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Introduction

> [In the autumn of 1885 the 2nd Battalion moved to Pembroke Dock] a very pleasant station, with lots of hunting, fishing and shooting and enjoyable weekends in Tenby. But it was a dreary spot for the men. During the winter of 1885–86 I was the Acting Adjutant of the Battalion and, with a view to providing recreation for the men, I managed to hire a fairly level field near the Barracks – an amenity not easily come by in that hilly country. Further I purchased all the essential requirements of football, really nothing but goalposts and some balls … Now it is hardly believable, but it is an absolute fact that only some 47 years ago hardly a man in the Battalion could be persuaded to come down even to kick a ball about, still less to take part in a game.
>
> 'Reminiscences of Lt. Gen. Sir Gerald Ellison KCB, KCMG', *The Lancashire Lad. The Journal of the Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire)* (April 1933), p. 10

In a recent study of British military medicine, Mark Harrison found it hard to think of any other aspect of military life that had been so poorly served in histories of the British armed forces.[1] If there is another it might be sport, which over the last century and a half and particularly during the years with which this study deals, 1880–1960, took up a good proportion of the time and energies of many serving sailors, soldiers and later airmen. It has certainly been left out of the accounts of most writers on military history who have, perhaps unsurprisingly, had more warlike themes on their minds. Edward Spiers, in a number of authoritative studies of the Victorian and Edwardian army, only occasionally alludes to the role of sport, usually as a part of that package of reforms designed to improve the lot of the ordinary soldier in part to provide a stimulus to recruiting in the last decades of the nineteenth century, or as one of the activities that soldiers could enjoy in rear areas and garrisons even on active service in the imperial

[1] M. Harrison, *Medicine and Victory: British Military Medicine in the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 1.

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'small wars' of that period.[2] A. R. Skelley, similarly, only devotes a few pages to physical training and a paragraph to sport, as an example of other ranks recreations, in his exploration of the lives of British regular soldiers in the later years of Victoria's reign.[3] There have been some recent signs that a more serious look at the role of sport in the services may not be too far off. Anthony Clayton had emphasised its role in the training and recreation of West African recruits during the years preceding and the decade or so after the Second World War and he has returned to the subject of sport in his latest history of the British army officer.[4] Historians of the Victorian navy have also made some recognition of the role which sport played in the lives of sailors in the later nineteenth century. Henry Baynham, Peter Kemp and Eugene L. Rasor all mention the development of naval sport briefly, again in the context of improvements in the conditions of service for ordinary seamen over the latter half of the nineteenth century.[5] The sailors whose reminiscences contributed to Baynham's *Men from the Dreadnoughts* remembered sport as a fairly significant part of their naval life.[6] A more sustained analysis was recently offered by Oliver Walton, suggesting that sport provided one of the key ways through which the late Victorian navy rendered alien landscapes familiar, affirmed the bonds of empire through matches against colonial settlers and 'natives' and fostered productive competition between ships.[7]

[2] E. M. Spiers, *The Army and Society* (London: Longman, 1980), p. 63; *The Late Victorian Army 1868–1902* (Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 96–7; *The Scottish Soldier and Empire, 1854–1902* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 195.

[3] A. R. Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home: The Recruitment and Terms and Conditions of the British Regular 1859–1989* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), pp. 58–60, 162–5. J. M. Brereton, *The British Soldier. A Social History from 1661 to the Present Day* (London: The Bodley Head, 1986) thought sport an important part of army life but again provided only a few descriptive paragraphs about it.

[4] A. Clayton, 'Sport and African Soldiers: The Military Diffusion of Western Sport throughout Sub-Saharan Africa', in W. J. Baker and J. A. Mangan (eds.), *Sport in Africa. Essays in Social History* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), pp. 114–37; *The British Officer. Leading the Army from 1660 to the Present* (London: Longman, 2005).

[5] H. Baynham, *Before the Mast: Naval Ratings of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p. 117; P. Kemp, *The British Sailor: A Social History of the Lower Deck* (London: Dent, 1970), pp. 210–11; E. L. Rasor, *Reform in the Royal Navy: A Social History of the Lower Deck 1850 to 1880* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1976), p. 106.

[6] H. Baynham, *Men from the Dreadnoughts* (London: Hutchinson, 1976). Christopher McKee's more recent *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy 1900–1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002) explicitly excluded consideration of 'organized competitive sport', along with a number of other topics which he nevertheless recognised as 'important in themselves' (p. 5).

[7] O. Walton, 'A Social History of the Royal Navy, 1856–1900: Corporation and Community', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2004, pp. 198–203.

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The study of the roles played by sport in the United States military is somewhat more developed – surprisingly, perhaps, since it seems clear that the growth of American military sport lagged some way behind that of the British, and at times was strongly influenced by its example. (It also appears to have been much more of a top-down development.) Although Charlston has noted some earlier examples of sporting enthusiasm, sport in the American military was not actively promoted until the Spanish-American War of 1898, when a younger generation of officers with a commitment to the welfare of the other ranks used sport in attempts to combat alcohol, desertion and the lure of prostitution. It was only during the First World War, however, that sport really took off in the American forces, encouraged by the authorities – themselves influenced by the success of the British army sports programme behind the lines on the Western Front – both as a form of social control and as a means of military training.[8]

It was a retired US army officer, J.D. Campbell, who was the first to undertake a serious study of the development of physical training and sport in the British army between the end of the Crimean War and the end of the First World War. His doctoral thesis was an ambitious attempt to describe the processes by which sport and games became 'the most popular and frequent activities for all ranks throughout the entire Army'. That sport was training for war seemed to him an obvious conclusion; it is one that will be tested in the chapters that follow.[9] The belief that sport and war were in some sense the same, that sport was 'mimic war' and war only the 'greater game', was certainly firmly held in the late Victorian and Edwardian public schools. In the ideology of athleticism, expressed in school sermons and schoolboy verses, games produced not only the physical but the moral qualities required in a good soldier – courage and stoicism, quick-wittedness and quick decision, leadership qualities and loyalty to the team.[10] As

[8] S.W. Pope, 'An Army of Athletes: Playing Fields, Battlefields, and the American Military Sporting Experience, 1890–1920', *Journal of Military History* 59 (1995), 435–56; W.E. Wakefield, *Playing to Win: Sports and the American Military, 1898–1945* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY, 1997); J.A. Charlston, 'Disorganised and Quasi-official but Eventually Successful: Sport in the US Military, 1814–1914', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 19 (2002), 70–87.

[9] J.D. Campbell, 'The Army Isn't All Work: Physical Culture in the Evolution of the British Army, 1860–1920', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Maine, 2003. See also his article '"Training for Sport Is Training for War": Sport and the Transformation of the British Army, 1860–1914', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 17 (December 2000), 21–58.

[10] J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 191–6. See also G. Best, 'Militarism and the Victorian

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the headmaster of Harrow School put it in 1906, 'the spirit of subordination and co-operation, the complete authority, the ready obedience, the self-respect and self-sacrifice of the playing field enter largely into life … There is no cricketer worthy of the name … who would not be glad to sacrifice himself if he could so win the victory for his side'.[11] Most officers had been educated at the public schools and most seem to have absorbed these ideas without any serious consideration of them. Since war was their profession and sport one of their main pleasures it was natural to call on the sport–war analogy to justify the amount of time devoted to sporting activity. Yet the relationship between sport and war was asserted rather than demonstrated; nor was the ideology entirely coherent. The public-school emphasis on playing the game for its own sake sat uneasily with the insistence that sport was training for war; war, after all, is a 'game' that can only be played to win.[12] Within the army itself, and especially after 1900, the idea that sport fostered 'officer qualities' was challenged by military reformers anxious to create a more professional officer corps.[13]

The benefits of sport to the military may well have been less direct. David French includes in his fine study of the rise and fall of the regimental system the most thoughtful consideration to date of the place of sport in the history of the British army. French is clear about the ways in which sport contributed to the construction of regimental identities and concludes that, although interest in sport was widespread, it was not all-consuming. Though field sports were said to accustom men to taking physical risks, they did not necessarily make officers less apprehensive of battlefield dangers. Sport did facilitate the growth of *esprit de corps* and inter-rank relations and was often an interest shared by officers and men, but it rarely undermined rank and status. As for the inculcation of sporting ideologies, French suggests that, so far as other ranks were concerned, sportsmanship, fairness and good manners were less important than winning, leading him to conclude that their attitudes to sport were probably much like those of working-class males outside the army. French also suggests that sport was one way in which units

Public School', in B. Simon and I. Bradley (eds.), *The Victorian Public School* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1975), pp. 141–3.

[11] Quoted in W.J. Reader, *'At Duty's Call': A Study in Obsolete Patriotism* (Manchester University Press, 1988) p. 97.

[12] P. Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos* (London: Constable, 1987), p. 84.

[13] J. Lowerson, *Sport and the English Middle Classes 1870–1914* (Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 285–9. For a recent restatement of the link between sport, specifically rugby, and leadership skills, see Wing Commander Pat Carter, 'Who Needs Officer Qualities?', *Journal of the Royal Air Force College, Cranwell* (March 2002), 14.

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could 'commend themselves' to the civilian communities in which they were embedded.[14]

The issues raised by French will be discussed in greater detail throughout this work. First, however, we must establish the sporting context, both military and civilian, in which service sport developed in the later nineteenth century. Sport was never entirely absent from the mid-Victorian army and navy. Certainly by mid-century military schools such as Addiscombe, Sandhurst and Woolwich were beginning to use sport rather as the public schools had been doing to bring a sense of discipline and purpose to the recreation of their students. A kind of football was certainly played at the East India Company's College at Addiscombe in the 1850s, for example, though it seems mainly to have provided an additional opportunity for the older boys to rough up the younger ones.[15] There was also a twice-yearly athletic meeting which became a popular event attracting crowds made up of parents and local residents. Instruction in 'physical education' was provided by a former corporal in the Life Guards. There were similar activities at Sandhurst and Woolwich. Sandhurst had separate grounds for sports including cricket and racquets. At Woolwich a professional bowler was engaged for two or three days during the cricket season to coach the cadets; racquets and football were increasingly encouraged; and under the reforming Cadet Company officer Captain Frederick Eardley Wilmot an athletics meeting was held as early as 1849. However, such initiatives do not seem to have put down very deep roots. When Eardley Wilmot left Woolwich in 1854 the athletics meeting lapsed. It was the cadet 'mutinies' at both colleges in the early 1860s that led the authorities to endorse sport as a permanent part of college life. General Burgoyne's 1864 report into the Sandhurst 'outbreaks' prescribed 'all outdoor manly exercise', including cricket, football, racquets, boating, swimming, quoits, rifle practice and gymnastics, as the best antidote to youthful unruliness. This certainly reflects what was happening in civilian circles, and it seems that it was from this time, the 1860s, that records of sporting activities

[14] D. French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army and the British People, c. 1870–2000* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 115–21, 143, 238–9, 305.

[15] This paragraph is based on J.M. Bourne, 'The East India Company's Military Seminary, Addiscombe 1809–1858', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 57 (1979), 206–22; T. Hearl, 'Fighting Fit: Some Military Initiatives in Physical Education in Britain, 1800–1860', in N. Parry and D. McNair (eds.), *The Fitness of the Nation: Physical and Health Education in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (History of Education Society, 1983), pp. 46–69; Col. H.M. Vibart, *Addiscombe: Its Heroes and Men of Note* (London: Constable & Co., 1894), pp. 249–54; A. Shepperd, *Sandhurst: The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and Its Predecessors* (London: Country Life Books, 1980), pp. 54–5, 70–4.

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and performances began to be kept at the colleges, with inter-college competitions providing the main sporting rivalries.

It was also in this period that the first connections between sport and recruiting were made, initially by one of the more thoughtful soldiers, Captain Henry Brackenbury, who in an article in *Fraser's Magazine* on military reform noted that

> We have a race of hardy villagers and stalwart country lads fond of sport, of all games that require pluck and skill, a quick eye, a strong hand, and a fleet foot, to whom the spice of danger enhances the pleasure of such games as football and cricket, and who are ready to join in anything promising a chance of adventure. It would seem that a soldier's life is exactly the career suited to such as these; but the fact stares us in the face that these men will not come in any numbers to the army.[16]

In 1878 (reflecting both the upper-middle-class enthusiasm for organised sport and concerns that the new emphasis on intellectual ability since the abolition of purchase was undermining the physique of army officers) the Civil Service Commissioners proposed setting candidates for first commissions in the army an 'athletic examination' with marks for proficiency in walking, running, leaping, riding, swimming and shot-putting. A debate in the House of Lords, disapproval in the newspapers and opposition from the staff at Woolwich seem to have combined to undermine the idea.[17] By this time sport was also being suggested as 'very beneficial for boys entering the Navy'.[18]

As for the young men already serving in the military, cost seems to have inhibited the development of sporting facilities. As early as 1836 Her Majesty's Commissioners inquiring into the system of military punishments in the army had suggested the provision of games such as fives, racquets, cricket and football might help keep young soldiers out of trouble. Cricket pitches were laid down from 1841 but gymnasia would have to wait until much later, and the Treasury reduced the number of fives courts to be built from 146 to twenty-nine.[19]

In fact there is some evidence that admiration of physical prowess and sport were both already common elements in the framework of service life, if still awaiting organisation, rationalisation and system. The

[16] H. Brackenbury, 'Military Reform', Part I, *Fraser's Magazine* 74 (1866), 692.
[17] Hearl, 'Fighting Fit', p. 66. For support for the idea of 'physical competition for the army' see *Field* 56 (1880), 42.
[18] Report of the Committee on the Regulations for the Entry and Training of Boys in Her Majesty's Navy, 15 Dec. 1879, Paragraph 24, ADM 116/704, National Archives, quoted in Walton, 'A Social History of the Royal Navy', p. 200.
[19] H. Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy: The Reform of the British Army 1830–54* (Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 85.

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Guards regiments, for example, had a reputation for producing boxers and wrestlers. Feats of strength were widely performed and admired, as on the occasion when James English of the King's Company, Grenadier Guards, carried three of the heaviest privates of the regiment on his shoulders the length of Pall Mall. It is not altogether surprising to learn that a good deal of money was riding on the result.[20] T. H. Kirby was already a well-known pedestrian when he joined the Yorkshire Regiment in 1859, and there were large wagers between the officers' mess and neighbouring ones at Aldershot on whether he could run a mile on the Farnborough Road in less than four and a half minutes. Sentries were placed next to the milestones presumably to inhibit anyone who might have been tempted to move them. A large crowd saw Kirby succeed in the attempt.[21] Prize fights were not uncommon in the areas around Aldershot and in garrisons such as the Curragh. Army officers had been part of the 'Fancy' in the early nineteenth century and would often be seen at the Covent Garden headquarters of the National Sporting Club when evenings of boxing were put on there in the 1890s.[22]

Sporting challenges were another regular feature of military life especially in those far-flung parts of the Empire where soldiers had a lot of time which was hard to fill. A Captain Brigstock of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry once put out a challenge to any other officer to compete against him in six more or less athletic activities: single-wicket cricket, quoits, throwing the cricket ball, putting the stone, billiards and racquets. Colonel W. S. Jervis of the Royal Munster Fusiliers took him on and won by four events to two. 1/King's Royal Rifle Corps, the Greenjackets, provide two other interesting examples. In Malta in 1866 they challenged the rest of the garrison to swim, run, play racquets and cricket and won both the latter two and the one-mile road race. More expansively their officers challenged the rest of the officers in the Jubbalpore Garrison in India in 1908 to polo, cricket, a three-mile road race, a two-mile walking race, billiards, golf, rifle shooting, revolver shooting, racquets, tennis, the racing and jumping of polo ponies and tug of war. This was an event of Olympic proportions which the Greenjacket officers won even though their strength was a

[20] *Lloyd's Weekly News*, 30 March 1913.
[21] His time was reported as 4 minutes 26 seconds, which seems suspiciously fast and would not be beaten in the army championships until 1937. *Lloyd's Weekly News*, 3 August 1913.
[22] G. Deghy, *Noble and Manly: The History of the National Sporting Club* (London: Hutchinson, 1956); J. Harding, *Lonsdale's Belt: The Story of Boxing's Greatest Prize* (London: Robson Books, 1994).

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mere fifteen compared to fifty in the other regiments. The whole event took six weeks to complete.[23]

Sport in the army and navy would eventually also receive some encouragement from the physical trainers. The Army Gymnastic Staff was established in 1860 and was part of the critical reappraisal of the force which took place after the disappointments of the Crimean War. Twelve NCOs drawn from a variety of units under the charge of a Major Hammersley were sent to Oxford for a six-month course at the Gymnastic School run by Archibald MacLaren. A School of Army Gymnastics was then set up at Aldershot with Hammersley as superintendent.[24] Gymnasia were erected in most garrisons during the 1860s, and in 1865 the first regulations governing physical training in the army were published. It was to Aldershot that NCOs selected from every regiment were sent on courses of physical training lasting six months, from which they returned to their regiments as qualified instructors. By 1890 a staff of fifteen sergeants and twelve assistant instructors were systematically preparing 150 NCOs together with a smaller number of officers whose ambition was to become gymnasium superintendents.[25] There might have been a serious division between these men and those who preferred sport to gymnastics as there was in some European armies. But it is clear that the military PTIs believed that sport and physical training could not only co-exist but that each could benefit the other. Hammersley, for example, was Vice-President of the Aldershot Divisional Cricket Club, and later the Assistant-Inspector of Gymnasia would be Captain W. Edgeworth Johnstone, Royal Irish Regiment, winner of the first officers heavyweight boxing championship and an active promoter of that sport. Moreover PTIs on many camps would play an important part in the growth and development of service sport, as we shall see.[26]

Regular soldiers were also part of the pre-history of football, the game that would become the most popular among the other ranks of

[23] *Lloyd's Weekly News*, 20 April, 25 May 1913. John D. Astley was said to have carried off four cups in one day at Aldershot in 1856: 100, 150 and 440 yards races and 200 yards running in heavy marching order. *British Sports and Sportsmen Past and Present*, 13 vols. (London, 1908–), vol. II, p. 183.

[24] His father was not impressed. 'I hope you will not be tempted by the prospect of an easy birth [*sic*] to accept a situation which seems hardly fit for a gentleman, much less an officer, who aspires to military distinction.' Quoted in E.A.L. Oldfield, *History of the Army Physical Training Corps* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1955), p. 2. In 1870 Hammersley was appointed Inspector of Gymnasia with the rank of lieutenant-colonel.

[25] Oldfield, *History*, ch. 1.

[26] The annual assault at arms presented by the PTIs of Aldershot and local regiments included both boxing and gymnastic displays as well as more obviously military exhibitions, *Sheldrake Military Gazette*, 6 September 1871.

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all three services. By the 1850s several regiments were reported as having played a form of football that seems to have combined some of the features that would, by the 1880s, have matured into the separate sports of association and rugby football. The London sporting newspaper *Bell's Life* reported one such occasion at Parkhurst barracks on the Isle of Wight in 1856 when thirty-eight of the 30th, 55th and 96th played against thirty-eight of the 15th and the 34th in a match which consisted of 'two goals out of three' – in other words, the first team to score twice.[27] The same paper also reported a match at Lord's Cricket Ground between two teams of ten players a side drawn from the 3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards and selected on the basis of hair colour – dark or light. Perhaps this had been partly in preparation for a challenge between teams of fifteen a side representing the 2nd and 3rd Battalions which several gentlemen watched and which ended in a tie after nearly four hours.[28] In the same year a match with sixteen players a side was reported from Corfu between the garrison and the 2nd Battalion of the 9th Regiment. The teams were made up of officers including Lieutenant-Colonel Sankey of the 9th Regiment, and the 9th won by 'three goals out of four'.[29] Meanwhile in Sheffield, a town which already had a reputation for being a centre of footballing activity, late in 1860 the 58th Regiment from the local Hillsborough Barracks took on a team of civilians from the Sheffield club and lost by one goal and ten rouges to one goal and five. Not long after, in Aldershot, five officers and fifteen men of the 8th Regiment took on an equal number of the 53rd in what was labelled the 'first match of the season' in November 1861. The correspondent who had submitted the report, presumably a serving officer, added that he hoped 'to see many such matches played at Aldershott [*sic*] for the amusement of the soldiers, who appear greatly to enjoy the game'.[30]

Football seems to be in the process of becoming a frequent if not necessarily a regular activity in the army during the 1860s. By 1868, what was described as the 'first match between the sister corps' took place between the Royal Artillery and the Royal Engineers. The former had 'not got a club at present' but managed to get ten men together and were given two more by the Engineers to make twelve a side. At least the Gunners were said to have had a splendid goalkeeper,

[27] *Bell's Life*, 23 November 1856.
[28] It was to be 'played out another day'. Five officers took part. *Bell's Life*, 13 March 1859.
[29] *Bell's Life*, 17 April 1859.
[30] *Bell's Life*, 23 December 1860, 1 December 1861. A rouge was an outer goal scored when the ball passed between posts four yards either side of the inner goal.

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which suggests that this was a match played under similar rules to those drawn up by the five-year-old Football Association.[31] In fact the Royal Engineers joined the Football Association in 1869 and in the ensuing decade became not only an example to all military footballers but important innovators in this rapidly developing sport. The School of Military Engineering on the Great Lines at Chatham in Kent may well have been the first unit in which officers took modern sports seriously. Chatham in the early 1860s may have had no golf or lawn tennis but it did have cricket and croquet, fives and racquets, and rowing and sailing on the Thames and Medway, all these mainly in the summer. At first, football was only played occasionally in the winter[32] but it quickly became established among a group of young officers who had almost certainly played some form of the game at their public schools.[33]

Two officers at Chatham, Major Francis Marindin and Captain William Merriman, seem to have been most responsible for the rise of the RE footballers. Both were players, Marindin mainly at full-back and Merriman in goal, but both were also enthusiasts and leaders, and Merriman in particular was a real sporting virtuoso, being a sprinter, oarsman and cricketer as well as a footballer. Marindin was an Old Etonian who became Brigade Major at the School of Military Engineering from 1867 to 1874. He was also an early member of the committee of the young Football Association and would be its President from 1874 to 1890.[34] Both Marindin and Merriman played for the Royal Engineers when the team reached the first ever FA Cup final in 1872 and again in the final of 1874. Both of these were lost, but Merriman played in the team which beat the Old Etonians to win the Cup in

[31] *Bell's Life*, 12 December 1868. There was talk of a return match in the following week.

[32] See Sir B. Blood, *Four Score Years and Ten* (London, G. Bell & Sons, 1933), p. 30. Eight cricket matches were played in the first part of the summer of 1870 including one in which thirteen officers beat twenty-two sappers and NCOs by an innings. *Royal Engineers Journal* 1 (1 July 1870), 20–1.

[33] It seems clear that other army units were less familiar with this new game than the Chatham aficionados. When a team of Royal Welch Fusiliers were beaten 3–0 by the Engineers in March 1870 the chronicler in the *Royal Engineers Journal* (1 August 1870) thought it fair to say that the Welch 'had not played for two or three years and consequently were not in good training'. By 1874 soldiers in the 2nd Battalion the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry stationed in Sheffield were sending out challenges to local clubs and playing two or three matches a week although, as they failed to win any of them, it seems they had not quite got the hang of modern football yet. *Bell's Life*, 19 December 1874.

[34] Sir Francis Marindin 1839–1902. On leaving the Engineers he became Chief Inspector of Railways at the Board of Trade and was knighted in 1889. He also refereed eight FA Cup finals between 1880 and 1890.

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