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"*Cricket Has Given Me Everything*": Women's Sport and the Women's Movement in Twentieth-century Britain

« Le cricket m'a tout donné » *: le sport féminin et le mouvement des femmes en Grande-Bretagne au vingtième siècle*

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Introduction

1 "*Cricket*," former international sportswoman Beth Morgan explained in our interview, "*has given me everything*"":

> I was a very shy kid...I was very socially awkward and struggled with any social situation really...But [cricket] completely gave me confidence and friends, a social network, and a confidence in myself and something that I was good at and enjoyed...I'm a completely different person...it's been my whole life.[1]

2 Viewed through a feminist lens, this account - from a 31-year-old woman who grew up playing cricket in the late 1980s and 1990s - suggests that cricket has proved an empowering experience for many of the women who have participated in it. Indeed, the theme of empowerment runs through many of the oral history interviews which I conducted with 27 female cricketers aged between 27 and 90 as part of my PhD research.[2] Given this, it is surprising to find that major surveys of women in twentieth-century Britain such as Jane Lewis' *Women in Britain since 1945* (1992), Sheila Rowbotham's *A Century of Women* (1997), and Martin Pugh's *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999* (2000) contain almost no reference to the issue of women's sport.[3]

3 And yet a detailed examination of women's sporting lives can disrupt and alter our current understanding of women's history. One example is that of the development of the

women's movement in twentieth-century Britain. Recent research in this area has sought to reevaluate women's organisations which were not overtly "political" or "feminist" in character.[4] One case in point is Catriona Beaumont's study of the Mothers' Union, Catholic Women's League, National Council of Women, Women's Institutes and National Union of Townswomen's Guilds, in which she suggests that the term "women's movement" needs to be expanded beyond its associations with feminism and recast in a way that includes the "dynamic networks of women" created by these conservative women's organisations. Though all the groups under study rejected "feminism" and endorsed domesticity, Beaumont argues that they

> acknowledged the status of women as equal citizens and continually sought to inform and educate their members about the importance of democratic citizenship...[they] encouraged members to participate in local and national politics and campaigned to ensure that women benefited from the rights of equal citizenship bestowed upon them in 1928'.[5]

4 Beaumont's definition of the "women's movement" thus incorporates any network of women which advocated the advancement of their sex. This position is not uncontested: as Nancy Cott has written, there is concern that "*expanding [the term feminism] to cover every worthy or new endeavor women take up equates the term with 'what women did' and renders it meaningless*".[6] Many feminist historians of modern Britain, notably Lucy Delap, have highlighted the importance of whether or not historical subjects actively adopted or rejected the term feminist as being important signifiers of whether we can, as historians, consider them to have been part of the "women's movement".[7] Nonetheless, the importance of Beaumont's work is in her suggestion that "*the term 'women's movement' needs to be liberated from its exclusive association with feminism*".[8] Thus all women's organisations, including those whose members actively disavowed the term "feminism", should be incorporated into any history of the "women's movement".

5 This article takes up Beaumont's plea and adopts her definition of the "women's movement", arguing that sporting organisations, too, need to be reconceptualised as part of a thriving women's movement throughout the twentieth century. They, too, were female-only spaces which allowed women autonomy and provided them with a support network. Women's sport by its very nature requires women's absence from the home in order to participate in an activity which is centred around their own enjoyment. As feminist sociologists have recognised, participating in sport is therefore a "*feminist act*" simply because it asserts women's right to time for themselves.[9] While this does not necessarily make those who participated in sport "feminists", it does suggest that women's sporting organisations, which provided a space for women to escape from constricting gender norms and advocated female equality in leisure, need to be incorporated into our definition of the women's movement. As will be shown, their continuous existence lends support to the claims of Beaumont, and others, that there is much greater continuity between first and second-wave feminism than historians have previously recognised, overturning our understanding of the ideological development of ideas about female empowerment across the twentieth century.

6 This article therefore makes the case that an examination of sport has the potential to transform our understandings of the women's movement in 20th century Britain: both its chronology, and its ideological development. To do this, it uses a case study of one such sport, women's cricket, and its governing body, the Women's Cricket Association (WCA). A description of the development of the WCA is followed by an analysis of its evolution across the twentieth century during which, this article argues, many of its activities

centred around female liberation from existing societal norms. While in many respects the WCA was a conservative organisation, enforcing stringent dress and playing regulations, it was still a site of empowerment, and including sporting organisations in a broader definition of the women's movement is therefore crucial for historians, as we seek to make sense of women's lives across the twentieth century. Sport, after all, was not just sport. It was a way of feeling valued as a woman in a male-dominated society.

The Women's Cricket Association: conservative femininity?

7 The interwar years were a period of dramatic growth in the prevalence of women's sport. This has recently been documented by a number of scholars, including Jennifer Hargreaves, Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska and Fiona Skillen.[10] Hargreaves argues that the First World War was a "*unique and liberating experience for many women, leaving them with confidence to flout old restrictions*".[11] She highlights organisational growth in this period; for example, the Women's Amateur Athletics Association (WAAA) was formed in 1922, the first competitive events having been held during the war by munitions workers, and the All England Netball Association (AENA) was formed in 1926 at a meeting of the YWCA in London. By 1938 the WAAA claimed a membership of 20,000, and in the following year it was estimated that 160,000 women were playing in clubs affiliated to the AENA.[12] Hockey expanded enormously: by 1939, 2,100 clubs and schools were affiliated to the All England Women's Hockey Association (AEWHA).[13]

8 Within this context came the formation of the Women's Cricket Association (WCA), the brainchild of a group of female hockey players who in October 1926 travelled to Colwall in Herefordshire for several days of cricket on the Malvern College Ground. Among them was Marjorie Pollard, who recalled:

> After play was over we sat in the Park Hotel at Colwall...and discussed how cricket could become real for us – no longer to be an illusive thing, that one played half afraid of ridicule. We pondered, mused, talked.[14]

9 Out of this came the decision to form an association. At the first meeting of the WCA nineteen women met, elected a chairman and formed a committee to arrange fixtures around the country. Two aims were declared: "*To encourage the foundation of cricket clubs throughout the country*" and "*to provide facilities for and bring together...those women and girls who previously have had little opportunity of playing cricket after leaving school and college*".[15] This was a bold step, but it paid off almost immediately. For the 1927 season the WCA arranged a fixture list and 49 matches were played; by 1929 37 clubs and 39 schools were affiliated members and the first public women's cricket match was played on Beckenham Cricket Ground between London District and the Rest of England. In 1933, County Associations were formed in Middlesex, Lancashire, Kent, Nottinghamshire and Surrey along the same organisational lines as the male counties. An official magazine for the sport, *Women's Cricket*, was set up in 1930 and edited by Pollard until 1950. And in late 1934 an England team travelled to Australia and New Zealand for the first ever international women's cricket matches. The enormous success in the venture is demonstrated by the affiliation figures for 1938: 105 clubs, 18 colleges and 85 schools.[16] Having said that, it is likely that up to 1939 and in the postwar decades the majority of participants were middle-class: generally, the sport required time and financial independence in order for women to purchase the correct equipment, pay club

subscriptions, and travel to away matches. The 1934/5 tour was self-funded by the players, which effectively prevented any working-class women from participating; LEA syllabi stated that cricket for girls was "*not worth attempting*" due to the lack of suitable facilities within state schools.[17]

10 Perhaps as a consequence of its domination by middle-class women, from the outset the WCA adopted both the rules of the equally middle class-dominated governing body of men's cricket, the Marylebone Cricket Club, and also, arguably, their conservatism: they dictated how their players dressed, and how they behaved on and off the pitch. It was necessary, wrote Marjorie Pollard in 1930, "*to play in something that is above criticism*"; during the 1930s, the WCA rules dictated:

> Official WCA teams must play in white and wear long stockings. Dresses, divided skirts or tunics must not be shorter than four inches from the ground when kneeling. Coloured jerseys and sleeveless dresses are not allowed.

11 While after 1945, the Executive Committee amended the rules to allow for 'shorts', the length – not shorter than four inches from the ground when kneeling – was still carefully controlled, and knee length socks were required wear.[18] Mollie Buckland, who joined the WCA in the 1950s, confirmed that appearing 'feminine' was a central concern during her early involvement: "*they would never, never have worn trousers then. It was not the done thing...no way would you wear anything that looked male. No, never...because you were trying to keep feminine in a man's game*".[19]

12 Thus the WCA does not appear at first glance to have been a radical organisation which sought to undermine societal ideals about "femininity".

13 Oral history interviews in which interviewees were questioned about their attitude towards "feminism" on the surface also appear to confirm this. The response of Norma Whitehorn, aged 82, was typical:

14 RN: The other thing is that the media seems to have labelled female cricketers as 'women's libbers' and seen you as feminists. I wondered what you made of that.

15 NW: Yes, I'm not greatly enamoured. I mean there's always somebody who will want to pick on something and chop and change it all around.

16 RN: So you don't think, did you see yourselves as fighting against inequality or anything like that?

17 NW: No, no, not really, no.[20]

18 For Norma, and for others, to represent their actions as "*feminist*" is to "*chop and change*" them around, to misrepresent them. Cricket was a recreational activity, pure and simple. This supports the findings of other historians of women's sport that British sportswomen have generally wanted simply to participate in their sport of choice without viewing their actions politically, and have to that end almost with one voice disavowed the "feminist" label.[21]

19 Nonetheless, what female cricketers appeared to be rejecting was not the idea of equality, nor indeed the idea that playing cricket enabled them to transform societal expectations about the role of women, but any association with the radical strand of second-wave feminism which has, for a certain generation who lived through the 1970s, come to define the feminist movement as a whole. Take this extract from my interview with Janet Bitmead, aged 64:

20 RN: Are you a feminist?

21 JB: Oh, I wouldn't have said so, no, no...to me a feminist is someone who is quite outspoken about things, and I don't think women's cricket, any one person is outspoken about anything like that... I suppose you're always trying to move the barrier, the men, trying to give you a few more facilities...

22 RN: So have any of the women that you've played cricket with been feminists, would you say?

23 JB: Oh I wouldn't have said so, no. That's all burning bras isn't it? I don't think any of them are like that! Obviously they like to show that they're as good as the men, and we have, we've bowled out a few men in our time playing in the friendly games and things...[22]

24 This abstract is very revealing about Janet's views of feminism. To her, a "feminist" is someone who is outspoken in public and who burns her bra. And yet she tacitly recognises that playing cricket did have the ability to improve female self-confidence and transform women's consciousness. While historians recognise that it is problematic to assign the "feminist" label to those who actively disavow feminism, therefore, this should not necessarily prevent us from viewing the WCA and its members as a central part of the women's movement.[23] As will now be shown, the WCA provided a space for the rejection of dominant societal values about gender throughout the twentieth century.

1926 - 1970: The WCA and resistance to gender norms

25 While women's sport had grown enormously in the interwar period, this was not an uncontroversial development. In 1950 the editor of the *Sportswoman's Manual* summarised the situation as follows:

> It has been established that a woman may play games if she chooses, just as she may go into Law, Medicine or the House of Commons....But now that we need no longer struggle we must take stock. Some people look with alarm at women playing strenuous games. It is unladylike, it is unattractive, it stops them having children, and the rest of the century-old arguments are still with us.[24]

26 While women's cricket never faced the extreme opposition which women's football had to contend with – the Football Association, angry at the seriousness with which women's factory teams continued to play after the First World War and the massive crowds they were attracting, banned the sport in 1921[25] – the sport was from its early days subject to scrutiny as to its suitability as a sport for women. In the 1930s, the argument that women had no place in the masculine domain of cricket was fairly common, as was the criticism that the average female had no genuine interest in cricket but merely "*goes to the ground to eat strawberries and be admired*".[26] Hargreaves highlights that as women's cricketers staged public matches, rendering the sport increasingly visible, "*antagonists became more vociferous*".[27] The England cricketer Walter Hammond wrote in 1952 that:

> There are still a great many people who wonder whether feminine players are likely to do themselves harm if they try to play really hard. I must say that I myself do not like to see schoolgirls playing cricket, and I believe many doctors will agree that serious and permanent damage can easily be done at that age...There are some games women can play, in general, actually better than men, but the muscular differences of the sexes prohibits cricket from being one of them.[28]

27 Female cricketers were fully aware of this controversy. One of my interviewees stated that: "*men pooh-poohed the women's game, on the whole*",[29] and the President of the WCA was well used to receiving letters like the following, penned in 1948:

> Women should occupy themselves in doing things for which they are fitted and avoid trying to act and dress as men do...
> It is a most ridiculous thing for females to waste their time in going Overseas to play at Cricket.
> Yours faithfully,
> One who likes a woman to be a woman.[30]

28 This letter was published in *Women's Cricket* in 1948, without comment. Yet the implication is clear: despite an awareness that their choice of leisure activity was subject to criticism, female cricketers remained determined to participate nonetheless. Such a determination has strong feminist undertones, and suggests that the very formation of the WCA in 1926 was predicated upon the belief that women had a right to dictate their own leisure preferences.

29 In seeking to locate the WCA within the broader history of the women's movement in Britain its status as a women-only space which provided its members with a support network should also not be overlooked. While the WCA may have shared similar values to those running men's cricket, it was a completely independent organisation until it merged with the newly-formed governing body of men's cricket, the England and Wales Cricket Board, in 1998. Right up until the 1990s, the WCA remained an organisation in which no man was permitted to take office or become a full member.[31] Indeed, when discussing the role of men within the Association in 1950, the Executive Committee concluded that "*of the fundamental principles on which the WCA was founded, one of the most important...was that women should run every aspect of it*".[32] The Association was also keen to utilise female umpires and coaches throughout its history, and men were excluded from joining the WCA's "A" Register of umpires, from which all umpires for women's international matches were selected. Andrews sees the women-only status of the WI as significant because it offers an arena in which women can be themselves and thus develop their sense of self-worth.[33] The same is clearly true of the Women's Cricket Association.

30 Caine writes that the interwar years were a period where "*there was still immense pressure on [women] to devote themselves to family and home*".[34] Additionally, the 1950s has been seen as a decade of "*cosy domesticity*".[35] Yet all evidence suggests that the WCA wholly rejected these norms. Jack Williams' assertion that before 1939 the general practice was for women to end their cricketing days upon marriage has recently been questioned by Skillen, who indicates that many married women were continuing with sport after marriage in the interwar period.[36] Evidence from the postwar decade supports Skillen's conclusion. In 1952 at the England Women v The Rest match at Southampton, the secretary of Hampshire CCC wrote that: "*Women's cricket is now so firmly established that one supposes there must already be husbands, or 'cricket widowers,' wondering when next their socks are to be darned – oh! glorious thought!*"[37]

31 Reports in *Women's Cricket* of local club activities highlight a tendency for women at lower levels to continue with cricket both upon marriage and after having children. One article on Hampshire and Dorset WCA read:

> SALLY SMITH, who is married with two children, comes to the team as a medium fast off-break bowler...She is accompanied to all matches by her husband in a vehicle in which almost a whole cricket team and gear can be stowed...She is a great enthusiast and never says 'no' to a game of cricket.[38]

32 Birmingham WCC consisted of a number of players with small children and the Secretary, herself married with three children including one aged just six months, wrote: "*I think we*

shall soon have to start a creche to enable cricketing mothers to play in matches!"[39] Sympathy was very much with the women on this issue and older players advised: "*If you must marry, be sure to choose an understanding cricketing husband*".[40] In 1951 a poem appeared in *Women's Cricket*, entitled "The Married Woman's Apology to her Husband":

> Tell me not John, I am so strange
> That from the scullery
> Of our good home and quiet life
> To bowl and bat I fly.
> True, a new venture now I chase,
> The Aussies must be beat;
> And with a firmer grip I brace
> My bat, my nerves, my feet.
> Yet this desertion from my hearth
> Which you, I know, deplore –
> I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not cricket more.[41]

33 Langhamer has argued of this period that "*women's own individual leisure preferences were subsumed into those of the family, with 'leisure' becoming a vehicle for service to husband and children*".[42] But the above evidence suggests that in fact, female cricketers viewed themselves as having a fundamental right to exercise their own leisure preferences, and did so.

34 What does this mean for our broader historical understanding of the women's movement? Firstly, it supports the work of historians like Beaumont, who by showing that women's organisations like the Women's Institute, Mothers' Union and National Union of Townswomen's Guilds were encouraging women to participate in local and national affairs throughout the 1950s, and were acceptant of the reality of the working housewife and mother has demonstrated that "*the years between so-called 'first wave' and 'second wave' feminism should no longer be called a 'silent period'...the history of the twentieth-century women's movement is one of continuity*".[43] The values espoused by the WCA presented here regarding freedom of choice in leisure and the placing of female leisure above that of their husbands and families suggest significant continuity with their pre-war activities. This adds further weight to the argument that the 1950s was a decade when feminist ideas, far from being fallow, were flourishing. Playing cricket in full view of the world was a powerful statement, and the idea that women's primary responsibility was to their husbands and children had already been rejected by a significant group of women decades before so-called "second-wave" feminism established itself as a social movement.

The 1970s: Women's Cricket and Women's Liberation

35 The 1970s has generally been viewed by historians as a decade of transformation for the women's movement in twentieth-century Britain. With their assertion that "the personal is political", those active within Women's Liberation challenged male dominance in almost every sphere of British life: the home, marriage, the workplace, the body, and female sexuality.[44] Yet arguably sport is one arena in which women made little progress towards equality in the 1970s. The Sex Discrimination Act, for example, outlawed discrimination on the basis of sex, but with several key exemptions, including that of "*any sport...where the physical strength, stamina or physique of the average women puts her at a disadvantage to the average man*".

36 Nonetheless, many of the activities of female cricketers indicate a wholesale rejection of norms of femininity which was, after all, one of the main rationales behind the WLM. For example, despite the fact that marriage had become "*virtually universal*" in the 1960s,[45] large numbers of women who played cricket remained unmarried. Oral histories can reveal the reasoning behind this. During my conversation with Norma Whitehorn, who played club and county cricket from the 1940s to the 1960s, the subject of her non-marriage arose:

37 NW:So when I go, the Whitehorn dynasty ends. Unless I decide to get married suddenly, and I don't think I will somehow! [Laughs]

38 RN:So you haven't ever been married?

39 NW: No. Never had any inclinations. As I used to say, "no, I'll take my hockey stick and cricket bat to bed thank you". And that was, that was my way of life.[46]

40 Norma chose to reject marriage altogether. For her, cricket (and hockey) were a "way of life". The subtext here is that both were too important to her to risk having to give them up on marriage.

41 Indeed, this was recognisably a risk for women growing up in the environment of 1950s and 1960s Britain. Mollie Buckland had met her future husband in her early 20s, just prior to the 1960/1 tour of South Africa. She was determined to go on tour even if it meant giving up their blossoming relationship:

> I had an inkling then that this was going to be, there was going to be a serious relationship, but I was not going to give up this chance to go abroad. I just wasn't. It was too – I knew that it was my big chance to go. But I also knew that if I did marry him, when I came back...I would never go again. Because I'd never have the money to do it...I said to Gerry, "well I'm going. Whatever happens I'm going." And I was selected, so that was nice. And then when I came back, I thought, "well have I jiggered it now? Have I lost this?" But no. He said, "okay, now will you marry me?" And I said, "yes I will"...And I knew that if I did decide that I was going to get married, then I would lose my cricket...but I didn't care, I'd done it![47]

42 Mollie wanted to get married, and was prepared to give up playing cricket once she had done so: she never represented England again after the 1960/1 tour (though she remained involved in WCA administration). Yet she was also prepared to put the possibility of marriage at risk in order to first fulfil her own cricketing ambitions.

43 Several other interviewees explained to me that continuing with cricket was non-negotiable as far as their choice of husband was concerned. Pat Siderfin, who took up cricket in the late 1940s and married Steve in 1962, had two children:

44 RN: ...has that ever been an issue for...you, in terms of having to stop playing when you had children?

45 PS: Not if I wanted it not to be. It's just that you dictate to the men and they accept it!

46 SS: I was there to be a taxi!

47 Pat chose to marry Steve because, in her words, "*he was a person who would let me do what I wanted to do...if I wanted to climb on Everest or go to the moon, I don't think Steve would have stopped me. Mind you, I don't think I'd have given him a chance to.*"[48]

48 Many cricketers, too, were determined to combine motherhood and cricket. Enid Bakewell, for example, first went away on a four-month international tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1968/9, leaving her husband to care for their three-year-old daughter; she continued to go on tours right up until the 1982 World Cup in New Zealand

when she left three children aged 15, 11 and 10 behind. All this took place in an era when John Bowlby's ideas of "*maternal deprivation*", in which any kind of separation between a child and their mother was seen as neglectful, still held sway in much of society.[49] One exchange of correspondence in *Women's Cricket* magazine in the 1960s was sparked off by a letter from Alison Littlefair of Kent, who asked for advice: "*I have become the mother of a baby girl and...am determined not to stagnate in domesticity...how does one manage to resume playing and look after one's charge?*"[50] The practical advice contained in the replies received show a clear acceptance of combining cricket with motherhood within the women's cricket community.

49 Rachael Heyhoe-Flint, who gave birth to a son in the summer of 1974, was actually reprimanded by the WCA Executive for going home in the middle of the 1976 Edgbaston Test against the Australians in order to spend the night with her two-year-old. The policy was outlined by the Chairman as follows:

> All the players selected for 1976 were asked sometime before the Tour to ensure that home domestic matters and care of children were organised so that married players could give their undivided attention to playing the game for England. Rachael was no exception. A request had been made by players after World Cup 1973 that children should not be allowed in Dressing Rooms and that the team should be accommodated in hotels a day before the match started and during the match itself. This was agreed and no exceptions were to be made.[51]

50 In a societal environment whereby women were often defined principally in terms of their family relationships, and when working mothers "*suffer[ed] constantly from the assumption that a 'good' and 'proper' mother should not leave her young child in order to go out to work*", this kind of attitude is remarkable.[52]

51 How did juggling motherhood and cricket work in practical terms? The fact that women's cricket remained throughout this period a sport dominated by middle-class women helps answer this question; many were able to afford paid childcare, not to mention time off work to go away on tour for months on end, leaving their children behind. Yet there was an even more radical solution available. In an interview with Heyhoe-Flint in 1980 she laid out her ideas for the expansion of women's cricket, concluding: "*What we have to do is present clearly the opportunities for women and it may mean the husband will have to stay home to look after baby*".[53] A number of my interviewees reported precisely this arrangement, which seems to have been common. Indeed, the picture that emerges from Heyhoe-Flint's autobiography is of a shared responsibility for childcare, as the following passage highlights:

> During one match against a men's side in Notts, I looked up during my innings and spotted Derrick pushing Ben's pram around the boundary. It was an odd sight to me and I felt slightly perturbed. It wasn't right, I reasoned, that things were this way around. I wondered if Derrick was thinking the same, and that there ought to be a Men's Lib for him.[54]

52 She also openly admitted that cricket left her with "*little time for housework or ironing*": "*her lonely husband has eaten so many frozen dinners that he's been treated for a chilblained stomach and has had a gas heater fitted in his igloo*", wrote Eric Morecambe in the foreword of her autobiography.[55]

53 Indeed it seems to have been widely accepted as natural amongst female cricketers that, if they were out for the day playing cricket, their husbands might usefully engage in their fair share of the housework. Netta Rheinberg reported in 1970 that one conversation amongst married female cricketers as to how far cricket might be compatible with

marriage concluded with the following advice: "*Nor was it advisable for your husband to accompany you, dutifully carry your bag, and then watch. Better for him to carry on with the chores at home*".[56]

54 Jane Lewis concludes that "*the extent to which unpaid work in the family has remained women's work is seemingly one of the most unchanging aspects of post-war life*".[57] Yet here was a group of women who, even before the onset of the second-wave feminist movement, challenged this kind of sexual division of labour within the home, as well as the idea that "good mothers" should not enjoy leisure activities separately from their children.

55 Sheila Rowbotham suggests that some of the crucial ideological elements of second-wave feminism were: challenging women's confinement to domesticity and unequal, dependent marriage; female empowerment; and giving women the power to control their own bodies.[58] Yet what is striking is that many of these issues had always been absolutely central to the activities of cricketing women, and were ever-present in the way they chose to live their lives. Not only does this suggest greater continuity with the postwar women's movement and second-wave feminism than has previously been recognised, it indicates that sport provided a crucial way by which women could resist societal norms of gender, even despite its participants remaining outside the structures and organisations of the Women's Liberation Movement.

The 1980s and 1990s: Continued resistance

56 A number of historians of modern Britain, writing during the 1990s, attempted to weigh up how far women had progressed towards equality by this period.[59] Jane Lewis, for example, recognised that three fundamental social changes had occurred by 1992 which particularly affected British women: an increase in married women in paid employment; an increase in the divorce rate; and the rise of illegitimacy.[60] Yet this focus on demographic changes, and in particular changes in the number of women in the workforce, failed to consider an important arena by which shifts in women's societal position might be measured: that of women's leisure. It was left to sociologists to highlight the continued difficulties women had in asserting their right to leisure opportunities. Studies conducted by Erica Wimbush (1986), Rosemary Deem (1986) and Eileen Green, Sandra Hebron and Diane Woodward (1987) all suggested that there were specific constraints on leisure for women: a lack of support with childcare, a shortage of time and money, the sexual division of labour, the attitudes of their husbands/partners, and a strong sense that they did not have a right to demand leisure if they were not in full-time employment.[61] While the phenomenon of the "working housewife" continued to increase during the 1980s, as the expansion of the service industries and the increase in part-time employment led to many more women entering the workforce, the expectation that women would still be largely responsible for domestic chores remained firmly in place.[62] Thus, far from opening up more opportunities for leisure, female employment actually created a "double burden" for women, which decreased their leisure time even further. While leisure opportunities were broadly speaking growing in the 1980s – the availability of personal credit meant more money to spend on holidays and home entertainments – this did not necessarily alter the situation for married women. Deem recognised that the majority of women in her study who regularly participated in sport were single.[63]

57 Given this general trend, it is notable that several of the women who played for England in these years do not even seem to have even contemplated the possibility of having to give up cricket upon marriage. Janet Southgate, who captained England during the 1984 New Zealand tour, was married throughout her England career. A 1982 interview in her local newspaper revealed: "*Janet and David...rarely see each other over summer weekends... 'We are ruled by a fixture card in the summer,' she admitted...'When we do see one another, we usually have about a week's conversation to catch up on.'*"[64]

58 Another piece in *The Times* from the same year, which reported the following conversation between the couple, is also striking: "'*When the washing piles up, I'll ring you,' [David] said to his wife.*

59 *'You'd better not,' she replied. 'I've left enough instructions. Every wall in the kitchen has notes stuck on it.'*"[65]

60 While this does indicate a certain level of adherence to the prevailing division of labour, the very fact that Jan made the decision to go away on tour for five weeks indicates that she prioritised cricket over her domestic role.

61 A number of England players also juggled motherhood with cricket during the 1990s. Laura Newton, who represented England between 1997 and 2007, opened the bowling for England against India in 1999 just five months after giving birth to her first child; she repeated the feat three years later, choosing to go on a month-long tour of India while leaving her two sons, aged three and five months, at home with her husband.[66] Jan Godman took time off from cricket to have four children during her England career, which lasted from 1991 to 1996, but returned to the squad afterwards each time. Once again, these events were reported on within the WCA's newsletter without any kind of fanfare, suggesting that continuing with cricket after having children continued to be accepted as normal within the women's cricket community. Thus, while *The Times* article quoted above concluded with Rachael Heyhoe-Flint's assurance that: "*No one in the party claims to be a feminist. Certainly not*", the ongoing assertion of their right to exercise their own leisure preferences shows that female cricketers continued to promote feminist values during the 1980s. In a society where female access to leisure was still limited, women cricketers were once again going against the grain.

62 Cricket also remained an important way in which women could challenge discourses surrounding the frailty and physical weakness of female bodies. During the 1970s, discussions emerged over the ways in which women experienced their bodies, and activists campaigned to reclaim, in the words of one slogan of the Women's Liberation Movement, "*power over our bodies, power over our lives*".[67] Such discourses may well have influenced those participating in women's sport during the 1970s and 1980s, and were certainly reflected in interviews with those who participated in men's league cricket during the decade. For some women this was a practical way to assert the power of the female body. Cathy Mowat, for example, who represented England as a fast bowler between 1978 and 1984, played for a men's club side for several years during the 1980s, and reported:

> ... they always bowled faster at me. But I could get my own back, because if I ever got, I remember one famous occasion, a guy who obviously didn't rate me and had been making apparently dodgy comments, I got him out, and he was ribbed the whole evening in the bar. So you can get your own back![68]

63 Carole Cornthwaite, an England cricketer who played for Fylde Cricket Club in Lancashire throughout the mid-1980s, also talked about her experiences:

> ... there was a couple of occasions where guys would get a bit carried away... Occasionally they'd sort of, you'd get the odd one, 'what on earth's a woman doing here?' But they soon learnt that I was quite capable of dealing with them. I think once I proved that I was quite capable of living in that company, then there was no problem, you were just sort of treated as an equal then.[69]

64 Ultimately, participation in men's cricket and the demonstration of physical prowess on the pitch was a very physical, corporeal resistance to existing ideologies of gender.

65 Concomitantly, a number of my interviewees revealed that participation in cricket had increased both their sense of self-worth and their confidence levels. Carole Cornthwaite provides a good example:

66 RN: What difference do you think your involvement with women's cricket has made to you generally?

67 CC:... It certainly did make a big difference... Through playing cricket I've got, I've done quite a lot of speaking to organisations, things like that, and that's something that I would never ever have dreamed of being able to do, had I not, and it was only really being involved with the cricket. You don't, I'm not quite sure how it ties in with being able to stand up and talk in front of people, but I think it does. It just gives a certain amount of self-confidence.[70]

68 Participation in cricket could evidently be an empowering experience for women, transforming their sense of their own capabilities and their self-belief.

69 Again it must be asked what this all means for our understanding of the women's movement? By 1983, as Bouchier acknowledged in his history of the Women's Liberation Movement, the feminist movement had "*receded from consciousness...The organised feminist groups are politically becalmed and divided by deep theoretical disagreements...the movement itself is almost invisible*".[71] Indeed, by the turn of the century, feminist ideas of equality had filtered through into wider society, but most feminist activists had become absorbed into mainstream male-dominated institutions, and the movement itself had consequently become deradicalised. Feminist ideas had taken root; yet the feminist movement itself was much less visible than it had been during the 1970s. Yet there remained some female-only spaces where a radical rejection of ideologies of gender remained possible, and where female empowerment was central. For historians, an exploration of the activities of the WCA and its members surely opens the door to a deeper understanding of the evolution of the women's movement up to the turn of the century.

Conclusion

70 Why, then, is it so important for historians of women to pay attention to the sporting activities of women? Firstly, sport was clearly central to the lives of many women throughout the twentieth century, and the meaning of activities like cricket for women always went deeper than simply being a physical activity. Playing cricket was a way to challenge discourses surrounding female frailty and to assert female independence; the women I interviewed expressed definite feelings of empowerment as a result of their involvement. As an organisation, too, the WCA actively advocated placing the right to leisure above domestic commitments. It would be difficult, therefore, not to conclude that female cricketers should be seen as part of an evolving women's movement across the century. No doubt a similar case can be made for other women's sporting

organisations, such as the All England Women's Hockey Association: this is an obvious area for future research.

71 Secondly, and relatedly, it has been shown here that female cricketers continually, from the formation of the WCA in 1926, espoused so-called "second-wave feminist" ideals such as the freedom to control their own bodies, the importance of female autonomy, and a rejection of traditional models of domesticity, placing their own leisure needs above servicing the needs of their husbands. This in itself is significant, because it indicates that there were important continuities between the first and second-wave feminist movements which have previously gone unnoticed by historians. Yet it is not just that, as Beaumont has argued, women's organisations like the WI promoted a public role for women; but that groups like the WCA were clearly espousing ideals such as bodily liberation and liberation from a regime of housework and childcare, right from the 1920s. Surely, as historians attempt to tease out the ideological precursors of second-wave feminism - not to mention its broader impact on British women - a deeper examination of women's sport is therefore crucial, in order to create a more complete picture of the development of the women's movement across the twentieth century. This article has sought to begin that process.

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NOTES

1. Interview with Beth Morgan, 16 September 2013. All ages given are the age of the interviewee at the time of the interview.

2. Rafaelle Nicholson, '"Like a man trying to knit"? Women's Cricket in Britain, 1945-2000', (PhD thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2015).

3. Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992); Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women. The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (1997; reprinted London, Penguin, 1999); Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999* (Hampshire, Macmillan, 2000).

4. See for example Maggie Andrews, *The acceptable face of feminism: the Women's Institute as a social movement* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1997).

5. Catriona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens. Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928-64* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 3.

6. Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (London, Yale University Press, 1987), p. 9.

7. Lucy Delap, 'The "woman question" and the origins of feminism,' in Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 320-22.

8. Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, p. 3.

9. See for example Mariah Burton Nelson, *The stronger women get, the more men love football: sexism and the American culture of sport* (1994; reprinted London, Women's Press, 1996).

10. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the body: beauty, health and fitness in Britain, 1880-1939* (Oxford, 2010); Fiona Skillen, *Women, Sport and Modernity in Interwar Britain* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013).

11. Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting females: critical issues in the history and sociology of women's sports* (London, Routledge, 1994), p. 113.

12. These figures are quoted in Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, Oxford Unviersity Press, 1998), pp. 368-70.

13. All England Women's Hockey Association, *Women's Hockey (from Village Green to Wembley Stadium)* (London, MacDonald and Evans, 1954), p. 11.

14. Marjorie Pollard, *Cricket for Women and Girls* (London, Hutchinson & Co., 1934), p. 18.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

16. An account of the formation of the WCA is given in Jack Williams, *Cricket and England: A Cultural and Social History of the Inter-war Years* (London, Frank Cass, 1999), chapter 5.

17. Board of Education, *Supplement to 1919 Syllabus of Physical Training for Older Girls* (London, HMRC, 1927), p. 33.

18. WCA, 'Rules', WCA Yearbook, 1945, http://www.womenscrickethistory.org [accessed 1 July 2014].

19. Interview with Mollie Buckland, 18 June 2014.

20. Interview with Norma Whitehorn, 14 May 2013.

21. Jean Williams, *A Game for Rough Girls? A history of women's football in Britain* (London, Routledge, 2003), p. 9.

22. Interview with Janet Bitmead, 21 October 2013.

23. See for example Nancy Cott, 'What's in a Name? The Limits of "Social Feminism"; or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History', *Journal of American History*, 76:3 (1989), p. 822; Cordelia Moyse, *A History of the Mothers' Union: Women, Anglicanism and Globalisation, 1876-2008* (Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2009), p. 10.

24. Susan Noel (ed.), *Sportswoman's Manual* (London, Hutchinson's Library of Sports and Pastimes, 1950), p. 14.

25. Jack Williams and John Woodhouse, 'Can play, will play? Women and football in Britain', in Jack Williams and Stephen Wagg (eds.), *British Football and Social Change. Getting into Europe* (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1991), p.105.

26. *Daily Mirror*, April 21 1938.

27. Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, p. 124.

28. Walter Hammond, *Cricket's Secret History* (London, Stanley Paul & Co., 1952), p. 155.

29. Interview with Mollie Buckland, 18 June 2014.

30. *Women's Cricket*, 18 September 1948.

31. A handful of men were granted Associate membership, but this did not give them voting privileges at WCA meetings.

32. WCA Executive Committee minutes, 19 May 1950, WCA Archive, Lancashire.

33. Andrews, *The acceptable face of feminism*, p. 12.

34. Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1980* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 182.

35. See for example Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain*, chapter 10.

36. Williams, *Cricket and England*, pp. 95-6; Skillen, *Women, Sport and Modernity*, p. 202.

37. *Women's Cricket*, 25 July 1952.

38. *Ibid.*, 8 July 1955.

39. *Ibid.*, June 1946.

40. *Ibid.*, 3 September 1954.

41. *Ibid.*, 18 May 1951.

42. Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-1960* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 144.

43. Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, p. 217.

44. For histories of the Women's Liberation Movement, see Sheila Rowbotham, *The past is before us*, David Bouchier, *The feminist challenge: the movement for women's liberation in Britain and the USA* (London, Macmillan, 1983), and Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet freedom: the struggle for women's liberation* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1987).

45. Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945*, p. 72.

46. Interview with Norma Whitehorn, 14 May 2013. While lesbianism appears to have been relatively common amongst female cricketers, this was seemingly not a route Norma chose to pursue. See Nicholson, 'Like a man trying to knit'?, p. 86.

47. Interview with Mollie Buckland, 18 June 2014.

48. Interview with Pat and Steve Siderfin, 27 May 2014.

49. Bowlby was a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst whose theories held that separation between a child and their primary caregiver (the mother in most instances) would be harmful for the child, and could cause trauma leading to significant mental health problems in later life. See Matthew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford, 2013), chapter 3.

50. *Women's Cricket*, 5 May 1963.

51. Sylvia Swinburne, 'Haywire, a reply to *Heyhoe!*', WCA Archive, Lancashire.

52. Sue Sharpe, *Double Identity. The Lives of Working Mothers* (London, Penguin, 1984), p. 137.

53. *Sport and Recreation*, January 1980.

54. Rachael Heyhoe-Flint, *Heyhoe! The autobiography of Rachael Heyhoe-Flint* (London, Pelham Books, 1978), p. 131.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

56. *The Cricketer*, August 1970.

57. Lewis, *Women in Britain*, p. 88.

58. Rowbotham, *The past is before us*, introduction.

59. Examples include Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945*, Pat Thane, 'Towards Equal Opportunities? Women in Britain since 1945', in Terence Gourvish and Alan O'Day (eds.), *Britain since 1945* (London, Macmillan, 1991), and Rowbotham, *A Century of Women. The History of Women in Britain and the United States,* chapter 10.

60. Lewis, *Women in Britain*, p. 2.

61. Erica Wimbush, *Women, leisure and well-being* (Edinburgh, Centre for Leisure Research, 1986); Rosemary Deem, *All work and no play?: a study of women and leisure* (Milton Keynes,

Open University Press, 1986); Eileen Green, Sandra Hebron and Diane Woodward, *Leisure and gender: a study of Sheffield women's leisure experiences* (London, Sports Council, 1987).

62. Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain,* p. 336, p. 343. As a percentage share of the total labour force, women's work increased from 37% in 1971 to 45% in 1987. See J. Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945*, p. 65.

63. Deem, *All work and no play?*, p. 71.

64. Newspaper clipping, 7 October 1982, private collection, Surrey.

65. *The Times*, 8 January 1982.

66. *The Times*, 2 June 1999; *The Cricketer*, January 2002.

67. Rowbotham, *The past is before us*, p. 61.

68. Interview with Cathy Mowat, 17 September 2013.

69. Interview with Carole Cornthwaite, 10 July 2013.

70. Interview with Carole Cornthwaite, 10 July 2013.

71. Bouchier, *The feminist challenge: the movement for women's liberation in Britain and the USA,* p. 1.

ABSTRACTS

This article examines the formation of the governing body of women's cricket in 1926 and its subsequent activities, arguing for a reinsertion of women's sport into the history of women and the women's movement in twentieth-century Britain. The centrality of sport to many women's lives is clearly demonstrated; it is argued that playing cricket was a way to challenge discourses surrounding female frailty, and a way for women to reject traditional models of domesticity, placing their own leisure needs above servicing the needs of their husbands. Overall it is suggested that a detailed examination of women's sporting lives can disrupt and alter our current understanding of women's history, revealing new continuities in the ideological development of the women's movement. Including sporting organisations in a broader definition of the women's movement is therefore crucial for historians, as we seek to make sense of women's lives across the twentieth century.

Cet article étudie la création, en 1926, de l'organisation qui gouverne le cricket féminin, et ses activités, afin de plaider pour la réinsertion du sport féminin dans l'histoire des femmes britanniques et de leur mouvement au vingtième siècle. L'importance capitale du sport dans la vie de nombreuses femmes est clairement démontrée et il est suggéré que jouer au cricket était une manière de mettre à mal les discours concernant une prétendue fragilité féminine, ainsi qu'une manière de rejeter des modèles traditionnels de domesticité, puisqu'elles donnaient la priorité à leurs propres loisirs plutôt qu'aux besoins/attentes de leurs maris. Regarder de manière détaillée la vie sportive des femmes peut altérer notre point de vue sur leur histoire, en faisant apparaître de nouvelles continuités dans le développement idéologique de leur mouvement. Inclure les organisations sportives dans une définition plus large du mouvement des femmes est donc essentiel pour les historien.ne.s si nous espérons faire sens de la vie des femmes au vingtième siècle.

INDEX

Keywords: Sport, leisure, gender, women's movement, feminism
Mots-clés: sport, loisir, genre, mouvement des femmes, féminisme

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