

# **Living Sports History: Football at Winchester, Eton and Harrow**

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## **Introduction**

Discussion about football in the Public Schools in the early and mid-19th century has ranged over widely different areas. Important aspects of sporting and cultural change have been examined, and much of the research has helped to open new debates. It is easy for the general reader to assume that the Public Schools each gave up their home-grown systems of play in favour of one or other of the ‘universal’ codes when the laws of Association Football and Rugby Football became formalized. But many schools retained their peculiar systems of football for a considerable time before pronouncing themselves followers of the Association or Rugby systems.<sup>2</sup> A handful of schools adopted one or other code to be played alongside their locally developed game.

My purpose is to return to the characteristics of the football played by three schools, and to explore aspects of the game that made them different. How did the peculiarities of geography and tradition come together to provide a form of football for each school to play as its winter team game? What would it have looked like to a spectator? Can we visualise ourselves playing and enjoying these games? Do we accept that each game was an appropriate adaptation of generally common principles of ball-play, tailored to the social and physical context of the school?

The three schools have not been chosen for investigation at random. My interest in the early codes of football played at Winchester, Eton and Harrow stems from the fact that all three codes of football are still played extensively today. Some details of the rules have changed from those of the 1840s, but the characteristics of Harrow Football, the Eton Field Game, and Winchester Football remain largely the same

as the games played at the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign. I believe that an investigation of the football codes played at these three schools will reveal a line of continuity and similarity which has not been acknowledged so far.

In describing the football played at Eton, Winchester and Harrow I make the assumption that the reader has a working knowledge of at least one modern team field game such as hockey, rugby or soccer. Descriptions of sports rules can be very difficult to digest, and it is more easily done if they are located within the framework of a sport you know well. This paper will concentrate on the Eton Field Game rather than the Wall Game, as the nature of the Field Game gives greater opportunities for comparison between the three schools.

Television documentaries from time to time use glimpses of the Eton Wall Game, Winchester or Harrow Football to colour the image of these schools' peculiar and traditional nature. Because they are usually filmed on the ceremonial occasions of St. Andrew's Day or 4th June at Eton, and Founder's Day at Harrow, even the sports historian could come to the conclusion that these displays are quaint attempts to pay tribute to one of the aspects of nineteenth century life that sets them apart from other schools. Today Winchester, Eton and Harrow still employ their own, very different codes of football as the 'major game' for all or part of the Lent Term. I would strongly refute Percy Young's suggestion that the games at Eton, Harrow and Winchester are only: '...occasionally maintained at the present time (1969): ritual offerings to an unknown god...'4

The football codes found at the chosen schools are far from limited to ceremonial occasions such as Founder's Days. There are approximately 125 games of Harrow Football played between the second week in January and mid-February, when their main season ends. These include house matches in each age-group, and a match each Saturday against old boys' sides. The Eton Field Game is played from early January until late March in a network of league and knock-out house competitions in each age-group, for the 25 houses. There are competitions for 2nd teams, and still more of the Field Game available for those who are not involved

in rowing and minor sports. Four school sides also play against old-boy teams each weekend. Winchester's season is the same as that of Eton, but Winchester Football is played at 15-a-side, 10-a-side, 9-a-side (juniors only), and 6-a-side (seniors only). There are inter-house league and knock-out competitions between the 11 houses, as well as prestigious matches between the historical divisions of the school into College, Commoners and Old Tutors' Houses. It should be understood, therefore, that these games are played today just as frequently as Association Football, Hockey or Rugby Football are played in other terms, but without fixtures against other schools.

It may be useful to begin by putting the football played at the Public Schools at the turn of the 19th century into a wider sporting context. I subscribe to the view that some aspects of the games played at Eton, Harrow and Winchester will have been transferred from the home environments of the pupils, and these might have found their origins in what can be called 'folk football'.<sup>5</sup> Just as we can witness a game being invented by children in a playground today, the games of football in the Public Schools developed conventions that depended on the limitations of the land available, and which were retained or modified by each successive group of players. Huizinga is right to say that elements of the spontaneity of children's play have been lost through history as games have become more systematized and regimented.<sup>6</sup> Numerous reasons have been put forward to suggest why games became regularized at different times: to prevent unacceptable levels of violence and injury;<sup>7</sup> to show off 'appropriate' behaviour;<sup>8</sup> to enable local rivalries to be tested, quantified and repeated. Particular games may have been employed by school authorities to develop an ethos desirable at the time - a theme which Tony Mangan has developed.<sup>9</sup> Rules might have been introduced to exclude certain types of people, such as 'professionals'.<sup>10</sup> But the rules are changeable also to make the game more enjoyable, as Allen Guttmann writes:

...new rules are invented and old ones discarded whenever the participants decide that ludic convenience outweighs the inertia of convention. The rules are cultural artifacts not divine instructions.<sup>11</sup>

The concentration of attention on developing a universal code of football in the mid-19th century might have been brought about by a dutiful wish to provide the 'lower orders' with a system of play for the winter. Standardization seems to have been tied up with notions of militarism and utilitarianism. There was also the motive of finding a scheme which would enable pupils of differing Public Schools to play against each other at university and in the clubs. But there is an irony in the fact that the school games will have been adapted from older rural folk forms, localized in the individual Public Schools, and then returned for popular consumption again. The highly patronizing debate in *The Sporting Gazette* and *The Field* regularly insisted that rules should not be too complex for the 'uncouth brethren' or 'John Bull, fresh from the plough'.<sup>12</sup> There was certainly more than a touch of social engineering in the minds of the proponents of universal codes in the 1860s, who looked to the example set by cricket:

One of the most encouraging features of the progress of Cricket has been that it has brought out the spirit of order and discipline in the uneducated classes, and, like the volunteer movement, has infused self-control and orderly behaviour among the masses.<sup>13</sup>

When did the boys in Public Schools have time to play their games? Long before the 19th century these schools offered quite extensive opportunities for participation in games such as football. The award of a 'remedy' of a full- or half-day holiday was not reliant on rebellion on the part of the boys, as was the case in some types of school.<sup>14</sup> The time for games had almost become a right by the mid-eighteenth century, but can be seen to have existed long before. The Winchester Statutes clearly endorse recreational activities, provided they take place so as not to damage the fabric of the College, so as not to disturb others; and so as not to bring the College into disrepute. The Eton Statutes are exactly copied from those of Winchester on this point, and retain the same protective attitude to their buildings. The Orders, Statutes and Rules of John Lyon, dated January 18 1591, are also clear in their support for physical activities at Lyon's 'Free Grammar School in Harrow'.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the requirement for each pupil to possess: '...a bow, three shafts, bow-strings, and

a bracer to exercise shootings,' Lyon ordains that the scholars can play:

...upon Thursday only sometimes when the weather is fine, and upon Saturday, or half-holidays after evening prayer. And their play shall be to drive a top, to toss a handball, to run, or to shoot, and none other.<sup>17</sup>

William Horman, a scholar of Winchester College who became Headmaster there and then Provost of Eton, writing in 1519, warns of the balance needed by the authorities:

There muste be a measure in gyuynge of remedies or sportynge to chyldren, leste they be wery of goynge to theyr boke if they haue none, or waxe slacke if they haue to many.<sup>18</sup>

There is the clear assumption that time for recreation is part of the scholar's day, but that the adults should regulate it. Another Headmaster of Winchester, Christopher Johnson, has left valuable information about his period in office in the 1560s. In over 400 Latin themes Johnson consistently supports the need for recreation, but often chastises his pupils for preferring their sport to their work.<sup>19</sup>

Evidence such as this increases in its frequency as time goes on, but there has been less research done on the period before the early 19th century in Public School sport. It is all too easy in the face of such enormous developments in the 19th century, to suggest that there had been little or no provision by the school authorities for physical activity in the centuries before.<sup>20</sup> As I have written elsewhere, there is evidence that an encouragement for regular, supervised recreation was a fundamental part of the system in the earliest Public Schools.<sup>21</sup> Regular opportunities for physical activity were widespread within the schools, and not limited to the older or wealthier foundations. For example, the annals of Christ's Hospital show expenditure for construction of a 'play place' in the 1670s, and list activities which need greater control over them in 1725:

...throwing of Snowballs; playing of Football; throwing at Cocks or Bricks, or other things sett up in imitation of Cocks; Trapp ball or Crickett; Castle Topps; throwing Balls or Sticks at one another...<sup>22</sup>

The supervision of play-time in schools was usually carried out by the senior boys, but sanctioned by the authorities. The Winchester Statutes of 1400, give the details of the system of supervision of the scholars in their free time by senior boys appointed by the Warden.<sup>23</sup>

First Football at Winchester, Eton and Harrow

Winchester

The earliest documentary evidence of games that could have been football at Winchester and Eton appear in the 1519 *Vulgaria* of William Horman to which I have already referred. In this Latin text book Horman gives the translation of one phrase as: 'We wyll playe with a ball full of wynde.'<sup>24</sup> Some of Horman's phrases reflect the Etonian customs, while others can only have referred to the Winchester way of life.

Christopher Johnson, the Headmaster of the 1560s, mentions the activities which he enjoyed when a scholar at Winchester himself, between 1549 and 1553. He says that he: '...cared much more for balls, quoits and tops than he did for books and school.'<sup>25</sup>

Sir Henry Wotton was a Commoner at Winchester in the 1560s under Christopher Johnson. After Oxford he became Ambassador to Venice and then Provost of Eton. Wotton makes reference to football in one of his poems:

Jone takes her paille, and now

She trips to milk the Sand-red Cow;

Where, for some sturdy foot-balle Swaine,

Jone strokes a sillibub, or twaine.<sup>26</sup>

The first specific mention of football at Winchester is to be found in the delightful Latin poem of Robert Matthew, a scholar from 1643 to 1647. He describes the procession 'two by two' to the top of St Catharine's Hill every Tuesday and Thursday morning, where: '...we may play quoits, or hand-ball, or bat-and-ball, or football; these games are innocent and lawful...'27 Just how correct Matthew was in calling football 'lawful' beyond the school is debatable. Elias and Dunning remind us that there were at least 23 edicts prohibiting football between 1314 and 1615.28

Football at Winchester was certainly one of the regular activities played on St Catharine's Hill from a very early time. The College Meads immediately adjacent to the school buildings had only been offered for the boys' recreations occasionally; when it was too hot to play on Hills. That Hills was still the venue for some football after Meads is made available to the boys in 1768 is clear from a complaint to the Warden in the 1860s that their 'long game' was spoiled by a maze being re-cut in the ground.29 There were still important games taking place on St Catharine's Hill in 1818 and 1819, as a detailed diary tells us.30

So, at Winchester we approach the 19th century with a football game that stretches back well into the earliest times of the College, but without a clear image of the sort of game played.

## Eton

The Playing Fields at Eton had been purchased in 1443, immediately after the foundation of the school. The fields are referred to as the 'boys' field', 'the playing field close' and the 'playing-leas' early on in the College accounts, and they seem to have been at the disposal of the boys at least from the beginning of the 16th century.31 They are then called 'the Shooting Fields', which name survived into the 19th century.32

Access to the playing fields had certainly been granted from long before 1717, and I think it would be a fair suggestion that the Etonians

played some form of ‘kickabout’ football on the open expanses available to them. There was certainly supervision of recreation there in the 1530s by: ‘Prepositores in the feld whan they play, for fyghting, rent-clothes, blew eyes, or siche like.’<sup>33</sup>

A document from 1766 tells us that the ‘Football Fields’ were among the ‘Places of Resort’ of the pupils, and that among the nicknames of the scholars could be found ‘Kicky Osborn’ and ‘Headimy Owen’.<sup>34</sup> As well as football, there is a reference to a game called ‘scrambling walls’, which Maxwell Lyte considers to have been associated with the Wall Game.<sup>35</sup>

## Harrow

The rules laid down by the Founder of Harrow did not mention football among the approved physical activities for the scholars. But it is quite likely that some sort of ‘kickabout’ game would have existed, albeit informal and initially using the handball permitted by Lyon’s Orders. The school provided mostly for the sons of the locality, with some ‘foreigners’ lodging nearby. The influence of the villagers and their sporting traditions would have been formidable in the newly founded school.

John Lyon’s system of supervision did include the appointment of two monitors who were to report transgressors to the Schoolmaster for punishment. The only specific duty of the monitors in recreation was to report any boy above the first form who spoke English instead of Latin during their games.<sup>36</sup> But we know that areas of land were acquired specifically for the use of the boys in their recreation from time to time. William Horne, elected Schoolmaster in 1669, arranged the purchase of a piece of land adjacent to the School Yard as a playing field in 1680. Two years later he had the School Yard itself levelled.<sup>37</sup> In 1750 Harrow took back leased land and made it over to the use of the boys as ‘the lower playfields’.<sup>38</sup>

We could suggest that this amount of land would be very much more than adequate just for the spinning of tops, the playing of handball,

running and shooting. Remnants of informal football games can be identified in the form of 'fug' football in the School Yard at Harrow. From 1803, football was played on the School's share of the newly-enclosed Roxeth Common, about 8 acres.

### The Winchester Game

It is not known when the first set of rules was written for Winchester Football. The first printed rule book dates from 1863, but it is clear from other sources that a generally agreed code existed before this time, and that some aspects of the game were different from the printed rules.<sup>39</sup> Manuscript books from 1842 onwards record Winchester's peculiar language, *Notions*, and consistently refer to the rules of football as played at Winchester. That some of the *Notions* books have been copied from an earlier, centrally available source is emphasised by the exact reproduction of certain phrases in each manuscript. I am sure that a printed edition of Winchester Football rules was only thought necessary when the debate was raging in the press about the adoption of a set of football rules as the 'universal code'.<sup>40</sup>

The game seems to have always been played on a long and narrow pitch, standardized to 27 yards by 80 yards by 1863.<sup>41</sup> The more formal encounters put 22 players against another 22, and 6 against 6. Although these were the serious confrontations, there were numerous lesser struggles, and their composition was limited only by the imagination of the participants. The competitions noted in the early years include: second 6 v 6, 8 v 8, 6 v 9, 15 v 15, halves of the alphabet, 8 Commoners v 14 of Tutors' Houses, Prefects v Inferiors, Tall v Short, and the World v the Rifle Corps.

The pitch was marked out in different ways at different times in history; doubtless just clothing strewn on the ground at first, but hurdles, then ropes were used to mark the sidelines. But all these did allow the ball to occasionally be kicked inconvenient distances beyond the playing area. The senior pupils, fully in control of the leisure of the school population, frequently employed 'boy labour' for menial tasks, and it is not surprising that there was 'fagging' at football.

Probably the most striking requirement for the main senior games was that:

...about forty boys stand outside the ropes, on both sides, at equal distances from each other, and when the ball is kicked outside the ropes, it is their duty to put it inside the ropes again, at the same place as it came out.<sup>42</sup>

Of course the 'kickers-in' were quite capable of re-directing play as they saw fit or dared, but there were serious consequences for failure.<sup>43</sup> The mass employment of kickers-in was abolished mid-century, at the insistence of the Second Master Charles Wordsworth, and canvas sheets 8 feet high were erected on poles to do their job.<sup>44</sup> But the juniors were not totally free from football fagging. In September 1860 the Captain of Football issued a rule which stated that all who were not in the 'Twenty-Two', or exempt for other reasons, had to appear every day to play football in Junior and Middle Games. Those that had leave from playing had to: '...stand outside 'Canvass' to 'put in balls'.'<sup>45</sup>

The ropes which originally marked the sidelines of the senior games and later protected the canvas screens from being pushed over were, and are, supported by solid wooden posts at intervals of ten yards. These posts mark the different divisions of the pitch ('one post' or 'three posts' indicating ten or thirty yards) rather like the grid lines in American football. The ropes soon came to be included as part of the strategy of the game, and particular tactics were developed in the space between the canvas and the ropes. An attacking side tried to keep the ball in the open, but a feature of defensive play was the wish to play 'in ropes' from where a goal could not be scored directly. The canvas then was replaced by netting in 1866, providing once again a spectator game. Throughout the time of this transition, the juniors continued to play a less formal game, bounded by hurdles, and fetching their own ball. Juniors were still playing in an area bounded by hurdles into the 1890s.<sup>46</sup> In the way that Public School language tends to cling to the obsolete, the playing area for Winchester Football is still called a 'canvas' although the material has long

since disappeared. It is worth noting that the game played today again employs kickers-in, now called 'watchers out'; two junior pupils assigned the duty of retrieving the balls kicked over the side netting.

The players are divided according to their positions on the field into 'ups' and 'behinds', relating in a similar way to the division into 'forwards' and 'backs' in rugby football. The 'ups' are members of the 'hot' or scrum; the 'behinds' are differentiated into 'hot watches' (like scrum halves) and 'kicks' (like full backs).

In its first documented form of 1842 a player was nominated by each side to act as the goal, and to umpire at the same time.<sup>47</sup> He stood with his feet apart in the centre of the goal line, called 'worms' from 1874,<sup>48</sup> with gowns rolled up and placed on his feet. The object of the game was to propel the ball towards the opponents' end of the pitch to obtain points as follows: if the ball was kicked between the sides of the pitch and the goal it counted as a 'pass' or point; if it was kicked over the gowns it scored a 'gowner', equal to two points;<sup>49</sup> if over goal's head it was called a 'goaler' and was worth three points. If however, goal managed to touch the ball before it went behind the line it did not count at all. The system was simplified and the person standing as 'goal' was removed some time before the rules were first printed. It is possible that Winchester players dabbled with the use of goal-posts at some time in the 1850s, as there is an oblique reference to them in a letter from an Old Wykehamist to *The Field* in November 1861.<sup>50</sup> In published form, the object now became one of trying to kick the ball over the opponents' goal line, which stretched the whole distance between the ends of the canvas or netting.<sup>51</sup> There was still a reduced score if the full back, called 'last behind', touched the ball before it crossed the line. The modern game awards 3 points for a goal scored from a kick directly crossing the line, and 1 point if the ball crosses the line having come off another player, or from the netting, ropes or posts, or as a result of a penalty for infringement of the rules.

The game was, as now, started by the 'ups' forming a 'hot' and attempting to drive their opponents off the ball. When the ball comes out of

the 'hot', play is characterised by a series of hard first-time kicks of the ball, with the kicker following up and attempting to block the opponent's kick. Although most of the game is taken up with hotting and fierce kicking, great acclaim has always been accorded to this following up which has the colourful name of 'raising a plant'. The ultimate demonstration of bravery is to charge down the opponent as he kicks the ball into your body or face.

These spoiling tactics make it harder to get the ball to the opposite goal line, as do the limitations imposed by the rules. There is no dribbling and no forward passing (an offence called 'tag'), no handling of the ball except when caught on the full ('kicks' may also use their hands to stop or steady the ball), and a strict definition of off-side. A catcher may only run with the ball if being chased. Otherwise he must restrict himself to three paces before punting the ball. Another limitation is that when a player kicks the ball after it was last touched by a member of his own side, he has to keep it below head height. The standard penalty for breaking the rules is to lose one or two 'posts' of ground, although certain penalties result in a free punt.

An interesting inclusion in the printed rules of 1863 is the statement that tripping is allowed; this is strongly prohibited by the time the rules are revised and reprinted in 1876. It is worth reminding ourselves that the Rugby rules permitted: 'Hacking...to use the toe in kicking the shins of the opposite players who are in a scrimmage...or in tripping up a player who is 'running in'.'<sup>52</sup>

Umpiring is quite a complicated business. It was taken from the junior boys in the late 1860s when more members of staff became involved in the game.<sup>53</sup>

The style of Winchester football depends on the conditions and the number of players on each side. When the ground is dry and there are some good long kickers, it is not difficult for a team to score 50 or more points. When the hots get bogged down in deep mud, it becomes more a contest of attrition. The 19th century hot could be a momentous

struggle, with the reluctant or the faint-hearted ‘...reminded of their duty to get into the middle of it by the application of a gentle persuasive from a leather strap employed for the purpose.’<sup>54</sup>

To quote from some of the busy correspondence of the mid nineteenth century:

The general rule of the (Winchester) game was that it was a game of football, and not handball; and manly, straightforward play was more applauded than scientific dodging and sneaking.<sup>55</sup>

Another sort of game besides the junior version was also in existence at Winchester in the early 19th century; less formal, with fewer players and no hots.<sup>56</sup> This ‘long game’ would have corresponded to the ‘kickabout’ game at Rugby, and ‘fug’ football at Harrow.

#### Football at Eton

The first recorded rules of the Field Game date from 1847, to be found in a manuscript in the Eton College Collection. The goal sticks are described as 7 feet high and 11 feet apart, but the size of the playing area is not defined. Dimensions of 130 yards by 90 yards are given as the established area of the 1930s.<sup>57</sup> Success in the Field game relies on good dribbling and support from teammates. ‘No-one can hang about waiting for passes, for no passing is allowed.’<sup>58</sup>

The start of the game is not detailed in these early rules, but it was by means of a ‘bully’ - the equivalent of a Winchester hot or Rugby scrum. The ball has to be driven forward in the bully, rather than heeled backwards. As the push of one team drove through the opposition, the ball comes into open play and the kicking game takes over again. The bully seems to have had various phases of development. The first rules do not describe the bully, but an article in *The Field* of December 1861 reveals that different types of bully had been developed by this time. The writer distinguishes between an open bully and a close bully. The close bully appears to have been very similar to a scrum, but the players crouched down;

...shoulder to shoulder, with their elbows on their knees, four in front, the others assisting by their weight behind them, and the other side similarly opposing them with shoulders touching theirs.

The open bully is described as being: ‘...When the players stand opposite to one another, with a little space between them, each occupying perhaps a square yard...’<sup>59</sup>

There is an interesting feature to the modern Eton bully: the team awarded the advantage in each bully has what is called ‘heads’. This gives them the right to bind lower than the opposing team, so that their push is clearly more effective. The opponents, having yielded heads, must arrange their front row with their heads up out of the bully. Just when this method of differential binding was introduced is not clear.

When the ball crosses the goal line without passing through the goal, the first player to touch the ball gains an advantage for his side: if a member of the defending team touches the ball first he secures a kick off from the goal line; if an attacker touches the ball first he obtains a ‘rouge’ for his team. This is only awarded if the attacker touching the ball was ‘bullied’, or under pressure from the opposition, as he pursued the ball across the line. If the ball crosses the line still in a bully it is ‘rougeable’, as it is if it last touched a defender. If a defender touches a ‘rougeable’ ball first, the attackers choose between a five yard bully and the award of one point, and a kick off by the defenders. No player may stand and wait beyond the goal line for the ball - both attacker and defender must remain in the field of play until the ball crosses the line. The conversion of a rouge is an extraordinary phenomenon to watch, and today closely reflects the rouge of the 1847 rules. In outline it resembles a five yard scrum in front of the posts in Rugby, but the similarity ends there. The ball is placed one yard from the goal line, in the centre of the goal-mouth, and the defending side bind together as close to the ball as possible without touching it. The earliest accounts of the rouge describe the attacking players arranging themselves also in a ‘close semicircle’ leaving a gap for the player who touched the

ball to 'run in and give it the first kick'.<sup>60</sup> Today the conversion of a rouge sees the use of the 'ram', a sort of running 'bulldozer'. The ram binds tightly together and builds up to its concerted push with the chanting of a mantra. At an appropriate moment the ram sets itself in motion, hoping to push the ball, and the opponents if necessary, through the goal.

A goal is scored in the Field Game when the ball passes between the goal posts and under the crossbar. In the first half of the 19th century no crossbar existed, and one of the two umpires had to judge the height. In the 1847 rules there was also one referee engaged: '...to cast decision if the umpires disagree.' The modern game employs a crossbar, and the target area is more clearly defined. The present scoring system awards three points for a goal or a rouge, and two points for a conversion goal or conversion rouge. One point can be scored in certain circumstances.

The Field Game enforces an offside rule, but this has become much more complicated over time. The earliest form we have describes a player as 'sneaking' if he has 'three or less players before him'. In this situation he may not play the ball or prevent others from playing it. Being behind the goal line before the ball is another form of offside. The present sneaking rule places a player offside if he is in front of the ball when any bully-player on his own team touches it, except if the bully-player is in a tightly-formed bully, is returning the ball into the back of a bully, or is taking a kick off. Sneaking is also called if a player is in front of the ball when a 'behind' on his own side dribbles the ball forwards, rather than kicking it ahead. The offside situation lasts until either the offending player is no longer in front of the member of his own team in question, or until any advantage he may have gained by his position has disappeared. Handling the ball is not permitted in the Field Game except to stop the ball on the ground, or to touch it when it goes out.

Two further infringements are characteristic of the modern Eton Field Game. They are 'cornering' and 'furking'. Cornering is when a player stands to the side of the bully when not bound to it. When a player

propels the ball out of the back of the bully it is called *furking*, and is also penalised.

Just as Winchester Football was played between some imaginatively devised teams, Eton's Football included some interesting games in the 19th century: Boats v no Boats, Dissyllables v the Rest, Tall v Short, and even the 'Step-and-fetch-its' v the 'Puff-wheeze-and-gasps'.<sup>61</sup>

The question of whether the Field Game pre-dates the Wall Game is a difficult one. The Wall Game cannot have been played in its present location before 1717, as this is the date the Wall was built. The Wall Game is played in an area measuring approximately 110 yards by 5 yards, with the brick Wall running down one side. At each end is a chalk line which denotes Calx (one end is known as Good Calx and the other Bad Calx). In Good Calx the goal is a door in the end wall, and in Bad Calx the goal was an elm tree with an area corresponding to the size of a door chalked on the trunk - yet to be replaced after the tree's demise. According to one Eton historian the Wall Game was played on a much wider strip of ground in the 1820s, and was much less dependent on the lengthy bullies that dominate the game today. In this earlier form it would have much more closely resembled the Field Game, and the game was appropriately described as: '...one of open warfare, whereas today it is essentially trench warfare.'<sup>63</sup>

The Wall Game requires tremendous determination and effort, as most of the time is spent pushing in the scrums. There is so little open play with the ball being kicked that you could lose the association of the game at the Wall with football. The bully forms one player at a time against the Wall, a player from the side which has 'heads' taking position first. The bully-players crouch very low, but must not touch the ground with any part of the body apart from hands and feet. The ball is rolled into the bully so that it touches the Wall, and the struggle begins.

Progress is very slow, and the exhausted forward players are occasionally dragged out of the bully and replaced by fresher legs. When the ball does come loose from the bully there is a frantic affray to kick the

ball on. Handling the ball is not permitted except when a 'behind' catches full-pitch and then drop-kicks. Handling is necessary in order to claim a 'shy' and throw a goal. Between Calx and the back line the ball must be propped up off the ground against the Wall and touched with the hand. When this has been done the attacking team claims a 'shy', which is the right to try a throw at the goal. Immediately a shy is awarded the defending side race to guard their goal. A successfully thrown goal counts 10 points. One point is scored for the shy if no goal is scored. A goal can also be kicked, but is worth only 5 points. Outside Calx no passing back or 'furking' is permitted, but this is allowed in each Calx. If the ball goes out of the boundaries a bully is formed opposite where the ball is stopped or comes to rest -rather than opposite the place at which it left the field.

The Wall Game equivalent of offside is called 'sneaking', and is almost identical to the 'sneaking' of the Field Game. The Eton Wall Game is a difficult game to watch because the ball seems not to be moving at all for long periods, with the endless straining of the bully players, and with the frequent sound of other players appealing for 'sneaking' and 'furking'. When the ball becomes loose there are thrilling moments of intense activity as the players try to kick ahead or out.

Looking closely at the rules of both the Eton football games it is easy to accept that they sprang from the same origins, but that the different restrictions of the playing areas suggested divergent developments. The Wall Game may have started as a more open Field-style game, but with the Wall providing a boundary on one side particular skills and tactics emerged until an entirely different game was identifiable. The first known rules of the Wall Game date from 1841, and the wording is identical in places to the first rules of the Field Game of 1847. Of course it is likely that one set was used as the basis for drawing up the other, but the similarity between the games themselves is also emphasised in the rules.

Thomas Gray's Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College of 1747 does not specify which game of football he had in mind, but the melancholy of the poem conveys his wish to return to his childhood games, as he asks:

What idle Progeny succeed

To chase the rolling Circle's speed,

Or urge the flying Ball?<sup>64</sup>

### Harrow Football

No early manuscript or printed version of the Harrow Football rules exists in their archives, and we must rely on accounts of the game as it was described in the press of the mid-nineteenth century. The first formal rules we can work with are ascribed to Edward Bowen 'and the authorities of those old days' in about 1860.<sup>65</sup> The modern rules are very simply presented on a typewritten sheet, giving the almost unchanged regulations from 1860, followed by some amendments and advice to players. The Harrow game is played on a pitch 150 yards by 100 yards. The early games featured numerous junior boys crowded into their goal, called a 'base', with the seniors playing the open game by 'following up' in the main part of the pitch.<sup>66</sup> Bases are 18 feet wide, 12 feet high, and have no crossbar. The ball used in Harrow Football is a quite curious implement: much larger than a full-sized soccer ball, and flat on the two side panels - a bit like a squat barrel or tub. The ball rolls very easily on its side, but does not often travel straight in the air. It is claimed by many that this ball has been retained due to the very soggy conditions in which the game is often played; indeed these circumstances are said to be preferred. An extract from a Harrow song by Edmund Howson is less than complimentary about the ball:

Bother the ball, it goes so dead!...

Rolling about like a lump of lead,...

Who could play, I should like to know,

With half a ton at the end of his toe?

At least Howson advises later in his song:

Nothing can drive the dumps away

Like Harrow footer on Harrow clay.<sup>67</sup>

It appears that there were efforts to develop the definitive and best Harrow game in the 1850s and 1860s, during which time several existed together.<sup>68</sup> When the Sixth Form Game was formed in 1867 it was arranged with 13 players on each side. 8-a-side games were played against the 'old boys', but 11-a-side was kept fairly standard. Other experiments included 1-a-side house matches, and in a way similar to Winchester, games were played between a few of the best players and a larger number of lesser players. When they had finished their game, it used to be traditional for the players to repair to a public house for large measures of hot rum punch.<sup>69</sup>

The game is begun with a kick off from the centre of the pitch. If, at any time, the ball goes out of the marked ground at the side, it is brought back into play by a throw in, and it is kicked in if the ball goes over the ends of the pitch without passing through the bases. After each base is scored the teams change ends. This used to create the effect of bases only being scored at one end, due to prevailing wind, slope and drainage problems. Another unusual characteristic of the Harrow game is the doubling of the distance between the bases for a replayed match in the event of a draw. The side with a strong kicker at the back will have a great advantage on these occasions, shooting between goal posts 36 feet apart.

The ball may be caught when in the air, and if the catcher calls 'yards'

he may take 3 yards unmolested, but must then kick at goal. According to one history of the school, the award of yards used to mean a free throw at the base rather than a free kick -the author gives no support for his statement. In practice a common trait of the present game is for a player to dribble the ball forward and then turn and chip the ball into the hands of a team-mate, who then calls for yards. The catcher must be behind the kicker at the time of the kick. If he fails to call for yards the catcher is liable to be tackled by the opponents. Should he find himself near the opposing base with yards awarded the player may try to cross the base line with his three strides. If he fails, he must return to his starting point and have a free kick at the base, the defenders having to stay at least the distance of his three strides away. No other handling is permitted than this 'fair catch'. Holding and tripping are both proscribed, but charging is allowed except in the back. Umpires follow play by moving around the pitch with the players. An offside rule is also contained in the Harrow Game, the emphasis being that a player catching the ball must be behind the kicker at the time of the kick. The player in an offside position is not allowed to take part in the game until the ball has been touched by an opponent.

John Cartwright praises Harrow Football as a faithful representative of the kicking game, but modern play does encourage a player to chip the ball sideways or backwards into the hands of a member of his own side. Would Cartwright still be convinced that: '...by whatever name it is called, the system in use at Harrow is true foot ball...'

From at least the middle of the 19th century football was compulsory at Harrow. Senior boys were responsible for organising the juniors in their games twice a week. The monitors assigned this duty went by the title of 'slave-drivers', and just as the Wykehamist might be driven to keep up with the game, the slave-drivers had to ensure there were no stragglers.<sup>71</sup>

In the same way that Gray asked Etonians to think of their football prowess when in old age, Edward Bowen emphasises the importance of these school games as preparation for the greater struggles in later life, in his song *Forty Years On* written in 1872:

...God gives us bases to guard or beleaguer,

Games to play out, whether earnest or fun;

Fights for the fearless, and goals for the eager,

Twenty, and thirty, and forty years on!

### Summary and Comparison of the Three Games

The settings are different for the football played at Harrow and Winchester, and the Field Game at Eton; Harrow's pitch is 150 yards by 100 yards, Eton's measures 130 yards by 90 yards, and Winchester's canvas is 80 yards by 27 yards. The Harrow goal is called a base, and employs posts 12 feet high and 18 feet apart. The ball may pass over the base at any height. At Eton the goalposts are 7 feet high and 11 feet apart, but before a crossbar was added later in the 19th century the umpires could only award a goal if the ball crossed below the height of the top of the posts. 'Worms', as the Winchester goal is called, extends the full width of the pitch, so the goal is effectively 27 yards wide. This replaced the single player who had to act as goal, with a gown on each foot, in the early 19th century. The ball may cross worms at any height unless the attacker has kicked the ball after it was last touched by a member of his side; then it must remain below shoulder height.

The Eton and Winchester games begin and restart with their respective scrums: the Winchester hot and the Eton bully. Harrow have no such feature, and start the game with a kick off. If the ball goes out of play beyond the sideline it is thrown back into play at Harrow, and 'hotted' or 'bullied' in the other two systems. Beyond the goal line but not scoring a goal, the schools all return the ball to play with a defensive kick. At Harrow the ball is thrown in if being brought back into play from behind the opponents' goal line. In the Eton Field Game if an attacker touches the ball down having been pursued across

the line by an opponent in close contact a rouge is awarded, and the conversion involves the 'ram' described above.

Handling rules vary between the three schools, but with some similarities. At Eton the ball can be handled only to stop it, and to touch the ball down once it has passed outside the field of play. The ball must not be carried, thrown or struck. The Harrow game allows the ball to be caught if in the air, and a 'free kick' to be taken from a 3 pace run up. Winchester Football has an almost identical handling rule to Harrow's: if the ball is caught 'on the full', the catcher may take 3 strides and kick. In the Winchester game only the 'kicks' can stop the ball on the ground in order to kick it.

One very obvious similarity between the Harrow and Winchester games is this three-paced free kick. Both games recognise that catching the ball in the air should entitle the catcher to a privilege. In the Harrow system the giving of 'yards' means an uninterrupted kick with no more than three strides being taken, but at Winchester the catcher may continue to run beyond the three strides if he is chased by opponents. The similarity between Winchester and Harrow is all the more interesting if we note that it is also a feature of the game played at Shrewsbury described by Cartwright in 1863. In a way, the Winchester insistence on having to be pursued is also similar to the conditions under which a rouge is allowed in the Eton Field Game. The attacker gains a rouge only if he is being 'bullied' as he takes the ball over the goal line.

The more physical aspects of the three games have tended to converge so as to reduce the amount of contact apart from that legitimated by the hot and the bully. Whereas the Winchester rules of 1863 encouraged tripping, charging, and holding, tripping had been removed by the time the second edition of the rules was printed.

The offside rules are all very similar, and seem to have been fundamental to the earliest forms of the games. Eton's 'sneaking' relies on the position of a player in relation to the position of the ball. Harrow Football plays an offside rule which requires the catcher to be behind

the kicker. In the Winchester game to be 'behind your side' means being between the ball and the opposing goal line. All three games rely heavily on the player in the wrong standing back from the game until he is put onside; the umpires would penalise if necessary, but the implication in the rules is for the honourable withdrawal of the offender.

One further similarity between the three codes is the provision for certain players to play as 'behinds', with particular handling and kicking privileges. These players equate clearly to a more mobile and less well protected goalkeeper of the Association game.

For all their similarities, the differences also stand out: Winchester Football is a game of big first-time kicks with no passing or dribbling, and no goal-posts. Winchester starts with a hot. Harrow Football is a dribbling game, with a pass chipped into the hands of a teammate; the goal has no crossbar. Harrow starts with a kick-off. The Eton Field Game is a dribbling game with no passing or handling permitted; their goal does employ a crossbar. Eton starts with a bully.

## Conclusion

This paper has sought to explain the three football games played at Winchester, Eton and Harrow. The information presented has shown that the games played today at each school are very closely allied to the games played in the early 19th century. Each system of football is exciting to watch, and holds great entertainment for those with an understanding of the rules.

Each school has modified the rules and playing conditions over time, and the changes have been influenced by geographical considerations and national trends - but always with an eye on the unique character of the particular school. When we examine the similarities between the schools' games it is possible to accept common origins, but also to assume communication between players of different codes. They would meet at home, sharing ideas, and trying them out when they returned to their own schools. It is this generation of sporting youth that

took the complicated Babel of school footballing systems to the universities. The various Public School football games, together with the influence of clubs such as those in Sheffield and London generated the interest in the mid-19th century to find a way of playing together. Exactly why this happened at this particular time is a subject for further study.

The three codes of football outlined here thrive at the schools, but do not prevent other, national, sports being enjoyed as well. The systems of play and their surrounding traditions add much to the character of each school; emphasising that links with the past need not only be via history books and inanimate monuments. They are examples of living history and as such should be valued and studied.

#### Notes

1. See P.Young *A History of British Football* (London: Stanley Paul, 1969); J.Walvin *The People's Game. The Social History of British Football* (Allen Lane 1975); T.J.L.Chandler, 'Emergent Athleticism: Games in Two English Public Schools, 1800-1860', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 5, 3 (December 1988), 312-330; E.Dunning 'The Development of Modern Football' in E.Dunning *The Sociology of Sport* (London: Cass, 1976); J.A.Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

2. Repton, for example, did not make a definitive decision between Rugby and Association Football until 1878. See B.Thomas, *Repton 1557 to 1957* (Batsford, 1957), p 161. Thring's Uppingham played a game '...founded mainly on Shrewsbury with something of Rugby in it...' according to one old boy (W.F.Rawnsley) *Early Days at Uppingham Under Edward Thring* (Macmillan, 1904, p 79

3. For further discussion of geographical influences on sport see J.Bale *Sport and Place: a Geography of Sport in England, Scotland and Wales* (London: C.Hurst & Co, 1982); J.Bale 'The Adoption of Football in Europe: an Historical-Geographical Perspective' *Canadian Journal*

of the History of Sport and Physical Education, 11, 2, (1980) 56-66; E.Konig 'A Geography of Football in England and Wales' B.A. dissertation Portsmouth Polytechnic (1972).

4. P.M.Young A History of British Football (Stanley Paul, 1969), p 64

5. See P.M.Young (1969) op cit., Chapter 1 'Tribal Origins'; J.Walvin The People's Game: the Social History of English Football (Allen Lane 1975), Chapter 1 'Pre-Industrial Football'.

6. J.Huizinga Homo Ludens: a study of the play-element in culture (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), passim

7. L.Stone "Interpersonal Violence in English Society 1300-1980", Past and Present, 101 (November 1983), 22-34

8. For a valuable discussion about changes in behaviour and manners see N.Elias, The Civilising Process. Volume 1 The History of Manners trans. E.Jephcott (Oxford, 1978). Sport as an instrument of cultural repression is presented in a collection of essays by J-M.Brohm, Sport - a prison of Measured Time trans I.Fraser (London: Ink Links,1978).

9 J.A.Mangan "Imitating their betters and disassociating from their inferiors: grammar schools and the Games Ethic in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" 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), p 1-45

10. See chapter 6 of J.Lowerson, Sport and the English middle classes 1870-1914 (Manchester University Press, 1993).

11 A.Guttman, From Ritual to Record, The Nature of Modern Sports (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p 40. A reply to the ideas presented in Guttman's text is offered in J.M.Carter and A.Kruger, Ritual and Record. Sports Records and Quantification in Pre-Modern Societies (Greenwood Press, 1990).

12. 'Goalstick', "Football" in *The Field*, (October 12 1861), 335
13. J.H. "Football and other pastimes of the people" in *The Field* (January 18, 1862), 47
14. K.Thomas, *Rule and Misrule in the Schools of Early Modern England*, (University of Reading, 1976)
15. Statutes of Eton College (1443), Statute XLVI, 164 typescript of English translation in the Eton College Collections.
16. Although Lyon founded his school in 1572, these documents appear to have been final guidelines for the good government of the school just before his death in October 1592.
17. E.Laborde, *Harrow School: Yesterday and Today*, (Winchester Publications Ltd., 1948) p 239
18. W.Horman *Vulgaria* (London 1519)
19. British Library Add MSS 4379, (1563-6) folio 24L.
20. See D.W.Brailsford, 'Attitudes towards exercise and Physical Education in England 1560-1714'. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, (University of Southampton, 1968)
21. S.J.Bailey 'Changes in the form and function of physical activity at Winchester College 1382-1680', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, (University of Southampton, 1992)
22. E.H.Pearce *Annals of Christ's Hospital* (Hugh Rees Ltd, 1908), p 255. I have inserted the punctuation as none exists in the original.
23. Statutes of Winchester College (1400), Winchester College Muniments
24. Op cit. Horman (1519)

25. A.F.Leach, Hampshire Schools. Victoria County Histories of the Counties of England, (London, 1903), 2, p 313
26. Sir Henry Wotton On a Bank as I sate a Fishing - A Description of Spring, quoted in P.Young (1969) op cit., p 32
27. R.Matthew De Collegio seu potius Collegiata Schola Wicchamica Wintoniensi trans. in A.K.Cook, About Winchester College (Macmillan, 1917) p 21
28. N.Elias & E.Dunning The Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process (Blackwell, 1986). p 176
29. H.C.Adams Wykehamica, (Parker, 1878), p 295
30. J.Minet, MSS Diary 1818-1819, Winchester College Muniments
31. H.C.Maxwell Lyte, A History of Eton College (1440-1910) (Macmillan, 1911), p 126
32. Ibid. p 221; also correspondence with Eton College Archivist.
33. Etoniana, (May 22, 1907), 133
34. T.Frankland Nugae Etonenses (MSS 1766), in Etoniana (July 15, 1907), 156
35. Op cit. H.C.Maxwell Lyte, p 320
36. E.D.Laborde Harrow School: Yesterday and Today (Winchester Publications, 1948), p 30
37. Op cit. E.D.Laborde (1948), p 34
38. Op cit. E.D.Laborde (1948), p 39
39. See "Football" in The Field, (December 28 1861), 578

40. John D.Cartwright, in his series of articles on each school game, was supplied only with a written copy of the Winchester rules - the rules were then printed (J.D.Cartwright "Football: the game at Eton in The Field, and the Winchester Rules. Chapter IV" The Field, (November 14, 1863), 487. He refers to the receipt of the printed Winchester rules in The Field, (December 28, 1863), 581
41. The Rules of Football as Played at Winchester College (1863)
42. R.Gordon Winchester College Notions Book MSS Wiccama Collection (1842)
43. W.Tuckwell The Ancient Ways: Winchester Fifty Years Ago (Macmillan, 1893), p 34.
44. The first appearance of the word 'canvas' in the Notions books is in 1846: W.Elmhirst Winchester College Commoner Word Book (1846) MSS Wiccama Collection
45. J.N.Pyke MSS letter (1860) Wiccama Collection
46. H.A.Jackson Winchester Football since 1866 MSS, 4
47. R.Gordon Winchester College Notions Book (1842) MSS Wiccama Collection
48. J.A.Fort Winchester College Commoner Word Book (1874) MSS Wiccama Collection
49. This applied only to the Scholars, who wore gowns as part of their uniform. In the game played by Commoners the equivalent was called a 'coater' (F.Fane Winchester College Commoner Word Book (1843) MSS Wiccama Collection). The Scholars and Commoners did not fully mix for their games until later in the 19th century.
50. "J.H." Letter in The Field, (December 28, 1861), 578

51. There is the suggestion from Cartwright that 'goal-sticks' were in use at some time at Winchester (abandoned in about 1851), but I can find no mention of this trial, and other sources of information are consistent in referring to either a 'goal' as a boy with coats piled at his feet, or 'worms' as a goal line. It is possible that between the abolition of the 'goal' and the move to the full-width goal line, goal-sticks similar to those at Harrow or Eton were tried.

52. J.C.Thring "Football" in *The Field*, (March 15, 1862), 219

53. Fratibus Wiccamia (W.A.Fearon) *The Passing of Old Winchester* (P & G Wells Ltd, 1936), p32

54. A.K.Cook "Hills, Meads and Games" in *Winchester College 1393-1893* (London, 1893), p 136

55. "Football" in *The Field*, (December 28, 1861), 578

56. "Long Game: Any game of football without Hots." Thomson *Winchester College Commoner Word Book* (c 1855) MSS Wiccamia Collection; "Long Game: In the Football season when there is no 'Canvass', and all fellows play together, but do not dress." A.L.Royds *Winchester College Commoner Word Book* (1867) MSS Wiccamia Collection; "Long Game: In football season when there is no canvas, all used to play together but did not dress. Now it is a game in the afternoons of half remedies chiefly to teach new men the rules." Cripps *Winchester College Commoner Word Book* (1868-72) MSS Wiccamia Collection

57. L.S.R.Byrne and E.L.Churchill *Changing Eton* (Cape, 1937), p 227

58. R.H.Lyttleton et al. (eds) *Fifty Years of Sport at Oxford, Cambridge and the Great Public Schools*. (London: Southwood, 1922), p 73

59. 'Olim Etonensis' in *The Field*, (December 28, 1861), 579

60. 'Olim Etonensis' in *The Field*, (December 28, 1861), 579

61. Op cit. L.S.R.Byrne and E.L.Churchill (1937), p 226
62. W.Sterry *Annals of the King's College of Our Lady of Eton Beside Windsor* (Methuen 1898), p 326
63. Op cit. R.H.Lyttleton et al. (eds) (1922), p 51
64. Op cit. H.C.Maxwell Lyte (1911), p 296
65. Op cit. R.H.Lyttleton et al. (eds) (1922), p 237
66. P.H.M.Bryant *Harrow* (Blackie & Son), p 47-48
67. E.W.Howson 'Play Up!' in *Harrow Musical Society Harrow Song Book: Complete Edition 1862-1901* (Novello & Co., 1901), p 120
68. Op cit E.D.Laborde (1948), p 196-198
69. Op cit. P.H.M.Bryant (1936), p 48
70. Op cit. P.H.M.Bryant (1936), p 48
71. S.Daryl *School Days at Harrow* (Routledge, 1867), p 49
72. E.E.Bowen 'Forty Years On' in *Harrow Musical Society Harrow Song Book: Complete Edition 1862-1901* (Novello & Co., 1901), p 39
73. J.D.Cartwright "The Rugby game, the Shrewsbury rules and a collated summary of football laws" in *The Field* (November 28, 1863), 523