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### *Abstract*

Bourdieu regarded biographies as illusions, arguing that the straightforward, one-dimensional life story could not exist and that lived lives are chaos. For C. Wright Mills, however, observers need to fully understand how biographies intersect with social structures. The changing nature of the sporting context in the late nineteenth century was reflected in the significantly different lives experienced by swimming professors Frederick Beckwith and Walter Brickett, whose careers overlapped, spatially and temporally. The creation of the Amateur Swimming Association, in 1886, forced many professional swimmers from the Beckwith era to predicate their aquatic entertainments at places such as the Westminster Aquarium, the "Aq", and by the time Brickett began coaching, a generation later than Beckwith, swimming was an amateur controlled activity. The social networks that Walter established with leading amateurs, especially through involvement with the life saving association, allowed him to remain an independent professional but one acceptable enough to be appointed as trainer to the 1908 and 1912 Olympic teams. Both men achieved a measure of recognition, although the considerable variation in their coaching biographies, despite their temporal proximity, is lasting testimony to the power of sporting bodies to structurally determine the nature of the coaching context.

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Every individual lives, from one generation to the next, in some society...he lives out a biography...within some historical sequence. By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of his society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove (Mills, 1970, p. 12).

Although Bourdieu regarded biographies as illusions, arguing that the straightforward, one-dimensional life story could not exist and that lived lives were chaos, he recognised that individual careers, or life-stories, could be seen as a reflection of the social structure (Bourdieu, 1998). Similarly, C. Wright Mills believed firmly in the notion that men make history and social analysts therefore need a clear appreciation of how biography interfaces with social structures (Mills, 1959, pp. 6, 143). The changing nature of the sporting context in the late nineteenth century, and its impact on coaches, is demonstrated by the significantly different coaching lives experienced by Frederick Edward Beckwith and Walter Septimus Brickett, whose coaching career intersected with Beckwith's, spatially and temporally. This paper explores the structural constraints that determined the life courses of these coaches, especially the creation of amateur swimming associations which restricted the financial returns available from racing and encouraged professors like Beckwith to further predicate aquatic entertainments alongside their teaching. Walter emerged onto the swimming scene a generation later than Frederick by which time competitive swimming was an amateur controlled activity which tolerated professionals only in the context of teaching.

Coaches operate as social beings within a social milieu and successful practitioners, like Beckwith and Brickett, are those who prove capable of adapting their behaviours to meet the unique demands of their environment. During the nineteenth century, professional

swimmers, having established their prowess by attaining a "championship", consistently used the symbolic capital garnered from performances to establish themselves as "Professors", thereby advertising their personal expertise, the fact that they earned their living through the activity, and that they were available for coaching. What distinguished professors from other swimming teachers was the breadth of their activities. In addition to teaching, they competed against each other, they performed swimming feats for the public, and they trained promising individuals. While the trajectory of each professor's career was dictated by his abilities as swimmer, coach, and publicist, it was also heavily influenced by the spaces and facilities available. Coaches moved to where they could find the crowds, the swimming baths, and the competition, to support them.

Beckwith, born in Ramsgate circa 1821, relocated to Lambeth in London, after beating all the "cracks" in Southern England (*The Era*, 1898 June 4), an astute decision given a tenfold population increase in the parish between 1801 and 1901. Lambeth's numerous theatres and music halls had a reputation for "sensational" performances and census returns for 1881 show nearly three hundred actors, dancers, comedians, as well as over eighty acrobats, equestrians and other artistes as residents. At *The Royal Victoria Palace Theatre* "The lower orders rush there in mobs, and in shirt-sleeves applaud frantically, drink gingerbeer, munch apples, crack nuts, call the actors by their Christian names, and throw them orangepeel and apples by way of bouquets." By 1872, the *Surrey Theatre*, *Canterbury Music Hall*, *South London Music Hall*, *Astley's Royal Amphitheatre*, and the *Bower Music Hall*, were all operating, like the "Vic", within eight hundred yards of Lambeth Baths (Centre for Metropolitan History, 2006, pp. 383-407). These privately run baths on Westminster Bridge Road were described at their opening in 1853 as "the most extensive in England" (*The Times*, 1853 July 4). The gymnasium that operated there during the winter included an indoor track and Beckwith was promoting professional pedestrian events by the end of the 1850s (British Library *Evanion* 1882; *The Era*, 1859 January 23). He was swimming master at Lambeth Baths for more than twenty years, and taught at several public and military schools while his position at Lambeth allowed him to organise galas and benefits, both inside and outside of London (*The Era*, 1857 September 13; 1858 August 15; 1858 October 3; 1859 June 26; 1859 August 28; 1898 June 4).

Although Frederick described himself as a Fancy Willow Seat Maker in 1851, he was a Professor of Swimming ten years later, having established his swimming credentials by winning and defending the Championship of England (*Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 1850 August 4; 1851 August 10; *The Era*, 1898 June 4; 1854 August 6; Thomas, 1904, p. 253). He began his coaching career during this period and was writing on swimming, producing *The Whole Art of Swimming* in 1857, as well as creating the National Philanthropic Swimming Society during 1859 to spread among the working classes "a knowledge of the art of swimming" (*The Era*, 1855 July 22; 1856 April 6; 1858 July 18; 1859 June 19; *The Morning Chronicle*, 1857 May 29). He also evolved aquatic displays, which included daughter Jessie, and sons Frederick and Willie (*The Times*, 1863 October 7; *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, 1867 June 29).

Between 1859 and 1860 Beckwith managed *The Leander*, an alehouse in Westminster Road, and, in 1861, he took over *The Good Intent* in Lucretia Street, close to the baths, where there was a comfortable parlour for members of Parliament and their friends, a large clubroom, a taproom, and a covered skittle ground. Activities on offer included harmonic meetings, "select" sparring conducted by "clever professors", every "convenience for gentlemen trying their dogs" with "Plenty of rats always on hand." Beckwith advertised his large collection of sporting pictures while sporting books like *Fistiana* were kept behind the bar. By February 1862, *The Good Intent* was the most celebrated sporting resort in Lambeth and was "nightly patronised by crowds of the right sort". Leading professionals debated aspects of their sports and accurate news of every sporting event of the day could be "constantly gleaned" at the house of the Champion Swimmer of England (*Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 1859 December 4;

1860 April 29; 1861 September 22; 1861 September 29; 1861 October 6; 1861 October 13; 1861 December 1; 1861 December 22; 1862 February 2; 1862 February 9).

Beckwith continued to develop his aquatic entertainments, which included tank displays in music halls, theatres, and aquaria. In 1869, the family appeared at Cremorne Gardens in Chelsea, where the "Beckwith Frogs...in fleshings and drawers...flash about the aquarium with a fishlike facility that is extraordinary", and, in 1872, Les Enfants Poissons, two of the Professor's children, made their debut at the Porcherons Music Hall in Paris (*The Era*, 1868 January 26; 1868 March 29; 1872 February 4; 1872 August 18; *Liverpool Mercury*, 1868 February 15; *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, 1869 June 19; *Bideford Gazette*, 1875 June 29; British Library *Evanion* 1566; 1667; 984; 161; 869; 1138; 966). Many displays featured Willie, described as "the most graceful, as well as the most perfect, over-arm stroke swimmer the world has yet seen". (Watson, 1899, p. 18; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 1880 October 3; *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, 1870 July 9; 1872 October 19; 1874 June 13; 1881 August 6; *Liverpool Mercury*, 1881 August 1; *The Leeds Mercury*, 1882 August 17; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 1882 August 27; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 1892 December 14; *The Graphic*, 1892 December 17; *The Era*, 1892 December 17). If Willie, "who has so fully kept pace with the wonderful march of improvement", should fail, then younger brother, Charles, billed in 1883 as "The Present Champion Swimmer of England of his Age", could replace him (British Library *Evanion* 983; *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, 1890 March 15; *Ashore & Afloat*, 1883 November 2; *News of the World*, 1886 October 24; *The Graphic*, 1887 June 4; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 1889 December 19; *Daily News*, 1889 December 20; *Glasgow Herald*, 1889 December 21; *The Era*, 1892 October 8; 1895 December 28; 1898 February 26; 1898 July 9).

During 1877, Beckwith was the host of the *King's Head* in Westminster Bridge Road and a later *Business Directory* listed him as both "teacher of swimming 156 Westminster Bdge rd SE. Agent for aquatic galas with his family" and "tobacconist 142 Westminster Bridge rd SE" (*The Era*, 1877 July 8; *The Business Directory of London and Provincial and Foreign Trade Guide*, 1884, p. 47). By 1891, the professor had moved, with daughter Lizzie (12) and son Robert (7), to Tothill Street opposite the Royal Aquarium (The "Aq") in Westminster (Census Returns 1891). Early public aquaria had been built for the purpose of education and scientific study but, by the 1870s, private companies were building aquaria for amusement. The Royal Aquarium and Summer and Winter Garden in Westminster, was opened in 1876, opposite the Houses of Parliament. It was intended to be a cultural institution but, after mounting losses, the directors hired ex-trapeze artist, "The Great Farini", as manager and he made "The Aq" a place of popular entertainment (Norfolk, 2004). The aquarium tanks subsequently became the site for Beckwith's displays and teaching classes throughout the 1880s.

These aquatic entertainments involved a range of "Feats of Natation" including the sidestroke, the over-hand stroke, the chest stroke, swimming feet first, lifesaving, and ornamental and "scientific" elements including drinking a bottle of milk underwater, waltzing, and swimming with hands and legs tied (British Library *Evanion* 814; 2756; 1798; 1150; 1408; 1395; 983). Advertising material for the "Aq" consistently included references to the professor's diversions alongside notices for attractions such as Nat Emmett's performing goats, Madame Paula, "fighting and conquering alligators", and Little Lu Lu on the high wire. Beckwith was fully aware of the value of the female performer and daughter Agnes, the "Premier Lady Swimmer of the World", maintained a lifetime's association with swimming, as teacher, competitor, and performer (*News of the World*, 1886 December 26; British Library *Evanion* 487; 500; 996). She had a hundred and fifty-one weeks of continuous engagement at the "Aq" and her performances were visited by royalty, the Professor subsequently advertising his promotions as being patronised by "T.R.H. the Prince and Princess of Wales and Royal Family" (*Swimming Notes*, 1884 May 3 p. 8; Watson, 1899, p. 21; British Library *Evanion* 983 1883; 339). Agnes married William Taylor, a theatrical agent and an integral part of the Beckwith community, in 1882, but kept the Beckwith name for public performances (General

Registry Office; Census returns 1891 and 1901; *The Era*, 1879 November 9; 1882 September 9; 1889 July 27; 1892 June 25; 1892 July 9; 1892 September 24). Agnes exhibited in North America in 1883, and swam in France and Belgium as well as having engagements with the Great Barnum and Hengler's Cirque in 1887 (*The Penny Illustrated Paper*, 1883 August 18; *Liverpool Mercury*, 1887 February 8; *The Era*, 1887 March 5).

The close relationship between entertainment and swimming was not unique either to the sport or to the age, but Beckwith clearly had the acumen to develop his public persona and to present himself positively to as broad a church as possible. No contemporary swimming professor was as well respected, either as a teacher or an exponent of the art, although a series of misfortunes, including a burglary where losses included his £200 Championship of England testimonial belt, meant that Frederick ended his days in "straitened circumstances" (*The Era*, 1895 November 2; 1898 June 4). Thomas (1904) suggests he died in "much distress" (p. 295) while Watson (1899) referred to the "veteran's melancholy life and still more melancholy death" (p. 18). When this "father of English swimmers" died in May 1898, having "of late been rarely seen in public", few people, other than family, attended "the last obsequies of one who has been before the public for half a century" (*The Era*, 1898 June 4; 1898 June 11; General Registry Office 1898 Deaths: April to June Frederick Edward Beckwith 77 Uppingham 7a.199). A depressing finale for a man who through his coaching and teaching, demonstrations and exhibitions, his exploitation of the potential of female swimmers, and through his entrepreneurial skills, was as responsible for the growing appreciation of swimming at the end of the nineteenth century as any individual or organisation.

Unfortunately, amateurs, not professionals, ultimately wrote the history of swimming. On 7 January 1869, London swimming clubs formed the Metropolitan Swimming Club Association which evolved into the Swimming Association of Great Britain (SAGB) in 1874. Although professionals and amateurs continued to race and mix socially, meetings held during 1881 eventually agreed a definition of amateur which prevented amateurs and professionals competing together. Subsequently, the Professional Swimming Association (PSA) was formed in July 1881, with the aim of organising and promoting professional activity, with the full support of the SAGB, which decided that an amateur would not lose his status by becoming an honorary member of the Association (*The Sporting Life*, 1881 July 9; *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 1881 July 16). The Beckwiths were intimately connected with the PSA. Willie was elected captain in 1881, Charles won the captaincy race in 1882, and Frederick was on the committee in 1886, but the PSA ultimately ran into financial difficulty in 1891 and disappeared from the record. Even advocates of amateur swimming regretted that "the honest attempt which was made by the promoters to raise the status of professional instructors of the art has resulted in failure" (Thomas, 1904, p. 357; *The Graphic*, 1881 September 24; *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, 1882 July 29; *The News of the World*, 1886 May 2; 1886 October 24; Sinclair and Henry, 1893, p. 341).

Meanwhile the SAGB was being transformed into the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA), which concentrated on organising and regulating competition, encouraging participation and life saving skills, excluding professionals, and abolishing gambling. The amateur ethos emphasised style and elegance over competition. The work of the Royal Life Saving Society in particular had demonstrated that there was "something far more noble...than mere competition for pots" and "pot-hunting", was considered "an outrage on our common sense as sportsmen" (Sinclair, 1906, pp. 2, 6; Daniels, Johannson and Sinclair, 1907, p. 11; Cobbett, 1907, p. 2; Austin, 1914, p. 6; Sinclair and Henry, 1893, pp. 399-411).

Initially, ASA officials relied on persuasion to disseminate their values and perspectives, but once they had established themselves, they began to apply both economic sanctions, through the regulation and licensing of galas, and coercion, through the rigid application of laws relating to professionalism (Sinclair and Henry, 1893, pp. 349-351). ASA laws

consistently deemed swimmers as professional if they were paid for teaching, training, or coaching, although payment made to an instructor of lifesaving did not endanger his amateur status because life-saving was regarded as "a higher and combined development of gymnastic exercise, swimming, ability, and medical knowledge for the benefit of the race" rather than as a sport (*The Fourth Olympiad*, 1908, pp. 769-770).

Gentlemen amateurs engineered their sporting rules and structures to sustain a master-servant relationship with the teaching professional. Sporting servants existed in tennis, golf, and even in cycling, with some society participants employing cycling grooms, while middle class organisers in amateur boxing hired servants, in the form of professional trainers like Bat Mullins, to provide a buffer between themselves and boxers. (Rubinstein, 1977, pp. 58-59; Sheard, 2004, p. 23; Shipley, 1983, pp. 41, 47-49). The ASA exclusion of those who taught, trained, or coached, for "pecuniary gain" effectively barred swimming professors like Beckwith from involvement within embryonic governing bodies. However, given the shortage of enough amateur coaches and properly trained schoolteachers, the ASA eventually conceded that professionals were essential for increasing participation. The key was to ensure that they retained control so the organisation instituted a Professional Certificate in 1899, which was granted, upon application, "to such as are desirous and deemed worthy of obtaining them" (Sinclair, 1906, p. 8). Each ASA District Executive had to be "satisfied as to the character and antecedents of an applicant as well as to his ability as a professional teacher" (Keil and Wix, 1996, p. 25).

#### *Walter Brickett, A Respectable Professor*

While there was a degree of consistency across sports in the way that professional coaches were marginalised, there was also considerable leakage around the margins of amateur hegemony and, as a result, every coaching life was unique. As Wittgenstein observed, "No rule can determine its own application. For every rule there is an interpretation of that rule" (Wittgenstein, 1953, paragraphs 201-2), and the lines of demarcation between professional and amateur were constantly blurred. There was a tradition of tolerance for the "educated mechanic, the intelligent working man", and just as some English workingmen could be considered worthy and respectable, so some professional athletes and coaches could display amateur-like qualities (*Baily's Monthly Magazine of Sports and Pastimes*, 1884, February p. 45; Light, 2005, pp. 71-73). The life of Walter Brickett, an amateur swimmer and coach who initially earned his living outside of swimming, at least until the early 1900s, when he began to be referred to as professor, demonstrates how acceptable transitions could be made across this divide.

When the British swimming team attended the Stockholm Olympics in 1912 it was accompanied by Mrs. Holmes and Mrs. Jarvis, the chaperones and trainers for the female swimmers, and by W. S. Brickett, attending his second Games as trainer (Swedish Olympic Committee 1913 p. 965). Walter Septimus Brickett was born in 1865 in Camden to Sarah Brickett and James Brickett, a *Grocer*. By 1881, Walter was following in the footsteps of brothers Charles, Alfred, Arthur, and James, as a *Pianoforte Maker*, which census returns confirm as his primary occupation until at least 1901. Between 1883 and 1898, Walter competed regularly in amateur swimming events. He was at Lambeth Baths in September 1883, finishing third in an eighty-yard amateur handicap, and at the Welsh Harp, Hendon, in July 1885 for the one-mile amateur championship, swum under the auspices of the SAGB. Walter was third in the five hundred yards Championship in 1888, and second in 1896, third in the Ulph Cup race, 1889, second to Tyers for the *Sportsman* Cup in 1892, and third in the Salt Water Championship, 1891. Walter also competed in athletics winning the One Mile Open Walking Handicap for Highgate Harriers at a London Athletic Club meeting in 1887 (*The Penny Illustrated Paper*, 1883 September 22; 1888 October 6; *The Manchester Guardian*, 1883 September 19; *The Times*, 1885 July 20; 1888 August 13; 1889 September 2; Newman, 1899, p. 80; *The Times*, 1890 July 7; 1890 October 7; 1887 April 4; *The Leeds Mercury*, 1893 September 25; *Glasgow Herald*, 1893 September 25; *The Illustrated Police News*, 1893 September 30).

Walter established himself in many areas of swimming, crucially life saving, being involved in the formation of the Life Saving Society, along with leading amateurs William Henry and Archibald Sinclair, in 1891 (Thomas, 1904, p. 379; Sinclair and Henry, 1893, p. 234). He also became a prominent coach and, in 1907, "Prof. Walter Brickett, the well known and popular instructor," was accorded an annual entertainment by the twenty-five clubs he was involved with. In 1908, Walter was appointed trainer to the Olympic team. After the Games he was presented with a unique testimonial from the ASA, signed by George W. Hearne, ASA President, and seventy members of the Committee, water polo, swimming, and diving teams, "bearing testimony to, and sincere appreciation of, the valuable and unremitting services of professor Brickett, to whom all British Olympic swimmers were greatly indebted". Walter was trainer again for Stockholm, his appointment as "trainer and adviser-in-chief" having been confirmed at the 1912 AGM of the ASA. Belle White who won a diving bronze medal in Stockholm described Walter as "a fatherly type of man, but...a hard disciplinarian in training. He gave you marvellous encouragement and always tried to make you feel confident" (Brickett family papers; *The Times*, 1912 March 4).

Walter's business card, circa 1914, advertised him as the "well-known British Olympic Trainer, appointed by the Amateur Swimming Association, and teacher of all styles of Swimming". His credentials were reinforced by a list of his 1913 successes including H. E. Annison, hundred yards English Champion, and Dorothy Anderson, hundred yards Southern Counties Champion. When St. Pancras Swimming Club advertised a Ladies Section in 1919 they announced that "Professor Walter Brickett, the famous Olympic swimming trainer and coach, has been engaged to improve those who can, and teach those who cannot, swim". Brickett was the "Maker of Champions. Well-known Swimming Instructor and Coach" (Brickett family papers).

Walter was involved in training Channel Swimmers after working with Greasley in 1904. He trained Jabez Wolffe, who made twenty-two attempts and never succeeded, failing by yards in 1911. Wolffe acknowledged his debt of gratitude to "Professor Walter Brickett, who has always understood me thoroughly and who has developed my powers in a truly remarkable fashion". Walter's long and successful experience of training pedestrians, as well as swimmers, had given him ample opportunity for observation, whereby he is invariably enabled to come to a rapid and accurate decision on any point". Wolffe was always well rubbed all over with a "special preparation of Brickett's", which was allowed to thoroughly soak in and dry, and was then covered with a coating of lamb's fat. Brickett also fed him every half-hour during swims, principally with chicken sandwiches, biscuits, Oxo, chocolate, chicken broth, biscuits and jam, weak tea and cocoa (*The Times*, 1904 August 20; Wolffe, 1910, pp. 58-70.)

Many of Walter's life experiences in the sport mirrored the experiences of those like Beckwith who had been professional swimmers before they turned to coaching. Walter certainly generated his own community of practice through his athletes, like Wolffe, and through his children. Sons Sidney and Reg were founder members of the National Association of Swimming Instructors, and Reg became President of the Swimming Teachers Association of Great Britain (Brickett family papers; Hart, 2006, p. 18). In that respect, Walter behaved much like Gramsci's local, organic intellectual, although a combination of factors specific to him generated an acceptance by the swimming establishment that was denied to some of his predecessors. Walter's social background was rooted in the artisan class and it is a measure of the potential democracy of some amateur sports organisations, in this case the ASA, that an amateur from this class could be involved in the formation of the Royal Life Saving Society and then, as a professional, be appointed as a trainer to successive British Olympic teams.

Walter's experience highlights the imperfect way that amateur structures were applied to coaches, instructors, teachers, and trainers, as well as emphasising the diverse nature of

coaching lives. Brickett's involvement with the life saving association and the social networks that he established with powerful amateur figures, placed him in a different position to that of Beckwith. He portrayed the sober, respectable artisan rather than the swashbuckling entrepreneurial figure epitomised by Frederick. As a result, Walter could be more easily assimilated into the amateur system, even when he became professional. His social and symbolic capital, generated through establishing medley event records, allowed him to fulfil a dual role as a professional but with a degree of subservience agreeable to amateur administrators. There is a hint of this in Wolffe when he discusses how useful Walter had been to him as a trainer, referring to him as "Brickett" in the same way that amateur gentlemen referred to their huntsman or cricket professional (Wolffe, 1910, pp. 67-70).

Although C. Wright Mills argued for a sociological method grounded in historical understanding, few historical sociology studies dealing with sport include biography, even though coaching lives are intimately connected to their social environs (Mills, 1959, p. 6; Loy and Booth, 2004). Brickett and Beckwith encountered different swimming worlds which required different solutions. Faced with structural exclusion, coaches like Beckwith utilised their entrepreneurial skills to ensure that they could make a living from their knowledge and expertise, while some later coaches, like Brickett, found ways to work within, and alongside, the dominant amateur structures. Beckwith was admired by contemporaries for his aquatic expertise, but not always for his values and behaviour, while Walter's appointment as trainer to the 1908 and 1912 Olympic teams emphasises both his acceptance to the amateur establishment and the opportunities afforded to coaches by the creation of formal international competitions. Both men recognised their own strengths, took the opportunities that were open to them, and, in different ways, achieved a measure of recognition. In this respect, there is a degree of continuity in their coaching lives but the considerable variation in their coaching biographies, despite their temporal proximity, is also lasting testimony to the power of amateur sporting associations to structurally constrain the nature of the coaching environment.

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