Martina Bergman-Österberg

Martina Sofia Helena Bergman-Österberg (née **Bergman**; 7 October 1849 – 29 July 1915) was a Swedish physical education instructor and women's suffrage advocate. After studying Swedish gymnastics in Stockholm she moved to London, where she founded the first physical education instructor's college in England, in which she admitted women only. Bergman-Österberg pioneered teaching physical education as a full subject within the English school curriculum, with Swedish-style gymnastics at its core. She also advocated the use of gymslips by women playing sports, and played a pivotal role in the early development of netball. Bergman-Österberg was an advocate of women's emancipation, directly encouraging women to be active in sport and education, and also donating money to women's emancipation organisations in her native Sweden. Several of her students founded the Ling Association, which would later become the Physical Education Association of the United Kingdom.

Early life and career

Martina Bergman-Österberg was born on 7 October 1849 in Hammerlunda, a farming community in Malmöhus County (now part of Skåne County), Sweden. Her parents were Karl Bergman, a farmer, and Betty Lundgren; she also had two brothers who both died at a young age, and three sisters who eventually settled abroad. After receiving a sound private education, she was employed as a governess from 1870–73, and from 1874–77 she worked as a *Nordisk familjebok* librarian, where she met her future husband.

In 1879, she started a two-year course at the Royal Central Gymnastics Institute in Stockholm, studying pedagogical and medical gymnastics. She was trained in the Swedish system of gymnastics devised by Pehr Henrik Ling. Her gymnastics studies also took her to England, France, Germany and Switzerland. She graduated in 1881, and later that year moved to London.

Early development of netball

Martina Bergman-Österberg is noted as having played a pivotal role in the early development of netball. Netball was derived from basketball, which was invented in the United States in 1891. In 1893, Bergman-Österberg returned from a visit to the United States, and informally introduced one version of basketball to her students at Hampstead. Two years later, an American lecturer by the name of Dr Toles (alternatively spelled "Toll") more formally introduced basketball to her students. The rules of this game were modified by Madame Österberg's students over several years. Substantial revisions were made during a visit in 1897 from another American teacher, Miss Porter, who introduced rules from women's basketball in the United States.[30] By this time, the new sport had also acquired a new name: "net ball".

Dartford College

With less space to accommodate increased enrolments, and with the imminent demolition of the Hampstead campus to make way for a railway, later in 1895 Bergman-Österberg purchased a large country house named Kingsfield on a 14-acre (57,000 m^2) estate in Dartford. She converted the ballroom to a gymnasium, and the lookout tower to servants' quarters, before opening the new college in September that year. At its new campus, the school became known as the Bergman Österberg Physical Training College.

Bergman-Österberg's students were themselves to have their own influences on women's physical education. In 1897 one of her students, Mary Tait, invented the gymslip, a dress that facilitated practical movement for women playing sport, replacing the ground-length skirts and mutton-arm blouses that were normally worn by contemporary sportswomen. Bergman-Österberg eagerly adopted the new apparel for her students, which became a standard uniform among British schoolgirls during the 20th century.

A group of her graduate students formed the Ling Physical Education Association in 1899, the first association representing the workers of the emerging profession in the United Kingdom. They invited Bergman-Österberg to be president of the new association, but she angrily refused, disavowing any rival institutions to her own; however, Kathleen McCrone attributes Bergman-Österberg's opposition to the fact the she did not come up with the idea herself. Instead she formed her own, insular association, the Bergman Österberg Union, in 1900. Conflicts between the two associations would not be resolved until after Bergman-Österberg's death, with both organisations merging to form the Ling Association and Affiliated Gymnastic Societies. This organisation would eventually become the Physical Education Association of the United Kingdom.

Other details of her career are :

London School Board

Bergman-Österberg was appointed in 1881 to the London School Board as Lady Superintendent of Physical Exercises in Girls' and Infants' schools. Eleven years earlier, the Elementary Education Act 1870 had provided universal elementary education in England, and allowed schools to receive government grants for providing physical training. But at the time, physical education (or "physical training" at the time) as a subject was not taught in the curricula of most schools. Military drill was taught to boys in public schools, while private institutions taught either German-style gymnastics, which emphasised apparatus-based and rhythmic exercises, or Swedish-style gymnastics, which used anatomy-based regimented drills and therapeutic exercises. Physical training was permitted for girls in 1873 by the Gladstone government, and within three years it was made compulsory for girls in elementary schools within the London School Board.[7]

The superintendent position at the London School Board was first established in 1878. Since no English teachers possessed sufficient qualifications at the time, its first appointee was a Swede named Concordia Löfving, who like Bergman-Österberg was trained at the Royal Central Gymnastics Institute in Stockholm. She advocated Swedish gymnastics and introduced it to girls' schools; after one year in the position she had received 600 applications. When Löfving resigned from the post in 1881, Bergman-Österberg was appointed as her successor.

Bergman-Österberg was responsible for the instruction of female physical training teachers and with certifying their competence. During her appointment she trained 1312 teachers in Swedish gymnastics, anatomy and physiology, and pioneered a national system of physical training instruction, incorporating Swedish gymnastics as taught by Ling. Most of her work focused on training educators for elementary school students, and during her time at the London School Board she introduced Swedish gymnastics to nearly 300 schools; by 1888, Swedish gymnastics was being taught by qualified teachers in girls' schools in every department of the London School Board.[9] Bergman-Österberg also organised public demonstrations of her students performing Swedish gymnastics and

promoting women's physical education: one such public demonstration in 1883 was attended by the Prince and Princess of Wales, and received approbation in the press.

Her interest eventually shifted towards teaching middle-class women to become physical training instructors in English public schools. She grew dissatisfied with the bureaucracy at the London School Board, and felt stifled in fully achieving her aims. She also remarked on the unsuitability of teaching working-class girls in London, observing that they lived in an environment of malnutrition, neglect and dreadful living conditions.[13]

Hampstead College

In 1885, Bergman-Österberg established the Hampstead Physical Training College and Gymnasium for women, against financial advice, at Broadhurst Gardens in South Hampstead, London. Her college was the first physical training college in England, one in which she admitted women only, as she felt that female instructors would better understand their female students. While male instructors did teach physical training in schools, at that time there were no institutions offering pedagogical physical training courses for men in England, who generally had to travel to Germany, Denmark or Sweden to gain formal qualifications.

Bergman-Österberg developed a two-year course modelled on that at the Royal Central Gymnastics Institute in Sweden. She taught anatomy, animal physiology, chemistry, physics, hygiene, theory of movement, dancing, deportment and Swedish gymnastics. English team sports were also taught at the college: although Bergman-Österberg never fully understood them, she did appreciate their significance to the English people, and their potential to teach an "appreciation of space and time, discipline, reason, quickness and unselfishness".

Believing that the liberators of the female sex were to be found in the ranks of the middle class, she deliberately kept enrolment fees high and student numbers low. She only admitted students with above-average intelligence and education, an aptitude for natural science, a sound constitution and character, a pleasing appearance, and considerable zeal and devotion. Bergman-Österberg's ideas on women's emancipation were centred on contemporary social Darwinism, gearing her young students for motherhood, or establishing them to train other young women for such a role: "I try to train my girls to help raise their own sex, and so to accelerate the progress of the race; for unless the women are strong, healthy, pure, and true, how can the race progress?".

Once students entered the college, Bergman-Österberg maintained an autocratic rule over their daily lives. She forbade students from visiting each other's rooms, enforced an early "lights out" rule, permitted only cold baths, refused weekend leave except in special circumstances and censored their mail. But after completing the course, graduates of the college were virtually guaranteed employment in girls schools throughout the country, with an ample yearly salary of £100.

In 1886, she married Dr Edvin Per Wilhelm Österberg, a professor at the University of Uppsala, and was often referred to as Madame Österberg after her marriage. However, while Dr Österberg remained in Sweden, Madame Österberg continued her work in England, although they visited each other as often as their work allowed.

Later years and legacy

Madame Österberg remained at the college for the rest of her life, although she retired from her teaching duties starting in 1913. Her health was reported to be declining in the spring of 1915: on 29 July that year, Martina Bergman-Österberg died of cancer at the age of 65. Before her death, she bequeathed her college to the English nation. She also left 50,000 kr to the Country Association for Women's Suffrage, a women's suffrage organisation in Sweden, and donated a property near Båstad to the Fredrika Bremer Association for the establishment of an orchard garden school.

Bergman-Österberg received a Litteris et Artibus medal in 1906 for her life's work. An English Heritage blue plaque also commemorates Bergman-Österberg's original physical training college campus at 1 Broadhurst Gardens (NW6) in South Hampstead, London.

A physical education instructor's college for men would not exist in England until the 1930s.[35] During World War II, her college at Dartford was evacuated to Newquay in Cornwall, at which time it was renamed the Dartford College of Physical Education. In 1976, Dartford College was amalgamated with Thames Polytechnic: gymnastics instruction ceased in 1982, and by 1986 teacher training had stopped as well; the college was eventually incorporated into the University of Greenwich. The university maintains The Bergman Österberg Archive, a collection of material regarding her physical education college in Dartford.

- The Bergman Österberg Union Archive at the University of Greenwich