

The Industrial Middle Class and the Development of Sport in a Railway Town

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An increase in industrial activity during the Victorian period led to the creation of industrially focused townships such as Crewe, whose growth was stimulated and sustained by the involvement of the London and North Western Railway Company. As in other townships, the paternalism of the employers was reflected in company involvement in all aspects of the social, political and economic life of Crewe and the influence that was exerted on the local population through the engagement of middle-class managers. Men such as locomotive superintendent Francis Webb and company clerk Thomas Abraham had a significant impact on the sporting and recreational life of the town and this paper explores their life courses in some detail to chronicle their involvement. These men were not public school or university educated but they shared similar attitudes to sport with their middle-class counterparts in the South and this paper uses their biographies to suggest that individuals concerned with the organization of amateur sport across the country adhered to the basic tenets of the amateur ethos. The authors also reinforce the notion that, while the creation of National Governing Bodies was certainly important in structuring late nineteenth-century sport, the enthusiasm, commitment and motivation of the individual was always critical in ensuring that local sport was played 'in the right way'.

Keywords: Middle-class, Railway, Amateurism, Paternalism, Athletics, Crewe

Introduction

Urbanization, one of the traditional 'grand narratives' of nineteenth-century history,¹ led to changes in the sporting landscape of Britain as the practice of sport migrated from the intermittent events that typified pre-industrial village life into the cities.² This process was accelerated by technological advances such as the development of the railways, which helped break down spatial barriers and open up new avenues for the circulation of capital.³ The statistics on urban growth in this period suggest that around forty-four per cent of the total population of England and Wales were urban based in 1831 but that this had risen to over eighty per cent by 1911. Although London had the biggest concentration, cities such as Manchester, closely associated with the textile industry, Birmingham, where the metal trades were important, Glasgow, and Liverpool grew to over 500,000, while Sheffield, Leeds, Newcastle and Bristol all developed into mass urban centres after the 1850s.⁴ This process of urbanization and industrialization was accompanied by modifications in the

traditional social and political hierarchy as the emerging middle classes of the late-eighteenth century evolved into a powerful social and political constituency.⁵

Contemporary historians have highlighted an increasing differentiation between social classes from the Tudor period onwards⁶ and its study is vital to the understanding of all aspects of later periods, including sport. Much of this discourse has been informed by the categories and concepts associated with Karl Marx,⁷ who classified individuals according to their relationship to the means of production. Landowners drew income from their estate through rents, bourgeois capitalists obtained income from business profits and proletarian workers exchanged their labour for a wage.⁸ Whilst these categorizations have exerted a powerful influence on the way class has been interpreted, commentators have suggested that a Marxist approach to class analysis is no longer fit for purpose.⁹ Cannadine, for example, suggests that class can be visualized as a hierarchical model, a triadic model or a dichotomous model.¹⁰ Importantly, class was never dependent solely on one's wealth (although the source of wealth did contribute to social standing) but relied instead on the way an individual spoke and dressed, their educational background, and the values they held.¹¹ Gellner emphasizes that a three-tier model cannot possibly appreciate the complexity of human society¹² and it is important to understand that broad categorizations such as 'the middle class' encompass a wide range of disparate groups that shared some values but not others. Although the notion of a profession became central to middle-class identity and status, reinforced by an increasing focus on credentialism, this class never consisted purely of professionals, government officials or bankers but also included those such as factory supervisors and clerks.¹³ Middle-class boundaries were always blurred and, whilst members of the middle class might be recognized as such, their wealth and status fluctuated significantly. In provincial areas, for example, wealthy middle-class families often socialized with the local gentry, forming a social group known as 'polite society', while in urban areas the lower middle class often interacted with the skilled working class.¹⁴ Despite these differences, there is general acceptance that society, at its most basic level, consisted of working, middle and upper classes¹⁵ and this triadic model is utilized here to explore aspects of the impact of the Victorian industrial middle class on sport in North-West England.¹⁶

As the Industrial Revolution gathered momentum, the middle classes, including a number of vigorous and ambitious entrepreneurs, seized political, economic and ideological control from a declining aristocracy.¹⁷ Whilst both the industrial and professional middle classes could proclaim to be 'self-made men', the professional's emphasis on training and service based on merit stood in direct opposition to the industrial entrepreneur's idealization of capitalism.¹⁸ As a result, the middle class was riddled by internal conflicts with the large congregation of middle-class professionals in London holding different values from their industrial contemporaries in the north.¹⁹ This is reflected in the rules and regulations of the National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of sport that emerged throughout the nineteenth century. The majority of these strictly amateur organizations, such as the Amateur Rowing Association, could be found in the south, primarily in London, whilst in the North, organizations such as the Northern Counties Athletic Association (NCAA) tended to be much more inclusive and more tolerant of professional athletes.²⁰ These differences in regional middle-class attitudes can be most clearly seen in the schism in rugby in 1895.²¹

Sport and leisure

Victorian sport and leisure activities helped to delineate social status, with different social groupings having a predilection for different types of activities.²² During the 1830s, for example, pedestrianism,

the precursor of modern athletics and a favourite with the working classes, proved a major spectator and gambling attraction in the emerging industrial conurbations, where the mechanization of the workplace, as well as government legislation, resulted in increased leisure time.²³ The commercialization of the sport was reflected in the building of enclosed racetracks, often established and run by enterprising publicans.²⁴ As the century progressed, however, the dominance of professional sports was challenged by NGBs, formed by middle-class public school/university men who espoused an ethos of amateurism.²⁵ This reflected a change in class attitudes regarding the sporting professional and the morality of gambling with the evolving sport of track and field athletics being firmly regulated by its middle-class aficionados. In 1880, a year after the formation of the NCAA, the governance of athletics was centralized nationally with the creation of the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) by a group of professional middle-class men. They were determined to shape athletics into a format that suited their ethical and philosophical perspective and their eventual assumption of control over the sport on a national level was a contributory factor in the rapid decline of pedestrianism in the latter stages of the century.²⁶

No sporting development occurs in isolation from its social, political and economic context and the rise of the sporting official²⁷ is explored in this paper through the placing of biographical studies of two middle-class industrial managers within their working environment in a Northern town. Francis Webb was the locomotive superintendent of Crewe Works, a production site of the London and North Western Railway Company (LNWR), while Thomas Abraham, secretary of the Crewe Alexandra Athletic Club (CAAC), was employed as a clerk by the LNWR.²⁸ The development of the town due to the presence of the LNWR has been studied before, as has the history of Crewe Alexandra Football Club, but the broader relationship between the railway company, its middle-class managers and the development of sport and leisure in Crewe during Hobsbawm's 'long Victorian' period (1789-1914) has never been previously articulated.²⁹ The intention here is to present Crewe as an exemplar of how industrialization in the form of the railway, and the middle-class men associated with it, stimulated and sustained opportunities for play and recreation. This use of biography as a method of constructing Crewe's sporting past and exploring regional differences in sporting experiences follows examples provided by other authors and has been enhanced by the range of archival material accessed here, which has allowed individual lives to be placed within their context.³⁰ The paper draws upon material from primary sources such as the *Crewe Chronicle* and other local newspapers, census information, birth, marriage and death registers, local maps, event programmes, and railway company records, to uncover the economic and social context of the town in this period and to compile the biographies integral to the study. Although sports historians have sometimes used newspaper archives uncritically, ignoring issues related to potential inaccuracies, bias and the selectiveness of reporters and editors, these sources have been triangulated here wherever possible.³¹

Railway developments and urbanization

The 'long Victorian' period witnessed a new era in transportation and the railways that connected the new and emerging cities stimulated their growth,³² thus having a profound effect on the urban fabric and economy of England.³³ Since the railway required the creation of a completely new network, the visual landscape of the Victorian city and surrounding countryside changed significantly. By 1890, the principal railway companies had spent one-eighth of their capital for the provision of terminals, bought thousands of acres of land and undertaken the direct work of urban demolition and reconstruction on a large scale.³⁴ Historians generally agree that the true start of the

railway age was sixty years earlier with the construction of the first steam-powered line, the inter-urban Liverpool-Manchester Railway. Whilst initially promoted as a freight line to link the port of Liverpool to East Lancashire, sixty-five percent of its revenue came from passenger traffic in the first year of operation, a trend that was mirrored in other railway company spreadsheets until the 1850s. The opening of this line marked the start of a forty-year development in the railway infrastructure that saw the fifty-one miles of track in 1829 extending to 15,736 miles by 1871.³⁵ This expanded network, combined with technical advances in steam locomotives, reduced travel times and meant that the country effectively 'shrank' in size, widening horizons from a local to a national level. Railway travel became immensely popular and helped to break down social barriers as excursions and day trips to the seaside became a staple of British social life,³⁶ while the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851 received six million visitors by rail.³⁷ Sporting events also grew in popularity since spectators could now travel further afield while sports teams could arrange matches with opponents who had been previously too far away.³⁸

Industrial townships

Due to the increase in industrial activity and the need for labour, a number of industrially focused townships emerged during this period.³⁹ Supported by paternalistic, middle-class employers, these towns typically grew around local industries and the infrastructure required was often provided by companies for free or at a subsidised rate. The most commonly referred to example is Cadbury's Bournville site,⁴⁰ which was relocated in the late 1870s from an urban-industrial location into a rural landscape, a move motivated by a combination of business needs and philanthropic desire.⁴¹ Whilst Bournville was not planned or executed as a 'company town' in the traditional sense, Cadbury's did facilitate the construction of housing and infrastructure, taking care not to replicate the conditions of the city.⁴² One of the main features of the Bournville site was its open-air recreation facilities,⁴³ which included factory gardens that were believed to be particularly useful for the female workforce.⁴⁴ At Port Sunlight, the village was constantly expanded upon to house all the workers necessary for the smooth running of the nearby factory. The first set of public buildings came in 1892 in the form of a shop and Gladstone Hall,⁴⁵ which acted as the men's dining hall until canteen facilities were provided at the factory in 1910 and which hosted the dramatic society, choir, minstrel troupe, and chemistry club as well as Sunday services.⁴⁶ A gymnasium was added in 1902 alongside an open-air swimming pool, followed by an auditorium in 1903.⁴⁷ Both Bournville and Port Sunlight reflected the views of their owners, the factory proprietors, and Chance argues that they 'harnessed landscape in this period as a form of social engineering designed to attract and maintain a quality workforce for maximum profit'.⁴⁸ Lever believed in providing a wide range of facilities and gave encouragement to clubs and societies while Bournville represented the Cadbury family's Quaker beliefs that guided the ethics of the firm.⁴⁹ Little work has been done on how these beliefs permeated the middle-class managers responsible for the day-to-day running of the factories and it is the intention here to explore how middle-class railway managers applied the paternalistic, corporate approach of their employers.

Railway companies also created townships associated with industrial and engineering complexes,⁵⁰ such as Doncaster, Derby and Swindon. Prior to 1840, railway companies had their equipment supplied to them by private engineering works,⁵¹ but the rapid expansion of the industry meant that independently owned workshops could no longer keep up with demand so railway companies began to provide their own manufacturing facilities or adapt pre-existing repair shops. Since the majority of

workshops provided both construction and repair services, placing them at or near the centre of the principal focus of railway networks made economic sense,⁵² and this brought small market towns such as Swindon and Ashford to the forefront of railway engineering. This formation of industrial complexes in rural England meant recruiting skilled workers from the pre-existing engineering districts of northeast England, Liverpool, south Yorkshire, Lancashire and Scotland and housing them in specially constructed settlements adjacent to their workshops.⁵³

This process is exemplified by the development of Crewe in the North-West of England. When it was decided to join Birmingham to the Liverpool-Manchester railway in 1837, the new line passed through land that would eventually become Crewe and the construction of a Crewe and Chester line three years later created a railway junction.⁵⁴ A Crewe and Manchester line was added in 1842 and when the Grand Junction Railway (GJR) decided to relocate their Merseyside workshops by settling 221 company employees and their families into the Cheshire area in 1843 it effectively created a new town.⁵⁵ Previously, the parishes of Monks Coppenhall and Church Coppenhall had a combined population of 741, but by 1843, this had increased to 2,000 and census data shows further expansion from that point onwards.⁵⁶ The central location that Crewe provided on GJR owned lines was key to the selection of Crewe as the home of its operations and the company's workshops would develop in less than a generation into one of the most advanced railway and locomotive workshops of the Victorian period.⁵⁷

Sporting developments

Sporting and leisure organizations emerged wherever Victorians congregated in the second half of the nineteenth century, and Crewe was no different in this respect. Crewe Alexandra Athletic Club, which was to become well known in Northern athletic circles, began life as a cricket club having been formed in October 1866, at a meeting attended by eight individuals including Thomas Abraham, one of the subjects of this paper.⁵⁸ By 1867, membership had increased to twenty-four and the club played its first match, beating Tattenhall by eighty-eight runs to forty-five.⁵⁹ A year later, membership had doubled to forty-two, a figure that would stay constant until 1873. After two years of making use of 'unprepared ground' for practice and playing the majority of their games away, the club secured 'a proper plot for the pursuit of the game', at a cost of £22, in 1869.⁶⁰ A subsequent disagreement regarding the lease of the field meant that the club had to seek new accommodation and members obtained another field until 1872, when they acquired a more suitable area of land.⁶¹ Membership grew again in 1873, up to ninety-two, and the club was able to replace the 'old railway coach' they had been using with a 'handsome and commodious' pavilion at the cost of £120.⁶² Further developments came in 1877 with the successful negotiation for the use of the newly constructed Royal Hotel Recreation Ground, built next to the railway station by hotel owner Charles Welsh. Oval in shape, the ground could accommodate cricket, athletics and bicycle racing. To open the ground, the cricket club played host to an athletic festival, which produced a profit of £75 and subsequently became one of the most prominent meetings in the Northern athletic calendar. In August, the club formed a football division, based next door to the recreation ground used by the cricket and athletic sections, which drew its first match at home against the well-regarded Potteries team, Basford. In 1891, the football club decided to break away from the parent club, a decision regretted by Abraham who believed that the club would be bankrupt within two years.⁶³

The expansion of the adjacent railway station in 1898 meant that the Alexandra Recreation Ground was forced to close and the Alexandra Athletic Club (the club was now more known for its athletic

activities rather than its cricket) had to find a new venue. Francis Webb, the locomotive superintendent of Crewe Works, persuaded the directors of the London and North Western Railway (LNWR) to provide another suitable site and the company gifted a plot of land on Earle Street to the club. Within the nine-acre site, three and half acres were dedicated to cricket, and there was space for the construction of a quarter of a mile athletic track and a third of mile of sloped bicycle track. A pavilion was erected at a cost of around £400, together with a grandstand, dressing rooms, bowling green and other facilities. At the opening ceremony, which featured a cricket match between Crewe Alexandra and Nantwich, attended by Webb, town council representatives and local magistrates, club officials publicly expressed their appreciation of the generosity of the LNWR.⁶⁴

The implementation of the LNWR's paternalistic policy towards its workforce was left to the middle tier management of the company and a number of men were important in this respect, reflecting the critical role that individuals have always played in the development of sport. A corporate approach is reliant for its effectiveness on the efforts of those in its employ and two men, Francis Webb and Thomas Abraham, stand out in particular as having made a major contribution to LNWR's efforts to embed itself into the local culture. Both men were intimately connected to the LNWR and they exerted a powerful and lasting influence on the town. In contrast to their counterparts in the South, these were not professional, public school or University-educated men but they were typical of the industrial middle classes that were a central feature of Northern sport and leisure activities.

Francis William Webb: 'The King of Crewe'⁶⁵

Francis William Webb, the third child and second son of William Webb, rector of Tixall, and his wife, Maria, was born at Tixall rectory, Staffordshire, on 21 May 1836.⁶⁶ He was educated at home by his father, commonplace practice for the clergy,⁶⁷ and showed a keen interest in mechanical pursuits from an early age. Webb joined the LNWR in August 1851 and became a pupil of Francis Trevithick, the company's first locomotive superintendent,⁶⁸ serving an apprenticeship for six years before joining the drawing office.⁶⁹ In February 1859, Webb became chief draughtsman for £140 per annum after the death of William Williams⁷⁰ and in September 1861, he was appointed as Crewe work's general manager and chief assistant to John Ramsbottom, the locomotive superintendent of the Northern division.⁷¹ Webb was now responsible for the management of the design and construction of locomotive engines, the waterworks between Crewe and Whitmore and the new Bessemer Steel Works,⁷² an experience that prompted him to leave the LNWR in 1866 to take up a partner and manager's position at the Bolton Iron and Steel Company. Following Ramsbottom's retirement, Webb returned to the LNWR in 1871 as the Chief Mechanical Engineer and Locomotive Superintendent.⁷³ The prospect of getting Webb back had appealed to Richard Moon, chairman of the LNWR and someone who believed that an LNWR official was first and foremost, a gentleman and an LNWR man second, and it has been argued that Webb had an advantage over other candidates because of his 'gentlemanly upbringing'.⁷⁴ Leaving Bolton at the end of June, Webb embarked upon a LNWR funded tour of the United States to study steel production and locomotive practices before assuming his LNWR post in October.⁷⁵ He was now in complete control of thirteen thousand men and the design and execution of the mechanical engineering works for all of the LNWR.⁷⁶

Webb proved to be a difficult man to work with in his later years with the LNWR. His poor performing compound locomotives were not meeting the standards that were expected and he refused to listen to suggestions to change his design philosophy. However, although a chief mechanical engineer was always going to be assessed on his locomotive designs work, this was only

a small part of Webb's overall contribution to the company, which expanded in route mileage, ton mileage as well as general traffic and infrastructure during his time in post.⁷⁷ Webb was also influential in developing Crewe as a town and, as an LNWR representative, he was much involved with municipal politics. When Crewe became a borough in 1877, Webb and the LNWR were unhappy with the state of local governance. In a private letter written to T.W. Worsdell, Webb's chief aide at the works and a local board member, Webb wrote that;

I am only sorry that on Saturday last (June 30) they [the men of Crewe Works] so far forgot their obligations that they did not exert themselves to return some of the company's officers to watch over their own and the company's interests in this railway town of ours.⁷⁸

In a more public letter written before the 1877 election, Webb issued a subtle threat, stating that, 'if the people of Crewe do not study the Company's interest, I shall not be responsible for what the directors will do in reference to putting on the rates'.⁷⁹ In 1880, Webb's friend and colleague, Dr James Atkinson, the LNWR's surgeon in Crewe and leader of Crewe's Conservative Party, approached Webb seeking permission to form a committee of works foremen⁸⁰ who were tasked with approaching prominent supporters within the town, obtaining their candidatures, and promoting their return to the town council as 'Independents'.⁸¹ As the company intensified their presence on the political landscape, Webb became mayor in 1887,⁸² unsurprisingly given the support of the LNWR,⁸³ and he was elected again in 1888. He then used his influence with the LNWR directors to obtain a grant of land for the forty-five acre, oval-shaped Queen's Park,⁸⁴ which consolidated the position of the railway independents on the Council.⁸⁵ Webb later became an alderman with the Cheshire County Council,⁸⁶ a useful appointment for the LNWR since the County Council controlled matters relating to the railway, including deciding the rates that the company paid,⁸⁷ and Webb was also a county magistrate.⁸⁸

Outside of the business and political arenas, Webb's presence was considerable within many of the town's recreational societies and clubs, including the Crewe Alexandra Cricket Club. When the club was facing eviction from their Nantwich Road ground in 1898, due to the adjacent railway station needing to expand because of increased traffic, Webb stepped in and persuaded the directors of the LNWR to provide another suitable site in the form of a plot from their considerable land reserves on Earle Street.⁸⁹ When the new ground was officially opened on May 21, Webb was invited to provide the principal speech and he was given the honour of receiving the first ball in the celebratory cricket match. The assistance provided by Webb was not provided purely out of charity. Webb believed that 'a healthy body conducted to a healthy mind' and by providing a place for employees to exercise and relax he expected them to be more productive at work.⁹⁰ His attitudes to sport mirrored those of his middle-class contemporaries across the country and he supported the exclusion of professional competitors and the abolition of gambling.⁹¹ Shortly after the schism between the Crewe Alexandra club and its football section, Webb and the LNWR released a statement confirming that the company would 'refuse to find employment in the Crewe Works for any professional football player',⁹² a decision that was not universally popular within the town.

Other responsibilities assumed by Webb included acting as president of the Crewe Cricket Club, Crewe's other major cricket club, and he was one of the vice-presidents of the Memorial Cottage Hospital Cup Competition.⁹³ Away from sport, Webb was president of the Crewe Mechanics Institution Chess and Draughts Club, the Philharmonic Society, which had the Duke of Westminster as its main patron, the Scientific Society, the Shorthand Writers' Association and the Horticultural

Society,⁹⁴ as well as being the vice-president of the Chrysanthemum Society.⁹⁵ In all of these aspects, political, sporting and leisure, Webb's life course reinforces the impact that influential middle-class individuals could have on the development of their communities, the range of leadership roles they assumed and the way in which they used these interactions to propagate their values and attitudes. His career also emphasizes that this process was not limited to the Southern public school and university middle class but was replicated by their industrial managerial counterparts in the North. Some of these men were also able to penetrate and influence the Southern-dominated NGBs and this was certainly true of Thomas Abraham, another of LNWR's employees who lived and worked in the Crewe area.

Thomas Maxfield Abraham: 'The Grand Old Man of Amateur Athletics'⁹⁶

Whilst Francis Webb helped establish and sustain the Crewe Alexandra club, with the LNWR's support, it was the ordinary members, most of whom were also railway employees, who managed the everyday affairs of the club. While the Alexandra cricket, athletic and football clubs were initially created and nurtured into successful enterprises thanks to the collective efforts of many different club members, no single individual made more of an impact on the development of local amateur sport than Thomas Maxfield Abraham. Born in 1850 to William Abraham, a druggist and chemist, and his wife Rebecca, Thomas was the eldest of eight children. William's occupational status and the presence of a servant in their Earle Street household in 1851, suggests the family would have considered themselves as middle class.⁹⁷ By 1861, the family had moved, leaving Thomas behind in the care of his uncle, Thomas Beech, a farmer who played a prominent role in local government.⁹⁸ On 29 May 1873, Abraham married Mary Bagshaw, daughter of Benjamin Bagshaw, a works locomotive driver,⁹⁹ although the marriage was short lived as Mary died in 1878.¹⁰⁰

Abraham's death in 1928 marked the end of his sixty years of 'dedicated service to organised amateur sport', which had started immediately after leaving school when he began work on 2 October, 1865 as an apprentice clerk in the accountant's office at the LNWR works in Crewe.¹⁰¹ Starting at a salary of £20 per annum, his wage steadily increased year on year until 1876 where available records suggest it plateaued at £80 per annum.¹⁰² A year after joining the company, Abraham, along with several other interested individuals, formed the Alexandra Cricket Club¹⁰³ and when the club decided to form a football section he was amongst those who oversaw the arrangements.¹⁰⁴ Upon the formation of the Cheshire Football Association in 1878, he was appointed secretary and he was one of the umpires in the first Lancashire Cup Final, held at Darwen in 1880.¹⁰⁵ That same year, Abraham refereed the first Liverpool Cup final and he travelled 'many thousands of miles' to umpire Crewe Alexandra's matches.¹⁰⁶

It was Abraham's contribution to amateur athletics, however, that consolidated his regional and national reputation as a sporting official. The athletic festival that the Alexandra club hosted annually at the Alexandra Recreation Ground evolved over the course of twenty years to become one of the 'premier athletic gatherings in the Kingdom' and Abraham was given much of the credit for its development.¹⁰⁷ He also attended the first NCAA meeting, held on 14 June 1879 in Southport, where he advocated the need for immediate action to be taken over the malpractices that existed in contemporary athletics.¹⁰⁸ The meeting agreed to form a governing body to control the events of affiliated clubs and to promote amateur championships in the North. One of the first things that the new organization's committee (which included Abraham) introduced was a limit of £10 on the prizes

for handicaps because they 'considered that quite enough for the genuine amateur'. They also abolished cheques as prizes and decided to exclude any 'shamateurs' or cheats from athletics.¹⁰⁹

After receiving an invite from the Oxford University Athletic Club to send delegates to a conference at Oxford on 14 April, 1880, Abraham and five other committee members were selected to represent the NCAA and given 'full discretionary powers'.¹¹⁰ The conference was called in order to form a similar organization (which would be known as the AAA) to the NCAA but with jurisdiction over athletics throughout England. The rules they subsequently imposed on affiliated meetings did not prove popular with everyone and Abraham and his fellow executive board members came in for a great deal of criticism. In one instance in 1888, he was issued a formal challenge to a 'dust-up' at a forthcoming athletic festival.¹¹¹ In the end, the AAA, whose committee at its inception in 1880 consisted primarily of an ex-Oxbridge elite as opposed to the railway clerk, ironmonger and journalist who had driven the formation of the NCAA, survived its difficulties and was able to extend its control over amateur athletics in England into the twentieth century.¹¹²

Abraham served on the executive committee of both the AAA and the NCAA uninterruptedly until his age reduced his involvement and he was the honorary treasurer and twice president of the NCAA, as well as serving as vice-president of the AAA for nearly forty years. In 1899, A.T. Shingles and Abraham were credited with the development of the framework for the establishment of the NCAA Handicapping Board of Control.¹¹³ Abraham served on Championship and Olympic Games Committees, being widely considered as one of the most valued members. He was one of the referees judging the track competitions at the 1908 London Olympiad and he was mentioned several times in the official report of the Games.¹¹⁴ In 1922, he was among the official party that received King George V when he attended the AAA Championships at Stamford Bridge.¹¹⁵

While Abraham was one of the key figures in the development of amateur athletics at a national level, he remained firmly in touch with his roots at Crewe. Abraham's talents in organizing and management certainly made him influential in the development of the Alexandra club and he was credited with keeping the club financially healthy. There was general agreement as well that the success of the annual athletic festival could be directly attributed to his efforts.¹¹⁶ In November 1902, at the Crewe club's annual dinner, 'old boy' C. Vickers recalled that,

...progress had indeed been most marked and much of the success which had been achieved was undoubtedly due to the untiring zeal and energy which had been displayed by Mr. Abraham during the time that he with such conspicuous ability, had presided over the destinies of the club in the capacity of general secretary.¹¹⁷

Like many of his contemporaries, Abraham held strong views with respect to athletics and amateur status. Upon receiving a gold badge and honorary membership of the Stoke Victoria Club in 1904, he reminisced on the state of athletics in previous years.¹¹⁸ For Abraham, the character of competitors had been of a much better quality in the 1870's than it was among competitors of the early twentieth century, despite the lack of a controlling body. The amateur definition in that period had forced them to comply because of the exclusion of 'mechanics' and 'labourers' and athletes had competed for a prize of nominal value. As athletics became more popular, prizes had increased in value and gate receipts went far beyond what was required to maintain the facilities leading, Abraham believed, to a lower grade of competition. The system of giving prizes in the form of cheques to be used with tradesmen was abused by competitors and other malpractices were rife.

These behaviours had persuaded Abraham and other representatives of northern-based athletic clubs that change was needed in athletics and so the NCAA had been formed. What makes the NCAA important in the history of the development of athletics is that it served as an inspiration for the AAA that was formed a year later and that those responsible for the creation of the NCAA were also engaged in developing athletics administration on a national scale.

Conclusion

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the industrialization of the 'long Victorian' period, combined with the amateur ideals that emerged during the late nineteenth century, played a significant part in the evolving nature of sport and recreation. This was especially true of the impact of the railways, and the values held by railway employees, on the urban sporting landscape, although this was only part of the role that railways played in the development and administration of towns like Crewe.¹¹⁹ As the railway company expanded so did the town in order to accommodate its growth and the patronage of the LNWR was evident in all aspects of town life from the gifting of Queens Park to the town, to the sponsoring of the Cottage Hospital and the gift of the Webb Orphanage upon his death.¹²⁰ This locally focused philanthropy was not unique to Crewe as industrial and commercial concerns across the country made efforts to improve the quality of life for their workforce. These initiatives were often accompanied by attempts to exert control over the political life of the community and the LNWR played a major role in the politics of Crewe. A decline in Conservative representation, paired with a growth in trade union activity, spurred the LNWR to seize control of the local, Liberal government in 1880 with one of its key employees, Webb, serving as 'puppet master' to railway employees elected to the Borough Council before entering the political arena himself towards the end of the 1880s. All these initiatives, social and political, reinforce the conclusion that, like other middle-class organizations, the LNWR attempted to control their workforce's lives by manoeuvring themselves into every aspect of community life.

Sport and leisure proved a fruitful arena for industrial concerns to exert their influence and impress their values onto the local community through the local engagement of their senior employees. Managerial middle-class sportsmen, as exemplified here by Francis Webb and Thomas Abraham, may not have been public school or university educated but they clearly shared similar attitudes with their employers, and their counterparts in the South, about how sport should be organized and played. Their role within the railway company hierarchy and the influence they exerted locally meant that they were also in a position to propagate their values. They controlled many of the town's sport and leisure organizations through presidencies, vice-presidencies and other positions on the boards of the town's societies and their involvement was never purely altruistic. In the case of the athletic club, for example, the LNWR benefitted through their activities by having a more contented and healthier workforce, which, in turn, might improve productivity. By offering patronage to the athletic club, the directors of the company were also able to press home their middle-class beliefs and ideals onto the organization's working-class members.

Two key areas for future work emerge from this paper. The existence of a North-South divide in the organization of sport in the late nineteenth century is suggested by the evidence elsewhere of tensions between swimming and rugby communities in London and those in the North of England, although it seems from the material discussed here that the individuals concerned may well have shared some common values. These were seemingly not dependant on one's education but on one's status within the local community. To be middle class was to adopt a shared ethos concerning the

way sport should be played, irrespective of whether one was a professional man or an industrial manager. The second point is that more needs to be understood about how the industrial middle class assimilated and applied these amateur values and how far down the company hierarchy these views were accepted critically or uncritically. In order to help answer some of these questions, future research needs to extend the biographical aspects of this work to produce a collective biography of those industrial middle-class individuals who were central to the development of recreation in Crewe in this period.

¹ Chris Williams, *A Companion to Nineteenth Century Britain* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2006), 238.

² Mike Huggins, *The Victorians and Sport* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2004), 1.

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