

Kathleen E. McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914*. Routledge, London, 1988. Bibliog., illus., index. pp.310. \$105.

Sport and the Physical emancipation of English Women is a scholarly, thorough, precise and intelligent analysis of the link between women's involvement in sport (at a time when British sports were very popular) and the way in which this interacted with the emancipation of women. McCrone herself rightly claims this analysis 'can be situated within the history of women's education, women's rights, sport, leisure and recreation' (Preface). She achieves this largely by descriptive material and themes, leaving the majority of the analysis to chapter conclusions and the final chapter itself. For this reason the earlier chapters tend to be light on analysis and somewhat dull possibly because the source material itself is limited. Overall, however, McCrone's method of approach has produced an objective and positive result. Her analysis is not used as a tool to push 'the Women's Cause'. It is also to her credit that McCrone does not view her topic in an emotive way and, when required, clearly differentiates between the society of the present and the position of women in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain. This was obviously a difficult task given that while circumstances may have changed many of the traditional social

mores and prejudices discussed in the book are still present today.

McCrone begins with a brief history of British women's involvement in sport and introduces one of the book's major themes, the need to relate the fields of sport and women's history. 'The Lady Blue: Sport and Exercise at Oxbridge Women's Colleges' deals with the subject of Victorian women's entry into sport as part of the campaign for female higher education. As with all the chapters in this study, she concludes with a succinct and credible overview of the limited involvement of women in sport and education.

Chapter Three then gives an account of 'Sport, Exercise and the Public School Phenomenon'. It analyses the role of female public school sport as part of a broad movement for social reform and as an extension of women's limited entry into universities and physical activity.

'The Rise of the Physical Training Mistress', Chapter Four, accounts for the academic development of physical education for women and the way in which the gymnastics and games mistress welded sport into the wider system of physical education. It was in this realm that physical training schools for girls were far in advance of their male counterparts. Gymnastics and games mistresses, such as Martina Bergman-Osterberg and Margaret Stansfield, provide excellent examples of the types of women who influenced female sport during this period. The detail and analysis of their individual personalities and motivations provide an effective backdrop to the various forces that combined to heighten 'the public's consciousness of the dignity and potential of the female sex' (p.122).

McCrone next analyses the involvement of women in various team sports, including hockey, lacrosse and cricket. In this chapter she describes the motivations, nature and degree to which adult women became involved in team sports. McCrone claims that while these women ventured beyond traditional conventions, the nature of the games themselves were still determined by traditional male social systems. The involvement of women in team sports and their limited acceptance by the general

public were more the result of their compromises with the social system than an expression of feminism (p.149).

Chapter Six, 'Individual Sports: Lawn Tennis, Golf and Cycling', evaluates the less controversial involvement of women in sports which were closer to the acceptable social and cultural images of womanhood than team games (p.184). McCrone explains that women's involvement in all sports, however, was still regarded as frivolous diversion compared to men's sports.

'The Medical and Scientific Debate on Women's Sport' deals specifically with the prejudices and mainly male debate which surrounded the issue of women and sport. These arguments, McCrone reveals, produced a situation where it was thought reasonable that while games and exercise were considered beneficial to women in small amounts, women's sporting opportunities should be restricted on the grounds of social traditions and women's 'physical condition and biological purpose'.

The next chapter analyses 'Women's Sport and Dress Reform'. Fashion is looked at as a product and expression of the prevailing social-cultural systems. McCrone discusses the ways in which the limited changes in sporting dress reflected and contributed to the changing attitudes of society, and of women themselves, towards women's abilities and role in society. The limited acceptance and progress that women had made in the realm of sport is then analysed in Chapter Eight in terms of 'The Literature of Women's Sport'.

The conclusion is perhaps the most significant chapter. It relates the past to the present and successfully links this immensely complicated 'story of ups and downs, of parallel advances and reversals' (Preface). McCrone also provides an extensive select bibliography of primary and secondary source materials including periodicals, newspapers, books, booklets, articles, papers, theses and dissertations. A brief index is also included.

Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women should be compulsory reading in all sports history courses. To fully appreciate and understand McCrone's conclusion that 'In its own way sport was just as significant to the ultimate goals of

feminism' as political emancipation, education and striving for economic independence, this book must be read in its entirety (p.289). McCrone's contribution to the history of sport, women and education should be viewed in terms of the book's likely impact. The achievement is not only to have produced a scholarly work but a study which will certainly act as a catalyst to further research.

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