

# **Sport and the British Upper Classes c.1500–2000: A Historiographic Overview**

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This article explores the main continuities and changes in upper-class sport, some foci of current research and gaps in current knowledge. It provides an overview of work carried out on individual sports such as hunting and shooting, and examines the upper-class contribution to sports patronage and rule codification in Britain, as well as the class's involvement in sport on a global scale. Upper-class sport has had a substantial impact on the rural landscape and natural environment, as well as on country-house architecture. A number of deficiencies and opportunities are identified, such as an analysis of the monarchy's sporting interests and its effects, the complex interplay between amateurism and upper-class values and the place of sport in upper-class women's life. The article concludes with a brief review of available sources.

For both mainstream and sports historians, upper-class attitudes to British sport and their involvement in it have been of minor interest, but the limited historiography provides a tentative periodization of the main trajectories of change, albeit viewed through the shifting perceptions and biases of writers lower down the class system. This essay sets out to identify some of the main continuities and changes, some foci of current work and some current gaps in knowledge, though given the exigencies of space the available literature can only very selectively be touched on here.

Upper-class sport during the Tudor period was best shown in the world of the royal court and household. Various forms of sport were part of the leisure lifestyle of their entourages, but varied with the character and inclination of individual kings. Deer hunting and falconry in the Middle Ages were exclusive sports, enshrined in legislation and directives. Noble and other visitors saw the lifestyle and copied it. Enjoyment of sports was thus, as Peter Bailey memorably put it, both 'a display of ruling class power and a model for lesser aspirants' by 'the aboriginal leisure class'. [1] Hunting in particular was a key status marker. 'He cannot be a gentleman, which loveth not hunting and hawking', argued one Elizabethan authority. [2] Sport established and maintained personal and national prestige. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature on country 'contentments' and 'recreations' generally stressed horses, hunting, hawking, fowling, fishing and cockfighting. Archery, bowls and tennis were sometimes also mentioned.

From at least the seventeenth century a significant proportion of the aristocracy and gentry increasingly revelled in country sports. An act of 1671 confined all hunting to those with a landed-property qualification. Falconry was in decline but upper-class enjoyment of the amenities of

their country estates, horseracing, hunting, grouse shooting, deer stalking, horse breeding and fishing and other gentlemanly sports had become central to the invention of British 'high culture'. [3] In the eighteenth century, as game became more scarce, fox hunting replaced hunting for deer. Marginal moors were beginning to be exploited for grouse shooting. On the Devonshire estates records start in the 1750s. [4] By the 1780s upper-class sports were associated with traditional rural values, patriotism and national strength. Sporting spirit was supposedly synonymous with national spirit, helping to foster the moral, economic and physical strength of the landed classes upon whom British strength depended. [5] The interest and involvement of the titled, the landed and elite gave a material impulse to many sports during this period. Their very presence helped to give organized sport a higher profile and make it more and more a subject of comment. [6]

In the early nineteenth century landowners were still leading figures in supporting urban plebeian pleasures in their areas of influence, though by the 1830s there was a withdrawal of patronage, partly due to political changes and partly through evangelical disapproval. [7] David Spring suggested, though not without some challenge, that high living and gambling characterized many of the old landed families at this time. [8] A significant proportion of estate staff was employed to manage and care for fauna, though the upper-class relationship with animals was always ambivalent. On the one hand, it was always argued that field sports were to help the preservation of game. On the other, animals and birds were there to hunt at the landowner's pleasure, even if this was surrounded by the rhetoric of effortless skill and respect for game and habitat. Hunting horses, thoroughbreds, dogs, cocks, falcons and other live creatures were also bred to assist in that process. A number of studies have implied that the great emphasis on strong blood lines and breeding of such animals, and the huge amount of material accumulated in upper-class archives on studs and pedigrees, was symbolic, justifying their wealth by celebrating a belief in the hereditary principle and their own superior breeding. [9]

The Game Reform Act of 1831 introduced game licences. Social interaction with certain sections of the middle classes increased, and some upper-class participant sports such as cricket, hare coursing, horse racing and riding to hounds drew upon significant middle-class support through the Victorian period, while nouveau riche plutocrats increasingly joined in the events of the London 'season' and the countryside's hunting, grouse shooting and deer stalking. [10] The railway opened new opportunities for sporting travel. Gentlemanly families only spent May, June and July in London. The London 'season' ended at the beginning of August, when attendance would taper off at upper-class sporting clubs such as Hurlingham, and southern county cricket and the Marylebone Cricket Club sides would find less availability of wealthy amateurs. August saw grouse shooting from the twelfth on the moors, or visits to the seaside. From autumn onwards those wintering on estates would enjoy shooting and hunting. Others would find temporary accommodation in the neighbourhood of a fashionable hunt, and sporting papers and local

newspapers would list the aristocratic visitors staying at prestigious hunting centres such as Melton Mowbray. At Christmas, there might be special seasonal shoots across estates. Sporting sociability was always important, and the likeminded tended to cluster together.

The sports columns of the Times documented the increased acceptability of particular sports to its select readership as sports diversified: seven sports in 1847, twenty-seven by 1901. Upper-class willingness to share its sports with its social inferiors became dependent on the nature of the sport and the extent of social contact. So, for example, playing cricket with professionals was still socially acceptable, playing soccer far less as the power of the Home Counties old-boy clubs waned from the 1870s. Some sections of the upper classes began to adopt more respectable (and sometimes evangelical) middle-class values. [11] Upper-class field sports still flourished in the late nineteenth century, and attracted enthusiastic and prosperous industrialists and merchants in substantial numbers, as the process of gentrification saw their families acquire land and ape aristocratic fashions such as fox hunting and grouse shooting. [12] The lavish house-parties in the later nineteenth centuries used sports as a part of the social programme and, according to David Cannadine, the upper classes shifted, from the 1880s to 1939, 'from rootedness to restlessness, and from service to sport'. The older polite, dutiful sociability of the aristocracy faded as they moved to the more open-ended indulgence of pleasure. [13] In part this was thanks to automobiles, which now allowed country houses to be exploited for weekend or sporadic year-round use.

The major cultural and socio-economic works on inter-war leisure have all argued that it was still clearly differentiated on class lines. [14] Nevertheless, between 1918 and 1939 many among the upper classes were patrons of or played golf, cricket and tennis, though few watched soccer, and even fewer played it. Cricket's summer popularity in public-school life increasingly gave it a special place, the 'focus of upper-class nostalgia for a past golden age . . . where everyone knew they had a place and kept in it'. [15] Post-war, the thinness of coverage means upper-class sporting trajectories cannot be tracked in any clear way, and they await their historian.

Any such brief survey, however, tends to disguise the complex picture of diverse upper-class sporting interests. It is important to stress that the upper classes were always divided among themselves, competing for wealth and status. So, for example, 'emulation and rivalry were powerful motives in country house building', according to Wilson and Mackley. [16] Religious and ethnic differences sometimes surfaced in such building. From c.1850 to the 1920s, leading wealthy Jewish families such as the Rothschilds and Sassoons tried to emulate the aristocracy and achieve status by building impressive country houses, but struggled against the anti-Semitism of the old order, some of whom dismissed their homes as being tasteless, vulgar, ostentatious and 'un-English'. [17] More generally, fox hunting was full of interpersonal rivalries and competition

between different hunts, and by the late nineteenth century top shots were ranked in upper-class society. And the upper classes were divided as much as united even by their choice of sporting activities. Some were traditionalists, typified by the Tory squire with his more 'traditional' hunting, racing, shooting and fishing interests. But it is important to remember that there were always some who spent their money on 'modernity' and new technology, whether it was yachting, air races or motor racing.

### **Studies of individual sports**

Studies of particular sports are still rare, and largely adopt a narrow chronological framework. Historians' attention has been more focused on the popular 'mass-leisure' sports, such as football, cricket, rugby, racing or even, increasingly, golf, than on the more private, low-profile country sports most patronized by the upper classes. These have been far less studied, and researchers will find that even the available encyclopaedias of sport vary significantly in the quality of coverage and detail they provide. [18] Many sports enjoyed by the upper classes were self-limited by cost, and though exclusivity was rarely total the less socially adroit nouveaux riches found it difficult to penetrate exclusivity-preserving club election procedures or gain invitations to country houses. Country or field sports variously involving hunting with dogs for foxes, deer, otters and hares; shooting of various types, including deer stalking, covert shooting, rough shooting and wildfowling; and fishing, especially game fishing for salmon and trout - these dominated upper-class life, but few have been studied in detail. [19] Such leisure generated significant rural employment, although such work has yet to be probed in any detail. By contrast, the changing politics of field sports, and the rise of agitation against what are now seen by many as 'cruel sports' and their legislative extinction, are only now beginning to be explored.

Hunting has attracted the most significant scholarly attention, and Raymond Carr, Emma Griffin, David Itzkowitz and Roger Longrigg have all provided substantial treatments and explored the various debates surrounding it. [20] As Emma Griffin has pointed out, hunting was every bit as much about land, power and social mores as it was about morality. [21] It was also about sociability, and hunt balls allowed social mixing which integrated the aspirant middle classes and tenant farmers into hunting society. Hunting, like amateur sports, supposedly demonstrated that taking part was more important than winning. Yet hunting required substantial areas of land to ride over, and ownership, and the ability to pay the expenses of hunting, reaffirmed upper-class status in rural communities, just as being an amateur in the later nineteenth century often affirmed wealth and status. Kings and nobles jealously guarded their hunting preserves. As deer and boar were hunted out, fox hunting, previously held in low esteem, became the sport with most national appeal in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The various hunts parcelled out huge swathes of land between them into 'countries', and

most hunts were founded by the upper classes. The Old Raby Hunt, for example, was started by the third Earl of Darlington, who hunted the Raby Hounds for about fifty years, while paying considerable sums to his tenants for the preservation of foxes on his estates. Localized hunts offered various levels of exclusivity, and hunting adapted to the changing environment, offering its devotees the pleasures of usually mounted cross-country chase, sustained by breeding or importing foxes. Hunting increasingly became an artificial sport, preserving ever fewer 'wild' animals in order to hunt them across ever more cultivated and tamed landscapes. Riding out was symbolic for the upper classes. It could be read and defended as developing 'proper' upper-class attitudes, with their devil-may-care approach, recklessness, dash, courage, 'bottom', exhilaration, force of will and leadership. Hunting supposedly provided an ideal training context for cavalymen, whose regiments were most highly regarded in terms of an upper-class military career. It gave an eye for ground, helped young men overcome fear, and developed the will that would later 'prove' they were 'natural' leaders of men. It also involved the expensive, ostentatious display expected of the upper classes. Hunting was costly. According to one authoritative source, in 1899 a master of fox hounds would need £1,000-£2,000 to start his hunting stable. There were further costs: keeping, feeding or replacing hounds, feed for horses, pay for huntsman, whippers-in, kennel boys and other staff and compensation to farmers could reach £2,000 or more each year. By the inter-war years tacit dress codes, which stipulated expensive clothes for members (scarlet coats and top hats), and subscribers (black coats and top hats) while allowing ordinary check coats to the rest, carefully preserved status differentials. Hare coursing, at its peak in the nineteenth century, when served by between 150 and 200 clubs, was dominated by the more select Altcar, Newmarket, South of England and Swaffham clubs. Jonathan Magee's work and a recent study of nineteenth-century coursing by Ian Roberts stand out as rare incursions into the topic. [22]

Upper-class involvement in horse racing has been a focus of attention for some time, attracting a substantial bibliography. [23] By contrast, shooting has been less studied, though Scottish historians have explored deer hunting in some detail across the Victorian, Edwardian and inter-war decades. [24] In Scotland, upper-class representational practices, embodiment rituals and political strategies served to reinforce their right to the sporting landscape. Game birds have received limited attention, though Alastair Durie's work on grouse shooting and Bujak's study of landed society shooting in late Victorian Suffolk are salutary reminders of its potentialities. [25] Grouse shooting was always a major expense, limiting it to the well-off. In 1899 average rent for a grouse moor was £500 per annum and another £200 for keepers; pheasants cost 2s 6d a head to rear. An English grouse moor in Yorkshire providing about 4,000 grouse would cost £1,000-£1,200 a year to rent, while forty beaters each cost 4s a day. [26]

Other sports have been relatively neglected. For example, general academic studies of fishing, such as John Lowerson's work, have largely

ignored the upper-class world. [27] Yachting, another sport with significant upper-class participation, often centred round Cowes week, by the later nineteenth century a key part of the 'season', has also been neglected. Polo, another major upper-class sport, has been better studied in its imperial context than in Britain. [28]

## **Sports patronage**

Upper-class sportsmen have rarely been top performers, with a few honourable exceptions, perhaps because the sustained sacrifice and effort needed may have been too great. Few could compete with professionals. But the upper classes have always used cultural patronage to demonstrate status, and so they provided a significant proportion of the financial sponsorship, support and patronage that sustained broader British sporting life. [29] The upper classes financed and bore most of the cost of many field sports. To be a master of foxhounds required substantial assets, especially when the more prestigious hunts were considered. Outside of the field sports, only a minority of the male upper classes ever took a leading participant or administrative role. Their connection with other sports in their political areas of influence was often more ornamental. They lent symbolic support to clubs and individuals, and in turn this helped to consolidate and reinforce their social primacy, and encouraged deference and local support. In the eighteenth century the substantial financial support, often underpinned by an interest in betting, given by aristocrats and gentry to boxing, horse racing, cockfighting and cricket was a key factor in their wider growth in popularity. In cricket, for example, the key period was from the early 1740s, when Charles Lennox, the second Duke of Richmond, sponsored the village team of Slindon, Sussex, and used cricket to court popularity with county voters. Noble involvement transformed cricket from an informal, rural pastime into an organized, professional sport. The MCC, with aristocratic and gentry members, was founded in 1788. [30] In the case of boxing, one of the first bare-knuckle events recorded was for the entertainment of the Duke of Albemarle, and there was significant royal backing for boxers such as Figg (1695-1734) or Broughton (1704-1789). The Pugilistic Club, formed in 1814 by aristocratic patrons, helped control the sport until problems around mid-century forced the introduction of the Queensberry rules, and the later introduction of Lonsdale belts. In hare coursing the Waterloo Cup was initiated in 1836 as a small, local event, with only eight dogs entered, but when the Earl of Sefton assumed his title in 1838 and lent it support it was immediately expanded to thirty-two entries. Prize money rose rapidly, and it soon became the major British coursing competition. In horse racing, the names of cups, medals, belts and other prizes offered to participants at leading events often symbolized or commemorated upper-class wealth, status and power or office-holding. Both the St Leger and the Derby horse races were named after wealthy aristocrats.

Patronage was found at a local level even more often than at a national

one, though it is often difficult to decide whether the upper classes actually gave money or just their names to an event. John Hargreaves has suggested that upper-class patronage of sport died out with industrialization. This is to over-generalize a complex phenomenon. Certainly this was true of some individuals, especially as a response to loss of urban votes following the 1832 Reform Act, but Lorna Jackson's detailed analysis of patronage in nineteenth century Argyllshire, for example, is highly suggestive in its illustrations of the substantial extent to which the 'county gentry' were still expected to support local sports activity towards the end of the century. [31] Many further examples can be found. The traditional Alnwick football game, long enshrined in custom, was supported by the Duke of Northumberland through the century despite opposition from some townspeople. [32] The Earl of Eglinton supported the St Leger and Doncaster race meeting in 1847 when it was in a bad way, with a contribution of £200, despite opposition to racing and gambling by the nonconformists in Doncaster. Sometimes patronage of sports facilities had a practical benefit to landowners. When the Earl of Scarborough provided a cricket ground at Scarborough at a cost of £1000, or the Dukes of Devonshire provided Eastbourne with sports facilities, this made selling their building land a little easier. [33]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century clubs still tried to gain income and so survive by trying to induce rich patrons to become honorary presidents, vice presidents or subscribers. After the First World War the Professional Golfers' Association was in a bad way financially until 1912 British Open champion Edward Ray induced the Earl of Wilton to provide a subscription of £500. Upper-class support gave status to clubs and this in turn attracted more members. Sutton Harriers and Athletic Club, founded in 1899 in St Helens, initially gained substantial support from the local landowner, Michael Hughes of Sherdley Hall, who became president of the club, and whose £5 subscription was always the largest item in the accounts even after he resigned the presidency in 1907. [34]

## **Rule making**

How far the upper classes made a more substantial impact on British sport by exercising their potential power to codify rules is debatable, and remains to be teased out in more detail. Many of their country sports lacked formal rules, though hunting, shooting and fishing operated around tacit sets of conventions and rituals that outsiders had to painstakingly assimilate. [35] The limited written rules for local hunts, for example, were often only concerned with subscriptions. Rules were often necessary for gambling reasons, such as in horse racing or hare coursing, and during the eighteenth century the initial transformation of traditional popular games into sports, a process that Elias described as 'sportization', involving the formalizing of structures and the organization of competitions according to written, universal rules and according to a specific calendar, certainly stemmed in part from the upper classes. [36] An early example was Thomas, Duke of Norfolk, who set the early

coursing rules in the 1500s. But, as Adrian Harvey has recently reminded us, many early-nineteenth-century commercialized sports had developed sophisticated but often local and regional rules and codes that were not put there by the upper classes. [37]

Where the upper classes had a major impact on sporting rules was through their membership of the more exclusive clubs, whose rulemaking, often confined initially to that club, was often emulated by others. Some aristocratic members of ruling bodies lent their names to rules, though while their patronage conferred status and attracted support in many cases, as in racing, for example, middle-class administrators appear to have often formulated and drafted the rules themselves. [38] In 1867 Lord Queensberry lent his name to the new rules of boxing, but John Chambers largely drafted them.

The upper classes were sociable, found together at assizes time, at major sporting events and in London, at social clubs such as White's, Boodles or the Turf Club or political clubs such as the Carlton or the Reform. They were members of the most elite high-status voluntary sports clubs too. This sometimes helped such clubs impose their rules on a wider basis and establish tournament or event calendars, though many lost their national power in the later twentieth century as sports organization became more professional. The Jockey Club, almost entirely composed of upper-class landowners, enjoyed general dominance over flat racing from the 1870s, though their power took time to spread from elite courses such as Goodwood, Ascot and Newmarket to the provinces. [39] In cricket the Marylebone Cricket Club, first formed by a group of noblemen including the Earl of Winchelsea and Lord Charles Lennox, was increasingly able to maintain, revise and amend the rules of cricket during the nineteenth century. The actual proportion of titled members slowly grew less as membership increased, but 327 members were still titled in 1886, and between 1825 and 1939, 86 per cent of MCC presidents possessed a title. Such membership illustrated the club's status, tradition and power over English cricket, which lasted until 1969. The Royal and Ancient at St Andrews is still a ruling authority in golf. The Hurlingham polo club became a key power owing largely to the initiative of one of the club's first trustees, Lord De L'Isle and Dudley, and its manager, Captain the Hon. J.D. (later Lord) Monson. It became, and remained until the Second World War, the headquarters of polo for the British Empire, the scene of major competitions, especially the famous Westchester Cup matches between England and the United States.

## **Landscape**

Upper-class sport demanded large spaces. Resource-hungry, it placed heavy demands on the environment. A recent study showed that almost a quarter of Scotland is still used mainly as playground for rich absentee landlords to invite their friends to enjoy hunting, shooting and fishing. [40] Upper-class tenurial hegemony, aesthetic preferences, economic



interests and leisure pursuits played a major role in shaping the British countryside, while Robert Hewison has noted the power of the country house and estate to preserve values such as hierarchy, individualism, privilege tempered by social duty, deference and respect for social order, and to reinforce such values in the present. [41] Upper-class sports helped to shape rural appearance and ecology. Foxes were imported or encouraged to breed. Birds were deliberately introduced. Poor soil continued to be cultivated only because pheasants preferred cultivated land. Grouse shooting, for example, was initially shaped by a variety of factors: social factors relating to perceptions of what constituted acceptable upper-class recreations; firearms technology; logistical issues of access to the grouse moors; and ecological factors concerning the grouse habitat. These were then worked out on the landscape through the management of the heather landscape, and even by the construction of gun butts in relation to topography, wind direction and favoured bird flight-paths. [42] Despite the substantial literature on parks and gardens, surprisingly little has been published on recreational rural sporting landscapes, even though the upper classes were a territorial as well as a governing and social elite, and their affection for sport further impacted on architecture and rural employment.

The relationship between sporting estates, hunting and recreational land use should be set in the context of a growing debate about the ownership and use of land. The estates could be, and often were, socially contested space, preyed upon by poachers, suffering complaints from tenant farmers when hunts damaged their crops or frightened their stock and, by the inter-war years, a focus for the nascent outdoor movements, as in the case of the famous Kinder Scout trespass. Land use was (and is) a particularly strong issue in Scotland, where the ways in which the Highlands, for example, were shaped into grouse moors and deer forests during the nineteenth century, often to the detriment of local crofter tenants, have been explored in some detail. In 1883 more than 16 per cent of the crofting counties were given over to deer forests and by 1911 this had risen to 34 per cent. [43]

The English landscape has received less research attention than the Scottish. Medieval royal forests put their stamp on the whole country, while Elizabethan maps showed more than 800 private deer parks all over Britain. Even after deer were hunted almost to extinction, the years from 1780 to 1820 saw an upsurge in the building of great mansions such as Chatsworth, Belvoir, Lowther or Lambton Castle, often surrounded by great landed estates, which were exploited for field sports. These estates left a major impression on the modern rural landscape, and helped shape modern images of and attitudes to the countryside, as the support for the National Trust exemplifies. Where aristocrats became cash-strapped, estates provided a source of potential revenue, for rent or sale. The Duke of Gordon was advertising the hunting and fishing opportunities of his estates in the Times in the early 1800s, and by the late nineteenth century shooting and fishing rights were regularly available for rent, with salmon and trout streams particularly prized, with fishing for both

becoming appropriated as elitist sports. [44] Newly wealthy businessmen were always keen to buy sporting estates to aid their social mobility.

By 1914, thanks to the demand for field sports, much of the English landscape had become what Charles Masterman, in his influential 1909 book *The condition of England*, called 'landlord's country', with open woods, grass fields and wide hedges, created for shooting and hunting interests. Even so, the impact of landlordism must have varied depending on region and location. As late as the 1870s, in England, for example, in Northumberland, Nottingham, Rutland, Wiltshire and Dorset over 30 per cent of the county belonged to landed estates.

### **Architecture of stately homes**

Changes over time in the architecture and facilities of country houses and stately homes in part reflected changing sporting interests. [45] Bowling greens were a feature of the seventeenth century, while the huge stable blocks and kennels attached to many great houses reflected hunting hobbies as well as transport needs. Sometimes private trainers trained horses on the estates. Sometimes, most famously at Sledmere in East Yorkshire, land was utilized for a stud farm. [46] Enthusiastic sportsmen spent hugely on sporting architecture and stable buildings. The third Earl of Darlington paid leading architect John Carr of York to build the stable block at Raby Castle in the 1820s, and had running fox emblems incorporated on the fireplaces inserted by Joseph Browne in the library about the same time. From the eighteenth century onwards, 'small' hunting, shooting or fishing lodges were being built on estates. These could have anything up to twenty beds, and stables for fifteen to twenty horses. The Bedford family built Endsleigh, for example, in Devon, c.1800. It was opened just once a year, when they arrived with their servants, silver, children and animals. By this time architects were producing books of plans for rural residences that featured designs for such lodges. Papworth's 1818 'fishing lodge', for example, was 'planned for the convenience of small parties engaged in the amusement of angling, when accommodation cannot be obtained in its neighbourhood'. When it was not being used it was suggested that an estate servant sleep in the kitchen, and his wife would 'keep it ready at all times for the purposed occupancy'. [47] Many of these lodges are today converted into small hotels.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century fashion for archery among the aristocrats and landed gentry recently documented by Johnes left little long-term impact on the land. [48] But the fashion for country-house cricket from the mid-nineteenth century left its mark, for example, at Arundel, Raby and Alnwick castles, and pavilions began to replace the earlier tents. On larger estates, as well as gentry 'country house' team games, the cricket field was also used for competition between different estate teams. In the eighteenth century guns were usually kept in gun cupboards in studies and cleaned in the pantry, but gunrooms for

cleaning and storing guns, and game larders to hang birds, became indispensable to country houses of any pretensions from c.1850 with the increased popularity of shooting parties. Butts and lunch huts began making their appearance on the moors.

Billiard rooms began to appear in country houses in small numbers in the late eighteenth century. [49] Of houses built between 1835 and 1870, about two-thirds were designed with a billiard room, sometimes paired with smoking rooms, and by the 1860s these were a common feature of more masculine suites in country houses. This might suggest that billiards was a male game, but a range of evidence suggests that in many houses mixed billiards was quite usual. [50] By the late nineteenth century, when the Prince of Wales played, furnished billiards rooms were a standard feature, and the segregated male suite was unfashionable. In many houses, souvenirs of the eighteenth-century Grand Tour found themselves joined by the new products of taxidermy, the big game and other sporting trophies.

Young women increasingly played billiards, while about the same time most country houses were incorporating tennis courts that allowed sociable mixed doubles. Hockey or football pitches were less common, though when Lord David Burghley was staying at Raby Castle he put hurdles on its hockey pitch to train for the Olympics. [51]

## **Global impact**

Upper-class influence spread wider still, with a substantial impact on elites in both Europe and the Empire, though it can only selectively be touched on here. Upper-class Englishmen travelled across the globe as administrators and as sportsmen. Certainly the British upper-class sporting lifestyle was copied by sections of the European aristocracy, and much European racing took English racing as its model. [52] The Hon F. Curzon gave the Curzon Cup for the Cresta (toboggan) Run in 1910. British upper-class sportsmen took their sports overseas from an early date, introducing fox hunting into America, where Thomas, Sixth Lord Fairfax, organized the first large hunt in 1747. The various imperial viceroys and governor-generals encouraged dominion sport. In Canada the Ottawa governor generals were key patrons. In 1893 Lord Derby donated the Stanley Cup to encourage ice hockey and the National Hockey League. Lord Minto encouraged skating and propagated it forcefully. He set up the Minto Skating Club in 1903. In Australia cricket's famous Sheffield Shield competition began after the third Lord Sheffield gave 150 guineas to advance cricket in 1892. In South Africa the Currie Cup was given by Sir Donald Currie in 1889 to stimulate inter-provincial cricket. In New Zealand Lord Bledisloe gave the Bledisloe Cup in 1931 to stimulate rugby union contests between Australia and New Zealand.

Upper-class hunters travelled, hunted and shot from Iceland, Norway and Canada in the north to Africa and Asia. In India the titled could enjoy

sports from pig-sticking to tiger hunting, while in east Africa, Nairobi became a centre for game safaris. Imperial upper-class sportsmen made hunting big game part of the imperial project, in the process, as John Mackenzie observed, killing swathes of game across Africa, all but exterminating whole species. [53] J.A. Mangan has pointed out the importance of hunting in military officer circles. [54] Voices were rarely raised in protest. Although the upper-class Shikar Club, founded in 1907, urged restraint in the killing of game in Britain and abroad, it had little impact. [55]

### **Other deficiencies and opportunities**

As we can see, there are still substantial deficiencies in upper-class sporting historiography, even at the most basic chronological level, where there are still major and almost unexplored gaps. Although there is some useful work on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, upper-class sporting life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has received only limited attention. Denis Brailsford's *Sport from Elizabeth to Anne*, published in 1969, failed to stimulate the subsequent research that might have been expected.

There has been surprisingly little detailed analysis of the monarchy's sporting interests beyond Hoyle's recent work on their field sports, even though they were key patrons and exponents, and it can be argued that their participation in sports, at least in the early modern period and possibly beyond, helped to prove their fitness to lead. By the later nineteenth century they enjoyed deer stalking and grouse shooting at Balmoral, and pheasant shooting at Sandringham. Tiger shooting and pig-sticking in India was left to the Prince of Wales. [56] Substantial sources are available, ranging from royal diaries to estate records in the Royal Archives at Windsor, and multiple representations of their cultural pursuits in the media, and much more needs to be done here in teasing out their sporting contribution. [57] The hunting skills of Tudor and Stuart monarchs were a key part of their royal deportment, and generally royal sporting interests overlapped with those of the aristocracy through the next two centuries, but following the death of Victoria, its intellectual and social range narrowed. It has been royalty's racing interests that have best been studied, albeit in more populist literature. It is clear, for example, that they made an enormous contribution to the development of the English thoroughbred through their breeding activities, especially those of William Duke of Cumberland, and later the Hampton Court stud under Victoria. [58] The extent of their role as key sponsors and patrons of sport still remains unclear, though in the sixteenth century, for example, there were many royal courts built for real tennis, while from George IV to Elizabeth II many monarchs have been patrons of the Royal Toxophilite Society, Britain's premier archery society. The British National Rifle Association still competes for the Queen's (or King's) Badge, first founded in 1860 by Queen Victoria.

In general the Hanoverians and Windsors largely shared the country sports interests of their upper-class subjects, and most were resolutely Tory in political tone. The royal family maintained a pack of staghounds near Ascot from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Queen Victoria's interest in racing was limited, while her son Edward VII was keen on hunting, racing, betting and shooting, as a fairly hagiographic study of him as a sportsman illustrated. [59] He was also a member of the exclusive London Fencing Club, founded in 1848. When he was Prince of Wales, his membership of the 'fast set' encouraged social emulation of his sporting and gambling interests. Pigeon shooting, which had been popular among sections of the upper classes in the early nineteenth century, had fallen somewhat out of favour, but was revived with the founding of the Hurlingham Club at Fulham in 1867 as an agreeable country resort. When the prince joined he ensured the club's status, and by the late 1880s it had 1,500 members, though only 200 were shooting members. [60] Increasingly royal sports attendance at certain events such as Ascot or Cowes became represented and repackaged as part of the traditional rituals of monarchy. [61]

George V, also followed the seasonal cycle: going shooting at Sandringham, horse racing at Ascot, yachting at Cowes, and visiting Balmoral for the Highland Games and deer stalking. He founded the King's Cup as a trophy to encourage sporting aviation, and restricted it to British-registered aircraft. His sporting exploits were featured regularly in the newsreels, though he was more often watching than participating. In 1932, for example he was shown at several key British sporting events, including the FA Cup Final (reflecting a sensitivity to working-class culture), the Derby, Ascot, a Test match against India, Wimbledon, Cowes and Braemar, often with his wife. His sons were also shown watching hunting, rugby, football and even the Isle of Man TT races. Edward VIII did briefly try National Hunt racing, but unsuccessfully. In the inter-war years the newsreels, press and radio gave the royal family increased cultural centrality in British life, and its members' activities were featured on biscuit and sweet tins, mugs and other decorative items. How far this helped to generate public support for the monarchy or their sports is less clear, though the newsreel coverage may well be significant. More recently Queen Elizabeth II, like her mother, has enjoyed horse racing and country pursuits on her Balmoral estates, while Prince Charles has been involved in hunting and polo, and Princess Anne and Zara Phillips with three-day eventing. The Duke of Edinburgh has enjoyed shooting and carriage-driving.

### **Amateurism and the upper classes**

How far aristocratic ideals, amateur ethics and approaches to sporting leisure permeated other social classes is difficult to assess, especially given the gaps between ideal and reality. J.A. Mangan's careful and long-sustained exploration of the Victorian and Edwardian public-school and university worlds, where the high-status habitus of the upper classes was

displayed in their sports, showed the substantial extent to which the upper-class and middle-class worlds mixed and often overlapped at Eton, Harrow, Westminster and Winchester, and less commonly a few other schools, though it failed to stimulate interest in pursuing the upper classes into adult life and there has been little of major influence since. As educationists have recognized, but sports historians too easily overlooked, the nineteenth-century public school was 'a highly successful device for the preservation in an industrializing society of aristocratic values, institutions and the distribution of power and wealth'. [62] The public schools provided sustenance and support for amateurism. Such support was beautifully illustrated in 1907, when the Hon. Alfred Lyttleton, old Etonian and former England international, chaired the meeting at which the Amateur Football Association was formed, largely by clubs of the oldboy type.

Support was also found at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. These were melting-pots in which upper-class and upper-middle-class youth mixed, and at both institutions, as Mangan has demonstrated, team games, amateurism and athleticism, while strengthening their hold from the later nineteenth century, always coexisted with more traditional aristocratic pursuits. At Harrow, for example, beagling continued through the nineteenth century, while at Eton, the Eton College Hunt, dating back at least to the mid-nineteenth century, ran up to the 1960s if not beyond. [63] When William Allison, son of a Yorkshire upper-middle-class solicitor, was at Rugby between 1865 and 1870 he participated in athletic sports such as rugby and cricket but his real interests, like many of his fellow-pupils, lay in field sports. Back home he shot partridge, pheasant and grouse, was keen on hunting and dogs, and took a keen interest in racing and breeding, interests he continued through to Balliol. [64] At Oxford in the mid-nineteenth century, the Prince of Wales and his rich landowning friend Henry Chaplin hunted and raced, but also played cricket. [65] The fifth Earl Rosebery bought his first racehorse when he went up from Eton to Christ Church, Oxford. [66] Such intermingling of interests seems to have been typical, yet there has been little interest in assessing its later impact on British culture. There has been no subsequent study of the girls' public schools, while Eton, which played a central role in structuring the sporting attitudes of the many upper-class boys who attended, remains unanalysed.

In the 1930s the ninth Duke of Devonshire admitted that 'sport has appealed to me more strongly than brain work, which may have been one of the reasons why I have not succeeded in making any money'. [67] Mainstream historians have long debated how far the cultural transmission of such values across society impacted on Britain's lack of sporting competitiveness for much of the twentieth century, although we need to avoid overly simple models of diffusion. Leading writers such as Lawrence Stone, William Rubinstein, F.M.L. Thompson and Martin Wiener have wondered why Britain's early economic dominance, stimulated by entrepreneurial striving for landed wealth and status, eventually faltered, and have tried to assess the extent to which a resultant gentry culture

based on hierarchy and patriarchy undermined the previously vibrant enterprise ethic. [68] It is therefore possible that amateurism helped make Britain a less egalitarian, competitive, entrepreneurial and achievement-oriented society by drawing the time and energy of the elite, though if it did, then, as Holt points out, 'the nature of the conjuncture of the competitive principle and play among the British elite remains unclear'. [69] Through what cultural processes such ideologies might have impacted more broadly, we have yet to flesh out.

The suggestion that Victorian middle-class sport drew in part on older upper-class notions of honour and chivalry in shaping the emerging ideology of middle-class amateurism and athleticism is also potentially relevant, since it links to Britain's lack of competitiveness at the highest levels. [70] Certainly the chivalric tradition influenced elements of upperclass culture in the nineteenth century, as Mark Girouard has stressed. [71] Chivalric models of leadership simultaneously conferred status and cast the upper classes in more serious mode, and spread widely through some aspects of elite culture. The Earl of Eglinton, a leading Scottish sportsman, sports patron and racehorse owner in the mid-nineteenth century, was heavily influenced by ideas of chivalry, organizing a medieval tournament at his castle as a young man. In recast, 'modernist' form it is highly likely that chivalry made some impact on the playing fields of the public schools, although exactly what, and to what extent, is still unclear, though the patriotic chivalric militarism exhibited among many upperclass officers during the first years of the First World War may or may not be suggestive.

Did elite strategies of social exclusion in sport, and aversion to the working classes and those who made money in the 'wrong' way, impact on the introduction of middle-class amateurism? This remains unclear. There are certainly many examples of exclusion, both in terms of upperclass club membership, and in terms of rules of competition. A case heard at York Assizes as early as 1791 concerned the Knavesmire Race Committee's concern to exclude from 'gentlemen rider' races any 'whose professional skill would give them an advantage', as those of lower social standing were likely to be fitter, stronger and more skilful. It refused to hand over the prize money of a race won by a man it believed not to be a gentleman. The plaintiff believed he was, and so did the jury. [72] Such an example indicated the complexity of gentlemanly attitudes, since clearly the 'gentleman' winner was not averse to making money, nor was there any lack of keenness to compete. The questions were rather against whom, and about upper-class ability to define the terms of sporting activity and competition. Even during the nineteenth-century sporting revolution, the almost complete identity between the social, financial and governing elites ensured that most self-made businessmen were kept outside for at least a full generation.

But on the other hand notions of exclusion were never totally rigid and the gaps could at times be bridged. As Leonore Davidoff has shown, the codes of the upper classes actually enabled a certain amount of boundary

negotiation, and the potential possibilities of both rigidity and fluidity. [73] In hunting, for example, the upper classes always paid attention to tenant farmers' interests and opinions, and encouraged them to join the hunt. And taking part in the 'right' sports, in the 'right' way, could be a route into future elite status. So there were always those from the upper middle class who wished through social emulation to move up, perhaps buying an estate, or using sport as a means of social access. How many this affected is unclear, though the sheer volume of printed material devoted to educating the social aspirant between the wars is almost certainly indicative. W. Scarth Dixon's *Fox hunting in the twentieth century* (1925), for example, devoted a chapter to explaining how to ride, dress and behave appropriately. In 1932 Captain H.F.H. Hardy gave a readership that supposedly included both 'sons of our "oldest" landowners . . . living a town or city life' and the 'nouveaux riches', the 'Manner of every Sport', including hunting, riding, shooting, fishing, racing, polo and yachting. [74]

Nor should we over-emphasize the lack of competitiveness in upperclass sporting life, since when we examine upper-class discourse, it is clear that informal competition was a perennial strong theme. Upper-class sporting literature celebrated the good shot, the good rider to hounds or the top racehorse breeder, and most participants were only too aware of their personal ranking. By the late nineteenth century, at the end of a day's shoot, the 'bag' of each person was keenly observed and the best shots, who spent their time going from estate to estate on shooting parties, were being unofficially graded. By the 1920s there were lists of record bags and shooting tables. [75] Within the upper-class betting world, there was both a keenness to make money and, among certain groups at certain times, a lack of aversion to how it was made, or the honesty of those with whom they associated. Horses would be 'made safe' or run to lose, the jockey or trainer suborned, if it suited the betting book. [76]

### **Upper-class women**

Upper-class sporting life was highly gendered, but though the sports of working-class and middle-class women have attracted attention, we know little still about the sporting activity of upper-class women, though it is likely that upper-class women would have had far more opportunities and fewer constrictions than working-class women. Queen Elizabeth I was a keen sportswoman, a capable and enthusiastic rider who regularly hunted and shot into old age. Queen Anne kennelled the Royal Buckhounds in Windsor Forest, and hunted herself. There does not seem to have been any rigidly prescriptive code limiting women's participation, though they were expected to ride side-saddle. But more generally women appear to have occupied a marginal position on the hunting field, and during the eighteenth century, when the new sport of fox hunting was emerging, there was some temporary opposition to their presence. But it was increasingly acceptable for women to hunt after the 1850s, despite the societal imposition of implicit rules about dress and decorum, and with the introduction of the shorter safety skirt, perhaps 10 per cent of riders



were women by the end of the century, though hunts still usually refused them the privilege of membership, and they took no managerial role. During the First World War women's hunting involvement increased, and by 1918 there were twelve female masters of foxhounds. Increasingly thereafter, women began riding astride and participation grew. This posed potential problems for males still fixated on an upper-class masculinity centred on endurance, courage and physical strength, or on the homosocial experiences of all-male sporting activity.

We know less about women's involvement in other country pursuits. [77] By the later nineteenth century we can see from the pages of magazines such as *Punch* that women who were prepared to perform like men, though not too aggressively, gained more acceptance than those who tried to be more feminine. It is clear that some women were keen to take part in fishing, and by the later nineteenth century instruction manuals and magazines for upper-class women readers often gave advice on appropriate behaviour, procedures and clothing. Shooting was more problematic. Women shots were conspicuous by their absence in photographs of the big shoots of the period, though they might make an appearance early in the day at smaller shoots, but largely as spectators, as they were not normally trained to handle guns as children. We still know little of the extent to which things changed in the twentieth century. By contrast, horse racing always attracted upper-class women spectators to the more exclusive grandstands, though their open active participation as jockeys or trainers was unacceptable until the late twentieth century.

### **Potential sources**

For such research a vast, largely untapped range of primary sources is available. The *Sporting Magazine*, which was 'a monthly calendar of the transactions of the turf, the chace, and every other diversion interesting to the man of pleasure and enterprize', was published from 1793 to c.1870. The *Gentlemen's Magazine* by contrast celebrated politeness, reserve and reading over physical sport, and tried to present an alternative to what it already perceived as the overly popular, rough, more brutal masculinity of field sports. [78] A survey of Mitchell and Co.'s annual publication *The Newspaper Press Directory* shows that by the mid-nineteenth century there were already specialized weekly newspapers covering field sports. These included the *Field*, established in 1853, describing itself as 'a gentleman's paper', devoted to sports, pastimes, natural history and all country pursuits, with ample details of racing, cricketers and yachting events; also biographical sketches of the leading patrons of field sports. Sir Theodore Cooke later edited it. Others included *Country Gentleman Sporting Gazette* and *Agricultural Journal* (established in 1862), *Land and Water* (weekly from 1866, a 'journal of field sports'), *Horse and Hound* (weekly from 1884) and *Rod and Gun and Country House Chronicle* (weekly from 1889), which to be 'a welcome visitor to every country house'. Study of key magazines would certainly pay rich dividends, since they attracted upperclass writers as well as readers. *Baily's Magazine of Sports and Pastimes* was

published from 1860 to 1926, and the Badminton Magazine of Sports and Pastimes from 1895 to 1923. The Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes, a series of books on major sports aimed at a better-off market, was conceived and founded by Henry Somerset, eighth Duke of Beaufort (1824-1899), and dedicated to the Prince of Wales, described as ‘one of the best and keenest sportsmen of our time’. Country Life, with its combination of traditional aristocratic values and public-school principles, was founded in 1897 and covered field sports and golf. There are the many and various representations of upper-class life in art and literature. Gentlemanly sports and their patrons have generated some of the finest paintings in British art, from Stubbs to Sir Alfred Munnings, whose paintings of horses and traditional field sports were commissioned after 1918 by the royal family, especially the future King Edward VIII. [79] There is a wonderfully fascinating genre of sporting literature, which includes famous names such as Robert Surtees, Anthony Trollope, Irish novelists Edith Somerville and Violet Ross and also Siegfried Sassoon, most famous for his war poetry, but a man who had formerly lived the pastoral life of a young squire: fox-hunting, playing cricket, golfing and writing romantic verses, and who later wrote enthusiastically of his sporting pleasures. Such material provides fascinating representations of upper-class sporting life, some, but not all, written by the upper classes themselves. The traditional upper classes often criticized the new arrivals for their lack of understanding of traditional social mores, but many of the books on field sports were written for potential participants, to help them avoid potential social embarrassment. There are also the many upper-class memoirs, in which love for country sports, big-game shooting and a pastoral, traditional view of Britain dominates discourse. [80] Almost every record office and archives centre in Britain contains substantial numbers of estate records offering major potential to shed light on economic, social and cultural aspects of their racing, breeding, hunting, shooting and fishing activities, and the exercise of power, while family dairies and papers would allow a deeper exploration of sports’ meanings in gender divisions and social life. The opportunities are there. Historians need to take them up.

## Notes

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