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## Late nineteenth-century swimming teachers in England

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### INTRODUCTION

Nineteenth-century English society was inherently patriarchal and women's role within that world has often been interpreted through the lens of 'separate spheres', the belief that women were best suited to a life of domesticity.<sup>1</sup> However, confinement to domesticity was never a feature of many women's lives within the working classes or in the lower reaches of the middle class. While wage labour was often seen as a transitional stage for young women between school and marriage, paid employment remained commonplace among women for much of the century and in 1860 it was estimated that more than three million females over fifteen, including over 780,000 married women, were in employment.<sup>2</sup> The majority were working-class women engaged in waged manual work, in contrast to working middle-class women who were often salaried and in supervisory positions, but class boundaries were never strictly delineated and some female occupations straddled the intersections between these populations. This chapter adds to the limited literature on this social group through an exploration of female swimming teachers, women whose class origins lay within the skilled working classes and the lower middle classes, which highlights the ongoing influence of patriarchy on their careers.

Although it has been suggested that circumstance, climate, the availability of facilities, and prevailing social attitudes, were important influences in modernising

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<sup>1</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle-Class, 1780–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> "Statistics as to the Employment of the Female Population of Great Britain," *English Woman's Journal*, March 1, 1860, no. 25: 1-2.

swimming,<sup>3</sup> individual female practitioners were key to driving the transition of ‘bathing’ into ‘aquatics’ for women during the nineteenth century. The building of public baths and washhouses provided a novel working environment and recent scholarship suggests that the women employed in and around these facilities had a significant impact on the development of all aspects of swimming as a sport.<sup>4</sup> To illustrate their influence within the swimming community a combination of biographical methodologies and methods has been employed, including a prosopographical database, collated from census data taken in England between 1841 and 1911,<sup>5</sup> which consolidated details about female swimming teachers to identify trends in the data. This helped to identify individuals and the interconnections that formed their social networks,<sup>6</sup> but this approach has its limitations in being able to explore day to day lives and working practices so the focus of much of this chapter is on the life courses of six practitioners. Exposing these lives is not easy since little trace remains of most swimming teachers, so the narrative draws on a wide range of sources, combining the traditional use of newspapers, texts, directories and organizational records, with census data, birth, marriage and death records, probates, divorce records, and family material gathered through

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<sup>3</sup> Forbes Carlile, *A History of Australian Swimming Training*. A presentation at the World Swimming Coaches Clinic in Indianapolis, Indiana, under auspices of American Swimming Coaches Association, October 9, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Dave Day, *Class, Gender and Employment in England’s Victorian Public Baths*. ISHPES Conference, Paris, France, June 29-July 2, 2016; Dave Day, *The Female Bath Attendant: Nineteenth-Century Sport as a Driver of Gender Equality*. CESH Congress, Florence, Italy, October 22-24, 2015; Dave Day, *The Female Swimming Teacher in Victorian England: A Preliminary Analysis*. BSSH Annual Conference, Swansea University, September 2-4, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Census Returns of England and Wales, 1841-1911. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA): Public Records Office (PRO).

<sup>6</sup> Samantha-Jayne Oldfield, “Narrative Methods in Sport History Research: Biography, Collective Biography, and Prosopography,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1855-1882.

genealogical contacts, to provide an interpretation of female swimming teachers' lives. The chapter concludes with some brief reflections on the use of different biographical methods and suggests combining different approaches to help uncover previously hidden lives, connections and networks.

## SWIMMING

Although both sexes engaged in bathing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, often under the supervision of local 'bathers', swimming for exercise remained a primarily male activity. As the century progressed, swimming became increasingly acceptable for women because of its utilitarian value as a lifesaving activity and its situation in a segregated environment that concealed physical effort. Female doctors advocated swimming as an exercise on the basis that it was good for the lungs and allowed women to use their muscles in a natural and healthy manner, while also helping them to bear healthy children.<sup>7</sup> Widening female participation was facilitated by an increase in baths provision following the 1846 Baths and Washhouses Act, which encouraged local authorities to build facilities for swimming, private bathing and laundries. These provided cold and warm baths for a penny or tuppence, while a swim in a general tepid bath, with a clean towel, could be had for the 'almost ridiculously low charge of one halfpenny' and would 'at least teach as much of that useful exercise as will save life under the ordinary accidents that occur on our rivers.'<sup>8</sup> There was general agreement that these facilities were of 'inestimable benefit' in transmitting middle-class values to the working classes,<sup>9</sup> and a subsequent Act in 1878 stimulated further

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<sup>7</sup> Frances Hoggan, *Swimming and its Relation to the Health of Women* (London: Women's Printing Society, 1879).

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Ashpitel, *Observations on Baths and Wash-houses, with an Account of their History: An Abstract of the Acts of Parliament Relating thereto* (LSE Selected Pamphlets, 1852), 17.

<sup>9</sup> L.J. Beale, *On Personal and Domestic Hygiene Showing the Value of Sanitary Laws Addressed Especially to the Working Classes* (London: John Churchill, 1855).

building. By 1915, there were 343 public baths and 69 wash-houses in Britain, maintained by public authorities who encouraged school swimming, charged low prices, enabling working-class access,<sup>10</sup> employed swimming teachers, and made at least some provision for female swimmers.

At the end of the nineteenth century these aquatic enthusiasts could be found in all levels of the social hierarchy and in all parts of the country. The clientele of Brighton Baths included many aristocratic women and the Bath Club in London had a membership of about 300 by 1900, while middle-class women enjoyed swimming in clubs such as the Ladies (Amateur) Cadogan Swimming Club and the Ravensbourne Swimming Club, whose festival in 1900 involved competitors from Portsmouth, Leeds, Glasgow and Jersey. When the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA), then an exclusively male organisation, presented a silver vase to the club in 1901, this marked their recognition of the increasing number of female swimmers. By this stage there were many working women's clubs and swimming was increasingly being encouraged among schoolgirls.<sup>11</sup> Despite its popularity, however, patriarchal baths' committees, made up of male representatives of local authorities, initially only set aside a few hours at a time on one or two days per week for women and, even when dedicated facilities were provided, female swimmers found their spaces restricted. At Lambeth Baths, opened in 1897, the women's pool was used as a first- and second-class men's pool and a women's pool, in rotation during the winter. This practice had repercussions for the professional swimmers who used these facilities and the increasing

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<sup>10</sup> Christopher Love, "Local Aquatic Empires: The Municipal Provision of Swimming Pools in England, 1828-1918," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 24, no. 5 (2007): 622-627.

<sup>11</sup> *Morning Post*, September 26, 1898; *Girl's Own Paper*, November 26, 1898; *Woman's Herald*, September 28, 1893.

number of women employed in various categories at the baths as swimming teachers, matrons and bath attendants.

### **Baths attendants, matrons and natationists**

As the number of facilities increased, the role adopted by the female 'bathers' who had attended to women on the seafront moved indoors. Some took on formal teaching positions, designating themselves as swimming teachers or mistresses, and some assumed managerial duties as matrons, although the majority referred to themselves as bath attendants, a role that assumed greater importance as more women participated in segregated spaces. Their position, which often included teaching swimming, was fluid with individuals working around a facility according to demand. In 1887, there were several competent teachers on the staff at the Edinburgh Baths but from 'excess of work' they were unable to devote any attention to teaching, their time being devoted to the safety of swimmers, cleaning, and attending to customers requiring hot baths.<sup>12</sup> Attendants normally looked after bathers of their own sex, but women were paid less than men. The weekly wage of a male attendant in Liverpool in 1856 was 24 shillings,<sup>13</sup> but when the Portsmouth Club advertised in 1884 for a female attendant who was able to teach they only offered 15 shillings a week for up to six hours a day with Sundays free.<sup>14</sup> At Dulwich Baths in 1892, Mrs Mary Anderson was hired for 20 shillings a week, while William Sanderson received 25 shillings.<sup>15</sup>

A married couple were often employed as superintendent and matron and lived above the baths. Typically, the man would hire the staff and run the baths while his wife acted as

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<sup>12</sup> "Where are the teachers of swimming?" *Scotsman*, September 7, 1887, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Annals of the Liverpool Corporate Baths Dept., 1952, 29, cited in Claire Parker, "The Rise of Competitive Swimming 1840 To 1878," *The Sports Historian*, 21 no. 2 (2001): 62.

<sup>14</sup> *Swimming Notes*, May 10, 1884, 13, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Polly Bird, "The Origins of Victorian Public Baths, with Special Reference to Dulwich Baths," *Local Historian* 25 (1995): 149-150.

money-taker. Richard and Anne Whitehead were appointed as superintendent and matron of Blackfriars Street Public Baths, Salford, in 1880. Richard received £91 per annum and Anne £26 per annum, plus accommodation on-site in the purpose-built staff apartment, with free coal, gas, and water.<sup>16</sup> When Cardiff Corporation advertised for a general manager and wife, specifically to attend the ladies' baths, they offered a joint salary of £70 per annum with accommodation, coal and gas provided free of charge.<sup>17</sup> Part of the attraction of the post of superintendent was that other family members could be employed and their ability to facilitate access to employment for women from their families highlights the patriarchal influence they wielded. John Howarth was bath superintendent at Victoria Baths in Ormskirk in 1891 with wife Agnes as superintendent and daughters Frances and Edith working as swimming teachers.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to baths employees, an emerging sport and leisure culture stimulated the emergence of several female professional swimmers ('natationists') who displayed diving skills, held their breath underwater, swam in endurance events, raced for money, and performed in aquatic entertainments, shows that involved the staging of commercially profitable spectacles.<sup>19</sup> A popular feature of their performances was ornamental or scientific swimming, which displayed a range of aquatic skills in an artistic manner much like contemporary synchronized swimming. Their skill was widely appreciated, primarily because

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<sup>16</sup> Keith Myerscough. Personal communication.

<sup>17</sup> Simon Graham Allen. *The Provision of Public Baths and Wash Houses in Cardiff and their Effect on Victorian Public Health and Hygiene, 1846-1901*. MA thesis, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, September 1998, 66.

<sup>18</sup> Census Returns 1891. John, Agnes, Frances and Edith A. Howarth (3036/133/37).

<sup>19</sup> These types of displays, especially by young females, still resonate in the contemporary world. See Chisholm, Ann. "Acrobats, Contortionists, and Cute Children: The Promise and Perversity of U.S. Women's Gymnastics." *Signs* 27, no. 2 (2002): 415-50

female spectators would become accustomed to seeing women swimming easily and would be motivated to emulate them. Natationists made a major contribution to swimming, not least through their involvement as teachers. The art of swimming required instruction, and a need for tuition meant that there were always opportunities to supplement the returns from professional performances by teaching others, opportunities which amplified as the number of facilities expanded and the demand for lessons increased. Income from teaching was critical to natationists and in cases such as that of Laura Saigeman, this helped sustain their longevity within the swimming community.

### **Laura Saigeman (1857-1925)**

Laura Saigeman was born in Worthing, Littlehampton, Sussex, in 1857, into a swimming family. She was the daughter of Ben Saigeman, a bathing machine proprietor who instructed all his children in the arts of swimming.<sup>20</sup> Her sister Annie was instructress at Ilfracombe Baths (1881-82) and at Reading Baths (1883-84), later becoming swimming mistress of the municipal baths in South Brisbane, Australia, while sister Janet taught swimming at Eastbourne Baths for twenty years and sister Frances taught many notable families. Brothers Ben and Charlie were also prominent professionals<sup>21</sup> and the family would appear together on occasions.<sup>22</sup> Laura became one of England's best-known swimming professionals as aquatic entertainer, competitor, and teacher, firstly for four years at Brighton Baths and then at Eastbourne Baths.<sup>23</sup> In 1881, she was lodging with the baths manager in Park Cottage, Eastbourne, and working at Devonshire Baths as a swimming instructor. She married engineer Edward Tait in 1882 and was still living at Park Cottage in 1891, along with

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<sup>20</sup> "Death of Mrs Tait," *Littlehampton Gazette*, April 17, 1925, 3.

<sup>21</sup> *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, April 23, 1934, 12.

<sup>22</sup> "Swimming Entertainment," *Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, October 30, 1880, 5.

<sup>23</sup> "Miss Saigeman," *The Wheelwoman and Society Cycling News*, March 20, 1897, 11.



Edward, now manager of the swimming baths, and two-year-old daughter Sibyl. By 1901, Edward was a self-employed bathing machine owner and ten years later he was a mechanical engineer at the Union workhouse.<sup>24</sup>

Laura competed more often than many of teaching professionals, featuring in races off the English South coast in 1873 and 1875, before winning a half mile contest against Mdle. Laurent, from Paris in 1876.<sup>25</sup> She won two out of three races with Agnes Beckwith in 1879,<sup>26</sup> and subsequently styled herself 'Lady Champion Swimmer of England', although she had to relinquish that title following defeat by Theresa Johnson.<sup>27</sup> While racing could lead to rewards from prizes and gambling, it was an intermittent activity. In contrast, aquatic entertainments were a constant feature of the professional's life being especially useful in advertising expertise and encouraging pupils to sign up for lessons as well as generating spectator income. Laura appeared regularly in aquatic displays, demonstrating that skill in the water was not 'confined to the sterner sex',<sup>28</sup> although she was best known as a 'very clever teacher' and her 'excellent' teaching style was highlighted by one patron in 1878.<sup>29</sup> Her skill

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<sup>24</sup> GRO (1857/birth/June/Worthing/2b/266), (1882/marriage/December/EastPreston/2b/657). Census 1881 (1038/36/18). 1891 (772/30/52), 1901 (871/17/25). 1911 (RG14PN4840 RG78PN208 RD71 SD2 ED28 SN195).

<sup>25</sup> *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, August 24, 1873; "Swimming Feats," *Grey River Argus*, XVI, December 1, 1875, 2; "Swimming Fete on the River Lea," *Morning Post*, September 11, 1876, 3.

<sup>26</sup> *The Times*, August 26, 1879, 9; *Bell's Life*, September 27, 1879, 5.

<sup>27</sup> "Swimming. Who is the Lady Champion?" *American Gentleman's Newspaper*, August 1883, 99; "Swimming. The Ladies Championship," *The Times*, November 1, 1883, 9.

<sup>28</sup> "Swimming fete at Brill's Baths, Brighton," *Bell's Life*, November 14, 1874, 8; *Penny Illustrated*, June 5, 1875, 14; "Swimming fete at the Oriental Baths," *Leeds Mercury*, October 5, 1878; *Manchester Guardian*, September 4, 1883, 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Graphic*, August 30, 1879, 211; "Miss Saigeman as a Swimming Mistress," *Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, September 14, 1878, 7.

was attributed to ‘persistent practice’<sup>30</sup> and reporters often pointed out the successes of her pupils, including daughter Sybil, who had won medals by the time she was five.<sup>31</sup> Writing in *Hearth and Home* in 1893, ‘Lady Di’ described Laura as a ‘most able teacher’<sup>32</sup> and Laura was kept busy, sometimes giving as many as fifty lessons in one morning. She also engaged in sculling, dancing, and bicycling, often giving cycling lessons to nervous beginners.<sup>33</sup>

Reflecting the way in which newspaper reports of the period focused on the femininity of swimming practitioners, Laura was described as a well-made muscular woman, particularly graceful in all her movements,<sup>34</sup> and when she was interviewed in 1887 it was in her ‘cosy sitting room adorned with pictures of herself in natatory costume’. She claimed to have taught more people of all ranks and classes how to swim than anyone else and she proudly presented her own version of her racing career, which seemed to have been especially important to her, before taking the reporter to see her regular Tuesday afternoon entertainment, performed in front of both sexes. She dived and floated with ease and confidence, demonstrated her graceful sidestroke, turned somersaults and wrapped herself in a sack, jumping overboard and escaping from it under the water. The reporter described her as an expert in every branch of swimming and advised ladies wishing the best possible swimming tuition to take advantage of her lessons.<sup>35</sup> In 1900, Laura branched out and

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<sup>30</sup> *Penny Illustrated*, September 10, 1887, 6.

<sup>31</sup> “A Lady Swimmer,” *Sussex Agricultural Express*, September 3, 1892, 10.

<sup>32</sup> “The World of Sportswomen,” *Hearth and Home*, July 27, 1893, 370.

<sup>33</sup> “Miss Saigeman,” *The Wheelwoman and Society Cycling News*, March 20, 1897, 11.

<sup>34</sup> “Ladies' Gossip,” *Northern Echo*, August 20, 1894.

<sup>35</sup> “Celebrated swimmers at Eastbourne,” *Eastbourne Gazette*, August 10, 1887, 8.

purchased a bathing machines business, which she ran alongside her husband, an enterprise that seemingly provided a reasonable living since she left £597 when she died in 1925.<sup>36</sup>

**Figure 8.1. Laura Saigeman**



Source: Charles Newman, *Swimmers and Swimming or, The Swimmer's Album* (London: Henry Kemshead, 1899)

### **SWIMMING TEACHERS**

The opportunity for a female like Laura to earn a living as a professional swimming teacher was a result of the increasing popularity of the activity among women, an expansion in indoor facilities and ongoing concerns about maintaining the segregation of the sexes, which resulted in swimming teachers teaching their own sex. In 1859, the *Leeds Times* appealed for female swimmers to pass on their expertise to the next generation and suggested that swimming mistresses could be imported from France, although fathers should be allowed to teach their own children ‘in infancy’.<sup>37</sup> Another writer that year suggested that if a swimming mistress was attached to each bath females might ‘readily learn an art which would assist in

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<sup>36</sup> “Bathing Season, 1900,” *Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, August 18, 1900, 8; BMD. Probate 1925. Eastbourne, 2b 86.

<sup>37</sup> *Leeds Times*, October 15, 1859, 6.

prolonging and saving many a life'.<sup>38</sup> Gradually, as swimming teaching became more widely accepted as an appropriate way for women to earn a livelihood, the supply of female professional teachers increased, especially in London where clubs like the Excelsoir Ladies Swimming Club engaged a swimming mistress at Battersea Baths during the summer.<sup>39</sup> At London University, the Royal Holloway College built a heated pool in 1894 and the staff included a teacher for swimming and lifesaving. Outside of London, the Royal Pump Room Swimming Bath in Leamington engaged a qualified swimming mistress for their ladies' bath as early as 1866<sup>40</sup> and in 1885, the Portsmouth club employed Helga Lassen of Copenhagen to act as its 'lady instructress'.<sup>41</sup> In the Midlands, Cadburys, the chocolate company, recruited full-time female swimming instructors for their baths at their Birmingham factory and within five years 'upwards of two thousand girls' had learnt to swim'.<sup>42</sup>

To get an overview of this expansion, the census data for England and Wales between 1841 and 1911 was trawled and the data analysed. Only individuals who used the term swimming 'mistress', 'teacher' or 'instructor/instructress' to denote their occupational status were considered and those who taught swimming but preferred to call themselves something else, such as aquatic entertainer, bath attendant or professional swimmer, were excluded. This is inevitably an underrepresentation of those involved in teaching swimming given that many women did not have their occupations recorded, especially if they were married, and several

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<sup>38</sup> T. Herbert Braker, "Tracts of the Ladies' National Association for the Diffusion of Sanitary Knowledge-London," *The Medico-Chirurgical Review, and Journal of Medical Science* (1859): 115.

<sup>39</sup> "Excelsior Swimming Club," *Women's Penny Paper*, October 5, 1889, 8.

<sup>40</sup> *Royal Leamington Spa Courier*, April 21, 1866, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Ian Keil and Don Wix. *In the Swim: The Amateur Swimming Association from 1869 to 1994* (Leicester: Swimming Times Ltd., 1996), 21.

<sup>42</sup> John Bromhead, "George Cadbury's Contribution to Sport," *The Sports Historian* 20 no. 1 (2000): 97-117.

individuals who appear as swimming teachers in other research material do not appear as such on the census. In all, 233 relevant individuals were identified, and the indications are that there were an increasing number of females giving swimming teaching as their occupation. In 1841, there are no instances recorded but each subsequent census saw an increase with 110 women giving swimming teaching as their occupation in 1911.

Secondly, there is strong evidence of family influence, particularly patriarchal, in deciding these career choices. Of the 166 swimming teachers whose paternal occupations or, failing that, husbands' occupations, have been identified, 34 (20 per cent) emerged from established swimming families. This is not surprising, since, in activities where finesse and skill are paramount, family involvement tends to be sustained over generations. Thirdly, the evidence suggests that even when women adopted this career path independent of familial influences, their class remained consistent with most individuals emerging from populations that straddled the skilled working class and lower middle-class boundaries, reinforcing the fact that few women from these classes were confined entirely to the home. The largest categories identified from paternal or husband occupations were the skilled working classes with 55 (33 per cent) working in trades such as carpentry and shoemaking, small businessmen 23 (14 per cent), running greengrocers, newsagents and so on, and clerks and managers 21 (13 per cent), ranging from foreman to accounts clerks. The 20 (12 per cent) unskilled working class, including labourers and cab drivers, and the 13 (8 per cent) slightly higher middle-class occupations, such as religious ministers and schoolmasters, made up the remainder. When this data is compared with similar analysis of baths employees it suggest a swimming hierarchy in terms of female swimming/bathing careers, one which places the swimming teacher firmly across the working-class and middle-class boundary both in terms of class origins and working practices.

**Table 8.1. Nineteenth-Century Females Swimming Roles: Approximate Class and Status Hierarchy**

*Sources: National Readership Survey (NRA); National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC)*

Role	NRA	NS-SEC	Social Capital
<b>Matron</b>	C1 Supervisory	3 Intermediate Occupation	High - respectable
<b>Natationists</b>	C2 Skilled Manual	4 Self-employed	High – but less respectable
<b>Swimming Teacher</b>	C2 Skilled Manual	4 Self-employed	Medium – higher over time
<b>Ticket Clerk/Cashier</b>	D Semi-skilled	5 Lower Supervisory	Low
<b>Bath Attendant</b>	D Semi-skilled	6 Semi-routine	Low
<b>Washerwoman/Laundress</b>	E Casual	7 Routine	Very low

While this prosopographical data proved useful in identifying several features of female swimming teachers, such as class positioning and family influence, it is only through more detailed life courses that individual working lives can be better understood. The usefulness of this approach can be illustrated through brief biographies of four swimming teachers who had long careers, Emma Crocker, Charlotte and Jane Humphrey, and Fanny Easton.

#### **Emma Crocker nee Whyte (1860-1949)**

Despite always calling himself as a ‘fret cutter’ in census returns between 1861 and 1901, Charles Whyte was one of the leading swimming professors in Victorian London. Known variously as the ‘champion swimmer of the Thames’ or the ‘five-mile champion’, he was captain of Serpentine Swimming Club in 1866 and swimming master to the Elephant Club in 1869.<sup>43</sup> He involved son Charles in his entertainments and lifesaving displays<sup>44</sup> and passed on

<sup>43</sup> “Swimming. The Serpentine Swimming Club,” *Bell's Life*, December 29, 1883; *Sporting Gazette*, July 3, 1869, 477.

<sup>44</sup> *Bell's Life*, July 20, 1872, 11; “Regent Club,” August 3, 1872, 10.

his skills to daughter Emma who, as swimming mistress at Chelsea and South Kensington Baths, was afforded a financially successful benefit in 1879, at which she went through some 'clever feats of natation'.<sup>45</sup> In 1882, the twenty-two-year old was advertising lessons for ladies and young children on Saturdays at Barnet Swimming Baths,<sup>46</sup> and a year later she was giving lessons at Alexandra Hall Swimming Baths in Blackheath.<sup>47</sup> Having married Thomas Crocker, son of a pianoforte maker, Emma had her first child Archibald in 1884 but was back organizing entertainments and giving aquatic displays a year later.<sup>48</sup> Son William was born in 1886 and daughter Jessie in 1890. By 1891, husband Thomas was a solicitor's certified clerk, and the Law was destined to be a career route for Emma's sons. Despite having no occupation noted in the census, Emma remained active in swimming, presenting the prizes at her father's entertainment in September,<sup>49</sup> and, as the swimming teacher at the Kensington Baths, her 'able system of training' turned many novices into accomplished swimmers. In August 1894, she could be seen teaching in a costume of 'heliotrope flannel, with silk-scalloped edging to the tunic and décolletage'.<sup>50</sup>

After having son Walter in 1894, by which time Thomas was a fully qualified solicitor, Emma was closely associated with the Ladies Tadpole Swimming Club (LTSC), which was very active during the 1890s. A large crowd witnessed the LTSC races in September 1893 when Emma, their swimming instructress, 'worked indefatigably' in handicapping as well as starting and judging. A year later, the LTSC held two races at Kensington Baths when the times were taken by Emma, the 'popular swimming instructress',

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<sup>45</sup> *Bell's Life*, October 11, 1879

<sup>46</sup> *Barnet Press*, May 13, 1882, 8; 17 June 17, 1882, 2; September 23, 1882, 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Kentish Mercury*, June 15, 1883, 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Sporting Life*, October 3, 1885, 4; *Sportsman*, October 3, 1885, 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Sporting Life*, September 16, 1891, 7.

<sup>50</sup> *Hearth & Home*, September 7, 1893; October 12, 1893; April 19, 1894; August 2, 1894.

who had carried out a successful display and entertainment by her many Board School pupils before a crowded audience on the previous evening.<sup>51</sup> The LTSC was flourishing in 1895 when swimmers were advised that they could now obtain instruction in life saving since Emma, the ‘clever little swimming mistress’, had just taken a certificate for this ‘invaluable art’. The club entertainment in July 1895 drew a ‘large and feminine crowd’ to the baths when the races were arranged, and times taken, by Emma, the ‘energetic swimming instructor’, whose life saving classes were proving very successful. She was described as a popular, ‘clever and painstaking teacher’ whose ‘careful tuition’ had led to several successes in passing the bronze medal and certificate examinations of the Life Saving Society.<sup>52</sup> Emma was also, it seems, able to manage her personal affairs equally successfully. The 1939 National Register shows Emma living on private means and at her death in August 1949, she left over £3,000 to Archibald and Jessie.

### **Charlotte and Jane Humphreys**

Living in Marylebone in 1861 was James Humphrey, a bootmaker but best known for being a swimming professor, with wife Charlotte, his son, and daughters Charlotte and Jane.<sup>53</sup> James was swimming master for the Serpentine Club and in 1864 he was presented with a silver medal in recognition of his ‘merit and courage as a teacher of swimming and bather for twenty-eight years past, winter and summer; he having been the first to set the manly and healthful practice of Winter bathing’.<sup>54</sup> In 1867, St Marylebone parochial schools board

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<sup>51</sup> “The World of Sportswomen,” *Hearth and Home*, October 12, 1893, 740; October 18, 1894, 813.

<sup>52</sup> “The World of Sportswomen,” *Hearth and Home*, August 1, 1895; June 13, 1895, 164; July 18, 1895, 354; December 12, 1895, 200; December 19, 1895, 231; January 23, 1896; March 19, 1896.

<sup>53</sup> 1861 Census RG9/77 Schedule 292.

<sup>54</sup> *Era*, July 3, 1864, 13.



employed the 'efficient' and experienced swimming teacher to work with pauper children and he tended to their instruction with 'great care'.<sup>55</sup> James passed on his skills to his daughters and in July 1869 Charlotte, aged 22, and Jane, aged 17, swam across the widest part of the Serpentine with confidence and ease, their 'style and manner doing their father great credit'.<sup>56</sup> Two years later, Charlotte was a teacher of swimming,<sup>57</sup> and at an 1875 entertainment in Paddington Baths she presented a silver cup for the 300 yards race in her role as the resident swimming mistress.<sup>58</sup> In October 1876, Charlotte and Jane presented three medals for the Serpentine Club's 1,000 yards handicap,<sup>59</sup> and, after their father died, these 'experts in everything connected with natation' presented two Leander medals in his memory.<sup>60</sup> The 1881, 1891, 1901, and 1911 censuses and the associated electoral registers record Charlotte and Jane as single women working as swimming teachers.<sup>61</sup> Jane died in 1919, aged 65, and Charlotte died five years later, aged 79, neither of them leaving a will.<sup>62</sup>

Jane ('Jennie') had operated at the Croydon Baths throughout her career and adverts for her teaching classes there appeared regularly throughout the late nineteenth century and

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<sup>55</sup> *Marylebone Mercury*, October 5, 1867, 2.

<sup>56</sup> "Novel Swimming in the Serpentine," *Bells Life*, July 17, 1869, 3; *Marylebone Mercury*, July 17, 1869, 3.

<sup>57</sup> 1871 Census RG 10/165 Schedule 134.

<sup>58</sup> *Bell's Life*, October 16, 1875, 9.

<sup>59</sup> *Bell's Life*, October 14, 1876, 9.

<sup>60</sup> "Swimming. The Serpentine Club. The Humphrey Memorial Trophies," *Sporting Life*, July 23, 1903, 4; see *Bell's Life*, August 27, 1881, 10; August 2, 1884, 3.

<sup>61</sup> 1881 Census RG11/31 Schedule 69; 1891 Census RG12/22 Schedule 94; 1901 Census RG13/23 Schedule 100; 1911 Census returns.

<sup>62</sup> BMD. Registration in Kensington. Volume 1a, pages 130 and 136. Electoral registers.

into the twentieth.<sup>63</sup> She was described as an ‘efficient instructress of ladies’ who had been successful in teaching many ladies to swim easily.<sup>64</sup> In October 1891, when Croydon Ladies’ Swimming Club (CLSC) gave its first public entertainment most of the young female prize-winners had been taught swimming by Jane,<sup>65</sup> and at the club’s third annual entertainment in September 1893, when only women were admitted, Jane sponsored several events and presented the prizes, following which the ‘Misses Humphreys’ gave an ‘excellent display of ornamental swimming’.<sup>66</sup>

**Figure 8.2. Advertisement for swimming teacher Jane (‘Jennie’) Humphrey in 1898**



Source: *Croydon Advertiser and East Surrey Reporter*, August 6, 1898, 5

Jennie also taught swimming to ladies and children at St. Marylebone Baths, where a display of swimming by around sixty women was given in October 1881 at an entertainment

<sup>63</sup> *Croydon Advertiser and East Surrey Reporter*, July 5, 1879, 4; August 1, 1885, 1; August 6, 1898, 5; *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*, July 27, 1907, 7; *Surrey Mirror*, September 3, 1907, 1.

<sup>64</sup> *Croydon Advertiser and East Surrey Reporter*, July 19, 1879, 5.

<sup>65</sup> *Croydon Advertiser and East Surrey Reporter*, October 3, 1891, 8.

<sup>66</sup> *Surrey Mirror*, September 30, 1893, 8.

managed by Miss Foot, the matron, and Jennie, the swimming mistress. Several women spectators were present but, although the costumes were 'becoming in the extreme', gentlemen were rigorously excluded. There were about a dozen races, some for beginners and some for more advanced pupils, and the 'Misses Humphery' exhibited fancy swimming, turning somersaults and floating in various positions.<sup>67</sup> Charlotte continued to operate at Paddington Baths,<sup>68</sup> and when a reporter visited there in 1889, girls and women of all ages were swimming and diving. Charlotte said, 'I try to teach women to swim in eight lessons' and added, 'They have to learn three essential strokes, and when they can do those they can swim sufficiently to save themselves if they were upset in the middle of a river'.<sup>69</sup>

### **Fanny Elizabeth (Nellie) Easton (1854-1919)**

As with the Humphrey sisters, Fanny Elizabeth (Nellie) Easton, made a long career out of teaching swimming, working as a swimming mistress at Hornsey Road Baths between 1881 and 1911. She was born in Middlesex in 1854 to cordwainer Charles Dear and wife Emma and then married James Allford, a tin smith, in 1873.<sup>70</sup> Two years later she was divorced having been adjudged guilty of co-habiting with costermonger Levi Jackson, committing adultery with an unknown man in Hyde Park, and leading the life of a common prostitute.<sup>71</sup> In 1877, the twenty-two-year old machinist, married David Easton, a shorthand clerk, whose brother, T.C. Easton, later became secretary of the Professional Swimming Association.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Sunday Times*, October 16, 1881, 3; *Morning Post*, June 29, 1894, 1.

<sup>68</sup> "Swimming," *Morning Post*, June 12, 1886, 1.

<sup>69</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, June 1, 1889, 7.

<sup>70</sup> 1861 Census RG 9/693 Schedule 138; 1873 May 12 Marriage. Paris Church, St Marks, Notting Hill, Middlesex.

<sup>71</sup> 1874 Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes. James Allford v Fanny Elizabeth Allford & Levi Jackson.

<sup>72</sup> 1881 Census RG 11/337 Schedule 153; *Penny Illustrated*, October 5, 1889, 6.

**Figure 8.3. Nellie Easton**



Source: Charles Newman, *Swimmers and Swimming or, The Swimmer's Album* (London: Henry Kemshead, 1899)

Despite her chequered early life, Nellie established herself as a highly respected teacher and aquatic entertainer and in the 1881 census she described herself as a swimming mistress. She displayed ornamental swimming at the Webb memorial entertainment at Lambeth Baths in September 1883,<sup>73</sup> and over the next few years, she appeared regularly inside and outside of London, with and without her pupils.<sup>74</sup> By 1888, she was swimming mistress at nine metropolitan baths and her aquatic exhibitions were proving popular.<sup>75</sup> At Bath in 1888, Nellie was introduced as the most accomplished lady swimmer in England, and someone who had taught more women to swim than any other female teacher, before she went through several different styles of swimming, including her speciality, revolving in the

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<sup>73</sup> *Penny Illustrated*, September 8, 1883, 7. The Webb Memorial Benefit.

<sup>74</sup> *Bell's Life*, April 16, 1885, 4; *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, July 22, 1885, 1; *Western Daily Press*, July 22, 1885, 1; *Bell's Life*, May 4, 1886, 4; *Penny Illustrated*, April 14, 1888, 234; *Ipswich Journal*, August 3, 1888, 4, 5; August 10, 1888, 5; *Licensed Victuallers' Mirror*, May 7, 1889, 179; *Bristol Mercury*, September 9, 1891, 4; *Morning Post*, October 3, 1892, 5.

<sup>75</sup> *Western Daily Press*, August 29, 1888, 5; *Bristol Mercury*, August 29, 1888, 5; August 30, 1888, 8.

water.<sup>76</sup> Reflecting the fascination these women held for male observers, she was described as a charming and beautifully proportioned woman, while her promotions emphasized that she did not wear corsets in the water and the public were invited to inspect her clothing in the changing rooms for confirmation.<sup>77</sup>

The 1891 census saw Nellie referring to herself again as a swimming mistress<sup>78</sup> and she continued to be active during the decade, exhibiting ornamental swimming at Colchester alongside her pupils, Ada Clair, Nelly White, and Rose French, and demonstrating eighteen items of ornamental swimming and floating in Bristol with Ada.<sup>79</sup> In August 1891, 'three clever lady swimmers', Nellie, Belle White and Rose Gamble, appeared at Ilfracombe Hotel Baths, and Belle White gave an ornamental swimming and floating exhibition with Nellie again in Bristol in September.<sup>80</sup> Nellie gave exhibitions when both the Islington Baths and the Dulwich Baths were opened in July 1892 and when Camberwell Public Baths and Washhouses opened in October that year, Nellie and her pupils gave an exhibition of swimming and floating.<sup>81</sup> She acted as starter at the annual swimming competitions of the Girls' Division of the London Pupil Teachers' Association at Hornsey Road Baths in 1893 and gave swimming entertainments at the Baths in September 1894 assisted by many of her female pupils, ranging from babies upwards, who made a 'grand show, none having the slightest fear of the water, plunging and swimming about like so many ducks'.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, November 1, 1888, 3.

<sup>77</sup> *Licensed Victuallers' Mirror*, September 11, 1888, 390.

<sup>78</sup> 1891 Census RG 12/141 Schedule 450.

<sup>79</sup> *Essex Standard*, August 2, 1890, 5; *Bristol Mercury*, September 11, 1890, 3.

<sup>80</sup> *North Devon Journal*, August 13, 1891, 2; *Western Daily Press*, September 10, 1891, 7.

<sup>81</sup> *Morning Post*, July 27, 1892, 3; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, July 3, 1892, 8; *Standard*, October 3, 1892, 6.

<sup>82</sup> *Woman's Herald*, September 28, 1893, 502; *Penny Illustrated*, September 29, 1894, 198.

**Figure 8.4. Nellie Easton's Entertainment at Hornsey Road Baths, September 1894.**



Source: *Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, September 29, 1894, 198

In the 1901 census Nellie was describing herself as a self-employed swimming mistress and ten years later she was a self-employed swimming instructress again working out of the County Council public baths. Contradicting some reports of her having had children, the 1911 census suggests that she had had no children during her 34 years of marriage.<sup>83</sup> Nellie died on 19 June 1919, leaving effects worth over £2,700.<sup>84</sup>

## THE PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATE AND NGB RECOGNITION

By the time of the 1911 census professional female swimming teachers had achieved a significant degree of official recognition, although they continued to be prevented from competing by the ASA, whose Law 49 specifically excluded anyone who had 'taught, pursued or assisted in the practice of swimming, or any other athletic exercise, as a means of

<sup>83</sup> 1901 Census RG 13/1253 Schedule 253. 1911 Census Schedule 146. Also in household, niece May Brion, 18, assistant swimming instructress at County Council public baths.

<sup>84</sup> Probate London 25 July.

**Table 8.2. Female ASA Professional Certificate Holders 1902**

Female ASA Professional Certificate Holders 1902							1901 Status			1911 Status		
No.	Surname	Christian	Town	Born	Father's Occupation	Age	M/S	Census Occupation	Age	M/S	Kids	Census Occupation
15	Austin	Muriel	Richmond	1879	Watchmaker/Jeweller	23	S	Swimming Instructress	32	M	1	None
18	Foulkes	Louisa	Burslem	1880	Painter	21	S	None	31	M	1	None
21	Daly	Amy	Chelsea	1874	Boot Manufacturer	27	S	Swimming Instructress	37	S	0	Swimming Instructress
34	Yates	Lilian May	Bristol	1876	Water Works Store Keeper	25	M	None	35	M	4	None
39	Wilson	Edna	Leeds	1862	Farmer/General Dealer	38	M	Swimming Instructor	49	M	2	Turkish Bath Attendant
40	Johnson	Charlotte A.	Leeds	1864	Button Trader	37	M	None	48	M	0	None
41	Craven	Elizabeth	Bradford	1873	Blacksmith	28	M	Swimming Instructor	Emigrated to Canada			
43	Proctor	Clara	Bradford	1880	Stoker in Dyehouse	21	S	Drawer in Worsted Mill	31	M	0	Stitcher in Cotton Dyehouse
44	Cunliffe	Jane	Leeds	1881	Miner	20	S	None	30	S	0	Teacher of Music
50	Howard	Lily	Bradford	1877	Stoker in Mill	24	S	None	34	S	0	Swimming Instructress
54	Sanderson	Ethel Mary	Huddersfield	1880	Bank Caretaker	21	S	None	31	M	0	None
55	Beaumont	Adelaide J.	Huddersfield	1866	Draper	36	M	Fancy Draper Shop Keeper	44	M	8	None
61	Purcell	Mary	Eastbourne	1880	Shoe Maker	21	S	Swimming Teacher	31	S	0	Swimming Mistress
62	Ireland	Olive	Richmond	1879	Licensed Victualler	22	S	None	32	M	0	Assisting in business (Pub)
64	Perkin	Gertrude	Leeds	1884	Millwright	17	S	None. Lodging at Baths.	27	M	3	None
65	Steele	Nellie	Newcastle	1881	Baths Manager/Plumber	20	S	Book Binder	30	M	3	None

pecuniary gain',<sup>85</sup> a standard rule for many National Governing Bodies of sport in this age of amateurism. However, the ASA also realised that professionally qualified teachers were essential for increasing the numbers of people who could swim so the organisation instituted a Professional Certificate in 1899, partly as a means of establishing control over the field. By 1900, the ASA had awarded 26 certificates to male and female candidates, the first woman recipient being twenty-three-year-old Muriel Austin of Richmond.<sup>86</sup> Of the 356 certified teachers in the 1913 handbook, 108 were women,<sup>87</sup> 16 of whom had gained certificates by 1902 as shown in Table 8.2, which reinforces the class origins of these women, as assessed by their fathers' occupations, and highlights once again that the census often did not record women's occupational status, especially after marriage. Further recognition came for these women with the growth of international competition. In 1910, the Fédération Internationale de Natation agreed to sanction women's events and when women's swimming events and a diving contest were included in the 1912 Olympic programme the British team were accompanied to Stockholm by two women as chaperones and coaches, a Mrs Holmes and twenty-seven-year-old Clara Jarvis.<sup>88</sup>

### **Clara Jarvis (1882-1940)**

Clara was born on 23 August 1882 to house painter John and Elizabeth Jarvis, with whom she was still living as a nineteen-year-old.<sup>89</sup> Although the 1901 census does not record her

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<sup>85</sup> Charles M. Daniels, Johansson, H. and Sinclair, A., *How to Swim and Save Life* (Spalding's Athletic Library Series, British Sports Publishing Company Ltd, 1907), 110.

<sup>86</sup> *ASA Committee Minutes*, 12 May 1900; *ASA Committee Report*, 1902.

<sup>87</sup> *ASA Handbook*, 1913, 193–95.

<sup>88</sup> *ASA Committee Minutes*, 1912, 150.

<sup>89</sup> 1891 Census. RG12/2530.1901 RG13/2992.



occupation, a year later she was honorary instructor to the Leicester Ladies' Club and in 1903 the club engaged her professionally, as did the Leicester Ladies' Junior Branch. In May she was appointed as instructress to the Ladies' section of the Coventry Swimming and Life Saving Society. Clara was described as an experienced swimmer who had been taught by her brother J.A. Jarvis, a leading amateur swimmer, five years previously. She was able to teach the new Jarvis-Nuttall kick, plunging, plunge diving, floating, revolving, sculling, walking on water and so on and she held the ASA professional teacher's certificate, number 73, plus the Royal Life Saving certificate and bronze medallion.<sup>90</sup> The Society subsequently awarded its diploma to Clara in 1909.<sup>91</sup>

At the opening of the Derby baths in 1904, Clara gave a 'finished exhibition of trick swimming'<sup>92</sup> and at Teignmouth in 1906, Clara's ornamental swimming exhibition included demonstrating the over-arm stroke, propelling feet first, water wheel, walking on the water, full-length somersault, reversed propelling, swimming like a seal, floating, swimming like a porpoise, waltzing, and revolving on surface of water. The performance of this 'amphibious lady' was 'characterised by that masterly art which stamps her as being one of the best lady swimmers of the day'.<sup>93</sup> A month later, Clara gave another exhibition in Gloucester, performing with 'remarkable grace and ease', before distributing the prizes at the end of the gala.<sup>94</sup> The 1911 census records Clara as a 'Swimming Teacher'<sup>95</sup> and when she married

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<sup>90</sup> "Swimming and Lifesaving," *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, April 22, 1903; April 29, 1903; "Swimming. Amateur Association Meeting in London," *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, May 11, 1903, 9.

<sup>91</sup> "Notes on Swimming. Royal Life Saving Society," *Nottingham Evening Post*, November 27, 1909, 3.

<sup>92</sup> "Notes on Swimming," *Nottingham Evening Post*, April 30, 1904, 6.

<sup>93</sup> "Benefit Day at Teignmouth on Saturday," *Western Times*, August 13, 1906, 3.

<sup>94</sup> "Gloucester Swimming Club," *Gloucester Journal*, September 22, 1906, 3.

<sup>95</sup> 1911 Leicester, 50 Adderley Road.

Robert Rayns later that year she received wedding gifts from most of the prominent Ladies' swimming clubs in the Midland District. After honeymooning in London, she resumed her duties as swimming instructress to the Leicester, Loughborough, Burton, Coventry, and Hinckley Ladies' swimming clubs retaining her professional name as 'Madame Jarvis'.<sup>96</sup>

**Figure 8.5. British relay team in 1912 with Clara ('trainer') in middle**



Source: *Sketch*, July 24, 1912, 28

Clara reputedly coached Jennie Fletcher to six ASA 100 yards titles and several world records between 1906 and 1912 before being appointed by the ASA as professional trainer to the female swimmers selected for the British Olympic team at Stockholm, where the team was accommodated under Clara's supervision at the Hotel Excelsoir.<sup>97</sup> The swimmers, who had been 'assiduous in their training' subsequently won the 400 metre team relay and the ASA recorded that October that Clara had been 'untiring' in her efforts on behalf of the team,

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<sup>96</sup> *Leicester Mail*, December 16, 1911.

<sup>97</sup> "Olympic Games," *ASA Committee Minutes*, March 1, 1912, 90; April 13, 1912, 137, 31; "Report of the Selection Committee," *Amateur Swimming Association Committee Minutes* October 12, 1912, 150.

discharging her duties ‘in the most capable manner’.<sup>98</sup> Following Stockholm, Clara continued her teaching activities alongside her coaching duties and one of her pupils, six-year-old Freda Pickett, swam half a mile across Dover Bay in 19 minutes in July 1912.<sup>99</sup> The 1939 National register records Clara as a ‘Teacher of Swimming’ and it was reported that year that Melton school had presented a stool to their departing physical training and swimming instructress, Miss Jarvis.<sup>100</sup> When Clara died the following year she left over £1,200 to her husband, now a motor engineer.<sup>101</sup>

## DISCUSSION

The Victorian and Edwardian periods witnessed a significant expansion in the number of women engaging in swimming and in swimming-related occupations. Despite the restrictions imposed by patriarchal baths committees who, despite their acceptance of female swimming as a respectable activity, continued to give preference to males in terms of accessibility to spaces and times for swimming, women took advantage of societal norms that insisted on segregated spaces to search out opportunities to swim, perform, and teach. The overall picture given by this narrative is that of an increasing number of working-class and lower middle-class women, both married and single, finding employment as swimming teachers within the new public baths in this period, often, though not exclusively, through family influences. While every swimming-related life-course reflected the context in which it was lived the evidence suggests that the careers of many of these women did not conform to the discourse

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<sup>98</sup> “The Olympic Games. Swimming,” *Scotsman*, July 16, 1912, 8; *ASA Committee Minutes* October 12, 1912, 150

<sup>99</sup> “Tiny Swimmer’s Feat. Girl of Six Crosses Dover Bay in Nineteen Minutes,” *Daily Mirror*, July 17, 1912, 4.

<sup>100</sup> “Gifts to Melton Headmaster and Member of Staff,” *Leicester Daily Mercury*, July 28, 1939, 16.

<sup>101</sup> National Register 1939; Probate 1940.

surrounding the impact of the ‘domesticity’ ideology on gender employment patterns, although in the majority of the instances cited in this chapter the boundaries between their domestic and working lives were constantly blurred by the widespread involvement of their families and close confederates within the swimming community.

Both the prosopographical data and the individual biographical material indicate that this was an acceptable working environment for women at the intersections between the working and middle classes and that some of them made substantial careers as swimming teachers, as well as achieving a degree of financial security. All the women considered in the biographies here appear to be living comfortably by the end of their lives and in some cases, most obviously that of Emma Crocker, their careers enabled them to achieve a level of social mobility, although in her instance it is likely that her husband’s occupation played a significant part in that process. Not surprisingly, given their mother’s interests, her children William and Jessie competed in swimming as youngsters before pursuing their own careers, the returns from which highlight the social and economic advancement made by the family within a single generation.<sup>102</sup> Jessie was a kindergarten teacher in 1911 and married a jeweller and furniture dealer in 1918 before becoming a shorthand secretary. When she died in 1985, she left more than £134,000. Walter, Archibald, and William became solicitors and served in the First World War.<sup>103</sup> All three did well financially, with Archibald leaving over £24,000 at his death in 1960 and Walter leaving over £33,000 in 1963. The most successful was William, who won the Military Cross before practising with various London firms and receiving a knighthood in 1955. When he died in 1974, he left more than £122,000. The careers of Emma’s children highlight the degree of respectability that could be achieved by

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<sup>102</sup> *Sporting Life*, September 29, 1897, 6; October 2, 1900, 4; October 2, 1901, 7.

<sup>103</sup> *Record of Service of Solicitors and Articled Clerks with His Majesty’s Forces, 1914-1919* (London: Spottiswoode, Ballantyne & Co. Ltd., 1920).

female swimming teachers and reflects the widespread appreciation of the contribution they made to raising awareness of the value of swimming to women and the subsequent expansion in female participation.

As in all athletic activities in this period, however, their initial opportunities were often dependent upon men.<sup>104</sup> The Humphrey sisters, Laura Saigeman, and Emma Crocker were all inducted into the swimming community by their fathers, reinforcing the patriarchal influences highlighted by the prosopographical data. In addition, almost every reference to Clara Jarvis records her relationship with her brother John Jarvis, the leading amateur swimmer of the period who won Olympic medals and 24 ASA titles, and this continued throughout her career.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, while patriarchy seems to have been an important factor in the early stages of their careers, it does seem from their biographies that some of these women were able to subsequently exert some control over their activities and that the tenets of Victorian patriarchy never extended completely into all their lives.<sup>106</sup> No doubt these women had to negotiate carefully the accepted gender norms and boundaries but they seem to have found ways to circumvent some of the conventional constraints associated with the patriarchal ideology. The Humphrey sisters, for example, avoided the more repressive arrangements that often came with marriage and childbirth, Clara Jarvis kept her maiden name throughout her teaching career, and Laura Saigeman was able to take on a bathing

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<sup>104</sup> Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (London: Routledge, 1994), 97.

<sup>105</sup> See "World of Sport," *Portsmouth Evening News*, May 13, 1903, 4; "Benefit Day at Teignmouth on Saturday," *Western Times*, August 13, 1906, 3; "Swimming and Lifesaving," *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, April 29, 1903; "Tiny Swimmer's Feat. Girl of Six Crosses Dover Bay in Nineteen Minutes," *Daily Mirror*, July 17, 1912, 4.

<sup>106</sup> Catriona M. Parratt, "Athletic 'Womanhood': Exploring Sources for Female Sport in Victorian and Edwardian England." *Journal of Sport History* 16 no. 2 (1989): 154.

machines business under her own name, while Nellie Easton established a personal reputation that had little to do with her husband's career. In all these respects, these women made life choices that contributed to their establishing a degree of independence and self-determination.

## CONCLUSION

Research into previously hidden lives is always difficult given the paucity of resources normally available and it pays researchers working on 'history from below' to explore different complementary approaches. In reflecting on the methodologies employed in this chapter, it is clear that the prosopographical catalogue has proved useful in uncovering some common characteristics and the social networks of these swimming teachers, as well as helping to identify suitable case studies for further study, but its reliance on census data means that it needs to be treated with caution. Higgs stressed that quantitative data is not necessarily 'raw material' for unbiased scientific analysis, it is also a human construct, so it cannot be used uncritically and he argued that, without a grasp of the processes involved in census data collection, the historian could end up building 'elaborate quantitative mansions on shifting archival sands'.<sup>107</sup> This is particularly true in this narrative since the way that women's occupations were recorded impacts on any interpretation of the data. For example, Laura Saigeman's occupation was never recorded on the censuses after her marriage, even though the individual biographical material demonstrates that she continued to operate extensively within the swimming world. Similar omissions occur regularly elsewhere, reflecting the census enumerators' view of the place of women with the social world rather than any reality.

It is essential, therefore, that census statistics are supplemented with all the historical and literary evidence available to be able to draw any realistic conclusions about topics such

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<sup>107</sup> Edward Higgs, *A Clearer Sense of the Census* (Public Record Office, 1996).

as previously hidden working lives and that biographical methods should be combined creatively to produce what Jockers calls, a 'blended approach'.<sup>108</sup> This type of research not only enables more reliable connections to be established between the generic and the specifics of past working lives and practices but it also enables the researcher to reflect more overtly on the dynamic relationship that always exists between the historian and the subject. Carr emphasized the need for imaginative understanding for the people being considered and argued that history cannot be written unless the historian can achieve contact with the mind of those being studied.<sup>109</sup> Diverse interrogations and interpretations of the source material, presented through different modes of expression, can only help in that respect.

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<sup>108</sup> Matthew L. Jockers, *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary Theory* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 26.

<sup>109</sup> E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

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