
Country Seats and Sporting Feats

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Résumé

This presentation explores the rich sporting heritage of Britain's country houses, from the hunting parks of the early nobility to the cricket pitches, shooting grounds, and tennis courts of later centuries. *Country Seats and Sporting Feats* examines how sport and leisure shaped daily life and social identity within these great houses, revealing sharp distinctions of class and gender in access, participation, and authority. Drawing on activities such as fox hunting, the presentation contrasts the experiences of elite women, who might ride, shoot, or spectate within carefully defined boundaries, with those of middle-class visitors, tenants, and estate workers' wives and daughters, whose involvement was more restricted, informal, or entirely invisible in the historical record. It considers how aristocratic men dominated formal sporting spaces, while women of all classes navigated social expectations that framed sport as display, support, or transgression rather than competition. Particular attention is given to the ways class shaped women's opportunities differently, for some, sport offered limited expressions of autonomy and sociability while for others, labour, service, and access to land defined their relationship to leisure altogether. While drawing on examples from across the UK, special focus is given to Tabley House in Cheshire and its estate, situating it within this wider tradition. Through architecture, landscape design, material culture, and archival records, this talk uncovers how sporting pursuits were embedded in the everyday workings of the country house, reflecting wider changes in hierarchy, gender roles, and leisure across the centuries.

Mots-Clés: gender, sport, leisure, class, social expectations, sporting spaces

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