Fig. 1. Professor Frederick Beckwith. Portrait in Charles Newman, *Swimmers and Swimming or, The Swimmer's Album*, London, 1899, p. 7.

Fig. 2. David Pamplin. Portrait in Charles Newman, *Swimmers and Swimming or, The Swimmer's Album*, London, 1899, p. 58.

Fig. 3. Willie Beckwith. Portrait in Charles Newman, *Swimmers and Swimming or, The Swimmer's Album*, London, 1899, p. 67.

Fig. 4. Charles Beckwith. Portrait in Charles Newman, *Swimmers and Swimming or, The Swimmer's Album*, London, 1899, p. 40.

Kinship and Community in Victorian London: the 'Beckwith Frogs'

by David Day

The sporting landscape of Britain changed during the course of the nineteenth century as individual engagements with sport which emphasized public spectacle, entertainment and profit, such as pedestrianism and pugilism, were superseded by national governing bodies of sport, the collective structures favoured by a professional middle class that intended to separate its sports from both gambling and professionalism. For such men the value in sport lay not in its ability to make money but in its contribution to health and sociability, ideas encapsulated in the notion of amateurism that they applied not only to sport but to other leisure activities such as music. Incorporated in this amateur ethos was a rejection of specialization, serious training and coaching. The impact of this ethos on all classes of athletes has been extensively studied both generically and in relation to particular sports.[1] The specific studies are especially important since there were differences in how amateur administrators, who could agree unanimously on a written definition of amateur eligibility, actually applied those principles in their respective sports. This is exemplified by the differing attitudes to professionals in team sports, considered by amateurs to be especially important because of their ability to develop teamwork, leadership and comradeship. Cricket continued its tradition of employing professionals, while maintaining their servant status, and football legalized professionalism, with the aim of keeping professionals under control. In rugby union, however, officials vehemently opposed any hint of professionalism; and with rowing in an eight, the pinnacle of teamwork, professionals were rigorously excluded both as participants and as coaches. Individual sports (such as athletics or swimming) posed particular problems for amateurs, partly because it was thought they might engender selfishness and partly because they had a long tradition of professional participants and professional trainers. Both the Amateur Athletic Association and the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) had resort to the courts as they attempted to eradicate professional practices. Within swimming, amateur exponents were faced with a number of additional problems. Although it had been initially a lake, sea or river activity, and late nineteenth-century championships were still being swum in

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open water, it had become predominantly an indoor activity in major cities, where its association with the baths and washhouses provided for the health and welfare of the lower orders discouraged many middle-class swimmers from taking part. In addition, there was a traditionally strong relationship between amateur and professional exponents of the sport and, because swimming was a skill that had to be taught, an acceptance of the value of professional teachers in encouraging and expanding participation. This view was reinforced when in 1899 the ASA followed the example of other sporting bodies which had attempted to control professionals, by instituting a professional qualification, granted upon application 'to such as are desirous and deemed worthy of obtaining them'. Factors other than the ability to teach swimming were considered since officials had to be 'satisfied as to the character and antecedents of an applicant as well as to his or her ability as a professional teacher' before awarding the qualification.[2] By 1902 sixty-seven certificates had been awarded, to both male and female candidates.[3] This was viewed with general satisfaction within the amateur swimming community, although one outcome was that swimming coaches gradually became instructors rather than the independent entrepreneurs epitomized by some of their predecessors.

Nineteenth-century professional sports coaching had much in common with conventional craft processes, with the coach as the master of a body of traditional specialist craft knowledge, which was passed on through kinship groups and through coach-athlete relationships. This craft knowledge was embedded within informal communities of practice, typical of which were the close-knit interest groups surrounding swimming professors, practitioners who developed a shared methodology and a repertoire of resources that constituted the key elements of their coaching 'toolbox'. Part of their expertise was the ability to react positively to changing circumstances, especially important during the latter stages of the century as the divide between their own versions of sport and those of the emergent national governing bodies controlled by amateurs became ever more accentuated. As structural exclusion increased, artisan coaches had to seek alternative ways of supplementing their income. Many swimming professors, their reputation established by the winning of a championship, expanded their activities into various parts of the Victorian leisure milieu, especially those related to the entertainment industry. What distinguished these professors was the breadth and variety of their activities, which included teaching, competing and the performance of swimming feats and displays, as well as the coaching of promising individuals, who – in the tradition of craftsmen coaches – were often recruited from within the family or from the locale of the baths. The trajectory of each professor's career was dictated not only by his or her abilities as swimmer, coach and publicist, but also by the accessibility of appropriate facilities. Ambitious coaches moved to where they could find the crowds, the swimming baths and the competition to support them financially.

This commercial imperative can be seen in the life course of Frederick Edward Beckwith (Fig. 1), the central figure in this essay, whose aquatic promotions, in baths, theatres and aquaria, were constant features in the sporting and entertainment landscape for the second half of the nineteenth century. Beckwith's swimming knowledge, social networks and entrepreneurial flair, together with his control of essential facilities, established him at the centre of the South London sporting and entertainment community and maintained his reputation as the leading swimming professor of the age. His career as a swimming entrepreneur exemplifies the role of the organic intellectual in stimulating and sustaining local interest in a sport and illuminates the interactions that took place between coach, family and other connected individuals. Over the course of his life Beckwith's core community contained his children, Jessie and Frederick, then Willie, Charles and Agnes, and finally Lizzie and Robert, along with other family members such as second wife Elizabeth, daughter-in-law Emma and grandchildren Frederick and Agnes. Among the non familial members of his community were professionals like Thomas Attwood, who was Frederick's assistant swimming teacher by 1869, David Pamplin, who first exhibited with Beckwith in 1858 and went on to make a career as a swimming teacher (Fig. 2), and Richard Giles, who swam with the Beckwiths in the 1870s and later became a professor himself.[4] As he developed his swimming entertainments from the mid 1870s onwards Frederick's aquatic community broadened to encompass many of the prominent swimming professors and female natationists of the period.

Having beaten all the 'cracks' in Southern England by 1840, Beckwith, reportedly born in Ramsgate on 16 December 1821, relocated to Lambeth in London, an astute decision for anyone intent on selling his sporting or entertainment skills to the public. Lambeth was a compact area about a mile and a half in length and half a mile in breadth with a population which rose from 139,325 in 1851 to 301,895 by 1901. The parish bordered the Thames and was linked to Westminster on the other side by bridges at Waterloo, Hungerford, Westminster, Lambeth and Vauxhall. Within its boundaries were the Waterloo Road railway terminus and Vauxhall Bridge station, together with significant facilities for river traffic. Lambeth had a long history of public entertainments and numerous theatres and music halls existed by the 1850s, mainly producing spectacular or 'sensational' performances. Of the Royal Victoria Palace Theatre, Charles Matthews had observed that 'The lower orders rush there in mobs, and in shirt-sleeves applaud frantically, drink gingerbeer, munch apples, crack nuts, call the actors by their Christian names, and throw them orangepeel and apples by way of bouquets'. By 1872, the Surrey Theatre, Canterbury Music Hall, South London Music Hall, Bower Music Hall and Astley's Royal Amphitheatre (renowned for equestrian and gymnastic performances) were all operating, like the 'Vic' (Royal Victoria Palace Theatre), within half a mile of Lambeth Baths.[5]

London had had public bathing facilities before the Public Baths and Washhouses Acts of 1846 and 1847. Many were privately owned, like the National Tepid and Cold Swimming Baths at Marsh Gate, Westminster Road, Lambeth which hosted swimming races as well as accommodating a range of other activities. Grimwood, the celebrated Brighton billiard marker, played Jabez Hare there for twenty pounds a side in 1836, and during 1839 the baths were converted into a shooting gallery during the winter. When the nearby Astley Amphitheatre burnt down in 1841, the baths were converted to fulfil some of its functions and house a temporary circus ('The Olympic Arena'), and a prize ring with fortnightly exhibitions was organized there by the Pugilistic Association.[6] The baths with which Beckwith was to establish a long and intimate association were a new facility on ground behind 156 Westminster Bridge Road. This was financed by the Lambeth Baths and Washhouses Company Limited and described at the opening in 1853 as the most extensive baths in England.[7]

Like their predecessor these baths were designed so that the main pool could be boarded over to make an indoor arena and they served a broad local constituency. A large meeting of the artisan class held there in 1866 resolved that railway companies should be forced to find alternatives for those whose homes they pulled down while another crowded public meeting later that year considered the pay and conditions of dock and wharf labourers. Middle-class groups and specific interest groups also found the baths useful. An industrial exhibition took place there in 1865, which Prince Albert attended; in 1867 a petition raised from a meeting there asked that the British Museum be opened three evenings a week; and in 1869 a well-attended meeting protested against taxation levels. The gymnasium which operated at the baths during the winter, managed variously by Beckwith, his son Willie and his son-in-law William Taylor, had a good track for pedestrianism and 'Every appliance for healthful and manly exercise of all kinds'.[8]

Beckwith held the post of swimming master at Lambeth for over twenty years, and also taught at a number of schools, including the Royal Wellington Military School, Royal Naval School, Christ Hospital, King's College and Westminster School, through which he established strong connections to members of the nobility.[9] In 1851 he was living close to the National Baths, although swimming was not yet his main source of income: he was recorded as a fancy willow seat-maker both in the census of that year and on the birth certificate of daughter Frances Ann Jessie in November 1852. He was still recorded as a journeyman chair-maker at the births of sons Frederick in 1854 and William Henry in 1857, and at his marriage to their mother, Agnes Oram, in July 1858, but by June 1859, when four-month-old Agnes Sarah died, he was calling himself a professor of swimming. Census returns from 1861 described Frederick as a professor and his children, Frances (Jessie) and Frederick, as scholars and public swimmers.[10]

Between his arrival in London in the early 1840s and his claiming of the title of professor in 1859, Beckwith had established himself as a leading swimming professional. He won the gold Leander medal at Harold Kenworthy's benefit in 1850, and the champion belt of the Surrey Swimming Club in 1850 at the Westminster Baths and again in 1851. After potential rivals Charles Steedman and Thomas Young had left for Australia, Beckwith had an easy win for the Championship of England and then defended it successfully against James Westron, in Wenlock Baths, over a quarter of a mile; he subsequently defeated William Walker of Northumberland over a course from Hammersmith Pier to Putney Bridge. For several years Frederick regularly issued challenges, for any sum, over distances from one hundred yards to four miles, but in 1858 he announced his intention to retire, because teaching commitments meant that he could no longer sustain 'that condition fit to hold his title of champion, which he has maintained for six years against all comers'.[11]

By 1857 Frederick was writing on swimming and the *Morning Chronicle* recorded that *The Whole Art of Swimming*, by F. E. Beckwith, had been forwarded to them for review.[12] He also established the National Philanthropic Swimming Society during May 1859 to diffuse knowledge of, and to promote proficiency in, swimming among the working classes. Part of the plan was to stimulate public competition, and the first event took place on Whit-Monday in the Serpentine, before about two thousand spectators, with the support of the Humane Society. These races continued under Beckwith's management, with prizes paid for by subscriptions, and in 1861 one observer noted that 'too much praise cannot be given to the Professor for his energy and perseverance'. A second aim of the Society had been to encourage individuals to subscribe from half-a-guinea to ten guineas annually which gave them the right to send pupils for free instruction. In August 1865, all the entrants for one gala at Poplar Baths had been taught by Beckwith in twelve lessons, at the expense of a Mr A. Currie, who not only paid for about a hundred boys to be taught but also hired the baths, donated the prizes and sent gala tickets to their fathers.[13]

Beckwith used the symbolic capital accruing from his status as champion to expand his commercial concerns. In 1859 and 1860 he ran The Leander, an alehouse in Westminster Road, and issued regular challenges from there, declaring in April 1860 that he would swim any American from one to five miles, for a hundred pounds a side or upwards. That same month, having been requested by a number of gentlemen to form an amateur swimming club, he held an inaugural meeting at The Leander. In September 1861, he took over The Good Intent in Lucretia Street, within a hundred yards of Lambeth Baths, where facilities included a good bar, with a comfortable parlour for members of Parliament and their friends, a large clubroom, a taproom and a covered skittle ground. Harmonic meetings were held every Saturday, select sparring was conducted by professors Bill Thorpe and Dooney Harris, glove bouts for a purse were held regularly, and there

were plenty of rats and every 'convenience for gentlemen trying their dogs'. There was a large collection of sporting pictures, including portraits of all the celebrated pugilists, pedestrians, rowers and swimmers, while *Fistiana* and other sporting books were kept behind the bar. Despite his threats to retire, Beckwith continued to issue challenges with the support of his backers and his racing colours were available at the bar. He took advantage of the popularity of pedestrianism to advertise a match with Deerfoot, the American pedestrian, in October 1861 over twenty lengths of Lambeth Baths. When Deerfoot forfeited, Beckwith was 'bitterly disappointed at not being enabled to meet the Indian, as he has expended a good deal in training for the event, and hopes, therefore, his friends will rally round him'.[14]

By February 1862 The Good Intent had become the most celebrated sporting resort on the Surrey side of the Thames and was 'nightly patronised by crowds of the right sort', including leading sporting professionals, while accurate news of every sporting event of the day could 'be constantly gleaned at the house of the Champion Swimmer of England'. The professor may also have been running The Perseverance in New Cut, near the baths and, by 1863, when articles (the agreements regarding conduct and finance made between fighters) for the Cook versus Stanley and the Harris versus Hatton fights were sent to Mr Beckwith as stakeholder, his address was Post Office Stores, Kennington Road.[15] During the late 1870s Frederick was host of the King's Head hotel in Westminster Bridge Road from where he announced in June 1877 that he would match a dog to swim Mr R. Eade's dog over a hundred to two hundred yards for not less than five pounds.[16] Business directories in 1884 listed him variously as a teacher of swimming and an agent for aquatic galas based at 156 Westminster Bridge Road, a tobacconist of 142 Westminster Bridge Road, and a swimming instructor.[17] Apparently, however, he was not a good businessman. In June 1861, described as swimming master, beershop and eating-house keeper and tobacconist, Frederick appeared in the Court for Relief of Insolvent Debtors, and in 1879, as a licensed victualler and teacher of swimming, he was in the London Bankruptcy Court.[18]

While the publicity generated from the Deerfoot challenge was probably a motivating factor in its organization, serious competitive swimming continued. In August 1863, Beckwith and E. B. Mather, of Manchester, raced from Hammersmith to Putney, for the Champion Cup and two hundred pounds. The race was organized by London Swimming Club and caused considerable interest because Beckwith had not competed in a championship match since he defeated Walker in 1859, while Mather had held the title since the previous August. The thirty-nine year old Beckwith, who stood five feet four inches and weighed eight stone six pounds, was the favourite in the betting and he won comfortably after Mather retired before the finish.[19] The following year the professor was the favourite again, in a water steeplechase where swimmers jumped over or dived under a number of poles, at Belle Vue

Gardens, Manchester, but this time, 'much to the chagrin of Beckwith, who had booked the event as a certainty', he lost by about three inches in front of nearly five thousand spectators.[20] His coaching career also began during this period when he worked with H. Gardiner (or Gardner), the five hundred yards champion of England. In August 1864, Beckwith and Gardiner were staying at the British Rolla Inn, Collier Street, Salford, prior to Gardiner racing Meakin for the Manchester Champion Cup, which could be seen behind the bar. In July 1867, when London Swimming Club organized an amateur race in the Serpentine, D. J. Aviss won the event by 'Cleaving along . . . at a spanking pace', urged on by Beckwith, who had taught him to swim.[21]

His position as swimming master at Lambeth enabled Beckwith to exploit its commercial possibilities, including 'benefit' performances whose proceeds went to him as organizer. At his benefit in September 1857 a good crowd witnessed his pupil, Escomb, win the deciding heat of the programme; another benefit in August 1858 included a race between two more pupils, won by David Pamplin; and Frederick himself concluded yet another benefit in October by combining with other swimmers in a display of ornamental swimming and floating. By 1859 he was also regularly engaged outside London, for instance at the Weston Shore Baths, Southampton, where in June he and his assistants contributed to the entertainment. In August 1862, the Beckwiths appeared in Manchester and a year later Jessie, Frederick and Willie joined their father in an exhibition at Lambeth Baths when a race for youths was won by Thomas Attwood.[22] The difficulties encountered by swimming entrepreneurs were illustrated by one writer who recalled accompanying Beckwith to Southampton only to find that a travelling circus trumped his aquatic entertainment, and drew all the crowds away apart from those wanting to compete for prizes. Beckwith often suffered similar problems and he invariably relied on Jessie to attract more spectators than 'our whole array of talent could have done under the most favourable circumstances in Southampton'. In 1875, the *London Journal* recalled that she had charmed London swimmers a decade previously with her graceful and elegant performances but it was her sister Agnes who became increasingly central to the family entertainments over this period as first Jessie and then Frederick fell out of favour and retired or were excluded by their father.[23]

By 1871 the professor was living in Princes Terrace, within half a mile of the Baths, with wife Agnes, daughter Agnes Alice (aged ten), Charles (seven), Frederick (sixteen) and William (thirteen).[24] Willie, who began his aquatic career demonstrating his diving prowess, grew up into the 'most graceful, as well as the most perfect, over-arm stroke swimmer the world has yet seen',[25] and he was widely regarded as the most promising swimmer of his age (Fig. 3). He was certainly among the most active during the 1870s and 1880s, winning many championships, notably, the five hundred yards in 1876, 1879, 1880 and 1881. The 1872 handicap race at Wenlock Baths for Tom Senn's silver cup attracted all the leading amateurs and professionals,

including Willie and Frederick, and fifteen-year-old Willie was matched against Stanley for the same cup the following year. He was at the Zoological Gardens, Belle Vue, Manchester in July 1875; and in October 1877 Willie, 'Champion of London and the fastest Swimmer of his age ever known', swam J. B. Johnson for fifty pounds over a thousand yards at Lambeth.[26] In October 1879, Willie completed three attempts to better existing record times. The first two distances were swum 'off the reel' and he bettered Johnson's 480 yards time and Jones's thousand yards time although he was then unsuccessful in the attempt on Jones's hundred yards record of one minute, nine and two-fifths seconds.[27]

Willie received a benefit at Lambeth in April 1880 and he went on to win the 1880 Amateur-Professional 500 yards championship and the one mile and 1,000 yards professional championships in 1881, besides beating Matthew Webb, the Channel swimmer, in a six-day swim of ten hours a day. In an all-comers' match in Plymouth in 1882 Willie comfortably beat a field which included brother Charles, and then, within a fortnight, he beat James Finney over a mile in Hollingworth Lake, Rochdale. Willie continued to issue challenges from a hundred yards to twenty miles for sums up to five hundred pounds a side in an effort to attract a major opponent but there were no acceptances. A benefit entertainment for Willie took place in 1892 only a week before his death on 12 December, aged thirty-six, from a long-standing chest infection. He had been invincible at his best, although he had always remained 'agreeable and by no means boastful of his undoubted ability'.[28]

Commentators on Willie's death recalled that, because the swimming gift ran in families, the name of Beckwith had long been associated with swimming supremacy. The professor had been ably succeeded by Willie who had 'kept pace with the wonderful march of improvement' but, if he should fail, then Charles, born in May 1865 and much taller than Willie, could assume his mantle (Fig. 4). Nearly five hundred spectators at Lambeth in June 1877 watched Charles win the boys' race and Willie win the all-England two hundred yards handicap.[29] When Charles swam E. J. Kirk of Exeter for fifty pounds over five hundred yards at Lambeth in 1886, the race was witnessed by 'a capital muster', but there was little speculation at three-to-one on Beckwith who won by twenty yards.[30] In 1887, Charles won the second and third of his swimming races with John Haggerty of Stalybridge, over one mile and half a mile, and, in 1889, he beat American Davis Dalton in a six-day backstroke match at the Westminster Aquarium.[31]

Both Willie and Charles were still living in Lambeth in 1891 and they continued their aquatic careers into the 1890s, although their appearances became more theatrical and less competitive in nature.[32] Willie appeared with his wife and other lady swimmers in 1890 and 1892 and Charles accompanied his sister in entertainments across the country from Birmingham to Nottingham, from Morecambe to Sadler's Wells in London.[33] Charles also

became closely associated with the Water Rats, a group of sportsmen and entertainers which included music-hall impresario George Adney Payne. A smoking concert at the White Horse, Brixton Road, in March 1898, held as a benefit for Charles, attracted numerous popular performers. When he died on 2 July 1898, aged thirty-three, having not long survived his father, he was buried alongside Willie and Frederick at Nunhead Cemetery. The mourners included his daughter Aggie, who continued the family tradition, appearing at a swimming carnival at Lambeth Baths in 1899.[34]

The family was extending its performances into the entertainment world as the ASA consolidated its grip on the structures surrounding competitive swimming: had Professor Beckwith confined his swimming activities to Lambeth Baths he might never have established either his contemporary reputation or his place in the historical record. Over the course of his lifetime, however, he utilized every facility at his disposal, including crystal tanks in aquaria, circuses and theatres, to display both his entrepreneurial and aquatic skills. Frederick later claimed credit for the introduction of tank performances, and in an acrimonious public exchange of letters in 1891 he emphasized that he had been the first to travel with a tank during a visit to Paris just six months after the conclusion of the Franco-German war (1870–1). At the time of this engagement, he had been teaching the Rothschild family, and 'Mr. Leopold [de Rothschild] kindly translated the French agreement, and gave his opinion as to its not being a very good engagement, as everything was so dear in Paris, and I found it so to my cost'.[35] He was certainly active in developing existing practices. Cremorne Gardens in Chelsea was attracting up to two thousand customers each evening by 1867 when 'Natator', Thomas Attwood, was exhibiting in a large tank and Attwood appeared there with the Beckwiths in 1869 when the 'Beckwith Frogs', dressed in fleshings and drawers, flashed about the aquarium with an extraordinary 'fishlike facility'[36] (Fig. 5). One 1868 Beckwith notice, targeted at theatrical proprietors and agents and describing his amphibious family as the 'Greatest Novelty of the Age', recorded that they had completed an engagement in Manchester in a glass-fronted aquarium and were opening at the New Star Music Hall in Liverpool in February. Later that year, the family appeared at Birmingham Concert Hall, and, in February 1872, Les Enfants Poissons, probably Willie and Agnes, made their tank debut at the Porcherons Music Hall in Paris. During August, the Beckwiths were among the main attractions at the new aquarium in Brighton where the locals, who had 'tank fever, and have gone into this watery entertainment a buster', crowded the hall every evening. At Lambeth Baths in November 1873 Willie and Agnes performed their tank feats, 'a mode of entertainment that has of late years been highly appreciated by the public', at one end of the gymnasium.[37]

Beckwith was still living close to Lambeth Baths in 1881, with Agnes and Charles, and his aquatic entertainments from Alexandra Palace to Stockton-on-Tees, from Stockport to Blackburn, from Luton to Chester,

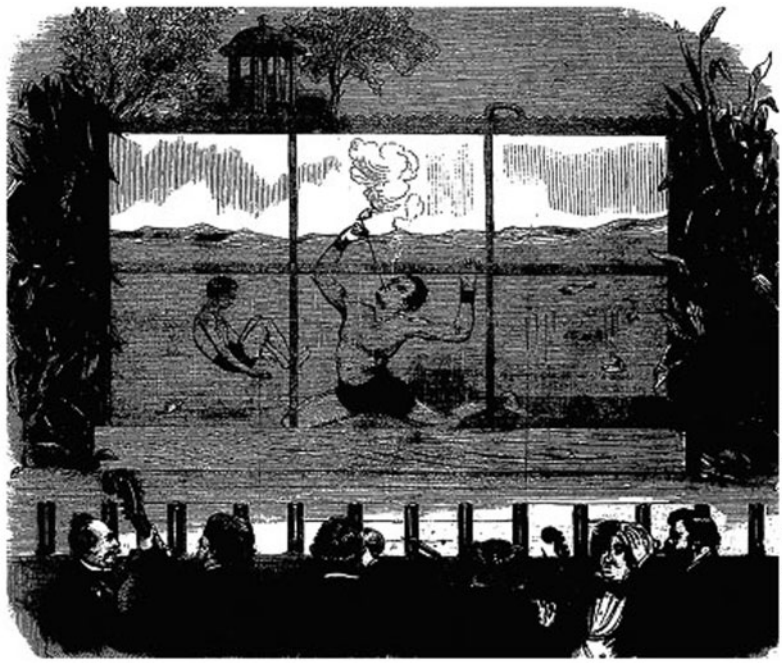

Fig. 5. The Beckwith Frogs at Cremorne. *Penny Illustrated*, 19 June 1869 p. 385.

continued to prosper.[38] He was also taking full advantage of the whale-tank facility at the Royal Aquarium in Westminster, opened opposite the Houses of Parliament on 22 January 1876, where his amphibious family figured in advertisements for swimming, diving and boating entertainment throughout the 1880s. The 'Aq', a redbrick building six hundred foot long with a glass roof, was initially intended to be a cultural institution with libraries, exhibitions, concerts and scientific lectures. After mounting losses the directors hired ex-trapeze artist, 'The Great Farini', as entertainment manager and he turned it into a place of popular entertainment, with the first human-cannonball act, human freak-shows and gymnastic displays. In the aquarium tanks Beckwith's troupe demonstrated swimming strokes and methods of lifesaving alongside various feats of natation such as smoking, drinking a bottle of milk, and eating two sponge cakes under water.[39] These shows ran for more than ten years and advertising material for the 'Aq' consistently referred to the professor's entertainments alongside notices for attractions such as Madame Paula, 'fighting and conquering alligators', little Lu Lu on the ten-foot high-wire and Zulima, the strongest woman in the world. Always aware of the value of the female performer in attracting an audience, in December 1885 Frederick introduced Alice Sinclair, 'the Lady Godiva, and champion ornamental swimmer of the world', and in his Christmas advert he announced champions Minnie Ward and Alice May.[40]

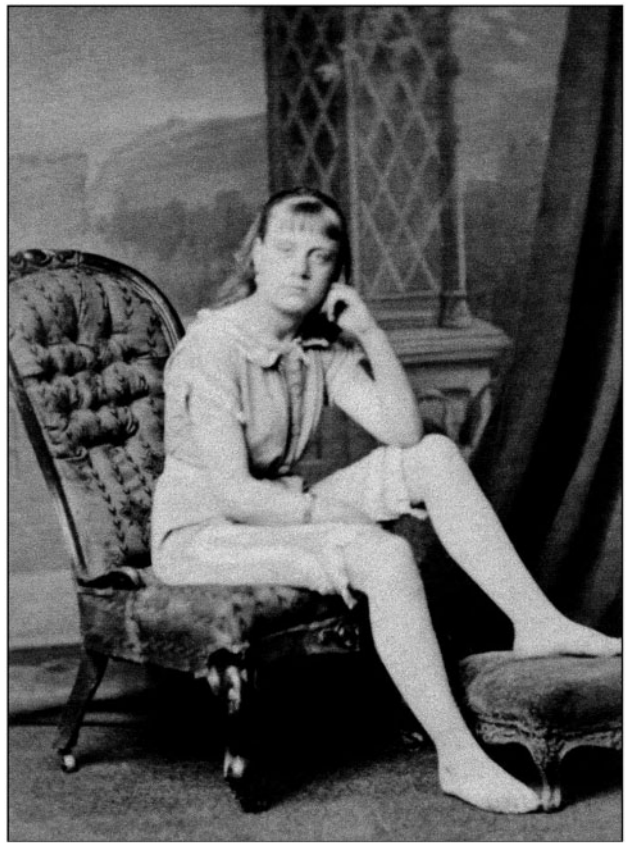

Fig. 6. Agnes Beckwith, aged 14 in 1875. Carte de visite.

In 1882, after a hundred weeks of performances, Beckwith's daughter Agnes, the 'Premier Lady Swimmer of the World', took a farewell benefit at the 'Aq' in order to have a rest before exhibiting abroad.[41] Agnes had a lifetime's association with swimming, as teacher, competitor and performer and she was as well known as any of the Beckwiths (Fig. 6). When Professor Parker advertised that his sister Emily would swim the five miles from London Bridge to Greenwich in 1875 Frederick pre-empted him by starting the fourteen-year-old Agnes over the same course, the first of her many high-profile endurance swims.[42] In 1876 Agnes swam three quarters of a mile in the Tyne in May, ten miles from Battersea Bridge to Greenwich in July, and, on 17 July 1878, another twenty miles in the Thames. Within a month she was writing to *Bell's Life* expressing her desire to attempt the Channel.[43] The commercial value of these swims to Frederick was widely recognized. Both *John Bull* and the *Examiner* noted that the events seemed

to be a clever advertising ruse, and Beckwith made the most of the publicity, advertising Agnes as the 'Heroine of the Thames and Tyne'.[44] At the opening of his 1877 season at the Lambeth Baths, he announced ladies' mornings and a ladies' swimming class, attended by Agnes, while a Grand Swimming Gala on 11 June featured Agnes along with several lady amateurs. Frederick's adverts emphasized the copied-by-many equalled-by-none displays of ornamental and scientific swimming given by Agnes,[45] and he used Agnes to reinforce the utilitarian value of swimming skills in saving life. To cater for the demand for swimming lessons created by her performances, the professor extended his Tuesday and Friday classes for ladies at Lambeth, where swimming dresses could be bought or hired, as well as at the Aquarium where the tepid swimming bath was open daily from seven in the morning as a school of swimming into the mid 1880s.[46]

Agnes was closely associated with the 'Aq' where, in May 1880, she had completed a thirty-hour swim, taking all her meals in the water and reading daily accounts of her swim while still swimming. She successfully completed a hundred-hours swim in six days in September, after which Beckwith advertisements described her as 'Heroine of the 100 hours' swim'. This performance was visited by the Princess of Wales and her sons, and the professor made the most of this and other royal visits by subsequently advertising his promotions as being patronized by 'TRH [Their Royal Highnesses] the Prince and Princess of Wales and Royal Family'.[47]

Partly to protect his investment, Beckwith was always cautious about exposing Agnes to possible defeat in competitive contests but she did swim three matches against Laura Saigeman in 1879, winning the first over two miles for a silver cup at Lambeth Baths on 25 August. Laura won both the second race in a Birmingham lake and the final contest on 22 September, for fifty pounds a side, in salt water at Hastings in front of over twelve hundred spectators. Press reports noted that Beckwith had 'pulled it off' at Hastings. Many people considered that the match he had made for Agnes to swim three miles was a foolish one but, chuckling over the gate money, he said, 'All right! At any rate, I go back with my gal to London a richer if not a *sage man*!'[48]

Frederick relinquished some control over Agnes in 1882 when she married William Taylor although she kept the Beckwith name for public performances.[49] Taylor, a theatrical agent, was an integral part of the Beckwith community. He ran the gymnasium with Frederick in the 1870s, and was managing the Beckwith family in their swimming engagements at the time of his marriage. He later accompanied Agnes and Willie when they exhibited in North America in 1883, although the trip was not a financial success. Agnes also swam in France and Belgium during the 1880s as well as having engagements in 1887, alongside Willie, with P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth at Madison Square Garden and with Hengler's Cirque in Liverpool and Glasgow. At Hastings in 1889 Mr William Taylor, 'Miss Beckwith's courteous and able manager', received a benefit, and when Agnes appeared

in Bournemouth in 1892 her 'business-manager' was given two galas as a benefit.[50]

The professor's first wife, Agnes, died in 1875 and he married Elizabeth in 1876; by 1881 they were separated and two-year-old Lizzie, who later appeared with the Beckwith troupe, was living with her mother.[51] The relationship appears to have been somewhat tempestuous and, in 1889, Frederick applied for a judicial separation on account of his wife's violence towards him although in the meantime the couple had had another child, Robert, who was baptised on 3 October 1883, and Elizabeth was also present at Frederick's death in 1898.[52] By 1891 Beckwith had moved, along with Lizzie, Robert and professional swimmers Minnie Ward and Olivette Flower (Fig. 7), to lodgings in Tothill Street opposite the venue of his long-standing engagement at the Aquarium.[53] Contemporary reports constantly cited Beckwith's swimming entertainments, which contained a boating sketch and now included Bobby and the infant sons of Willie Beckwith, as one of the most remarkable sights in London. Invariably, the swimming annexe was filled to overflowing, for which the *Licensed Victualler* believed the Beckwiths deserved the 'tanks' of the public.[54]

These shows continued into the 1890s, with various members of the family and their connections appearing at different times. At a family benefit in March 1890 Agnes, Willie and Charles gave an aquatic display, a race for amateurs was closely contested, and several well-known music-hall artistes contributed their services.[55] The 1891 summer season was spent at Morecambe People's Palace and Aquarium, where the Beckwiths gave a 'refined performance', and Agnes appeared at the Standard in Pimlico in December. In the 1892 and 1893 summer seasons, the family appeared twice daily in Hastings, combining a comic aquatic farce with an exhibition of the natatory art, and the professor distinguished himself by saving a lady from drowning, having jumped in fully dressed, a 'plucky deed for a man nearing the age of three score and ten'.[56]

Throughout 1893 and into 1894 the Beckwiths gave tank performances and aquatic entertainments in music halls, circus rings, aquaria and swimming baths as far afield as Manchester, Hastings, Middlesbrough, Chesterfield, Leeds, Crystal Palace and the Royal Agricultural Hall, Islington.[57] When the Glasgow Industrial Exhibition opened in June 1895, the outdoor attractions included parachuting by the Spencer Family and aquatic displays by the Beckwiths, and the company had a short, successful season in Sunderland in August. In September, Beckwith's troupe went through underwater feats in their large tank in Ramsgate, and his lady swimmers demonstrated their amphibious performances at the World's Fair again over Christmas 1895.[58] The identity of troupe members becomes somewhat confused at times because unrelated individuals often adopted the Beckwith surname and related individuals used different names. In her early days, Agnes's half-sister Lizzie appeared on bills as 'Nellie', as when she accompanied Agnes at the Canterbury Music Hall in 1887 and at

British Library Board (Shelfmark LON 416 [1890] NPL).

Fig. 7. Olivette Flower. ***Licensed Victuallers Mirror*****, 9 Dec. 1890, p. 582.**

Scarborough in 1888, while other Beckwith appearances included Dora and Nellie at Hastings in 1889, May and Mabel at Bournemouth in 1891, and Mabel again at Scarborough in 1896 (Fig. 8).[59] Agnes remained at the heart of the troupe's performances and Frederick declared himself very proud of her 'for she's been a credit to my system of teaching, and I am glad I brought her up as a professional lady swimmer'.[60]

Fig. 8. Emma Beckwith. Portrait in Charles Newman, *Swimmers and Swimming or, The Swimmer's Album*, London, 1899, p. 61. *British Library Board Shelfmark W16/0747*.

While the core of Beckwith's community was family and immediate colleagues, his contacts extended throughout the amateur and professional aquatic community, locally and nationally, and he maintained strong connections to aristocrats, writers such as Robert Watson, and sportsmen of all hues, including the members of the Lambeth-based Ilex Swimming Club, who were drawn from amateur rowing, yachting, canoe, cruising, athletic and football clubs.[61] At a benefit for Frederick in Lambeth in July 1861, all the best swimmers of the day were joined by professional oarsmen including Chambers, Clasper and Kelly. Professor Harrison demonstrated 'astonishing feats with clubs' and James Pudney, the ten-mile runner, exhibited his champion's belt. In November 1873 the gymnasium winter season commenced with an exhibition by wrestlers Tomlinson, Beevy, Graham and Hunter, followed by the Brothers Harrison who performed their 'Herculean feats', then Willie, Agnes and Attwood exhibiting in a large tank, and finally boxers McCormack and Jem Cody, the Brothers Welch and Professor Hawkes and Dan Hawkes. In 1879 Willie and William Taylor, the 'popular managers of the Lambeth Baths Gymnasium', promoted a pedestrian event for music-hall artistes highlighting the close relationships between sportsmen and entertainers in this period. At the Canterbury Theatre of Varieties in 1888 a testimonial for Jem Carney, world-champion

lightweight, brought together boxers, pedestrians, swimmers, rowers and jumpers.[62] Music halls like the Canterbury provided an alternative to the pub as a focus for popular culture during the second half of the nineteenth century and music halls in places like Lambeth became centres of local sporting networks. At a benefit for Australian oarsman R. A. W. Green, at the Royal Surrey Theatre in 1863, the programme included a farce on a boating theme in which a number of professional scullers appeared wearing their coats and badges. Prominent English cricketers were present, including the captain of the 1861–2 touring side, H. H. Stephenson. When pedestrian R. Brown took a benefit on 6 December 1871 at the Raglan Music Hall, Holborn, the 'elite of the fleet of foot' put in an appearance, as did Frederick and Willie. At the South London Palace champion boxers Daltry, Higgins and Seaforth demonstrated their skills in 1884, and in July 1894, Newcastle boxer Dick Burge, the undefeated ten-stone champion of the world, whose training routine was a well-booked act on the music-hall circuit, appeared in a boxing exhibition.[63]

Swimming professionals of the day, especially those based in London, invariably had an association with Beckwith and in June 1875 Matthew Webb began to train for his Channel swim under the professor.[64] After his success, endurance events became popular and in 1879 Beckwith announced a six-day swimming race for seventy pounds, eventually won by Webb. Frederick used his association with Webb to enhance his own publicity, announcing that he had been 'the first to introduce Captain Webb as a Long Distance Swimmer, in a Swim from Blackwall to Gravesend', and inviting Webb to present prizes at his promotions. Following Webb's death in 1883 Beckwith and a committee of professional and amateur swimmers promoted a swimming entertainment at Lambeth for the benefit of his widow. A model of Webb from Madame Tussaud's was on view and a number of professionals, among them Charles Beckwith, the Ward family, Thomas Attwood, Laura Saigeman and Frederick himself, exhibited aquatic feats.[65]

Amateurs and professionals had always mixed easily in swimming and even after the formation of amateur organizations there was a belief that everyone should work together for the benefit of swimming, reflected in one proposal that leading amateur swimmers should combine with professors like Beckwith to organize a National Swimming Festival during 1885.[66] By then, however, the Swimming Association of Great Britain (SAGB) had resolved that amateurs would not be allowed to compete with professionals, although when the Professional Swimming Association (PSA) was formed on 6 July 1881 to look after their own interests the SAGB supported the new organization by declaring that an amateur would not lose his status by becoming an honorary member.[67] The Beckwiths were connected with the PSA from its inception, Frederick as vice-president and Willie as a committee member, and Willie was elected captain in 1881 while Charles won the captaincy race at Hendon in 1882.[68] The PSA dinner in February 1886 was

attended by a large number of amateurs and professionals, including Fred and Willie, and Horace Davenport, the Amateur Champion, whose networks took in all branches of the sport. He had, as did many London swimmers, 'graduated in swimming at one or two of Beckwith's aquatic fetes, which are really stiff competitive examinations in natation', eventually receiving from the professor the 'coveted medal, which was the forerunner of countless prizes'.[69] Even after the collapse of the PSA in 1891, amateurs and professionals continued to socialize. In 1892 a committee convened to organize a benefit for Willie at the Canterbury Theatre. Its seventy-five members included professional swimmers such as Charles Whyte, amateur swimmer Davenport, professional sportsmen such as J. H. Clasper and music-hall entertainers like Dan Leno. The artistes who appeared reflected the cream of music-hall talent and included Marie Lloyd, American gymnast Lu Lu and Professor Thornbury.[70]

Beckwith's youngest daughter, Lizzie, made the transition between sport and entertainment even more markedly than her siblings. During the early 1890s she regularly appeared with her father, Bobby and Charles in swimming entertainments and in September 1893 up to ten thousand spectators witnessed her win a 220 yard race at Earl's Court, following which Frederick issued challenges on her behalf.[71] By 1896, however, Lizzie had also established herself as a song and dance artist, initially in conjunction with fellow natationist Florrie Newton as one half of the 'Sisters Beckwith'. Frederick subsequently advertised them in two distinct turns: as high divers, sea swimmers and tank performers or, alternatively, as Lizzie Beckwith and Florrie Newton, song and dance artists, an act which became increasingly popular and appeared all over the country (Fig. 9).[72] After Florrie's marriage, Lizzie reverted to a solo music-hall act, often as a tank performer using her Beckwith name, although by late 1899 she was being variously billed as a serio and dancer, or a soubrette, sometimes drawing on her mother's maiden name as Beth or Bessie Osland.[73]

This close relationship between entertainment and sport was not unique to the age. Professional athletes, aware of the transitory nature of their earning potential from sport, tend to explore every potential avenue to capitalize on their reputation. For those unable to establish a sufficiently powerful public presence their engagement with sport can be brief and that was certainly the experience of a number of nineteenth-century sportsmen. For others, such as Beckwith, who had the acumen to develop his public persona and whose activities spanned a broad cultural range, his long-term presence in the public imagination was a function of his ability to appeal to all sections of society for over forty years. He remained prominent in the sporting psyche of the late nineteenth century and no other professor was as well regarded by the contemporary swimming community, both as teacher and as exponent of the art. The *London Reader* in 1864 described Frederick as a real champion and advised anyone who wanted to achieve a perfect style to watch Beckwith in action. For another commentator, he was 'without

Fig. 9. Lizzie (Nellie) Beckwith. *Hearth and Home*, 6 Aug. 1891, p. 383.

exception, the most graceful and accomplished swimmer we ever witnessed' and when 'Captain' Webb in *The Art of Swimming* (1875) described side-stroke as the most elegant form of swimming, he named the two ideal models as 'Beckwith, senior, and David Pamplin'. For Webb, Beckwith was 'the best judge of swimming living'. Payne, the editor of Webb's book, recorded that Beckwith was the first to advise Webb that, 'when the hands are used as Propellers the fingers may be kept open, thereby avoiding the risk of cramp'. It was improbable that Webb had spent time under 'probably the ablest swimming master in the world without learning much that some swimmers would be surprised to hear'.[74]

William Wilson in *The Swimming Instructor* (1883) described Beckwith as 'the father of present-day swimming', which Ralph Thomas in 1904 agreed was the general consensus at the end of the nineteenth century, noting too that his hereditary skill had been transmitted to his children.[75] In a retrospective on swimmers, Charles Newman observed that Willie Beckwith and David Pamplin, both Frederick's protégés, had achieved success with the ordinary over-arm stroke, in which 'nearly as much swimming takes place below as upon the surface', and the 'perfect manner with which they could use it', while amateur stalwart Archibald Sinclair recalled that the conditions under which these older swimmers raced, and 'the opportunities afforded to them for displaying their ability, have nothing in common with the great

advantages possessed by the swimmers of to-day'. It was 'all the more creditable', therefore, that men like Beckwith 'should have risen above the common herd of bathers'.[76]

Beckwith's last years were not easy, however. Because of a series of misfortunes, notably a burglary at his house when he lost many valuable and irreplaceable prizes, including the two hundred pounds silver champion belt presented to him in 1860 by the Royal Lifeboat and Humane Societies, he ended his days in straitened circumstances. Several prominent patrons of sport, including Leopold de Rothschild and George Adney Payne, joined a committee to promote a testimonial to him, and a special matinee, including sparring demonstrations by 'professors of the noble art', was given at the Canterbury Music Hall on 10 February 1896 in front of a large number of the sporting fraternity. Beckwith publicly thanked the audience, all those who had assisted in securing the success of the benefit, and the numerous variety artistes who had volunteered.[77]

On Sunday 29 May 1898, Beckwith, 'the doyen of English swimmers' who had 'of late been rarely seen in public', died aged seventy-seven at Uppingham, 'in much distress' and a year later Robert Watson referred to 'Poor old Beckwith's . . . melancholy life and still more melancholy death'. In reviewing the professor's career one obituarist recalled how the swimming art had declined during mid century but Beckwith had 'revived its drooping energies, and his races and displays were productive of great excitement'. He had subsequently devoted his time and attention to teaching and training swimmers and his appointments as instructor to the leading schools and colleges, together with the success of his swimming family were indisputable proof of his teaching prowess. The professor was laid to rest in the family grave at Nunhead Cemetery on 6 June, although few people other than members of his family attended 'the last obsequies of one who has been before the public for half a century'.[78]

Academic assessments of Beckwith have often concluded that his success in the swimming world was due to his entrepreneurial skill and his capacity for self-publicity, rather than his swimming ability; in some cases there is even a hint of criticism of his employment of what were, for his time, normal professional practices.[79] Such censure fails to appreciate the true nature of his contribution to the sport through his teaching and coaching, his capacity to keep the activity, in all its guises, in the public domain, and the legacy that he left to swimming through those he influenced. Inevitably, professionals looked after their own interests when raising prize money but, without the incentives engendered through this process, swimming would have lacked any public profile. Even as early as 1859 Beckwith was being described as one who had 'striven hard, both by precept and example, to cultivate and uphold this noble and useful art' by 'his unwearied exertions to promote and extend among all classes a practical acquaintance with the art of swimming'.[80] A journalist wrote in 1882 that Beckwith had been 'untiring in his zeal and energy' for the past forty years in showing the public the

necessity of teaching swimming to children and noted that the family displays at the Aquarium had provided a major stimulus.[81] According to another observer, in 1890:

> The favour with which the Beckwiths are held in the public estimation is testified to by the fact that . . . I can see no signs of any abatement in the interest taken in the performance . . . The Beckwiths have found many imitators, who, while earning an honourable and, I hope, adequate living, have helped to popularise swimming. A benefit was accorded the Beckwiths on Monday, at the Aquarium, and I hope it was the bumper it deserved to be.[82]

Beckwith's continuing involvement in all things aquatic during the later stages of his life demonstrated the esteem in which he was held, although this recognition of his status in the swimming world clearly did not translate into wealth and comfort. The new baths constructed at the Marine Palace, Margate in 1884 were placed under the direction of the Professor and his family, who gave entertainments and taught swimming every day. He was engaged as swimming master for the new swimming baths built on the Thames Embankment in 1891 (lit by electricity and including a well-appointed café), and when the Corporation Baths in Kennington Road in Lambeth were finally opened on 9 July 1897, the Bath Committee entrusted arrangements for the entertainments on the day to the veteran professor.[83]

Commenting on professional swimmers in 1892, one writer, who probably reflected a hardening of attitudes among the amateur fraternity, observed that, 'With the notable exception of the Beckwiths who, father and sons, are a credit to themselves and their sport . . . professional swimmers are, as a rule, the dirtiest dogs in the world . . . and as for their behaviour, mud-larks aren't in it for blackguardism'.[84] The death of sons Willie and Charles in the same decade as their father Frederick limited the long-term impact of his approaches and ideas, while the marginalization of professionals by the increasingly powerful Amateur Swimming Association meant that the traditional professional swimming cultures of the late nineteenth century lost their ability to influence the development of the sport. These tightly connected communities of practice had centred on professors such as Beckwith, men with multiple roles as trainers, technicians, managers, publicity agents and entrepreneurs. Operating mainly, but not exclusively, at a local level, Frederick had responsibility not only for the performance of his athletes but also for the progress of the sport, since he depended on both for economic gain and social status. His intimate circle contained his family, involved from an early age, and others who like Attwood and Pamplin were drawn into his orbit, whether as athletes who could be trained for competition or for their potential to contribute to entertainments. Both family members and other athletes went on to develop the sport further, locally, nationally and internationally, using the tried and tested methods of the professor but

with their own approaches and innovations. As a result, through his coaching and teaching, his demonstrations and exhibitions, his exploitation of the potential of female swimmers and his entrepreneurial skills, Beckwith was ultimately as responsible for the growing appreciation of swimming at the end of the nineteenth century as any other individual or organization. In the absence of any centralized organization, it had been through his efforts, and those of others like him, that the teaching of swimming and life-saving was initiated and sustained throughout the century. In many respects, however, Beckwith was the last of his kind. As the ASA sought to build on the foundations established by the swimming professors it took control of the teaching of swimming and of gala organization and imposed its amateur vision through certification and exclusion leaving no place for the independent entrepreneurs, who were destined to disappear along with the music halls to which they were ultimately consigned.

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