Chapter 7

Branching Out

“It would be impossible to form a better idea of the advance made by Englishmen of all classes, whether in town or country in the art of ‘popular amusement’ than from a comparison of the advertisements relating to sports, pastimes and recreations in a newspaper of today with those that made their appearance less than half a century ago. One would look in vain now for the announcements of pugilistic encounters between bruisers of established and growing reputation, cock-fights, dog fights and performances of terrier dogs, backed for large sums to kill several scores of rats within a limited space of time. One would have looked in vain then for the accounts of cricket matches, and the scores made by their players, in differing parts of England which now occupy entire pages of the sporting journals; for the notices to excursionists that are a regular feature in every newspaper during the summer season; for the miscellaneous programmes of picture exhibitions, lectures, theatres, music halls, entertainments of all kinds, places of amusement of every variety, which have become an essential part of the machinery of our social life.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

It would be difficult to argue with the sentiments expressed by the author of this passage if one looks at the press that covered, during our period of interest the Aston Manor area. They were, as the years progressed full of indicators as to recreational opportunities that were available to the population. Whether the people took them up is, of course is another matter, but what is certain is that many did. The school hall, the church, the theatre, including the Music Hall, the facility of The Lower Grounds and of course the inn and tavern all afforded the individual, albeit for many years the male only, the chance to step outside the world of home and work.

However, what the author’s statement does not directly relate to, and something that increasingly the newspapers unwittingly implied was the change to the social nature of what was on offer. In addition to that which has already been alluded to other opportunities began, from the beginning of our period of interest to present themselves. It was these, particularly within the arena of the sporting contest that undoubtedly helped define what we enjoy today.

Certainly the most profound alteration to recreation was that it often came to reflect the identity of those who participated and mirrored:

“experiences, inherited or shared, feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from and usually opposed to theirs.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Whilst, for example the music concert might be enjoyed by a working class man or woman it did not, at least until the emergence of the music halls truly represent their identity, aspirations or general lives. Likewise the traditional game of football was not a reflection within Aston Manor of the general life of the mass of the population, though the game did in other locations come to represent the community wherein it was played. Examples abound where the playing of variants of the game, such as by the School Football team of Uppingham School, Rutland, which in the 1860s required pitch wide goals[[3]](#footnote-3) and the Shrove Tuesday football match in Derby came to represent a community spirit.[[4]](#footnote-4) Additionally the violence which was endemic in much of recreation had, as stated previously been fundamentally eradicated and was ever increasingly replaced by rules and codes of participation which defined the game and the way it was played. It could be argued that this process was a result of a desire for the ‘respectable classes’ to obtain and retain social control over those of the lower classes who chose to participate. That such an ambition was desired reflected the fact that recreation, in its many emerging forms had become an arena of enjoyment for many of the working class that increasingly reflected this classes distinct social identity. It was, in the very broadest sense an arena where the working class itself took, if not total control, at least a modicum of it and in so doing modified it to their own needs and desires, making it in reality an arena of social conflict.

This development was not, however, a sign that the respectable classes had in some way failed in their ambitions. The notion, so forcibly expressed through the Rational Recreation Movement[[5]](#footnote-5) and in regards to sport, of ‘Muscular Christianity,’ which perceived recreation as a means by which ‘moral fibre’ could be instilled into those of the lower orders had largely been assimilated. This latter term, which came to be increasingly associated with the notion of the spiritual value of team sports seemingly first appeared in Victorian Britain in 1861 via the popular novel of Thomas Hughes, ‘Tom Brown at Oxford’, a sequel to the infinitely more illustrious ‘Tom Brown’s Schooldays’.[[6]](#footnote-6) It was a term that came to be linked with a belief:

“that a man's body is given him to be trained and brought into subjection, and then used for the protection of the weak, the advancement of all righteous causes, and the subduing of the earth which God has given to the children of men.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

The reality was that the acceptance of rules and codes of behaviour had become part of the recreation. It was therefore the fact that the ‘respectable’ had essentially confirmed their ambitions, which, as Edward Royal stated contained: “a realisation that the poor could not be abandoned in a Christian country.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Certainly in regards to Aston Manor from 1870 to 1911 there was nothing less than what might be described as a recreational explosion. Indeed it might be difficult to identify any area in the country, of a similar size and population which encompassed so much. All forms of opportunity were clearly at hand. However, it was, without doubt the game of football which witnessed the greatest expansion. For as appendix vi indicates the game within the area can be clearly identified as having undergone, in participatory terms an amazing transformation. Nationally this also witnessed the development of female participation, indeed to such an extent that by the 1890s many organised ladies’ teams were participating in what was now a codified game. Indeed all the signs were that the female version was poised to enjoy a popularity that, if not rivalling the male’s would at least have allowed her a more than adequate recreational opportunity. Officially, it was in 1895 that the first women’s game was played, one that saw the north beat the South 7-1. However it would appear that the first ‘proper’ women's football team in the world was founded by the magnificently named Nettie Honeyball[, in England, in 1894](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Nettie_Honeyball&action=edit), the team being named The British Ladies Football Club, and according to Ms Honeyball:

"I founded the association... with the fixed resolve of proving to the world that women are not the 'ornamental and useless' creatures men have pictured*.*"[[9]](#footnote-9)

Unfortunately the ambitions of this indomitable lady failed, at least in regards to Aston Manor. There are no indications whatsoever of any organised female football participation within the area until well past our period of interest. There was however one area of the game that the female, without any shadow of a doubt did inhabit, that of the spectator. Though the responsibility of home and child may have proved an obstacle to attendance for many there are still numerous indications of their attendance. It can certainly be assumed that some may have attended to support a brother, boyfriend, fiancée or husband at many of the smaller clubs fixtures, whilst certainly in regards to Aston Villa at the turn of the century it was said that:

“you will find no ladies on the unreserved side but in the reserved stands there are almost as many ladies as men.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

The explosion of activity fundamentally allowing many young men to participate also reflected an existence of a growing social awareness. It was, as Holt points out, in regards to sports of all types:

“a complex network of formal friendship and of club memberships which helped humanise the industrial landscape. The working class preferred to take part in sport at this level rather than joining a club beyond the familiar frontier of the street, the pub and the local church.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

Nevertheless within this development there is a question to be answered, when did they play? It can only be presumed that initially, certainly in regards to church sides that the matches must have been enacted on the Saturday. However there is much to suggest that as our period progressed and as the overriding influence of the religious community began to decline, Sunday became the preferred day to play, Certainly, given that in the later years of our period there were clearly defined ‘Sunday Leagues’ in operation it must be accepted that it increasingly became a normal recreational day.

It is this which, as well as pointing to the possible decline in the influence of the church also might in some way explain the continuance, and in some cases the resurgence of the public house as a focal point of local recreation. As appendix vi clearly shows a great many clubs can be identified with the inns and taverns of the area as well as streets, roads and of course churches. Though, as already indicated the game of football was well established in the area, fixtures being held on a reasonably frequent basis on the Lower Grounds site, often involving The Birmingham Cricket and Football Club it was from the religious community that one of the earliest and clearest references to a football team participating in a fixture in the area can be established.

It was in 1876 that a team from St. Mary’sfulfilled a fixture against the Erdington Preparatory School in Aston Park. However this game, played under what might be described as ‘local rules’ lasted some two hours, the result being in favour of St. Mary’s 2-0.[[12]](#footnote-12) The church, perhaps encouraged by such fixtures continued to fulfill a role right up to the end of our period of interest, playing matches against such teams as Nechells, 1-0[[13]](#footnote-13) and Sutton Town, 2-1,[[14]](#footnote-14) eventually during the later years competing in a Suburban league.[[15]](#footnote-15) It was also during this period that this particular church, through its associated schools developed and appears to have become a force within local school football, a matter that will be discussed later. Football, no doubt inspired by these contests quickly grew in popularity, in such a way that a local newspaper was driven to comment in regards to its expansion that in 1876:

“Aston appears to be taking a very active part in football exercise. There are numerous clubs in the district and many of them figure in the various contests that are taking place every week, sometimes on the losing side, sometimes on the winning.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

Indeed in the very week that this newspaper chose to make this comment four other games, if Aston Villa FC are to be considered a local team were participating in matches - Holte Wanderers v Small Heath Alliance[[17]](#footnote-17) 0-1; Aston Park Unity v Wednesbury Town 1-1; Wednesbury Town 2nd v Aston Park Unity 2nd 0-1 and finally Saltley College v Aston Villa 5-0.

The emergence of St. Mary’s FC onto the sporting scene certainly appears to have provoked other religious institutions to follow suit. That this should have happened is perhaps not really surprising, as they had, through the Sunday school movement access to the young male, the female not being considered as suitable for such recreation, who like their counterparts of today can be imagined to have been more than willing to take part in sporting activity. Aston Christ Church were the next to make an entrance, first fulfilling a fixture in 1880 and then seemingly on a regular basis up to the 90s. St Matthias then followed, who initially seemed to have favoured matches against other religious institutions such as St. Matthews and St. Mary,[[18]](#footnote-18) followed shortly afterwards by The Aston Congregationalists, who, it would seem were particularly successful as records indicate that it was still actively running a football club up to and perhaps beyond 1905.[[19]](#footnote-19) It is this particular institution that appears to have been the most ambitious. There are indications that they were quite prepared to travel, often quite reasonable distances to play, one of these being in the 1905 season when they fulfilled a fixture against the Forest of Arden club, in Warwickshire. Whether the effort was worthwhile is debatable, as they lost heavily 5-0.[[20]](#footnote-20) However it would appear that this particular church and its supporters, in its enthusiasm perhaps may have lost sight at times of its Christian values. For, in one particular fixture against Christ Church on the Trinity Road pitch it was reported that

“Aston suffered severely from the vagaries of the referee whose decisions were to say the least of a very farcical character. They became so bad that he was barracked by the spectators who resented such unfair and unjust conduct.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

How little times change!!!

Other religious institutions continued to introduce themselves into the scene as the years passed such as the Victoria Street Baptists*,* and the Aston Villa Wesleyans. It was this latter establishment that provided the individuals who were to form Aston Villa FC.[[22]](#footnote-22)



The Wesleyan Methodist Chapel which was located on the corner of George Street and Lozells Road, Birmingham. Built in 1865 it was from within this religious establishment that members of the Villa Cross Wesleyan Chapel cricket team, who were looking for a sport to play during the winter months formed in 1874 Aston Villa FC.

Though originating from within the Manor this club must be considered, at least up to the early 1890s to have been a Birmingham based club. Formed from a cricket club they came to take up association football after:

A number of the cricket Villans witnessed a football match which was played on the Handsworth ground . . . . under a crude set of rugby rules. The watchers were most interested in the game, and decided to take a start on their own account. It was thought however, by these Villa pioneers that the game according to the ‘Rugby’ gospel was a little too dangerous, so that eventually a decision was arrived at to commence operations under the auspices of what was considered the milder and less harmful association code.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

Interestingly though during the time when they were encamped in Wellington Road which is in the area of Perry Barr, Birmingham,[[24]](#footnote-24) they gloried not under the nickname of ‘The Villa’ but ‘The Perry Pets’.

The progress of this club was, like many others linked to the introduction and development of an organised competitive environment, winning its first major competition in season 1879-1880 when it lifted the Birmingham Senior Cup defeating Saltley College 3-1. From this time onwards success mounted upon success. Apart from national triumphs which amounted to winning no less than six Football League Championships and four FA Cups prior to 1911 the club won the Birmingham trophy no less than nine times before the turn of the century as well as being runners up on several occasions.[[25]](#footnote-25) On the occasion in 1905 when they had again won the FA Cup, beating Newcastle United 2-0 at The Crystal Palace Ground they received a tumultuous reception when they returned home to Aston Manor. After being received by the Mayor the team and club officials were driven through the streets to Villa Park, followed by a ‘struggling and rushing crowd which placed ordinary pedestrians in considerable jeopardy’. All along the route it was reported thousands of Villa enthusiasts assembled, all waving the club’s colours and cheering themselves hoarse.[[26]](#footnote-26) It was such success that prompted a newspaper to voice an opinion a little while later that, with the visit of the famous Woolwich Arsenal, a match that they won 2-0 they were in fact “coining money.”[[27]](#footnote-27) That the club could be so successful would seem at odds to the rather strange request that the club made some seven years earlier. Then it had appealed through the press for ‘books for a library that that was intended for the player’s usage’!! There are no indications as to how successful this plea was.[[28]](#footnote-28) Indeed such was the accomplishments of the club that, in it’s 36th annual report in 1911 the directors stated that the balance sheet showed a profit of some £5,924 17s 3d which brought the balance brought forward from the previous year to a total of £10,429 11s 6d, a not inconsequential amount of money for the time.[[29]](#footnote-29) Indeed so famous and influential had it become that in 1909 its stadium was selected as the venue for an Amateur International fixture between teams from the North and South of England, which the South won 5-2, a choice which indicates how highly rated was the club and its facilities.[[30]](#footnote-30) It was, however, from the Lozells area that perhaps the greatest contributor during the initial stage of development, at least in number of teams provided emerged, St. Pauls. Located on the corner of Wheeler Street it provided no less than five teams, one being purely for the choir boys of the church. Unfortunately little appears to have been recorded as to their team’s activities so it is impossible to judge the success this establishment had. However the fact that some churches and chapels did not sustain a lengthy relationship with the game was perhaps due less to the popularity of the game and the enthusiasm of individuals to play it but more to the fact that fixtures were relatively infrequent and initially were seemingly always of a friendly nature. It could well have been that many young men wishing to play on a more regular basis chose to organise themselves and reject what they might have perceived as a restrictive authority, the forming of Aston Villa being a most conspicuous example. Though undoubtedly many individuals did use the church as a means of initially obtaining a game they came to recognise a need to construct their own recreational society though retaining the ideals of the church and Muscular Christianity, assimilating them into their own experiences. The use of the term ‘Aston’ as can be perceived from the appendix was particularly popular, as was Manor and Villa, obviously providing for a clear local identity, as was the use of ‘road’ and ‘street’, teams such as Rocky Lane, Station Road and Farm Road existing at various times. This does not mean, of course that all the teams within Aston Manor that emerged chose to show their allegiance to the locality. One club, for example though clearly choosing to indicate a local identity decided to name itself Aston Hawthorn, perhaps indicating that the members were fans of Aston Villa’s great local rivals, West Bromwich Albion. It has to be noted however that they seem to have only lasted one season!!

Perhaps the most interesting result of this movement towards self identification was the adoption of the public house as the ‘club’ of the working class. Perhaps this owed much, from the licensee point of view to the possibility of increased trade and, of course profit through the providing of a location which team members could accept as their headquarters. It would also appear quite possible to perceive that the expansion of football also removed much of the financial dependency that the landlord must have had on many of the local recreational societies and general trade. Indeed, it could be argued that this movement, in a sense allowed for the inn to recreationally speaking further cement its working class roots.

If then the local press reports are considered a true reflection of the situation it can be accepted that the majority of public houses in Aston Manor had at least one team associated with it. Indeed the Albionand the Holte Hotel could have possibly have had as many as three whilst the Vine two. However, no team within Aston Manor, including not even its most illustrious, Aston Villa could compete with the social connection that the Aston Old Edwardian FC enjoyed. Though not strictly an Aston Manor side they were a regular presence on the park, often fulfilling fixtures against many of the local sides. Always keen to be a cut above the ordinary, they did, after all represent one of the most prestigious schools in the land they, in 1894 managed to attract no less a figure than the then Prime Minister of the day, Lord Rosebery, to become the president of the club for the season 1894-1895.[[31]](#footnote-31) In accepting the position he replied, through an aide to the offer, a response which must have been received with absolute delight by both the club and school:

“Lord Rosebery desires me to say in reply to your letter that he is obliged to make a rule of not becoming President of any clubs, except in districts with which he is locally or personally connected. But he thinks yours is a case in which an exception may be fairly made, as it is the only application of the kind he has ever received which was dissociated from a subscription. He therefore will, with pleasure become your President for the year 1894-95 and will be happy to send £5 for the purposes of the Club on hearing from you that this would be accepted. I am, yours faithfully, V. E. Jones Esq.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

Of course for many, the most important monument to the game was Aston Villa, though it should be borne in mind that the club, though associated with Aston Manor, as previously indicated spent much of its existence, up to the early 1890s in Birmingham. Though it did fulfil fixtures on The Lower Grounds and Park it was not until this time that it made its permanent home in the Manor. Nevertheless, given its success it is not surprising that many must have considered it, because of its very name and from where it originated a ‘local’ team and as such must have inspired many teams to identify themselves with it. There are innumerable examples which indicate how the club enjoyed a large fan base but perhaps one of the most visible indicators of this following occurred when they met Tottenham Hotspur in the 2nd Round of the English Cup in London. Due, no doubt to the large numbers of visiting fans arriving at the ground allied to the interest of the locals, having a chance of seeing one of the nation’s top sides the fixture provided for a ‘full house’. Though it would seem that an estimated 30,000 were in the ground there remained perhaps an equally large body of fans outside trying to get in. The result was that after the match had begun it soon became clear, after several instances of spectators spilling onto the pitch that it could not continue and it was abandoned. Because of the seriousness of the situation an enquiry was set up which adjudged that the home club were at fault for not appreciating how large the crowd would be.[[33]](#footnote-33) As a penalty the game was ordered to be replayed, Villa eventually winning 2-0.

Significantly however, in regards to association there did seem, initially little connection with the world of work, though it would appear, at least in the case of Aston Manor that as our period progressed the intrinsic link between it and leisure became increasingly more substantive. It is, of course, difficult to establish the influence of the employer in regards to most clubs. Some firms may well have assisted in the setting up of a club, as an act of social welfare but it is not until the end of our period that the ‘works team’ becomes in general terms a clearly recognisable factor. This is not of course to say that in the early years such teams might not have existed, for either the Britannia Swiftsand Britannia Works could have possibly been connected to a local factory as well as the Britannia Inn.

Nevertheless the formation of clubs and the ever expanding number of individuals who chose to partake, both as players and spectators did not initially provide for a coherent game. Because of differing rule codes, the major ones being the Sheffield and London Codes[[34]](#footnote-34) and a need to agree on suitable conditions within which to play games in Aston Manor football often took on a bizarre appearance. The Birmingham Clerks, for example whilst playing in Aston Park ‘on a particular foggy day’ were reported as being ‘at fault for not knowing the ground’[[35]](#footnote-35) whilst Aston Park Unity, on playing The BCFC on one occasion fielded thirteen men against an eleven of the opposition.[[36]](#footnote-36) Indeed is it recorded that Aston Villa met one of their biggest rivals West Bromwich Albion in a match that was played 6 a side over a series of thirty minute periods.[[37]](#footnote-37) Such was the situation that teams who even used the same facilities often differed in the rules that they adopted. Even though Aston Park Unity and The Birmingham Football and Cricket Club both used the park and Lower Ground they were affiliated to the London and Sheffield Rules respectively. It might well be perceived that teams of a more informal nature, i.e. ones who were associated to church, inn or street might have made up their own rules, ones that suited their needs. Indeed Aston Villa*,* inplaying their first game, against St. Mary completed the first half according to the rugby code and the second to football.[[38]](#footnote-38)

The situation could not logically continue and, eventually in 1875 at a meeting called by Aston Park Unity and other teams from the surrounding area a call was made for a unified code of competition. In initially adopting the Sheffield Code it was stated that:

“we felt severely the want of union and the inconvenience of playing different association rules.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

However this arrangement lasted only to 1877 when the Sheffield Code was rejected in favour of the London, now termed as The Football Association rules which had been compiled in 1863.[[40]](#footnote-40) It was an off-shoot of this organisation, TheBirmingham Football Association which introduced the first structured team competition in the recreational world of Aston Manor, when in 1877 it formulated a challenge cup, at the cost of 50 guineas.[[41]](#footnote-41) Originally contested by sixteen clubs, many from the Manor, it was, in its inaugural season a 12 a side competition. As a result of its initial popularity it, now as a eleven a-side format grew in popularity, so much so that in 1887 it became a regionalised league competition.[[42]](#footnote-42)

There can be little doubt that this initial competition, moving the game away from the friendly was the catalyst for many others that followed. For, prior to any organised competitions being inaugurated, especially those based on a league premise it was, as already indicated the friendly that dominated. The local newspapers carried many requests from team secretaries asking for fixtures. Once such competitions as The Aston and District League; The Aston Manor Cup; The Birmingham and District Association Challenge Cup and Aston Villa Challenge Cup Competition*,*[[43]](#footnote-43)this latter competition being, as the name suggests inaugurated by Aston Villa had became established, the friendly format went into decline, though it still remained as a means of arrangement right up to 1911. That it was still a relevant form of fixture arranging can be verified when it is noted that in 1897, for example Aston Manor Star, Avenue Villa, Church Excelsior, Star FC [[44]](#footnote-44) and Clifton Villa all requested pleas for matches[[45]](#footnote-45), whilst Victoria Swifts were pleading for away fixtures, perhaps because of a lack of a home pitch!![[46]](#footnote-46) There were however many other, smaller and less well publicised competitions that were arranged that seem to have lasted only a short time, perhaps being played for only once. The local press, for example on occasions drew attention to such as The Evelyn Cecil Shield, The Ian McGregor Cup,[[47]](#footnote-47) The Ansells Shield[[48]](#footnote-48) and The Park Challenge Cup,[[49]](#footnote-49) none of these seemingly having no more than a passing history.

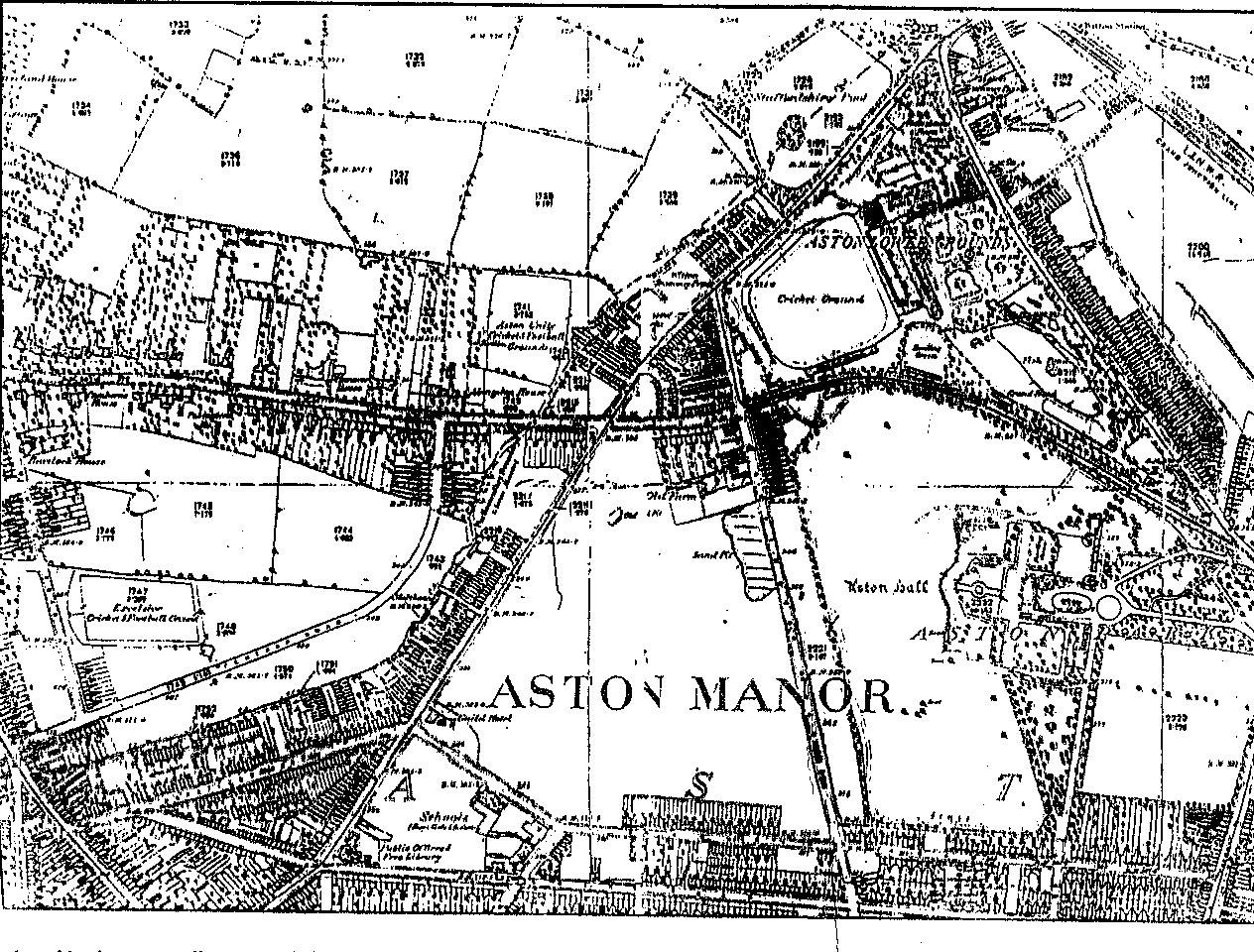
The Aston Villa Cup interesting though appears to have become a competition that was seemingly dominated by ‘works teams’. Certainly from its inauguration in 1898 by 1911 there is little evidence of any other type of club participating. Interestingly though there seems to have been only two Manor sides definitely involved, Park Mills and Excelsior Works and one possible, Britannia Works.[[50]](#footnote-50) It would seem that the Manor was not a fruitful area for works teams though there was one, Aston Postman’s FC who competed in the Postman’s Challenge Cup, a competition that was otherwise dominated by Birmingham based sides.[[51]](#footnote-51) Though these fixtures were almost certainly of immense importance to the participants they, in reality provided little more than the proverbial ‘one man and his dog’ in attendances. However in the case of The Birmingham and District Challenge Cup some matches did really prove to be an attraction, often drawing quite substantial crowds. Indeed a fixture not even featuring an Aston Manor side, between Saltley College and Derby contested on the Lower Grounds provided for an attendance of some four thousand.[[52]](#footnote-52)

In regards to the ‘friendly’ however it would be wrong to believe that these informal fixtures, arranged by invite were limited to the local area. There are many instances where teams travelled some distance to play. Apart from the Congregationalists already mentioned Aston Holte Wandererswere reported as having visited Walsall[[53]](#footnote-53) whilst Aston Manor actually travelled to Wales.[[54]](#footnote-54) The friendly was also a convenient vehicle by which charity could be advanced. The ‘charity fixture’ seemingly was a regular feature in the football world of the Manor, such as when a ‘derby’ was arranged between Aston Unity and Aston Villa, in aid of the Aston Villa Bed Fund.[[55]](#footnote-55)

For some clubs though, their existence was short. That so many failed to sustain themselves could well have been due not only to a lack of success on the field but more likely to the financial stresses of paying for kit and obtaining pitches etc. For one team, The Excelsior a heavy defeat by a local rival, The Aston Shakespeare, 6-0 seemed to have pitched them into crisis. In an attempt to regain former glories, its members chose to relocate the club, which saw them leave Aston Manor and establish their headquarters at the Gaiety Palace Music Hall in Birmingham. It was said that the members had received ‘every attention from the proprietor’, presumably through financial backing which allowed them to continue to fulfill their fixtures within Aston Manor.[[56]](#footnote-56) However it would seem that to lose to Aston Shakespeare may not have been too much of a surprise. For during this time this particular club appears to have been very successful, competing as it did in all the major competitions. They are recorded as playing in the English Cup (what many at the time termed the FA Cup) against such as Selly Oak Athletic and Warwick County and in the Birmingham Cup against Shrewsbury Town. That they were so successful perhaps may be attributable to the fact that they had access to a purpose laid pitch, on the grounds of the Aston Cross public house, for which an entrance fee of 2d for spectators was levied.[[57]](#footnote-57) During the season 1889 the team is recorded as taking on Burton Alma, Oldbury Town, The 1st Warwicks (presumably from the regiment), Leonard Unity and The Mint, again presumably from Birmingham, both at first team and reserve levels. However, now it would appear the entrance charge fluctuated according to the importance of the match. Though the standard entry remained at 2d for matches against better known teams such as Burton, perhaps in the hope of raising extra finance it was raised to 3d.[[58]](#footnote-58)

For others though, the problem of obtaining a suitable playing area did not prove so difficult a task. For those who were organised to play during the week in such as The ‘Wednesday League’, a competitive structure for those employed in trades where weekend working was the norm must have found it considerably easier, most matches being played during the weekend. This league, run under the auspices, as were the vast majority of clubs and competitions, of The Birmingham FA did not initially concern any Aston Manor side. However, as the period progressed one particular club seems to have emerged, Aston Wednesday. Though no evidence can be found to indicate the origins of this club it is certainly recorded that from 1909 onwards it fulfilled fixtures against such teams as Redditch, Saltley Traders, City Wednesday and Corporation Trams.[[59]](#footnote-59) This club, which appears to have been the Manor’s sole midweek football representative from the middle years of the 1890s also competed in a charity knock-out competition, entitled The Wilkinson Charity Cup.[[60]](#footnote-60) Again, as seems the case for many of the smaller teams sadly their exploits went unrecorded from within the pages of the local press so there is no means by which we can gauge either their longevity or, if they had any success. Nevertheless for the vast majority of teams, from whatever origin the problem of finding a pitch was one that had to be solved. Certainly, when the game was essentially, in terms of organisation fragmented any land that was both affordable and of practical size and condition could be used. However, once the game began to be structured and fundamental guidelines laid down this must have been a matter of great difficulty for many who wished to compete.

Certainly, given the number of teams that were formed and managed to compete it appears that Aston Park and other areas of ‘grass’ must have been extremely well utilised. It would seem that by pure necessity some teams, though originating from the Manor must have been forced to play in adjacent locations, Aston Clifton*,* and Aston Park Rangers for example played in the Erdington area whilst Aston Casuals, during 1903 are recorded as advertising for a pitch either in Aston or Handsworth.[[61]](#footnote-61) The situation was perhaps so dire that at least one club, Aston Manor, though clearly having an affinity to the area were perhaps forced by necessity to compete in an ’outside league competition’, in this case the Sutton and Erdington League.[[62]](#footnote-62)



The Ordnance Survey Map of Aston Manor, 1885 showing the Aston Unity, Aston Excelsior and the ALG.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Indeed so critical had become the situation in regards to the availability of suitable playing areas that in 1885, the Birmingham Baths and Parks Committee, because of the overuse of Aston Park sought to restrict all games on the land, including both football and cricket. In 1887, when the sporting area of the park was described as a ‘vast patch of black mud’ the Council actually banned football completely.[[64]](#footnote-64) This move however provoked a storm of protest and through the pressure exerted by the local press the decision was rescinded.[[65]](#footnote-65) However by the 1890s aspiring clubs still had the problem of finding a suitable pitch though at least in regards to Aston Park the price was not prohibitive, a fee of 1/- being levied, equating at approximately d per player.[[66]](#footnote-66) This reliance on the park and by inference the lack of alternative open spaces is perhaps reflected by reports of individuals, in pursuit of a game risking the wrath of the local magistrates. One incident, during 1876 might be considered typical. Here it was reported that three boys were each fined 2/6d plus costs for ‘damaging the turf’ whilst playing on a field belonging to a Mr. Ansell of Park Road.[[67]](#footnote-67)

Of course for many young individuals, particularly those of school age participation would have often been reflected via activity in the street and road. This, did not, if the local papers are to be believed seem to have caused any discontent amongst the local population until the later years of our period. However, towards the turn of the century more and more reports began to appear of individuals being prosecuted for using the street as a pitch, perhaps due to the fact that the roads and streets were by this time considerably more congested. The Aston Chronicle, for example in 1889 reported of several appearances by children and young men before the local magistrates. A William Brown, a bird cage maker of 40, Kensington Street, was fined 2/6d including costs for obstructing the highway by the playing of football[[68]](#footnote-68) whilst another, named Arthur Sands was fined 1/- following numerous complaints about his activity in the streets.[[69]](#footnote-69) Clearly the situation had not seemingly changed, for, some sixteen years later, in 1905 it was reported that several young men had likewise fell foul of the law. Here a John Gough, of Clarendon Street, Arthur Richard and Arthur Inkcorn, both of Park Lane and a Frederick Smith were all summonsed and duly punished, all fined 2/6d except for the last boy who received a caution,[[70]](#footnote-70) whilst in the following year the press again could report that two brothers Harold and Reubin Wilkins were both fined 5/- each for a similar offence.[[71]](#footnote-71) Indeed the perceived situation was such that, two years later, albeit with a modicum of understanding. The Aston News saw fit to state that:

“Street footballers are an intolerable nuisance in almost every instance but one can readily understand two or three working men in a shop leaving the premises during the dinner hour and have for a few minutes recreation - in the practice of kicking a ball or a substitute in the shape of a newspaper tied up about the road. They are, however generally more careful than the ordinary youth who will try and hitch a goal at the expense of a street lamp and in such circumstances a caution should be ample for a first offence.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

The not unexpected demand for participation from the young eventually had a distinct effect. As the period progressed more and more instances are recorded of ‘junior teams’, often associated with more adult clubs beginning to appear. These should not however be thought of, in the modern parlance of being schoolboy teams. For given that the school leaving age was, up to 1911 considerably lower than today[[73]](#footnote-73) meant that many were in fact made up of individuals who were of working age. It can therefore be construed that the term simply refers to the players being young, though it could be supposed that if an individual was big and strong enough he could, and most often did play with adult team mates. That this ‘youth’ development was so strong can be evidenced from the fact that throughout the period from 1890 onwards meeting were regularly held throughout the Manor in order to educate the young players in the game, as in 1900 when the ‘offside rule was discussed’.[[74]](#footnote-74) These ‘instructions’ under the auspices of the Birmingham and District FA were paramount in spreading and understanding of the game amongst the participants from the Manor.[[75]](#footnote-75)

Interestingly however a development which owes its emergence to a similar time, that of the youth organisation, ie The Boy Scouts and Boys Church Brigade surprisingly does not seem to have, at least initially immersed itself in football or indeed any other sporting pastime, though towards the end of our period these bodies did begin to contribute, as organisataions towards sporting recreation. Certainly in regards to football there appears to have only been one element, The Aston Church Brigade which initially had become involved. In this case the team seems to have satisfied itself playing friendly matches against other local junior sides.[[76]](#footnote-76) Whether this omission was due to a lack of interest, which given the response by the young in general is unlikely or simply a lack of coverage by the press is unknown. Alternatively it could, of course been a response by the organisers of these movements against the rising tide of professionalism and competitiveness. Whatever the reason it would appear that these embryonic youth concerns did not follow the trend. This stance can perhaps indicate a recognition by these movement’s governing powers of a desire to stand firm against the fundamental changes that had occurred in attitudes towards competitive sporting activity. A situation it would seem had been arrived at that had witnessed a change from the Corinthian spirit to a more competitive and confrontational ethos.[[77]](#footnote-77)

However it might well have been this increasing realisation that the young of Aston Manor were interested in the game, and sporting recreation in general that led those in authority to accept there was a need to rationalise schoolboy football in the Manor. Though initially no interest in any form of sporting activity in regards to schools had been indicated by the Aston Manor School Board, by 1890 it and the educational establishments themselves through, it must be believed the efforts of the school teachers resulted in a change of attitude. That such a change had occurred was noted by, for example The Saturday Night newspaper. For when, in 1890 it detailed the history of schools football in the area it recognised that, in earlier years: “very little interest had been shown by the Board to encourage football.”[[78]](#footnote-78)

However prior to this undoubted change of attitude it is recorded that one school, Albert Road had indicated some thirty years previous that it was interested in forming sporting teams for the pupils. These recreations it was stated were to be provided under the ethos of ‘work while you work, play while you play,’[[79]](#footnote-79) an ambition which failed through a lack of opponents. When eventually the school did achieve its ambitions, albeit in football only it prompted the comment:

“A good deal of additional life and energy has been thrown into the games of the boys by the offer of a competition shield to be competed for by any of the Aston Schools.”[[80]](#footnote-80)

It was, however in 1886, seemingly within a recognition that football and general sporting activity would be advantageous for the youngsters that a group of teachers gathered together to form a competition for the schools of Aston Manor. The result of this was that a Mr. Perry, headmaster of Upper Thomas Street School raised enough funds by the organising of a concert to allow a sum of money to be handed over to the Birmingham FA. To this sum was added a donation from this association which allowed for a trophy to be purchased. The result was that in the same year an eight team league competition, The Aston Manor Schools League was set up, under the auspices of The Aston Schools Football Association,the teams being;

Gower Street Upper Thomas Street

Alma Street Vicarage Road

Aston Lane St. Mary’s

Vicarage Road Albert Road.

This competition, which by 1907 had been augmented by:

Cromwell Street, Burbury Street,

Osbourne Road, Burlington Street,

Station Road and the nearby Slade Road School, Erdington[[81]](#footnote-81)

had obviously proved to be immensely popular, especially with the Gower Street School. For in a report in 1905 it was reported that this it had won the competition no less than eleven out of the nineteen times that it had been competed for.[[82]](#footnote-82)

This quickly inspired further developments which resulted in another two competitions being introduced, The Aston Schools Challenge Cup, the trophy being donated by Aston Villa FC and The Aston School Board Challenge Shield, both being fashioned upon the ever popular FA Cup.[[83]](#footnote-83)These competitions appear to have proved particularly popular provoking the illustrious and redoubtable Honorary Secretary Mr. J. MacGregor,[[84]](#footnote-84) himself a national driving force within the game to state that, in regards to the former:

“during the present season [1892] thirty seven teams entered the cup, this being the highest ever recorded.”[[85]](#footnote-85)

Unfortunately, due to a lack of coverage in the press there is little recorded in regards to these competitions apart from the fact that in the 1887 final of The Challenge Cup Gower Street defeated Albert Road 2-0 whilst in 1889, in The Challenge Shield in a rare report Albert Road are recorded as triumphing 2-0 over Lozells Street, both these matches being played on the Villa Ground, Perry Barr, Birmingham.[[86]](#footnote-86) Additionally at the very end of our period, in 1911 it is recorded that Upper Thomas Street, the holders were defeated by St. Mary’s 2-1, the venue not being indicated.[[87]](#footnote-87) However, because of the limited number of schools available it was decided very early on in the competitions history that, if it was to prosper it would require expansion. The result was that schools from outside the Manor were gradually admitted.

However, as can be expected within any competitive atmosphere there are always likely to be disagreements. One that clearly illustrates the desires that had pervaded these, and undoubtedly other such competitions was when the Bloomsbury Board School after competing a fixture against the Montgomery Street School (both from outside the Manor, in an unidentified competition) accused the latter of playing ineligible boys. As a result Mr. Johnstone of the Bloomsbury establishment demanded proof of the eligibility of the players concerned. Upon not receiving any answer he demanded and obtained, from the organising committee the disqualification of the offending school.[[88]](#footnote-88) Such an attitude certainly indicates that these competitions were extremely competitive and had become an accepted element within the educational life of the schools. Another competition that was introduced to satisfy the competitive the demand was the Croucher Cup. Yet, as so often was the case this competition does not appear to have lasted many seasons. However it is recorded that yet again Lozells Street in one of the finals failed at the final hurdle, this time succumbing to the indomitable St. Mary 6-4. Significantly, given what has been mentioned previously in relation to the availability of pitches this final was played in Saltley, Birmingham.[[89]](#footnote-89)

However this disappointment might well have faded somewhat by 1896 when it would seem that three Lozells players were selected as part of the English Junior Team to play Scotland at no less a place than Villa Park, these individuals being Chattaway, Johnson and Skeldon. It would seem that only Skeldon actually figured in the match which England won 2-0. Interestingly however this match actually predates the official first Schoolboy international which was, according to the English Schools FA was played in 1907 between England and Wales at the Hillary Park Ground (later to be Fellows Park, home of Walsall FC), Walsall, being won by England 3-1. It could well be that though seemingly unofficial Aston Manor might be able to lay claim to possibly having staged the first ‘Schoolboy’ international football match ever.[[90]](#footnote-90)

This movement, of involving the schoolboy in the competitive atmosphere of football though initially viewed with suspicion by some was perhaps vindicated some years later by one of the leading educational figures of the day, Dr. Frank Fletcher. This gentleman, as headmaster of the prestigious Marlborough College believed the playing of schoolboy football and sport in general could be summed up as: “it is better to play a game or do something active yourself than to watch others playing,”[[91]](#footnote-91) an ethos which was, certainly within Aston Manor adopted with gusto. It is clear that by the end of our period the area had a vibrant and dedicated schoolboy football fraternity. The situation had perhaps been arrived at when the statement made, in regards to the playing of football, in The Birmingham Daily Mail might be believed to have summed up perfectly the current state of affairs within the Astom Manor area:

“Every season the newcomer (association football) is gradually encroaching upon its rival’s domain until one may be said to linger in the lap of the other. In our neighbourhood the football fixtures are unfinished before cricketers have entered upon their summer campaign. There is no logical reason why football should remain exclusively a winter sport, and thus the competitions may be brought still closer and closer until the deposition of cricket as the ‘national’ pastime may be still more forcibly demonstrated.”[[92]](#footnote-92)

Nevertheless, as successful as football was in developing a presence there can be little doubt that at the beginning of our period of interest it was cricket, as a recreational pursuit that took the first steps towards becoming a regular feature in Aston Manor. That this was the case is not perhaps surprising, for the game was already a firmly established recreational pastime during the time up to 1870.[[93]](#footnote-93) Yet, despite the fact that it had featured on both the Lower Grounds and Aston Park it appears that it was initially Aston Park Unity who led the way. Formed in 1868 the club, during the early years of our period provided both a first and second XI and fulfilled a great number of fixtures. These games were, however often played away from the Manor, principally because initially the club did not have their own pitch.

There can be little doubt that they and the vast majority of teams in the area, like their footballing counterparts found it extremely difficult, outside of the park and Lower Grounds to obtain pitches. Indeed, even for such a club as Aston Manor Unity the cost was, even as early as 1868 as much as 2/6d per match.[[94]](#footnote-94) It might well have been the case that for those teams of limited means pitches, when found might well have been hired or perhaps borrowed on the strength of increased takings from public houses that they were connected with. Of course it is highly likely that many would have played their fixtures outside of the Manor, St. Paul’s Lozells, for example often played in neighbouring Handsworth, though they did eventually play on Aston Park.

In regard to Aston Manor Unity the situation was initially no different, playing on the Park as well as at various locations around Aston Manor, including, it is recorded against a club named Blenheim at Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham. However, in 1885the club did manage to obtain a permanent home within the Manor, at Trinity Road, a site that they occupied up to 1908. However they then relocated to a new site on the same road which had the advantage of providing a large house which they utilized as a pavilion[[95]](#footnote-95) providing for the continuance of a club that even today, as Aston Unity still exists.[[96]](#footnote-96) This is not to say, of course, that other teams were not in existence, for as appendix vii indicates there were many others operating, but that simply it was this club which appears to have had the greatest impact at the local level of competition.

The club, which, as already indicated was a prime mover in the development of local football again inspired the emergence of a local governing cricket body, The Birmingham and District Cricket Association. Formed, as in football by the leading clubs of the area, Aston Park Unity being the only Aston Manor side the aim was to promote the game via a knockout cup competition. However, this proved unsuccessful, and by 1888 the club along with others, upon the demise of the District Association formed The Birmingham and District Cricket League whose aim was to promote the best interests of the local game. This structure, taking its style and content from the newly formed Football League sought to promote the game at a local level through a more rational approach to the game.

The result was a meeting in The Queens Arms, Easy Row, Birmingham which was attended by six clubs. In establishing the league these original clubs also added a caveat that the number of teams allowed to play in the league should be limited to allow some free Saturdays for friendly matches. It was within this vein of thought that a Mr. C. R. Durban, an official of the league who drew up the first set of rules welcomed its introduction:

“after the various fiascos and unpleasantness in connection with local cricket cup competition the news of the formation of a Birmingham and District Cricket League should come as a boom and a blessing to cricketers who like to take their cricket in a rational manner and without the feverish activity which appears to attach itself to cup ties.”[[97]](#footnote-97)

In establishing the competition a statement of intent was made which clearly laid out the aims of the newly formed organization:

“the object of the League shall be to promote the best interests of local cricket and club members consistent with loyal support to County Cricket.”[[98]](#footnote-98)

Whether Mr. Durban had in mind the comments of the great W. G. Grace is not known but little more than two years earlier the great man, in praise of the game was reported as stating:

“cricket as a sport and pastime for the working classes is to be recommended and encouraged above all other games. It not only benefits them physically but he questions whether they can play any other game that has the same educating influence of as cricket”. Another reason for upholding the game says Grace in the same article in the *Church Monthly* is: “the absence of gambling among the players. In the old days of cricket we hear of matches being made and being played for large sums of money, but whether this was so or not we have no means of proving. Anyhow we do know at the present time that the social qualities of cricket partake of greater purity than any other sport in the world.”[[99]](#footnote-99)

Whether the vast majority of teams in Aston Manor would have chosen to agree with him is not certain. Certainly, what is known is that the game under the leadership of the sports local association and its leading club, Aston Park Unity flourished, albeit somewhat away from the supposed ethics of Grace.[[100]](#footnote-100)

It was thus, in the following year of 1889 that Aston Unity had the singular honour and distinction of participating in what was the world’s first official cricket league match. For, on 4th May, 1889 they travelled to Handsworth Wood to fulfil the inaugural fixture in the newly formed league, attracting as it did a sizeable crowd, unfortunately losing by six runs.[[101]](#footnote-101) This setback did not seem to have deflated them too much for the period up to 1911 witnessed them achieving no less than four league winning seasons along with three where the honour was shared. Indeed they had the distinction of being the very first league champions, losing only one game:

P W D L Pts

Aston Unity 12 8 3 1 19

Mitchells 12 6 4 2 16

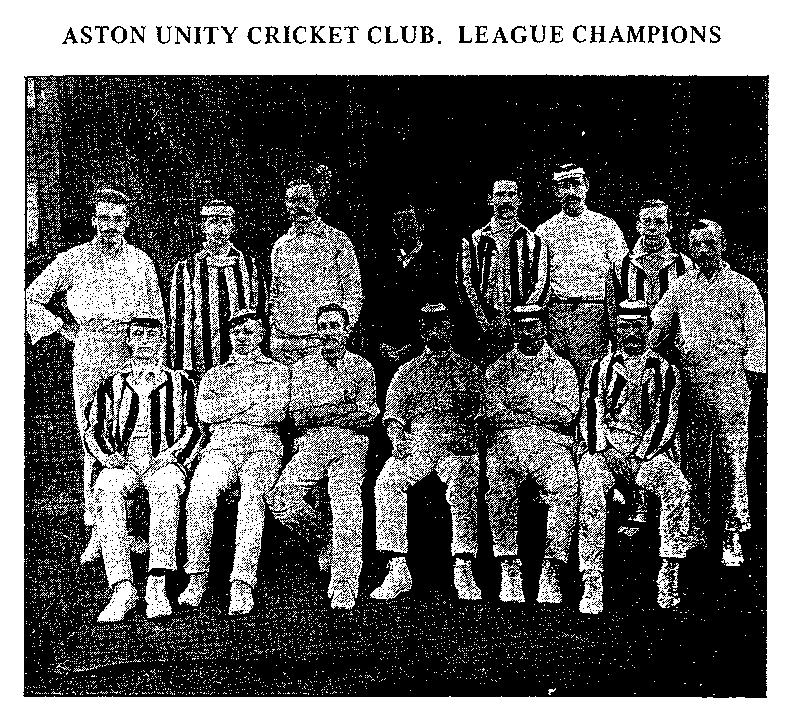
Handsworth Wood 12 4 5 3 13

Salters 12 4 5 3 13

West Bromwich Dartmouth 12 3 4 5 10

Kings Heath 12 1 5 6 7

Walsall 12 1 4 7 6



The Aston Unity Championship winning side of 1906.

Left to right: Back row: A. Devey, E. T. Edden, E. Markwick, James Evans, W. E. Cook, E. J. Leake, F. G. Hurst, F. W. James.

Front Row: C. M. Sykes, A. H. Crane. H. Holland, J. Rhodes, C. R. Durban, W. E. Dimelow.

Due no doubt to their success the club continued to attract a sizeable following so much so that in a league fixture against Moseley in 1895, in what might be considered a ‘local derby’ at the Lower Grounds some 1,500 spectators were attracted.[[102]](#footnote-102)

That such a development could and did occur perhaps was the reason for a certain Dr. Waine, late headmaster of Eton to exclaim, with evident sadness:

“I will only say the tendency to turn sports into spectacles and to professionalise games and to make a business of every pleasure seems to me to be unwholesome and not likely to have a good effect upon the material life.”[[103]](#footnote-103)

Nevertheless the attitude that this gentleman exhibited, so reminiscent of the Victorian age, was passing. The changing nature of the game, with clubs formed by individuals which reflected their social identity provided for a new perception. Again, like as in football local uniqueness was used to provide distinctive identities to groups of like-minded individuals. However what is apparent is that as our period of interest progressed there was a significant dropping of the number of teams who are recorded as competing. This may of course have been due to the lessening of interest in the reporting of the minor clubs, attention being almost entirely devoted to the reporting of the first class game. Only within the Sports Argus were the activities of the smaller clubs reported, though this publication often chose not to make any reference either to the origins of the participants or the venue of the match.

Yet, in regards to the formation of the league, despite the criticism of some individuals it was both welcomed and appreciated, for some four years later a reserve division was drawn up, again Aston Park Unity submitting a side.[[104]](#footnote-104) Surprisingly however, it appears that the association did not make any concerted effort to expand competition against other associations, unlike football which, as already indicated did so very successfully. Any other matches which were fulfilled in Aston Manor from 1870 onwards and which were outside of the League were friendly ie against such as Nottingham and Kidderminster.[[105]](#footnote-105) Most surprisingly, given their fame and obvious status Aston Park Unity were not afforded the opportunity to oppose any of the illustrious visiting touring sides that visited Aston Manor, these including the County, the Australian and those that contained W. G. Grace.

For the majority of the teams that played cricket in and around the Manor the format was that of the friendly, though, like their football counterparts they played within a strict code of rules and behaviour, being governed by their local district association. Similarly many of the teams either owed their origins to local establishments, with once again the religious community prominent in the spreading of the game, with St. Mary’s and St. Peter and St. Paul along with Aston Congregationalist being to the fore, this last location being from 1872 until at least 1885 the home of The Aston Clifton Cricket and Football Club. It was in this latter year that it was stated that the club had over 40 members and regularly meet for social evenings.[[106]](#footnote-106) However, the expansion of the game owed perhaps as much to the public house. Many emerging clubs adopted them as their headquarters, and, in some cases adopted the name of the establishment, (see appendix vii), The Aston Tavern, for example being the headquarters of The Aston Police Team. For many however this adoption was a continuation of an already existing relationship, for many clubs had both football and cricket interests as in the case of Birchfield Harriers who not only provided athletics but had in 1887 formed a football club.[[107]](#footnote-107) In so doing the individuals concerned developed the potential to extend their recreational interest in sport to cover the whole year.

There can be little doubt that the establishment of a league system was the inspiration for further developments. Though the number of competitions that did emerge was considerably less than in football, one, The Birmingham and District Parks League was particularly influential in assisting the expansion of the game in Aston Manor. Formed in 1903 it was initially a single league structure but eventually by 1911 it comprised of four divisions, though it would appear no system of promotion or relegation was installed, the local sides that first appeared being Aston Corinthians; Congregational Mutual; Aston Park Unity; Aston Park; Aston Manor and Aston Casuals.[[108]](#footnote-108) Sadly however the Corinthians did not seem to have existed for any great length of time. It was reported in 1903 that they were in severe financial trouble and as no further record of their activities appears past 1906 it could well be that they succumbed. However, some seven years later these clubs had been supplemented by a number of others including in some cases 2nd XIs. Additionally from around 1907 a junior league had been formed which, unlike its football counterpart did not refer to age but to simply to status. It was within this league that several company teams participated who came from outside of the Manor, Miller Street Tram Depot, Crabtree, Mitchells & Butlers Brewery. To these can be added such local sides as the Aston Police,[[109]](#footnote-109) Aston Mansfield, Aston Church Bible Mens and last but not least Aston Manor.[[110]](#footnote-110) This last club, formed in 1903 and though extolling Aston Manor by its very name, playing many of its early fixtures on the Aston parkland soon found its way to Birmingham. Indeed even today it still fulfils its fixtures at its home in Perry Barr. However, apart from its name it still retains one substantial link to its formative days, its use of the squirrel emblem so resplendent on the Aston Manor heraldic coat of arms.[[111]](#footnote-111)

Interestingly, as in football there were some individuals who, through employment could not enjoy the game at weekends. They had, by necessity to seek recreational enjoyment during the week. Only one club appears to have existed that was faced by this problem, Aston Wednesday.[[112]](#footnote-112) As no trace of a midweek league can be found it can be presumed that they played friendly fixtures only. Notwithstanding this it would appear that they had an extremely thriving club membership. For, in holding their annual meeting at the Holte Hotel it is recorded that over 100 members and friends attended.[[113]](#footnote-113) Yet despite this advance it has to be recognised that the game did not expand to the same extent as football, perhaps not only due to cost, pitches, kit etc but also, perhaps more significantly to its inherent respectability and connection to an already established class ethic. The same could be said of school cricket. It would seem that Aston Manor did not come to enjoy an organised school cricket presence until well late into our period. Indeed it was not until the time around 1907/08 that a league emerged, containing most of the areas schools. However, it has to be said that the game, at whatever level did not truly ever reach the popularity and extent as that of football.

Football and cricket however were not the only areas of sporting recreation that individuals used to make attempts to move away from the constraints of a middle class ethos and authority. It was in the field of athletics that Aston Manor can lay claim to having provided one of the most famous clubs this country has ever produced, Birchfield Harriers. As already referred to between 1870-1880 the Manor had a well established athletic tradition through Pedestrianism, supplying as it did local athletes as well as attracting a decent following. Nevertheless, it was The Birchfield Harriers Athletic Clubwho can be identified as taking over the mantle of athletic endeavour. Formed in 1877 in a school room at Lozells Sunday School, Wheeler Street by disaffected athletes after they had been involved in a race that had been badly organised[[114]](#footnote-114) they quickly became a major force in national competitions, substantially aided, it has to be recognised by the athletic track that had been laid at the Lower Grounds site.

Though originally having their HQ at Calthorpe Park, Birmingham the club became permanent residents of the Lower grounds in 1881, quickly becoming Aston Manor’s most famous non-footballing recreational organisation. Their attitude to competition reflected a competitive ethos which indicated a move away from a Corinthian attitude towards a more determined, competitive and professional approach. They were so unwavering in their quest for success they: “did their utmost to strengthen their ranks by the addition of men from the Metropolis, Liverpool and other towns.”[[115]](#footnote-115)

Certainly one of their finest achievements during these early days was a triumph in the Cross Country Championship of England, held at Roehampton. Their entry, according to the Aston Observer and Handsworth Times*,* providing much interest, the teams competing being, apart from Birchfield who entered as Midland Champions:

Thames Hare and Hounds (English Champions)

Spartan Harriers

Blackheath Harriers

Clapton Beagles

Hampstead Harriers,

each team providing twelve runners, the first six across the line counting towards the teams overall score, the lowest total deciding the championship. The race, which was won by P. H. Stenning of the Thames club with a time of one hour, eight minutes, the first Birchfield arrival was J. Law, third, some three minutes after the winner. However, the title was won through the fact that the other Birchfield athletes finished in 4th, 6th, 8th, 13th, and 18th, thus securing a winning total of 52 points. Indeed, such was their efforts that the newspaper was driven to comment that the club (which was referred to as being from Birmingham despite the fact that it had substantial Aston Manor connections) had achieved:

“a great victory, there can be no mistake about it, in every way the triumph is equally meritorious. For a small club like the Birchfield Harriers to send a team such a distance from home, and to overthrow, upon their own ground the holders of the cross-country championship, together will all the other leading London clubs are two startling performances and quite enough one would think to make the most empty-headed ‘cockney’ paper chaser pause and ponder for, at least one short minute over such an apparent revolution of public form.”[[116]](#footnote-116)

Their success and the fame that it brought to the area was reflected in the many invitations made and accepted by other clubs and organisations to compete on the Lower Grounds site. Indeed it was their prowess that might be identified as the impetus by which in 1881 the Amateur Athletic Championships were held on the site. That this event drew in a gate of over 10,000 and made a handsome profit of some £325 could only have added to their lustre.[[117]](#footnote-117) However, due to their fame the club became almost nomadic, accepting invitations and gaining success all over the country.[[118]](#footnote-118) Nevertheless its association with Aston Manor, in holding various events including meets against athletics clubs from around the country allowed it to progress. In 1905, for example they met the South London Harriers at Aston Park, proving victorious.[[119]](#footnote-119) Additionally they also held their Annual Sports Meeting continuously right up to 1911 and beyond, some of which attracting what can only be described as amazing crowds. These meetings, featured clubs not only from the surrounding areas but from further afield. The one held in 1905, for example attracted some 10,000 spectators and featured competitors from such as Highgate Harriers, Lozells Harriers, Small Heath, Edgbaston Harriers, and Handsworth from Birmingham and, from farther afield Northampton Alpine Harriers, Walsall Harriers, Clements FC and Leicester Fosse, this latter club perhaps deriving from the organisation that spawned Leicester City FC.[[120]](#footnote-120) However, in 1911 one of these meetings drew a considerably smaller crowd, of some two to three thousand only, this for a day which featured no less than two hundred competitors.[[121]](#footnote-121)

That this club retained a special place within the affections of the local population as well as within the world of athletics however cannot be denied and can be substantiated when, in 1911, they organised what must have been a truly significant event. For, in July of that year they held, on the track that had been established around the Aston Villa pitch, what was termed by the local press as an ‘Olympic Meeting’, which apart from the usual events featured the World’s 25 mile AAA Championship. The fact that the governing body of their sport could lend their name is indicative of the clubs standing. This event, attracting 39 entries and attracting again, some 3,000 paying spectators was won by a Mr. Henry.[[122]](#footnote-122)

It would be amiss however not to mention one particular Birchfield athlete whose exploits did much to elevate the club and in doing so benefit the reputation of the area. This individual, William Snook, a native of Shrewsbury was born in 1861. He joined the Birchfield club in 1885 and immediately began a run of success, winning a series of titles including the National Cross Country Championship in 1885. Controversially however, following a race within which he came second he was banned by the Midland Counties AAA who believed that he had connections with the local betting fraternity and had an interest in not winning the race. The ban, when imposed was for life, he never ran as an amateur again. That such a draconian sentence was imposed was almost certainly due to the fact that, when the association was formed it implicitly set itself against gambling. So sensitive was it to the dangers that it perceived to present that it specifically entered within its constitution, in Rule 14 a demand that members:

“use their best endeavours to suppress betting at their respective meetings.”[[123]](#footnote-123)

Yet despite this clearly stated ambition it must be accepted that, in reality this ambition was not entirely fulfilled.

For a time he competed professionally, on one occasion taking part in a race against a most unusual opponent. Appearing in Small Heath, Birmingham he was advertised as being pitted against ‘High Bear’, a champion North American native from the Sioux tribe.[[124]](#footnote-124) This race, the result of which appears not to have been published had an admission charge of 3d.[[125]](#footnote-125) However, some time afterwards he turned to the licensed trade but this change of career, as the landlord of The Alma public house in Lichfield Road appears to have been unsuccessful. He then seems to have returned to the professional running circuit, which was, at that time still against the principles of the AAA, in France before returning, in 1916 to the Birmingham area. In failing health he was taken to the workhouse at Highcroft Hall, Erdington, passing away in the same year, aged 55. Not forgotten he was carried to his final place of rest accompanied by officials of the Midland Counties AAA.*[[126]](#footnote-126)*

The fame and the not inconsequential economic benefit that the club brought to the area might well be imagined to have provided the impetus for other athletic clubs that emerged in the area. Certainly several were formed, (see appendix viii) these being Aston Harriers, Lozells AC, and Heathfield Harriers, this latter club, though possibly emanating from Wolverhampton were recorded as often running handicap races from various locations within Aston Manor.



Aston Harriers, taken on the occasion of their first run of the 1909 season around Sutton Park.[[127]](#footnote-127)

In regards to Aston Harriers however, from their headquarters at the King Edward public house they often arranged runs, a feature of which was for some years was a festive run on Boxing Day.

On one particular occasion when a ‘Hare and Hounds Paper Chase’ was held, as an additional attraction a challenge match was made between a Mr. Smith and a Mr. Berry. This event, being a handicap race commenced with Smith having a 10 minute start, the actual race being over six miles. Though there is no record of whether odds were being offered in regards to the result it was noted that over 300 persons were in attendance to witness the finish, ‘vehicles ranging from large motor cars to farmers wagons.’ Whatever the reason for such a large attendance, gambling must be considered a possibility it witnessed Smith winning the race by eight minutes.[[128]](#footnote-128) Though little else is known as to their activities they are recorded in 1910 as holding a Paper Chase (fast and slow packs) from their headquarters, competing in the following year in a seven mile cross country handicap race,[[129]](#footnote-129) and in the Midland Junior Championships at Bromford Bridge, Birmingham, finishing fifth.[[130]](#footnote-130) It appears that this club must have remained attached to Aston Manor for a month later they organised a Cross Country run over the countryside at Witton, following its conclusion with a concert, at the King Edward in aid of The Holy Trinity Mission. It can only be supposed that they continued to function after the absorption of the area, though to what length is not known. In regards to The Lozells Harriers however their existence appears to have been short lived. It seems that they were formed, possibly, in 1905, having their headquarters in the Lozells Chapel, Wheeler Street, and arranging an early meeting against a St. Thomas church team, which was held in Lozells.[[131]](#footnote-131) Little else is recorded is regards to running activity, though some of is members did feature in the 1905 Birchfield Harriers annual sports day.[[132]](#footnote-132)

Perhaps surprisingly athletics does not seem to have enjoyed a substantial relationship with the local schools community. Whether this was because of a lack of interest on behalf of the children or a lack of willingness to arrange by the school staff or regional governing body is not known. It would seem that it was not until as late as 1898 that an indication of school’s involvement in the recreation can be gleaned. It was in this year that The Fulford Challenge Trophy for Aston Schools was competed for, though restricted to a 100 yard sprint competition. It cannot be verified if this was the first, latest or last held contest as no records appear to exist of its inauguration or ending. The competition which appears to have been based upon some sort of a knock-out system provided the following results: Cromwell Street beat Cowper Street; Farm Street beat Staniforth Street and Burbury Street beat St. Georges. Sadly no record of who actually won the trophy can be found.[[133]](#footnote-133)

It is highly likely that any athletic activity that may have featured in the curriculum of the Aston Manor school community would have been restricted to individual schools holding their own competitions, within the confines of their own establishments. This may explain the limitation to 100 yards races as previously mentioned. If this is true then it would seem to explain the lack of newspaper coverage that this aspect of child activity received.

It might well have been the fact that such a deficiency within the Manor’s sporting provision may have prompted the Council authority by 1911 to a new realisation. It must have been clear that athletics, and indeed all child recreational activity was being limited by the very lack of participatory space. Though they could not provide more parkland what they could do was to utilize areas of space under their control so as to improve the recreational provision of the area. The result was that, through the Finance and Building sub-committee a number of schools were permitted to open their playgrounds between the evening hours, 5 p.m. until 8 p.m. for the recreational use of the youngsters of the area, this, being allowed during the span of time 1st April to 30th September, 1911. The schools, initially being Alma Street, Aston Lane, Burlington Street, Lozells Street and Vicarage Road would seem, at a stroke to have provided space where youngsters, of either sex could enjoy a game of football, cricket or simply meet!![[134]](#footnote-134)

There can be little doubt that sports, both actively and passively were of great interest to the young of Aston Manor. However, for some there was another choice that could be made, to join one of the emerging youth organisations that came into being from end of the 1880s. These, The Scouts, Boys Brigade and other similar formations though never attracting a mass following were nevertheless popular with a minority of young people, giving to them opportunities that were not present before their conception.

It was in 1889, the same year that Birmingham enjoyed the introduction of its first Boys Brigade Company that The Aston Lads Brigade was formed.[[135]](#footnote-135) This body, essentially being religiously sustained was linked to St. Peter and St. Paul and had its headquarters at Hoadley’s Bedstead Works, Aston Lane. Enjoying what seems to have been a good membership and a brass band it gathered under the control of a Captain, The Rev. Arthur Pritchard and existed until the October of 1891 when it became affiliated to The Boys Brigade and was then renamed the 1st Aston Manor Boys Brigade.



The 1st Aston Manor Company Boys Brigade c1894.

Nevertheless it would seem that though affiliated to the BB the Lads Brigade still continued to parade. For, in 1898 a group described as The Aston Company provided, at the Victoria Hall both a concert and a display of their skills, these being gymnastic and bayonet exercises!![[136]](#footnote-136) That this identity could have continued might well have been due to the fact that normally the children involved in the Lads Brigade were too young for the BB. Again, though supposition it might well have been that because of the success of this organisation with its ability to induce young

boys to become members that a 2nd (1896) and 3rd company (1904) were formed.

Though the picture is credited as being of the 1st Aston Manor Company the badges on the boys caps are the numbers 2 and 3. This would, as P. Arkinstall and R. Bolton suggest indicate that these boys were from the 2nd and 3rd companies. Additionally for the officers to be wearing peaked caps and the boys ‘pill box hats’ would point towards that fact this illustration is in fact of members of the Aston Manor Lads Brigade and not the Boys Brigade and thus predates 1891.[[137]](#footnote-137) Whatever the argument in 1901 they enjoyed, for the first time a camp, spending time under canvas whilst at Habberley Valley, Worcestershire. They also, on the majority of Sundays performed church parades and attended company meets to discuss such points as field craft and signalling. This company however can glory in the fact that they can be identified as being truly Astonians in that its membership was strictly limited to those boys who attended The Vicarage Road Sunday School, the HQ being the Albert Road school. That this troop existed at all is tribute to those who arranged many fund raising events to allow it to be established, as in 1889 when a concert was enacted to raise money for uniforms.[[138]](#footnote-138)

Sadly for the Manor despite what appears to have been a continuing popularity its Astonian identity was partially removed. In 1895, under the captaincy of a Captain Buckley the headquarters was moved to a site in Birmingham. Though it retained its distinctive name by 1910 it would seem that the impending annexation of Aston Manor provided the reason for another change of name, to that of The 1st Birmingham (Aston) Company. In regards to the 2nd and 3rd they too lost their Astonian tag, both being like the 1st assimilated into Birmingham, the 2nd, under the captaincy of a Mr. Doogood (an admirable name for one in such a position) being relocated to St. James’. Sadly, on the other hand, there are no indications as to where the 3rd company was transferred to. What is known however is that the 3rd Aston Manor became the 17th Birmingham Company whilst the 2nd seems to have either been disbanded or assimilated into another company, for nothing exists as to their fate. There was nevertheless, if the individual did not wish to enrol in the above organisations, others that were available, one being The Boys Life Brigade. Founded in 1889 it certainly flourished in Birmingham but not it seems within Aston Manor.

There was also available probably the most famous youth structure of them all, The Boy Scouts. This movement after being formed in 1907 by Lord [Robert Baden-Powell](file:///C:\wiki\Robert_Baden-Powell,_1st_Baron_Baden-Powell), [Lieutenant General](file:///C:\wiki\Lieutenant_General) in the [British Army](file:///C:\wiki\British_Army), held its first camp at [Brownsea Island](file:///C:\wiki\Brownsea_Island), Dorset and in 1910 witnessed the introduction of a female counterpart, The Girl Guides. Holding weekly meetings, in what were often church halls and which were known as Scout Dens cultivated an appreciation of outdoor activity, camping, hiking and sports, though the general application was, during the early years markedly militaristic. In regards to Aston Manor it would seem that the area was very quickly off-the mark, The Aston News reporting that by the end of 1908 the area could boast of a Troop, this being the 1st St. Paul’s, Lozells. In a display, no doubt to publicise the movement at The Ellen Knox Mission in Tower Road, the company gave a display of their skills to an audience containing Captain Needham of The 6th Warwickshire Regiment. After performing marching and forming exercises and giving exhibitions of physical drill, erection of tents, utilising staves and canvas they enacted a camp scene within which they portrayed a defence from attack by an enemy, this being greeted by the audience with ‘much applause’. In addressing the boys the visiting Captain stated that “it was a great pleasure for him to inspect them” and adding that:

“It was the first Troop of Baden Powell’s Boy Scouts he had seen and he was every much struck with their motto ‘Be Prepared’ as it was the duty of Scouts to be prepared at all times”.

He also expressed him satisfaction, it was said with:

“the appearance of the officers and boys presented and commented on the admirable way the boys had rolled their coats. The drill and all the other exercises he had witnessed were a credit to both the officers and boys. He understood that that they had only been formed six weeks and he could only wish the Territorial Army would pick up their drill as quickly as the boys. He hoped to have the pleasure of inspecting them again and should be willing to do so at any time.”[[139]](#footnote-139)

In thanking all who attended The Rev. Guinness of The Mission thanked the boys and hoped that their efforts would allow another troop to be formed at the Hall. Unfortunately there are no indications available to show that this ambition came to fruition.

Nevertheless there are, from the pages of the local press clear signs that the movement did prosper in the Manor. For, only two years on from St. Paul’s efforts the movement was able to parade an expanded presence, as part of the Birmingham and District Scout movement for inspection in Aston Park by the Lord Mayor, Alderman A. Taylor. Here, on this occasion the number of Aston Manor troops had swelled to include St. James and The 1st Lozells as well as St. Pauls. After marching to the accompaniment of a band from William Street near Six Ways they, after entering the park were, as was usual inspected, and then, for the entertainment of the crowd and to exhibit their prowess gave a display of their skills. Additionally, in front of a crowd which was believed to have numbered over six thousand the Aston Manor Boys of St. Paul’s gave an exhibition of physical drill; St. James of staff play; of marching by the 1st Lozells and fire drill, relay dispatch race and ambulance work by a combined force. Additionally, the Aston Edwardian Troop who, despite having many connections with the area were actually based outside of its borders provided a fire rescue display. Also, it might be supposed, to provide a little humour to the afternoon blindfold boxing was enacted between members of the various troops. Additionally, to provide a further indication as to their skills they gave an exhibition of signaling, the message being sent reading: ‘Aston Boys Scouts send their best wishes to General Baden Powell’ a message which was interpreted by another scout located some two hundred yards away. In passing comment the Mayor stated in regards to the expansion of the Boy Scout movement:

“The general impression a short time ago was that it was only a game the boys were playing at, but now they all know it was a great national movement for the development of all kinds of usefulness. He could always identify a scout in the street by his smart and cheerful appearance. The training they were receiving might some be useful in helping the defence of their country and he felt sure they would as loyal subjects of the King all do their duty in this respect”.[[140]](#footnote-140)

Finally, as was normal in such presentations the Mayor took the salute as the assembled companies marched past.

It is clear that by the end of our period of interest the Scout movement was well established and had become a permanent factor in the recreational life of the area. Indeed on the occasion of St. George’s Day in 1910 the Scouting fraternity were again in the public eye when, in accompanying the Lord Mayor and other local dignitaries they marched, again from William Street to St. Peter and St. Paul in order to celebrate the day. Led by the St. James Troop, accompanied by their band they took a route which included Victoria and Park Roads, providing a parade which included, what the local press described as ‘eight troops’ though unfortunately no indication as to the identity of which individual troops actually took part. Interestingly however the report did see fit to mention that:

“about a dozen girl scouts also joined the procession out of a total of twenty one who have become members.”

Again, no information is available as to which troop these females were associated with but their presence certainly indicates that the movement was moving towards a state of sexual equality. After entering the church the Vicar, in his sermon referred to their presence and made remarks designed specifically for the movement in general in regards to discipline.

“There must always be a readiness to obey those in command. The same applied in the shop. Business would not go very well unless there was discipline, punctuality and attention. Everybody should obey those who were specially set over them”.

It is clear that this particular vicar and presumably most others of his calling would have seen the scouting movement as well other similar organisations as being a means by which the governing classes could attain and sustain social control! It could also be argued that these bodies were the last attempts to provide the idioms of muscular Christianity and rational recreation. After these instructions to the gathered congregation and the conclusion of the service the boys paraded in the park and performed the obligatory march past to, on this occasion again the Mayor of Birmingham, returning to Lozells where they were dismissed.[[141]](#footnote-141) Sadly this would appear to have been the last time that the Scout movement of Aston Manor paraded as a body. For less than six months later Aston Manor was no more.

As impressive as these developments clearly are it should not be imagined that recreational activity was limited to those areas which has been mentioned. The people, both adult and child were certainly able, during our period of interest to divert themselves with other activities, which today are still part of our lives. In this chapter the theme has been on the individual, in a sense taking over his recreation, and perhaps nothing personifies this more than angling. Here the individual could remove himself from the group and enjoy his pastime with little concern other than making sure he was legal. However it can be presumed, in time-honoured tradition many were not!! Though it might be hard today to believe that the angler could enjoy the waters of The Tame as well as the Aston Reservoir then many certainly would have, especially the enthusiastic young perhaps using crude rods. Nevertheless whether using a correct rod or improvised instrument these waters must have borne witness to many catches. Indeed the Reservoir was the scene of some celebration in 1900 when a local man landed, by the use of a free rod a 25 ounce fish, though for some unexplained reason the report failed to mention what type!!.[[142]](#footnote-142)

Certainly, from 1890 onwards it would seem that a small but active angling club scene emerged, (see appendix viii), the first club being The Aston Britannia Angling Club*,* formingin 1885. However, amazingly for an angling club, it had a very peculiar problem, the members being reported as stating that:

“The one thing lacking was water for they could not find much to fish in and that marred their progress,”

the club being limited to the waters of Sutton Coldfield. As well as this the report commented on the fact that the club found the charges which had to be met to allow them to travel to enjoy their pastime made by the local railway company excessive!![[143]](#footnote-143)

Two years later they seem to have solved this problem, for in 1893 they announced that they had secured a portion of the Avon, at Spring Hill Farm, Flodbury, Worcestershire and a portion of the Avon in the Chapelry of Hill and Mear and Wyre Piddle, this latter being a length of some two miles.[[144]](#footnote-144) It would appear that from this time onwards the club prospered, for in 1894 they are recorded as enjoying a Smoking Concert with some one hundred and fifty members present,[[145]](#footnote-145) though by 1898 the membership had dropped to one hundred and nine.[[146]](#footnote-146) The club continued to enjoy an existence right up to 1911 participating in several of the competitions organised by the clubs of Aston Manor. These being, amongst others the Angling Benefit Society Contest which was fished in various locations, mostly on the River Severn,[[147]](#footnote-147) and The Thomas Cup which took place during the early part of May of each year.[[148]](#footnote-148)

This club was followed into existence by The Aston Park Angling Society who often fished at Pershore, Worcestershire, The Aston Manor Club and The Gunmakers Angling Society who could boast of, at the end of our period of interest a membership of some one hundred and fifty.[[149]](#footnote-149) There is no evidence of the female however being a participant, though there is no logical reason not to believe that some did participate. Certainly one ‘lady angler’ reminiscing about her youth reflected upon the ‘catching of Minnows’ appears to verify at least one example of a female’s interest in fish!![[150]](#footnote-150)

It would appear that fish were not the only animals of interest to those of Aston Manor. From the early years Dog shows were also held. One of the earliest, held on the Grounds at Albert Road School attracted many entries and was open to all-comers, prizes being available for the winners.[[151]](#footnote-151) Nevertheless this sort of competition appears to have been held very infrequently, presumably because many of those interested would have almost certainly have gone to Birmingham which at the time was the location for several large shows. However, in 1900 an event devoted to the Bull Dog was organised. This, held at Villa Park on the 25th July appears to have been, rather surprisingly well attended with a Mr. Baker and his animal ‘Aston Monarch’ winning three classes.[[152]](#footnote-152) Four years later it is recorded that a Fox Terrier exhibition was held, though the location is not mentioned. It would seem that this event won by Mr. Hepworth’s ‘Crackler Jim’ had inspired the owners to consider the formation of club in regards to the breed. However nothing more is reported in regards to this, so it can only be assumed that the ambition failed to materialise.[[153]](#footnote-153) It is clear however that there was within the area an active interest in the showing and breeding of dogs, the local newspapers often carrying advertisements offering ‘pedigree’ puppies for sale. However, given that the owner of, for example a ‘Rory o’ More, a 44lb Bulldog could demand a Stud fee of three guineas must suggest that those who did participate took it very seriously indeed.[[154]](#footnote-154) Not to be outdone the Cat admirers also featured, albeit also infrequently. Though the Cat fancying fraternity did appear to have established a major event for their interest, the Midland Counties Cat Show it does not seem to have been held in the Manor very often. There are indications that it was held in 1894 in the Victoria Hall and again, at the same venue in 1905. However the press reports state that at this latest show the entries were down in comparison to the 1894 event, perhaps suggesting a flagging of interest.[[155]](#footnote-155)

The interest in animals was not however simply restricted to those of four legs, for there were those whose love was birds, in particular the Pigeon. The interest in this animal, particularly in regards to its racing capabilities was, it seems limited to one particular club, The Aston Villa Flying Club. Seemingly formed sometime prior to 1898 and meeting at the Villa Tavern every Tuesday its activities were, like the previously mentioned pastime also closely connected to the railway system. On one occasion, in 1898 the club organised four races, two for younger and two for older birds, from Whitchurch, Shropshire and Winchester and Ventnor respectively, utilizing the railway system to travel to the locations mentioned.[[156]](#footnote-156)

Once again the local press appears to have had little interest, choosing not to devote much column space to it. However, in the September of 1905 a report was forthcoming, which clearly indicated that the sport had provided for itself a local governing structure, The Birmingham and District Saturday Federation. Though there is no evidence to suggest any persons from the Manor were involved it would seem highly likely that some were. This Federation certainly arranged various events, one of which was the ‘Produce Stakes’ which actually took place from Bournemouth, where it was reported no less than 2,500 birds were consigned. Such a large amount of animals would have needed, along with their owners transport to get to their destination adding further to the assumption made earlier in regards to the importance of the railways.[[157]](#footnote-157) It would also seem that around this same time a second organisation emerged, this being the Aston and East Birmingham Association, though again no evidence is forthcoming as to the involvement of Manor fanciers. Yet despite these advances, for the vast majority of the people of the area their only concern with the pigeon was to avoid its droppings, the animal being often considered a pest. For those, who nevertheless did have an interest in animals, as pets the local press, throughout our period of interest carried advertisements offering, not only the usual array of cats and dogs but often the more exotic breeds of birds such as Parrots.[[158]](#footnote-158)

It would appear that for some however, though living in terrace and back-to- back town houses and perhaps having a pet their interests were elsewhere. This type of housing, small, confined and affording little, or at best a restricted space did not however prevent the hobby of gardening being chosen by some as their recreational activity. Given that the type of housing that generally existed in the Manor would not have usually incorporated a garden, the yard being a normal feature it can be appreciated that it must have taken a great deal of effort and ingenuity to provide the environment within which flowers and perhaps vegetable produce could have flourished. Unfortunately it is not recorded to what extent the local housing stock had in the way of ‘growing space’ which might have allowed for the location to be a haven of peace and colour in what must have been a somewhat depressing landscape. Yet, despite of the obvious limitations it appears that gardening and horticulture blossomed within the Manor. Sadly there appears to be no evidence to indicate the availability of allotment space so it must be presumed that if such locations were available they might well have been outside the Manor.

Though it is difficult to believe that the large agricultural shows which were enacted on the Lower Grounds were instrumental in popularising gardening in the area there can be little doubt that the regular showing of blooms in both the Lower Ground site and parkland may have provoked an interest. Certainly towards the end of our period it appears to have become popular, this being reflected not only by the emergence of societies and clubs devoted to the recreation but also by the presence of articles related to its enjoyment contained within the pages of the local press.

From as early as 1876 individuals has gathered together to exhibit the results of their labour. St. Mary’s School Room, on 14th August was perhaps one of the earliest scene of an exhibition of flora, fruit and vegetables that had been grown by The Cottagers and Artisans Society, for which an admission charge of 6d, 3d if entry was after 5 p.m. was charged. It is also recorded that on this occasion, to provide an ambience for the visitor, a Brass Band was in attendance.[[159]](#footnote-159) Though little is indicated within the pages of the local press it is clear that the pastime retained, during the on-going years popularity. For in 1880, on several occasions it is noted that The Holte Theatre was utilised in regards to the hobby. Here was put on a ‘Grand Floral Display’ along with other attractions, such as music and outdoor variety acts.[[160]](#footnote-160) Sadly, it would appear that this particular venture had a short lived life and, after this year was never again used, perhaps due to this event being financially a failure.

However, in 1882 The Aston Flower Mission was formed. This society, formed as it was to raise money for charitable causes was soon the prime mover in the area for the exhibiting of garden produce. From its conception the society put on an annual Chrysanthemum show at the Queens Hotel,[[161]](#footnote-161) this event seemingly lasting well towards 1911. These were, accompanied from 1891 by what was termed as their ‘Annual Flower Show and Floral Display‘. These events, as befitted the ambitions of the society were to allow growers to display the results of their labour for sale, the proceeds then being made available as donations to charities, both in Aston Manor and surrounding districts including hospitals located in the Birmingham area. One of these events held in September 1891 was described as: “the best that had been held.” The event, in the aforementioned hotel was attended, it was reported by over one thousand paying visitors during the one day of its staging. The venue, the main room of the facility it was said was:

“tastefully decorated with flowers [and] plants and bouquets of flowers were displayed round the room,”

these being made available to the general public for purchase at prices ranging from 1d to 2/6d. Alternatively, should the visitor not want to purchase, he or she was respectfully requested to ‘make a donation.’ These functions were often graced with leading local dignitaries, including on this occasion Captain Grice Hutchinson MP, who had agreed to assist towards obtaining a target for the year of fifty guineas. The Mission also, for many years used the same venue for the displaying, on Sundays, bouquets for sale, the monies raised again being sent to local hospitals.[[162]](#footnote-162) At another, some eight years later, again at the location that seems to have been their normal ‘showing arena’, the exhibits seem to have been particularly fine. The local press was able, in response to a fine showing of blooms and produce to state that the organisation was now a household word in the Manor. At this particular event it was recorded that the various stalls set up to display the members efforts were able to boast of providing blooms and produce of all types, all in order to:

“raise funds for providing the poor and need with hospital and other notes and thus enable them to have the best attention.”

Indeed such was the breadth of the exhibits that the show was described by the press as “being superior to any that had yet been held.” Roses, bouquets, cut blooms of all types, baskets and displayed fruit all vied for the customer’s attention. Many of the items were, in fact gifts, coming from such as the licensee of the Red Lion as well as numerous private donations. Additionally many local companies subscribed, including the brewing companies of Mitchells & Butlers; Atkinsons and last, but not least Ansells.[[163]](#footnote-163) This society was, seemingly, the mainstay of Aston Manor’s gardening world until in 1892The Royal Albert Floral Society emerged. This organisation, holding their shows at the Royal Albert public house, like the previous Mission was aimed at aiding charity, in 1899 for example contributing towards the upkeep of the Children’s Hospital, Birmingham. Though they are recorded as being in active until at least 1905, after this date no more reports of their deeds appear to have been recorded.[[164]](#footnote-164) Their events were, it would appear unlike those of the Aston Flower Mission, being competitive in nature. At the 1899 event, for example, some 22 entries were received in regards to apples and in potatoes ten as well as all the usual cut blooms. However, one particularly unusual entry submitted was a dish of new laid eggs from a member whose gardening is confined to a Hen roost? There was also promised, but perhaps thankfully not delivered a ‘porker’ from the sty of a local councillor, these contributions suggesting that there was a lighter side to the proceedings. One exhibit however that certainly appears to have raised a laugh was when a member introduced a Sunflower that had been:

“manipulated by some facetious member who had taken a portion of the seeds out so that it resembled slightly a man’s face, was offered for sale as ‘President Kruger’. None seemed anxious to buy it and the salesmen were besieged by one of the members not to bore (Boar) the visitors.”[[165]](#footnote-165)

It was also in this year that the Lozells Mission, who utilised the Bell Inn as its headquarters appear to have run some sort of competition at the Queens Hotel, presumably against the Aston Flower Mission in which it can be assumed members pitted their best growing efforts against each other. There was, however, another floral society that had a connection with the Manor, The Cottage Floral Society, which may well have been an off-shoot of The Cottagers and Artisan Society.

This new body, formed in 1897 was actually from outside of the Manor, coming from Witton but seems to have decided to make its headquarters in the Assembly Room of The Holte Hotel. Within this venue, from around 1899 it held functions very similar to those of the Royal Albert Floral Society in that it arranged competitions in regards to the produce that it produced.[[166]](#footnote-166) On the other hand it would seem that this particular society had a rather different view of ways to present their efforts, for, as in 1900 the arrangements were accompanied by music, in this case by a Mrs. Edith Trickett playing the Mandoline.[[167]](#footnote-167) It would seem that this particular club continued for a few more years but after this time nothing is recorded as to its activities. It could well be that it may have relocated, away from the Manor. However, around 1900 the number of clubs was bolstered by the addition of the Albion Floral Society. Unfortunately little can be established as to where they held their meetings or exhibitions that they may have been involved in.[[168]](#footnote-168)

It was also at this time that a Mr. Jesse Collins presided at a meeting of the Rural Labourers League which demanded an allocation of land for allotments within the area of Aston Manor. That such a demand was made was, in fact a continuance of an earlier one made at a meeting in The Duke of York Inn in 1895 that land at Gravelly Hill, Erdington should be acquired for use as allotments.[[169]](#footnote-169) This proposal suggested that, at least in the opinion of the supporters of the movement there was still a real need for a greater provision of land for cultivation. As a result a petition was gathered but generated little support, only being signed by forty seven individuals.[[170]](#footnote-170) The allotment movement which began in 1830, as a result of the Labourers Friendly Society eventually however had nationally bore fruition in 1873 when the principle of allocating land for the use of the working class was established.[[171]](#footnote-171) It might well be that because Aston Manor had initially a modicum of open land surrounding it the need was not so great, but as industrialisation and urbanisation conspired to alter the landscape and nature of the area the need for such land increased. Keenly aware of the desirability to provide better social provision for the population the local press despite what appears initially to have been fragile support increasingly took up the cause. In 1891 it was stated that:

“We are glad to note that the subject of allotments was brought up at the Aston Rural Sanitary Authority at its meeting on Tuesday. It was said that there were two fields in the village of Minworth [some five miles from Aston Manor] suitable for allotments, but unfortunately nothing could be done in the winter. We strongly approve of any endeavour on the part of the local authority to provide allotments for the benefit of the labouring classes. Such action would have a great tendency to keep them out of the public house and give them something worth living for.”[[172]](#footnote-172)

Given that the acreage that was available was some distance from the Manor it would certainly infer that there was a distinct shortage of available land. However, despite this problem and a seeming lack of interest from those of Aston Manor there appears to have developed a burgeoning general interest in the allotment as a recreational pastime. Despite local apathy it would seem that the Aston and District Allotment Associationwhich appears to have been formed around the same time was an expression of this. It was through their offices that many individuals would have been able to presumably gain advice and to show off the results of their labour. Indeed by 1909 this society had established an annual flower show, which was held at The Assembly Rooms, The King Edwards public house, Lichfield Road where the landlord’s wife, Mrs. Berry arranged her establishment as an exhibition area, utilising every inch of the location including the Billiard table for flower displays.[[173]](#footnote-173) In the same year as the demand for allotment provision was made another society emerged. This, The Aston & Handsworth Amateur Gardeners Association sometimes using the Burlington Hall for their exhibitions.

They were however, essentially nomadic, exhibiting all over the surrounding area, and, if the press reports are taken as an indication rather infrequent visitors to the Manor. This could well have been because when they are recorded as showing in the area, as in 1898 the attendance was recorded as poor.[[174]](#footnote-174) Nevertheless the recreation of gardening appears to have sufficiently established itself that it continued to flourish certainly up to the end of our period of interest and beyond. It would seem that despite what must have been both limited and restricted space within the area this particular interest was actively embraced by many of the people

1. T. H. S. Escott, *England: Its People, Polity and Pursuits, London:* Chapman & Hall, 1885. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of The English Working Class*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf,

   1994, Preface. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. M. Tyler, *The Story of Football*, London: Book Club Associates, 1976, p18. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. H. Cunningham, *Leisure in The Industrial Revolution*, London: Croom Helm, 1980. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The term can be most associated with the formation of the Working Men’s Club, see Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England,* London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. T. Hughes, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* & *Tom Brown at Oxford*, England: Wordsworth , 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Chp 11 of T. Hughes, *Tom Brown at Oxford*, England: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. E. Royal, *Modern Britain: A Social History, 1750-1985,* London: Edward Arnold,

   1987, pp244-245. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Women’s Football [*http://www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/worldwideprograms/news/*](http://www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/worldwideprograms/news/) and [*http://www.thefa.com/GetIntoFootball/Players/PlayersPages/WomensAndGirls/*](http://www.thefa.com/GetIntoFootball/Players/PlayersPages/WomensAndGirls/) *History\_of\_womens\_football.aspx* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. T. Mason, *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915*, England: The Harvester Press,1980, p152. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. R. Holt, *Sport and The British*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp158-159. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle,* 23rd October, 1976. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle,* 10th February, 1877. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Aston Times*, 1st April, 1893. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Sports Argus*, 4th January, 1908. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle,* 11th November, 1876. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This club was later to become firstly Birmingham and then Birmingham City. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Aston News*, 8th December, 1900. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Aston News*, 4th November, 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Aston News*, 9th December, 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Aston Times*. 18th November, 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. P. Morris, *Aston Villa: The First Hundred Years,* England: Heinemann, 1960, p2. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The Early Days of Aston Villa, *Saturday Night*, 22nd April, 1893. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. G. H. Osbourne, Newspaper Cuttings relating to Football and Cricket 1874-1907, LF25.1 Acc. No. 243150, p119. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Carr, S., *The History of the Birmingham Senior Cup 1876-1905,* England: Grorty Dick, 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Aston News*, 22nd April, 1905. For history of the achievements of the club see G. McColl

    *The Hamlyn Illustrated History of Aston Villa, 1874-1998*, England: Hamlyn, 1998. For

    additional information see *Aston Villa FC Cup Record*. A complete record of the

    achievement of the Aston Villa Football Club in The English Cup Competition from 1880

    and their records in other matches, 1924, Birmingham Institutions C/21,

    Accession No. 312161and *Aston Villa, Souvenir, English Cup Final 1912-1913 Sunderland v*

    *Aston Villa*, History of the Clubs, 1913, Lp25.14, Accession No. 244450. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Aston News*, 30th December, 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Aston Times*, 26th February, 1898. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Aston News*, 17th June, 1911. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Aston Times*, 6th February, 1909. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Lord Rosebery was Prime Minister between 1894-1895 succeeding Gladstone. He resigned in 1895 after a Bill to increase the government budget for the purchase of [cordite](file:///C:\wiki\Cordite) for explosives was

    defeated. He chose to declare that this defeat was an expression of no confidence, thereby not only

    dissolving the government but also his premiership. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, 19th May, 1894. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *Aston News*, 27th February, 1904. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The London Rules can best be interpreted as those appertaining to The Football Association  *wikipedia.org/wiki/The\_Football\_Association* whilst for the Sheffield Rules of Football see  *wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheffield\_Rules#Rules* [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9th March, 1875. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Birmingham Daily Post,* 24th November, 1874. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. *Aston Observer and Handsworth Times*, 15th November, 1879. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Aston Villa FC, see *wikipedia.org/wiki/Aston\_Villa\_F.C.#History* [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. S. Carr, *History of the Birmingham Senior Cup* 1876-1905, England: Grorty Dick, 1988, p6. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. M. Tyler, *The Story of Football*, London: Martin Cavendish Publications, 1976, pp18-28. For a discussion on the differences between the codes see A. Gibson & W. Pickford,  *Association Football and The Men who Made it,* England: Caxton , 1905, p69 and G. Green,  *The History of the Football Association,* London; Naldret Ltd., 1953, p94. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. S. Carr, *History of the Birmingham Senior Cup 1876-1905*, England: Grorty Dick,1988, p6. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *Birmingham & District Cup Competition 1887-1888*, Birmingham Archives MS519/2. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. S. W. Clives, *The Centenary Book of The Birmingham County Football Association 1875-1975*, Birmingham: Birmingham County FA, 1975, p97. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *Sports Argus*, 18th December, 1897. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. *Sports Argus*, 30th October, 1897. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *Sports Argus*, 4th December, 1897. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. *Aston News*, 9th December 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. *Aston News*, 1911. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. *Sports Argus*, 18th December, 1897. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *Aston News*, 15th August, 1908. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. *Sports Argus*, 1908. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *Aston Observer and Handsworth Times,* 13th March, 1880. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, 12th January, 1878. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. *The Grasshopper*, 19th April, 1895. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. *Aston News*, 18th September, 1900. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, 17th March, 1888. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, 27th November, 1888. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, between January, 1889 and March, 1889. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. *Aston News*, 1st October, 1910. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. *Aston Times*, 11th November, 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. *Sports Argus*, 4th April, 1903. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. *Sports Argus*, 4th January, 1908. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Extract from The Ordnance Survey Map for Aston Manor, 1885 in S. W. Carr, *The History of The Birmingham Senior Cup, 1876-1905,* England: Grotty Dick, 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. *Report of The Birmingham Baths and Park Committee,* 1887 [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. *The Saturday Night*, 9th October, 1888. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Molyneux D. D., *The Development of Physical Recreation in The Birmingham District,*

    *1871-1891,*Unpublished MA Thesis, Birmingham University, 1958. Housed in the Holdings Department, The University of Birmingham, p164. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle,* 8th April, 1876. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. *Aston Chronicle,* 2nd February, 1889. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. *Aston Chronicle*, 16th February, 1889. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. *Aston Times*, 28th January, 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. *Aston News*, 15th December, 1906. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. *Aston News*, 23rd March, 1907. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Children of the 1800s: Education, *http://ourwardfamily.com/children\_of\_the\_1800's.htm#Education* [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. *Aston News*, 15th December, 1900. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. *Saturday Night*, 4th June, 1892. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. *Aston News*, 3rd October, 1900. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. For the history of the Corinthian spirit in sport see D. J. Taylor, *On the Corinthian Spirit:*

    *The Decline of Amateurism in Sport,* London: Yellow Jersey Press, 2006.  [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. *The Saturday Night*, 6th December, 1890. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. *Albert Road School Log,* 9th April, 1883. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. *Albert Road School Log,* 28th July, 1887. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. *Aston News*, 9th November, 1907 [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. *Aston Times*, 1st July, 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. J. Motson, *Motson’s FA Cup Odyssey*, England: Robson Books Ltd, 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. McGregor is often considered to be one of the forces behind the forming of the Football

    League in 1888 and was also a director of Aston Villa, one of the twelve original members. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. *Aston News,* 12th November, 1892. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, 18th May 1889. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. *Aston News,* 4th March, 1911. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, 30th April, 1887. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, 11th May, 1889. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. *Aston News*, 18th April, 1896. See also English Schools Football Association, see  *http://www.esfa.co.uk/wembley/?History* [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. *Aston News,* 24th April, 1906. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 1st May, 1882. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. G. B. Buckley, *Fresh Light on Victorian Cricket including references to Birmingham*

    *District*, 1937 Accession No. L25.13 472203. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. V. J. Price, *Aston Remembered*, England: Brewin Books, 1989, pp27-28. It should be noted

    that the cost quoted does appear to be excessive given the level of income of the day. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. A. Davis, *First in The Field:A History of the Birmingham and District Cricket*

    *League,* England: Brewin Books, 1988, p7. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Aston Unity Cricket Club see *astonunity.play-cricket.com/home/home.asp* [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. A. Davis, *First in The Field: A History of the Birmingham and District Cricket League,*  England: Brewin Books, 1988, p7. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. A. Davis, *First in The Field: A History of the Birmingham and District Cricket League,*  England: Brewin Books, 1988, p7. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. *Aston News*, 4th January, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. At sometime around this time the club cease to use the name ‘Park.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. A. Davis, *First in The Field: A History of the Birmingham and District Cricket League,*

     England: Brewin Books, 1988, p15. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. *The Telegram,* 19th May, 1895. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. *Aston News,* 24th April, 1906. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. *Saturday Night*, 15th April, 1893. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, 16th June, and 11th August, 1877. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, 21st March, 1885. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle,* 27th August, 1887. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. *Sports Argus*, 1903. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. *Aston News*, 8th June, 1907. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. *Sports Argus*, 1908 season [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. *Aston Manor CC*, *http://www.astonmanorcricket.co.uk/* [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. It can be supposed that the Aston Wednesday FC who appeared in the Midweek Football

     League are one and the same. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. *Aston News*. 15th February, 1901. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Prof W. O. Alexander and W. Morgan ed., *The History of the Birchfield Harriers Athletics Club,* England: Renault Printing Co. Ltd, 1988, p11. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. *Midland Athlete*, 18th February, 1880 and 5th May, 1883. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. *Aston Observer and Handsworth Times* 13th March, 1880. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Prof W. O. Alexander and W. Morgan ed., *The History of Birchfield Harriers 1877-1988,*  Birmingham: Renault Printing Co. Ltd, p10. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. For the club record between 1880 and 1911 in the English Cross Country Championships see Prof W. O. Alexander and W. Morgan ed., *The history of the Birchfield Harriers Athletics, Club,* England: Renault Printing Co. Ltd, 1988, p110-111. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. *Aston Times*, 29th July, 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. *Aston News*, 15th April, 1905. For another, earlier example of these meetings see

     *Sports Argus*, 23rd March, 1903. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. *Aston News*, 11th August, 1911. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. *Aston News*, 15th July, 1911. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. *Midland Athlete*, 17th March, 1880. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. It can only be presumed that this Native American individual was connected to the Buffalo

     Bill Company. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. *Aston and Birmingham Chronicle*, 27th November, 1888. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Prof. W. O. Alexander, and W. Morgan, ed., *The History of Birchfield Harriers 1877-1988,* Birmingham: Renault Printing Co. Ltd., p14. For a full list of Snook’s record see British Athletic Championships, 1876 -1914, *www.gbrathletics.com/bc/bc1.htm* [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. *Aston News*, 16th October, 1909. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. *Aston News*, 2nd January 1909. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. *Aston News*, 7th January, 1911. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. *Aston News*, 28th January, 1911. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. *Aston Times,* 22nd May 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. *Aston Times*, 22nd July, 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. *Aston Times,* 11th June, 1898. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. *Aston News*, 29th April 1911. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. It is a [Church of England](file:///C:\wiki\Church_of_England) [youth organisation](file:///C:\wiki\Youth_organization) whose origins lie in the formation, in 1891 of

     the Church Lads' Brigade with its sister organisation, the Church Nursing and Ambulance

     Brigade for Young Women and Girls, later the Church Girls' Brigade, founded in 1901.

     The two respective founders were Walter M Gee and Rev Thomas Milner. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. *Aston Times*, 30th April, 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. P. Arkinstall and R. Bolton, *Forward: The Birmingham Battalion of the Boys’ Brigade*

     *1902-2002,* England: RB Publishing, 2002, p1. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, 18th May, 1889. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Aston News, 7th November, 1908. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. *Aston News*, 18th June, 1910. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. *Aston News*, 29th April, 1911. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. *Aston News*, 15th December, 1900. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. *Aston News*, 23rd March, 1901. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. *Aston Times*, 13th May, 1893. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, 17th November, 1894. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. *Aston Times*, 30th July, 1898. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. *Aston News*, 28th July, 1900. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. *Aston News*, 28th January 1911. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. *Aston News*, 17th December, 1910. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. *Aston Times*, 8th August, 1896. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, 8th July, 1876. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. *Aston News*, 28th July, 1900. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. *Aston News*, 23rd April, 1904. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. *Aston News*, 15th August, 1908. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. *Aston Times*, 11th November, 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. *Aston Times*, 2nd April, 1898. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. *Aston Times,* 2nd September, 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. One animal that certainly during this period that might not be considered as a potential pet

     would have been the Horse. The fact that they would have required a reasonable space for

     housing, something that Aston Manor was distinctly short of but also that the animal, at this

     time was an essential factor in regards to transport. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. *Birmingham and* *Aston Chronicle,* 5th August, 1876. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. *Aston News*, 17th June, 1880. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. *Birmingham and Aston Chronicle*, 20th October, 1894. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. *Aston Times*, 12th September, 1891. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. *Aston Times*, 5th August, 1899. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. *Aston Times*, 23rd September 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. *Aston Times*, 23rd September, 1899. This can be identified as an expression of dislike in regards to Kruger and his opposition to Britain in South Africa. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. *Aston Times*, 22nd April, 1899. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. *Aston News*, 10th November, 1900. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. *Aston News*, 5th October, 1901. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. *Aston Times*, 2nd February, 1895. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. *Aston Times*, 7th September, 1895. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. J. Burchardt, *The Allotment movement in England 1793-1873*. London: Royal Historical

     Society, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. *Aston News*, 1st August, 1891. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. *Aston News*, 16th October, 1909. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. *Aston Times*, 10th September, 1898. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)