

19TH CENTURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

STAGE ONE (1790 – 1828)

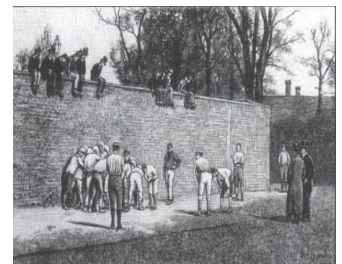
BOY CULTURE

Boys had lots of free time, so they played lots of sport and recreation. The masters (teachers) had nothing to do with them outside of the classroom and there weren't many lessons (only maths, and the classics). The boys had to look after and organise themselves (hence the term 'boy culture'). Participation was strictly for fun and recreation. Life for pupils in Public Schools showed the contrast in society between the culture of the upper classes, and low culture of the masses: pupils were taught maths, the classics and educated as aristocrats, yet in their own time they often indulged in the barbaric sports of the working classes.

NON-LOCAL / DIFFERENT VERSIONS

Stage One saw boys taking their ideas from where they lived to school with them. They then had lots of ideas about what to do in their free time (during the day between lessons). Some of the sports they played at school were based on the sports they either watched or played at home. In other words the sports didn't originate at their school – they were based on sports from other areas (ie: they were non-local).

- Some of their activities were violent – mob football could be violent, and they used bare-fist fights as a way of settling disputes, that had strict rules just like the bare-knuckle fighting of popular recreation: other boys would bet on the outcome. They hunted (in the early days they might have stabled horses near the school), went poaching (game and fishing) on land owned by local farmers, and placed wagers on cock-fighting. At this time the games reflected the boys' lifestyles and the harsh conditions that they lived in: within the school there was bullying and rule by fear, and boys had to have courage in order to survive the first few years of public school where they were expected to fag for the older boys: they regularly got beatings from older boys and masters. The lack of a police force at the time was also significant in this as the boys could get away with trespass and other criminal offences.
- They **adopted** some sports: for example they would play their own version of the mob football that they may have seen at home in the local village, so the game had few rules and was violent, as a way for the boys to rebel against the strict and brutal punishments in class. Different schools would develop different versions of mob football (they couldn't yet play football against other schools as there were no means of transport. At Rugby a handling game was developed : at Eton the wall game was developed (still exists today). At Winchester a mob of boys had to fight to get the ball from one end of the pitch to another. This is still played today on St Andrew's day. Their games depended on the facilities and grounds available, so there were no set playing areas. They played cricket that they had known in their local village. Cricket was the one sport that did have fairly well-established rules.
- They **adapted** some sports: for example they participated in 'hare and hounds' (paperchase) which was an adaptation of fox-hunting
- Boys from 13 upwards went to Public Schools: alongside the brutal sports played by older boys would have been relatively child-like games such as spinning tops and playing with hoops, played by younger boys.



Public Schools in STAGE ONE were very much a **MELTING POT OF IDEAS**. The Popular Recreations of England were taken to Public Schools by the boys that went there and once there they were subject to a series of changes: these activities became institutionalised and part of life at school. That process was the beginning of sport as we know it in modern times.

NOT ORGANISED / NO SPECIALIST FACILITIES

In Stage One, sports were not well-organised and only natural facilities were used, or whatever happened to be available either within the school grounds or outside them. There was little space or grass for the boys to play on in the school. Sometimes they played games that weren't restricted to school grounds: the 'paper-chase', also known as 'hare and hounds race' involved a lot of trespassing. At Eton the game of Fives (hand and ball game) developed against the Eton Chapel wall. This later developed into a sport and the court was designed to copy the chapel wall's shape, with a small wall protruding into the court half way along, like the Chapel's buttress. At Harrow, boys swam (to wash and keep clean) in the 'Duck Puddle', a part of the local river. Sport had low levels of organisation : there were no leagues or cup competitions/no cups/no competitions/no fixtures/no special kit/no special equipment.



NOT SKILFUL

Sporting activities were not particularly skilful, and no teaching or coaching of skills took place: the emphasis was on brute force and not skill.