

Crunden, Colin, *A History of Anstey College of Physical Education 1897-1972*, (Anstey College of Physical Education, Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire, 1974). 64 pp., illustrated.

“My aim in writing a history of Anstey College of Physical education was twofold,” writes Colin Crunden in the foreword: “There was an obvious need to satisfy the particular interests of past, present and possibly future students . . . It was also hoped that some small contribution to the history of education might be made . . .” In the first instance, the book must be judged on how well it succeeds in achieving the writer’s stated aims. If it should do more than he set out to accomplish, all well and good, but one cannot ask for more.

It is impossible for a reader who has not been a student at Anstey to comment with any validity on the first of Mr. Crunden’s aims, but one suspects that ex-students might get frus-

trated by the writer's views, sociological background material and similar digressions from what would be their main focus. As far as the second aim is concerned, there is little that is new in the book, other than that which is relative only to Anstey College.

Mr. Crunden has padded his largely anecdotal material with some general statements which are often poorly expressed and sometimes grammatically incorrect. This reviewer found irritating and distracting sentences like: "Despite moving to Erdington the College was still fairly isolated and the range of social encounters which were possible would have been very limited," (p. 5) and "In addition to the emphasis upon remedial work an important part of the college life at Anstey were the occasions when the students gave displays . . ." (p. 14). Similarly the constant use and misuse of words like "whilst" and "thence" did not assist the reader to keep his attention on the subject matter.

The editor is also remiss in not ensuring that the general reader is given all the information necessary for understanding. In the third chapter, for instance, Mr. Crunden reprints the contents of a program for an Anstey College demonstration given on July 17th, and 18th, 1919. The second part of the performance by the students was a display of their work in Swedish Educational Gymnastics. All of the movements are given, but are given in abbreviated form, for example: "Yd. c. toe fall out st. to yd. a ½ kn. st. T. flex. form a downw. (boom)." (p. 32). While an Anstey ex-student, or a Swedish Educational Gymnast, might read that with perfect comprehension, most people and even most Physical Educators, one would suspect, would have considerable difficulty. It would seem that, at the least, a key should have been provided.

The foregoing may seem somewhat trivial, but they combine to militate quite strongly against the book's readability. The net result is to create a lack of "flow" in the narrative, which is unfortunate because the text is already rather choppy. Mr. Crunden is both the editor and the author of the work. He has assiduously collected reminiscences from Old Students, Anstey Staff members and others with a personal knowledge of Anstey College, and has strung them together under various headings and sub-headings. For example, Chapter 3 contains:

The Early Post-War Years 1918-1927

- (i) Medical Gymnastics
- (ii) Three Year Training
- (iii) Personal Education

(iv) Miss Anstey and Mrs. Bridgman-Retirement

all of which, including notes, is covered from page 28 to page 36. The overall result is that the text is disjointed and the con-

necting prose does nothing to mitigate the effect. He even inserts a collection of anecdotes in the second chapter because he is unable to work them into the text.

One cannot help but feel that there must be more of the history of Anstey College available than is presented in this book, and certainly, if the editor were serious about making a contribution to the history of education, there should have been much more background material offered. Comparisons between Anstey and other ladies' physical education colleges between the ladies' and the men's colleges, and between the colleges and the universities would have been particularly useful. In fact Mr. Crunden tells us little, of a general nature, that was not already available in a publication such as McIntosh's *Physical Education In England Since 1800*.

If nothing else, one would expect that a book dealing with almost legendary leaders in the field of physical education would bring those figures to life. However, apart from a few interesting side-lights, Miss Anstey, Mrs. Bridgman and Miss Squires remain aloof, unknown and unknowable. It is difficult to believe that a lady like Miss Anstey, who sunbathed in the nude with her students, was so uncommunicative that a much fuller portrait of her could not have been painted.

Despite its drawbacks, *A History of Anstey College of Physical Education 1897-1972* does help one to see the social forces at work in 20th century England. The work and beliefs of Miss Anstey, and others like her, helped to create a social climate such that women of the middle-classes were enabled to take up professional work and to aid in the war effort. The leadership of Miss Anstey and her pupils in the matters of dress and physical activity for ladies and in attitudes towards the body undoubtedly helped to speed up the changes from the Victorian standards which took place throughout the first half and particularly the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Some of the many quotations and excerpts are excellent and, despite the editor's reservations, are enhanced, by being anecdotal in nature. One of the rare glimpses we get of Miss Anstey in her early days is offered in a long quotation from a piece in the College Jubilee Magazine written by Ethel Adair Impey, who says, that Miss Anstey's*:

" . . . health and eager kindness encouraged a spirit of harmony around her . . . She believed God was goodness and goodness was God. She also believed profoundly in the existence of a spirit of Evil - or a Personal Devil as she called it.

Her thinking was assorted rather than profound, and led to her adoption of numerous dogmas on nature, conduct and ethics. Her pronouncement of these dogmas with almost headline bluntness often proved hopefully convincing to parents

and others, but with the medical profession of Halesowen they earned for her the nickname of “the Heretic”. Fifty years ago, of course, Miss Anstey’s unconventional garb, corsetless figure, be-sandled (sic) feet — the very venture of the College itself, were enough to antagonize any small *town* orthodoxy.”

(p. 7)

We also learn that Miss Anstey was a keen theosophist and a believer in “solar biology”, despite being a firm Christian.

The section on the development of dance in the College is one of the most interesting, but again one is frustrated by a lack of comparisons with what was going on in other institutions at the time. One section, which is devoted to the University of London Diploma does give some idea of the work in the other colleges. It is one of the better sections, despite sentences like: “It is also important to remember that the London Diploma was only one of the external examinations for which the students had to study, including those of the Chartered Society of Massage and Medical Gymnastics, which remained as an integral part of the College course. (p. 40)

One of the aspects of the book that is surprisingly good is the footnoting. Up to forty-eight references and notes accompany each chapter, and each chapter is short (from nine to thirteen pages). The notes give evidence of much more work and scholarship than is apparent in the text.

The text is illustrated with twenty-seven photographs, a reproduction of a 1901 Certificate from Anstey College and College Timetables from the years 1918-1952. The photographs tend to be dark and to lack definition, probably because of the poor quality of the originals. In many cases the captions for the photographs do not include the date on which they were taken, which detracts both from their usefulness and their interest.

The book is an attractive, 10¼ x 8¼" volume, with dust-cover and chapter-heading pages of a mustard colour with white lettering on brown illustrations. The book’s cover is brown, as are the type and photographs. The type, 10 pt. Perpetua, is clear and attractive, but rather small. The binding is not of the best quality, but is adequate for so slim a volume. All-in-all the designer of the book, Miss Maggie Atkinson, is to be congratulated on a very pleasing presentation.

Overall the book is not to be recommended for those readers who do not have a special interest in Anstey, or at least in Physical Education for Englishwomen in the 20th Century. Even for Anstey ex-students there is little to warrant the § 3 outlay other than the attractiveness of the book qua book.

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