



ENGLISH HERITAGE

# Sport and Recreation Buildings Selection Guide

Heritage Protection Department

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# Selection Guide

## Sport and Recreation Buildings

### I INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

Sport and recreation play an ever greater part in modern life. Sports buildings can be structures of architectural elegance, imbued with considerable social history interest. Those that have come down to us today – and losses have been considerable – often transcend utility, and have a character all of their own. They range in architectural pretension from the simplest unadorned billiard hall to Joseph Emberton's modernist masterpiece, the Sailing Club at Burnham-on-Crouch (Essex) of 1932. They tell us much about social attitudes and notions of appropriateness: cottagey old-English for cricket pavilions, neo-Georgian club houses for golf, or smooth *moderne* for lidos and dog tracks. Sports buildings are subject to enormous pressures: from changes in fashion, changing attitudes towards comfort and, most importantly, from changing requirements for safety especially following the Hillsborough tragedy of 1989 and the ensuing Taylor Report of 1991. Some types of historic sports buildings, particularly spectator stands, have almost disappeared. Sports buildings elicit strong emotional and sentimental responses and the whole area is sensitive, especially as standards are changing all the time and there is funding available to encourage new facilities and greater public participation.

This section looks at purpose-built sporting buildings, such as gymnasias; mixed-use buildings used for exercise, such as drill halls; and at sporting complexes like race courses.

### 2 SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN SELECTING SPORTS AND RECREATIONAL BUILDINGS FOR DESIGNATION

Due to the massive changes in recent years, the greatest care needs to be taken to establish authenticity as well as significance. Sports buildings are only now receiving the study they deserve, and our enhanced understanding comes sometimes too late in the day – understanding that is steadily developing, however. Some candidates for designation will require considerable research in order to place them in context, and understand their relative rarity or earliness of date. Building types such as swimming pools, drill halls, lidos and spectator stands, are reasonably well researched and there are enough listed examples to help determine benchmarks. Other types e.g., ice rinks, are less well understood. There are some important sports that have not encouraged the building of bespoke premises at all; other leading sports (like motor racing) have used short-life structures that undergo constant change or replacement, and where it is hard to match sporting significance with statutory designation.

Designation is intended to encourage appropriate management of buildings and structures. Some sites of sporting renown may nonetheless be unsuitable for designation as the relevant buildings and historic fabric have gone. Historical associations can only be accorded so much consideration, therefore, when it comes to designation.

### 3 HISTORY BY BUILDING TYPE

#### Buildings for Indoor Sports

**Real Tennis** Real or Royal Tennis has its origins in the Middle Ages. England has the oldest real tennis court in the world, at Hampton Court (1625, remodelled in 1661) and there are fragmentary remains elsewhere: all those that have been identified are designated, such as the 1777 example off Julian Road, Bath (now the Museum of Bath at Work). The sport enjoyed a revival from the mid nineteenth century, and is undergoing a second revival now, with forty courts world wide, two-thirds of them in Britain. Examples include Leamington Real Tennis Club (1846 J. G. Jackson, club room and reading room in 1848) from the start of this revival, and the Manchester Tennis Court and Racquet Club (Salford, 1880, G. T. Redmayne), both grade II\*. Courts were also built at country houses, sometimes on the site of an historic court, as at Easton Neston (Northants.), or in association with a new house, as at Jesmond Dene, Newcastle (1890s and which included a two-storey apartment for a professional player).

Derivatives of real tennis and 'fives' (a medieval variant that has left evidence of shutters to protect windows on some church towers) include racquets for which there are courts at the Leamington and Manchester clubs mentioned above and at a number of country houses, such as Copt Hall, Epping (1896, C. E. Kempe). Other examples survive at public schools and in military buildings (e.g., Fulwood Garrison, Preston, 1842-8). Squash evolved from raquets by using a soft ball and smaller court, and the first purpose-built courts appeared at Harrow in the 1860s. It remained the preserve of schools and colleges until the early twentieth century, when it began to be played in clubs and by the armed forces. Squash courts began to be incorporated into English country houses in the 1930s.

**Riding Schools and Equestrian Buildings** These constitute some of the earliest bespoke buildings for recreational use. Covered spaces for equestrian exercise date from the mid seventeenth century, when continental approaches to the schooling of horses (*haute école*) became fashionable in court circles. The riding school at Bolsover Castle, Derbyshire, built for the Duke of Newcastle just before the Civil War, is an early example; that of c.1820 at Syon House (Middx.), with its broad roof of cast iron trusses, showed how new technologies were being applied to this well-established building type, which required a considerable span, unencumbered by columns, across the dressage floor. The most prominent buildings associated with racing are grandstands, considered below; specific sorts of buildings developed at Newmarket and elsewhere as training racehorses became ever more specialised.

**Gymnasia and Drill Halls** Growing government concern at the poor physical condition of British troops led in 1862 to the mandatory provision of a gymnasium and special instructors at all barracks. Pioneer examples are normally listed, e.g., the gym at Brompton Barracks, Gillingham, Kent, (1872-4, Archibald Maclaren) and the old and new gyms at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst (1862 and 1910, the latter by Harry B. Measures, Director of Barrack Construction, whose work was widely imitated by members of the Royal Engineers). Generally they were robust red brick buildings and often form strong groups with other military buildings. Gymnasia were encouraged in the civilian sphere as at Woolwich Polytechnic and a number of early examples survive in public schools (see the **Education** selection guide). The Gymnasium Society

(founded 1859) moved into neo-Grecian premises in Brighton (1864), and continental practices were imported at e.g., at the German Gymnasium, St Pancras (1864, Edward Grüning). Gymnasia remained popular and later examples include St Alban's Court, Nonington, Dover (1938, Joyce Adburgham for the English Gymnastic Society).

Drill halls were first built for the Rifle Volunteers corps established in 1859-60 to defend Britain against the perceived threat of invasion from France. They were partly social organisations, offering camaraderie and an exotic uniform as well as organised sport. They can be seen as developments of private fencing schools and shooting galleries. Famous early examples include the drill halls for the Artists' Rifles and the Bloomsbury Rifles in London, and many others survive in towns throughout the country (the Northampton drill hall of 1859 is a classic instance of the baronial brick armoury). Drill halls for the professional forces followed slightly later. The 'drill shed' at Shoebury, Essex (1859-60) is exceptionally early. Like Shoebury, most later drill halls are important components in extensive barracks complexes. They share a simple external panache, often of red brick with terracotta details and lettering on the principal elevation, and are occasionally treated in a castellated Gothic or proudly Baroque idiom. The need for large unencumbered internal spaces, as with riding schools, stimulated the early use of steel roofs and experiments with laminated timber trusses (in the nineteenth century) and latticed 'lamella' trusses (in the 1930s).

**Lads' and Girls' Clubs** By the 1870s there were many improving institutions attempting to keep men and older youths out of the public house and away from crime, but few for younger boys. The lads' (and subsequently girls') clubs were an attempt to fill this gap, and the first opened in Kennington (London Borough of Lambeth) in 1872. They offered a range of indoor sports, including gymnastics, snooker, boxing and fives. Most listed purpose-built clubs possess architectural distinction, and are associated with an estate development: e.g., the working men's institute at Chester, built for the first Duke of Westminster, the girls' club at Port Sunlight (1913, J. Lomax Simpson) and Salford Lads' Club (1904, Henry Lord), part of a housing development that included a large sports hall, with a concert hall above it, surrounded by smaller rooms for dedicated activities such as boxing and fives.

**Billiard Halls** Billiards achieved great popularity in the nineteenth century, until it was eclipsed by snooker in the 1930s. Billiard rooms were built at country houses from c.1800 and are a distinctive feature of Victorian country houses and some, like Dean House, Kilmerton, near Winchester, have a free-standing ballroom and billiard room separate from the rest of the house so late-night games would cause least disturbance. The earliest public billiards halls are at resorts: The Montpellier Rotunda, the assembly rooms at Cheltenham, included a billiard hall in 1817, while Brighton had four by 1824. Later examples either formed part of a larger complex (Lytham St Anne's, Lancashire, 1878, with a lecture room and billiard hall) or were purpose built (Paignton, Devon, 1881); others were attached to village halls. The most distinctive billiard halls were built by the Temperance Billiard Hall Company and are widely distributed. The company was established in order to move the game out of the pubs. They have domed roofs to admit natural lighting, along with a jaunty Queen Anne style. Billiard halls are often found alongside skittle alleys and are a feature not only of temperance halls but also of reformed pubs. Snooker, invented by British officers in Jubbulpore, India, in 1875, became exceedingly popular in the 1930s. Retailers such as Montague Burton's tailoring

stores used snooker halls, usually on the first floor, to entice men inside to buy their suits.

***Roller-Skating and Ice Rinks*** Roller-skating enjoyed a brief fashion in the 1870s after the invention of the guidable, wheeled skate and again in 1909 following an improvement in skate design. By 1876 there were fifty rinks in London. Some used converted premises and most adapted to meet changes in fashion. Ice rinks had little in the way of decoration and most of that was ephemeral. Country houses occasionally built themselves a skating pond (e.g., at Beningborough Hall, North Yorkshire, c.1900).

***Sports Centres*** in the modern sense with badminton and squash courts and five-a-side football pitches are a 1960's phenomenon following the Wolfenden Report's exposure of the inadequacy of public indoor facilities for sports other than swimming. Harlow (Essex), the first, opened in 1964; others such as Crystal Palace, which was remarkable in its range of sports provision, and Newcastle's Lightfoot Centre, one of the first buildings to use fibre glass, were funded by a variety of consortia comprising local authorities, trusts and private bodies. Universities built the most advanced centres of the early 1960s and local councils began to assume greater responsibility from the mid 1960s, notably 'the grandfather of leisure centres' (Pevsner), the Billingham Forum in County Durham (1965-8), which includes an ice rink, swimming pool, indoor bowls centre and sports hall, as well as a listed theatre. By the end of the decade, some counties such as Nottinghamshire were experimenting with building sports and recreational facilities in conjunction with secondary schools (see the **Education** selection guide).

## **Buildings for Swimming**

***Public Baths*** Recreational, as opposed to medicinal, bathing became popular during the nineteenth century. At first, pleasure and utility shared premises: local vestries were first permitted in 1846 to build slipper baths, laundries, open-air pools and washhouses for purposes of public hygiene. In 1878 this was widened by Act to include covered swimming baths and these became both popular and profitable. The Act permitted the pool to be covered over in winter to serve as a public hall, an added amenity and incentive for building them – some even had a small staged area. Few authorities adopted the Act until the 1890s, when baths began to flourish. The first baths tended to be simple but by 1900 they were increasingly elaborate: few surpass the celebrated Victoria Baths, Hathersage Road, Manchester of 1906. Initially segregated, separate pools for men and women had fallen out of fashion by the inter-war period.

***Lidos*** The late nineteenth century saw the appropriation of ponds in public parks for swimming – Highgate Ponds are the principal survivors. A few specially excavated pools are earlier e.g., the Cleveland Baths, Bathwick, just outside Bath on the River Avon (1820s) and the lido at Lewes, East Sussex (from 1866), but the increasing concern with hygiene, particularly in the hot summers of the early 1930s, saw their replacement with concreted and filtrated pools or lidos. It is the ancillary buildings that often make for architectural interest rather than the pool itself, which is generally square, shielded by walls with changing facilities on four sides. More architectural effects can be found with seaside lidos, built in some numbers on coasts with rocks or dangerous currents, or where the tide never comes in like Skegness (Lincs.). They are most common in Devon and Cornwall: those at Plymouth and Penzance combine modernist design in a dramatic

setting, and are among the most representative building types of their day in their combination of design flair, outdoor leisure and devotion to the cult of sea, sun and fresh air.

## Outdoor Sports

### ***Stadia, Stands and Sports Pavilions***

*Note* Stands, as opposed to smaller-scale pavilions, are a sensitive building type to assess for designation because of stringent new standards for cricket and football grounds following the Taylor Report of 1991.

Small pavilions survive from the nineteenth century for tennis, bowls and amateur cricket at country houses, in public parks and in the grounds of mental hospitals (where games formed part of the therapy). They are generally modest, fragile in construction and vulnerable, but had adopted a distinctive architectural form by c.1890 that owed much to the Indian bungalow, with verandahs, awnings and raised viewing platforms. A world apart from the facilities at large professional venues, they nonetheless share common origins in the growth of organised sports around 1850.

***Cricket*** was the first field sport to build substantial grounds. Part of cricket's character is its sense of place, the views of the outfield and pavilion and the views from the ground enjoyed over the eight hours or so spent in a day watching a game. Public schools invested in cricket pavilions: Rugby (1860 and timber framed), Haileybury (Hertfordshire, 1884-5, Reginald Blomfield) and, perhaps the best, at the Parks, Oxford (1881, T. G. Jackson). An excellent modern example is the delicate pavilion built by lecturer Gerald Beech for Liverpool University in 1961. Wealthy benefactors of the game produced notable sports ensembles such as Julius Cahn's complex at his house, Stanford Hall, Rushcliffe (Notts.), that included cricket and tennis pavilions, a swimming pool and sea lion and penguin pools. A few cricket pavilions are also listed in public parks, notably that of 1860 at Birkenhead Park, Liverpool.

***Racing*** Among the earliest buildings erected for spectators of sporting events are grandstands. That at York (1755, by John Carr) is among the earliest, and contains echoes of the hunting stands and lodges built in country parks for spectators of the chase. A few small nineteenth-century stands are listed for their venerability and long association with major sporting events. Warwick has a complex of three stands dating back to 1809. Brick and stone slowly gave way to timber and cast iron, as stands became larger. Lincoln racecourse has a listed stand of c.1897 with cast-iron columns. Most, but not all, were built for race courses: At Henley, a listed nineteenth-century grandstand at the Phyllis Court Club accommodates visitors to the regatta.

***Football*** Stands are also synonymous with football. The Football League was formed in 1888 and most professional football clubs moved into permanent grounds between 1889 and 1910. These grounds quickly developed homogeneity, influenced partly by the Athens hippodrome that accommodated the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, but owing more to the ingenuity of engineer Archibald Leitch (1866-1939), who made his reputation in Glasgow. He provided a full-length, two-tier grandstand on one side of the pitch and three open sides of terracing. This plan survived in many lower-division English clubs until the 1990s, and Leitch's stand of 1905 at Craven Cottage, Fulham, is listed.

Despite all this, the more traditional stand types remained in use, especially for non-league football, such as the brick and timber stand at Wellesley Recreation Ground Great Yarmouth (Norfolk), of 1897.

In the inter-war period more stands appeared, as one or both ends were given protection against the elements, but few new grounds were built. Arsenal developed its Highbury venue in the 1930s and built stands that, though not truly cantilevered, required fewer supporting posts than their predecessors, and included art deco detailing. For technical innovation one has to look to the small grandstands built by athletic clubs in the period. But, by and large, England produced little work of international significance in the inter-war years. Cantilevers were adopted only for indoor banks of seats as, e.g., at the Empire Baths, Wembley (1934, Owen Williams) and it was not until 1958 that they became more widely adopted. Three were opened that year: at Richmond Athletic Ground, the modest Warner Stand at Lords, and Scunthorpe (Lincs.) - the first fully cantilevered stand in British football, now demolished.

**Greyhound racing** began in the United States, where the mechanical hare was invented, and arrived in Britain in the 1920s. (A similar story can be told of *speedway racing* too.) The first greyhound race was held at Manchester's Belle Vue Stadium in July 1926 and there were thirty courses in Britain by the end of that year. Its rapid growth in the 1920s and 30s means that most buildings adopted a stripped art deco, set off by neon lighting, showing a strong American influence: the best-known example is Walthamstow (London Borough of Waltham Forest, 1933) with its strong street presence, and matching kennels behind.

**Golf** originated in Scotland in 1744 and the first English course followed quickly at Blackheath (London Borough of Lewisham), in 1766. Many clubhouses are reused country houses, e.g., notably, Wentworth (Surrey), a Gothic house of c.1830 adopted in 1924 and subsequently extended. The first English links course opened in 1864 at Westward Ho! Devon, and by the 1890s superior resorts were all building them. That at Frinton-on-Sea (Essex), for example, dates from 1896. Many more courses opened in the 1930s, but only a handful of clubhouses from this period survive, such as the Royal Birkdale Golf Club, Southport (1935) and Childwall Golf Club, near Liverpool (1938).

**Bowls** is one of the oldest of English sports and some early structures survive. The 'bowles house' at Swarkestone (Derby.) is believed to date from 1630-2 and Pembroke College, Cambridge, retains bowling green walls and pavilions from 1700. Other examples are at Hampton Court (Middx.), Wrest Park (Beds.) and Chatsworth (Derby.) and, on a more modest scale, Wells-next-the-Sea (Norfolk) and Whitehaven (Cumbria), dating from the eighteenth century. Bowling clubs remained popular throughout the nineteenth century. Early greens were traditionally flat and rectangular, but crown bowls took root in the north in the mid nineteenth century. Although most commonly associated with public parks, where the grounds may incorporate a private clubhouse, in practice most late Victorian examples were originally in the grounds of private country houses and may make a significant contribution to a registered park or garden. Around the same time, bowling greens were built to the rear of 'reformed' pubs, as an attractive pastime for working men that was also an alternative to solid drinking.

**Lawn tennis** was devised in 1868 when the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club was established, and in 1877 the first tennis championships were held at Wimbledon. Relatively few buildings associated with the sport are distinguished. Some are connected with country houses as part of garden improvements; others are grouped with other sports buildings as at Wellesley Recreation Ground, Great Yarmouth (Norfolk).

**Boating** There are various listed boat houses in the grounds of country houses, used for private rowing and angling purposes, such as the castellated late eighteenth-century example at Tabley Hall, Cheshire. Rarer are purpose-built club houses for competitive teams. These comprise a club room, viewing terrace and changing rooms set above a boat store, and they gain immeasurably in interest where they form a group, as at Oxford and Cambridge, Eton, or Henley where five late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century boat houses are listed.

**Sailing** club buildings first tended to adapt existing buildings such as at West Cowes Castle on the Isle of Wight (headquarters of the Royal Yacht Squadron). Where they are purpose-built, however, yacht club houses can be among the most impressive of all sporting buildings. The Torbay Yacht Club (1840) is an early example, and two others epitomise the architectural styles of the early twentieth century: the Arts and Crafts Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club, Lowestoft (1902-3, G. and F. Skipper) and the Modern Movement Royal Corinthian Yacht Club, Burnham-on-Crouch, Essex (from 1931, Joseph Emberton) which was England's principal contribution to the International Style exhibition held in New York in 1932.

## 4 SPECIAL INTEREST

Many sports buildings are modest and unadorned, but some were designed as architectural statements that projected a private institution's prestige or a public authority's commitment to health and welfare. Normal architectural considerations are thus important in assessing this category, but there may be specialist considerations as well.

**Swimming pools** comprise the largest number of listed buildings within the category. Their outward form was often impressive, and they can form significant additions to the public realm. Therefore their relationship to other civic buildings is a consideration. The level of intactness is also an important consideration. The larger establishments contained first and second class (male) pools and a separate ladies' pool, slipper baths for both sexes, a laundry and perhaps a board room, and would also have had their own boilers and chimney. Not all these features will necessarily be present, but any service spaces will add interest to a striking main pool hall (perhaps with a gallery and integral changing cubicles) and a bold façade. For the inter-war period, only the larger swimming bath complexes are generally of special interest, and should normally contain the complex of main, secondary and sometimes a ladies' pool, perhaps with a Turkish bath, slipper baths and wash house. Many continued to have a large pool that was covered over in winter and the hall used for concerts and dances. Where the flooring has been left down the pool may well survive beneath. Prominent features include the roof structure over the large main pool - some like Poplar Baths (1934) are listed for their innovative use of hyperbolic arches that permitted clearstory glazing to give natural light and ventilation to the pool. A very lavish architectural or engineering display is

required for post-war pools. These need structural ingenuity and a mix of two pools or a pool and space for dry sports, ideally with diving board, to justify listing. The juxtaposition of two large spaces makes for more interesting architectural and technical solutions.

A handful of *lidos* date from the late nineteenth century, but they have usually been altered and extended many times to an extent that robs them of their special interest. It is the ancillary buildings that normally give a lido its special quality - changing rooms, a grandstand and a café, diving boards and art deco aerators rather than the pool itself. In the case of seaside lidos, however, the pool can be imaginatively treated and they often occupy dramatic cliff-side sites.

Early *pavilions and stands* are sufficiently rare to be worth consideration if intact. The old pavilions on the major county cricket grounds such as Trent Bridge have sufficient symbolic and sentimental value to ensure that they survived even if the rest of the ground has been developed. Others are modest but contribute to designed landscapes such as public parks. Boat houses and sailing clubs, which incorporated spectator accommodation, are strong on architectural display. This is especially impressive where a number of clubs have built similar facilities in a row – as with the boat houses in Oxford and Cambridge or on the Thames around Barnes Bridge.

Stands are a challenge since most have been demolished or undergone massive alteration. Some retain their technological or structural interest, such as the use of cantilevered roofs. Some celebrated sporting buildings will combine rarity, structural interest, early date and other factors, with claims to sporting history significance too. Examples of this include the stand at Aintree, Liverpool (from 1885), which is listed in part because of the ground's historic importance as the home of the Grand National, or that at Lord's Cricket Ground in St John's Wood, London, by Thomas Verity (1889-90) for its status as the 'home' of cricket. Associations with notable sportsmen and women or with teams - and there are many - should be taken on board only if a building or structure has some architectural or engineering merit in itself, or is preserved in a form that directly illustrates and confirms its historic associations.

Surfaces, like tracks, are not eligible for listing: this protection is reserved for buildings and structures. The sole structure of this sort to be designated is the impressive section of banked track from the Brooklands motor-racing circuit, in Surrey (1907, reconstructed in 1933) which, exceptionally, has been scheduled as an Ancient Monument. Playing grounds as such are not eligible for designation, although some form part of municipal parks on the *Register of Historic Parks and Gardens (available on the English Heritage website)*. Pavilions and other related buildings can play a key part in the character of such areas, and this value deserves full acknowledgement when designation is being considered.

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