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Title of Thesis: **The Life and Times of John Graham Chambers: Sports and Commercialization of Leisure in Victorian Britain**

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ABSTRACT

Title of Document:	The Life and Times of John Graham Chambers: Sports and Commercialization of Leisure in Victorian Britain.
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The profound changes in middle-class athletics that began around the third quarter of the nineteenth century, both cultural and commercial, have been widely recognized by historians. Yet, one of the earliest and most important architects of this movement has not been recognized for his contributions as a wildly innovative Victorian sports entrepreneur: John Graham Chambers. Through his athletic association, Chambers was able to secure land in West Brompton, Fulham, for development. The commodious fields there became Lillie Bridge Grounds, opened in 1869. Thousands regularly attended athletic exhibitions, or, partook in competition themselves. While Lillie Bridge Grounds has hitherto remained little-known, what has been utterly ignored is Chambers' pioneering and original business model. This study aims to provide a thorough analysis of his groundbreaking profit-generating combination of sports and leisure which closely resembled a present-day amusement park.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOHN GRAHAM CHAMBERS: SPORTS AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF LEISURE IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN.

By

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Chapter 1: *Introduction*

When tracing the origins of the commercialization of modern sports in Britain, historians like John Plumb have argued that sporting events have been monetized since the eighteenth century by the gentry class.[1] Others, such as Adrian Harvey, emphasize the period from 1793 to 1850 in which the number of sporting events and expenditure on stakes had steadily increased. Furthermore, Harvey recognizes that from 1815 onward sports were developing a "national uniformity" with an independence from the pre-industrial timetable of recreation that constituted a commercial "birth."[2] Though many features of these interpretations are valid, when considering the explosion of wealth that developed among the middle-class in the second half of the nineteenth century, these historians are largely comparing apples to oranges.

Sports were but one element of what has more broadly been considered a "Leisure Revolution." This historical phenomenon is characterized by rising wages, lower working hours for wage laborers, the development of new forms of entertainment, and changing attitudes towards health and physical well-being. Peter Bailey has identified and documented the evolution of the music halls during this period. A prime example of this new commercialization of leisure, music halls began as pubs with performers that shouted simple, Rabelaisian songs to entice the audience

[1] John Plumb, *The Commercialisation of Leisure in Eighteenth Century England* (Reading: University of
Reading Press, 1973).
[2] Adrian Harvey, "Genesis: A National Sporting Culture is Born," in *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain, 1793-1850* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004).

to sing along and continue ordering drinks. Later in the nineteenth century, staging began to be used as these establishments became more financially successful. This attracted serious artists and led to the development of more nuanced modes of performance.[3]

More recent scholars of sport and leisure have focused heavily on the growth of professional football and association football clubs, by far the largest sports enterprises over the past century and a half. Most date the earliest development of football clubs as profit-making enterprises between 1885 and 1914. Yet these early commercial efforts were aimed largely at maintaining and improving facilities; turning a profit was not their primary goal.[4]

Outside of football, John Lowerson has carried out the most comprehensive research regarding the gradual monetization of both spectator and participant sports enjoyed by the British middle-class between 1870 and 1914.[5] Lowerson's analysis focused on manufactured products like guns and fishing rods, seaside resorts, yacht clubs, and the breeding of horses and fox-hounds. While these are certainly crucial aspects of the profound cultural and economic transformation of sport in the late-Victorian period, this literature has almost entirely missed a far earlier and pioneering figure that combined *both* commercialized sports and leisure: John Graham

[3] Peter Bailey, "Rational Recreation and the Entertainment Industry," in *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977); Peter Bailey, "Conspiracies of Meaning: Music-Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture", in *Past and Present*, no. 144: 138-170 (Oxford University Press, 1994).
[4] Matthew Taylor, "Chapter 2: The Making of British Football, 1885-1914," *The Association Game: A History of British Football* (London: Routledge, 2013).
[5] John Lowerson, "Land and Water," in *Sport and the English Middle Classes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993.

Chambers' highly successful sporting grounds and entertainment center at Lillie Bridge, Fulham, in the 1870s.

Chambers died in his home in South Kensington, London, in 1883. He had reportedly suffered from "a severe breakdown of the nervous system."[6] An earlier report, entitled, "A Victim Of Overwork," had noted that Chambers had been "obliged, under medical advice, to take thorough rest for a year, and to go abroad."[7] This was just two months before his passing, so he had obviously not taken his doctor's advice. Multiple tributes were published in honor of the prominent oarsman, journalist, and sports entrepreneur over the following days, all testifying to his monumental role in the Victorian athletic community.

Chambers' restless spirit allowed him to make the most of his short time by shaping a major portion of the growing sporting landscape of Victorian Britain. His influence rested partly on his own personal athletic credentials, including notable rowing victories during his public school and university careers, as well as various distance-walking championships. At his funeral, Chambers' coffin was adorned with both the Eton and Cambridge standards in recognition of his life-long promotion of university and public school athletics. Having founded the London-based Amateur Athletic Club (AAC) in 1866 (later to be absorbed into the present-day national level Amateur Athletic Association ((AAA)) in 1880), many of the first athletic contests using modern rules and regulations were conducted under Chambers' leadership and direction. Upon the collapse of the Thames Subscription Club, Chambers spearheaded

[6] *North Devon Journal*, 11 January, 1883.
[7] *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 5 January, 1883.

the Henley Regatta from 1868-1876.[8] He also helped codify the rules for several major sports, promoting a new code of "ethics" that gave the sports social significance and commercial viability. Most notably, Chambers devised and authored the famous Marquess of Queensbury Rules, formally published in 1867 under the name of his aristocratic friend from Cambridge University.

However, it was the Lillie Bridge Grounds in West Brompton, Fulham, that was the centerpiece of his entrepreneurial efforts, where he hosted sporting events joined by the best athletes of the day and regularly attended by thousands of ticket-buying spectators. There, Chambers confected an original and creative business model by combining a number of elements commonly associated with twentieth-century commercialized athletics. As will be argued later, Chambers should be credited with not only codifying modern rulesets, but also planning and operating the first fully-commercialized, sports-themed amusement park.

Lillie Bridge Grounds was situated on a vast expanse of land, just outside of metropolitan London. Innovations in transportation that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century facilitated easy access to the grounds. Just as railways and metro routes cater to stadiums today, residents of the capital were ferried to Lillie Bridge from multiple stations. Chambers accompanied athletic contests with musical concerts and performances, the sale of wine and stronger drinks, and highly popular spectacles like camel-racing, hot-air balloon launches, and cultural exhibitions to create a multi-draw entertainment venue that was far ahead of its time. The available records indicate that the largest spectator event at Lillie Bridge, held on May 20th,

[8] *Carmarthen Reporter*, 9 March, 1883.

1871, was attended by twelve thousand spectators, and the grounds regularly drew crowds of around five to six thousand.[9]

Media outlets like *ESPN*, *The Bleacher Report*, and *Sports Illustrated* are inextricably linked to the popularity and promotion of sports in the present day. Chambers clearly anticipated and recognized this symbiotic relationship between athletic events and journalism. As the editor-in-chief of the popular sports periodical, *Land and Water*, Chambers used its pages to promote his various athletic enterprises, with accounts of past meetings, advertising of future events, and notices indicating the addition of new facilities at Lillie Bridge. But his columns also addressed a far wider range of interests, including links between mental and physical health, the sad state of the arts and sciences in Victorian society, remedies for working-class poverty, and truant Poor Law guardians. This style of public-interest journalism has been described by historians as "new journalism." Though certainly altruistic in some respects, this approach was also an effective way to sell media. *Land and Water* is a vitally important primary source for this study of Chambers' pioneering role in commercializing sports and leisure.

Chambers' various enterprises, though ostensibly disparate, were linked as constituent parts of a *bone fide* sports and leisure empire. His key position at the congested intersection of Victorian sports, entertainment, journalism, and commerce, begs the question of how he has remained so remarkably unheralded. Very little secondary literature on Chambers exists. His entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography devotes only two short sentences to Lillie Bridge, and the few

[9] *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 20 May, 1871.

short studies of Chambers, though valuable in themselves, have focused mostly on the part he played within the AAC and the codification of modern sports, but have paid little attention to his pioneering role in the commercialization of sports.[10]

The purpose of this study is to fill this gap by analyzing Chambers' unrecognized work in combining athletics and leisure in a brand new amusement park format at Lillie Bridge. In Chapter One, I will present his work in codifying universal rules for popular games as the premier sports administrator of the late-Victorian period. Though this information has already been demonstrated by other historians, it is important to touch on these accomplishments in order to grasp Chambers' respected position in the London sports community. In Chapter Two, I will describe Chambers' weekly sports magazine, *Land and Water*. As has already been stated, his journalism was not only a commercial success in its own right, it also helped him to further the success of his other sporting ventures. Additionally, an examination of what came to be described by historians of Victorian Britain as "new journalism" will show Chambers' unique participation in this movement. In Chapter Three, I will describe the physical structure of Lillie Bridge Grounds, relate various events held there, and provide a thorough breakdown of Chambers' multi-faceted and innovative business model. In Chapter Four, I will detail the events leading up to Chambers' untimely death and the state of his legacy today.

[10] Peter Lovesey, *The Official Centenary History of the Amateur Athletic Association* (1979); H. F. Pash, ed., *Fifty years of progress, 1880-1920: the jubilee of the Amateur Athletic Association* (1930); A. C. M. Croom, ed., *Fifty years of sport at Oxford, Cambridge and the great public schools* (1913); M. Bryant, 2005 "Chambers, John Graham (1843-1883), sports administrator and journalist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 Sep. 2018.

When Muhammad Ali faced George Foreman in their famous bout nearly a century after Chambers' death, the audience in Zaire was unknowingly appreciating the Victorian sports administrator's ruleset. When the Grambling State Marching Band performed the first halftime show for Super Bowl I, the National Football League administrators were utilizing Chambers' blueprint. His work in the nineteenth century has proven monumentally significance well over a century later.

Chapter 2: *Chambers, the Man*: Background and Sports Administration

Chambers was born on February 12th, 1843, in Llanelly, Carmarthenshire, Wales. Chambers' father was a landowner in Wales, likely placing his family in the lower-gentry stratum. He attended Eton, where he was formally introduced to organized team sports like cricket, rowing, and both of his school's variety of football. Likewise, he proved to be a natural in individual sports like shot-putting and hammer-throwing. Chambers first began applying his methods of measurement, codification, and organization of sports during his time at Trinity College, Cambridge. Throughout his tenure as a "Cantab," he took part in rowing, pedestrian, and throwing competitions.

Chambers must have expected to live a life of leisure after receiving his education. However, due to a string of poor investments made by his father, the family fortune disappeared, and Chambers was pushed into the work force as an upper middle-class entrepreneur. Nevertheless, he managed to maintain good standing with his former classmates despite his financial woes. This would serve him later in life, as he was able to secure respectable positions and convince celebrities to promote and patronize his events.

Chambers' initial effort in sports outside of educational institutions was the founding of the AAC in 1866. The Club held their first annual championship games the day before the University Boat Race. The entry fee was one guinea, with the universal rule for all competitors being "that no gentleman who has ever run in any open race or handicap can enter for the club races," but "any objection to a competitor

who has entered must be made before the race, and his claim to run will be decided by the committee." A report stated that the various athletics events would be held on "some grounds," showing that the AAC held events prior to the establishment of Lillie Bridge Grounds.[11]

A Great Codifier of Sport: Games Old and New

It is important to recognize that many of the most popular games that emerged prominently from the late nineteenth century sports movement were not created *ex nihilo*. Most of the sports that Chambers is associated with were deeply rooted in tradition, with established rules long before he updated them for modern participants. Beyond his more direct contributions to various games, Chambers also helped ignite the fanfare for other established or developing games that grew in popularity during his time.

Henley Regatta and Cambridge Rowing

The Henley Regatta began about four years before Chambers was born in 1839. It was initially an affair instituted by Henley's mayor, featuring public amusements not dissimilar to a carnival or a summer fair. However, rowing races on the Thames River came quickly to dominate the yearly event. By 1851, Prince Albert became the first royal patron of the event, thus renaming the function to the Henley Royal Regatta. After the Prince Consort's death, subsequent English monarchs have continued monetary support of the Regatta as a tradition of the royal family. Considering the Regatta quickly became the most prestigious sporting event in

[11] *Sporting Life*, 23 December, 1865.

Britain, it goes without saying that when Chambers became chairman of the Thames Regatta Committee in 1868 he was thrust into the position of a major national figure.

Beyond his efforts to plan and run the annual Royal Regatta, Chambers also worked to coach the Cambridge Rowing team. By all accounts, he was extremely effective. Chambers was known to hold his athletes to a high standard, and the press noted that his crew practiced "with energy every day." This, in turn, yielded "gradual improvement noticeable in their rowing." It was held that Cambridge had "good reason to be looking up."[12] In one instance in which the Oxford and Cambridge teams held open practices for the public, one journalist stated that Chambers "deserves great credit for the fine condition into which he is getting the crew." During this exhibition, Chambers was seen coaching "from the bow."[13] In competition, Chambers' crews typically contrasted favorably against the Oxford rowers over the course of his coaching career. In a University race held in 1871, the Cambridge rowers were said to be generally admired for "their finished style and nearness to perfection." The Oxonians, by comparison, appeared "decidedly bad, possessing nothing like the finish of the Cantabs."[14]

Chambers was not one to hide from the limelight of the Victorian sporting community; he made sure that his contribution as the head coach of the successful team was well known. At a boat race in 1873, which had been "semi-officially announced for 3 p.m.," the Cambridge team was forced to delay their start. According to one news outlet, the late start was due "to the unavoidable absence of coach, Mr. J. G. Chambers." This was "to no small chagrin" of the "large attendance of spectators."

[12] *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, 25 February, 1865.
[13] *York Herald*, 24 March, 1874.
[14] *Morning Advertiser*, 21 March, 1871.

It was not until nearly four o'clock that Chambers arrived in grandiose fashion "on a steed of marvellous (sic) conformation."[15] Along with being a capable rowing coach, Chambers was clearly also a man who knew how to make an entrance.

The Marquess of Queensbury Rules

Prior to Chambers' contributions to boxing, Jack Broughton codified the first standardized rule set for the sport in the mid-eighteenth century in Britain.[16] The establishment of "rounds" had been introduced to protect downed fighters. However, these periods were not measured in time, but knockdowns. One of Broughton's rules established the addition of "scratches"; two lines separating fighters at the center of a "ring." A knockdown ended each round, and was followed by a thirty-second interim. In addition, these breaks offered thirty seconds for the fighter's second, a friend or associate elected by the fighter, to help rally their man to his scratch. There was no limitation on the number of rounds, and high-profile fights sometimes exceeded one hundred rounds – that is, one hundred knockdowns.[17]

A bout under the Broughton Rules was, at times, as much a wrestling match as a fist fight. While a knockdown that ended a round was expected to be delivered by a punch, it was far from uncommon to see a fatigued combatant clinch his opponent and execute a desperate throw, or trip, to enjoy a thirty-second respite. However, this was frowned upon by spectators and the sporting press. One reporter demonstrated

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[15] *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 15 March, 1873.

[16] Broughton's initiative to create rules for his beloved sport has been attributed to his part in the death of George Stevenson of Hull, see Jack Anderson, *The Legality of Boxing: A Punch Drunk Love?* (Oxon: Birbeck Law Press, 2007), 13; Henry Downes Miles, *Pugilistica*, vol. I (London: Weldon and Company, 1906), 26.

[17] Andy Bowen was involved in one of the longest fights under the Queensbury Rules which was fought to 110 rounds over the course of seven hours. Bowen died in the ring after another fight, see *The New York Times*, 16 December, 1894; see also Henry Downes Miles, *Pugilistica: Being One Hundred and Forty-four Years of the History of British Boxing* (London: Weldon, 1880), 25.

this disapproval of such foul play in 1847 when he questioned the sportsmanship and manhood of "a tripper-up."[18]

What the sport looked like when played out in this bygone fashion is worthy of being fleshed out if we are to grasp the significance of Chambers' reforms. The match between Phil Sampson and Bill Hall at the Warwick Racecourse in 1822 is useful as an example of a rather typical bout under the Broughton Rules. When the fight began, the two felt one another out cautiously. By the third round the underdog made his aptitude apparent by flooring Sampson with a blow. By the fifth round the betting shifted twenty to ten on Hall. In the 13th, Hall received "a blow in the wind" (possibly a strike to the throat, or a blow to the body that took his breath away), but Sampson, fatigued, was unable to capitalize on his fortuitous strike. In the 46th round, Sampson's second, Josh Hudson had to work hard to rally his man, which was related as "waking him from a nightmare." Hudson attempted to concede for his man, but Sampson staggered out to his starting position "on his legs...expressing his desire to continue it." After three more rounds, Sampson was unable to make it to his scratch. The bout lasted approximately one hour and thirty-nine minutes.[19] For perspective, this average match is brutal by modern standards, but more extreme instances in the nineteenth century beggar belief. In Hudson v. Bowen, the Chatham Caulker – a fight that lasted about three and a half minutes – Hudson struck the Caulker so hard it produced "pink gushing out of both of his peepers."[20]

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[18] *The Era*, 3 January, 1847.
[19] Pierce Egan, *Boxiana; or Sketches of Modern Pugilism, Containing All the Transactions of Note Connected With the Prize Ring, During the Years 1821, 1822, 1823*, vol. 4 (London: Sherwood, Jones and Co., 1824), 549-55.
[20] Ibid, 127.

Pugilism was considered a typically British sport at home and abroad. However, with the rise of the British middle-class, the disorderliness of back-street boxing matches came under scrutiny and control by bourgeois society.

In the Marquess of Queensbury Rules, published in 1867, Chambers sought to update boxing in a manner suitable for the new middle-class audiences and participants. While the Marquess has largely been credited with this updated ruleset, Chambers was the true author. Being an old Cambridge friend of Queensbury, Chambers merely asked him to lend his aristocratic name to the new rules he had drafted. As a prominent horseman and a notable celebrity, Queensbury's name carried great weight. The major contributions of the Queensbury Rules included the removal of seconds from the ring (leaving only fighters and referees), three minute rounds with one minute intervals between, the ten count for downed fighters, mandated use of gloves, and the removal of clinching. Boxing quickly came to be seen as a respectable sport that did not harm either public morals or order.[21]

Despite being the grand architect of modern boxing, Chambers did not approve of matches held on the streets (as they commonly were). While he stated that no "lackadaisical milk-and-water philosopher" ought "to include sparring in the condemned list," he nonetheless contrasted backstreet bouts with athletic events held at Lille Bridge under the new rules, in which "skill is the criterion of merit, and the credit and superiority rest solely with the judges to determine."[22] This critique was quite common in the discourse about boxing over the course of the Victorian period, as yet another contemporary called for "an impartial judge" that could concede for a

[21] Jack Anderson, *The Legality of Boxing*, 27-38.
[22] *Land and Water*, 8 August, 1874, vol. XXVII.

combatant that "was obviously worsted."[23] The fair rules and disinterested officials at Lillie Bridge provided the disciplined and civilized environment that Chambers and other respectable sportsmen of his day demanded.

Amateur boxing at Lillie Bridge was certainly a far cry from contests under the old Broughton Rules. A brief description of the Amateur Boxing Championship by the *Morning Post* in 1877 shows how much safer the sport was made about a decade after the adoption of the Queensbury Rules: "the accepted condition are (sic) to spar three rounds, the first two of three minutes each, and a third of four minutes with the option of a fourth if necessary, but these rules are… obsolete, and the judges stop the rounds just when they please."[24] Clearly, these highly regulated bouts stood in stark contrast to the bare-knuckle brawls and limitless rounds of the past

"Catch-As-Catch-Can"

Though Chambers is recognized as one of the earliest Victorian proponents of Catch Wrestling, the sport has roots in world culture that go back to ancient times. Various styles had been recognized as popular in nineteenth century Europe, such as Collar-and-Elbow and Greco-Roman. Even Japanese Jiu Jitsu and Judo had influenced grappling in the West by this time. Catch Wrestling, also known as "Catch-as-Catch-Can" (intended to mean lock onto whatever you can), combined various regional British styles from Westmorland, Cornwall, Lancashire, and Cumberland. Greco-Roman, Irish Elbow-and-Collar, and various Japanese grappling arts influenced this new style of wrestling as well.[25]

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[23] *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 8 January, 1843.
[24] *Morning Post*, 23 March, 1877.
[25] Tim Corvan, *Pioneers of Professional Wrestling: 1860-1899* (Archway Publishing, 2014), 1-3.

Chambers first began to promote this sport at Lillie Bridge in 1871 but it produced so little fanfare that he began to devise new variations to the old format. The first change Chambers introduced was to allow "the competitors to wrestle on all fours on the ground," as contemporary Walter Armstrong put it. Armstrong considered this practice to be "objectionable."[26] While this description is rather vague, later bouts with "rules introduced by the A.A.C. at Lillie Bridge" offer elucidation. By 1875, wrestlers at Lillie Bridge competed in "loose jackets." Described then as "catch-hold" (a variation of back-hold wrestling), Chambers' proposed style allowed combatants to work off of their backs to resist a pin that they might hopefully return to their feet. Pinning both shoulders of an opponent to win was considered "the French style" of wrestling to the late-Victorians.[27] With these new constraints, a bout was often "a matter of several minutes," and a much more entertaining affair for the spectators.[28] In 1884, *Sporting Life*, reported on a match which lasted sixteen minutes.[29]

Ultimately, Chambers was unable to spur support for fully realized "no holds barred" catch wrestling he had initially introduced in 1871. Respectable figures like Armstrong bemoaned the "struggling on the ground and sundry objectionable tactics, such as catching hold of the legs, twisting arms, [and] dislocating fingers" that characterized the influence of "Lancashire" to the sport of wrestling (i.e. brutal or unscrupulous tactics).[30] With respect to Chambers' contribution to the sport, it is necessary to restate that the various styles and techniques which constituted catch

[26] Walter Armstrong, *Wrestling* (F.A. Stokes, 1890), xiv.
[27] *Globe*, 5 December, 1881.
[28] *London Evening Standard*, 30 March, 1875.
[29] *Sporting Life*, 22 July, 1884.
[30] Armstrong, *Wrestling*, xv.

wrestling had been employed in grappling throughout history. It was his work in experimenting with different variations and regional rulesets, as well as providing a public platform for displays of the 'new' sport, that led to catch wrestling's popularity in his time and after.

There was no doubt an appetite for adaptations to wrestling among contemporary competitors and audiences. This is evidenced by the interest participants showed when dabbling in different regional styles. One sports reporter from the *Carlisle Patriot* stated that "it was reserved for Lillie Bridge to show what could be done by bringing the best men of [different styles] together." He remarked that "the catch-hold style… was a source of some amusement and no little interest to the Cumberland men." The reporter noted that "the public were greatly excited," and "there could not have been less than 5000 people in the grounds" though "the utmost order prevailed."[31]

Catch wrestling has waned in popularity today, but the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries experienced a major boom in interest – especially across the Atlantic. It is entirely worth considering to what degree Chambers' promotion of the sport influenced this phenomenon. Americans took quickly to the newly formulated grappling art with great enthusiasm. Theodore Roosevelt himself was even known to train in the skills of submission wrestling.[32]

[31] *Carlisle Patriot*, 8 April, 1873.
[32] Roosevelt was reported to train privately with both a catch wrestling coach and a Japanese Jiu Jitsu instructor to improve his trips, throws, and submission skills, see William Roscoe Thayer, *Theodore Roosevelt: An Intimate Biography* (Houghton Mifflin, 1919), 270.

Captain Webb's Momentous Venture

On August 25th, 1875, Captain Matthew Webb successfully completed the first crossing of the English Channel by a swimmer unassisted by flotation devices. Since Chambers was so often at the epicenter of innovations and exploits in contemporary sports, it comes as no surprise that he happened to have accompanied Webb in a small craft during the Captain's feat of endurance. A journalist for the *Bradford* Observer wrote an account of Webb's journey, explaining how he took breaks to partake of "some old ale and beef-tea" while resting on his back in the water. Eventually, "a row boat was sighted" by Webb's spotting team. Once they were "within hail she was found to contain a most welcome passenger, in the shape of Mr. J. G. Chambers, who [has] been expecting us." Chambers exited his craft to take "a dip with Webb" and "stopped to tea."[33]

Over the course of the months that followed the crossing, Chambers' own *Land and Water* rejoiced in Webb's accomplishment. Chambers and H. J. Chinnery, a regular judge at Lillie Bridge events, began raising a "testimonial fund" for Webb when he arrived in London to celebrate with the public. By September 4th, 1875, the men had raised "nearly £1000."[34] By March of the following year, "£1872" had "at the request of several subscribers, been invested by Messrs. Chambers and Chinnery on Webb's behalf." The fund was paid out in annuities so that it brought him "an annual income of £89." In addition, "other large sums from Shropshire, Liverpool,

[33] *Bradford Observer*, 27 August, 1875.
[34] *Essex Newsman*, 4 September, 1875.

&c., have been handed to Webb, who has placed a large portion of it at the disposal of his father, who is and has been for a long time in ill-health."[35]

The event was no doubt influential in prompting Chambers' subsequent promotion of the idea of a national swimming program. In the months that followed Webb's swim, he frequently began to publish statements complaining that "we are essentially a maritime people… yet instruction in swimming is the exception rather than the rule." Chambers proposed the allocation of public and private funds to build "baths" for the purpose of public swimming and swimming instruction.[36]

Unfortunately, since such monumental achievements naturally garner admiration from the community at large, copycats hoping to claim some glory for themselves were almost an inevitability. As can be surmised, foolhardy and haphazard attempts to replicate Webb's twenty-two hour swim by unassisted amateurs led to a string of open water drowning deaths. From what can be gleaned from the news reports, nearly all were young men. Some were doubtlessly attempts at crossing the Channel. However, it's possible that enthusiasts caught up in the swimming craze simply executed a fatal dive in the shallows, or were pulled out by riptides. Chambers swiftly weighed in with his disavowal of the "mania" inspired by Webb's record swim. He claimed these "bathing accidents" were the result of "weak intellect" in some youths.[37] While Chambers was certainly more often than not a kind and benevolent voice in the London community, he could nonetheless be forthright and obdurate in the face of common sense. Chambers understood the dangers inherent

[35] *York Herald*, 13 March, 1876.
[36] *Land and Water*, 10 July, 1875, vol. XX.
[37] *Land and Water*, 11 September, 1875, vol. XX.

in outdoor sport. To him, there was a proper and improper way to comport oneself; a poor respect for the powers of nature was not to be rewarded with sympathy.

"A greater love for the dog"

Today, many breeds of dog can be easily identified due to selective breeding. For those with more dedicated interests, the most minute details can be measured and compared to ideal breed standards as determined by Kennel Clubs across the world. The Victorian period was the birthplace for these developments. Indeed, many breeds can trace their official origins to the late nineteenth century. Chambers can, yet again, be credited with promoting early dog shows and shaping the contemporary definitions of favorable traits in purebred canines.

Though Sewallis Shirley, a Conservative MP, established the Kennel Club in 1873 to determine standards for breeds, he did not by himself consolidate consensus in the early years of the developing sport. It would be Chambers, both at Lillie Bridge and through *Land and Water*, who played a pivotal role in the pioneering efforts to document ideal traits in breeds. In one show, held at Lillie Bridge, a "Mr. Price's, pointer bitch Belle" that had been crowned champion of "the first field trials" had its measurements recorded for "breeders of this class of dog."[38]

It is worth noting that there were no commonly defined ideal traits in various breeds before the Kennel Club cemented its authority. Shirley and Chambers would themselves likely have had different metrics in the early 1870s. Aestheticians probably played a far larger role in establishing canine breed standards than would be

*From the preface to Hugh Dalziel's, *British Dogs* (London: L. Upcott Gill, 170, Strand, W.C., 1888), v.

[38] *Land and Water*, 9 May, 1874, vol. XVII.

suspected. Significantly, it was in an article published by *Land and Water* in January 1874 that Sir Edwin Landseer, a famous wildlife artist, served as a judge in a wager between two nobles. Landseer was expected to decide which dog, belonging to each aristocrat respectively, was "the handsomest." Landseer recognized "Tyke," a King Charles Spaniel, as the winner. Chambers seemed to agree and deferred to Landseer's expertise – demonstrating how aestheticians could possess the authority to adequately judge the beauty of nature prior to established standards of excellence from the Kennel Club.[39] Despite the lack of concurrence in the 1870s, canine experts thoroughly established order in the next decade. Hugh Dalziel published a compendium of club-accepted traits with an illustrated guide in 1888. He assured readers that in carrying out his research, he had accurately

> grouped the dogs, and as far as possible, given a full, minute, and accurate description of each variety as it at present exists and is recognised at our principal dog shows, and have illustrated these descriptions by faithful portraits of dogs that are acknowledged by the highest authorities to be true representatives of their class. [40]

[39] *Land and Water,* 10 January, 1874, vol. XVII.
[40] Hugh Dalziel, *British Dogs*, 1-2.

Chapter 3: *Land and Water*: Chambers' "New Journalism"

Chambers' short life alone has made finding primary documents to piece his life together relatively difficult. As a public figure in London, newspapers occasionally printed articles about happenings at Lillie Bridge Grounds or major events in his life. However, in order to give Chambers a voice, I've had to rely almost entirely on the publication, *Land and Water*, the weekly magazine for which he served as editor and which was issued every Saturday for nearly a decade of Chambers' brief journalistic career. This has presented further challenges, as the periodical is fragmentary in virtually all collections and has suffered from miscataloging issues in many cases. There are gaps in *Land and Water* that I am not able to account for – *sometimes entire years*. Despite this, the issues of *Land and Water* that are available have nonetheless afforded me more than enough material for my analysis of Chambers' accomplishments.

This periodical was launched before Chambers took over his editorial duties in 1871. Francis "Frank" Trevelyan Buckland, a well-reputed surgeon and zoologist, as editor, published the first issue on July 27th, 1866. From the offices of the *Land and Water* Journal Company on 80 Fleet Street, Buckland's *Journal of Field Sports, Sea and River Fisheries, AND Practical Natural History* offered its mission statement in its first number: "as the representative of the leading sports and recreations of the English gentleman… we believe that these subjects will lose none of their interest by combination with objects of higher importance."[41] Though *Land and Water* was a

[41] *L&W*, 27 July, 1866, vol. I.

sporting magazine, from its beginning, it was also deeply interested in issues philosophical, political, and scientific. Buckland's aim was not to merely make note of some hunt having taken place, but "to inform themselves on the nature of hounds," which its "KENNEL" section did in the case of the "British Bull-Dog (Canis Pugnax)," "the Engine-Driver's Dog," and the "the Sheep Dog" to name only a few.[42] Subscribers were encouraged to write to the editor to "communicate any interesting fact that may come under their observation." As the "educated gentlemen," its readers, "living chiefly amidst scenes of country life," were believed to offer valuable insights or direct the contributors towards multiple inquiries.[43]

Buckland differed from Chambers as editor in multiple ways. His preoccupation with archaeology and the study of antiquity far exceeded interest in such topics shown by his successor. The contents of the publication's index during Buckland's tenure as editor would often read as follows: "Relics of Antiquity," "Social Punishments in the Good Old Times," "Ancient British Canoe," etc.[44] Additionally, Buckland denounced "systemic betting" in a manner which Chambers never did. He bemoaned wagering carried out by "the scum of Hackney Wick," as noblemen and gentlemen sportsmen "endeavored to redeem the character of [pedestrianism] from the degradation which has hitherto characterised it."[45] He did, towards the end of his tenure as editor, cave to popular new attitudes with an article titled "The Science of Betting."[46]

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[42] *L&W*, 14 September, 1867, vol. IV; *L&W*, 21 September, 1867, vol. IV; *L&W*, 18 May, 1867, vol. III.
[43] *L&W*, 27 July, 1866, vol. I.
[44] Ibid.
[45] *L&W*, 13 October, 1866, vol. II.
[46] *L&W*, 23 July, 1870, vol. X.

Chambers, by contrast, made the "Latest Betting" section a regular staple of the journal. In commenting on contemporary gambling legislation which claimed "every person playing or betting by way of wagering or gaming in any street, road, highway, or other open and public place" was a "rogue and vagabond," Chambers came to the defense of the practice. He first claimed that a wager "for the price of a glass of ale at a public-house bar is one of those trifles with which the law ought not to concern itself."[47] This was a rather isolated opinion at the time, since much of the negative discourse surrounding spectator sports focused on complaints about gambling. However, Chambers did draw a crucial distinction between the respectability of a bet "upon a game of pure chance" and a wager on a "contest in which skill and strength are called into play."[48] Given Chambers' entrepreneurial role at Lillie Bridge, he wanted to help facilitate the second type of betting on competitive sports. One can see that his codification of sports rules worked to ensure that *only* skill and strength determined the outcome of athletics contests.

Setting these points aside, the most significant difference between Buckland and Chambers was the handling of the correspondence section. The former tended towards a deferential consideration of the correspondents and their opinions. By the second issue, gentlemen had already begun bickering over the manner in which police and magistrates enforced "fishery laws."[49] By issue number six, Buckland was forced to produce an apology for the proprietor of a river fishery for posting a letter in which a contributor accused him of illegal fishing practices.[50]

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[47] *L&W*, 4 October, 1873, vol. XXVI.
[48] *L&W*, 8 November, 1873, vol. XXVI.
[49] *L&W*, 3 February, 1866, vol. I.
[50] *L&W*, 3 March, 1866, vol. I.

Correspondents being given license to critique "a few wrinkles" in another gentleman's post (despite professing not wanting to take "the wind out of his sails") was certainly no serious issue associated with the manner in which Buckland managed his gentleman contributors.[51] Either his congeniality, or his enthusiasm, often left Buckland bereft of skepticism, thus allowing correspondents to make baseless claims about their wildlife observations. By lending such assertions credibility, Buckland quite arguably gave a platform for amateur zoologists to report their 'novel' discoveries. In multiple cases, outlandish claims were made without producing specimens or physical evidence. One sportsman, without proof, detailed a thirty pound jellyfish that he caught which he noted "was tolerably solid, rather grisly, in fact… like leather to the touch."[52] A fisherman being disingenuous about the size of his catch may have been allowed without much controversy, though Buckland's leniency towards the contributors bordered on the extreme in some instances. In one such case, on Mar. 9th, 1867, a Captain Cuming, returned from Yokohama with what he claimed was a mermaid. A contributor, "G. H.," sent a photograph of the creature to the publication which Buckland remarked was "a most admirable specimen of a mermaid."[53]

To be fair to Buckland, the British have been recognized as a nation characteristically gullible in regard to photographic evidence. One of the most famous instances of this credence came in the twentieth century: the Cottingley Fairies. After two young girls produced photographs of fairies outside their rural home in 1917, the nation at large, and otherwise 'credible experts,' were widely

[51] *L&W*, 2 February, 1867, vol. III.
[52] *L&W, 20* July, 1867, vol. III.
[53] *L&W*, 9 March, 1867, vol. III.

convinced of the veracity of the images. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote the initial report of the fairies for the magazine, *The Strand*. However, an investigation was carried out years later by "a member of the Executive Committee of the Theosophical Society." The member in question, a Mr. E. L. Gardner, demonstrated that he was duped with his declaration that "he was absolutely convinced of the entire genuineness of the photographs."[54]

Despite his profuse credulity, Buckland, a man of science, was almost certainly appealing to the interests of his burgeoning periodical in allowing such unsubstantiated claims and conjecture. He was more than likely simply pleased that he could rally some correspondence. Additionally, Buckland couldn't have predicted the explosion of interest in sport from the middle-class that was slowly beginning to gain momentum.

By all evidence, Chambers inherited a successful enterprise, as *Land and Water* appeared to be on an upward trajectory under Buckland's editorship. By the second year of the publication, its growing popularity seems apparent due to a highly increased number of product and service advertisements, as well as more abundant and higher quality images which likely denote a growing budget. By volume nine, charts, figures, and illustrations greatly improved again. [55]

Chambers joined the staff of *Land and Water* initially as a contributor in 1865. Due to the disjointed condition of *Land and Water* collections available in the archives at my disposal, I am uncertain of the specific date and issue at which Buckland officially stepped down from his editorial position. Despite this, I would

[54] *Shipley Times and Express*, 10 December, 1920.
[55] *L&W*, 28 July, 1866, vol. II-IX.

argue that due to major changes in the publication's format made around vol. xi, as well as a shift in the tone of the writing, that Chambers took over his duties around 1871. Buckland made a lateral move within the editorial office, becoming the primary contributor for the "Practical Natural History" section. With Buckland's editorial duties left to Chambers, his columns flourished. One subscriber noted that the publication's "pages have during the last two or three years exhibited in a remarkable degree the progress which our fellow countrymen have made in this useful and agreeable kind of learning."[56] Possibly due to Chambers' influence, Buckland also shied away from archaeology in his writing after stepping down as editor. After Buckland's death on December 19th 1880, an article was later posted which described a memorial bust of the late natural historian. Chambers remarked:

> the bust is a thoroughly good likeness although we miss the restless vitality and ever-changing humorous expressions that used to always lurk about, ready to break out all over his face, as Buckland would cap a good story or jocundly philosophise and start no end of quaint, strange theories concerning the whys and wherefores of the natural history specimen.[57]

Upon taking charge, one of the first points of order for Chambers was to begin front-loading editorial responses to the prior week's correspondents. This format adjustment, as well as the previously mentioned new tone, constituted the two most significant changes to *Land and Water* under Chambers. In stark contrast to the respectful and deferential manner in which Buckland considered the observations of 'gentleman experts,' Chambers asserted his authority with a terse forthrightness that commanded respect from subscribing contributors. To one such individual, Chambers stated that his "article is full of inaccuracies, and we cannot insert it… read the

[56] *L&W*, vol. XVI, no. 394 (date not available).
[57] *L&W*, 30 July, 1881, vol. XXXII.

Salmon Acts."[58] In the "TURF" section, Chambers fielded a two part question in his typically direct fashion: "(1), No (2), we don't answer irrelevant questions."[59] The "KENNEL" section often produced some of the most colorful responses. One such case involved an aspiring dog-show participant who was no doubt crestfallen and offended when Chambers informed him that his "dog will never gain a prize in good company – he is too leggy behind, head too narrow, and ears too high; photo returned." In addition, a prospective dog-owner, asking the publication for advice was instructed to "go to the dog's home and select for [himself]," as Chambers jabbed that "you might as well ask us to choose a wife for you."[60] This new tone is not only indicative of Chambers' bold personality. It signals his desire to move away from the conjecture and wild theories of country gentlemen whose authority rested simply on their rural dwellings and elevated social status. Chambers and his associates in the new *Land and Water* were now the experts and specialists to whom sportsmen and nature enthusiasts would field *their* inquiries. Observations could only pique the editor's interest. For recognition of a novel discovery, Chambers required documentation or specimens.

Chambers wasn't only an unflagging contender for authority in the realm of sport and nature. He aggressively defended his articles in the "TRAVELLER" section when his reviews of locations and businesses at home and abroad were called into question. In one such instance, an innkeeper wrote to the publication criticizing Chambers' remarks on his business. The dispute between the two men involved the handling (or rather, *mishandling*) of the editor's luggage and some matters of

[58] *L&W*, 12 July, 1873, vol. XVI.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

excessive billing. However, the proprietor took a personal jab at Chambers by criticizing his writing style, deeming that it was characterized by "*jumps* and *springs*" which amounted to an account "more funny than truthful." A Mr. Mackenzie fielded the main defense of their article's claims. However, not waiting for the following week's issue to respond to an opponent, Chambers offered his remarks beneath Mackenzie's rebuttal. He noted "that a springy style of writing is his misfortune, not his fault, but being springy, it enables him to pass over several uninteresting matters which a more plodding correspondent might have waded through, to the weariness of our readers." He advised the disgruntled proprietor "to obtain a copy of the Innkeeper's Liability Act, and study it before he take charge of other travelers' luggage." In closing, Chambers highlighted being overcharged for his drinks by stating that it was not "his custom when travelling to give the handmaidens, however attractive they may be, a bonus of 7d. for every glass of beer."[61]

Under Chambers' leadership, *Land and Water* saw a tremendous amount of commercial growth and consumption. The correspondence section frequently spilled over onto the second column, as contributors began to more readily provide letters and articles for the publication's staff to pour through.[62] 1876 was a banner year for *Land and Water*. A notice was proudly posted on July 8th stating that "in consequence of the large increase in our business, the offices have been removed to more commodious premises, at 176, Fleet Street.[63] By August 5th of that year, *Land and Water* boasted its first "illustrated extra sheet" that was regularly designated for the

[61] *L&W*, 10 January, 1874, vol. XVII.
[62] *L&W*, 2 December, 1876, vol. XXIII.
[63] *L&W*, 8 July, 1876, vol. XXIII.

first issue of every month.[64] These illustrations were so popular that reprints were often issued, as was the case with the popular "illustrations of the Sea-Serpent."[65] By the latter part of the decade, more product and service advertisements flooded the magazine, including "The Automatic Girdle" which was promoted just before Christmas.[66] On March 17th, 1877, *Land and Water* announced that "on and after APRIL 7th, owing to increased demands for space, *Land AND WATER*, will be *PERMANENTLY ENLARGED*."[67] These were no doubt happy years for Chambers who, along with growing commercial success and notoriety, had the honor of giving away his youngest sister at her early autumn wedding in 1878. Her ivory satin dress was complemented by both diamonds and pearls.[68]

After Chambers' death in 1883, the publication continued and maintained popularity, though the records become fragmentary after vol. xxxvii. Later editors over the next few decades can largely credit their continued success to sticking to Chambers' formula (other than some typeface changes). *Land and Water* ran until about 1920 before it was either absorbed into another publication or discontinued. Even in the years after the end of the Great War, the periodical had virtually abandoned the minutia of sport – thus encapsulating the nostalgia that characterized society *postbellum*. Having mapped *Land and Water's* path over the course of multiple decades and editors, my next aim is to detail the way in which he addressed and helped to solve social issues using his unique public-interest journalism.

[64] *L&W*, 5 August, 1876, vol. XXIII.
[65] *L&W*, 15 September, 1877, vol. XXIV.
[66] *L&W*, 16 December, 1876, vol. XXIII.
[67] *L&W*, 17 March, 1877, vol. XXIII.
[68] *Bury and Norwich Post*, 9 September, 1878.

"New Journalism" in an Unexpected Place

In order to understand the unique nature of Chambers' calls for reform efforts, the history of Victorian public-interest journalism must be put into context. Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and London Poor* (LLLP) is considered one of the first examples of investigative social reform journalism. Mayhew's work was published first in 1851, which places him in the generation of journalists before Chambers. *LLLP* was the first and most comprehensive example of combining sociological reporting, calls for social reform, and selling newspapers – a model which undoubtedly influenced Chambers.[69]

Of course, juxtaposing Mayhew's generation of journalists and Chambers' generation is largely comparing apples to oranges. Chambers' journalistic career began during a veritable media revolution. A confluence of factors contributed to the emergence of what has come to be called "new journalism." First, several taxes on newspapers were repealed in 1869.[70] Such taxation made newspapers and periodicals cost at least five pence – a prohibitively expensive sum for regular consumption. Second, Parliamentary Reform in 1867 effectively doubled the electorate. Third, the Education Act of 1870 mandated child education for the first time in Britain. By the

[69] Bertrand Taithe, "Henry Mayhew 1812-1887," and "The Genesis of LLLP," in The *Essential Mayhew: Representing and Communicating the Poor* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996). In a study contrasting Charles Booth of the Salvation Army with Mayhew, David Englander found that Mayhew's journals differed from more publishable mainstream Victorian sociologists. Because of this, his work serves as a more approachable, vivid, and powerful account of poverty, see David Englander, "Comparisons and contrasts: Henry Mayhew and Charles Booth as social investigators," in *Retrieved Riches*, eds. David Englander and Rosemary O'Day (Ashgate Publishing, 1995). A study of the working class subjects which Mayhew documented shows that deriving working class identity from *LLLP* is difficult due to his awkward classifications. Mayhew documented only about 50,000 subjects, or one-fortieth of the working class in London, see Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Mayhew's Poor: A Problem of Identity," in *Victorian Studies* 14, no. 3 (1971): 307-20: http://www.jstor.org.proxy-bc.researchport.umd.edu/stable/3826268.

[70] Martin Hewitt, *The Dawn of the Cheap Press in Victorian Britain: the End of the 'Taxes on Knowledge', 1849-1869* (A&C Black, 2013).

turn of the twentieth century, adult illiteracy had been virtually eradicated. Thus, cheaper newspapers, increased social consciousness which came along with being politically empowered, and a growing literacy rate all combined to create modern journalism.

While Mayhew was one of the earliest and most thorough of the Victorian social reform journalists, W. T. Stead was certainly the most famous. Stead is widely considered the father of modern tabloid journalism. Though he cared passionately about the important issues he promoted – including the Bulgarian Atrocities, child prostitution, and Jack the Ripper murders – Stead also used his sensationalist writing-style as a tactic for selling newspapers and stirring up public controversy. His private correspondence, in which he called for "government by journalism," bring his strong desire for political power to light. W. T. Stead and the tabloid journalism of the *Pall Mall Gazette* stand in stark contrast with Chambers and the respectable style of *Land and Water*, but they did share strong interest in bringing issues of social reform to public attention. It should also be taken into consideration that Chambers began his editorship around 1871 and died in 1883. Since the year of his death was the very year that Stead earned his first editorial position, it is possible that Chambers' public-interest journalism might have inspired Stead's later work when he was in control of his own publication. [71]

With all this context in consideration, it comes as quite the surprise that some of the most authentic reform journalism of the late-Victorian media revolution came from a popular sports periodical. Even for a sports journal, *Land and Water* was

[71] Sydney W. Robinson, *Muckraker: The Scandalous Life and Times of W.T. Stead, Britain's First Investigative Journalist* (London: Robson Press, 2012).

rather exceptional. Typical sports titles of the late-nineteenth century, such as *Cycling*, the *Fishing Gazette*, and *Golf Monthly* focused on specific athletic ventures. By contrast, Chambers' publication wrote articles about a vast number of games and leisurely pursuits. He also mixed his coverage with other topics of interest or concern to the public at large. *Land and Water* was indeed a publication ahead of its time. With Chambers' journalism now more clearly situated, I aim to detail some of the causes which he considered to be of the greatest importance for Victorian society.

A Sportsman's Call to Action

One of the causes Chambers was most steadfast in promoting involved the welfare of the working-class. In 1874, in light of proposed reform of the poor laws from a Mr. Bartley, Chambers came to the defense of the impoverished masses. Bartley broached the subject of a "thrift test." The test, in Utilitarian terms, was meant to assess the enlightened self-interest of prospective recipients of government aid. This was no doubt aimed at reducing the drain of the *residuum* (the hopelessly degenerate poor) on public resources. Though Chambers was certainly a free market capitalist, his benevolence caused his words to smack of Socialism, as he proclaimed that "when men are starving, there is no time to question their antecedents." Chambers found it to be self-evident that "the law lays down this broad principle – that no man shall starve, and to modify that principle in the slightest degree would be certain to be attended with disastrous results."[72] Chambers was by no means speaking out on an issue he wasn't informed about. He was a regular enough attendee of the official public meetings regarding the Poor Laws that he was able to identify which

[72] *L&W*, 21 April, 1874, vol. XVII.

Poor Law guardians were frequently absent. Finding many such individuals in dereliction of their duties, Chambers publicly complained that "it is a very great pity that ex-officio guardians of the poor do not attend meetings of their boards more regularly than they do."[73]

Another contemporary legislative concern that troubled Chambers was the Agricultural Children's Education Act. This legislation would have attenuated the compulsory schooling imposed by the Education Act of 1870 for the children of farming families. Chambers saw this as a terrible mistake, as he argued:

> the children of small farmers… belong to a class which is probably about the most in need of education of any in the community… and if the whole act is to fall into obeyance, as we fear that it will do, there will certainly be a very large number of children throughout the country who will receive no education at all.[74]

In terms of education in general, Chambers had a very unique stance for his time. He had managed "to take the highest honours in his class for natural sciences" upon his graduation from Cambridge.[75] Interestingly, Chambers had publicly championed the discipline at a time when it was largely eschewed by Victorian educators. The Factory and Transport Revolutions first allowed middle-class industrialists to generate the wealth necessary to afford to have their children educated at fee-charging secondary schools and universities. Prior to this, only aristocrats could afford to send their children to such institutions. Because of this, the curricula at these schools were tailored to suit the needs of future gentlemen of

[73] *L&W*, 18 July, 1874, vol. XVII.
[74] *L&W*, 20 June, 1874, no. 439.
[75] *Athletic News*, 7 March, 1883.

leisure. Classical languages, theology, and later, athletics, dominated educational programs across the country.[76]

By the time the middle-class began attending these schools, the proud and industrious parents of students wanted their children to receive the same education that the ruling class had traditionally enjoyed. This process has been described by historians as the gentrification of the middle-class. The corollary of resisting education reform was that the British Empire, the world's industrial superpower, began stagnating. Britain enjoyed a head start over other nations, with industrialization beginning around the last decades of the 18th century. However, the British had dominated earlier markets by producing manufactured goods like textiles. America and Germany started nipping at the heels of the English by the early twentieth century due to their investment in scientific education, as the second wave of industrialization involved making commodities like chemicals and rubber.

Despite this dismal outcome, Chambers wouldn't let the sciences be cast aside without a fight. In 1874, he publicly reported on a commission that assessed scientific education within Oxford and Cambridge. He applauded the efforts of the commission, and stated that "earning a doctorate in science, i.e., a higher degree in science" was "a great honour."[77] In another instance, he promoted the Crystal Palace School of Practical Engineering. Appealing to a young man's swashbuckling nature, he wrote that this program was "for gentlemen who intend to proceed to the colonies or abroad as explorers or settlers." Their instruction would arm such adventurers with "practical

[76] J. A. Mangan, "Athleticism: A Case Study of the Evolution of an Educational Ideology," '*Manufactured' Masculinity: Making Imperial Manliness, Morality and Militarism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012)
[77] *L&W*, 24 January, 1874, vol. XVII.

knowledge of scientific and mechanical work… when entirely dependent on their own resources."[78] Chambers was so devoted to science that he worked with like-minded *Land and Water* contributors to create a remedy for pests that ravaged local grapevines "unchecked."[79]

Chambers had a very interesting approach to the reform of hospitals. However, standards of care were not among his more colorful critiques. Instead, he questioned whether "we are in the right track, as regards hospital construction" as the "present system of building, fine, large, and permanent structures imposes on the imagination but it is not quite certain that they effect (sic) their purpose as well as humbler-looking erections might do."[80] While it may seem to be the case, Chambers was no philistine. He simply disagreed with where the beauty should be found. In an article titled, "Art in Hospitals," Chambers laid out his proposal. He recognized that "no one who visits [hospitals] can fail to be struck by the dull, dismal aspect of the long, monotonous, bare walls, undecorated in the slightest manner." By encouraging the "inmates and visitors" of hospitals to festoon the walls with their own art, they would be "providing both amusement and instruction." Chambers' theory was that this would increase "contributions for the support of hospitals."[81]

Both physical and mental health were extremely important to Chambers. He astutely identified the class-based bias with regards to insanity. Chambers held that "among the educated madness is looked upon simply as a bodily disease, but among the poor and uneducated it is regarded as a mysterious affliction, as a Divine

[78] *L&W*, 13 November, 1875, vol. XX.
[79] *L&W*, 26 September, 1874, vol. XVIII.
[80] *L&W*, 23 January, 1875, vol. XIX.
[81] *L&W*, 10 February, 1877, vol. XXIII.

punishment, and as possession by evil spirits." In advocating for the working-class patients admitted to hospitals and asylums, he claimed that certain wards should be fitted and adapted so that such patients could not "commit suicide or homicide." Chambers was also critical of how health professionals and the law recognize "no alternative between perfect insanity and madness." In his view, since "a hard and fast line" was drawn in determining if an individual was not of sound mind "there are many persons in confinement who might very well be allowed their liberty subject to conditions." Chambers wondered if "reforms which are needed are not initiated."[82]

Chambers was also an unflagging jingoist. He proudly promoted Britain's armed forces by holding military games at Lillie Bridge. In 1875, he envisioned "a grand military athletic competition… at Lillie Bridge next year" which he believed could "rank with the Boat Race [Henley Regatta], and" the "Eton and Harrow match." With this event, Chambers aimed to "bring our soldiers into prominence and favour with the general public."[83] Chambers wasn't just interested in the armed forces due to upholding Britain's empire, he deeply valued the discipline imparted by military service. In the same year that he began proposing his grand annual military games, he defended an aristocrat who publicly endorsed "the introduction of drill into schools." Chambers rallied behind the man who proposed this reform: Lord Sandurst. In a *Land and Water* article titled, "National Military Training," he claimed he was "glad to see the urgent need for some such regulation" begin "to force itself on the government."[84]

[82] *L&W*, 17 April, 1875, vol. XIX.
[83] *L&W*, 24 July, 1875, vol. XX.
[84] *L&W*, 1 May, 1875, vol. XIX.

Chapter 4: *Lillie Bridge Grounds*: The Finest Facilities in the Country

The development of West Brompton, a location sitting on the border between the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, has been credited to its ambitious former landowner. Sir John Scott Lillie, a soldier and inventor of the Lillie Rifle, began developing his large West Brompton estate in 1826. His plans included the North End Brewery and for-rent housing. The establishment of the London Road Car Company brought patrons to pubs that cropped up on Lillie's land by horse-drawn vehicles.[85] Interestingly, this location had a long history of sports. The Lillie Arms, a public house which predated Lillie Bridge Grounds, had long hosted events involving athletics and games. Participants favored pigeon shooting in particular. In one such contest of marksmanship in 1850, "Messrs Collins, Davis, Wood, Brand, Chance, Blaire, Hoop, and Flemmins shot a sweepstakes at 5 birds each; Davis won, killing all." Such events were regular appointments, and a journalist noted a coming event which would have plenty of "blue necks, sparrows, and starlings."[86]

Chambers acquired a lease on a large portion of Fulham around 1866. He worked through the AAC to drum up funds to lease land in West Brompton. While the figures are vague, one source discussing Chambers' renegotiation for the Club's rental agreement stated that "from March, 1875," he secured a lease on a sizeable cut

[85] Barbara Denny, *Fulham Past* (London: Historical Publications, 1997), 49.
[86] *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 13 January, 1850.

of land for a rate of "£100 to £500 per annum."[87] The Grounds officially opened on March 10th, 1869, with the Oxford and Cambridge Sports having the honor of being the first to play at Lillie Bridge.[88]

While commercial spectator sports are commonplace today, it is important to recognize that Chambers was undertaking a very novel enterprise at Lillie Bridge. Most historians date the "Golden Age" of British sports from the years 1870 to 1914, and Chambers was there at the very beginning. It was common for "noblemen and gentlemen [to give] their countenance" to athletic organizations – especially in their early years.[89] Chambers had no intention of relying on patronage from aristocrats, as Lillie Bridge Grounds was run as a business venture from the outset.

The physical facilities that Chambers and the AAC actually erected in West Brompton require a more detailed description. Lillie Bridge was enclosed by gates and fencing to secure the collection of entry fees. One poor soul, recently out of work and unable to afford the entry fee, attempted to watch a polo match from Brompton Cemetery in the summer of 1887. Standing on a recently dug grave, he was reported to have been buried alive.[90] The grounds had the requisite track, fields, and stands, but also dressing rooms, a pavilion, an administrative office, a members' bar, and a "ladies' boudoir."[91] Lillie Bridge had spacious halls fit for both gymnastics and musical performances.[92] The grounds even had facilities for ice skating. We know the last from an account of a peculiar event that Chambers hosted: a dog show held on the

[87] *Daily Telegraph and Courier (London)*, 2 December, 1881.
[88] *Globe*, 10 March, 1869.
[89] *Sporting Life*, 10 October, 1866.
[90] This description comes from a report of the remains of the facility after it was closed, see *Sheffield Independent*, 5 July, 1887.
[91] *Illustrated London News*, 24 September, 1887.
[92] *London Evening Standard*, 12 October, 1878.

skating rink. Chambers considered these facilities to be a "convenient place" for such an event.[93]

A Great Victorian Entrepreneur

By all indications, Lillie Bridge was an extremely successful business. Entry-fees were collected for amateur events at a general rate of about "2s 6d for each event," and were "to be sent to J.G. Chambers" at the *Land and Water* offices. Such entry fees probably provided sufficient income to support the grounds. Challenge cups were the common reward for amateur victories, but these were generally donated by a patron, social club, or school administrator.[94] While prizes were awarded to professionals, this was, by and large, not a major drain on profits. This was due to the fact that amateur events were far more numerous and frequent. To give perspective, in one instance 250 amateur entrants entered a pedestrian competition. Only 116 were accepted.[95] Professionals also paid entry fees which likely would have covered the sum of most monetary prizes. Even members of the upper classes partook of the competitive activities, with large crowds gathered to witness contests between aristocrats. Sir Charles Nugent challenged a "Mr. Sadler" to a foot race and their blueblood contest drew droves of spectators to the grounds.[96]

Entry fees weren't the only source of income for Lillie Bridge Grounds. Spectators were charged a shilling per person at the entrance, while reserved seating could be obtained for higher sums. By the 1880s, a price hike doubled general

[93] *Land and Water*, 5 May, 1877, vol. XXIII.
[94] The Marquess of Queensberry was a frequent patron, see *Sporting Life*, 9 April, 1870.
[95] *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 3 December, 1881.
[96] *Morning Advertiser*, 20 June, 1871.

admission fees.[97] According to Charles Feinstein, unskilled laborers such as full-time dock workers were making weekly wages falling between 21-26s. However, he noted that contemporary Charles Booth of the Salvation Army, who included stevedores, had calculated dock workers earned average weekly incomes up to 30s 9d.[98] Thus, entry fees remained affordable throughout the entirety of the operation of Lillie Bridge.

While a shilling might seem a paltry sum, the size of crowds should be taken into consideration. On a day with fair weather, it was extremely common for crowds to number in the thousands. In one such instance, it was estimated that six thousand spectators – mostly women – had gathered for the day's events.[99] On another occasion, approximately eight thousand attendees came out to enjoy themselves.[100] For yet another event "it was computed that no less than twelve thousand spectators were assembled" with "continuous streams of carriages and visitors… pouring into the Lillie Bridge Ground." Surprisingly, this event was held on a day in which the weather was less than desirable.[101]

Chambers also found other ways of making his sporting ground profitable. Year-long memberships for using the facilities for the purpose of training were offered to unattached professional athletes and amateur clubs alike. As the club opened, the price for this privilege was 2s. 6d. Some paid for these memberships just to watch the training sessions. By the end of the 1870s, memberships were raised to 1

[97] *Globe*, 28 March, 1882.
[98] Charles Feinstein, "New Estimates of Average Earnings in the United Kingdom, 1880-1913," in *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Nov., 1990), 625.
[99] *Brighton Gazette*, 9 June, 1870.
[100] *Sporting Life*, 1 April, 1871.
[101] *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 20 May, 1871.

guinea per year – likely due to both increased revenues and Chambers' desire to develop his facilities for the growth of his business. By that time the use of the "dressing room and locker" was "10s. 6d." These fees also entitled members to "housing of bicycles." Practice nights were slated for Tuesday and Friday at eight p.m. [102] An advertisement in *Sporting Life*, claimed that "gentlemen wishing to train will find this much cheaper than is offered anywhere else in London."[103] Lillie Bridge Grounds also publicized their professional trainers. By offering classes that met on "Tuesdays and Fridays in the gymnasium, for instruction in boxing" and "fencing, under Herr Stempel," the sporting grounds had further increased its monetized services.[104]

A fair question to ask is how Chambers was able to draw so much business. The answer is rather complicated, as there were multiple factors involved in his success. First, anxieties over the mixing of amateurs and professionals in competition must be explained. This was essentially a class divide. Some of Chambers' most important work in sports outside of the university involved establishing standards that prevented such cross-overs from happening. The AAC put forward the earliest guidelines which generally involved barring any participant who had previously accepted money to compete, previously competed against professionals, had taught the sport for income, or had been known to sell prizes. Professionals were believed to enjoy the benefit of specialized training. Amateur clubs were overwhelmingly bourgeois, while working-class athletes were largely professionals. Though Chambers and other administrators at Lillie Bridge Grounds were successful in weeding

[102] *Sporting Life*, 29 March, 1879.
[103] *Sporting Life*, 30 June, 1880.
[104] *Sporting Life*, 3 April, 1880.

professionals out of amateur events, this isn't to suggest that professional events weren't major draws for attendance – only that it likely increased amateur participation.[105]

Judges at Lillie Bridge also effectively managed competitions. In one instance, a participant in a speed-walking contest "who did not walk fairly, was disqualified early in the race." His opponent was declared the winner by technicality.[106] Their standards for measurement were also considered extremely accurate – further adding to the appeal and credibility of Chambers' sporting ground. One journalist declared that contests at Lillie Bridge Grounds were conducted "under the eyes of the best timekeepers of the metropolis."[107]

Chambers' efficient management and consistency also played a role in his success. One journalist attested in 1872 that an event with "numerous spectators" was "most ably managed throughout." Heaping praise on Chambers' organizational skills, the writer noted that, considering the "length of the programme and the extraordinary number of entries necessitating the greatest economy as regards time there were no unnecessary delays, and the business was proceeded with vigorously from beginning to end."[108]

Over time, indoor facilities were developed at Lillie Bridge. However, many, if not most, events were outdoor affairs. The weather played no role in an event being held as far as Chambers was concerned. On one occasion, a walking contest was held

[105] John Lowerson, *Sport and the English Middle Classes*, 1-7.
[106] *Sporting Life*, 1 August, 1882.
[107] *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 21 September, 1875.
[108] *Sporting Life*, 7 September, 1870.

on a "bitterly cold day."[109] The London Athletic Club carried out an event which took place "with the weather against it," as "rain fell almost continually."[110] In the most extreme case, the AAC held their Championship event despite "rain-squalls pointed with all the coldness and malignity of March."[111] Chambers obviously abhorred cancelling events. He may have prided himself on being a reliable man. However, there is also no evidence that athlete entry fees were refunded.

Chambers wouldn't have wanted thirst and hunger to thin his crowds. Such amenities also turned a profit. The annual Amateur Athletic Championship was promoted in *Land and Water* in 1875 with a long list of improved services and facilities. Chief among them, according to Chambers, was "the refreshment department" which he assured was "in first rate hands, so that people can now obtain an excellent lunch and a good glass of wine inside the grounds."[112]

It also seems that Chambers may have been selling stronger beverages to attendees. This can be seen through a court case in which he was involved as the plaintiff against three boys "named William Hunter, eleven, Henry Longford, eleven, and Herbert James Barlow, thirteen." The errant youths were charged with "breaking and entering a refreshment store-room in the Lillie Bridge Grounds, Fulham, and stealing some cheese and two bottles of whiskey."[113]

The previous example of Chambers resorting to the courts was not an isolated incident. He sought legal recourse whenever someone attempted to cut into the finances of his various enterprises. In 1873, a "Frederick Scott," was "charged with

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[109] *Morning Advertiser*, 23 April, 1872,
[110] *Sporting Life*, 26 October, 1870.
[111] *The Sportsman*, 16 April, 1870.
[112] *Land and Water*, 20 March, 1875, vol. XIX.
[113] *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 4 January, 1880.

obtaining £1 1s by false pretenses." Scott used a forged letter, which he purported was sent by Chambers, to coax funds from "supposed donors" for the benefit of the Thames Regatta. Collecting funds for the Regatta from institutions and private citizens was a regular practice, with advertisements encouraging donations from "those gentlemen who really wish to promote rowing amongst watermen" in countless publications.[114] One man that Scott approached, a Mr. F. W. Bryant, figured "that the letter was a forgery," and so "he told the prisoner to call again." In the meantime, "he communicated with Mr. Chambers." The two men, with the help of the London Constabulary, organized a sting operation. Upon the scam artist's return, "he received £1 1s from Mr. Bryant, but found himself in the hands of the police shortly after." After Scott was accosted, "Mr. John Graham Chambers… proved that the letter signed in his name was a forgery."[115] In trial, "Mr. John Pyefinch, secretary to Mr. John Graham Chambers," testified against Scott, stating that he "had no authority whatever to collect for the regatta funds."[116]

In another instance, a Henry Williams was summoned by Chambers "to answer a charge of embezzlement." During an event for the Cambridge University Athletic Sports, Williams was employed to help with coordinating efforts. He bribed the policeman who was appointed to oversee him, and began allowing "several people to pass, charging them half-a-crown, which was the price of admission." Upon being caught, Williams denied only the amount which he received – "a shilling" rather than "half-a-crown." The constable who abetted the criminal was "suspended

[114] *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 2 September, 1871.
[115] *Sporting Life*, 29 January, 1873.
[116] *Daily Telegraph & Courier (London)*, 22 January, 1873.

by the Police Commissioners for so doing."[117] All of these anecdotes go to show that Chambers was highly vigilant and unwilling to tolerate theft and pilfering. At the very least, they demonstrate that Chambers was well-respected enough to have members of the community tip him off.

Though Chambers, by at least the late 1870s, was running an extremely popular business, he wasn't solely driven by commercial motives. He also held events for philanthropic purposes. In 1882, Lillie Bridge Grounds were "*en fete* upon the occasion of the fourth annual athletic and pleasure gathering in aid of the Railway Servants' Orphanage Fund." The event featured music, feats of swordsmanship, and greasy pole climbing.[118] In that same year, the renowned professional sprinter Harry Hutchen was diagnosed with rheumatism, and his physician "forbade any work." As such, a benefit was hosted at Lillie Bridge. Unfortunately, the charity turned out to be "a wretched one with regard to weather."[119] In another instance, a large gathering of London Scots assembled at Lillie Bridge Grounds "to witness a series of competitions in Highland games in aid of the Scottish Corporation and the Caledonian Asylum." Judging by the account of a reporting journalist, the event was a splendidly good time "and yielded at the same time a handsome sum to the above-mentioned charities."[120]

Curiously, in light of the fact that Chambers was a journalist himself, he had a tense relationship with other publications that wished to cover events that he organized. It is evident that he hoped to reserve reports of athletic contests he organized exclusively for his own *Land and Water*. Often times, journalists from

[117] *Morning Advertiser*, 10 June, 1867.
[118] *Sporting Life*, 4 July, 1882.
[119] *Sporting Life*, 25 April, 1882.
[120] *Aberdeen Free Press*, 12 July, 1880.

other publications could report only on the outcome of events – leaving their accounts bereft of substantive descriptions. This fact came to characterize Chambers' public reputation among the press, as one reporter who attempted to cover Oxford and Cambridge sports noted in a terse jab: "as usual, the facilities afforded the representatives of the press for obtaining information were of a very meagre character."[121] Other reporters published far more scathing diatribes against him. This seemed to especially be the case for sports publications. A journalist from the *Athletic News* decried Chambers in a public indictment:

> At the Moulsey Regatta, held on Saturday last, members of the Press were one and all excluded from the umpire's launch. The Person really answerable for all this is, so I am informed, Mr. J. G. Chambers and it is as well that this should be widely known, as Mr. Chambers has a sufficient knowledge of journals and journalism to behave better towards them. Mr. J. G. Chambers got snubbed, and rightly so, over his connection with the Henly Regatta, and Mr. J. G. Chambers will get another snubbing before the Inter-(sic) Varsity Sports come round again. But in doing this the sporting reporters are assisting the public, while, in shutting these gentlemen out, Mr. J. G. Chambers and his admirers are laying a rod in pickle for their own backs.[122]

It is easy to pick up the reporter's personal ill-regard for Chambers. He was a figure who was both loved and loathed.

The Makings of a Victorian Amusement Park

When evaluating the sources surrounding Chambers and Lillie Bridge Grounds, it becomes apparent that the Victorian sportsman had highly ambitious and creative aims for his business ventures. While Lillie Bridge was a sporting ground, athletics were only one part of what made Chambers' enterprise successful. What his mixed business model amounted to was a combination of athletics with wild

[121] *Ross Gazette*, 6 April, 1882.
[122] *Athletic News*, 27 July, 1881.

spectacles and exhibitions, performances of music and drama, and efforts to incorporate other innovative leisure trends in Victorian society. In many ways, Lillie Bridge Grounds could be considered one of the earliest examples of what we would today identify as an amusement park. Lillie Bridge is arguably the first fully commercial amusement park of its time.

There are, of course, several other claimants to this title. Established in 1583, just outside of Copenhagen, Demark, *Bakken* has been identified as the world's first amusement park. It began as a source of fresh water springs that drew local crowds. This, in turn, attracted merchants and minstrels. However, *Bakken*, was never a very organized enterprise. It has never charged entry fees, and was conducted for the majority of its existence as more of a permanent fair consisting of tables and stalls run by independent artisans and craftsmen than an enclosed amusement park.[123]

Wurstelprater, in Vienna, Austria, also styles itself the oldest park. "The Prater" was a former aristocratic hunting ground that was first mentioned in 1162 when Emperor Friedrich I gave the land to a noble family by the name of de Prato. Emperor Josef II later opened it for public use in 1766. Similar to *Bakken*, the ground's early commerce involved privately owned coffee shops, bakeries, and inns. The Prater managed to host Vienna's only World Exhibition in 1873, yet even then it lacked much of the multi-draw appeal of an amusement park like Lillie Bridge. Only in the last decade of the nineteenth century did the Viennese park take on elements of Chambers' business model with musical performances by orchestras and famous

[123] https://www.bakken.dk/english/ [Accessed 26 May, 2018]

composers.[124] In 1897, the park opened a massive Ferris wheel, the *Wiener Riesenrad*, which was the tallest extant wheel from 1920 to 1985.

In Britain, the history of amusement parks can be traced back to the pleasure gardens of the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By the early nineteenth century, these outdoor businesses had grown increasingly commercialized. The Vauxhall Gardens were purchased for a sum rumored between £28,000 and £30,000 in 1821. Among their noteworthy features was a music hall, with a cockle-shell sounding-board over the orchestra which had been erected in 1824. The garden managed to attract some of the best-known singers, including Mallinson (*circ*a 1823), W.H. Williams (from 1824), and J.W. Sharp (from 1846). By 1826, Vauxhall was popular enough to increase the entrance fee from 3s 6p to four shillings. Both levels would have been prohibitively expensive for working-class customers. Thus, these pleasure gardens stand in stark contrast to Chambers' mixed class business model.[125]

There are few other contemporary examples in the United States of establishments similar to Lillie Bridge. One can be found at Lake Compounce in Bristol, Connecticut, known today as America's oldest amusement park. It sprung up around 1846 in an attempt to profit from experiments with electricity that Samuel Botsford was conducting near the lake. As crowds came to witness his demonstrations, they were entertained with music and purchased refreshments.[126]

In 1851, Gad Norton and Isaac Pierce developed Lake Compounce into "America's Pioneer Playground," but the focus was mainly on providing facilities for

[124] https://archive.is/20120907021221/http://www.praterservice.at/en/history
[125] Warwick Wroth, Arthur Edgar Wroth, *The Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1896), 316-19.
[126] Lydia J. Russell, *Lake Compounce* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2015), 7.

events organized by others, with clubs, organizations, and public figures holding their meetings and celebrations, such as a "Southern-style sheep roast" organized by local politicians in 1875. It was only after the Bristol and Plainville Tramway Company opened a line to the park in 1895 did Lake Compounce begin its emergence into a public amusement park. Between 1911 and 1914, a carousel and the Green Dragon Roller coaster were constructed. The latter was replaced by the Wildcat in 1927 and is still active today.[127]

By contrast to all these rivals Lillie Bridge was clearly envisioned as a mixed-draw amusement park from the very beginning. Chambers' extensive role in codifying and documenting modern sports cannot disguise the fact that he was far from a strict athletic purist. He fully understood that sports had dynamic utility as a potential commercial draw. When presented in an entertaining manner and mixed with other amusements, sporting events could garner interest from a far wider community than athletes and sportsmen. Profitability was obviously a welcome by-product. This is evident from contemporary accounts of the mixed types of events held regularly at Lillie Bridge. On March 31st, 1877, for instance, the *Bedfordshire Mercury* reported on "a novel series of sports, consisting of trials of strength and speed between men and animals… at Lillie Bridge in the presence of some five or six -thousand persons." A walking match was undertaken by a J. Miles whose opponent was "a huge elephant." Later, the same elephant, induced by a slice of bread, took part in a Tug-of-War match against "fifty Guardsmen." "Forty Guardsmen" had also engaged "four dray horses" in a contest of the same variety. Beasts were pitted

[127] Ibid.

against one another, as "two camels" raced "a donkey and a pony."[128] One reporter noted, however, that the camels were "quite untractable" (sic), as they "ran loose about the grounds, ignoring the path altogether." The pair trampled the flower gardens, but called forth "considerable laughter from those present" with their "ludicrous gait peculiar to" their species.[129]

Chambers himself was skeptical about one highly unusual contest. A gentleman offered a wager on a swimming contest between his "fat dog, Billy," and all takers. Chambers acknowledged that though the "offer [was] genuine," the precise "amount of the stake" had not been specified. Since the gentleman's proposed sum was not publicized in the article, Chambers ventured to guess that "Billy, if asked, would probably suggest a beefsteak."[130]

Bicycles were also pitted against both man and beast at Lillie Bridge. In one instance, a footman was given a twenty-four minute head start in a ten mile race against a cyclist. The pedestrian was said to have won "easily." A cyclist later dusted a donkey in a two mile race from a start on equal footing.[131] Furthermore, "Keen, the champion bicyclist" raced a young man on a pony in a two mile race. He too managed to outmatch his four-legged adversary.[132]

In 1870, a foot race was arranged at Lillie Bridge by the AAC that pitted an English runner against an Iroquois Native American, "Red Head" – so named, allegedly, for "the color of his hair." It was to be a one mile race in which the foreign challenger was given "twenty-five yards' start." The announcement played up his

[128] *Bedfordshire Mercury*, 31 March, 1877.
[129] *Manchester Courier and Lanchashire General Advertiser*, 27 March, 1877.
[130] *Land and Water*, 15 January, 1876, vol. XXI.
[131] *Bedfordshire Mercury*, 31 March, 1877.
[132] *Manchester Courier and Lanchashire General Advertiser*, 27 March, 1877.

exotic background, stating that "the Indian cannot speak our language… and is the only one of his tribe out of 1,700." Being such a fascinating spectacle, Chambers and his staff set the start "as half-past four, by desire, to enable many to see the races." Though amateurs were sometimes featured in events at Lillie Bridge, both Red Head and his challenger were considered professionals.[133]

Interestingly, this source also shows us how railway lines were assisting Chambers' venture by connecting Lillie Bridge to London. One journalist promoting Red Head's race noted that trains from "Broad-street, Moorgate-street, Blackfriars, Temple, Westminster, &c." would all offer routes to the grounds at the proper time on the day of the contest.[134] Such numerous transportation options at the disposal of Londoners no doubt help explain the large attendance at major Lillie Bridge events.

It was wise to expect such interest in Red Head's race, since "a large number of persons mustered at the Amateur Athletic Grounds" (Lillie Bridge). A journalist covering the event described it as a "sensation." The previous advertisement for the event failed to mention Red Head's credentials, which were impressive. He had the "reputation of being the fastest runner in America, having beaten all comers in his native country." He managed to best the famous contemporary runner "Deerfoot" of the Seneca tribe in a four mile match. A reporter described Red Head's race at Lillie Bridge against a local champion, Edward Mills, in great detail. They were started by "report of pistol," with Red Head quickly "placing a gap of fifty yards between them." Though Mills "crept up gradually, but slowly," when Red Head "caught a

[133] *Sporting Life*, 22 October, 1870.
[134] Ibid.

glimpse of Teddy" as they entered the final lap, he "shot away again in good style." Mills was defeated by three-quarters of a yard.[135]

Half-time shows and musical events during sports are, today, quotidian. However, this wasn't an obvious combination during the Victorian period, and it is possible that Chambers may have pioneered this concept. He officially applied for a music license in 1878 and thereafter regularly combined artistic performances with sports events. [136] The Royal Dramatic College, along with the staff at Lillie Bridge, devised an event on "the skating rink," which "was transformed into a theatre." Beyond the "improvised stage," there were also "scenery and effects." A journalist noted that "the exterior was decorated with coloured canvass representing approved histrionic subjects of an exciting type." According to this report, "the clamour of gongs and drum, invited the onlooker to walk in and see the show." Within the grounds, "a new and original tragedy, entitled *Alfonso and Claudina, The Faithful Spouse*; or, *the Hated Race*" was carried out by a prominent troupe of actors. Between the scenes, "Messrs. Howard, Russell, W. M'Intyre, Rogers Griffiths, and F. Hughes kept the fun going by their alternate burlesque delineations of the jealously, revenge, love and hate which animated the *dramatis personae*." The performance culminated in "the melodramatic music of Mr. Isaacson in murder and the avenging of the fate of the victim, amid a *tableaux* in which red and blue fires were predominant." Additionally, there were "selections from the Adelphi pantomime with the original juvenile performers."[137]

[135] *Sporting Life*, 25 October, 1870.
[136] *London Evening Standard*, 12 October, 1878.
[137] *London Evening Standard*, 28 July, 1877.

While these exhibitions of music and drama might convey that this event was entirely artistic in nature, spectator sports also played an equal role. At the same 1877 event, "an amusing race between a pony and bicycle resulted in a dead heat." A race was also held "between bicycle riders, in which the machines respectively used were of the old and new styles of manufactures." The contest "eventuated in a victory for the old one, which was ridden by" a prominent cyclist. Interestingly, even the sporting events were, "at intervals," interrupted by "a comic concert…" in "which various favourites of the music-hall profession energetically assisted." There were also heats of "running in sacks," and "races with buckets of water carried on the head of the competitors." In the case of the latter game, the competitors "without exception disqualified themselves by the drenching which they were unable to avoid." The affair was punctuated by "a well-contested polo match by officers of the Coldstream Guards." The reporter of the event claimed it was "an enjoyable afternoon and evening's entertainment."[138]

This mix of music, drama, light entertainment involving spectators, and more serious sports events was not an uncommon occurrence at Chambers' sporting ground. Another event reported on by the *London Evening Standard* in 1882, was a "Garden Party" featured program that commenced with a "concert in the hall by the professors and students of the London Conservatoire of Music." The journalist attested that "the performances were loudly applauded."[139]

Hot air balloon riding was first tested and demonstrated in the late-eighteenth century in France. Obviously, over the course of a century technology had improved.

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[138] Ibid.
[139] *London Evening Standard*, 15 May, 1882.

As such, popular clubs cropped up in Victorian Britain. Keen to capitalize on contemporary fads, Chambers often facilitated balloon flights by providing the capacious space his grounds offered.The sponsor of the "Garden Party" was the "Balloon Society," a prominent Victorian aeronautical club that used the occasion to launch two of its members in a hot air balloon, which "made a voyage in the direction of Croydon." The majestic nature of the ascent was emphasized by a performance by the music of the 1st Surrey Artillery Volunteers. The event ended with a dance.[140]

In another instance, Joseph Simmons, Colonel Bryan, and Mr. Powell took an "aerial voyage" in a balloon from the Lillie Bridge Grounds in July, 1881. The craft was a new prototype, "capable of accommodating in the car seven persons." Simmons himself declared it could have implications in regards to "scientific and military purposes."[141]

What all of these diverse events point to is that Lillie Bridge was not merely a sports ground: it was a precocious example of what could be considered a sports-themed amusement park. With its concessions, games, balloon flights, and light entertainment suitable for all tastes it seems to fit the criteria. The grounds offered extensive events which were designed to encourage guests to come, stay all day, and spend as much of their money as they could afford.

[140] *London Evening Standard*, 15 May, 1882.
[141] *Daily Telegraph & Courier (London)*, 29 September, 1881.

Chapter 5: *The End of an Empire*: Troubles Before and After Chambers' Death

By the later years of Chambers' life, he was juggling multiple profitable enterprises and ventures, including a small business that sold poultry and other foodstuffs.[142] However, a series of legal issues and other problems came to threaten his empire and, it may be speculated, contributed to his poor health and early death.

Chambers was a single-minded, eccentric, and aggressive man. He was known to be disagreeable and brutally honest at times and often found himself at loggerheads with other figures of the London community. One admiring journalist acknowledged this and came to Chambers' defense:

> In his position as a ground proprietor Mr. Chambers unfortunately made many enemies. From an intimate personal knowledge of him extending over twenty years we can safely affirm that he was more sinned against than sinning, and his traducers should recollect what he did for amateur athletes during the decade between 1865 and 1875, and likewise be mindful of the heavy rent, rates, and taxes (let alone the cost of maintenance and current working expenses) of a large enclosure like Lillie Bridge, situated in a busy metropolitan building area.[143]

Chambers was by no means one to shy away from conflict, but being denigrated by so many critics surely must have weighed on him over the years.

Chambers' struggles began with what the historian of the AAC, Peter Lovesey, has called the "Battle of the Bridges" between the AAC and its great rival, the London Athletic Club (LAC). Established in 1863, the LAC predated the AAC,

[142] I was able to discover Chambers' shop due to a report on poultry being stolen from the establishment, see *Berkshire Chronicle*, 12 January, 1878.
[143] *Sporting Life*, 6 March, 1883.

though the former was strictly a track and field club. Chambers must have believed that the two could coexist, considering the differing approaches of the organizations. Despite this, when brothers James and William Waddell managed to secure positions on the LAC head committee in 1870 they began efforts to divert athletic memberships to their own rival grounds. By 1877, the brothers had opened Stamford Bridge Grounds in Fulham. Its close proximity to Lillie Bridge signaled that it was a direct challenge to the AAC and Chambers. At Stamford Bridge, the Waddells succeeded in attracting various amateur clubs, while Chambers' Lillie Bridge, dominated university athletics. This battle for control put a noticeable strain on the London athletic community. In 1880, William Waddell wrote to Chambers, asking for the LAC and AAC to convene in order to determine the date and location for the annual Championship Meeting. This was necessary because two different championships were held in 1879. C. N. Jackson, B. R. Wise, and M. Shearman have been credited with ending the conflict by creating the Amateur Athletic Association in 1880. The AAC and LAC were subsequently absorbed into this new organization. Chambers conceded begrudgingly, but willingly. Had he lived just a few months longer, Chambers would have likely been delighted to learn that his nemeses, the Waddells, had disastrously failed in their business ventures. They were forced to flee the country the same year that Chambers died, leaving £30,000 in liabilities.[144]

Yet another issue that plagued Chambers' final years was the construction of a small-pox asylum in Fulham. In 1881, Chambers pleaded for an injunction against the hospital, claiming it was a "nuisance" and that his "property had been deteriorated in

[144] Peter Lovesey, "Battle of the Bridges," and "AAA: Start of a Century," in *The Official Centenary History of the Amateur Athletic Association* (Guinness Superlatives Limited, 1979).

value." Chambers' appeal to the court rested heavily on his business' promotion of health and exercise being undermined by the hospital's adjacency. Furthermore, he noted that Lillie Bridge was a common "exercise ground for children of the surrounding schools."[145] Chambers would fight tooth and nail on this matter for the remainder of his life. Unfortunately for him, this proved to be a fruitless effort, as a detailed article dedicated to Chambers noted that the asylum's existence continued to plague Fulham after his passing.[146]

Despite these challenges, we know that Chambers did not die a poor man. Chambers' wife owned land that provided her with generous income. Additionally, the couple had no children. Because of their affluence, Chambers was free to instruct the executors of his will to donate his estate in interesting ways. He posthumously gave a modest sum to the Cumberland and Westmoreland Wrestling Society.[147] His executors also bequeathed a colossal £10,000 pounds for the endowment of "a chair of English Literature in Aberdeen University."[148] While it was never explicitly stated why Chambers did this, his writing career likely inspired this decision.

Lillie Bridge did not fare as well following its founders' death. Without the expert administration of Chambers, the grounds were invaded by corrupt elements involving gambling and the Victorian equivalent of organized crime. This was perhaps ironic, since we know that Chambers had previously defended sports gambling and its reputation in Victorian society. But we have seen that he had drawn a hard distinction between the respectability of a bet "upon a game of pure chance"

[145] *Daily Telegraph & Courier (London)*, 2 December, 1881.
[146] *Sporting Life*, 6 March, 1883.
[147] *The Sportsman*, 15 January, 1885.
[148] *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 25 December, 1890.

and a wager on a "contest in which skill and strength are called to into play."[149] Unfortunately, criminal elements had become so dominant at Lillie Bridge soon after his death that a violent mob eventually destroyed the facility itself in the infamous "Lillie Bridge Riot" of 1887.

On September 19th, 1887, a pedestrian match between Harry Gent and Harry Hutchens was fixed by rival gangs – each instructing their respective shill to lose. The match in question failed to start on time. The tension between the two groups of swindlers became too thick; an upheaval of epic proportions ensued, resulting in the utter destruction of the track, its viewing stand, and other nearby structures.[150] The following day, journalists assessed the damages. One report deplored that "the damage said to have been done on the previous evening had not been in the least overestimated." Its author attested that:

> with the exception of the palings right at the bottom of the enclosure, scarcely a bit of timber had been left intact, the stand in front of the spring track and at the top being utter wrecks. The hoarding down the whole length of Seagrave road is smashed, whilst the bed of the skating rink has been tore up by yards to furnish the infuriated mob with missiles. Broke lemonade and other bottles were lying about in all directions, the window of the porter's lodge are broken, and the dressing rooms and refreshment bars are sacked. Heaps of charred timber indicate where bonfires blazed overnight… several bicycles and tricycles have been detsroyed (sic) and stolen.[151]

The destruction was indeed thorough. Among reporters, it was generally agreed "that the result of the disturbance will be to close the grounds for the purpose to which they

[149] *Land and Water*, 8 November, 1873, vol. XXVI.
[150] Peter Lovesey, *The Official Centenary History of the Amateur Athletic Association* (Guinness Superlatives Limited, 1979), 41.
[151] *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 20 September, 1887.

have been hitherto devoted."[152] This proved to be the case, as Lillie Bridge never reopened. The grounds remained mostly vacant until 1892, when the London and North Western Railway established the Brompton and Fulham Goods and Coal Station on the site of the former sporting ground. This, too, was gradually shut down in the 1960s. The remnants of the station were untouched until the West London line developed West Brompton Station. Today, a small strip of land south of Lillie Road became a modest nature reserve.[153]

[152] *The Derby Daily Telegraph*, 21 September, 1887.
[153] http://www.disused-stations.org.uk/w/west_brompton/

Chapter 6: *Conclusion*

Chambers has remained anonymous in large part despite his ever-present legacy. What little has been written about him has overwhelmingly focused on his efforts to codify sports. Yet Chambers' pioneering of commercialized sports and entertainment is connected with the universal rules he established. Prior to Chambers' work at Lillie Bridge, sports were in a state that was far from acceptable for middle-class participation and spectatorship. Civilized rules, orderly event management, and cross-class separation in competition were not merely for the sake of sport: these measures all contributed to the commercial success of nineteenth century sports as the more outwardly money-making ventures (i.e. entertainment, concessions, entry fees, etc.). Given Chambers' wildly successful and extremely early innovations, historians of sport and leisure should include him as an important figure in the broader narrative about modern and commercial athletics in Britain.

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