

Unintended Consequences: Bathhouses and the Expansion of Occupational Opportunities for Victorian Women.

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Although the social structures of Victorian Britain have been interpreted through the lens of 'separate spheres', a division of normative behaviours according to gender and class, class and gender boundaries were always blurred and scholars have argued for more case studies to discover how gender and class intersected at a micro level.¹ In response, this paper uses the creation of public baths and washhouses to explore how women from the lower middle and working classes took advantage of emerging employment opportunities as natationists, teachers, matrons, bath attendants, clerks, and ancillaries. The paper combines short biopics and mini case studies with prosopographical data compiled by colleague Margaret Roberts from census data collected between 1841 and 1911. Since the use of censuses to study the status of women has some issues because the data was compiled by men who had preconceptions about the societal position of women,² resulting in a significant under-estimation of women's work,³ census statistics are supplemented here with other historical evidence to illustrate the mobility of class and gender constraints while also reinforcing the ongoing impact of patriarchy on the lives of working women.

Women's Work

Thousands of women were employed by 1841, mostly as domestic servants, factory operatives, needlewomen, agricultural workers, or in domestic industries, although middle class women were put in a difficult position as ideas of 'refinement' increasingly prescribed a life of domesticity for women.⁴ It has been argued that this 'separate spheres' ideology became more entrenched throughout society, but this metaphor relates principally to the experience of middle-class women and utilises 'simplistic categorizations that assume the feminine is only about gender and never about other social identity locations' such as class.⁵ Although wage labour was supposedly a transitional stage for women between school and marriage, paid employment remained commonplace among married women.⁶

Baths and Washhouses

The building of baths and washhouses provided opportunities for single and married women from the working and lower middle classes. Middle class concerns about the 'condition' of the working classes was the catalyst for the 1846 Baths and Wash-Houses Act, which encouraged local authorities to build facilities that catered for swimming, private bathing, and laundry, at a price that was affordable to everyone. The Act also required byelaws to be made to ensure privacy and security at the Baths, to make sure that there was a separation of the sexes for anyone over eight years old, and to determine

¹ Amanda Vickery. Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History *The Historical Journal*, 36, 2 (Jun., 1993), 383-414, 413-414.

² Higgs, Edward: "Women, Occupations and Work in the Nineteenth-century Censuses", in: 23 *History Workshop Journal* (1987), pp.60, 63-64.

³ Hill, Bridget: "Women, Work and the Census: a Problem for Historians of Women", in: 1 *History Workshop Journal* 35 (1993), 78-94, p.82.

⁴ Pinchbeck, Ivy. (1981). *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850*. London: Virago Press, 282, 284, 287, 293-294, 315.

⁵ Susie Steinbach. "Can We still Use 'Separate Spheres'? British History 25 Years After Family Fortunes" *History Compass* 10/11 (2012): 826-837

⁶ August, Andrew: "How Separate a Sphere? Poor Women and Paid Work in Late-Victorian London", in: 3 *Journal of Family History* 19 (1994), 285-309, p.285.

the duties of the 'officers, servants and others' that were appointed.⁷ The subsequent Public Baths and Washhouses Act of 1878 stimulated the building of indoor facilities and the Baths that emerged functioned as key loci in the middle-class mission to propagate their values throughout society.

Female Swimming Teachers

One unintended consequence of facility creation was that female professional swimmers were presented with additional opportunities to develop aquatic careers, although these women might not have been entirely self-selecting in terms of their career choice, given the presence of family patriarchs. For Professor Peter Johnson, the addition of his daughters to his troupe from the 1870s enabled him⁸ to increase his earning potential at home and abroad.⁹ In 1886, Johnson and six daughters appeared in Paris and in 1892, the Johnsons performed in Russia.¹⁰

The popularity of female natationists stimulated the creation of female swimming clubs and a demand for swimming classes.¹¹ Concerns about maintaining the segregation of the sexes, which resulted in swimming teachers teaching their own sex, encouraged more women to become professional swimming teachers.¹²¹³ Census data indicates that the nine swimming mistresses recorded in 1871 had risen to 110 by 1911, a significant underrepresentation given that several other individuals have been identified as swimming teachers in other research material. Analysis of the data highlights the influence of the patriarchy on their careers. Of the swimming teachers whose paternal or husbands' occupations have been identified, 20 per cent came from established swimming families. Kate and Lizzie Boon were the daughters of a swimming instructor, while others, such as Annie McGarrick and the Leadbetter sisters, were the daughters of baths superintendents.¹⁴

Another significant factor is that the class origins of female swimming teachers, as assessed by fathers' occupations, were consistent. Leaving aside the 20 per cent emanating from swimming families, the largest categories were the skilled working classes with 33 per cent working in trades such as carpentry and shoemaking, small businessmen running greengrocers, newsagents and so on (14 per cent), and clerks and managers (13 per cent). The 12 per cent unskilled working class and the 8 per cent higher middle-class occupations, such as religious ministers and schoolmasters, made up the remainder.

This prosopographical data has been critical in identifying key features of female swimming teachers, such as class positioning and family influence, but it reveals little about the nuances of individual life experiences, narratives best understood through biographies, as in the following biopics.

⁷ *Bill for promoting Voluntary Establishment in Boroughs, Cities and Towns in Ireland, of Public Baths and Washhouses 1846* (523). House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online.

⁸ *Era*, "The Mermaids and Merman," March 12, 1881, p. 21.

⁹ *Blackpool and Fleetwood Gazette*, "The Baths," June 3, 1881, p. 5; *Era*, "Amusements in Blackpool, Circus Tower," July 6, 1895, p. 16; *Bell's Life*, "Swimming," May 6, 1882, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, "Parisian Shows," p. 62; July 17, 1886, p. 84; *Era*, "Music Hall Gossip," February 27, 1892, p. 17.

¹¹ Parker, Claire (2010) 'Swimming: The 'Ideal' Sport for Nineteenth-century British Women', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 27: 4, 675 — 689 683 *Bicycle, Swimming and Athletic Journal*, 27 Nov. 1878, 3. City of Birmingham Public Baths, 1897, 62.

¹² *Bell's Life*, "Female Natation," September 27, 1879, p. 5.

¹³ *Standard*, July 22, 1878

¹⁴ Census Returns, William Tuohy 1841 Scottish Census 493/7/24/18. 1851 (1589/425/3); 1861 (648/65/30); 1871 (1131/45/10); 1881 (1150/52/24); 1891 (2689/62/7); 1901 (986/77/6); GRO (1902/death/Portsmouth/2b/348); Annie and Ada Tuohy 1901 (3184/46/29).

Emma Crocker nee Whyte

Charles Whyte, one of the leading swimming professors in London,¹⁵ passed on his skills to daughter Emma who was swimming mistress at Chelsea and South Kensington Baths by 1879.¹⁶ In 1882, the twenty-two-year-old was advertising lessons for ladies and young children at Barnet Baths and a year later she was giving lessons at Alexandra Hall Baths in Blackheath.¹⁷ After marrying solicitor Thomas Crocker, Emma had the first of her four children in 1884 but was back giving aquatic displays a year later.¹⁸ Despite having no occupation noted in the 1891 census, Emma was still the swimming teacher at Kensington.¹⁹ By 1894, she was swimming instructress to the Ladies Tadpole Swimming Club and she officiated their races as well as giving displays with school pupils and instructing in life saving.²⁰ Within a generation Emma's family made significant social and economic progress.²¹ Daughter Jessie married a jeweller and left more than £134,000 when she died. Sons Walter, Archibald, and William became solicitors²² and William received a knighthood while Emma was able to live on her private means in the Inter-War period.

Charlotte and Jane Humphreys

The 1881 to 1911 censuses and electoral registers record Charlotte and Jane Humphreys as single women working as swimming teachers.²³ Their father James was a bootmaker, but he was best known for being a swimming professor,²⁴ and his daughters followed in his footsteps. By 1875 Charlotte was the swimming mistress at Paddington Baths.²⁵ When a reporter visited Paddington 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'.²⁶ Jane, an 'efficient instructress of ladies', operated at the Croydon Baths throughout her career and at a club entertainment in 1893, when only women were admitted, she sponsored events and presented prizes before the 'Misses Humphreys' gave an 'excellent display of ornamental swimming'.²⁷

Fanny Elizabeth (Nellie) Easton

Not all teachers had family background in swimming. Fanny Elizabeth (Nellie) Easton, who worked as a swimming mistress at Hornsey Road Baths between 1881 and 1911, was the daughter of a cordwainer who first married a tin smith and then David Easton, whose brother, T.C. Easton, became

¹⁵ *Sporting Gazette*, July 3, 1869, p. 477.

¹⁶ "Chelsea and South Kensington Swimming Baths," October 11, 1879, p. 5.

¹⁷ *Barnet Press*, May 13, 1882, p. 8; June 17, 1882, p. 2; September 23, 1882, p. 2; *Kentish Mercury*, June 15, 1883, p. 4.

¹⁸ *Sporting Life*, October 3, 1885, p. 4; *Sportsman*, October 3, 1885, p. 3.

¹⁹ *Sporting Life*, September 16, 1891, p. 7; *Hearth and Home*, "The World of Sportswomen," September 7, 1893, p. 546; October 12, 1893, p. 732; "The World of Sportswomen," April 19, 1894, p. 792.

²⁰ *Hearth and Home*, "The World of Sportswomen," October 12, 1893, p. 740; October 18, 1894, p. 813; "The World of Sportswomen," August 1, 1895, p. 423; June 13, 1895, p. 164; July 18, 1895, p. 354; December 12, 1895, p. 200; December 19, 1895, p. 231. January 23, 1896; March 19, 1896.

²¹ *Sporting Life*, September 29, 1897, p. 6; October 2, 1900, p. 4; October 2, 1901, p. 7.

²² *Record of Service of Solicitors and Articled Clerks with His Majesty's Forces, 1914-1919* (London: Spottiswoode, Ballantyne and Co. Ltd., 1920).

²³ 1881 Census RG11/31; 1891 Census RG12/22; 1901 Census RG13/23; 1911 Census returns.

²⁴ 1861 Census RG9/77 Schedule 292; *Era*, July 3, 1864, p. 13; *Marylebone Mercury*, October 5, 1867, p. 2.

²⁵ 1871 Census RG 10/165 Schedule 134; *Bell's Life*, October 16, 1875, p. 9; October 14, 1876, p. 9; August 27, 1881, p. 10; August 2, 1884, p. 3; *Sporting Life*, "Swimming. The Serpentine Club. The Humphrey Memorial Trophies," July 23, 1903, p. 4.

²⁶ *Morning Post*, "Swimming," June 12, 1886, p. 1; *Pall Mall Gazette*, June 1, 1889, p. 7.

²⁷ *Croydon Advertiser and East Surrey Reporter*, July 5, 1879, p. 4; July 19, 1879, p. 5; August 1, 1885, p. 1; October 3, 1891, p. 8; August 6, 1898, p. 5; *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*, July 27, 1907, p. 7; *Surrey Mirror*, September 30, 1893, p. 8; September 3, 1907, p. 1.

secretary of the Professional Swimming Association.²⁸ Nellie established herself as a highly respected teacher and aquatic entertainer and by 1888, she was swimming mistress at nine metropolitan baths, her aquatic exhibitions were popular,²⁹ and she was officiating at schools competitions. A *Penny Illustrated* artist sketched her giving swimming entertainments in 1894, when Nellie was assisted by 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'.³⁰ Between 1901 and 1911 Nellie described herself as a self-employed swimming mistress working out of the Council public baths and she died, without having had any children, in 1919, leaving over £2,700.³¹

Female swimming teachers achieved official recognition when the Amateur Swimming Association introduced a Professional Certificate in 1899,³² the first female recipient being Muriel Austin, daughter of a watchmaker.³³ Sixteen women had gained certificates by 1903 and 108 by 1913.³⁴ Further recognition came in 1912 when female swimming events were included in the Stockholm Olympics. The British team were accompanied by twenty-seven-year-old Clara Jarvis, sister of leading swimmer Jack Jarvis, and instructress to the Leicester, Loughborough, Burton, Coventry, and Hinckley Ladies' swimming clubs. She held the RLSS Diploma and ASA certificate, making her as qualified as any man, and the ASA report following Stockholm commended 'professional trainer and attendant' Clara for discharging her duties 'in the most capable manner'.³⁵

Staffing the Baths

While the provision of swimming-related careers for women had never been an objective for the middle-class promoters of the baths and washhouses, their creation resulted in an expansion in employment opportunities as supervisors, cashiers, bath attendants, and ancillary staff. The staff at the Hastings Baths in 1873 included a ticket clerk, a carpenter, an engineer, a laundress, and both male and female bath attendants. The ticket clerk was paid 12s a week, while bath attendants and laundress were paid 10s each.³⁶ Reflecting their status with baths committees and customers, staff were consistently referred to as 'servants'.

Superintendents and Matrons

A hierarchy evolved within the female baths staff with older, married matrons overseeing the working lives of less respected colleagues such as baths attendants, laundresses, and washerwomen. A married couple were often employed as baths' superintendent and matron, and they lived above the baths.

²⁸ 1861 Census RG 9/693 Schedule 138; 1873 May 12 Marriage. Paris Church, St Marks, Notting Hill, Middlesex; 1874 Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes. James Allford v Fanny Elizabeth Allford and Levi Jackson; 1881 Census RG 11/337 Schedule 153; *Penny Illustrated*, October 5, 1889, p. 6.

²⁹ *Western Daily Press*, August 29, 1888, p. 5; *Bristol Mercury*, August 29, 1888, p. 5; August 30, 1888, p. 8.

³⁰ *Woman's Herald*, September 28, 1893, p. 502; *Penny Illustrated*, September 29, 1894, p. 198.

³¹ 1901 Census RG 13/1253 Schedule 253.1911 Census Schedule 146. The household included niece May Brion, 18, assistant swimming instructress at County Council public baths; Probate London 25 July.

³² *ASA Committee Report for 1899* submitted to the ASA on March 24, 1900; Sinclair, A. (1906). *Swimming and Life Saving*, London: Health and Strength p. 8. *ASA Committee Minutes*, May 12, 1900. ASA Archives, Loughborough.

³³ *Amateur Swimming Association Committee Minutes*, 12 May 1900; Miss Muriel Austin, 23, Sheen Road, Richmond. Certificate number 15; Census Returns 1901. (674/89/20). Muriel Austin b. 1878 Ryde Isle of Wight. Daughter of Frederick Austin Watchmaker/Jeweller. Swimming Instructress; *Amateur Swimming Association Committee Report*, 1902.

³⁴ *ASA Handbook 1913*, 193–95.

³⁵ *The Times*, March 4, 1912, p. 15; *ASA Committee Minutes*, 1912, 150, report of the Selection Committee, Stockholm Olympic Games 1912.

³⁶ *Hampshire & Portsmouth Telegraph*, December 24, 1873, 4.

These roles were relatively well remunerated. When 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, plus accommodation on-site, free coal, gas, and water.³⁷

These positions were not dependant on aquatic abilities, but rather that they were a joint team capable of managing a small business. Typically, the man would hire the staff and run the baths while his wife acted as money-taker,³⁸ as well as providing a public face for the couple. In 1891, the Croydon Ladies Club presented Mrs. Creak the 'respected manageress of the baths' with a travelling bag and umbrella in appreciation of her 'courtesy and thoughtful care',³⁹ and visitors to the LTSC races in 1893 were entertained to tea by the matron, Mrs. Middleweek.⁴⁰ One attraction of these posts was that other family members could be employed. John and Agnes Howarth were superintendent and matron at Victoria Baths in Ormskirk in 1881 and daughter Frances was a swimming teacher. By 1891 nineteen-year-old daughter Edith was also a teacher of swimming.⁴¹

Analysis of census returns reinforces this family influence. Of 241 matrons, 219 had familial connections to the baths (91%) with 206 of these (94%) being married to the bath's manager/superintendent. With respect to the other clerical roles, both married and single women were involved. They were often not well paid and at Blackfriars Street Baths, Salford in 1880, ticket clerk Jane Thompstone was paid 12s a week and Lucy Cantrell was paid 10s.⁴²

Bath Attendants

Following the 1846 Act, more women were employed as 'bath attendants'. They played a critical role, their duties ranging from teaching, to monitoring the safety of the pool, cleaning, or attending to customers requiring hot baths,⁴³ and they worked long hours. Adverts from Leeds in 1895 and Liverpool in 1899 specified that applicants for the role of 'female attendant and clerk' at the public baths had to be able to swim.⁴⁴ As with swimming teachers, female attendants attended bathers of their own sex although they were generally paid less than men and at Dulwich Baths in 1892, Mary Anderson was hired for 20s a week, while William Sanderson received 25s.⁴⁵

Census returns show an increasing number of females, married and single, giving 'bath attendant' as their occupation, especially after the 1878 Act, with the 75 bath attendants recorded in 1871 rising to 455 by 1911. Analysis of the occupations of fathers and husbands of 464 women who could be confidently identified as working at the public baths, shows that the fathers of 37 out of 223 (17%) had baths connections and that 106 of 241 (44%) husbands were similarly engaged. The proportion of

³⁷ Keith Myerscough – personal communication; County Borough of Salford, *Report of the General Baths Committee*, 5 May 1880, 209.

³⁸ Bird, P. (1995). The Origins of Victorian Public Baths, with Special Reference to Dulwich Baths, *Local Historian* 25 pp. 149-150.

³⁹ *Croydon Advertiser and East Surrey Reporter*, October 3, 1891, p. 8.

⁴⁰ *Hearth and Home*, September 7, 1893, p. 564; October 12, 1893, p. 740.

⁴¹ Census Returns 1861–1891. John Howarth 1861 (4440/252/18), 1871 (3874/119/37). John, Agnes, Frances and Edith A. Howarth 1881 (3750/55/40), 1891 (3036/133/37).

⁴² County Borough of Salford, *Report of the General Baths Committee*, May 5, 1880, 209. Thanks to Keith Myerscough for providing details of the Salford Baths.

⁴³ *Scotsman*, "Where are the teachers of swimming?" September 7, 1887, p. 9.

⁴⁴ *Liverpool Mercury*, "Persons wanted," April 20, 1899, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Bird, Polly: "The Origins of Victorian Public Baths, with Special Reference to Dulwich Baths", in: 25 *Local Historian*, (1995), pp.149-150.

those with family connections reduces, steadily suggesting that the occupational area was becoming more widely available, but the class origins of women involved (as assessed by their father's occupations) remained consistent across censuses, with most attendants having backgrounds that straddled the boundaries between the artisan classes and the lower middle classes.

The Marylebone Baths in London

Family connections were a feature of the Marylebone Baths supervisory staff after they opened in December 1849.⁴⁶ Several 'ladies of importance' were attending the baths by 1852⁴⁷ and in 1858 superintendent Edwin Foot, whose wife, Frances, was the matron, allocated Wednesdays for women only.⁴⁸ Under the supervision of Frances, a committee of ladies formed a club and adverts appeared for female swimming classes to be taught by Elizabeth Beckwith, wife of Professor Fred Beckwith.⁴⁹

Edwin and Frances founded a dynasty at the Baths. In 1861, son Frank was the money taker⁵⁰ and ten years later daughter Annie was working as a 'money taker', before taking over from her deceased mother as matron.⁵¹ Annie married jeweller Owen Marchant in 1883. He was assistant superintendent at the Baths by 1884 and then he took over as superintendent after Edwin died.⁵² In 1897, the revamped baths were opened with four swimming pools, one specifically for women, which was 'beautifully and elaborately appointed' and should 'commend itself to the taste and requirements of high-class society'.⁵³ After Annie died that year, Owen married Elizabeth Crawford and the couple subsequently appeared on the 1901 and 1911 censuses as superintendent and matron.⁵⁴

Other female workers at Marylebone during this period included Jane Humphreys who taught swimming to ladies and children and organised swimming entertainments with Annie Foot in 1881. Several women witnessed the racing but, although the costumes were 'becoming in the extreme', men were rigorously excluded.⁵⁵ Eleanor Classey was also a professional swimming teacher in Marylebone between 1881 and 1901.⁵⁶ In 1887 there were sixty women washers, who were paid 1½d per hour,⁵⁷ and in 1891, the bath attendants included Mary Ann Crawford whose daughter Mary was a 'cashier Public Baths'.⁵⁸

⁴⁶ *Morning Advertiser*, "Opening of the Marylebone Baths and Washhouses," December 12, 1849, p. 3; *Illustrated London News*, "St Marylebone Baths and Washhouses," January 12, 1850, p. 32.

⁴⁷ Ashpitel, Arthur. *Observations on Baths and Wash-Houses, with an Account of Their History: An Abstract of the Acts of Parliament Relating Thereto, Etc.* LSE Selected Pamphlets. Weale, 1852, 28. <https://jstor.org/stable/60239734>.

⁴⁸ 1851 Census. HO 107/1489. 181 Marylebone Road, Baths and Washhouses, Marylebone, London; *Marylebone Mercury*, April 17, 1858, p. 1; May 8, 1858, p. 4; July 3, 1858, p. 2.

⁴⁹ *London Evening Standard*, "Female Swimming. Marylebone Baths and Washhouses," July 15, 1858, p. 6; *Morning Post*, "Mrs Beckwith at Marylebone," July 31, 1858, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Census 1861. RG 9/79. 181 Marylebone Road, Baths and Washhouses, Marylebone, London.

⁵¹ Census 1871. RG 10/169. 181 Marylebone Road, Public Baths, Marylebone, London; Census 1881. RG 11/150. 181 Marylebone Road, Public Baths, Marylebone, London.

⁵² Census 1891 RG 12/97 RG12/101 RG12/100

⁵³ *Edinburgh Evening News*, "Today's London Letter. Ladies Water Polo," October 17, 1896, p. 2; *Sporting Life*, "Opening of the Marylebone Baths," March 10, 1897, p. 6; *London Evening Standard*, March 8, 1897, p. 4; *Lloyd's Weekly*, March 7, 1897, p. 11.

⁵⁴ *Northern Whig*, "Deaths," July 7, 1897, p. 1; 1901 Census RG 13/111 181 Marylebone Road, Public Baths, St Marylebone, London; *Freemasonry Membership Registers*, Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London, England, Reel Number: 17

⁵⁵ *Sunday Times*, October 16, 1881, p. 3; *Morning Post*, June 29, 1894, p. 1.

⁵⁶ *Bucks Herald*, July 16, 1887, p. 8.

⁵⁷ *Bucks Herald*, July 16, 1887, p. 8.

⁵⁸ Census 1891 RG 12/97 RG12/101 RG12/100

The Kent Street Baths in Birmingham

The Kent Street Baths, which opened in Birmingham in 1851,⁵⁹ were unusual in that superintendents were appointed for their engineering expertise and not as part of a management couple. As a result, Birmingham relied heavily on other female administrative staff and advertisements for 'Money Takers' always asked for a 'respectable middle-aged Female'.⁶⁰ Mary Hughes, a fifty-two-year-old widow, and her daughter were employed as cashiers at the baths in 1861, living on the premises.⁶¹ In 1890, another advert for a money-taker was aimed at a widow who had good references and was 'well up in figures'. Wages were fifteen shillings per week with unfurnished apartments and applications, including qualifications, recent testimonials, and the age and number of children, had to be in the candidate's own handwriting.⁶² Cashier Clara Thorne, a thirty-eight-year-old widow with two children, was living at the Baths in 1891, while widow Mary Portlock was living and working as cashier at Kent Street in 1901 and 1911.⁶³ The management was also keen to ensure they recruited the right type of bath attendant and in 1883, they were looking to employ a 'Woman (respectable young)'.⁶⁴

By 1867, the first-class swimming bath was reserved for ladies until noon on Wednesdays⁶⁵ and the management advertised for a 'respectable' female, competent to teach ladies the art of swimming.⁶⁶ Elizabeth Tomlinson, the wife of the swimming master at Kent Street, was teaching swimming in the 1870s and 1880s.⁶⁷ Professor John Bates⁶⁸ taught at Kent Street from the 1880s,⁶⁹ as well as giving swimming displays with his family.⁷⁰ A 'Bates' Troupe' exhibition in 1897 included daughter Lizzie singing 'Daisy' while underwater.⁷¹ By 1901, Lizzie was a self-employed 'Teacher of Swimming' while another daughter, Edith, was a swimming mistress at Stourbridge.⁷²

Conclusion

The creation of nineteenth-century Baths and Washhouses was driven by the concerns of the middle classes about the state of the working classes and the facilities represented a key element within a broader movement designed to propagate middle class values to all sections of the population. While an expansion in career opportunities was not in the forefront of the minds of the instigators of the Baths and Washhouse movement, one of the most significant unintended consequence of their efforts was the rapid and widespread engagement of women in swimming, as employees, entrepreneurs, and participants. The gender segregation at the baths and an insistence on same sex teaching meant that matrons, female bath attendants, and female swimming teachers were in constant demand. The

⁵⁹ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 19 May 1851, p. 4; *Birmingham Journal*, 12 April 1851, p. 7; 24 May 1851, p. 8.

⁶⁰ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 1 October 1855, p. 3; *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 21 July 1863, p. 2.

⁶¹ 1861 Census 9/2141.

⁶² *Birmingham Mail*, 19 April 1890, p. 4.

⁶³ 1891 Census RG12/2381; 1901 Census RG13/2835; 1911 Mary Portlock, 72 Belgrave Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham.

⁶⁴ *Birmingham Mail*, 11 June 1883, p. 4.

⁶⁵ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 10 July 1867, p. 1.

⁶⁶ *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 7 June 1867, p. 1; 29 March 1877, p. 4.

⁶⁷ 1871 Census RG10/3103; 1881 Census RG11/2981; 1891 Census RG12/2473.

⁶⁸ 1861 Census RG 9/2152; 1871 Census RG10/3113; 1881 Census RG11/3011; 1891 Census. RG12/2401. Births, Marriages and Deaths; Baptism Register. Parish Church St Paul Birmingham, 1884, 1886, 1888, 1890.

⁶⁹ *Evening Despatch*, 29 December 1939, p. 8; *Birmingham Mail*, 29 December 1939, p. 8; *Sports Argus*, 30 December 1939, p. 2; 13 January 1940, p. 2.

⁷⁰ *Dart*, 12 August 1886, p. 14; 23 September 1887, 8; 19 August 1892, p. 14; 26 August 1892, p. 8.

⁷¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 27 July 1894, p. 8; *Birmingham Pictorial and Dart*, 24 September 1897, pp. 8-9.

⁷² 1901 Census RG13/2842; *Sports Argus*, 25 May 1901, p. 4; For a more comprehensive biography of the Bates family see Dave Day, 'A 'Remarkable Career of Public Usefulness': Birmingham Swimming Professor John Bates', playingpasts.co.uk Nov 9, 2020.

overall picture is of an increasing number of women, both married and single, being employed within the new baths, often as a result of family influence. While notions of separate spheres may have influenced the nature and extent of their careers, the ideology never extended completely into all their lives.⁷³

Every swimming-related life-course reflected the context in which it was lived but the evidence suggests that for many of these women this was an acceptable working environment for women at the intersections between the working and middle classes. The way in which some female bath employees transcended traditional notions of separate spheres provides a useful exemplar of how notions of gender roles were not always constrained by stereotypical and artificially created boundaries. This was particularly true for those who pursued long-term careers as swimming teachers, an occupation that, if properly managed, could lead to a degree of financial security. The women considered in the biographies here were 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.

Having said that, the data also makes it clear that for female swimming communities the influence of patriarchy in determining career choices was significant. Even though their lives might apparently challenge any rigid notion of 'separate spheres' it seems that few women really exercised any significant degree of self-determinism in their working lives. As in most situations in this period, the opportunities for women were often dependent upon men, and there is a strong sense throughout this paper of the importance of male kinship in generating employment prospects within the new facilities. Just as female natationists were almost always introduced to the activity through fathers and brothers, bath attendants often entered their careers through male connections, and matrons were almost exclusively engaged as an adjunct to their husband's appointment. The same is true for swimming teachers and the Humphrey sisters and Emma Crocker were inducted into the swimming community by their fathers, reinforcing the patriarchal trends highlighted by the collective data. Nevertheless, while patriarchy seems to have been an important factor in the early stages of their careers, their biographies suggest that some of these women were able to subsequently exert some control over their activities and that Victorian patriarchs never dictated all aspects of their lives. No doubt these women had to carefully negotiate 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, while Nellie Easton established a personal reputation that had little to do with her husband's career.

⁷³ Catriona M. Parratt, 1989. 'Athletic "Womanhood": Exploring Sources for Female Sport in Victorian and Edwardian England.' *Journal of Sport History* 16 (2): 140-157. 154