

SPORT, HEALTH, AND THE BODY

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Blind Bodies: St. Dunstan's and Blind Sport, 1918-39

St. Dunstan's was, and remains, a home for blinded ex-servicemen in Britain, which was established in 1915 to deal with the influx of blinded men from the First World War. In addition to caring and treating for the ex-servicemen, St Dunstan's developed a program that was based around sport as part of the rehabilitation process. From the early years the patients of St. Dunstan's took part in a wide variety of sports such as rowing, walking, goal kicking (blind soccer), athletics and gymnastics, even developing their own institutional sports day. In addition to the competitive part of their rehabilitation, the ex-servicemen of St. Dunstan's were invited to and attended a range of sporting events as spectators including soccer matches, cricket games and race meetings. The history of St Dunstan's specifically, and of blind sport generally form the backdrop to this paper.

In its entirety, the paper will examine the position of the blind within the disabled and able-bodied world. It will argue that the blind were more acceptable to able-bodied society than other types of disabled, as they were seen as whole. They did not suffer from terrible scarring or amputation as so many other survivors from the First World War, and as such achieved a high level of social acceptability and integration. As a result of this social positioning, the blind were placed at the top of the disabled hierarchy and were able to obtain a preferential position within society. The paper will show how the blind of St. Dunstan's had access to more funding than other disabled groups, which allowed them to develop their sporting regime. It will also show how their social acceptability gave them access to the elite and general able-bodied sporting world in a way that was denied to other disabled groups, The paper will argue that sport played a central role in the rehabilitation of the disabled body, as it allows for the reclaiming of a sense of masculinity that wounds and injuries denied them. The conclusions that are offered will demonstrate that the disabled body within sport, especially in the historical context, is one that needs further attention, and that in researching the disabled there

must be a careful assessment of the different types of disabled body.