

REAL SPORTING HEROES

A community research project by volunteers from The Fusilier Museum London



Some of the winners of the British Amateur Athletic Championships



THE FUSILIER
MUSEUM LONDON

www.fusiliermuseumlondon.org

Foreword

The Fusilier Museum London has a number of objects with a sporting connection in its collection. As London gets set to celebrate its sporting summer, the museum has been running a project to find out more about the Fusiliers' relationship with sport and has uncovered some famous serving sportsmen.

The museum enlisted the help of eight volunteer researchers who met weekly over a two month period to look at themes such as sport and recruitment, sport and training and sport and rehabilitation.

In between these meetings our volunteers undertook extensive research, not just in the museum's stores and archives, but at Arsenal Football Club, British Library, British Red Cross Museum and Archive, Imperial War Museum, National Army Museum, Surrey Cricket Club Museum and more. The museum was lucky to have the help of University College London, Museum Studies Masters student, Alice Williams, to co-ordinate the project, and to receive funding from Arts Council England's, *People's Record* project.

The project culminated in a small temporary exhibition which was exhibited at Bethnal Green Library 14th May - 12th June 2012. A celebration event was held at the museum at the end of the project and Prof. Tony Mason, De Montfort University, Leicester and co-author of *Sport and the Military; The British Armed Forces 1880-1960* talked on Sport's Place in Army Life 1900-1960.

This publication accompanies the project and includes some of the interesting things we just couldn't fit into the exhibition. Rather than use footnotes we have tried to credit sources within the text but if anyone feels they have not been correctly referenced the museum would be happy to hear from them and correct our error.

This project is one of a series of community curated exhibitions collectively called *Completing the Picture* and part of the museum's Fusilier Advance! Heritage Lottery Funded project.

Dale Copley
Museum Officer, May 2012



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Recruitment

Since the 1800s the British Army have used sport to attract new recruits.

In the 19th century ,upper class men became Army officers in far flung parts of the Empire, knowing they would spend large amounts of time engaged in field sports such as hunting.

Game books were kept detailing the officers' names and what they had shot.

By 1900 team sports such as football were becoming increasingly popular with British workers. The army hoped that by increasing leisure opportunities for regular soldiers ,they would attract more of the 'right sort' of men.

Sport was a common theme in recruitment posters and espoused 'The army isn't all work'.

Regimental sports teams often played against civilian teams. As well as providing some opposition, the civilian teams provided an opportunity for the army to increase its profile and improve its name, with the hope of attracting more recruits.

When the First World War broke out, and large numbers of new recruits were needed, sport was again used to help. The army could not promise opportunities for sport at a time of war, and so the emphasis of the recruitment posters changed. Posters called on sportsmen to put the qualities they had developed on the sports field to better use on the battlefield.

On 27 August, a letter written by W.G. Grace was published in *The Sportsman*,

'I think the time has arrived when the county cricket season should be closed, for it is not fitting at a time like this that able-bodied men should be playing cricket by day and pleasure-seekers look on. I should like to see all first-class cricketers of suitable age set a good example and come to the help of their country without delay in its hour of need.'

When war broke out, professional cricket and rugby was immediately suspended, but the football league continued with the 1914-15 season. Players were under contracts and so could only enlist if their clubs released them and clubs were worried about meeting their overheads if matches were suspended.

This soon attracted negative comment from those who thought fit, healthy young men should be fighting.

'There was a time for all things in the world. There was a time for games, there was a time for business, and there was a time for domestic life. There was a time for everything, but there is only time for one thing now, and that thing is war. If the cricketer had a straight eye let him look along the barrel of a rifle. If a footballer had strength of limb let them serve and march in the field of battle.' Arthur Conon Doyle, September 1914.

The Bishop of Chelmsford preached a sermon in Bethnal Green on the need for professional footballers in the services and the letters pages of The Times newspaper gave a voice to a discontented public.

Under considerable pressure the Football Association eventually backed down and indeed many footballers did enlist.

In December 1914 a special battalion known as the Footballers Battalion was established by William Johnson Hicks at Fulham Town Hall. This became the 17th Service Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment and amateur footballers served alongside their professional heroes Frank Huckley (England), Vivian Woodward (Chelsea) and Evelyn Lintott (Queen's Park Rangers).

According to *Victory was their Goal* cited by Jack Rollin in his book *Soccer at War*, the following football teams had men enlisting in the services 1939-45. Crystal Palace 98 Wolverhampton Wanderers 91 Liverpool 76 Chester City 69 Luton Town 68 Huddersfield Town 65 Leicester City 63 Charlton Athletic 62 Oldham Athletic 60 Grimsby Town 58 Preston North End 55 Burnley 52 Sheffield Wednesday 50 Hull City 48 Northampton Town 48 Queens Park Rangers 46 Chelsea 44 Clapton Orient 42 Watford 41 Brentford 41 Southampton 41 Sunderland 41 West Ham United 40

Sportsmen's Battalions

For those who were not footballers there were two other battalions dedicated to sportsmen and badged Royal Fusiliers.

The formidable Mrs Cunliffe-Owen, a wealthy and well connected society lady, formed the Sportsmen's Battalions from the Hotel Cecil on the Strand.

Allegedly, after she had criticised her male friend for not joining the army, he challenged her to raise her own battalion. She could also have been hoping to further her husband's position.

She believed a sportsman would make a good soldier, having already 'fitted himself for the hard life of the soldier by a vigorous life of sport' and thought potential recruits would be encouraged to join her battalion, knowing they would serve with like minded men.

In her own words her recruits were to be, 'of fine physique, accustomed to outdoor life, good shots and keen sportsmen'. Both professional and amateur sportsmen were welcome, and sports encompassed 'sporting' pursuits such as big game hunting, and adventuring, as well as team sports like cricket and football. Those who had been educated in public schools were by proxy thought to be of a 'sporting character', imbued with the qualities valued in a soldier.

Thus, a large number of upper class men joined the Sportsmen's Battalions, and were forced to serve as regular soldiers. These men brought along staff, who enlisted alongside their employer and so the battalion was not exclusively populated with public school boys, or indeed, with sportsmen.

Later, men joined the battalion hoping to serve with their sporting heroes. It was rumoured legendary cricketer Jack Hobbs had joined the battalion. The rumour was unfounded, although his batting partner Andrew Sandham did enlist.

Mrs Cunliffe-Owen was granted a concession from the King to raise the upper age limit of the battalion to 45 –as the sportsmen were meant to be very fit- meaning many older men, who had been rejected by other regiments, enlisted.



The 1st Sportsmen's battalion was initially funded by private donations and by a subscription paid by all new recruits, before being formally accepted as a fully formed battalion of 1300 men by the War Office.

The recruitment drive had been so successful that Mrs Cunliffe-Owen went on to form another battalion. The battalions became the 23rd and 24th Royal Fusiliers and served in the 99th Infantry Brigade in Northern France.

Second World War

When the Second World War broke out, professional sports teams were aware that their players would be called upon to serve.

Unlike in the First World War, notice immediately came from the Football League that the 1939-40 fixture list was nullified. The Football Association (FA) declared, agreements between players and clubs were also to be cancelled. The FA encouraged players to join the reserve and premiership players dispersed back to their home towns.

Many footballers joined up with their team mates. The most famous mass sign up was Bolton Wanderers. On 8th April, at a home game against Sunderland, captain Harry Goslin, spoke to the crowd:

'We are facing a national emergency. But this danger can be met, if everybody keeps a cool head, and knows what to do. This is something you can't leave to the other fellow, everybody has a share to do.'

Of the 35 players on the staff at Bolton Wanderers, 32 joined the armed services and the other three went into the coal mines and munitions. This included Harry Hubbick, who resumed his career down the pits and Jack Atkinson and George Hunt served in the local police force. A total of 17 players, including Harry Goslin, Danny Winter, Billy Ithell, Albert Geldard, Tommy Sinclair, Don Howe, Ray Westwood, Ernie Forrest, Jackie Roberts, Jack Hurst and Stan Hanson, joined the 53rd (Bolton) Field Regiment, whereas Tom Woodward, became a Physical Training instructor.

Quickly, the Government advised the Football Association that friendly matches could continue to be played, albeit without any wages, expenses only were to be paid to players. This was later relaxed further, allowing players fixed wages and allowing clubs limited travel to matches.

The Army Football Association also amended their rules for the duration of the War. They allowed soldiers to continue to play for professional clubs when leave could be granted, (however, they would not allow these professional players to play in the army league).



A Football League Wartime Council was formed and the teams were organised into local leagues which allowed matches to be played without contravention of the 'one-day-travel' rule.

The rules of the council were as follows:

- (1) Football must not interfere with National Service
- (2) Large crowds were to be avoided in evacuation areas
- (3) Police chiefs could cap the size of the crowds
- (4) Larger grounds could take maximum gate revenues of £15,000

In London 21 clubs were organised into two leagues.

For football clubs, the aim was to keep players trained and fit, for the commencement of the league after the war had ended. They also needed to provide at least a few of the promised matches to their season ticket holders, and make enough money to cover the grounds' overheads.

As war went on, there were inevitably problems with finding players. Professional players often turned out for several different clubs. Teams were let down at short notice when players were unable to be released from their war duties. Contemporary programmes often printed line-ups with the name A.N.Other, or A.Player, and in the worst cases, the 11th man was picked from among the spectators as the game kicked off.

There were other problems for the clubs. Some grounds were requisitioned by the army or suffered bomb damage. Clubs also had to manage the logistics of evacuating large crowds safely when the air-raid siren sounded. Spotters were put on the very top of the stands to look for the early signs of air-raids and to warn the referee, this allowed the players to get off the pitch before the crowds swarmed from the ground.

Games provided a recruitment opportunity for the army. They would call out at half-time for men to come and join up. Once subscription started, the police kept a close eye out at football games for men avoiding service.

Training

There was a popular belief that sport and war were in some senses the same. George Orwell condemned sport as being little better than war, a way to play out visceral hatred, jealousies and loyalties.

'serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence, in other words it is war minus the shooting'.

Others drew the same comparison between sport and war, but came to a different conclusion.

It was thought that the moral qualities needed in a good soldier - courage, quick-wittedness, team work, decision making and leadership- were best developed on the sports field.

In their book *Sport and the Military*, Prof. Mason and Dr Riedi have argued that this attitude was particularly prevalent in the public schools of the Edwardian and Victorian period, the schools that were filling the Army's Officer Class. It was used to excuse the amount of time Officers spent at sports such as big game hunting.

Whilst any moral qualities or personality traits developed on the sports field were contestable, the physical benefits to soldiers of regular exercise were more universally recognised, and by 1900 sport was a recognized form of army training.

1860 saw the establishment of the Army Gymnastic Staff (AGS). Founded by Major Frederick Hammersley it was meant to address the fitness of soldiers after a disappointing performance in the Crimean War. Beginning with a staff of 12 NCOs the AGS spread, establishing gymnasiums across the Empire. Peacetime training dedicated 110 hours to a new recruit's physical training. In 1914, by which time the AGS were playing a key role in training Kitchener's armies, new recruits got just 50 hours.



In 1916 the AGS outlined their aims as:

- (1) developing the physical efficiency of recruits
- (2) exercise for trained soldiers
- (3) restoring war worn men
- (4) remedial treatment in hospitals
- (5) sustaining morale

showing just how much their remit had expanded, and neatly summarizing the role physical fitness was beginning to play in the army.

In 1919, the AGS became the Army Sport Control Board, the minutes of their first meeting concluded.

'No efficient Army ever underrates the value of personal fitness, and sport in its various forms, has always helped to this end'

Physical fitness remains an important part of army training today. At the end of basic training a Fusilier must be able to carry 40kg over 120 metres and run 1.5 miles in less than 12.45 minutes. Many of the attitudes that made sport a core part of army life also continue.

'Army fitness is not just about assault courses, marches and gym work. Sport is an essential and integral part of Army life and it is actively encouraged and supported, regardless of whether you are playing for fun or aiming to compete in the Olympic Games.'

www.army.mod.uk

Sport and the Regiment

By the end of the 19th century, the Army had begun to administer sport centrally and integrate it into army training. However, sport had begun in the army at a regimental level.

Often stationed abroad for long periods, soldiers and officers had lots of free time on their hands. Organising sports and games filled up this time and kept boredom at bay. As early as the 1860s members of the Royal Fusiliers were photographed with a cricket bat whilst stationed on Gibraltar.

What began as informal kick-arounds soon became organised tournaments between companies, barracks or ranks within the Regiment.

Regimental journals, which were beginning around the same period, carried detailed reports of matches and even league tables.

Sport was encouraged by commanding officers and the Army administration as it kept the men fit, occupied and out of trouble.

The extent to which a certain sport was played or practised, depended very much on the individual preferences of those prepared to organise it. Many of the Royal Fusiliers journals lament 'not being able to raise a cricket team this season' as men's interest was diverted by other pursuits.

Where possible ,games were organised between different Regiments or with local civilian teams. There are further complaints in the Journals, especially from Battalions stationed in Indian outposts, about a lack of teams to play.

Sport encouraged a sense of loyalty to the Regiment and helped to create a unique Regimental identity. This was especially useful when regiments were reorganised and needed to create a new identity. Success on the sports field brought prestige to the Regiment.

There has been much debate as to what sport did with regards to inter-rank relationships. Before 1914, officers and soldiers might only really meet when playing sport. Some people suggested that sport improved relationships between the ranks. But in many cases separate competitions were run for soldiers, sergeants and officers, or else, rank teams would play each other.

Morale

'with polo, football, hockey and such like, we manage to keep fit and cheerful and hope for a better station when we move'

Letter from the 1st Battalion, *Royal Fusilier Chronicle*, January 1913

Besides filling time, sport helped servicemen to maintain morale and to relax and forget the horrors of war.

The Regiment's war diaries, from the First and Second World Wars, record sporting competitions even when men were stationed in support trenches at the Front.

One of the most famous of these sporting occasions was the First World War 'Christmas Truce'. In December 1914, on the battlefields of Flanders, German soldiers, having set Christmas trees along their trenches, proposed a truce with French and British soldiers. The soldiers left their trenches and met in the middle of no man's land to shake hands, share rations and bury their dead. An official German report mentions an improvised football match between the trenches. Both sides marked their goal posts with their caps and played with a ball brought by British soldiers. However, Commanders on both sides ordered their troops to restart hostilities under penalty of court-martial. The German report noted that the game finished with a score of three goals to two in favour of the Germans against the British.

'How many times did one see a Battalion which had come out of the line in Ypres Salient and elsewhere, battered to pieces and sad at heart at having lost so many Officers and men, hold up its head again and recover in a few hours by kicking a football or punching with the glove? It had a magical effect on moral.' General Harrington (1870-1938) cited Mason and Riedi *Sport and the Military*.

A 1922 report of the War Office Committee into Shell Shock had already acknowledged the usefulness of sport in preventing neurosis.

In most of the prisoner of war camps, there was an active sport program.

'with a cricket bat in his hands, the prisoner of war...is nearer home'

Hon. T. Prittie captured at Calais in 1940 and writing in *The Cricketer* whilst still a prisoner of war.

'In the heart of Germany Englishmen are playing traditional British games. Often they have little space, and the field is bounded with barbed wire. But thanks to the red cross and St John, these British prisoners of war have equipment for football, cricket, baseball, handball, softball and many other games...' British Red Cross Sports Committee, *Sport scores a million*.

The Geneva Convention of 1929 encouraged sport as a way for prisoners of war to maintain a good physical and mental condition.

Perhaps surprisingly, captors also supported sport in the camps. It was a way of relieving aggression and preventing outbreaks of violence, as well as a privilege that could be removed as a punishment.

The games provided interest for the guards as much as the prisoners. A prisoner of war held at Stalag XVIIIID reported to the British Red Cross wartime journal that a German Officer had given 500 marks in prizes for the Whit Sunday sports, which was judged, a 'good days sport on real Olympic lines'.

Sports equipment was provided by the British Red Cross and St John's. A standard case comprised; two footballs and a rugby ball, two cricket bats and four balls, three rounders sticks, twenty four small balls, five rope quoits, two tenniquoit nets, four sets of boxing gloves. six skipping ropes, two table tennis nets and posts, eight bats and two dozen balls.

Families could also send equipment through a third party organisation, which screened the packages on behalf of the government censorship department. One package could be sent every three months and it could weigh no more than 10lbs.



The most common sports played in camp were football, volleyball, boxing or running. But where a camp was near a pool or river, it was reported, the men were nearly always allowed to go swimming.

Games were adapted to the restricted conditions of the camp.

'Sport at P.G.78 (Sulmona) is very popular, but the cricket is not very M.C.C...the pitch has a gradient of one in four, there is a wicket (at the top of a hill) and you can be caught off a roof or wall of the huts around.' British Red Cross Wartime Journal.

Tennis balls, which bounced very high, were covered in elastoplast for cricket matches. This allowed better grip and even the possibility of spin, as well as prolonging the life of the ball.

Sport was of course dependent on the prisoners' health and where rations were low, energy had to be conserved. A prisoner at Stalag 357 reported food problems to the British Red Cross, 'sport is defunct at present. Reading and cards are the main items...to spin out half rations of food and tobacco'. At smaller camps and outlying working detachments opportunities for sport were fewer.

Rehabilitation

Sport was of value in the rehabilitation of physical injuries as well as mental ones.

Following the example of Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War, nurses in military hospitals began to organise informal games among their patients to strengthen muscles, to raise spirits, and to get them out in the fresh air.

Photographs from the First World War show soldiers and nurses at military hospitals playing cricket and crochet.

In the Second World War neurologist Sir Ludwig Guttmann made sport a formal part of the rehabilitation programme at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Aylesbury. Netball, archery and polo played in wheelchairs was used to treat spinal injury.

During the London 1948 Olympics, Sir Ludwig Guttman organised the first Stoke Mandeville games. His patients competed with patients from other hospitals. In 1960, he brought 400 wheelchair athletes to Rome to compete in a 'parallel' Olympic Games. This would later become known as the Paralympics Games, in which athletes from around the world with a variety of disabilities compete.

Sport continues to be used in the rehabilitation of servicemen and women. In 2008, 60 years after the first competitive games at the Stoke Mandeville military hospital the MOD launched a scheme called Battle Back. Battle Back provides opportunities for servicemen and women, who have been injured in action, to take part in sports and adventure training, and to show them how much they can achieve despite their disability. Battle back encourages adventurous training and sport such as waterskiing, sailing, diving, kayaking and even training athletes and Paralympic teams it helps wounded men and women both physically and psychologically.



Lance Corporal Rory Mackenzie, who was injured in a roadside bomb attack in Iraq, explains how the scheme has made a difference to his life:

'After seven months at Headley Court I had made a full physical recovery but I became aggressive, angry and upset at the hand which had been dealt to me. I had created in my mind a long list of things I would never do again.

It was at this time that I received an invitation via Help for Heroes to go adaptive skiing in Bavaria, Germany under a new military initiative called Battle Back. I didn't waste a second and jumped at the opportunity! Within five minutes of the initial brief I knew this was going to be HEALING. It gave me freedom like I never thought I would feel again; I came off those slopes with a completely different frame of mind towards my life and my future. I no longer had a list of all the things I couldn't do; I now had a long list of the things I could potentially do! Anything is possible!'

www.helpforheroes.org.uk

Influence

The Army has been central to the development and spread of a number of sports.

The Modern Pentathlon was based on the fictional story of a military officer trying to deliver a message in combat. It was designed by Baron de Coubertin in the lead up to the First World War, in order to demonstrate the masculine military ideal. The pentathlon combines horse riding, swimming and running with the military skills of fencing and pistol shooting. It was initially popular with Army officers in training. The Modern Pentathlon first appeared in the 1912 Olympics and remains one of the most challenging events of the Games today.

‘The choice of the five diverse and unrelated sports which make up the Modern Pentathlon arose out of the romantic, rough adventures of a liaison officer whose horse is brought down in enemy territory; having defended himself with his pistol and sword he swims across a raging river and delivers the message on foot.’ Baron de Coubertin.

In the 19th century the British Army took various sports to the Empire. Cricket was considered an officers’ game and became central in the spread of ‘gentlemanly’ sports. It spread to Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, and the West Indies. In contrast to sports like football, which were associated with lower ranking soldiers, cricket was used to develop the character and athleticism desired in potential leaders of the Empire.

The British Army also brought various sports back. Most notably Polo was adapted from an Indian game. First seen in Manipur, it became an integral part of life for officers stationed in India. As well as passing the time it was used for training and team building. Matches were played with local teams to strengthen relationships with Indian leaders. Polo was introduced to England by the 10th Hussars Regiment in 1834 and instantly became popular because of its association with the British Army.



'If we are ever so unfortunate as to lose our Empire it is a safe bet that soccer will continue to be played all over the world... in eternal memory of the British soldiers who accidentally brought the game over in their kit-bags'
Frank Richards (Royal Welch Fusiliers).

In the South African wars, the British introduced Boer prisoners of war to Rugby and Football. The Gloucester Regiment lent prisoners in Diyatalawa their football and the game quickly became popular in the camp.

In the Second World War, Canadian soldiers held in German prisoner of war camps taught softball to the British soldiers who were also imprisoned there.

The army has also provided sporting opportunities for women unparalleled in civilian society.

The First World War offered women the chance to take on new roles and threw them into the sporting arena. A context was set in which athleticism and participation in sport became possible.

The founding of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps in 1917 was the first opportunity for women to join the armed forces and quickly demonstrated their ability to compete with men in terms of physical fitness. Although women in the army were at first restricted to sports considered more suitable such as cricket and netball, its development within the forces was far more advanced than in civilian life.

In the 1950s sport was used as a strong recruitment tool for women's services as it provided opportunities in sport and recreation that were unavailable to women at the time.

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