

ALFRED EDWARD SYSON

INTRODUCTION

This record of the life of Alfred Syson has been written for the benefit of his family. It is based on a combination of information in the public domain and that held by members of the family. I have aimed to include virtually all of the information that I have gleaned to ensure that nothing is missed and to avoid anyone having to do the research again. Inevitably this makes some of the passages, particularly the First World War descriptions, quite long drawn out. Its value therefore, if it has one apart from giving me satisfaction in writing it, is to provide information on his life to members of his family who are already interested in the subject, rather than use it as a means to generate interest from scratch.

There is much in his life that is of interest: as a young man in the Royal Marines, as a competitor in the 1912 Olympics, as a participant in two campaigns in the First World War and as one who was in the forefront of the teaching of Physical Education in schools.

Virtually all of his own correspondence was destroyed during the Second World War to make paper, so very little of his own accounts and comment survives. It has thus been difficult to find much to describe his character. On the other hand I have benefited greatly from having access to a Dissertation written as part of a Master of Education degree by Richard Owen in the 1980s; entitled "Major AE Syson, Influences of the Military in the Male Inspectorate for Physical Training 1919 to 1939". Owen had done considerable research and had the added advantage of having talked at length to Alfred Syson's daughter Hope, my mother in law. Sadly I have been unable to track Owen down to thank him and to seek his approval to use his work.

All Alfred Syson's grandchildren have provided information to put this work together and all have given me encouragement. Pride of place goes to the late Charles Tibbits who started the ball rolling by typing up both a short description by Syson of his experiences at Gallipoli and also a letter to his wife just after he was wounded there and which whetted my appetite. Most of the family documentation and photographs on which I have drawn came from Mark Anderson who lives in Melbourne. Though I was unable to go through all the papers myself, I am very grateful to him for writing up the relevant information and sending it to me. Jane Powlett talked of her memories of "Gar" and Fiona Tibbits (now Innes) provided a considerable amount of archive material that had come down from Hope to Charles. Richard Anderson kept me amused by his input, particularly when I was probably taking myself too seriously. Finally I am grateful for the comments I have received, from my wife Pamela and from my two sons.

For technical reasons, to avoid the Word Files with the pictures becoming too large, I have divided the description into four parts:

Part One – 1880 to 1914

Part Two – First World War – 1914 and early 1915

Part Three – First World War – Service in Gallipoli in 1915

Part Four - First World War from late 1915 onwards and afterwards till his death.

Tim Jones

1 March 2010

SUMMARY

Alfred Syson was born in 1880 and was educated mainly at Christ's Hospital. He served in the Royal Marine Light Infantry between 1898 and 1911, retiring as a Captain. During most of his Service he was employed on Physical Training Duties.

After leaving the Royal Marines, he did a year's Physical Education Course in Stockholm and took part in the 1912 Olympics there, both as a competitor and Judge. From 1912 to 1914 he was the PT Master at Eton.

He was recalled to the Royal Marines at the outbreak of war in 1914 and served in the Royal Marine Brigade until May 1915 as a Company Commander in the Portsmouth Battalion, being on Active Service in Ostend, Dunkirk and Antwerp in 1914 and Gallipoli in 1915. He was wounded in May 1915 and evacuated back to UK after which he went to the Depot at Deal. From 1916 to 1919 he was seconded to the Army for Physical Training Duties. In 1919 he was promoted Major.

After leaving the Marines for the second time, he was briefly the PT Master at Harrow before becoming a Schools Inspector for Physical Training as part of the Board of Education from 1920 to 1941.

He married Mabel King in 1913 and they had two children Hope and Barbara. He died aged 72 in 1952.

For his Service in Gallipoli, he was Mentioned in Despatches and received the French Croix de Guerre. For his service to Physical Education with the Army, he was awarded the OBE.

PART ONE 1880 TO 1914



Alfred Edward Syson (AES) was born on 6 April 1880 in the Rectory of All Saints, Toynton, Near Spilsby, Lincolnshire. He was the fourth son of the Reverend William Syson, "Clerk in Holy Orders" as AES' Certificate of Service delightfully describes it. His mother Isabel Mary was a Tuson. His maternal grandmother was a Luxmoore. He was the fourth child and the children in all were:

- Mary, who went to Australia
- Leticia (known as Lettuce)
- One older Brother – William
- Two Younger brothers: John and Eric (or possibly Frederic)

William and Eric both served in Army in the First World War, both were wounded and both emigrated to Vancouver BC to grow apples. John joined the RN and rose to the rank of Paymaster Rear Admiral.

His father died 4 years after AES' birth and his mother found great difficulty in making ends meet. Fortunately, she was befriended by the Palmer family (of the Huntley and Palmer biscuit company). To ease the burden, AES went to live with his Aunt, Emily Syson, till he was 8. He then went to Christ's Hospital and remained there till the edge of 16, when he left because he was not a Greek scholar. The logic for this isn't clear, perhaps the school syllabus for boys aged 16 to 18 was only for those doing Greek. After that, he went to Bedford School till he was 18. In 1896, at the age of 16, he was awarded a medal for his proficiency in life saving skills. In 1897 he won a very smart silver medal for coming first in a half mile swimming race, pretty impressive as half a mile is a long way to swim. Both of these were awarded when he was at Bedford.

AES at Christ's Hospital in 1893, aged 13



AES at School Sports, aged maybe 14



Lifesaving medal



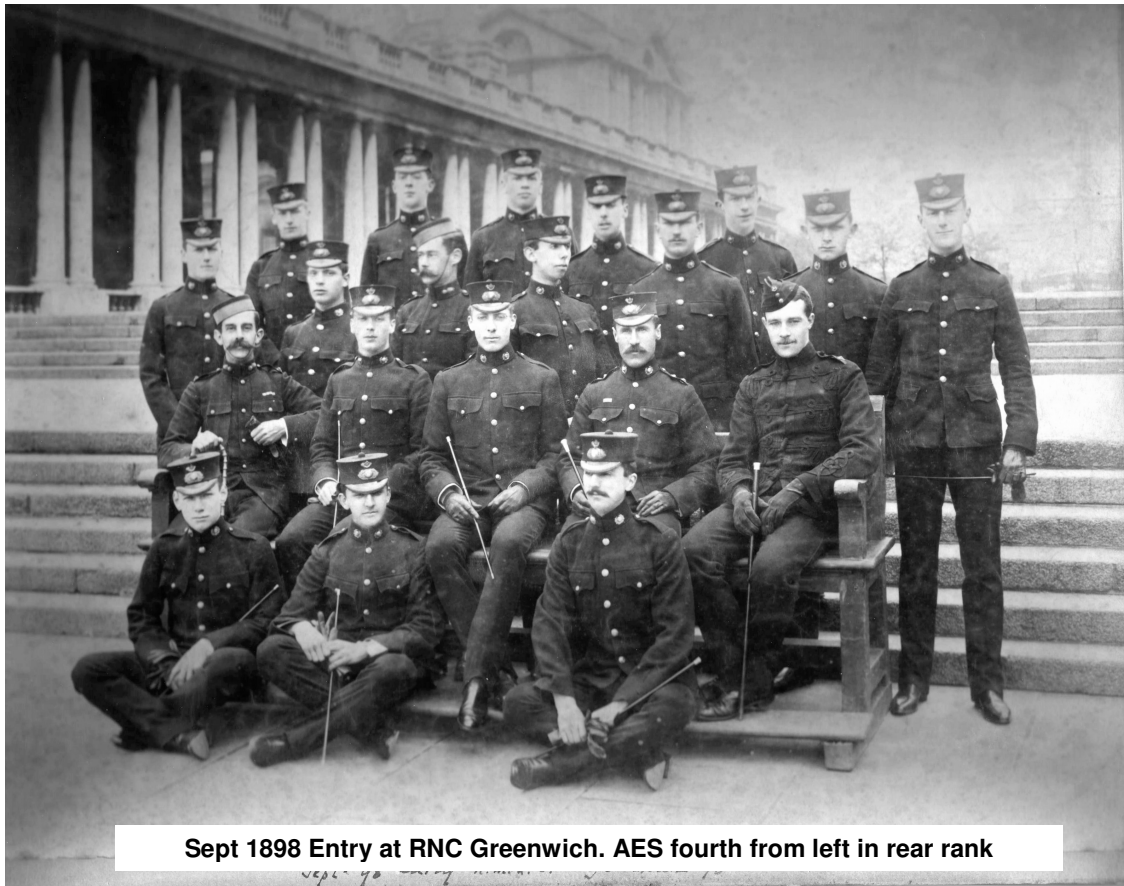
Swimming medal

ROYAL MARINES 1898 TO 1911

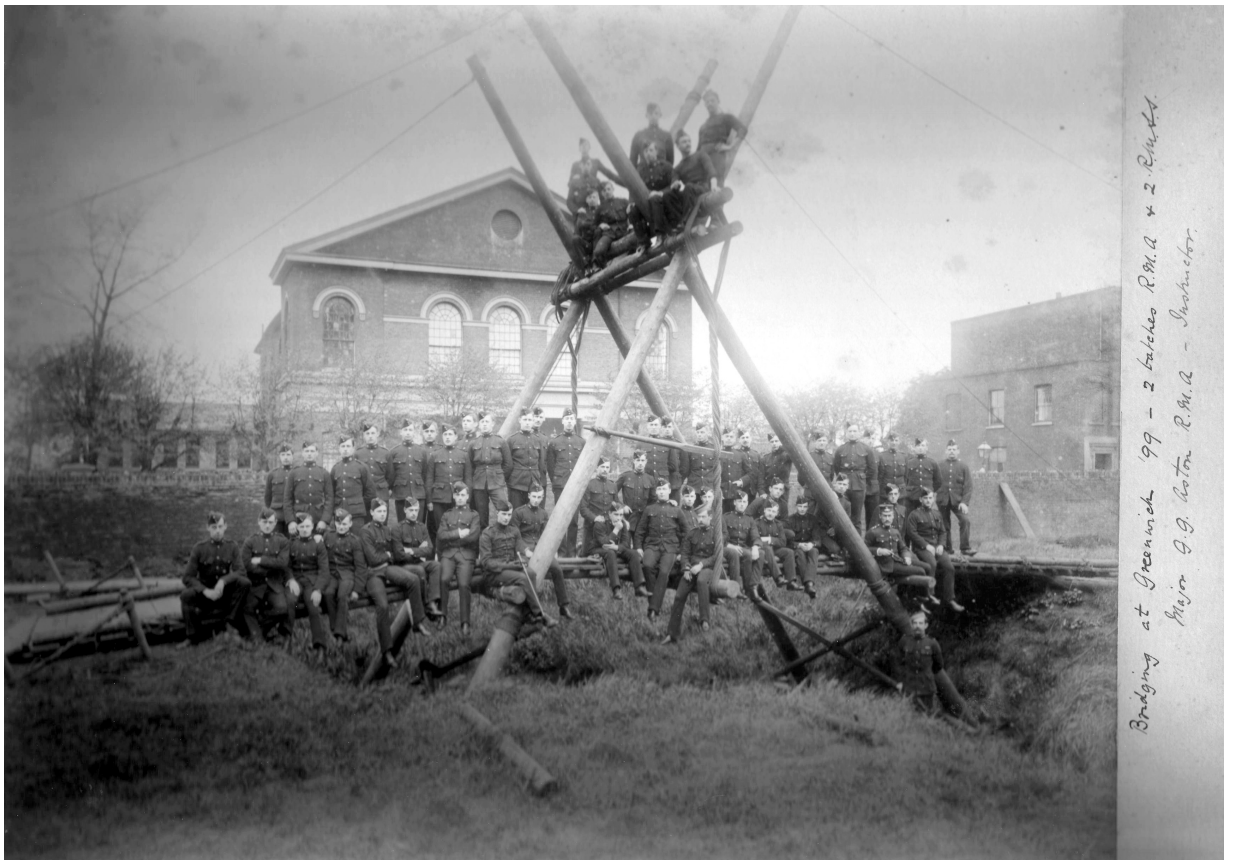
1898 to 1899 – RNC Greenwich

AES was very interested in horses and had considered joining the Indian Cavalry, but was persuaded by a family friend, Col CN Trotman, to join the Royal Marine Light Infantry. This was the same Trotman who was to become his Brigade Commander in the Royal Marine Brigade in 1914-1915. In addition there were apparently two relations, a father and son, both called Henry Tusa who had served in the Royal Marines in the Nineteenth Century and who might well have influenced him. He was commissioned on 30 Sept 1898 and went to RNC Greenwich for a year's Officer

Training. His Record of Service is largely unreadable but appears to indicate: "Promises well, a promising officer". He past out fifth out of 18 and promotion to Lieutenant was based on the examination results. He was promoted Lieutenant in July 1899. The location of an academic location such as Greenwich seems a strange choice for young infantry officers to be trained. However they may have had reasonable training areas in the vicinity. Presumably their training was focused on their being suitable to be Infantry Platoon Commanders or similar. Though the bridge building in the photograph shows that they must have done some All Arms Training. They probably didn't do much naval training, since that might have been left to the first sea appointment.



Sept 1898 Entry at RNC Greenwich. AES fourth from left in rear rank



1899 Bridging at Greenwich – RMLI and RMA



AES the first time he wears the uniform with the sash the wrong way. In Mortimer's garden Aug 1899



Photographs probably taken in 1899

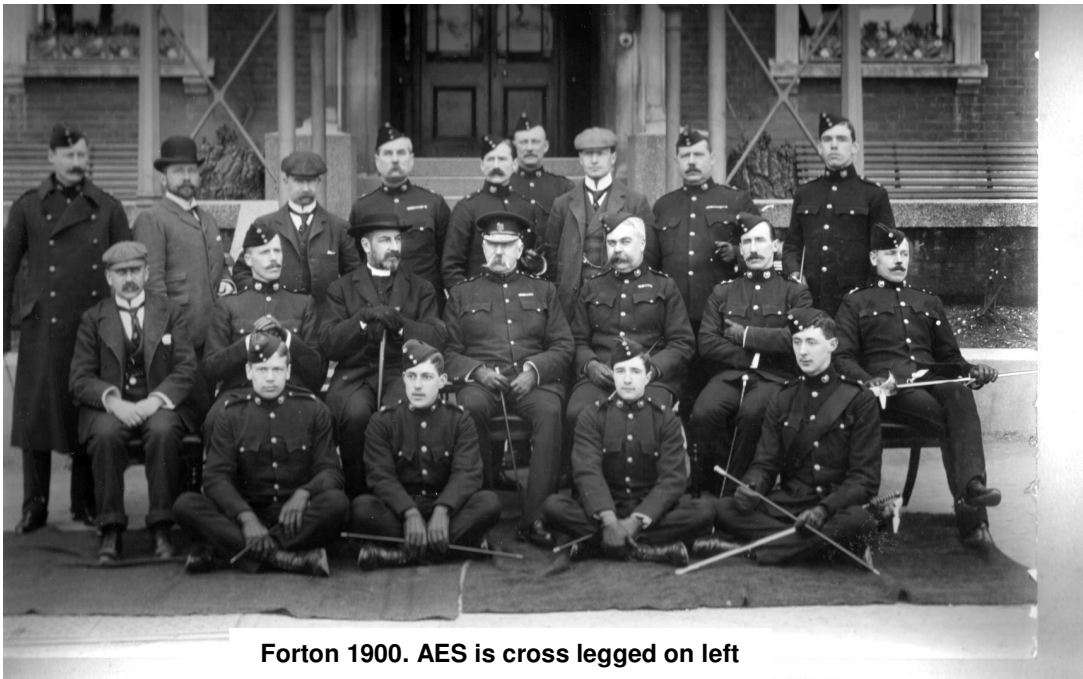
1899 to 1900 – RMB Forton



Forton as it is today, ex
HMS ST VINCENT

On 1 August 1899, he was appointed to the Portsmouth Division of the RMLI based at Forton Barracks, Gosport. At that stage there were two separate Royal Marines organisations, The Royal Marine Light Infantry (Red Marines) and the Royal Marine Artillery (Blue Marines). The RMA Barracks of the Portsmouth Division was at Eastney, where the RM Museum is now based, while the RMLI one was at Forton. Forton subsequently became a Naval New Entry Training Establishment HMS ST VINCENT.

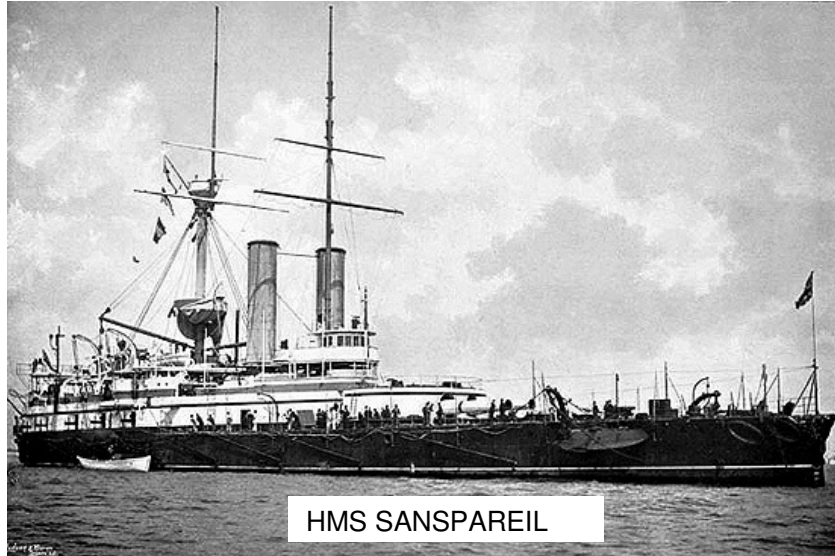
He remained 9 months at Forton. It is not clear what his duties there were. He was reported as being “zealous, physically strong and strongly recommended” by a Colonel Kirchhaffer, though what he was recommended for is not clear, presumably promotion to Captain.



Forton 1900. AES is cross legged on left

1900 to 1901 – HMS SANSPAREIL

During the period 7 April 1900 to April 1901, AES served in HMS SANSPAREIL, a battleship launched in 1887, powered by steam but with rigging and sails. The purpose of this sea time was to give practical instruction in gunnery, prior to the award of a Naval Gunnery Certificate. SANSPAREIL was a sister ship of the ill-fated VICTORIA. He was reported as being “a very good officer, hardworking, taking pains. He is physically efficient, taking interest in all games”. She may have been based at Sheerness.

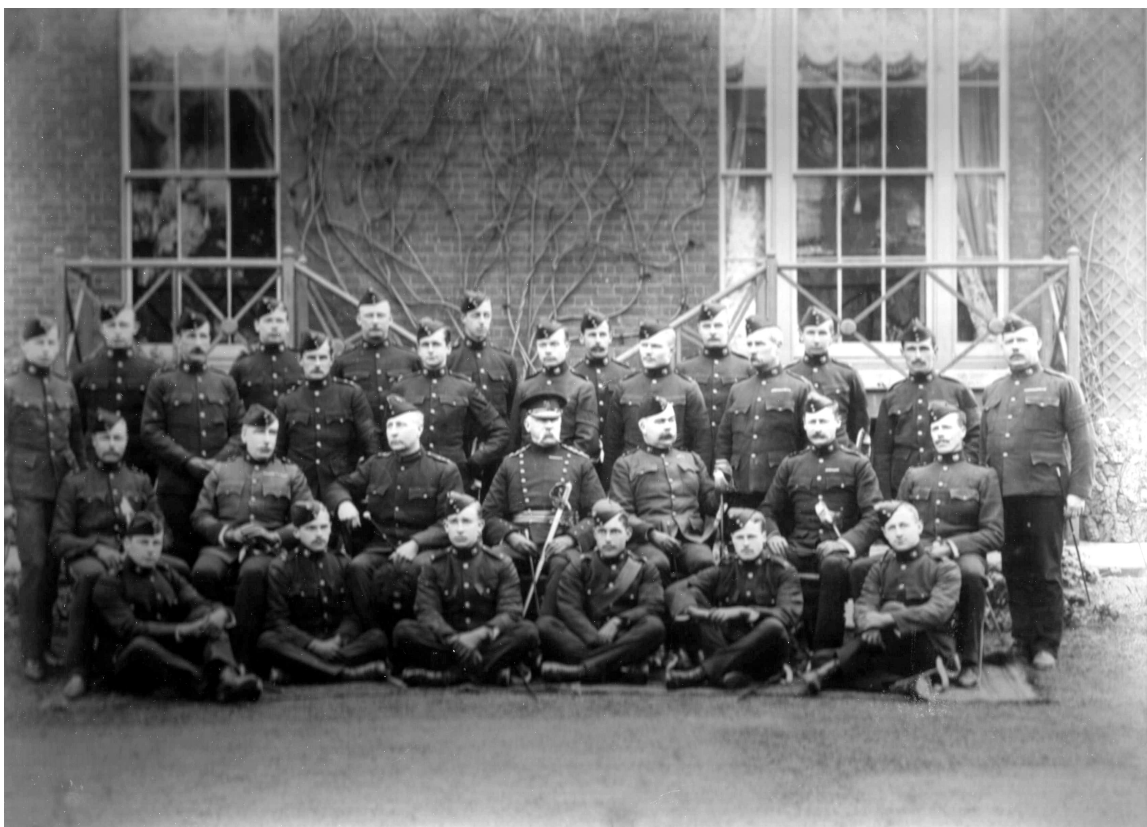


On 22 January 1901, Queen Victoria died. The Kaiser came over for the funeral and his family were looked after by Capt H La T Darley RMLI and AES. For this, AES was awarded the Order of the Red Eagle Class 4.

1901 Forton

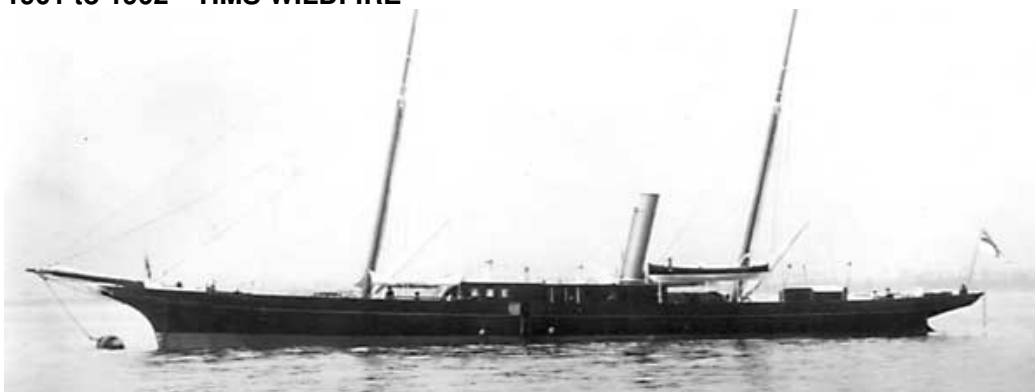
On 24 April 1901, AES returned to Forton for 7 months and was awarded a Naval Gunnery Certificate. During the summer of 1901, he played cricket for the officers against the Sergeants at Forton. A Captain Blumberg who was subsequently the author of Britain's Sea Soldiers 1914 to 1919 was also in the team. AES also played for the RMLI against RNC Greenwich. There is a story of him trying to swim across the Solent, but having to give up before completing the swim. This could well have happened at this time.

He was assessed VGI in General Conduct, VG in Ability and “Zealous. Good swimmer, Strong. Recommended”



Forton 1901. AES is 4th from left in rear rank, wearing black arm band

1901 to 1902 – HMS WILDFIRE



HMS WILDFIRE

In December 1901 AES returned to Sheerness this time to HMS WILDFIRE. WILDFIRE looks like some sort of Steam Yacht, so maybe she was just used as an Accommodation Ship. WILDFIRE appears to have been the Gunnery School/ship and the CO was a Captain Charles Henry Adair, antecedent of the Allan Adair, I served with in HMY in 1976 and 1977. He served there from December 1901 to July 1902

As well as his strong interest in sport, he was keen on amateur dramatics and, in April 1901 he played the part of the Judge in the Gilbert and Sullivan "Trial by Jury". In April 1902 he took part in HMS PINAFORE as Dead-Eye Dick. His brother John was also at Sheerness and played the Admiral in the play



Gilbert and Sullivan "Trial by Jury" Sheerness 1902
AES is the judge in the centre of the group



AES as Dead Eye Dick with his
brother John as the Admiral

1902 To 1903 - Military Gymnastics.

In 1902, the Boer War was in progress and there was great concern over the health both of potential recruits and of the nation as a whole. As a result, the RN reviewed their virtually non-existent system of Physical Training and looked at the Army and Scandinavian systems. At the same time the Royal Marines selected some officers to attend an Army Physical Training Course. In July 1902 AES together with 3 other RM Lieutenants (G Matthews and E Barr (RMA) and PH Colley RMLI) started the Army Course at Aldershot. The Army was still about 4 years away from adopting the Swedish system with wall bars. In 1952, AES recalled that there was a Scotsman who was his Instructor on the Course who subsequently went to Liverpool. This was probably Sgt Paterson, afterwards Director of Physical Exercise in Liverpool. The course lasted 6 months from July to December.

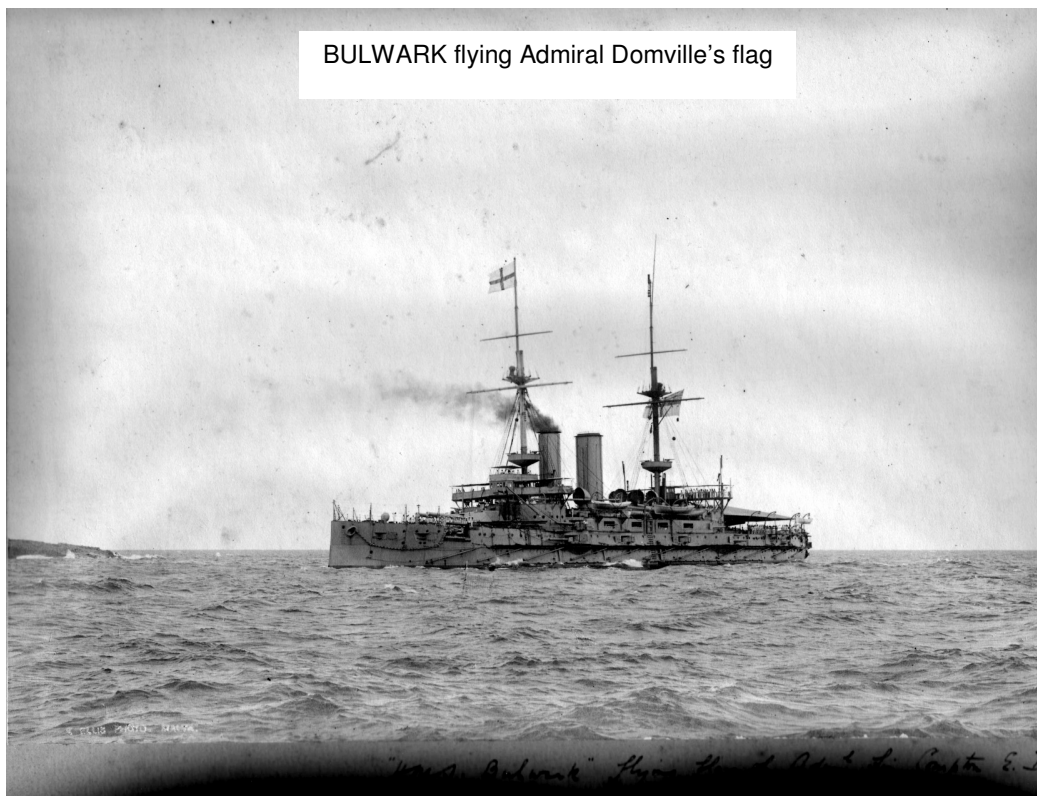


AES Army gymnastics
Course at Aldershot

1903 to 1905 – Mediterranean Squadron and HMS BULWARK

In 1902, the Admiralty had established two Billets of “Inspectors of Gymnastics” at sea to be filled by RM Lieutenants, one to the Channel Squadron and the other the Mediterranean Squadron. On 1 March 1903, AES was appointed to HMS BULWARK, Flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron, under Admiral Sir Compton Domville. AES became Domville’s specialist Gymnastics Officer (but also probably with some ships duties) with responsibility for the physical wellbeing of the men in the Squadron. Those afloat were “Inspectors of Gymnasia” (a Naval term), while those ashore were “Superintendents of Gymnasia”.

AES was supported in his job by RM NCOs with the specialist qualification of Gymnastics. In 1905, they became entitled to wear distinguishing badges to show their SQ, crossed Clubs. This emblem is still used and led to the nickname of “Clubs” or “Club Swingers”. The crossed Clubs were in contrast to the Army PT badge of Crossed sabres.



AES remained with the Mediterranean Squadron for two and a half years. During his time, Syson (together with his brother officers in similar appointments), went on to institute some form of training in the Fleets. There was some free-standing drill and drill with bar-bells and clubs, but it was not based on anything resembling a system. At the same time, Cdr NC Palmer and his Assistant, Lieutenant FH Grenfell, were introducing the Swedish system ashore in Portsmouth.

During his time in the Mediterranean Squadron, there was a visit to Malta by the Duke and Duchess of Connaught in March 2203. This was followed by a visit from King Edward VII, which included a Naval Review at Marsa with a Royal Marine March Past. The Kaiser also visited Malta during his time.



**On board BULWARK wearing the
German Decoration**

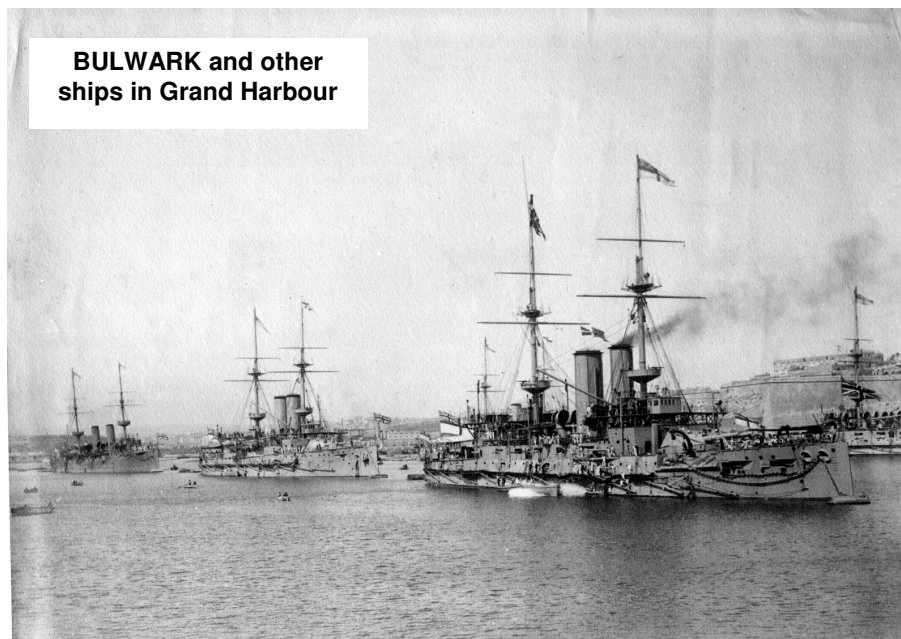


**Taken at Ghain Tuffeha Rifle
Range**



March past in front of the King at Malta

In Malta, Syson continued with his interest in amateur dramatics and took part in "White Bait at Greenwich" on board BULWARK. In Dec 1903 there was a Field Gun Competition at Corradino, though it is not clear if AES organised it. It is interesting that this competition had started so soon after the Boer War when it had been used in anger.



In BULWARK, Syson was assessed in February 1903 as VGI for General Conduct, VG for Ability and "Very zealous and attentive to his duties. Physically strong, a good athlete and good at all games". The reporting officer appears according to his Service Record to be by Captain Adair RN, however this officer was not in BULWARK, but was in WILDFIRE at Sheerness, so the record appears to have been entered incorrectly. In December 1903 he was assessed as VG in Conduct, VGI in General Ability and as "Zealous, tactful and very good physique" by a Captain Hamilton. In July 1905 he was assessed by the same Captain Hamilton as VGI in both Conduct and Ability and as "A most zealous, sound and able officer. Has performed the duties of Inspector of Gymnasia with marked ability and humour. Of excellent physique and good at all games"

In 1905 while in Malta, AES passed the promotion examination to Captain.

1905 to 1907 Forton and Chatham.

In July 1905 he returned to UK to the Portsmouth Division at Forton Barracks. In January 1906, he was assessed as VG for Conduct, VGI for Ability and as "A good stalwart officer" by a Colonel Evans.

In July 1906, he was appointed to be Assistant Instructor in Gunnery, Chatham Division. On 31 December 1906, he was assessed as VGI for Conduct, Ability and Professional Knowledge in Gunnery and as "An all round good officer, possessed of much sound common sense, recommended for promotion" by a Colonel Onslow. . In April 07 (aged 27) he was promoted Captain. On 7 August 1907, he was again reported on by Onslow as VGI in all 3 aspects and as "An excellent officer in all respects".

1907 to 1911. Staff of RN School of PT.

On 8 August 1907 he was appointed to the RN School of Physical Training (RNSPT). He was a student until 24 May 1908, during which time he re-qualified as a PT Officer, this time under the Swedish system. He appears to have done a short gymnastics course of 2 months followed by a longer one of 4. From June 1908, he was receiving Qualification Pay. In December 1908, he obtained the Royal Life Saving Society's Proficiency Certificate and Medallion. He was a Probationary Instructor until August 1909, when he was granted an "Honorary Instructors Certificate" and "Award of Merit"



**Captain Royds and
the staff of the RN
School of PT**



**Studio
Photograph
of AES as a
Captain, so
between
1907 and
1911**

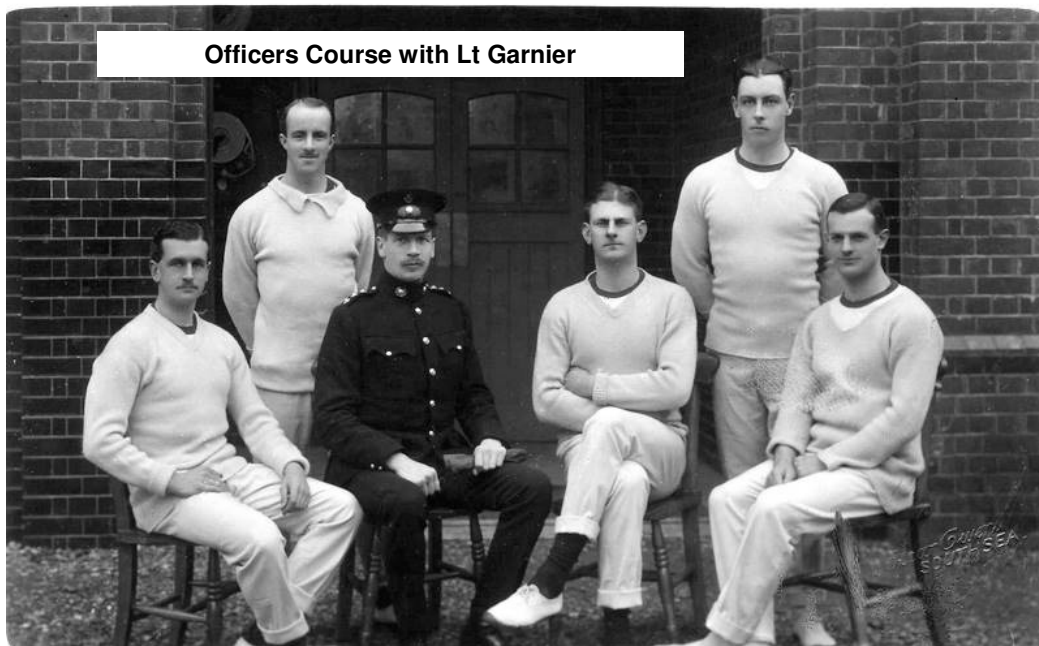
In 1910 the RN sent a Gymnastics Squad to the Royal Naval and Military Tournament at Olympia (subsequently called the Royal Tournament), with involvement of RNSPT. Earlier than that, Syson had been a Competitor in the Officers Bayonet Fighting Class coming third in 1908 and Second in 1909. In 1910 and 1911 he again competed in the Sabre Class for officers, coming second in both years.





Staff outside the new Flathouse Road PT School 1910

In 1909 a Lieutenant WK Garnier RMLI did the long PT Course under AES. He was a close friend of Syson and was his Best Man in 1913. He had qualified in PT at Aldershot in 1904. As a Major he was Superintendent of PT at the RM Depot during the First World War. He left the RM in 1923 and then ran the Lucas Toothbe Institute. In the Second World War he was recalled and was the Superintendent of the RNSPT as a Lieutenant Colonel.



To give an indication of what Syson did, the syllabuses of the courses at RNSPT included areas such as Theory, Anatomy, Personal Ability, Class Taking, Word Of Command, Boxing, Self Defence, Bayonet and Sabre.

1911. Chatham.

AES left RNSPT in Jan 1911 and returned to BULWARK at Chatham. He appears to have occupied a PT appointment during that time. On 26 June 1911 he left the RM at his own request and was placed on the Reserve of Officers. He received a gratuity of £1,200.

CIVILIAN LIFE – 1911 TO 1914

Board of Education and Related:

During the period that Syson had served in the RMLI, much had happened over Physical Education in schools. In order better to understand Syson's future career in PE in the British education system, it is necessary to digress to outline what was going and what attracted him to it.

In the 19th Century, boys in Public Schools and Grammar schools gained physical training through organised games and athleticism. In the 1890s, Public Schools utilised German Gymnastics, fostered by Army Gymnastic staff (AGS) who held Public School competitions at Aldershot every year. This provided a retiring ground for AGS instructors who were also useful for boxing. Some schools provided "drill" by this means and the instructor was often attached to the Cadet Corps or the Officer Training Corps (OTC).

For children in Elementary schools, physical training took the form of drill or drill like exercises, usually performed by large numbers in a small playground conducted by a teacher and after 1902 by former AGS Staff instructors.

In contrast to the situation in boys schools, girls in Secondary education were taught Physical Education by "specialist" girl teachers who had trained in the new Physical Training Colleges for women. There was no parallel Male Training Colleges for PE. So those teaching boys were either the ex AGS NCO Instructors or a very few who had attended institutes in Scandinavian countries.

In 1895, PE had become eligible for a grant as a subject of instruction in schools and this encouraged schools to participate. In contrast to the Public School system, games were not played in elementary schools, largely because they didn't have appropriate playgrounds or pitches.

In 1899, the Board of Education was formed and in 1900 the school leaving age was raised from 11 to 14. This was followed in 1902 with the Balfour Act, which covered the organisation of elementary and secondary education. The driving force behind the Act was Mr AL Morant who was Permanent Secretary to the Board of Education. The Balfour Act did not in itself directly affect Physical Training, but its framework and permissive nature allowed Physical Training to develop at a later stage.

As already indicated, at the time of the Boer War there was considerable concern, both inside and outside the Armed Forces about the health of potential recruits and indeed the nation as a whole. This general national concern for physical health and education resulted in the Board appointing Colonel Malcolm Fox as Inspector of Physical Education. He was instrumental in employing former Army Gymnastics staff as physical training instructors in schools.

As well as masterminding the Balfour Act, Morant also set up the post of Chief Medical Officer of Health to the Board in 1908 and the first incumbent was Dr George Newman (subsequently Sir George, knighted in 1911). Physical Education came under his responsibility. In October 1909 Colonel Fox was replaced as Inspector of

Physical Education by Lieutenant Commander FH Grenfell. When Grenfell went to the Board of Education he brought a "Swedish Gymnastics Influence" rather than Fox's "Drill Influence".

In 1903, Grenfell had been one of the first officers appointed to the newly formed RN School of Physical Training and in that capacity was an officer instructor in Swedish Gymnastics. After leaving the Navy, Grenfell had done a year's course at the Ling Central Institute in Stockholm and had been the Director of PT at Eton in 1908 and 1909. In 1909, just prior to his appointment to the Board, he had made an impassioned plea in an Article for the Training Colleges to produce teachers who had received proper training in PE. Women had been qualified for 20 years with hundreds of women available, but there were no men qualified. The Article was published after Grenfell had gone to the Board of Education. Grenfell subsequently rejoined the Navy during the First World War, had a distinguished career in Q Ships and was awarded a DSO and Bar. He returned as a Staff Inspector after the war and remained there until his retirement in 1934. Grenfell and Syson became close friends and colleagues.

Grenfell was followed at Eton by another ex Naval Officer Lieutenant BT Coote. Coote had himself being on the staff of the RN PT School and left the Navy in 1906 after which Grenfell and the two had worked together. Indeed they did the year's Swedish Course in succession, the one at home helping the other out with his earnings.

In 1911 the Board issued a Memorandum on Physical Training in Secondary Schools. This stressed the need for Physical education to improve the health and raise the standard of physical development of all pupils, rather than produce great technical excellence for a few

This then is the background to Syson leaving the Royal Marines and turning to Physical Education in schools. Much was going on that must have been of great interest to him, there was a strong military influence in this new career area and his friends and former Naval colleagues Grenfell and Coote had led the way. Thus AES became more aware of and interested in a Civilian Career. Having said that it is probable that the major influence that led him to leave was his increasing attachment to Mabel King.

Mabel King

According to Owen's Thesis AES had met Mabel King in 1908. Mabel's diary still exists and she records that on 10 October 1909, a Digby Jeff had brought Alfred Syson to lunch, but apparently he sat in a boat with some girls while Digby and she made much music. On 19 August 1910 she recorded that Alfred and John Syson had come to stay until the 21st after which, they were driven back to Barracks by "G". On 12 December AES was staying again till the 14th, after which he had gone on to Eton to judge physical training.

Mabel's diary entries are remarkably clipped and unemotional. For example the entry for 10 Jan 1902 states "Found Father dead in his office." There is a theory that her father had committed suicide and she had found the result, but there is no corroboration of that.

Mabel's grandfather was a George King who married Jane Alice Hall, both were born in about 1800 and Jane died in 1875. Mabel's father was George Hall King who married Lidia Young. They had 8 children: George, Frank (who died as an infant), Ina, Elsie, Leslie, Mildred (known as Tommy), Neta (known as Charlie and who died in France in the First World War). Mabel Gertrude King was born on 17 January

1878, so was 2 years older than AES. She appears to have been known both by the surname of Hall and Hall-King.

She left school in December 1896 and attended the Dramatic Class of the Royal Academy of Music in 1900 and 1901. She was clearly very talented musically and took part in a large number of musical productions over the years. There is a family view that she was a professional actress with the D'Oyly Carte Company. But that appears not to have been born out by the facts as a large number of Programmes survive of Productions in which she took part and these were all of an amateur nature. It looks as if these amateur productions were a fashionable thing to take part in, providing of course that you had the talent. The programmes of the amateur productions do not start till 1906, so it is possible that she was employed professionally from 1901 to 1906, but there is no evidence of this.

A number of the Programmes do not have the year shown, so it is difficult to track all that she did. However we know that in 1906 she took part in a series of productions at the New Theatre Portsmouth, the proceeds going to the Portsmouth Hospital. In January 1908, she performed in a Concert at the Town Hall for the "Tiny Tim" Cot Fund. In May, she sang the Waltz Song at the Portland Hall Southsea and then at the Workhouse at Fareham. Still in May she performed in a light Opera called "Haddon Hall" for Portsmouth Military Charities at the King's Theatre Southsea.

In August 1909 as part of the Portsmouth Orpheus Operatic Society, she performed in an extract of Trial by Jury in aid of the Lord Mayor's Submarine Fund at the King's Theatre Southsea. That November she sang at the Installation Banquet of the John Harvey Chapter at the Holborn Restaurant. In the same month she performed in "A Greek Slave" at the Aldwych Theatre in London as part of the Stock Exchange Dramatic and Operatic Society. Only 3 days later, in December she was in the Connaught Drill Hall as part of the Fareham Philharmonic Society singing in a Concert as the Soprano.

In April 1910, she took part in a Concert at the Church Hall Ashford (presumably in Middlesex) singing "Love is All" and "Songs my Mother Sang". In May and June she performed in "Merrie England" in aid of the Bromley Cottage Hospital at the Grand Hall Bromley. In September she was part of the Moonstruck Troupe, singing "I've got rings on my fingers" and the "Little Blue Moon". She was followed after the second song by AES singing "Ma Dusky Maid". There was also a Mr I Syson RN singing, presumably that is a misprint for John, his brother. In October she was at the New Theatre Royal Portsmouth singing in Tom Jones as part of the Portsmouth Orpheus Operatic Theatre where she was the leading lady. Again she was with AES.

In February 1911, she was back at the Portland Hall Southsea at a performance in aid of the King Edward VII memorial Fund of the Duke of Killicrankie. In October she was with the Portsmouth Orpheus in aid of local charities in Veronique in the Title Role at the New Theatre Royal Portsmouth. In December it was the Baltic Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society in the Royal Court Theatre London performing La Poupee.

Mabel as Sophia
Western, the lead
in Tom Jones, Oct
1910



In January 1912, she was in Merrie England at St John's Hall Richmond as part of the Thames Valley Amateur Operatic Society. In February she was at the Bromley Glee Club singing again the Brides Song and Songs my Mother Sang. In April she was doing Bessie again in Merrie England as part of the St Nicholas Operatic Society at the Moss Empires, possibly in Greenwich. In June she was at the Ladies Dinner of the Colquhoun Club at the Monico Restaurant, Piccadilly Circus singing "The Marry Maiden" and "Yum Yum's Song". In October, she was at the Theatre Hall Portsmouth in "The Geisha" with the Portsmouth Orpheus. The Vice President was Mr George Hall King, who was presumably some relation, but not her father who had died in 1902. In November she organised the Moonstruck Troop at the Church Hall, Ashford, Middlesex as part of an evening addressing National Service. John Syson and a Miss N King Hall (presumably her sister, Charlie) were also in it. In December 1912 the Sydenham Hill Operatic Society had a dinner at the Holborn Restaurant in London, which she attended.



Mabel in The Geisha
Oct 1912 as O
Mimosa San

There is then a gap till 10 April 1915 when Mabel, three months pregnant and now calling herself Mrs Syson, sang There's a Land and other songs at the Portland Hall, Fareham in aid of Queen's Work for Women Fund. At this stage AES must have been off Turkey or Egypt.

Stockholm 1911 to 1912.

Reverting from Mabel to AES, Mabel's diary records his retirement from the Marines on 26 June together with the information, not only that he is going to Sweden but also that he would then go on to Eton. So obviously he had obtained his job there before leaving the RM – sensible chap.

For the year following his departure from the Service, he was studying PT in Stockholm at the Royal Central Gymnastics Institute. On 8 July 1911, Mabel recorded that AES had gone to Ireland en route for Sweden. It seems a rather strange route but presumably he had friends there that he wished to visit. His Gratuity must have helped him to support himself during his time in Sweden, unless his future employers had contributed.

Olympics 1912.



AES in the Stockholm Olympics 1912



**Picture of the
Rosette worn by
AES for the
Olympics**

AES remained in Stockholm for the 1912 Olympics. He was selected to fence in the Individual Men's Sabre on 17 and 18 July 1912. He fought into the semi finals but was not successful in gaining the final pool, which fought for the medal placings.

As well as competing in the Men's Sabre, Syson was also the British Judge for the Gymnastics "Men's Team European System" competition. This was one of 3 Team gymnastic events, the other two were in the Swedish system and a free system. AES was one of 6 Judges, the other including Danish, Italian, German and Hungarian. In the competition, Italy were the Winners, Hungary got the Silver and Great Britain the Bronze. The competition included Free expression, horizontal bars, parallel bars and Horse. This competition took place on 11 July, five days before he was competing himself. They obviously didn't take it all so seriously then!

Mabel's diary records that on the 22 July 1912 she waited in the lounge of the St Ermins Hotel in London till 5 pm when AES arrived from Sweden. They had dinner at his Club and then went on to the Savoy for supper.

1912 to 1914. Eton

On return to UK AES went to Eton as the Master of PT and he started teaching there in the Autumn Term (Michaelmas Half) 1912. On 11 September, Mabel recorded that he was in his new room at Park Street, Slough. At Eton, he continued his work along Swedish lines, with Robinson.

The engagement is announced of Captain
Alfred Edward Syson, Royal Marine Light
Infantry (retired), second son of the late Rev.
William Syson and Mrs. Syson, of Ravens-
worth, Mortimer, and Mabel Gertrude, eldest
daughter of the late George Hall King and
Mrs. Hall King, of the Old Lodge, Ashford,
Middlesex, and Hillhead, Hants.

On 30 January 1913, Mabel recorded that they had announced their engagement. The engagement announcement indicates his mother living in Ravensworth, Mortimer. Mabel's mother was living at the Old Lodge, Ashford, Middlesex and also at Hillhead in Hampshire. On the day of the engagement AES had arrived at teatime, but Mabel had gone back to bed before dinner. Whether she was ill we don't know. Certainly on 15 February, she was shivering all day in bed. AES arrived at about 4 pm and "charmed all doubts away". They were married on 30 July 1913, leaving Slough for the Oxford Eastgate Hotel at 4 pm. Her sister Charlie had been her only bridesmaid. AES was then 32. At this time, Syson's cousin Harry Luxmoore, was teaching Latin and Greek at Eton so that must have made it easier for the couple to settle in to married life there.

In 1914, Syson produced a paper entitled "School Gymnastics". It was read before the Medical Officers of the Schools Association on 5 March 1914, asking Medical Officers to promote a national system of PT for school children, based on the Swedish System and including Games and Gymnastics. In his address he first of all quoted from the Chief Medical Officers report of 1912, reminding the doctors of the principles of physical training: that it must be of universal application – to boys and girls and to school children of all ages; that it must be progressive and that its purpose must be the general all round development of the body. He then went on to advocate the Swedish System of PT (whatever that is) rather than Swedish or other

Drill. He explained that games were not enough; they needed to be reinforced by PT or Gymnastics (as an alternative term). He pointed out that Primary Schools had had the Swedish System for 5 years, but not in Secondary schools. Finally he exhorted them to take every opportunity to encourage the introduction and reinforcement of the Swedish System.