

# Madame Bergman Österberg, her students and the Ling Association

## Their influence on the development of Netball 1895–1930

### THE EARLY HISTORY OF NETBALL

In 1891, Basket Ball was invented by James Naismith, in Springfield, Massachusetts. The game was played in a gymnasium with peach baskets used as goals.

1891

During Summer 1893, Madame Bergman Österberg visited Chicago and later reported on 'Physical Education in the States'. It is possible that she witnessed the new game of Basket Ball and introduced the game informally to her students. (1)

1893

In July 1897 Ester Porter, of Baltimore, was a guest of Madame Bergman Österberg. The students appreciated her instruction in American Basket Ball. 'It is very similar to the game we have had so long, but is played with a football on a much larger ground and the goals consist of iron rings fixed at the top of poles ten feet in height'. (3)

1897

By 1909 it was reported that the game was becoming more and more popular, starting with 250 copies of the rules in 1901 and 2,500 by 1909. Copies of the rules had been sent to all parts of England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and to France and South Africa. Interestingly, the Gymnastic Mistress of the McGill University of Montreal wrote that every teacher in Montreal interprets the American Women's Basket Ball Rules differently and in an attempt to achieve more uniformity she had passed round the Ling Net Ball Rules. (5)

1901

1909

In May 1895, Dr Justin Kaye Toles, an American and a guest of Madame Bergman Österberg, taught the students at Hampstead a version of Basket Ball. (2)

1895

When students at Madame Österberg's College passed on the game to the next set there were no printed rules and each set of students thought they could improve the rules, so the game was constantly changing. As students finished their training they introduced the game in their schools and without any uniform rules it became difficult to settle under which rules matches should be played. The Ling Association of Gymnastic Teachers was founded in 1899 and its members were chiefly drawn from Madame Österberg's College. The Association appointed a sub-committee to review the rules and establish a uniform set which was accepted and published in 1901. 'As we had made so many changes from the American rules, and as we had given up the baskets for nets and rings, we called the game Net Ball'. (4)

1. Madame Österberg had been invited as one of the Vice-Presidents of the Physical Education Department at the International Congress of Education. She later reported comprehensively on 'Physical Education in the States'. *Hampstead Physical Training College Report for 1893*, pp21-31.
2. *Madame Bergman Österberg's Physical Training College, Report for 1895*, p7 & p16.
3. *Madame Bergman Österberg's Physical Training College, Report for 1896-1898*, p15.
4. *The Game of Net Ball: A Paper read on June 18th, 1909, at the Roan School for Girls, Greenwich.....by Miss Hankinson, Secretary of the Ling Association* pp4-6.
5. *ibid.*, p8.

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**This research publication was undertaken on behalf of The Österberg Collection**

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Key: A name, followed by a date in brackets for example (1898), indicates a student trained at Madame Bergman Österberg College and the year they completed their training.

There are many different spellings of basket-ball and netball in this document. Some references use upper case, others lower case. Some use a hyphen, others do not. As far as possible I have used the original text. However, even that sometimes varies, within a publication. It does not seem possible to overcome the inconsistencies.

I am most grateful to the schools who have posted digitised archive material online. I was able to extract very useful information from the school magazines published by: The North London Collegiate School, Wimbledon High School, St Catharine's, Bramley, Central Newcastle High School, Notting Hill and Ealing High School, Manchester High School for Girls and Bedales School.

I have had correspondence with several school archivists who I approached for information. They have all been very helpful and delighted that their archive material is of interest to those beyond their own institutions.

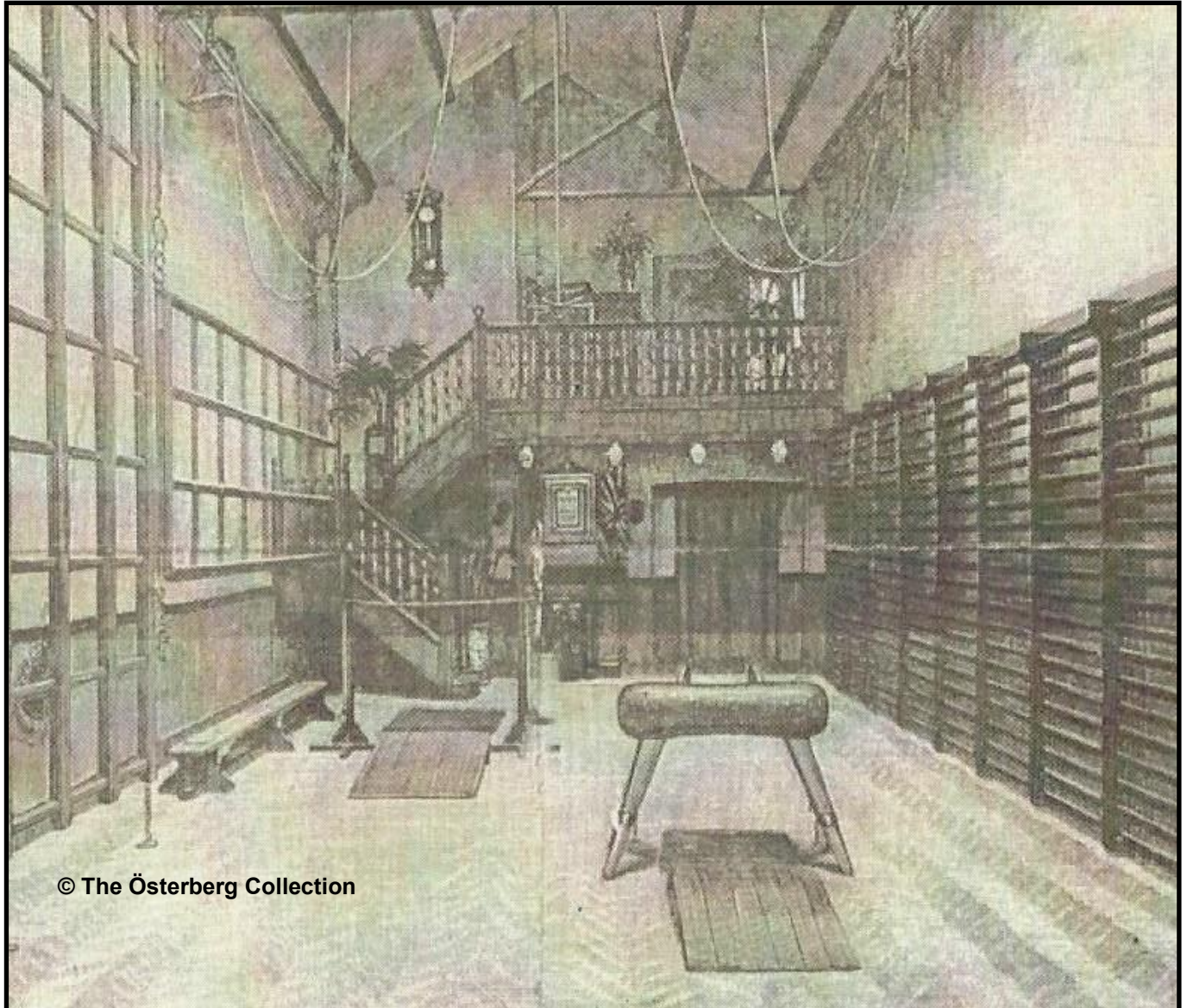
I found several useful dissertations and theses on line which referred to basket-ball/netball. They are listed in the references.

Dr Samantha-Jayne's presentation about the development of netball, delivered from Manchester Metropolitan University in 2017, provided the best insight as to how the game developed, the people involved and the founding of the All England Women's Netball Association (AEWNA) now known as England Netball.

I am most grateful to Christobel Elliott (1964), Margaret Angus (1968) and Alan Gamwell, who looked at this publication and made helpful suggestions, before it was given to Rosemary Moon, the Curator of The Österberg Collection, who has very kindly acted as Editor. Despite the Covid 19 lock down, Alan Gamwell located the wonderful photograph of Net-Ball played at Dartford in 1902 (See page 12). It is an exciting find.

This document is intended to provide researchers who are interested in the history of netball, with threads of information and avenues which could be followed, at some stage in the future.

Madame Bergman Österberg has always been credited with the introduction of the game now known as netball. On her return to Hampstead, after her visit to America in 1893, she introduced basket-ball informally to her students. The earliest description of the game indicates it was played in the Hampstead gymnasium, the first goals being two waste paper baskets hung on the walls at each end. The original game of basket-ball was developed by a Canadian, James Naismith and played in a YMCA gymnasium in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1891. Naismith used peach baskets for his first goals.



The majority of books, which include information about the history of basket-ball/netball, make reference to the visit by Dr Justin Kaye Toles to Madame's college in 1895. Recent research indicates that Dr Toles was not, as one might expect, a pioneer of basket-ball or even an expert in this new American game. No evidence has been found to seriously connect Dr Toles to basket-ball. It would seem, as Madame's guest, he may just have been asked by her to oversee a few basketball sessions in the gymnasium.

This comment, by Madame, about basket-ball was recorded in her Report 1895:

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Basket-ball, as played in the States is another excellent game for girls, suitable for the gymnasium, or better still for a smooth lawn such as now fronts the College.

Madame provided more information about Dr Toles' visit in her Report dated 1895

In May, Dr. Toles of New York, and Mrs. Toles (née Woods), paid the College a visit. For many years Dr. Toles has given his attention to the effects of corset wearing and tight waist-bands upon women's health ; he delivered us an excellent lecture upon the subject. He also gave a demonstration of his own training system by a course of ten gymnastic lessons to our students. And further, our present cycle track reminds us of his energy, as he kindly undertook the supervision when it was being laid down. Old students will be glad to hear that his work at Los Angeles, California, has proved successful, and that he gained recognition by a lecture given in the City Teachers' Institute of that town last November.

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A further contribution, published in the same Report 1895,  
was provided by Emily Baker, Captain of Cricket and Hockey XI.

She wrote:

*Basket Ball* is an American game introduced into our College by Dr. Toles ; its aim is to get the ball into the opponents' basket or goal, the basket being placed at a height of about seven or eight feet. The play is entirely with the hands, and no player is allowed to hold the ball for more than five seconds. It makes a good winter game, and can be played by any number. We played a few games in the gymnasium under Dr. Toles' supervision, but apart from that we have had little practice as yet.

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*Madame Bergman-Österberg's Physical Training College*

During a visit to the College last month, the writer was much interested in watching the students play at basket-ball. This game has been introduced by Mme. Bergman Österberg from America. The players divide into two sets. Each side has a basket placed on a pole at a height of about seven or eight feet. The aim of the game is to get the ball into the opponents' basket or goal. Another game which is shortly to be introduced at the College is La Crosse. © The Österberg Collection

Miss Frances Dove was the Headmistress of Wycombe Abbey School when she wrote *The Cultivation of the Body* in 1898, this was the third section of *Work and Play in Girls' Schools*. She included:

*Let us have games of all kinds: every game with the exception of football is suitable. Let us have lawn tennis, fives, bowls, croquet, quoits, golf, swimming, skating, archery, tobogganing, basket-ball, rounders and \*hailes, as many of these can be provided for, and some at one season of the year, others at another.*

*All these are useful, because only a small number of individuals, one or two, or at the most four, is necessary to make them enjoyable, and therefore they can fill up gaps of time when large numbers are not available for organised games*

*Let these games be encouraged by means of tournaments and competitions held occasionally, and let prizes or challenge cups be offered for success in these competitions.*

Miss Dove when Headmistress of St Leonards had overseen the introduction of lacrosse and hockey (which replaced the original school game of goals) and had become the authority in the British Isles for her views on gymnastics and games in girls' schools. Her visitors book at St Leonards recorded visits from other Headmistresses. Miss Dorothy Lawrence from Roedean, visited in 1890. An account in a St Leonards Gazette in 1895 indicated Miss Buss, from The North London Collegiate School visited in about 1893.

By 1899, schoolgirls and young women were being informed by *The Girls Realm* about basketball. An article by S.C. Mitford said:

*but today a vigorous game of basketball was going on. It was pretty to watch the girls as they ran to and fro eagerly striving for a goal . . . For the moment they had nothing to think of but their game, and to win it each put forth her best energy and skill.*

\*Miss Dove explained, on page 406 of her contribution, that hailes was an old Scottish game which had *localised itself in the playground of the Academy, Edinburgh..*

Mary Hankinson (1898) with first hand knowledge, described the first games of basket-ball at Dartford in a talk delivered to the Annual Meeting of the [Net Ball Association of the London Girls' Public Secondary Schools](#), in 1909 . She said:

*In the early summer of 1895, only four years after the game was invented, Dr Toles an American gentleman visited the college, which was then at Hampstead, and taught the game to the students who were then in training. These students passed on the game to the next set, and they in turn to those who followed them, and as they were provided with no printed rules to guide them it naturally happened that each set of students thought they could improve on the various rules and regulations, and consequently the game was constantly changing. The game was played in the Gymnasium at Hampstead and the first goals were two waste paper baskets hung on the walls at each end. The walls formed the boundaries, so that the ball was never out of play, and many can remember the wild game that used to be played.*

*Later on, though we played the outside game, there were no lines dividing the grounds into courts (they came with the adoption of the 'Women's Rules' in America.); there was no shooting circle and centre circle; we did not even mark the outside lines, but the garden paths, the bushes or flower beds did duty for the boundaries. The old Basket Ball goal posts were used which were only 8 feet high, and which may be described as waste paper baskets on top of jumping stands, the feet of which always got in the way. The ball was about half the size of the one now used and was covered in wash leather which used to get very slimy on wet grass. In 1898 (sic) an American lady paid us a visit and taught the game as then played by women in America; introducing rings instead of baskets, the larger ball and the division of the ground into courts.*

The photograph below is dated 1897 and is very clearly posed. It supports Mary Hankinson's recollections of playing the game at Dartford at that time. The leaves on the trees and bushes indicate it must be very early autumn or summer time and support Mary's explanation that physical aspects of the grounds formed the boundaries for the game. Students are now participating in the outdoor game at Dartford. The waste paper baskets are strapped to high jump stands.



Miss Porter of Baltimore visited Dartford in 1897. Very little seems to be known about Miss Porter, although, in Madame's Report 1896-1898, under the heading *New Games*, Hannah Williamson, a student, recorded:

*In July 1897, Miss Porter of Baltimore spent some weeks here at Madame Österberg's invitation. She had studied at Baron Posse's Gymnasium in Boston and the Central Institute of Gymnastics in Stockholm. Before coming here she had attended a course of Swedish games at Nääs, and several of these she kindly taught us. 'Pärk' we found very amusing but the rules are a little complicated, so we have not adopted it. Most of all we appreciated her instruction in American Basket-ball. It is very similar to the game we have had so long, but is played with a football on a much larger ground, and the goals consist of iron rings fixed at the top of poles ten feet in height. For children we consider the College game is preferable, and therefore we keep up the two as separate games, though the rules are much the same. We felt glad to have had this opportunity of learning something of the games of other nations.*

In these photographs the ball is very much smaller than the one used in subsequent years



It is very significant that Miss Porter had spent some time at the Normal School of Handicraft in Nääs, Sweden, immediately prior to her visit to Dartford. Nääs is best known as the home of Slöjd but research suggests the concept of outdoor games was also being encouraged there by the mid 1890s. (Madame had introduced games into her college curriculum at Hampstead in the late 1880s and the idea of combining Swedish gymnastics with participation in outdoor games was being copied elsewhere.)

Senda Berenson was the pioneer of women's basketball in America. She had introduced the game to her students at Smith College, Massachusetts, as early as 1892. Senda had travelled to Sweden in the early summer of 1897 to observe the work of Dr Torngreen at the Central Institute in Stockholm. She then travelled to Nääs, where she introduced basketball to the students attending a summer school. Ester Porter attended Senda Berenson's course before she travelled to Dartford in July 1897.

Ester Porter was a gymnast and the purpose of her visit to Dartford was probably to study Madame's work. Madame received many visitors who wished to observe her methods and her students first hand. As Hannah Williamson described, during Miss Porter's visit, Madame asked her to teach her students some of the games she had learned at Nääs, which included basketball.

An extract from ***Local korfball versus global basketball: a study of the relationship between sports' rule-making and dissemination***. Bottenburg, M. & J. Vermeulen (2011) provides information:

*Variants of women's basketball (in the making) were introduced to school teachers in Europe before the official rules were published in the United States in 1901. Without its official codification, these teachers only learned some rudimentary prescriptive and proscriptive rules, which were interpreted and adjusted freely according to their own visions, purposes and requirements.*

*In England, Martina Bergman Österberg introduced one version of basketball in 1893, after she returned from a visit to the United States. The rules of this game were modified several times at her newly formed Physical Education College in Dartford.*

*A visit by Ester Porter, a gymnast from Baltimore, who stayed at this college for a few weeks demonstrating women's basketball as it was played in the United States, led to more substantial revisions.*

*The result was another ball game, called netball. Just like women's basketball, netball was a single sex, non contact, non dribbling, three-court game which could be played both indoors and outdoors. However, besides using nets instead of baskets, this game, varied from women's basketball in that each player was given a specific playing area and positional responsibility.*

*A similar process of adaption took place in the Netherlands, where Nico Broekhuysen, a Dutch teacher of a primary school in Amsterdam, came to learn the rules of America's women's basketball.*

*In 1902 Broekhuysen followed a summer course at the famous Normal School for Handicraft of Otto Salomon at Nääs, Sweden, which among other goals aimed at the revival of outdoor games.*

*It was at this institute that Senda Berenson, a leading figure in the regulation of America's women's basketball, had taught the rules of this game to European colleagues during a study trip in 1897.*

A book with the unusual title of ***...and I went on a voyage to Sweden, 100 years of Korfball***, edited by Fred Troost (2003) provides information on page 29: Rensen said that a report, written by Knud A Knudsen, appeared in Danish Sports Journal *Ungdom og idraet* in 1897.

He stated that 35 men and women took part in the summer course at Nääs including three Americans and:

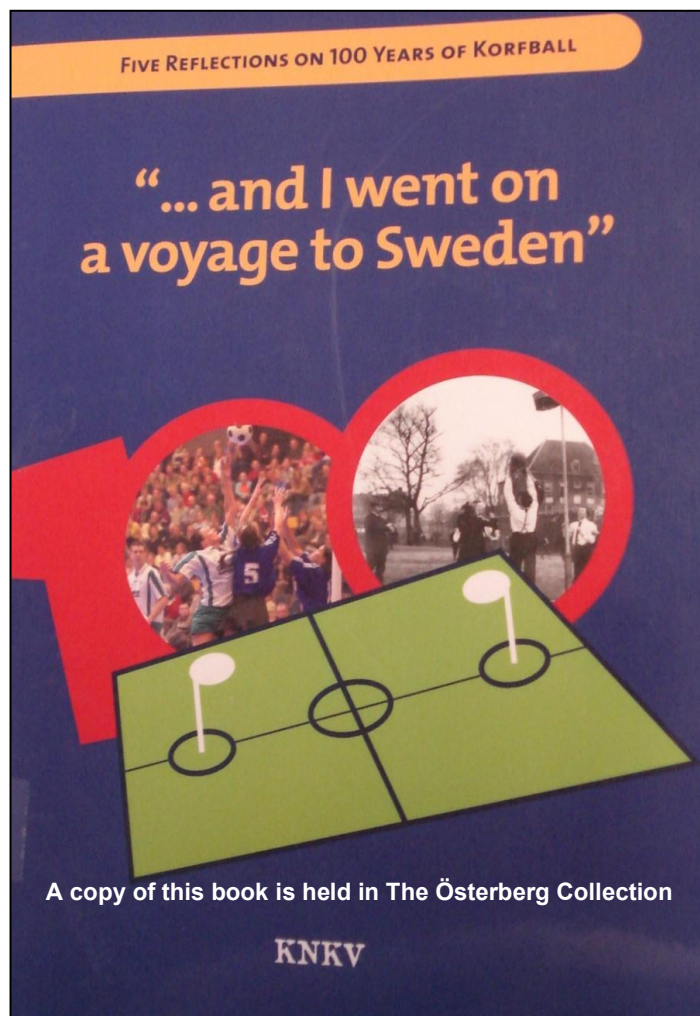
*All kinds of games were played from 9-11 in the morning, from 1-4 in the afternoon and from 8-10 in the evening, such as long ball, cricket, football,*

*Schleuderball, the old Swedish game of Pärk and a new American game, kurvbald (Danish for basketball) which is eminently suitable for girls etc.*

The Swedish game of Park was one of the games Miss Porter taught the students at Dartford. This was the game the students found *very amusing but the rules are a little complicated, so we have not adopted it.* (See page 5.)

Rensen's own research provides concrete evidence of both Senda Berenson and Ester Porter attending the same course in Nääs in 1897. He discovered, in **Nääs 1873-1942 Minnesskrift part II** (Holm 1943) on page 69, held in the archives of the Nääs Slott, the castle, that both women attended course Number 3 that year, together with another American, Maude Hopkins. The names of all the participants on the courses had been recorded.

On page 69 I found the evidence that I was looking for. The American Senda Berenson, registered as *Gymn. Director Boston* [gymnastics director], together with her compatriots Ester Porter, a gymnast from Baltimore, and Maude Hopkins, gymnastics director from Philadelphia, took part in the *Lekkursern* [games course] number 3 of 1897. That was actually the same game course in which the Danish gymnastics teacher from Copenhagen Knud A. Knudsen participated and of which he reported in Danish that the new American game *kurvbold* was taught during that time (see section 4).



On page 55, of...**and I went on a voyage to Sweden**, Senda Berenson was described as Gymn. Director, Boston, Ester Porter, a gymnast from Baltimore and Maude Hopkins, Gymnastics Director from Philadelphia.

It would be easy to assume that Maude Hopkins was on the staff at Bryn Mawr College, Philadelphia but this is not the case. Maude Hopkins was a student at Drexel Institute and appears on a photograph of a basketball team at Drexel in 1897.

Marianne Hansen, Archivist at Bryn Mawr College, Philadelphia, was able to tell me that Maude had trained at the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics, graduating in 1901 and was Head of the Department of Physical Training at Drexel Institute, Philadelphia by 1902.

**The Graphic** in 1907 published a series of photographs of Nääs, showing the house, views of the surrounding area, the games hall, students in national dress, boating, gardening and other activities.

Nääs, now part of the Swedish principality known as Lerum, was the centre, run by Otto Salamon, for the teaching of Slöjd. (Sloyd) It was a system of teaching handicrafts which built up as the children developed their skills. Madame's early students at Hampstead studied Slöjd until she decided there was not room for it on the timetable.

Otto Salomon was also very interested in physical education and he trained teachers to teach a variety of Swedish games. He attracted students from many different countries.

## Publicity

In the late 1890s magazines and periodicals were mentioning the new game of basketball. Information about the game was reaching a wider audience.

*The Windsor Magazine* was described as "an illustrated monthly for men and women" published in London, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A feature about Madame's College was published in *The Windsor Magazine* Volume VI June 1897–November 1897. The article, written by C. L. McCluer Stevens with the title *A Unique School*, consisted of a five page account of the author's visit and included illustrations. A copy is held in The Österberg Collection.

The photograph of netball, reproduced on page 5 is featured and the text, which accompanied, said:

Games include.... a new and exceeding fascinating sport called basket-ball. This really splendid game, about which a good deal will probably be heard in England in the future, is an importation from America where it has taken its place besides lawn-tennis and threatens to become to the typical up-to-date Yankee girl what football is to her brother.

The great beauty of basket-ball consists in its extreme simplicity. No expensive apparatus is required, nor is a smooth shaven lawn a necessity. Wherever, in fact a ball, two baskets and couple of clothes-props are, there can the game be played. The baskets are placed on the tops of the poles about 60 yards apart, the players are divided up into two numerically equal teams, and the object of the game is pass the ball from one to another, landing it eventually into their rival's basket. Basket-ball is in fact a sort of football played with the hands and the teams are disposed in much the same manner - goalkeeper, backs, half-backs etc.

A year later, in 1898, the game might have been included in the *Education Departments Special Reports* but no mention is made of basket-ball by Penelope Lawrence, Headmistress of Roedean. However, she did make reference to hockey, cricket, swimming and gymnastics in her paper, *Games and Athletics in Secondary Schools*, included in the *Education Department's Special Reports on Educational Subjects Vol. II 1898*.

Similarly, the document written for the same Report by Mrs Eliza Woodhouse, Headmistress of Sheffield High School, goes into detail about the work of her physical training staff. However, clearly her girls had not been introduced to basket-ball. (Constance Thomas (1888) was a member of her staff in 1893.) (Mrs Woodhouse was appointed Headmistress of Clapham High School in 1898.)

A decade later in 1911, *Public Schools for Girls*, was published. It was edited by the President of the Association of Headmistresses, Sara Burstall (Headmistress of Manchester High School) and Miss M. A. Douglas, Chairman of the Curricula Sub-Committee of the Association of Head Mistresses, (Headmistress of the Goldolphin School, Salisbury). Miss Burstall, stated:

*The game, however, which seems to suit all classes of girls of all ages is basket-ball, or as it is now called, net-ball. This is a new game invented in 1891 in America, where it is played by men indoors in the snowy weather, when outdoor games are impossible. It is also played by girls, although, of course, the rules and the character of the game differ in the two cases. It was introduced into England at Madame Österberg's Physical Training College in about 1895, the first goals being two waste paper baskets hung on the wall at one end. (sic) The game is not difficult, but full of excitement and comparatively safe, much safer than hockey, while its physical effects are much better. It is found possible to have a team in every Form in a school, and to arrange Form matches: the game is not, however, suitable for summer...*

*We may quote the arrangements for the Godolphin School...Spring and autumn terms lacrosse and netball.*



Madame was adept at marketing before the term was coined. She encouraged school teams to visit her college at Dartford and made sure the girls had an interesting visit and were able to see something of the work her students were undertaking.

Some of her students wrote to their former schools about their experience at Dartford and details were published in school magazines.

An article by Leila Wheeley (1898) published in the St Catharine's School, Bramley magazine in December 1896, mentioned playing basketball as one of the games the students played at college. She said:

*Basket ball is played in the out door gymnasium or on the lawns.*

Whether she inspired her former school to take up the game is not known but, in 1906 St Catherine's Bramley recorded in their school magazine :

*a basket ball court had been made last term and had been regularly in use ever since. The game is an extremely popular one, especially as it can be played in autumn and winter, because it provides abundant exercise.*

The following year, in 1907, the St Catherine's magazine reported that *basket ball was in full swing*.

Ethel Rigby wrote a longer description of the game and her letter appeared in the St Leonards Gazette in February 1898. Her audience would have been familiar with lacrosse. Ethel also mentioned in her article that basket ball was played all the year round at Dartford.

Basket ball is an excellent game for schools where there is only a small playground, and can also be played in a large room. It is not unlike Lacrosse played with the hands, the object being to throw a ball into a basket placed on a pole about 8 ft. high. Another form of this game is the real American basket ball, which is played with an Association football. To score a goal, this ball has to be thrown through a ring placed about 9 ft. from the ground. © SLS

Although basket ball had been adopted at St Katharines (the Junior School of St Leonards) by 1898, if not before, the game was not played at St Leonards. Cricket, Hockey and Lacrosse were firmly established as the major games at the school with tennis, fives and golf included as the minor games. It was perhaps the climate which did not encourage the game as an outdoor activity in the winter and the programme of inter-house games could not have accommodated an activity which only embraced perhaps 14 players indoors.

Silvia Cowles (1903) writing in *The Felician* in 1902 said there was a basket ball ground at Dartford.

Net-ball in Scotland did not materialise until about 1905 when Ethel Jane Adair Roberts, either when in post as the Lady Superintendent or as the Principal of Dunfermline College of Hygiene and Physical Training, introduced the game at the college. The exact date is not clear but her daughter Barbara L. Whitelaw included these words in *E. Adair Impey, Letters of Remembrance by Some Of Her Family and Friends collected in 1965*.

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It was while she was at Dunfermline that she introduced the American game of Basket Ball to the College but soon found that the majority of young women were not tall enough to reach the basket to release the ball. She discussed it with our Father who suggested that the basket might be replaced by a NET with a hole at the bottom so that the ball would fall through to the ground. So Ethel was really the pioneer of the game now called "NET-BALL".

**Photograph of Net Ball being played at Madame Bergman Österberg's College in 1902**



This photograph shows that the 10' poles were set into the ground by 1902.

There is a hint of markings on the grass. A side line and a circle can just be seen. Fourteen players are wearing tunics and presumably are the players but there may be an umpire or perhaps a member of staff wearing a white jersey, or top, in the centre of the game.

Another person is by the goal at the far end. There is no indication as to whether she was a spectator or even perhaps a goal umpire

A group of other students are sitting down, watching from the side lines.