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# **Women’s sport and the feminism conundrum: the case of interwar English cricket**

**Abstract:** Women’s cricket has not typically been viewed as a bastion of feminism, especially between the wars when the feminist movement was often thought to have dissolved, but this article will argue surface impressions of the sport have masked deeper feminist ambitions for independence, sovereignty, and physical liberation. By engaging with recent debates on the interwar feminist movement in Britain – and new historiography on women’s sport between the wars – this paper maintains that women’s cricket should be viewed as a new area of female emancipation after the First World War. However, this was a conservative feminism that largely excluded working-class women by embracing middle-class value systems to court (male) public opinion, which helps explain the divisions within the sport in these years. The Women’s Cricket Association’s (WCA) fixation with ‘high’ amateurism and its public rejection of political motivations has led some historians to interpret the sport as lacking feminist intent, but these arguments overlook the tightrope women had to walk between alienating and attracting public support for this precarious game. It concludes by arguing the WCA’s separatist philosophy was ultimately successful in safeguarding the longevity of the sport when compared with more competitive, male-controlled women’s cricket organisations.

**Keywords**: women’s cricket, women’s sport, cricket, feminism, gender, amateur, class, interwar, England, Britain

In April 1913, the pavilion at Nevill Cricket Ground in Royal Tunbridge Wells was thought to have been set ablaze by militant suffrage campaigners, leaving behind little more than a skeleton of scorched timbers. That same month, Perthshire’s pavilion was targeted, and two months later North Middlesex Cricket Club. The collective damage to all three pavilions was estimated at around £3,450 – no insignificant sum – as campaigners also attacked golf clubs, racecourses, rugby grandstands, and football grounds.In March 1914, Smethwick Cricket Club was also set alight and suffrage literature left scattered on the ground. As Joyce Kay has highlighted, it was not only Emily Wilding Davison who sought to disrupt or destroy sporting sites considered symbolic of male power, rather than seeking space or even equality on the field of play.[[1]](#endnote-1) Even if many suffrage campaigners were active sportswomen (although few played cricket) the issue of leisure time was firmly relegated behind campaigns for political, legal, economic, and educational equality in the years leading up to the First World War.[[2]](#endnote-2) Publications like *Votes for Women* called on readers to prioritise politics, adopting slogans such as ‘justice before sport’ and ‘no vote, no golf’,[[3]](#endnote-3) which has led some historians to consider women’s sport and physical recreation before 1914 as spaces where gender inequality was reinforced and reproduced.[[4]](#endnote-4) After the war, those who continued to campaign for women’s equality wrote of their disillusionment with the physically and socially liberated young woman, who they felt knew little of their pre-war struggle and rejected the label ‘feminist’.[[5]](#endnote-5) This article will explore debates over the extent women’s sport between the wars can be interpreted as feminist, and focus specifically on the conundrum that is women’s cricket.

Postwar disillusionment with feminism was unsurprising, given the general hostility towards the term in interwar Britain. Historians have typically depicted feminism between the 1920s and 1960s, or between the ‘first’ and ‘second’ waves, as a dormant period for the movement: fractured, declining, and near-absent. This was especially so after women achieved electoral equality with men in 1928, when all women over the age of 21 were given the vote and property qualifications were removed.[[6]](#endnote-6) Others have stressed the continuity of gender roles in society after the Great War,[[7]](#endnote-7) and how prejudicial gender attitudes were strengthened in literature and the mainstream press as the feminist movement came to be seen as illegitimate after equal enfranchisement.[[8]](#endnote-8) Many Anglicans began to support these beliefs not through science but culture, custom, and ‘common sense’.[[9]](#endnote-9) Most historians agree there was a strong public backlash against feminism between the wars, but in recent years some have challenged the assumption the movement completely dissipated, arguing that its activists, cause, and organisational zeal dispersed into wider public life.[[10]](#endnote-10) While these publications have tended to focus on feminism through a narrow political lens, others have explored the impact of the movement on less explicitly political organisations. In her study of five socially conservative, middle-class women’s organisations in mid-century Britain – such as the Mothers’ Union and Women’s Institute – Caitríona Beaumont argued that even if these groups rejected the label ‘feminist’ they nevertheless acted to improve the lives of women by campaigning on issues such as birth control, abortion, divorce, maternity care, and equal pay. Building on the likes of Maggie Andrews, who maintained the Women’s Institute represented ‘the acceptable face of feminism’ between the wars, Beaumont pointed out that while they did not directly challenge domesticity, these organisations did seek to improve the position and status of women. Publicly rejecting feminism and adopting a seemingly non-political position was prudent, as these organisations appealed to a wider membership and did not alienate public opinion. As with women’s cricket, these groups are presented as providing a space for women-only leisure, socialisation, and education, while challenging gender norms.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Women’s sport has not featured prominently in this research, if at all, but a growing body of literature is expanding our knowledge of women’s interwar sport in Britain, and historians have likewise debated the problems and merits of classifying sporting organisations as feminist. In the past three decades, these scholars have systematically challenged the assumption, made by Richard Holt in 1989, that ‘the history of sport in modern Britain is a history of men […] female sport itself has been a frail and pallid growth in the shade of men’s sport’.[[12]](#endnote-12) A wave of studies since the late 1980s by the likes of Jennifer Hargreaves, Kathleen McCrone, Allen Guttman, and Jean Williams[[13]](#endnote-13) have successfully exposed how ‘intellectually uncurious’ Holt’s statement has proved to be, as Williams puts it, even if women still remain on the periphery of sports history.[[14]](#endnote-14) There has been further progress, too, since Carol Osborne and Fiona Skillen’s claim, a decade ago, that the field ‘broadly speaks to male interests’.[[15]](#endnote-15) Much of this emerging literature has focused on either the interwar period, as a time of great expansion for organised women’s sport, or the mid-twentieth century (1918–1951).[[16]](#endnote-16) Although mainstream histories of cricket have all but omitted women, to the extent that it is generally assumed *the* history of cricket is simply the history of *men’s* cricket,[[17]](#endnote-17) there has been growing academic and popular interest both in Britain[[18]](#endnote-18) and internationally.[[19]](#endnote-19) In the past decade a number of scholars have chosen to explore the topic, led by Rafaelle Nicholson.[[20]](#endnote-20)

As with the women’s movement in this period, cricketers and organising officials attempted to project an image of respectability, femininity, and deference that appeared – at least on the surface – as deliberately rejecting feminism, especially the militant campaigning of the suffragettes. On the other hand, the fact that women crossed the boundary ropes of a sport so closely associated with ‘muscular Christianity’ in the long nineteenth century was inherently provocative. As Britain emerged from the First World War these feelings had little dampened. The war opened economic, cultural, and physical opportunities for many women, but peacetime brought a swift return to domesticity and an end to women’s employment in most wartime industries. Not only did commentators question if women *could* play, but also whether they *should* play. Unlike hockey, lacrosse, or tennis, cricket was uniquely associated with men and was thought of as a pedagogical tool for teaching boys idealised masculine characteristics like competitiveness, courage, sportsmanship, leadership, and independence. These were traits seemingly unnecessary for girls destined for lives in the home. Cricket was spoken of in terms chivalry and honour, as a nostalgic place of withdrawal after the horrors of the Great War. As discussed below, while most of the cricketing establishment were apathetic towards the women’s game, some were openly hostile or condescending, fearing it threatened men’s cricket and dominant notions of women’s role in society. Like other strenuous sports or activities, gender discrimination was often guised in the language of sexual difference and benevolence. Journalists, parents, and medical professionals spoke of the physical frailties that prevented girls playing, especially the developmental impact it had during puberty.[[21]](#endnote-21) The game, therefore, risked being banned as the Football Association had effectively done with women’s football in 1921. Some even warned cricket could ‘neuter’ girls, and these claims were repeated in popular magazines such as *Girl’s Own Paper*.[[22]](#endnote-22)

Despite players’ own protests, to dismiss women’s cricket (and other ‘masculine’ sports) as simply not feminist is therefore problematic. As Rafaelle Nicholson argued in her monograph on the history of the game: ‘historians of women, and of feminism, need to pay more attention to those women who were situated on the outskirts of the feminist movement. These women may not have been self-defined feminists, or involved in overtly “political” campaigns, but their ideas and actions fed into the feminist movement’.[[23]](#endnote-23) Building on the likes of Nicholson, this article will propose that women’s interwar cricket does represent a form of feminism but one that was conservative and limiting. If judged against many definitions of feminism, the Women’s Cricket Association (WCA) and women cricketers undoubtedly failed to offer a ‘comprehensive critical response to the deliberate and systematic subordination of women as a group by men’.[[24]](#endnote-24) Through its emphasis on gender differences, reluctance to challenge domesticity, and its *de facto* exclusion of working-class women and girls, the WCA never offered a ‘comprehensive’ response to male dominance. It did, however, provide middle-class women with a space to exercise autonomy in public life free from direct male influence, while establishing a liberating activity that forced audiences to question popular conceptions of women’s physical and psychological capabilities. Leading members of the organisation were feminists and while patriarchy was never explicitly challenged neither was it reinforced. It may have been a guarded form of feminism, but that was necessary given the antagonism the game commonly faced, and in doing so the WCA undeniably sought to change opinions and ‘unmask and eliminate discrimination against women in sports’.[[25]](#endnote-25) As Hargreaves noted, difference feminism (which adopted a ‘separate but equal’ policy towards women’s emancipation) may have offered ‘a very limited version of being free and natural’ but change in women’s sport was rarely ‘abrupt or dramatic, but rather a process of adjustment and accommodation, new forms of activity being formulated concomitantly with established conservative attitudes’.[[26]](#endnote-26) Social change could only be achieved by playing the game, both in the politics of public opinion and on the field.

## **‘Illusions of Sisterly Solidarity’**

Women’s cricket experienced unprecedented growth between the wars, but it was also a game divided. The first recorded women’s cricket match had taken place in 1745, just a year after the laws of the game were codified, but as with other sports, middle-class women increasingly found themselves homebound during the Victorian era and by the mid-nineteenth century it was rare for women to play the game. Nonetheless, by the 1880s the sport had begun a slow revival in newly established elite girls’ schools and by country-house teams formed by the daughters of aristocrats. A small number played at universities too, while the founding of physical education colleges expanded the game into less elitist educational settings. The first of these colleges was founded by Martina (Madame) Bergman-Österberg in 1885 at Hampstead Heath and soon disseminated the game into private schools and grammar schools throughout Britain.[[27]](#endnote-27) Despite this slight broadening of its social base, and the fact a few ‘enlightened’ employers also facilitated girls’ cricket, the sport was almost exclusively played by the upper- and upper-middle class before the war, and the number of regular participants probably never exceeding 1,000 in any one summer. Putting aside the occasional novelty game against men, almost all competitive women’s cricket before the Great War was played strictly in private.[[28]](#endnote-28)

These were humble beginnings, but like the expansion of other women’s team sports between the wars by 1939 cricket had lost much of its precarity and isolation. Around 10,000 women and girls played the sport regularly by this year, but it was also attracting thousands of paying spectators (10,000 watched Surrey play Australia at Mitcham Green in July 1937) to matches at first-class county grounds.[[29]](#endnote-29) By this time the game was regularly, and seriously, covered in local and national newspapers, and from 1935 was also featured on BBC radio stations, including live commentaries of international and domestic matches. This swift development, from the guarded, secluded nature of Edwardian matches two decades earlier was largely thanks to the efforts of the WCA, which was founded in October 1926 (by hockey players in search of a summer activity) as the chief organising body for the sport in Britain. The initial aim of the WCA was to develop the game through assisting the formation of clubs, primarily by stimulating interest in girls’ schools and colleges.[[30]](#endnote-30) After steady initial growth, in 1929 the WCA started promoting the game through public exhibition matches in order to ‘remove the incorrect attitude which some people take up when they talk about women’s cricket; the attitude which shows amused tolerance mingled with shocked pity’.[[31]](#endnote-31) In 1930, it launched its own monthly magazine, *Women’s Cricket*, which was published between May and September and actively challenged negative publicity of the sport.[[32]](#endnote-32) By 1938, the WCA had formed 19 county associations and five regional districts, which played regularly at first-class grounds. The WCA’s tour of Australia and New Zealand between October 1934 and March 1935 was the first international women’s cricket tour, and this was successfully repeated with an Australian tour of England in 1937.[[33]](#endnote-33)

Nevertheless, the game’s governance was not unified between the wars. The English Women’s Cricket Federation (EWCF) was founded in April 1934 as the parent organisation to the Yorkshire Women’s Cricket Federation and the Lancashire Women’s Cricket Federation. The Yorkshire body was established from a Bradford evening league that had started in 1931, and in 1933 was joined by the Lancashire federation, which also organised short, competitive matches and county games that attracted up to 8,000 spectators. The EWCF thrived on regional evening competitions, which were designed to draw in paying spectators after work to see games that mirrored men’s professional leagues. Although a self-titled rival to the WCA, the English Federation restricted itself to Yorkshire and Lancashire and never sought national expansion. It was dwarfed by the WCA and likely never exceeded a third of its size. By the early-1930s the Federation claimed to have 1,000 female cricketers, and probably reached a height of 3,000 a few years later, before disbanding around 1940.[[34]](#endnote-34)

There is no doubting that part of the division between the two organisations was due to class differences, both perceived and real. The WCA, a predominantly southern-based, middle-class institution, adopted policies that stifled working-class women’s participation. For most working-class women, cricket was simply unaffordable unless subsidised by their employer or organisations like the EWCF, whose gate receipts funded women’s sides. Unlike other popular and inexpensive physical recreations, like netball or dancing, cricket required expensive specialist equipment, training, and facilities that made it a costly venture. The most widespread entertainments of the period were cheap and hard to compete with: a night dancing at the Ritz in Manchester cost just 18 pence in 1931, or less than half the price of a cheap pair of WCA-approved white stockings.[[35]](#endnote-35) Cricket was not a ‘classless’ activity like swimming: the costs involved could be considerable.[[36]](#endnote-36) Even the initial fee for joining a private club, assuming bats, pads, balls, and other equipment could be shared communally, was unaffordable for most, varying from 7 shillings and 6 pence to 25 shillings in 1937. The WCA’s rigorous dress code did not make this easier. Guidelines adopted in 1928 maintained ‘teams must play in white or cream […] dresses or tunics must not be shorter than touching the ground when kneeling. Sleeveless dresses and transparent stockings are not permitted’. The cheapest new WCA-approved dress, stockings, shoes, and membership cost over 35 shillings.[[37]](#endnote-37) Efforts to relax the rules were almost unanimously defeated, and trousers and shorts were strictly disallowed as they were considered too masculine, despite their increasing adoption in popular physical recreations like hiking and cycling.[[38]](#endnote-38) WCA officials made public statements condemning the use of trousers or the wearing of dirty clothes, and some clubs even enforced sterner rules.[[39]](#endnote-39) The EWCF, meanwhile, was more flexible on the issue of dress. Acknowledging that buying new dresses was unaffordable for most of its players, the committee allowed girls to play in trousers and proudly claimed to provide cricket ‘irrespective of class, with a minimum expense to players’.[[40]](#endnote-40)

Added to this was the issue of competition and amateurism. Unlike the EWCF, which endorsed the strenuous and competitive play it felt attracted large crowds, the WCA embraced a ‘high’ amateurism, as Raf Nicholson has put it, that aimed to feminise the game by limiting combativeness and emphasising ‘feminine’ qualities on the field, such as friendliness, camaraderie, and fair play. To guarantee ‘there will never be competitive cricket’, the WCA adopted the Club Cricket Conference’s rules on amateurism, which not only forbade players from being paid, but also banned leagues and tournaments.[[41]](#endnote-41) When the WCA toured Australia and New Zealand in 1934/35, the players (and many spectators) believed they were providing an alternative to the ruthlessness England’s men showed in the 1932/33 ‘bodyline’ series, demonstrating the game could be played with courtesy, sportsmanship, and mutual respect. This narrative also supported class stereotypes established in the men’s game concerning the ‘naturally’ competitive working-class professional and the more cultivated, elegant gentleman amateur.[[42]](#endnote-42) These rules were strengthened in 1938 after local newspapers started offering bats and monetary prizes to players following the successful 1937 series against Australia: thereafter, members were prohibited from using their names or photographs for advertising purposes, although they could accept gifts anonymously. If clubs affiliated to the WCA were found to be playing in cup competitions, they were told to leave either the WCA or the league. Similarly, county sides were prohibited from using the term ‘County Cricket’ in preference for the more docile ‘County Association’, which was considered to hold less expectation on having ‘really high standards of play’, and no county championship existed like in men’s cricket.[[43]](#endnote-43)

The WCA never marketed cricket as a commercial endeavour, and any profit from gate receipts was used to further support the game. Players did not gain financially or materially, although many were wealthy enough that this mattered little. This ban on any potential commercial avenues not only prevented the possibility of many working-class women playing under WCA-affiliated bodies, but also amounted to a co-ordinated attempt to restrain competitive, over-strenuous elements of the game and guarantee cricket was not played aggressively in the pursuit of prizes. This image of wealthy, educated, and carefree women was reinforced by the 1934/35 tour, in which all 15 tourists were from solidly middle- or upper-middle-class backgrounds and funded the £94 10 shillings travel costs themselves.[[44]](#endnote-44) This class division was in contrast to women’s cricket organisations formed in Australia and New Zealand where, as Greg Ryan has demonstrated, cricket was less hierarchical and a higher proportion of working-class women played.[[45]](#endnote-45) The WCA’s ‘high’ amateurism prohibited many workplace sides, which had been common during the First World War and began to reorganise several years after, from joining the organisation.[[46]](#endnote-46) Judy Threlfall-Sykes has argued that this ‘class divide’ within the sport, fuelled by the WCA’s exclusivity and often undemocratic control of the game, limited the growth of the sport in these years. It was not until 1937 that the WCA began actively widening participation.[[47]](#endnote-47) At the very least, this class division limited the ability of cricketers to forge a unified feminist movement within the sport. If we accept that cricket was physically and culturally liberating, then this emancipation was partial, at best, if it failed to incorporate most women.

This issue was not unique to cricket. The WCA, whose leadership sometimes overlapped with that of the All-England Women’s Hockey Association (AEWHA), shared the latter’s commitment to ‘high’ amateurism. The AEWHA had been formed in 1895 by university-educated, upper-middle class women, and also banned competitions and any form of ‘expenses’, providing a model the WCA adopted. Unsurprisingly, the AEWHA’s ‘upper-middle-class sense of entitlement, innate social conservatism and unwillingness to compromise’, as Jo Halpin has put it, also alienated many working-class hockey players and in 1932 a rival body based primarily in the north of England was formed and proved a significant challenge to the AEWHA’s governance of the game.[[48]](#endnote-48) While amateurism was usually an expression of class status, another reason for this reluctance to accept competitions was probably the fear that over-exertive or competitive play was too closely associated with masculinity, and to succeed these games needed to court public opinion. The AEWHA, like interwar women’s netball, placed sporting success behind the preoccupation of gender performativity: physical contact was prohibited, and players were even prevented from running the full length of the pitch. As Skillen has maintained, ‘in this way, female competitors were limited in their actions, and theoretically they could not easily over-exert themselves’.[[49]](#endnote-49) Dominant notions of heterosexual femininity also shaped other controversial women’s interwar sports. Women’s rowing clubs enforced restrictions that bolstered notions of fragile femininity, such as through the banning of competitions, the use of long dresses, white gloves, and even corsets, and popular ‘style’ rowing where scoring was based on appearance, rhythm, uniformity, and technique, not physical prowess.[[50]](#endnote-50) Similarly, in cricket it was not sporting achievement that formed the guiding principles of the WCA, but ‘dignity, circumspection, caution and submission to public opinion’.[[51]](#endnote-51)

This unwillingness to overtly challenge preconceived notions of women’s ‘innate’ psychology and position in society was reinforced elsewhere, too. The WCA eschewed portraying itself as an example of the ‘new modern woman’ of the 1930s. Unlike tennis stars like Suzanne Lenglen, whose short dresses and competitive play symbolised the carefree, liberated, and fashionable modern woman, cricketers recognised these women were often a source of public anxiety and avoided this image in *Women’s Cricket* and other media.[[52]](#endnote-52) Cricket was discussed in terms of attire, reticence, and history, not fashion, beauty, or modernity. The editor of *Women’s Cricket*, Marjorie Pollard, frequently repeated the need for decorum, etiquette, respect, and deference to officials. Those who arrived late, played with poorly maintained equipment, or spurned the dress code were castigated as ‘personally inefficient, lazy, thoughtless, inconsiderate, and quite incapable of minding themselves’. The magazine was filled with moralising articles instructing players on correct behaviour, both on and off the field.[[53]](#endnote-53) Pollard stressed that in playing the game women were elevating their own femininity and not challenging men. In batting, cricketers were merely refining their grace, elegance, and delicacy by ‘shun[ing] the vulgar clout for the refined straight back-lift’.[[54]](#endnote-54) For this reason Threlfall-Sykes has argued the WCA were not feminist as ‘players reflected societal notions of femininity’.[[55]](#endnote-55) Similarly, the WCA fielded very few married women, especially in gated matches, to avoid accusations the sport was challenging domesticity – a fear that had been voiced by opponents of the game.[[56]](#endnote-56) *Women’s Cricket* regularly reported successful players quitting the game after or before marriage.[[57]](#endnote-57) In this context, the WCA was hardly an organisation set on toppling patriarchy.

Women’s cricket relied heavily on male support in this period, too, and the WCA and EWCF’s deference towards men is another reason historians have discredited the sport’s feminism. The EWCF, whose teams were extensions of men’s clubs and used their facilities and clubhouses, was mainly administered by men, and required male umpires. Rather than having any real commitment to the longevity of the women’s game or its potential to liberate, these teams often viewed women as a means of financially benefiting men’s clubs. While the WCA barred men from holding positions of power or allowing them voting rights, the organisation depended heavily on men’s clubs and male journalists, and appealed to all-male bodies for financial assistance. According to Threlfall-Sykes this dependency (and ‘subordination’) meant the WCA was ‘in reality, controlled by men’.[[58]](#endnote-58) Moreover cricket was, of course, primarily a site of social harmony and entertainment and therefore direct conflict with men or male bodies was very rare.[[59]](#endnote-59) Certainly, a level of obsequiousness was used by women officials. Many WCA players were coached by male professionals, and Marjorie Pollard described the likes of W.G. Grace, Don Bradman and Kumar Ranjitsinhji as ‘deities’ and their playing fields as ‘hallowed turf’.[[60]](#endnote-60) Businesses, too, often promoted women’s cricket not to extend their freedoms but as part of industrial welfare policies designed to discipline workforces and entrench ‘rational’ forms of recreation.[[61]](#endnote-61) Jack Williams has contended that the WCA’s reluctance to self-identify as feminists or ‘challenge male social power’, its courtship of male opinion, and media apathy meant the organisation lacked feminist intent or impact. It simply ‘call[ed] for greater recognition of those areas of social activity which were thought to be forms of feminine expertise’. In this fairly rigid interpretation of feminism, women’s cricket failed to meet the criteria as it did not challenge ‘cultural assumptions about the social roles considered suitable for women’.[[62]](#endnote-62)

Indeed, Williams and Threlfall-Sykes point to the wider relationship between women and cricket to further this point. They argue the ‘fair sex’s’ support for men’s cricket strengthened social expectations that women’s place was in the domestic realm. Men’s clubs looked to wives, sisters, and daughters to perform ‘domestic’ duties like preparing food, washing plates, cutlery, and clothes, or cleaning the pavilion, which was considered a natural extension of work in the home. Sometimes women volunteered in administrative positions, but it was very rare for them to be given formal power. ‘Ladies Committees’ were a common feature of many teams, but were limited to dealing with issues like teas, welfare, and fundraising, and did not integrate into the recognised power structure of most clubs. At league and county level, many clubs relied on female spectatorship to stay afloat.[[63]](#endnote-63) Women engaged in these support systems probably outnumbered those playing the game, and therefore viewed in a broader sense woman reinforced and reproduced existing patriarchal power structures.

For Threlfall-Sykes and Williams, therefore, women’s cricket not only supported class structures between the wars but also dominant gender roles and behaviours. Jihang Park and Neil Tranter have maintained that women rarely identified sports in a ‘feminist-conscious’ way before the First World War, while Jennifer Hargreaves has argued that sport was generally designed to affirm women’s social status and perpetuate bourgeois value systems that emphasised women’s fragility and primary domestic and reproductive functions.[[64]](#endnote-64) As Kathleen McCrone notes of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, ‘historians of women must never be blinded by illusions of sisterly solidarity’ that were so regularly undermined by class differences. ‘Social snobbery and group segregation’ could damage the growth of women’s sports, while feminists often saw sport as a distraction.[[65]](#endnote-65) Even if opportunities for women to participate in physical recreation and sport increased after 1918, this did not automatically mean such activities were feminist and could, in fact, strengthen prejudice and oppression.

## **‘Exploited by men’**

The view that class and geography split the game in these years has been contended by the likes of Raf Nicholson and McKie, who have argued that it was the WCA’s commitment to feminism that was the primary reason for the game’s division. As Nicholson stated, it would be wrong to retrospectively apply ‘radical feminist ideas’ to these women; their methods may have been exclusionary but ‘whatever the justification’ they still broke conventional gender boundaries. As she rightly pointed out, in seeking institutional autonomy from men the WCA demanded ‘a woman-only space, whereby they could control their own affairs […] forty years before the Women’s Liberation movement demanded spaces of their own’. This resulted, not insignificantly, in autonomy and freedom over their own bodies, too. Even if the organisation did not identify as feminist it nonetheless sponsored feminist values in championing ‘female choice over societal norms in the arena of leisure’.[[66]](#endnote-66) The WCA’s existence and philosophy provides evidence of the continuation of feminism between the ‘first’ and ‘second’ waves, when it was thought to have been in hibernation. This ‘flourishing’ of the women’s movement in mid-century Britain formed part of Nicholson’s wider proposition that in seeking to empower women, facilitate activities beyond the home, and challenge gender expectations, the WCA was ‘arguably a triumph for feminism’ from its formation until its merger with the England and Wales Cricket Board in 1998.[[67]](#endnote-67)

Even if the WCA never expressed explicit feminist goals, that should not diminish how transgressive women’s cricket was between the wars. While most men and women were probably apathetic towards the game, we should not undervalue the challenge it was deemed to pose for many in cricket’s establishment. Recognised and powerful figures, from famous cricketers such as Aidan Crawley (Oxford and Kent amateur) and Patsy Hendren (Middlesex and England professional) to the president of the Club Cricket Conference, George Hammond, expressed their alarm. Crawley, writing in the *Daily Mail* in 1931, claimed women’s ‘forlorn imitation’ was ‘a travesty’ of the ‘man’s’ game. These comments sparked a debate in the paper in which he doubled down, calling women ‘physically incapable’ of playing ‘real’ cricket.[[68]](#endnote-68) Hendren declared women’s ‘mental make-up’ prevented them from playing, while Hammond warned the WCA men would treat it with ‘serious misgivings or even disfavour’ should it ‘deprive’ them of pitches.[[69]](#endnote-69) These comments mirrored broader arguments that women were simply incapable of playing because of their apparently homogeneous psychology: they were too selfish and jealous for team games and too concerned with their appearance to focus on the game. Most common of all was the assumption that they were physically incapable of playing. The latter point was not unique to cricket but, nevertheless, the game was subject to pseudo-medical opinions that condemned it as detrimental to reproductive health. One Brisbane newspaper even apocalyptically wailed the game threatened ‘the perpetuation of the human race’ during England’s first international tour.[[70]](#endnote-70)

More common was the contention that even if women *could* play the game, it was still inappropriate. Players were seen to be trespassing on a sacred and exclusively male space, a quintessential expression of masculinity that was devalued by women’s ‘invasion’.[[71]](#endnote-71) Press often trivialised the game and even sympathetic commentators wrote in condescending, novel, or patronising ways.[[72]](#endnote-72) Given women’s increasing legal and political equality following partial enfranchisement in 1918, it was unsurprising some men reacted with contempt at women’s progress on the sports field too; cricket was a ‘masculine citadel’, as one put it, ‘men will not invade the work-basket and the feminine dominion of the kitchen, but, we beseech you – let us have this one sport to ourselves!’[[73]](#endnote-73) The notion cricket challenged women’s primary social role in the home was repeated by the likes of Somerset amateur Malcolm Lyon, who accepted women could play but cautioned the WCA to ‘let the married players at least try not to disturb their own domestic bliss’.[[74]](#endnote-74) As Nicholson pointed out, playing publicly was a ‘radical’ step that tested gender norms and helped ‘reshape discourses surrounding women’s physical capabilities’, and the WCA was therefore ‘acting in feminist ways’.[[75]](#endnote-75) Indeed, many did identify cricket as both feminist (as a way of belittling the sport) and liberating.[[76]](#endnote-76) One reader of the *Yorkshire Evening Post* wrote that while enfranchisement may have been the ‘outward and visible sign of equality’, the ‘real basis’ was on the cricket field, and the Co-operative Wholesale Society called on its female workforce to match political progress with equality on the field of play.[[77]](#endnote-77)

Furthermore, the WCA contained women’s rights activists at the very top of the organisation, and these individuals dominated the development of the game in its early years. For example, the chairman between 1926 and 1939, the powerful and determined Frances Heron-Maxwell (who was also president of the AEWHA) had been a suffrage campaigner before 1918. Although never militant, she co-founded the Liberal Women’s Suffrage Society in 1913 to pressure Prime Minister Herbert Asquith into supporting enfranchisement, although the society folded after the outbreak of war.[[78]](#endnote-78) While not openly aligned with feminism after the war, her reformist and emancipatory zeal transitioned into hockey and cricket, and into the Women’s Institute where she served on the national executive committee.[[79]](#endnote-79) Like the WCA, the AEWHA did not identify as ‘feminist’ but nonetheless wrote in 1935 that hockey ‘was part of the movement for the emancipation of women’.[[80]](#endnote-80) Jo Halpin has argued the AEWHA’s ban on men holding power also divided hockey between the wars, like it did cricket, but places greater emphasis on class divisions within the sport than ideological conflict.[[81]](#endnote-81) Other former suffrage campaigners also formed sporting bodies. In Australia, the short-lived Victorian Ladies’ Cricket Association was established in 1905 and elected prominent suffrage campaigner Vida Goldstein to the presidency.[[82]](#endnote-82) And even though the EWCF was managed by men to profit men’s clubs, it too had initially been proposed by three women councillors in Bradford.[[83]](#endnote-83) For Heron-Maxwell, women’s sport represented a continuation of her conviction to improve the opportunities available to women in all aspects of their lives. Before the First World War this had largely been political, but after she turned to the physical and cultural emancipation of her sisters. Even if feminism was denied, fearing a public backlash, the origins and philosophy of these organisations were rooted in the quest for liberation.

Another feminist force within the WCA was Betty Archdale. As England captain during the first women’s cricket tour in 1934/35, she had also served on the WCA committee between 1934 and 1938, wrote articles in *Women’s Cricket*, helped shoot a promotional film in 1939, coached schoolgirls and, as a qualified lawyer, helped write the WCA constitution.[[84]](#endnote-84) The daughter of imprisoned militant suffragette Helen Archdale, Betty was raised in close proximity to prominent suffragettes (her godmother was Emmeline Pankhurst) and was good friends with leading interwar feminists such as Margaret Rhonda, the founder of the Six Point Group which campaigned for greater legal equality. As a feminist and socialist, she devoted her early career to these causes, working as secretary to Ellen Wilkinson (Labour Member of Parliament for Jarrow) and even took part in the Jarrow Crusade of 1936; she later lobbied the League of Nations to adopt an Equal Rights Treaty, which garnered praise from former suffrage leaders.[[85]](#endnote-85) In her *Women’s Cricket* articles she called out sexist remarks and, internally, was eager to meet feminist groups interested in forging links with the organisation. For Betty, cricket was likely a form of self-expression that reinforced her mother’s message she should enjoy activities ‘regardless of sex’.[[86]](#endnote-86) Cricket was but one expression of her feminism that provided self-determination and self-expression beyond the confines of the home.

Unlike the Six Point Group, which sought strict equality between men and women, many feminist organisations in the interwar years – especially after equal enfranchisement in 1928 – eschewed demands for equality and embraced ‘new’ or ‘difference’ feminism, which recognised women’s different role in society and called for specific legislation to help them as wives and mothers. New feminists, led by Eleanor Rathbone as head of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (previously National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies), adopted a ‘separate but equal’ policy that stressed the differences, not similarities, between men and women while maintaining their ultimate equality. Rathbone recognised the need to campaign on issues that directly affected the lives of most women, like birth control, family allowances, and housing, and grounded her philosophy in the reality that most women’s lives orientated around the home.[[87]](#endnote-87) Like the WCA and AEWHA, it avoided labelling itself as feminist even if it fought explicitly for improving the rights and securities of women. This philosophy was shared by other organisations like the National Council of Women, which also publicly rejected feminism while calling ‘for the equality of the sexes in enfranchisement, in the workshop, and in the professions’.[[88]](#endnote-88) Even if domesticity was not challenged, no women’s organisation – feminist or otherwise – campaigned for an end to domesticity between the wars.[[89]](#endnote-89)

The WCA also embraced this ‘separate but equal’ feminism as a means of legitimising women’s cricket. It maintained its all-women governance was not ‘anti-man’, as *Women’s Cricket* editor Marjorie Pollard put it, but simply upheld the dominant belief in separate social spheres for men and women. In effectively banning mixed-sex games, she claimed the WCA intended to ‘discourage any attempt to introduce a spirit of sex competition’. Pollard regularly took aim at journalists comparing men and women’s cricket, declaring the WCA did not ‘want, wish, or hanker after games of cricket with men’. This was not because ‘the standard of women’s games is so far below that of men’s’ but because ‘the standards are different – just that – different. A Bugatti car does not race in the same class as an M.G. Midget. Yet who can deny the efficacy of both in their separate class?’[[90]](#endnote-90) This argument was employed often by Pollard in national publications including the *Daily Mail*, *The Cricketer* and *Girl’s Own Paper*, each time upholding that women’s cricket was equal to men’s but on its own terms. What women may have lacked in strength or speed they made up for with ‘grace’, ‘skill’, and ‘refinement’.[[91]](#endnote-91) In highlighting these accepted feminine attributes Pollard used the language of ‘new’ feminism to support the legitimacy of the game, infusing the WCA with an aura of moderation that helped reduce accusations of feminism, even as she simultaneously attacked ‘ignorant’ views on women’s sport in the Six Point Group’s feminist weekly *Time and Tide*.[[92]](#endnote-92) In acknowledging women’s widely accepted limitations and strengths, cricketers subtly used the rhetoric of new feminism to shun unpalatable and unflattering comparisons with men and demand recognition in their own right, helping to convince a sceptical public of the suitability of the sport.

The WCA’s ‘high’ amateurism was also motivated by feminism and the need to safeguard the future of the sport. Like the AEWHA and physical training colleges, the WCA embraced what Jennifer Hargreaves has called ‘sports separatism’ in establishing a woman-only space where players could avoid the discrimination and male chauvinism that was commonplace in mixed-sex sports clubs, even if the organisation still relied on men for support. This meant the needs of women were placed first and women were (theoretically) treated equally and democratically within the organisation, rather than being relegated behind the demands of the men’s section.[[93]](#endnote-93) Pollard publicly chastised the EWCF for its strong male control, calling it ‘wrong in principle’ and stating she was ‘convinced these girls can be exploited for the purposes of a gate’.[[94]](#endnote-94) This opinion was shared by Heron-Maxwell, who persuaded the WCA to rapidly expand into the north of England in 1932 ‘to counteract leagues and ensure cricket being played on the right lines and not exploited by men’.[[95]](#endnote-95) Older members were aware that the first commercial venture into women’s cricket in 1890 by the Original English Lady Cricketers, two teams that toured Britain and played exhibition matches, had been disbanded after their male managers absconded with the profits. This early venture did little to popularise the game: its novelty status attracted crowds but also disapproval from the cricketing establishment and ‘savoured of exploitation’, as Marjorie Pollard later put it.[[96]](#endnote-96) Due to the lasting, harmful impact of the Lady Cricketers, ‘high’ amateurism was a safe, if precluding, response that explains the interwar divide within the game. Indeed, the EWCF openly claimed the ‘ultimate benefit’ of its leagues was ‘to aid men’s cricket’.[[97]](#endnote-97) Profits from women’s games often greatly surpassed men’s matches in the early 1930s, but once revenue dropped most clubs simply disbanded their women’s sections.[[98]](#endnote-98) It was precisely this double standard that motivated the WCA to adopt its separatist, amateur stance. It was unwilling for women’s cricket to be held to ransom by ‘exploitative’ men, making amateurism not just a matter of class, but also feminism.[[99]](#endnote-99)

## **‘Any power offended […] may have repercussions that can undo the work of years’**

The argument that sport offered a limited and conservative form of emancipation for women, and one that primarily benefitted the middle class, is not limited to cricket in England. As Nameeta Mathur has outlined in her study on women’s interwar physical culture in Poland, sportswomen’s adherence to most cultural and gender norms demonstrated a ‘conservative feminism’ on their part that, while not openly challenging patriarchy, nonetheless afforded them ‘greater independence and emancipation’. By enhancing the heteronormative attractiveness and femininity of athletes, in the face of critics that declared women’s sport manly and harmful, they were able to chip away at physical and cultural restrictions.[[100]](#endnote-100) Similarly, Florys Castan-Vicente and Anaïs Bohuon have demonstrated that new (or ‘difference’) feminists in interwar France also played on widely accepted notions of femininity to ‘soften’ critics. These feminists may not have used the term, or have been radical, but in choosing ‘masculine’ activities and replicating feminist discourse about equal access and treatment they helped establish new and liberating standards of femininity. For these women sports separatism was ‘a classic feminist method’ that concealed progress behind prejudice, allowing women to control their own narratives.[[101]](#endnote-101) In athletics, for example, women were constrained to ‘aesthetical events’ in the Olympics like gymnastics, ice skating and swimming, which led frustrated organisers to hold four Women’s Olympic Games between 1922 and 1938.[[102]](#endnote-102) As with Bergman-Österberg’s justifications based on racial fitness and motherhood, this form of feminism was often contradictory as it demanded respect and acceptance in ‘masculine’ sports while reproducing gender differences.[[103]](#endnote-103) Mary Festle has maintained that sportswomen were forced into behaving in ‘apologetic’ ways that have sustained heteronormative and ‘feminine’ stereotypes; this premise is support by Nicholson who argued such measures were necessary in women’s cricket to achieve public approval, even if they alienated working-class women.[[104]](#endnote-104)

The history of women’s football highlights the sticky wicket cricketers were playing on. Considered more masculine than cricket, the sport was widely condemned by middle-class women, educational institutions, and medical professionals as unsuitable on health and cultural grounds. Popularised by munitions teams during the First World War, there were around 150 teams in Britain by the early 1920s that attracted upwards of 50,000 spectators to matches. Yet many believed the game was unfeminine, both in terms of paying attire and physicality, and that women undermined the game’s social prestige. Fearful of a rival spectator base, the Football Association unanimously passed a resolution banning women from use of its grounds in December 1921, simply stating football was ‘quite unsuitable for females and ought not to be encouraged’. The players were defiant in the face of the decision, but it spelled ruin for most teams. The ban effectively prevented a promising spectator sport developing a playing base, impeding the game’s growth for the next 50 years until it was officially lifted in 1971. The highly public reprimand was a result of women flouting the expectations of their gender: football’s vigorous play was at odds with the still-dominant expectation of fragile femininity, and footballers were punished for blatantly failing this ideal.[[105]](#endnote-105) The environment cricketers ventured into in 1926 was therefore hostile and raw. Marjorie Pollard wrote that women’s cricket was equally ‘threatened with extinction’ in the mid-1920s, and some opponents even organised an unsuccessful boycott of men’s clubs that allowed women to use their facilities.[[106]](#endnote-106) In light of this, it was tactful for the WCA to adopt values that safeguarded it against criticisms of unfeminine behaviour, fearing it would lead to a loss of male support. As one committee member said of playing outfits, ‘too much emphasis has been placed on personal comfort – members should be willing to give up their personal wishes for the good of the whole’.[[107]](#endnote-107)

Of course, these concerns were born from middle-class understandings of respectability. For mill workers in Lancashire, the ability to play in new dresses and stockings, and with no financial assistance, was virtually impossible. Demonstrating a reverence for the game was deemed necessary, because unlike tennis, and to a lesser degree lacrosse and hockey, cricket was historically closely associated with masculinity and ‘did not belong’ to women, and therefore ‘decency and respect’ were fundamental to the sport’s longevity.[[108]](#endnote-108) Marjorie Pollard persistently reminded players in *Women’s Cricket* to adhere to a strict dress code and etiquette ‘as any false step – any power offended – even by the sight of bare legs […] may have repercussions that can undo the work of years’. Openly wedding it to feminism would have certainly meant curtailing its progress between the wars. Instead, the WCA was preoccupied with attracting the ‘right kind’ of press coverage that ensured ‘proper recognition’ against quiet but sustained ridicule in the press.[[109]](#endnote-109) As many viewed feminism as a threat to femininity, emphasising behaviour traditionally associated with women helped persuade a sceptical public of the sport’s suitability. The sport’s precarious future was prioritised over inclusivity, by guaranteeing women controlled their own sport and were independent (as much as was possible) from both men and markets, making women’s cricket more than a short-lived novelty. This separatism allowed the WCA to forge its own cultural world rather than directly compete with men, even if this meant, as Pollard recognised in *The Observer* in 1937, that poorer women and girls were ‘penalised’ by such a policy.[[110]](#endnote-110) Thus, ‘high’ amateurism was followed not just because of English bourgeois infatuation with its perceived morality, but because it was a rational response to the game’s unique and precarious situation.

In the face of apathetic, condescending and sometimes hostile cricket audiences, ‘high’ amateurism was a judicious response. For instance, even as public facilitation of sport and physical recreation improved in the interwar period, and authorities increasingly catered for women and children, there is little evidence women were able to access public cricket pitches.[[111]](#endnote-111) Additionally, girls’ cricket was discouraged in state schools and no women’s team owned a ground in Britain, so the sport could only survive by courting public opinion, and specifically those wealthy and conservative men who held power within the sport.[[112]](#endnote-112) Likewise in Australia, the press were scandalised in 1932 when a team in South Sydney played in coloured dresses without stockings, causing them to be expelled from the competition by New South Wales Women’s Cricket Association.[[113]](#endnote-113) In England, banning mixed-sex matches (although never enshrined in the WCA constitution) cloaked the sport with a seriousness and authenticity, but also upheld a ‘separate but equal’ policy that appeased those who feared it challenged men’s cricket. Women’s assumed role in society was sometimes used to justify cricket, too. Some mothers insisted sport could better enable them to fulfil their duties through the physical benefits and moral virtues it instilled in them, while another claimed scrubbing floors and washing clothes helped develop a better batting technique.[[114]](#endnote-114) Through this careful use of heteronormative femininity and respectability, players and administrators countered narratives that cast women’s sport as masculine and uncivilised while preserving high standards of play.[[115]](#endnote-115) By cultivating an image of cricket that complemented expectations of women as elegant, humble, and reverential, the WCA skilfully, and successfully, secured the future of the sport and began to undermine these very stereotypes.[[116]](#endnote-116)

## **Conclusion**

The policies of the WCA were ultimately vindicated by the late 1930s. In 1937, when Marjorie Pollard estimated about 500,000 women and girls were playing regular team sports in Britain, women’s cricket was granted government funding (along with hockey, lacrosse, and netball) with the aim of improving national fitness rates in girls. The funding, although meagre, was symbolically momentous as it signified the dramatic progress the sport had experienced in just two decades, from a reclusive pastime played by wealthy women to mass participation, regular large audiences, and serious coverage.[[117]](#endnote-117) This article has argued that although it failed to provide a ‘comprehensive’ feminist response to women’s subordination, notwithstanding the WCA’s moderation and relative exclusivity, the organisation nevertheless held feminist values. It helped women exercise physical freedom and autonomy in the face of sceptical and often antagonistic audiences and was governed by women influenced by ‘new’ feminism intent on preventing the ‘exploitation’ of the game by men. Although this feminism undeniably maintained some aspects of women’s position in society, including heteronormative and dominant notions of femininity, it did so while entering a male space and the WCA’s success demonstrates the practicality of these policies. While this ‘high’ amateurism and strict control of playing attire excluded women unable to adhere to these policies, by the late 1930s the sport increasingly attracted working-class women and girls and ‘was probably more representative in the interwar period than at any other point in the twentieth century’.[[118]](#endnote-118)

By the end of the period, this cautious approach allowed the WCA to shift the narrative used to justify the game away from femininity and towards women’s role as active citizens, whereby cricket was an important educational tool for endowing girls with the moral, mental, and physical attributes the nation needed.[[119]](#endnote-119) Like Beaumont has argued of the women’s movement between the wars, women’s mass uptake of a sport viewed by contemporaries as a manifestation of English virtue and a vital component of Britain’s civilising imperial programme mirrored women’s mass introduction into the democratic life of the nation.[[120]](#endnote-120) As with other women’s sports, in being able to perform to a high standard in public the WCA was successful in helping change popular opinions on the physical and mental capabilities of women on the eve of the Second World War.[[121]](#endnote-121) Meanwhile, the EWCF folded mainly due to declining profits, further justifying the WCA’s caution regarding male control and commercialism. While the sport continued to struggle to attract working-class women in the decades after the Second World War, the WCA’s refusal to play second fiddle to men’s cricket in its early years allowed members to forge a space free from influences that threatened to weaken it, and instead established a solid foundation for the emerging sport.[[122]](#endnote-122)

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27. McCrone, *Playing the Game*, 127-52; McKie, *Women at the Wicket*, 20-32. On physical education colleges, see Fletcher, *Women First*. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. McKie, *Women at the Wicket*, 27, 42, 84-88; Judy Threlfall-Sykes, ‘A History of English Women’s Cricket, 1880-1939’ (unpublished PhD Thesis, De Montfort University, October 2015), 40-66. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. *The Cricketer: Annual 1937-38* (London, 1938), 9-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. McKie, *Women at the Wicket*, 21-22, 33-45. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Marjorie Pollard quoted in Raf Nicholson, ‘We didn’t just make the teas: the story of women’s club cricket’, in *The Show Must Go On: A Century of Club Cricket in the South of England*, ed. Phil Walker and Ed Kemp, (London: Jellyfish Publishing, 2015), 144-45. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. See Rafaelle Nicholson, ‘“Our Own Paper”: Evaluating the Impact of Women’s Cricket Magazine 1930-1967’ *Women’s History Review* 24 no. 5 (2015): 681-99. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. WCA, Report 1938 (held at Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) archives). [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. McKie, *Women at the Wicket*, 16-17, 34-36; Threlfall-Sykes, ‘History of Women’s Cricket’, 214-34. A ‘Roses’ game in June 1932 had a reported 8,000 spectators at Bradford Park Avenue. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. James Nott, *Going to the Palais: A Social and Cultural History of Dancing and Dance Halls in Britain, 1918-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 41. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Skillen, *Women, Sport and Modernity*, 119-32. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. WCA, Report 1928. For costs, see McKie, *Women at the Wicket*, 82-83. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. WCA, Report 1937; Katrina Bill, ‘Attitudes towards Women’s Trousers: Britain in the 1930s’, *Journal of Design History* 6 no. 1 (1993): 45-54. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. *Stratford-Upon-Avon Herald* (13 May 1932); Gunnersbury Women’s Cricket Club, Report 1933 (held at MCC archives); WCA, Report 1937. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Quoted in Threlfall-Sykes, ‘History of Women’s Cricket’, 229-35. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. WCA, Report 1930; Marjorie Pollard, *Cricket for Women and Girls* (London: Hutchinson, 1934), 128; Nicholson, *Ladies and Lord’s*, 73-81. On men’s amateurism see Duncan Stone, ‘“It's all friendly down there”: The Club Cricket Conference, amateurism and the cultural meaning of cricket in the South of England’, *Sport in Society* 15 no. 2 (2012): 194-208. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Betty Archdale scrapbook 1934/35 tour (held at MCC archive); Grace Morgan, *Women’s Cricket Touring in 1934/5 and 1948/9: An Autobiography* (Wiltshire: GAM Publishing, 2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. WCA, Executive Committee and AGM Minutes 1926-1936; Report 1938 (held at MCC archives). [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Betty Archdale scrapbook, ‘Letter from Vera Cox’, (1934, held at MCC archives); *Match Programme: England v Wellington* (5 February 1935, held at MCC archives). [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Greg Ryan, ‘“They Came to Sneer, and Remained to Cheer”: Interpreting the 1934–35 England Women’s Cricket Tour to Australia and New Zealand’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33 no. 17 (2016): 2123-2138. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Nicholson, *Ladies and Lord’s*, 61. On working class participation see McKie, *Women at the Wicket*, 7-11, 74-93. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Threlfall-Sykes, ‘History of Women’s Cricket’, 166-72, 202, 276-88. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Jo Halpin, ‘“Thus Far and No Farther”: The Rise of Women’s Hockey Leagues in England from 1910 to 1939’, *Sport in History* 37 no. 2 (2017): 146-163. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Skillen, *Women, Sport and Modernity*, 34-35. See also Neil Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 88-90. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Amanda N. Schweinbenz, ‘Against Hegemonic Currents: Women's Rowing into the First Half of the Twentieth Century’, *Sport in History* 30 no. 2 (2010): 309-326. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. *Women’s Cricket* (August 1936). [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. On the link between modernity and women’s sport, see Skillen, *Women,* *Sport and Modernity* and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, 236-78. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. *Women’s Cricket* (May 1939). [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Marjorie Pollard, ‘Women’s Cricket’, in Douglas Jardine, *Cricket: How to Succeed* (Evans Brothers, London, 1939), 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Threlfall-Sykes, ‘History of Women’s Cricket’, 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. For example, see Malcolm Lyon, ‘Cricket’ in *The Aldin Book of Outdoor Games* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1933), 682-686. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. *Women’s Cricket* (May 1935, August 1937). See Eilidh Macrae, ‘Risky or Relaxing? Exercise during pregnancy in Britain, 1930-1960’, *Women’s History Review* 24 no. 5 (2008): 739-756. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Threlfall-Sykes, ‘History of Women’s Cricket’, 10, 110-11, 178-80, 383-84, 418-20; Williams, *Cricket and England*, 100-101. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Nicholson, *Ladies and Lord’s*, 84-88. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. WCA, Report 1933; *Women’s Cricket* (June 1935); Pollard, *Cricket for Women*, 25; *The Cricketer* (August 1939), 498. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Much has been written on this topic, although rarely concerning women except for Fiona Skillen, ‘Preventing “robotised women workers”: women, sport and the workplace in Scotland 1919–1939’, *Labor History* 55:5 (2014), 594-606. See Steven Crewe, ‘What about the Workers? Works-based Sport and Recreation in England c.1918–c.1970’, *Sport in History* 34:4 (2014), 544-568; Robert Fitzgerald, *British Labour Management and Industrial Welfare, 1846-1939* (London: Croom Helm, 1988); Helen Jones, ‘Employers’ Welfare Schemes and Industrial Relations in Interwar Britain’, *Business History* 25 no. 1 (1983): 61-75; Stephen Jones, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class: Organised Labour and Sport in Interwar Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989). [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Williams, *Cricket and England*, XVI, 98-105. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Threlfall-Sykes, ‘History of Women’s Cricket’, 10; Williams, *Cricket and England*, 106-111. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Hargreaves, ‘Playing Like Gentlemen’, 40-52; Park, ‘Sport, Dress Reform and the Emancipation of Women’, 10-30; Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society*, 91-93. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. McCrone, ‘Class, Gender, and English Women’s Sport: c. 1890-1914’, *Journal of Sport History* 18 no.1 (1991): 180-81. See also McCrone, ‘Emancipation or Recreation? The Development of Women’s Sport at the University of London’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 7 no. 2 (1990): 204-29. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Nicholson, *Ladies and Lord’s*, 49-50, 88-91. Some of the material taken for this section can be found in McKie, *Women at the Wicket*, 94-109. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Nicholson, *Ladies and Lord’s*, 102-3, 140-44. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. *Daily Mail* (25 June 1931), 10; (26 June 1931), 9; (4 July 1931), 9-10; (6 July 1931), 6; (7 July 1931), 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. *Hockey Field and Lacrosse* (June 1929, held at MCC archives); *Women’s Cricket* (September 1932). [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Some examples include *Bristol Evening World* (12, 18 May 1931); *Halifax Courier* (10 September 1932); *Brisbane Sunday Mail* (6 January 1935), 1; *Daily Mail* (25 August 1936), 7. For context on pseudo-medical arguments see Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-century Women's Sport* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1995); Vertinsky, *Eternally Wounded Woman*. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. The term used by the Daily Telegraph and Daily Graphic when women first netted at Lord’s in 1951: see Nicholson, *Ladies and Lord’s*, 127. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. *The Times* (16 July 1937), 17; Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, 123-24; Ryan, ‘England Women’s Cricket Tour’, 2132-33. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. *Women’s Cricket* (May 1930), 8; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* (14 June 1954), 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. Lyon, ‘Cricket’, 682-686. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. Nicholson, *Ladies and Lord’s*, 73, 88-91. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. On associating it with feminism, see *Thanet Advertiser* (4 December 1926); *The Weekend Review* (25 April 1931); *Yorkshire Evening Post* (12 May 1931); *Belfast Newsletter* (5 June 1933). [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Co-operative Wholesale Society, *Ourselves: CWS Employees’ Journal* (July 1929), 21; *Yorkshire Evening Post* (12 May 1931). [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. Pollard, *Cricket for Women and Girls*, 27; Margery Corbett Ashby, *Memoirs of Dame Margery Corbett Ashby* (London, 1996), 60; Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 120-21, 179. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. Inez Jenkins, *The History of the Women’s Institute Movement of England and Wales* (London, 1953), 93-95; Marjorie Pollard, *Fifty Years of Women’s Hockey: The Story of the Foundation and Development of the All-England Women’s Hockey Association 1895-1945* (London, 1946), 21; WCA, Yearbook 1946, 7 (held at MCC archives). [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. *Women’s Hockey* (October 1935). [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. Halpin, ‘Rise of Women’s Hockey Leagues’, 149-52, 159. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Cashman and Weaver, *Wicket Women*, 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. Threlfall-Sykes, ‘History of Women’s Cricket’, 223. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. *Women’s Cricket* (August 1934, May 1935); WCA, Reports 1934-1938; *The Cricketer* (May 1939), 59; Deirdre MacPherson, *The Suffragette’s Daughter: Betty Archdale* (New South Wales: Rosenberg Publishing, 2002), 87. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World* (London: Gollancz, 1938), 333; Macpherson, *Suffragette’s Daughter*, 15, 38-41, 88-90, 115-24. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. *Women’s Cricket* (May 1935, June 1935); WCA, Executive Committee and AGM Minutes (26 April-3 August 1936, held at MCC archives); Macpherson, *Suffragette’s Daughter*, 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement*, 236-244. Although with some degree of overlap: the lines were never perfectly clear. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. *The Manchester Guardian* (20 October 1926), 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. Caitriona Beaumont, ‘The Women’s Movement: Politics and Citizenship, 1918-1950s’ in *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, (Harlow: Pearson Educational, 2001), 264-69. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. *The Observer* (15 May 1931), 17; Pollard, *Cricket for Women and Girls*, 16-17, 135. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. *Daily Mail* (3 August 1928), 10; *The Cricketer* (April 1931), 110; (April 1939), 109; *Girl’s Own Paper* (1939), 457-60; *The Observer* (2 June 1935), 30; Pollard, ‘Women’s Cricket’, in *Cricket: How to Succeed*, ed. Jardine, 30-31. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. *Time and Tide* (27 September 1930). [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, 30-37; see also Williams, *Cricket and England*, 99. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. *The Observer* (23 June 1935), 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. WCA, Report 1932. [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. Pollard, *Cricket for Women and Girls*, 16. On the Original English Lady Cricketers see Threlfall, ‘History of Women’s Cricket’, 70-77. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. *Yorkshire Observer* (17 August 1932); Threlfall-Sykes, ‘History of Women’s Cricket’, 337. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. Brian Heywood, Freda Heywood, and Malcolm Heywood, *In a League of Their Own: Cricket and Leisure in Twentieth Century Todmorden* (Cleckheaton: Upper Calder Valley Publications, 2011), 83-87; Threlfall-Sykes, ‘History of Women’s Cricket’, 338-51. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
99. For this argument, see also Nicholson, *Ladies and Lord’s,* 88-91. [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
100. Nameeta Mathur, ‘“The New Sportswoman”: Nationalism, Feminism and Women’s Physical Culture in Interwar Poland’, *The Polish Review* 48 no. 4 (2003): 458-61. [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
101. Castan-Vicente and Bohuon, ‘Emancipation through Sport?’. [↑](#endnote-ref-101)
102. Williams, *History of Women’s Sport: Part One*, 132-42. [↑](#endnote-ref-102)
103. Hargreaves, ‘Playing Like Gentlemen’, 47-51. [↑](#endnote-ref-103)
104. Mary Jo Festle, *Playing Nice: Politics and Apologies in Women’s Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Nicholson, *Ladies and Lord’s*, 14-15, 74-84. [↑](#endnote-ref-104)
105. Williams, *A Game for Rough Girls?*, 26-36; *A Beautiful Game*, 130-31. [↑](#endnote-ref-105)
106. *Daily News Chronicle* (13 July 1934). [↑](#endnote-ref-106)
107. WCA, Report 1937. [↑](#endnote-ref-107)
108. *Women’s Cricket* (May 1932); Pollard, *Cricket for Women and Girls*, 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-108)
109. *Hockey Field and Lacrosse* (June 1929); *Women’s Cricket* (June 1930; August 1936). [↑](#endnote-ref-109)
110. *The Observer* (22 August 1937), 21. [↑](#endnote-ref-110)
111. Matti Hannikainen, ‘Sport in London’s Public Green Spaces in the Inter-war Years’, *Sport in History* 38 no. 3 (2018): 349-54. [↑](#endnote-ref-111)
112. Nicholson, *Ladies and Lord’s*, 91-96, 267. [↑](#endnote-ref-112)
113. Charles Little, ‘Gender, Class and Sporting Opportunity: Working-Class Women and Sport in Early Twentieth-Century Australia’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31 no. 13 (2014): 1681. [↑](#endnote-ref-113)
114. *Daily Herald* (2 April 1931); Skillen, *Women, Sport and Modernity*, 198. [↑](#endnote-ref-114)
115. See Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 31-54. [↑](#endnote-ref-115)
116. This point is supported by the likes of André Odendaal, ‘“Neither Cricketers nor Ladies”: Towards a History of Women and Cricket in South Africa, 1860s–2000s’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28 no. 1 (2011): 130-31. [↑](#endnote-ref-116)
117. The Women’s Team Games Board (WTGB), (ED113/82, National Archives, 1937-39); *Sport in Industry* (June 1938). [↑](#endnote-ref-117)
118. Nicholson, *Ladies and Lord’s*, 67. [↑](#endnote-ref-118)
119. See McKie, *Women at the Wicket*, 110-23. [↑](#endnote-ref-119)
120. See Beaumont, *Citizens and Housewives*. [↑](#endnote-ref-120)
121. Jordan J.K. Matthews and Elizabeth C.J. Pike, ‘“What on Earth are They Doing in a Racing Car?”: Towards an Understanding of Women in Motorsport’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 33 no. 13 (2016): 1532-1550; McKie, *Women at the Wicket*, 124-36; Ryan, ‘England Women’s Cricket Tour’, 2129-34. [↑](#endnote-ref-121)
122. For the postwar decline, see Nicholson’s later chapters in *Ladies and Lord’s*, 105-267. [↑](#endnote-ref-122)