bulge' in the numbers of young people born immediately after the war reaching their teenage years, and, the rapid growth of new towns where recreation facilities were often lacking.⁴

This chapter will describe the final years of the Physical Training and Recreation Act and the impact of the Wolfenden and Albemarle reports on its final demise. Both reports laid the framework for a reform of public sport and recreation, provision and youth policy. The new order that flowed from these reports drew on many of the core principles that underpinned the 1937 Act.

(1) Alphonse Karr. *Les Guepes*. 1849. vi. ('The more it changes, the more it's the same thing').

(2) *The Times*. July 22nd. 1957. p.4.

(3) 'Trog'. *Spectator*. October 16th. 1959. p.37.

(4) New Towns Act 1946. *Report of the Development Corporations for the year ended March 31st. 1960* (London: HMSO. Cd. 30536. 1960).

Britain entered the post-war era burdened by debt, with inflation approaching 10%.⁵ Unlike the period following the Great War there was rapid adjustment with strong export led economic growth, virtually full employment and rising real wages.⁶

The Act had been reinstated, but was often used in a defensive manner when Government was challenged to do more for sport and recreation. For example, in 1958 Harold Macmillan was pressed in the Commons to explain why Government did 'so little to support major sporting events'. He reminded the House that the 1948 Olympiad had been staged without direct support, but, 'the Government supported sport in many ways through the Physical Training and Recreation Act to the tune of £400,000 this year'.⁷ By the standards of recent investment in the Act, this was a relatively generous allocation, but in other areas, public spending on leisure increased rapidly as Government relaxed its control over local authority borrowing and investment. Spending and loan sanctions for local authority playing fields, pavilions, tennis courts and swimming pools rose from £1.4 million in 1955/1956, to £3.2 million in 1959/1960.⁸ The Act was fast becoming a 'sideshow'.

The report of the Wolfenden Committee published in 1960 promised a new deal for sport and recreation. Established by the CCPR, but independent of it, the committee gathered a mass of data and opinion, and drew many of the same conclusions that guided the work of the National Fitness Committee in the 1930s. 'Much the most serious shortage is of facilities for the multitude of games and sports which of their nature, or in our climate, can best be played indoors'.⁹

(5) Tejvan Pettinger. <https://www.economicshelp/11697/post-war-boom> [accessed online September 15th 2017]. In the late 1940s Britain's debt to GDP ratio reached a record 230%. By 1960 this had fallen to 100%.

(6) Matthew Hollow. 'The age of affluence revisited'. *Journal of consumer culture* 2016. v.16. 1. p.p. 279-296.

(7) Hansard. House of Commons. November 20th. 1958. c.1322.

(8) *Sport and the Community*. The report of the Wolfenden Committee on Sport (London: Central Council of Physical Recreation.1960) paras.43-44.

(9) Ibid. para. 80.

‘School Physical Education is well organised’. ‘The problem arises when adolescents leave school and drop out of physical activity’.¹⁰ The importance of the recreative principle was restated. ‘It is not the end of the world if British teams are defeated, still less a symptom or proof of national decadence’.¹¹ Voluntarism was to be at the heart of any new deal. ‘The whole fabric of British sport is held together by the labours of unpaid, devoted enthusiasts’.¹²

Given that the report accepted so much of what had gone before, it is unsurprising that its ‘big idea’, a Sports Development Council (hereafter SDC) bore more than a passing resemblance to the excoriated NFC of the 1930s. The SDC was to be run at arm’s length from Government in the manner of the Arts Council. It should receive funding of around £5.0 million per annum to distribute to the voluntary sector in the form of capital and revenue grants. The new body would support, but not replace, other organisations in the recreation field such as the CCPR and the NPFA. There should be no Ministry of Sport.

Even the espousal of the case for a new generation of large multi-sports centres drew directly on the work of the 1941 Educational Theory Panel described earlier, using Copenhagen as a model. In short there was little in the report that provided fresh thinking, but it was presented to a generation that were now removed from the experience of the first national fitness campaign, and as such offered the prospect of a fresh and relatively well-funded start to the 1960s. The 1937 Act was acknowledged in the report, but only to dismiss its ‘administrative complication and overlapping of functions’.¹³ The funding mechanism suggested in the report, of the SDC allocating grants directly to recipients from its budget without ministerial sanction, would effectively remove any remaining role for the Act.

(10) Ibid. para. 78.

(11) Ibid. para. 181.

(12) Ibid. para. 16.

(13) Ibid. para. 267.

The Albemarle report offered a searching review of Youth Services. Its opening premise was that; ‘the Youth Service at present is in an acute state of depression’, with; ‘dingy premises, lack of equipment and insufficient provision for outdoor recreation’.¹⁴ The service had benefitted from grants capped at a maximum £5,000 under the Act, but lack of finance and facilities were the key issues retarding development to meet the needs of the rapidly expanding youth population. Albemarle offered strong support for an expanded role for sport and physical recreation in a new Youth Service. The Government accepted the report, and with that the need to increase spending, but also, rationalise multiple funding streams. Financial support currently offered under the 1937 Act was at best marginal, and under the new arrangements would be superfluous.

The Act had run its course and although grants continued to be made under its aegis into the early 1960s, as the new initiatives and structures described above were implemented, it fell from use. As is often the case, elements of the legislation lingered on, dormant, until final repeal in 2004.¹⁵

The final chapter of the study offers an overview of the complex web of influences and events that led to the formation of the Act. What seems in the first instance a minor piece of legislation, touches on matters of wider importance, and despite its troubled history, the Act and the National Fitness Campaign had a significant impact on the development of services for physical training and recreation.

(14) Albemarle Report; The Youth Service in England and Wales. (London: HMSO. 1960) p.1.

(15) Statute Law (Repeals) Act. 2004. c.14. Sch 1. Pt. 13.

Chapter Eleven. Conclusion

**‘Keeping fit is a jolly business’. Lord Aberdare.
Chairman. National Fitness Committee 1938.¹**

Plate 23. The ‘perfect Nazi woman’ meets the ‘perfect British girl’. 1939.²



The concluding chapter will draw together the various strands of the study and demonstrate that keeping fit is more than a mere ‘jolly business’. Activities that appear to be the essence of freedom and self-actualisation are often shaped, constrained and used for wider social and political purposes.

Chapter two offered compelling evidence that fear of physical deterioration was intimately connected with the defence of empire and the threat posed by the emergence of imperial rivals. Physical training was seen as an important contributor to the idea of national strength and ensuring a supply of vigorous recruits to the armed forces.

- (1) *Daily Express*. April 1st. 1938. p.6. In the same article it was reported that Prunella Stack of the Women’s League of Health and Beauty, a member of the National Fitness Committee, had recently returned from a study tour to Berlin. She was said to be ‘frightfully keen on anything German’.
- (2) www.nickleinthemachine/2011/12. [accessed online October 6th. 2017] In March 1939 Getrud Scholtz-Klink head of the National Socialist Women’s Union, described by Hitler as the ‘perfect Nazi woman’ visited London and was received by Prunella Stack of the WLHB, often described by the popular press as ‘Britain’s perfect girl’.

Despite the prominence given to the issue of national fitness in the wake of the recruiting crises of the Boer and Great wars, successive governments were reluctant to intervene directly, other than introduce ‘drill’, and later, physical education into schools. The matter was left to the voluntary sector and local authorities through the aegis of a few limited pieces of permissive legislation, and small grants. Where sport and recreation facilities were provided these proved popular, yet central government continued to adopt a decidedly laissez-faire approach to the question. By the 1930’s British reticence in this area stood in sharp contrast not only to the fascist regimes and the Soviet Union, but also Scandinavia, where there was a long tradition of state involvement in promoting health and fitness for adults.³

Government's reluctance to be involved directly in matters relating to peoples use of their free time owes much to the political and ideological legacy of the idea of the ‘free born Englishman’ and resistance to any extension of the power of the state and a consequent erosion of the freedom of the individual.⁴ Time and again objections to the Act and the national fitness programme were based on its perceived association with compulsion, fear of conscription and ‘militarisation’. Despite its populist appeal the Act was viewed with suspicion by the Labour movement and sections of the medical profession.

There seems no simple causal relationship between British rearmament in the 1930s, the Act and the national fitness campaign. The study has demonstrated an abiding level of concern over the physique of the nation. As the 1930s proceeded, the possibility of war became a likelihood. The strength and vigour of German youth was a frequent cause for comment, concern and envy, yet the British Government was at pains to emphasise the purely recreational and social ethos of its plan. None of the data examined including Cabinet and Board of Education records, which were not in the public domain at the time, make any reference to a connection between national fitness and military preparation. The War Office did make a tentative proposal in 1939 to launch a ‘fitness badge’ for adolescent youths but withdrew this as it was feared it might be seen as a measure militarising the civilian population.

(3) Niels Nielson. ‘The cult of the Nordic superman’ *Sports Historian* 19.1. May 1999. p.p.61-80.

(4) Edward Thompson. *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon. 1964).

Chamberlain's role in crafting a distinctively British fitness campaign was crucial, indeed it seems likely without his interest and persistence there would have been no Act. The initiative was designed to promote a sense of national wellbeing, and as a populist measure drawing on the growth of interest in keeping fit and outdoor recreation pursuits. The Act was administratively neat, and compared to comprehensive welfare reform, cheap to implement. As a measure it was typical of Chamberlain's managerialist approach to Government. Bentley has characterised him as, 'a man given to administrative tidying with a passion for order and logic in public affairs'.⁵

As a former Minister of Health, Chamberlain would have been aware of evidence that linked poor nutrition and housing to ill-health and incapacity, yet he chose to adopt a very narrow definition of fitness that was likely raise accusations of tokenism or window dressing to garner electoral advantage. Integrated reform of health and welfare services would no doubt have been popular with the public, but was a costly anathema to a National Government, dominated by Conservatives that had navigated the depression by rigorously controlling public spending. By 1937 the economy was recovering, but the demands of rearmament took priority in public expenditure. The Act was a timely and inexpensive way to show that 'something was being done'.

The tenor of the Act owes a good deal to lessons learnt in the Special Areas. The strategies employed to occupy the unemployed and their families may have stemmed from a desire to placate the workless, or divert them from radical protest, but many of the recreation programmes were genuinely innovative and advanced the concept of community cohesion. However, unlike the work of the NFC, the occupational initiatives in the Special Areas were relatively well funded. The £2.4 million capital budget for the three years of the national fitness campaign was completely inadequate and Government, inured by years of spending restraint seemed unable to react when this became evident.

(5) Gilbert Bentley. *British Social Policy: 1914 to 1939* (London Batsford. 1970) p.219.

It is impossible to say what might have been achieved with a larger budget. The NFC would still have been a group of what were essentially well meaning amateurs trying to deliver a sophisticated national programme of events, education and facility development.

It is easy to dismiss the Act and the work of the NFC as a failure and a political embarrassment. Government did not wish to run the fitness campaign directly as this would have eroded the voluntary principle. The NFC was granted considerable autonomy, but given very limited administrative and technical support. In consequence the Committee became isolated and pursued ever more ambitious objectives to justify its existence. The NFC did not manage the grants issue well, but here too blame must lie with the Board of Education which signed off every successful grant application and seemed not to react in a coherent manner when it became clear in the first year of the campaign that demand for financial support far exceeded the funds available. There is some evidence that senior civil servants at the Board and the Ministry of Health did not share their masters' enthusiasm for the campaign and the NFC as it eroded their hegemony in matters related to physical training and recreation. They may not have conspired directly to derail the campaign but did little to support it, and when crisis loomed, were quick to bring forward plans for the youth recreation strategy, which they well placed to deliver, and that left little or no role for the NFC.

It is important to make a distinction between the objectives of the Act, and the effectiveness of its implementation. The operational failure of the Act and the NFC between 1937 and 1939 was clear, but the philosophy that guided it exerted a powerful influence on leisure and recreation planning during and after the war. The central principle of the Act was a 'bottom up' community strategy based on assessing and responding to local conditions, needs and wants. This approach acknowledged the diversity of formal and, informal leisure and community interests. Camping, 'keep-fit' and youth hostelling held equal currency with the major Olympic sports. Despite the fears of those that opposed the Act, it enshrined the voluntary principle in terms of participation and organisation. The post-war planning approach described in chapters nine and ten challenged the demand led philosophy pursued by the NFC but maintained the central importance of community based recreation.

The National Fitness Committee had a very short life and faced problems from its inception. Despite this, the local case studies offered in Chapter seven reveal that local authorities had a good knowledge of the Act and were quick to apply for grants to develop recreation facilities. This was no doubt due to the extensive publicity that accompanied the launch of the Act. Both case cities were awarded provisional grants to improve and build facilities but as the funding crisis grew, these were withdrawn. The Act and the work of the NFC were disabled by the grants crisis and the accusation that the Committee was more concerned with 'bricks and mortar' than building enthusiasm for participation. The post-war experience of recreation planning vindicated the NFC view that the major barrier to promoting a fitter Britain was a lack of suitable facilities.

The primary beneficiary of the Act and the grants crisis was the Central Council for Physical Recreation. The CCPR was a focused and well run organisation that grew by exploiting the failure of the NFC. In retrospect it might have been a safer option to hand the implementation of the Act to the CCPR. By 1937 it had been in operation for two years representing the interests of governing bodies of sports, dance and outdoor recreation. It is not clear from any of the data examined why this option seems not to have been considered. In any event by the end of the war the CCPR had become the de- facto voice of sport and recreation and by 1958 had sufficient gravitas to commission the Wolfenden report that signalled the final demise of the Act. The tone and content of Wolfenden and the new agenda for sport drew heavily on the guiding principles of the 1937 Act. The importance of voluntarism was restated, as was the need to foster mass participation rather than elite performance. Even the contentious issue of grant allocation followed a model similar to that used by the Act.

The study has adopted a broad approach, looking back as far as the mid-Victorian period and forward to the Wolfenden report in 1960. This has allowed an analysis of the Act in a wider context and in particular, Governments' reluctance to become directly involved in the provision of leisure services. The Physical Training and Recreation Act marks the first, tentative shift away from this position towards a more interventionist role. Despite the problems associated with its timing, funding and delivery, the Act influenced subsequent leisure policy and planning in a manner that remained largely unchanged until the advent of lottery funding for elite sports performance in the 1990's.

The study has identified a number of issues that would benefit from further study but were beyond the scope and word limit of the thesis. The Act specifically excluded grant aid to commercial organisations to provide or run sport and recreation facilities for the public or their employees. The development and decline of works sports during and after the 1930's is a relatively hidden aspect of leisure studies.

The 1937 Act was conceived and delivered mainly by men, yet women played a leading role in the fitness movement of the 1930's. The Women's League of Health and Beauty has been studied, both for its contribution to the health of the nation, and suggestions of an underlying racial or eugenic ideology.⁶ There is less understanding of the experience and achievements of the thousands of 'ordinary' women who participated in fitness activities in countless village halls and recreation facilities.

The study has signposted the direction of leisure policy and planning following the dissolution of the Act. It would be interesting to pick up that thread with research on the implementation of Wolfenden, and in particular, the rise of the municipal leisure centre, a ubiquitous symbol of the 1970's

The final words of the study lie with Lord Aberdare, former Chairman of the National Fitness Council, speaking in the House of Lords in 1940.⁷

It's (the National Fitness Council) failure came from its being framed on too wide a long term policy with too little money behind it. [...] There were so many needs that it was difficult to meet all of the requests made. When you come to consider the number of villages, each of which might want its playing field and its village hall and possibly its swimming bath, it is quite obvious that the cost of providing these very necessary things made the whole scheme impossible.

(6) Jane Garrity. *Stepdaughters of England. British women modernists*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2003).

(7) Hansard. House of Lords. July 17th 1940. c.c. 1025-1032.

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