

AQUATIC AND WINTER SPORTS

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The Resurrection of George Mallory

In the spring of 1999, an international climbing party set off for Mount Everest in the hopes of finding clues to the disappearance of George Mallory, the legendary British climber who had disappeared with Andrew Irvine near the summit of Everest on June 8, 1924. Astonishingly, the search party accomplished their almost impossible goal. There on the unusually bare slope, frozen in self-arrest below the North East Ridge of Everest, lay the remarkably well-preserved body of George Mallory. News of Mallory's discovery was widely reported, first on the expedition's online site and then on the front pages of newspapers around the world. What was the meaning of this media attention? Indeed, what is the meaning accorded to Mallory as a sign, 75 years after his disappearance?

Part of a larger project that explores the cultural narratives produced around Mount Everest, this paper explores the cultural meaning of George Mallory at the times of his most eminent meanings – in 1924 when he disappeared on his way to the summit, and in 1999 when his body was discovered. Drawing on contemporary newspaper accounts, expedition accounts, biographies and autobiographies, and fictional accounts (such as James Hilton's Lost Horizon, 1933) and using a critical narrative analysis, this paper attempts to piece together some of those cultural meanings: what did Mallory mean to those of his generation; and perhaps more intriguing, what does the discovery of Mallory's body mean to a public 75 years removed from his death. In more theoretical terms, what is Mallory made to mean and by whom; and whose interests are the narratives constructed around George Mallory intended to serve?

The dominant narratives constructed around George Mallory, in both 1924 and 1999, are narratives of redemption. To trace this argument, I locate Mallory not only within the context of his own times and of our own, but also within the context of the dominant, intertwining narratives of mountaineering, adventure, exploration and heroism as those discourses have circulated

throughout the twentieth century. More specifically, Mallory must be located in juxtaposition to Hillary and Tenzing's glorious success in 1953 and Fisher's and Hall's disastrous failure in 1996.

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Dangerous Waters: Victorian Decorum and London Bathers

On June 22, 1867, nineteen-year-old George Johnston of London drowned in the North Branch of the Thames River. The circumstances leading to his demise, according to the London Free Press, resulted from efforts to evade the local police who, Johnston had been informed, would take his clothes if they were found on the city side of the river. While attempting to walk across the river, as he was not able to swim, Johnston was swept away in the current and drowned. The details of this tragic accident provide insight into two critical issues that surrounded the recreational activity of swimming, and the more practical act of bathing in Victorian London Ontario – public morality, and the physical safety of the individual.

Concern over what constituted appropriate swimming and bathing practices in late Victorian London, Ontario arose primarily over questions of public morality. The majority of that attention paid to swimmers and bathers focussed upon the potential for immoral behavior, yet the often overshadowed issue of safety did play an important role in determining where, when, and how the men, women, and children of London could participate in this leisure activity. In Victorian London, the code of conduct instituted by middle-class political leaders sought to ensure social order and decency for the greater good of the society. This governance took the form of municipal legislation that regulated bathing and swimming. As a result of this ideologically based decision to control and constrain swimmers and bathers, physical safety and the threat of drowning did not receive serious consideration when measured against middle-class reformers' need to maintain social propriety. It was not until the early twentieth century, with the appearance of the playground movement and the formation of a local playground department, that the importance of protecting both the physical and moral safety of Londoners, particularly the children, became a legitimate concern.