

Edward Thring's Theory, Practice and Legacy

Reviews of the First Edition

‘Salute the first gymnasium, the first full-time gymnastics master, the first swimming pool in any school, a philosophy of health education, a balanced view of team games, and an abhorrence of professionalism and publicity.’

—David Emms, *Conference & Common Room*

‘Thring was a forceful figure, absorbed in his school, determined to make it great; he had the knack of knowing how to develop its physical life, as his introduction of a gym and swimming pool show.’

—Jeremy Harvey, *Times Educational Supplement*

‘The chapters on the cult of athleticism and the ideal of manliness will be of particular interest to the serious student.’

—Nicholas Parry, *British Journal of Physical Education*.

‘Tozer argues convincingly that Edward Thring’s philosophy of physical education was essentially an Athenian one.’

—Professor Vincent McClelland, *Victorian Studies*

‘This book is a must for anyone seriously interested in the Victorian public school. Its historical, objective approach must recommend it. The author is to be congratulated on his initiative.’

—Professor Brian Simon, *History of Education*

‘The text is well written, in a scholarly style. The Thringian principles of true manliness expressed in this book remind us again of an inane cult of masculinity and esprit de corps.’

—D L Willey, *Bulletin of Physical Education*

‘Malcolm Tozer certainly seems to have turned over every stone and looked in every corner; this book is the proverbial mine of information.’

—Roger Bottomley, *Sport & Recreation*

‘Malcolm Tozer has made a commendable effort to explain the reasons for change and to categorise the many influences which bring it about. I commend the book to all serious students in the field.’

—David McNair, *Canadian Journal of Physical Education*

‘Anyone who wants to know how we have got where we are in physical education will enjoy this book.’

—Professor Peter McIntosh, *New Zealand Journal of Health, Physical Education & Recreation*

‘Malcolm Tozer combined a distinguished educational career with research on “Muscular Christianity”, leading to the publication of one of the best books on the subject.’

—Professor Hugh McLeod, *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift*

Edward Thring's Theory, Practice and Legacy:

*Physical Education in Britain
since 1800*

By

Malcolm Tozer

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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Physical Education in Britain since 1800

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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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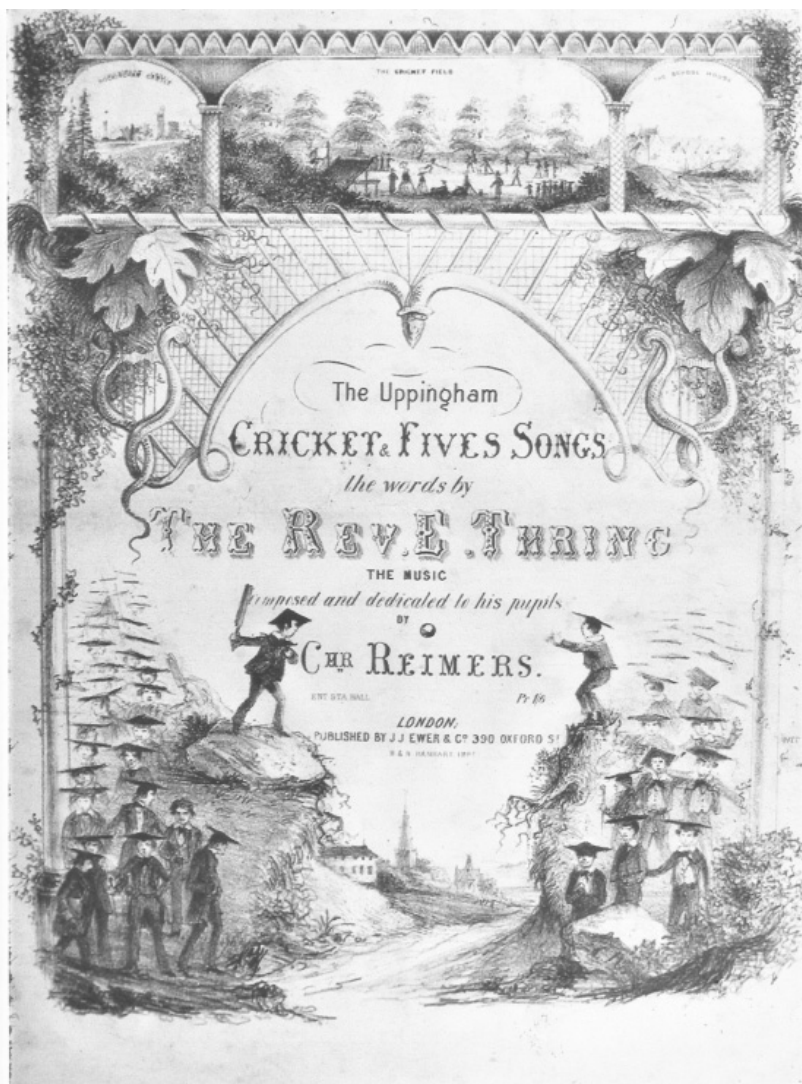
ISBN (10): 1-5275-2818-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-2818-5

Front cover: Thring in the 1858 cricket XI.

Frontispiece: *The Uppingham Cricket and Fives Songs*, 1857,
by Christian Reimers.

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Health of body, health of intellect, health of heart, all uniting to form
the true man, and being the common object of teacher and taught.

Edward Thring, *Education and School* (London: Macmillan, 1864), 32.

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John Royds of Uppingham

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INTRODUCTION

Physical Education at Thring's Uppingham was published in 1976 as a case study of the development and role of physical education at a mid-Victorian English public school. Interest in the history of physical education in Britain had been stimulated thirty years earlier by Peter McIntosh, the deputy director of physical education at the University of Birmingham. At this period, 1946 to 1965, Birmingham was the only university in Britain to offer an undergraduate course in physical education. His *Physical Education in England since 1800*, published in 1952 with a new edition in 1968, quickly became the standard reference book for his students and for those at the numerous teacher training colleges that specialised in physical education.¹ This was followed in 1957 by *Landmarks in the History of Physical Education*, a collection of essays edited by McIntosh that examined examples of physical education from classical Greece to modern-day America.² Jonathan May's *Madame Bergman-Österberg*, 1969, extended the field by presenting the history of a leading women's physical education college within the biography of its founder;³ and then David Smith re-examined the general provision of physical education in British schools in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in *Stretching Their Bodies: History of Physical Education*, 1974.⁴ Historical enquiry was also supported by a wave of unpublished theses, including those by George Knaggs, David McNair, John Mallea, Colin Crunden and Ida Webb.⁵

Interest in the history of physical education fell away in Britain during the 1980s with the demise of the specialist teacher training colleges, their absorption by polytechnics and universities, and the change of academic focus to the scientific and cultural disciplines associated with sport.⁶ The

¹ Peter McIntosh, *Physical Education in England since 1800* (London: Bell, 1952/68).

² Peter McIntosh, *Landmarks in the History of Physical Education* (London: Routledge, 1957/65).

³ Jonathan May, *Madame Bergman-Österberg* (London: Harrap, 1969).

⁴ David Smith, *Stretching Their Bodies* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1974).

⁵ See the bibliography for details.

⁶ The polytechnics became universities from 1992.

history of sport and of individual sports, sport's role in the history of culture, and the history of sport's contribution to images of masculinity and femininity, all these now took precedence in research and publications, and they have continued to do so until the present day.⁷

The new century brought a revival of interest in the recent history of physical education when observers noticed the over-representation and relative success in international sport of former pupils from the minority of schools that were independent of state provision when compared with that of their team-mates who had attended state schools.⁸ This difference was particularly noticeable at the five summer Olympic Games from 2000 to 2016 and it led to enquiries from sports administrators, educationalists, politicians and the press about the high quality of physical education and sports coaching at independent schools and the traditions on which they were built. An introductory chapter in *Physical Education and Sport in Independent Schools*, an essay in *The International Journal of the History of Sport* and an additional online chapter to the book, published in 2012, 2013 and 2016 respectively, sought to provide some answers.⁹

Physical education thrives in today's independent schools whereas it struggles to maintain its place on the timetable in many state schools and academies.¹⁰ This situation matches that for other ingredients of the broader curriculum, including art, design, drama and music. All these subjects are valued in independent schools for their contribution to holistic education and to foster the talents of every pupil, but they find it difficult to survive in schools that are supported by the state. As Anthony Seldon

⁷ Murray Phillips and Alexander Roper, "History of Physical Education" in *The Handbook of Physical Education*, ed. David Kirk, Doune Macdonald and Mary O'Sullivan (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 127-128.

⁸ See, for example, *The Daily Telegraph*, February 2, 2010 (Aislinn Laing); July 5, 2012 (David Cameron); and August 2, 2012 (Lord Moynihán).

⁹ Malcolm Tozer, "In the Beginning" in *Physical Education and Sport in Independent Schools*, ed. Malcolm Tozer (Woodbridge: John Catt, 2012), 31-37; Malcolm Tozer, "'One of the worst statistics in British sport, and wholly unacceptable': The contribution of privately-educated members of Team GB to the summer Olympic Games, 2000-2012," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no. 12 (August 2013): 1436-1454; and Malcolm Tozer, "Going the extra mile: The contribution of privately educated members of Team GB to the summer Olympic Games of 2016" in *Physical Education and Sport in Independent Schools*, ed. Malcolm Tozer (Woodbridge: John Catt, 2016), 318-338.

¹⁰ Academies have more freedom than other state schools over their finances, the curriculum, and teachers' salaries and conditions. A key difference is that they are funded directly by central government instead of receiving their funds via a local authority.

wrote in his review of *The Ideal of Manliness: the Legacy of Thring's Uppingham*:

The mission of independent schools is far more ambitious than that found in most state schools; in addition to often excellent academic education, they frequently devote a third or more of their time to holistic all-round development, including sports and the arts. Opportunities to discover and nurture whatever talents each pupil has are seen as an entitlement; they are readily available, well taught and generously resourced. This, Malcolm Tozer asserts, is the legacy of Edward Thring's Uppingham. Music, art, gymnastics, cricket, crafts and drama flourished alongside the academic curriculum at this mid-Victorian school well before they were adopted elsewhere. What Thring termed 'the ideal of manliness' is the forerunner of today's 'wholeness'. The education of the whole man and the attention to the individual pupil are now the norm in all good schools, but it was not always so.¹¹

A re-evaluation of the role of physical education at Thring's Uppingham is therefore timely, as is an examination of its legacy to modern practice.

Physical education's place in the curriculum of state schools was more secure in the forty years immediately after the Second World War, and in this period most independent schools learnt from state school best practice. Optimism in the profession was high. Teachers' hopes for the subject's future were realised in 1991 when physical education was included as a compulsory subject within the new National Curriculum. This was also the period when the history of physical education was included in college and university courses for physical education teachers, and when research and publication on historical themes were strong. Teachers who entered the physical education profession after the 1980s, however, learnt nothing of the subject's history from their training: it is not on the syllabus for GCE A-level courses in physical education; almost all universities ignore it in their physical education undergraduate and teacher training courses (Leeds Beckett is an exception); and not one of the hundred-plus books recommended by the Association for Physical Education (afPE) for the professional development of its members is on the history of the subject.¹² David Kirk asserts that this has contributed to the sidelining of physical education in many schools:

¹¹ Malcolm Tozer, *The Ideal of Manliness: the Legacy of Thring's Uppingham* (Truro: Sunnyrest Books, 2015), front papers.

¹² Some A-level and degree courses do, however, have short modules on the history of sport. See also www.afpe.org.uk/physical-education/recommended-readings/, accessed April 25, 2018.

The absence of history from physical education teacher education courses and, indeed, from the field in higher education more broadly, is one telling sign that the physical education community will be unlikely to make a substantial contribution to radical reform, and perhaps why physical educators have been excluded, under-represented or ignored in policy debates.¹³

He argues that it is impossible to imagine a secure future for physical education if its advocates are trapped in the present, preoccupied with immediate concerns, heads down rather than heads up, and with no conception of the subject's past, nor of its place in the holistic big picture.¹⁴ Universities and learned societies, he continues, are best placed to lead physical education, in part by securing the conditions that will encourage physical education teachers to fight for their subject's place on the timetable, to plot its future within the National Curriculum, and to encourage change so that it moves with the times.¹⁵ One of Kirk's conditions is to reinstate the history of physical education in their training.

"If I have seen further than others," wrote Isaac Newton, "it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants." *Edward Thring's Theory, Practice and Legacy* will inform trainee teachers, practising teachers and teacher trainers of the men and women who, from 1800 to the present day, strove to secure a place for physical education in the curriculum for all pupils. Let them stand on these shoulders! Historians of education, gender, society and sport will find new material to illuminate their fields of study.

Physical Education at Thring's Uppingham was a facsimile of the text of my master's thesis, "The Development and Role of Physical Education at Uppingham School: 1850-1914", that was submitted to the University of Leicester in 1974.

Much has been added to create the present book. The Uppingham Archives have increased enormously since the 1970s through donations and acquisitions, and material on the Thring years has also been discovered in many other archives, including in Bonn and Ottawa. New research by Timothy Halstead, James Mangan, Bryan Matthews, Nigel

¹³ David Kirk, *Physical Education Futures* (London: Routledge, 2011), 143-145.

¹⁴ Such preoccupation persuaded one advocate, Baroness Benjamin, co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on *A Fit and Healthy Childhood*, to announce in the House of Lords on December 5, 2016 that "the teaching of PE ... has not changed since the 1940s".

¹⁵ Email message to author, April 30, 2018.

Richardson, Cormac Rigby and the author has brought new insights as well as new information. In addition, the context of developments at Uppingham and for Thring's legacy has been expanded to take account of the social, political, educational, physical educational and sporting changes from 1800 to the present day.

It would have been impossible to contemplate this study without ease of access to the Uppingham Archives. I thank the Trustees and Headmasters of the school for granting it and for allowing me to publish what I found. The six Headmasters who span the forty years are John Royds (1965-74), Coll Macdonald (1975-82), Nick Bomford (1982-91), Stephen Winkley (1991-2006), Richard Harman (2006-16) and Richard Maloney, (2016+). I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Brian Belk and Jerry Rudman, successive archivists, for guiding me through their treasures.

I am grateful to past and present colleagues at Uppingham and to Old Uppinghamians who have helped me over the years: Jeff Abbott, David Ashworth, Peter Attenborough, James Barnett, Chris Dossett, Peter Flower, Geoff Frowde, Ben Goss, Timothy Halstead, Brian Ma Siy, Bryan Matthews, Casey O'Hanrahan, Simon Pattinson, Nigel Richardson, David Shipton, Sarah Singlehurst, Harry Spry-Leverton, Hedley Stroud, David Stewart, Neil Waddell and Garth Wheatley. Beyond Uppingham, I have benefited from the advice and help of Richard Aldrich, Harry Armytage, Charles Barr, Ian Beer, Lillian Beisiegel, Gerald Bernbaum, Paul Blackman, Karen Brazier, Mary Byatt, Tim Chandler, Tim Clough, Heather Edwards-Hedley, Peter Elliott, Camilla English, Robert Fisher, Ken Hardman, Jo Harris, Martin Holmes, John Honey, Ruan Jones, Sue Kalaugher, Jane Kirby, David Kirk, Liz Larby, Roy Lowe, James Mangan, David McNair, Dave Mills, Gerald Murray, David Newsome, Leslie Oakley, Alison Oliver, Harold Perkin, Elaine Phillips, Robin Proctor, Cormac Rigby, Rachel Roberts, Natalie Sanderson, Norbert Schloßmacher, Brian Simon, Barry Sterndale-Bennett, Roy Stephenson, Paul Stevens, Harold Tarraway, John Tosh, Dale Vargas, Bob Wight and Alexander Wolfshohl. I must also thank the staff at the Bodleian Library, the British Library, the Cambridge University Library, Cornwall Libraries and the London Library, and the support team at Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

My wife, Elizabeth, has lived with Thring for all those forty years. I thank her for her interest and support.

Malcolm Tozer
Portscatho, Cornwall; 1 January 2019

CHAPTER ONE

PROLOGUE

Generalisations are dangerous and often unfair. The traditional picture of the Victorian and Edwardian English public school assumes that all such schools were founded on Thomas Arnold, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and Rugby football. A Rifle Corps, Blues on the teaching staff, and an ethos of *esprit de corps* were all part of the system. The cult of athleticism reigned supreme.

Exchanging generalisations for particulars, some published but unsupported statements about Edward Thring and his school peddle errors that range from casual reporting to deliberate misrepresentation. The school was never a College, nor did Thring wish to become a Doctor of Divinity: the mock dignity of the doctor's top hat he found abhorrent.¹ Thring would have been amused by the claim that he helped to create the Football Association, even though the school did not play that code, but he would not have taken kindly to the lyrics of his *Football Song* being included in an *Anthology of Rugby Football*; he loathed the game and never permitted its play.²

The erroneous claims made by well-respected historians are more damaging for they misrepresent Thring's principles and practice, and their inaccuracies have been spread abroad by subsequent authors who rely on secondary sources for their research. David Newsome came to regret labelling Thring as "clearly of the muscular school"; Peter McIntosh realised that he had overstated his case when he claimed that Uppingham "took the lead in developing games"; but Dominic Erdozain remains adamant that physical education at Thring's school was merely "an

¹ For example, Brian Simon and Ian Bradley, *The Victorian Public School* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), 185; and Robert Mackenzie, *Almond of Loretto* (London: Archibald Constable & Co, 1905), 123.

² Fred Leonard and George Affleck, *A Guide to the History of Physical Education* (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1947), 174; Morris Marples, *A History of Football* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954), 142, 151 for Association football; and Kenneth Pelmar, *Rugby Football: an Anthology* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), 122.

outsourced remedy for vice and temptation”. Even James Mangan could casually ignore his own research when, in the introduction to a new edition of *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School*, he asserted that Thring’s stand against the cult of games “was defeated by philistine old boys, housemasters, parents and pupils – and the *general* ethos of the system”.³ Readers of *Edward Thring’s Theory, Practice and Legacy* will form their own conclusions.

It is true that physical education in schools invariably reflects the philosophy of the total educational environment but it is also possible, as with Athens and Sparta in ancient Greece, to have fundamentally opposed ideals and systems within the same contemporary society. Thring’s Uppingham was an Athens surrounded by Spartan strongholds and after his death the Spartans closed in and even claimed Thring as one of their own.

Between 1853 and 1887 a balanced programme of physical education flourished at Uppingham School within a sane but revolutionary educational framework. The spirit survived after Thring’s death but at other schools, its philosophy lived on through the first half of the twentieth century, and finally its practice became more readily acceptable in the years after the Second World War. The first National Curriculum for Physical Education owed much to Thring’s legacy.

The spirit, philosophy and practice of this physical education are as valid and valuable today as they were at Thring’s Uppingham.

³ David Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning* (London: John Murray, 1961), 220 and conversation with the author, April 1978; McIntosh, *Physical Education*, 47 and conversation with the author, April 1968; Dominic Erdozain *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Religion* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), 107-108; and James Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (London: Routledge, 2000), xxxiii.

CHAPTER TWO

ENGLAND IN THE 1850s: “THE AGE OF EQUIPOISE”

I

In 1853, when Edward Thring arrived as the newly appointed headmaster of the grammar school in the market town of Uppingham, ninety miles north of London, he inherited a boys' school with about twenty-five boarders and a few day pupils. By the time of his death in 1887, Uppingham School had risen from relative obscurity in England's smallest county to become a great public school. In the course of those thirty-five years Thring's reputation as an educational reformer grew in stature and his work both in and from Uppingham gained national and international attention. No man and no institution can exist in a social vacuum, for there is always a continuous interchange with the enveloping society and these environmental influences are especially strong during the formative years of a new enterprise. Thring arrived at Uppingham in a period unique in the century: "Of all the decades in our history," wrote G. M. Young, "a wise man would choose the eighteen-fifties to be young in."¹

The first quarter of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new society. The traditional order was challenged as the middle classes developed wealth and gained in confidence, and their members began to demand a role in government. The traditional values were similarly challenged now that the social, political, intellectual and spiritual standpoints inherited from the previous century would no longer suffice. First and foremost, society was becoming more humane. Government and law began to operate with more justice and with a greater sense of compassion, and individuals and groups were inspired to condemn the unfair practices, corrupt administration, biased legislation and intolerant institutions of earlier centuries.

¹ George Young, *Victorian England: A Portrait of an Age* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936/69), 77.

Adjustments to permit greater freedom and to enhance the rights of the individual citizen were effected during the second quarter of the century as a succession of government reforms ensured a period of active liberalism. These ranged from major changes to the Criminal Law in the 1820s to the repeal of the Corn Law in 1846, and included the Representation of the People Act of 1832 for the reformation of parliament. This momentum for change was maintained in the years immediately after Victoria ascended the throne in 1837 but it slackened in the late 1840s as conservative forces regained power. England was still a traditional oligarchy and those classes who did not enjoy the hereditary privilege of government continued to be disgruntled and, despite the efforts of Radicalism and Chartism, many anachronistic institutions remained intact until the second half of the century. The ruling classes had given much away but they had retained the material and machinery of their power.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 in London's magnificent Crystal Palace was the blazing symbol of the middle years of the century and the material representation of the nation's progress in science, industry, commerce and the arts. The exhibition confidently demonstrated to the world the success of the British way of life and confirmed Britain's growing international influence: it was a huge success. There was great national pride at this time, a pride built on industrial innovation, commercial triumph, civic prosperity and military might. Britain was the centre of world manufacture, commerce and banking, with free trade as the dominant philosophy. Relative freedom from economic worries made it a prosperous time, not only for the owners of factories, mills, businesses and land but also, through tax reductions on food and a shortening of the working day, for their workers. Britain was also secure. No large-scale wars disturbed the middle years of the century and the country's supreme naval strength protected its trading routes abroad and its island fortress at home.

"The Age of Equipoise", to borrow William Burn's label for the period of mid-Victorian political and social calm, was built within the framework of traditional institutions and the balance was one of conservatism against progress.² Many of these institutions were found wanting during the previous half-century and they had gradually been reformed. Now there was need for an interlude of consolidation before further modernisation could be initiated, a plateau amidst an era of acceleration and adjustment. A balance between order and change was also evident in the moral code of the time. Great trust was put in all institutions from the family outwards,

² Burn dated it from 1852 to 1867. William Burn, *The Age of Equipoise* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), *passim*.

each emphasising duty and restraint, yet at the same time a strong belief in free discussion and free thought was widespread. This age, with the Great Exhibition at its centre, was the foundation of the next sixty years and of the remainder of Queen Victoria's reign.³

II

That Uppingham School could climb from an obscure country grammar school to a great public school in a few years illustrates the peculiar and fluid nature of English education in the nineteenth century. The public boarding schools are a highly distinctive English educational institution yet they were not dominant in the early years of that century, and were even perhaps at the lowest point in their history. All provision of schooling in the British Isles was independent of the state before the implementation of William Forster's Elementary Education Act in 1870 and Arthur Balfour's Secondary Education Act of 1902 but popular demand for efficient secondary education for children above the age of eleven had been growing much earlier. Sons and daughters of the aristocracy and the gentry were customarily taught at home by governesses when very young and by tutors when older, but this was inevitably an expensive process. Offspring of the professional and middle-class families received their education at small private schools. As portrayed in the novels of Charles Dickens and William Thackeray, these schools varied greatly in standard and reputation but supervision by teachers was much stricter than that in the public schools.

There were also around eight-hundred old grammar schools at the turn of the nineteenth century. These were usually endowed schools for boys that owed their foundation to the generosity and public spirit of merchants, yeomen or clergy in Tudor times. Their restrictive curriculum and traditional teaching were much the same as they had been at the time of their creation, consisting mainly of rote learning of Latin and Greek in preparation for the universities at Oxford and Cambridge or for entry to the professions, especially the Church. These schools were generally shunned by the artisan classes, who viewed their curriculum as irrelevant to their needs, and so most were small and many dormant. Some public schools, Shrewsbury School and Rugby School for example, were originally grammar schools but had grown in size, status and renown under powerful headmasters and through improvements in communication

³ George Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England* (London: Methuen, 1962), 43.

and travel. In this way it was possible for a small school with purely local connections to develop into a boarding school that drew its pupils from across the country. Other public schools were collegiate foundations linked to colleges at the two universities: Eton College with King's College, Cambridge and Winchester College with New College, Oxford are two famous examples. These schools were wholly boarding from their inception.

Seven schools were recognised as public boarding schools at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and two more as public day schools. Shrewsbury, Rugby, Eton and Winchester, together with Harrow School, Westminster School and Charterhouse, comprised the former; St Paul's School and Merchant Taylors' School, both in London, were the latter. The poor quality of teaching was broadly similar at the public schools and the grammar schools but, in addition, the public schools had their own particular problems. Boarding facilities were crude and discipline was harsh. It was customary for the headmaster to have sole responsibility for pupil management in a school for several hundred boys aged eleven to nineteen, and occasionally even older. Bullying, rebellion, and mass flogging were all part of the reaction, whilst drinking, gambling and other vices were rife amongst the boys. The social reforms of the second quarter of the century eventually reached the public schools and soon they came under concerted attack. Their classical curriculum did not meet the needs of the Utilitarians and the boys' vices did not satisfy the code of the Evangelicals. Reforms had to be made. The work of a small group of headmasters, notably Samuel Butler and Thomas Arnold, saved the public schools from near extinction and brought them to a position where their influence was to be far reaching and long lasting.

Butler was headmaster at Shrewsbury from 1796 to 1836. During that time he not only revised the curriculum and teaching methods, and in the process made his school the foremost for the two classical languages, but he also introduced delegated management of school organisation to the senior boys through the introduction of a prefectorial system. Arnold was headmaster at Rugby from 1828 to 1840. He altered the teaching of classics, favouring Greek above Latin, and made both more relevant to nineteenth-century needs by applying them to examine contemporary social issues. Arnold saw his school as a microcosm of the ideal Christian-Platonic society as he strove to instil manliness in his charges. Decisive leadership, strong pastoral care, a morally earnest curriculum, the prefectorial system, a chapel-centred school life, and his weekly sermon: these were his means, and his purpose was to convert evil children into

saintly adults. Material conditions improved with smaller dormitories, individual studies, and stricter adult supervision.⁴

The work of Butler, Arnold and other headmasters lifted the public schools to a position of eminence that they had not enjoyed since the seventeenth century. As a result, the sons of the aristocracy were removed from their home-based tutors to join the throng at the leading schools and the rise of the middle classes made them affordable to an even larger clientele. By the end of the 1850s it was essential that the sons of respectable families should attend these schools, not least to learn from the aristocrats how to become gentlemen. The number of public schools increased three-fold by 1860 to meet this demand.⁵

Some of the new schools were founded as joint-stock companies and so were originally termed proprietary schools to distinguish them from the nine public schools that were above them in the social pecking order, and the numerous private schools below. Cheltenham College and Marlborough College are examples. As their fame grew so they would soon be grouped with the nine as public schools. A number of long-established grammar schools were now gaining national reputations for good teaching under forceful headmasters and the best were granting themselves public school status or were being raised to it by ambitious parents. The schools at Sherborne, Tonbridge and Uppingham were in this category. By the time of the Schools Inquiry Commission, set up under Lord Taunton's chairmanship in 1864, there were the nine original public schools, 122 proprietary schools (some with public school status), and about 800 grammar schools of which a few were well known.⁶

III

Uppingham Grammar School was founded in 1584. Like its sister foundation in the county town of Oakham, it was established by Robert Johnson, later Archdeacon of Leicester. Johnson provided each town with a school-room and a hospital; the latter gave lodging for the schoolmaster

⁴ For more on Butler and Arnold see Tozer, *Manliness*, 33-43, 206.

⁵ John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 117-118; John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), 85.

⁶ The Taunton Commission examined all schools between the public school nine and the mass of private and elementary schools. It led to the Endowed Schools Act of 1869 which in turn created the Endowed Schools Commission which had extensive powers over the administration of individual schools.

and the usher, and the “fifteen poor people” over whom the two teachers also served as warden and sub-warden.⁷ The two schools shared an endowment derived from rents and tithes totalling £266 – 13s – 4d.⁸ Johnson ordained that the schoolmaster, “an honest and discreet man, master of arts, and diligent in his place”, should teach freely all the “grammar scholars” born in the town.⁹ Some exhibitions were provided to permit able boys to proceed to the universities. In 1587 both schools were granted their charters of foundation, and both were governed by these statutes until new schemes were formulated in 1874 in the wake of the Endowed Schools Act.

The hospital at Uppingham ceased to provide residential care in the early eighteenth century and the hospitalers then received their alms in their own homes. The hospital building was taken over by the school to provide boarding quarters for boys from distant homes and a few shed-like studies were built across the quadrangle against the school-yard wall. After this period of relative prosperity, pupil numbers fell in the remainder of the century, largely through increased rivalry from the school in Oakham. In this period Oakham boys won most of the Johnson exhibitions to Cambridge University. By the turn of the century, however, Uppingham was again attracting boarding pupils and twenty new studies were built to accommodate the swelling numbers. By 1811 another decline had set in and the number of boarders dropped to thirty.

Henry Holden was appointed headmaster in 1845 and under his leadership the school steadily grew in numbers and in reputation. He increased the teaching staff to include four masters, plus an assistant teacher to help with writing and arithmetic. The school had sixty-three boys in 1850 and the visiting examiner noted in his report to the governors of 1848 that “the high character of the School is becoming more known every day and in distant parts of England”.¹⁰ Despite this praise, the school remained an undistinguished market-town grammar school; even its reputation in the county was overshadowed by that of its neighbour and

⁷ The usher was the assistant teacher. The term was still in use when Thring arrived at the school. Charles Bingham, *Our Founder* (Uppingham: Hawthorn, 1884), 41. Bingham was a boy at the school from 1865 to 1871. He won a scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge, took Holy Orders, and became Rector at Boroughbridge in Kent.

⁸ About £30,000 in 2018.

⁹ Bingham, *Founder*, 42.

¹⁰ Letter from William Sewell, October 6, 1848. In the Uppingham Archives (Hereafter UA). Sewell later served as Warden (or headmaster) of Radley College from 1853 to 1861.

rival in Oakham. When Holden was appointed headmaster of Durham School in 1853, taking eleven of the younger boys with him, Thring was left with twenty-five boarders and a few day boys. In the next twelve years he was to raise this figure to three-hundred.¹¹

IV

At the beginning of the nineteenth century scant attention was paid to physical activity as an ingredient of education. Although there was undoubtedly an increase in such activity in schools by the middle of the century, it is hard to ascribe the changes to the intended or conscious efforts of educationalists, other than the introduction of prescribed exercises in some elementary schools from the 1830s.¹²

Well before 1800 games had been played in the public schools. Thomas Gray wrote in 1748 in his *Distant Prospect of Eton College* of the chase of the “rolling Circle’s speed” and the urging of “the flying Ball”. Cricket, boating and fives were popular there in the 1760s and instructors were on hand to teach boxing, fencing and dancing; all sports were organised by the boys for their own recreation.¹³ Less formal but seemingly more popular pastimes included fighting, poaching and other forms of general lawlessness. In this same period Adam Smith travelled widely across continental Europe examining, among other things, the various educational systems. His experiences led him to plead in his *Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, for physical exercises to be included in a projected state-provided education; their introduction was necessary to alleviate the cramping effects of the classroom.¹⁴

Continental influences were felt again in the 1820s when the work of the German gymnast Johann Guts Muths was approved for use in the British armed forces. One of his disciples, Per Heinrich Clias, was appointed in 1822 to organise courses for the Army and the Royal Navy, and in 1825 an English translation of Clias’s work, *An Elementary Course of Gymnastic Exercises*, was published in London.¹⁵ Thomas Arnold was

¹¹ For more on Holden’s headmastership, see Bryan Matthews, *By God’s Grace: A History of Uppingham School* (Maidstone: Whitehall Press, 1984), 62-72.

¹² George Knaggs, “A Study of the Historical Development of Physical Education in English Schools to 1945.” (DEd diss., University of Houston, 1957), 188-194.

¹³ Alicia Percival, *Very Superior Men* (London: Charles Knight, 1973), 21.

¹⁴ Howard Barnard, *A History of English Education from 1760* (London: University of London Press, 1947/64), 45.

¹⁵ McIntosh, *Physical Education*, 80. See also Per Clias, *An Elementary Course of Gymnastic Exercises* (London: Sherwood, 1825), passim. Clias was Swiss.

another early enthusiast for German gymnastics. Between 1819 and 1828, before going to Rugby, he ran a small private school at Laleham in the Thames Valley. A “gallows” and a “pole” were erected in the grounds to foster gymnastic exercises for both teacher and pupils.¹⁶ In this same period Samuel Wilderspin, in his *On the importance of educating the infant children of the poor* (1823), advocated the provision of play areas in schools, together with equipment for games.¹⁷

Lord Byron talked his way in to the Harrow XI for the inaugural cricket match against Eton at Lord’s in 1805, although he was keener to indulge in the post-match drunken festivities than to make his mark in the game.¹⁸ Cricket, football and rowing were introduced at Westminster School in London from 1808 when the headmaster, William Carey, curtailed the boys’ freedom to roam and restricted them to the school’s grounds.¹⁹ Boys arranged all their own games at Shrewsbury during the long headmastership of Samuel Butler from 1798 to 1836; Butler saw no educational value in them.²⁰

The lawless recreations of the boys came under attack during the reforms of the public schools in the second quarter of the century. George Butler, headmaster of Harrow in Byron’s time, was probably quickest off the mark; by the time of his retirement in 1829 games had effectively been compulsory for many years. The boys controlled everything but the licence to impose compulsion on a school of over 200 came from Butler.²¹ One of the earliest actions of Benjamin Kennedy when he succeeded the other Butler at Shrewsbury was to provide a playing-field for cricket so that the boys might have “the means of innocent amusement and exercise in their leisure hours”, but he allowed the boys’ hunt to remain.²² Thomas Arnold thought otherwise on his appointment to Rugby in 1828, for he banned hunting and poaching, and disbanded the boys’ pack of hounds. The check on these pursuits led to an increase in other forms of recreation on the school site. Cricket had long been popular and football had an ancestry older than 1822 when William Webb Ellis “with a fine disregard

¹⁶ Arthur Stanley, *The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold* (London: Murray, 1844/52), 66.

¹⁷ Barnard, *English Education*, 60.

¹⁸ Christopher Tyerman, *A History of Harrow School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 159.

¹⁹ Timothy Chandler, “Emergent Athleticism: Games in Two English Public Schools,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 5, no. 3 (1988): 313.

²⁰ Chandler, “Emergent Athleticism,” 321.

²¹ Tyerman, *Harrow*, 192.

²² George Fisher, *Annals of Shrewsbury School* (London: Methuen, 1899), 189.