

SPORT IN TUDOR TIMES (PART 1)

Posted by [Roy Case](#) | Nov 26, 2018 | [General](#) | 0 |



Sport in Tudor Times
(Part 1)

By
Roy Case



The powerful Tudor dynasty reigned from 1485 until 1603. In his prime Henry VIII was perhaps the most infamous of the Tudor monarchs. Characterised as being lustful, egotistical, harsh, and insecure, he was described as being '*one of the most charismatic rulers to sit on the English throne*'. An author and composer, in later life he became severely obese, and suffered ill health which contributed to his death in 1547.



Henry VIII

Henry was extremely keen on sport, which in Tudor times was restricted to the upper class, and rigorously controlled by the government. He was a skilful joustier, the favoured sport of Tudor times, but in 1536 was seriously injured, which forced him to retire from the sport. He also enjoyed playing tennis, which was played indoors, with balls made of leather shells filled with hair. A keen hunter, he frequently spent as much as six hours a day hunting stags, which only noblemen were allowed to do. Farmers who cultivated their own land were allowed to hunt foxes, and the rest hunted hares and rabbits.

In the early 1500's a game similar to that of *'football'* became a popular sport. Two sets of goal posts were placed about a mile apart, and with no limit to the number of players taking part, the ball was booted around an indefinable pitch, carried, or driven, through village streets, over fields, hedges and streams, in an attempt to put it between the opponent's goalposts. Such rough *'kick abouts'* were usually held at holiday times, or times of celebration such as Shrove Tuesday. And records exist which suggest in medieval times young men left work early to compete for their village teams. However, it was essential the Tudor government ensured the populace spent most of its time working, and in order to achieve this passed a law in 1512 banning ordinary people from such a *'devilish pastime'*, as excessive injuries and fatalities were seriously depleting the available workforce. Tennis, bowls, skittles, cards, and other such games, were also forbidden.



Early football by the Thames

England was the first country to develop a '*kicking game*', similar to that of modern day football, and there is compelling evidence to suggest that in the county of Nottinghamshire team games were being played in schools as early as 1581. While the origins of the game of cricket remain a mystery, from the collection of folklore and fact expertly assembled over time, it is likely a simplified version of the game was played by children living in the south-east of England, in the counties of Kent, Sussex and Surrey, a region of the country then known as the Weald.

It has also been suggested a form of cricket may well have stemmed from the game of bowls. With a '*batsman*' introduced to intervene and try to hit the '*bowl*' in order to prevent it from reaching its target the '*jack*'. Since cricket can be reliably traced back to the 13th century, it may therefore be assumed bowls is the older of the two sports. The game of bowls can hypothetically be traced back to the 12th century, for in a biography of Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, graphically described the summer amusements of young men in the city of London as including the sport of '*casting of stones*', which is believed to mean the game of bowls.

Undoubtedly the first definitive reference to the game of cricket is dated Monday, 17 January, 1597, when a disagreement over a piece of common land was heard in court in Guildford, Surrey. John Derrick, a fifty-nine year-old former pupil at the Free School in Guildford, testified under oath, that some fifty years earlier he and some of his school friends played the game of '*creckett*' on the disputed site. It is universally accepted this is the earliest reference to the game. Proving beyond doubt that cricket was being played in Surrey circa 1550, around the time of the death of the Tudor monarch Henry VIII.

Numerous terms are thought to have been descriptive of the earlier word for cricket, the most likely source being the south-east of England. In the earliest definite reference it was spelled '*creckett*', and the name may well have been derived from the Middle Dutch '*krick*', meaning a stick.



Early Cricket 1721

By and large the game continued to be played by children for generations, and is defined in a dictionary of the day as a '*boys' game*'. Played in clearings, or on pieces of land grazed by sheep, the earliest items of equipment may well have included a matted lump of sheep's wool, or a small lump of wood, or even a stone, to serve as the ball. A stick served as the bat, and a tree stump, or a wicket-gate, functioning as the wicket.

During the early part of the 17th century the game was taken up by adults, with the first reference of it being played as an adult sport occurring in 1611, when two Sussex men were prosecuted for playing cricket on Sunday instead of going to church.

Village cricket had developed by the middle of the 17th century, and there are numerous references suggesting the game was contested between parish teams right up to the English Civil War. At that time considerable enthusiasm was being shown by the nobility to engage in village games, with the landed gentry actively adopting the sport. And by 1660 cricket had begun to thrive, primarily since it was attracting a significant amount of gambling. By the turn of the 17th century gaming on the results of cricket matches had become enormously important, with newspaper reports laying greater emphasis on the size of the wagers than on the quality of the play.

By far the most famous of the early cricket clubs was the Hambleton Club. Formed in 1750 in the village of Hambledon, Hampshire, the club came to prominence in 1756 and is recognised as the '*cradle of cricket*'. In spite of its rural location it developed as a private club incorporating among its membership noblemen and country gentry, some of whom occasionally turning out to play in matches, although the players usually employed were mainly professionals

The game of cricket is by far one of the oldest of the country's most popular team sports, with a wealth of information chronicled for those with an interest in exploring the history of village and county cricket. It's is perhaps understandable that a great deal more attention has been attributed to examining the men's game

than that of the women's, even though the women's game can itself be traced back at least 250 years and reveals a rich and varied history.

Continued in Part two – see – <https://goo.gl/MLxRex>

SPORT IN TUDOR TIMES (PART 2)

Posted by [Roy Case](#) | Dec 3, 2018 | [General](#) | 0 |



This article follows on from Part one – see <https://goo.gl/bMHwKQ> to read it.

Bowls pre-dates most of today's modern sports, and a rudimentary form of the game without dispute be traced to the 13th century. A manuscript of that period, held in the Windsor royal library, contains a drawing representing two players aiming at a small cone instead of an earthenware ball or jack. Round stones may also have been used in an early variation of the game, and there are records of iron bowls being used at a much later date on festive occasions in Nairn.

The word '*bowls*' first occurs in a statute of 1511, when Henry VIII confirmed previous laws prohibiting unlawful games, fearing it might jeopardise the practice of archery. Statutes prohibiting the game were continued even after the discovery of gunpowder and firearms, when the bow had fallen into disuse as a weapon of war. In a further act of 1541, which was not repealed until 1845, it was forbidden for apprentices and servants to play bowls at any time except Christmas, and then only in their master's house and presence.

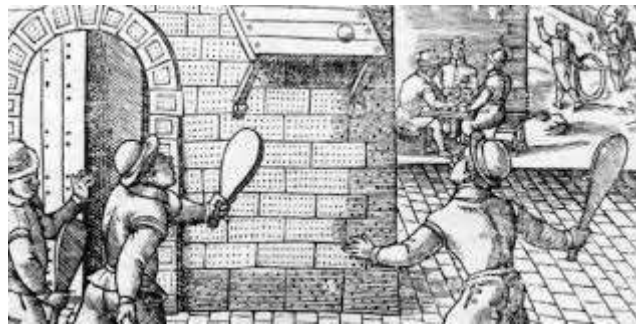


Bowls

Meanwhile, a suggestion that tennis originated in the 12th century in monastic cloisters in northern France has been largely discredited. Medieval '*real tennis*' or '*royal tennis*', evolved over a period of three hundred years, before it reached a peak in the 16th century. Originally the ball was struck with the palm of the hand, and it was not until racquets came into use, and the game moved to an enclosed playing area, that it began known as tennis. Royal interest began in England with Henry V, but it was Henry VIII who made the biggest impact on the game, when as a young monarch he played regularly on a court he built in 1530 at Hampton Court. Although the game is still played today '*real tennis*' declined with the emergence of the modern game of lawn tennis.

Although the Greeks and Romans are known to have played many ball games, some of which involved the use of the feet, which appear to have resembled a form of rugby football, the roots of the modern game of rugby are to be found much later than Tudor times. They are accurately documented as coming from a school for '*young gentlemen*', which outgrew its cramped surroundings in 1749. The school was

subsequently moved to a new site on the edge of the town of Rugby in Warwickshire, which came equipped with an eight-acre plot of land known as the Close, upon which the game of football was played. At the time the game had few rules, and the ball could be caught and handled, although running with ball in hand was not permitted. In the autumn of 1823, during a football match held on the Close, the features of the game were radically changed, which ultimately led to the origin of the sport now recognised throughout the world as rugby. A local historian recorded the momentous incident, as follows, '*with a fine disregard for the rules of the game as played in his time, William Webb Ellis first took the ball in his arms and ran with it, thus originating the distinctive feature of the Rugby game*'. According to the rules of the day, Ellis should have moved backwards to give himself sufficient room to either punt the ball up field, or to place it for a kick at goal. He would have been protected from the opposing team, as it was only permitted to advance to the spot where the ball had been caught. Disregarding the rules Ellis ran forward with the ball in hand towards the opposite goal, a move which in 1841 found its way into the fast-developing rule book.



Real Tennis

Reports relating to the early years of women's rugby union are somewhat vague, and it is difficult to accurately determine when and where the women's game actually began. Although in 1881, a report in the *Liverpool Mercury*, suggested that a match was held at the Cattle Market Inn Athletic Grounds in Stanley, Liverpool, which involved scoring goals following '*touchdowns*'. Implying the match may have been played using a modified version of the rules of rugby.

The Tudor monarchy came to power in the wake of the Wars of the Roses, succeeding the House of Plantagenet. Its first king, Henry VII, descended through his mother from a branch of the royal House of Lancaster. Only four of Henry VII's eight children survived infancy, Arthur, the Prince of Wales; Henry; Margaret; and Mary. When Henry VII died in 1509, his second son became King Henry VIII, as his brother Arthur had died at the age of 15 from an unknown ailment.



Henry VII

Many of today's modern sports began to flourish during the Tudor dynasty, significantly encouraged throughout the 38 year reign of Henry VIII. Immediately following his ascension to the throne, Henry married Arthur's widow, Catherine of Aragon, cruelly divorcing her when she failed to produce him a male heir. In order to gain his divorce, Henry established the Church of England and brought an end to Catholicism.

Henry was succeeded by his son Edward VI, a weak and ailing child, who came to the throne at the age of 9 years and died at the age of 15. Throughout his short reign the country was run by his protectors. Edward VI was succeeded Lady Jane Grey, who was chosen to be Queen by the Duke of Northumberland in an attempt to restore England as a Protestant country. However, the public did not approve of Jane's succession, and she reigned for just 9 days as Queen Jane before she and her husband were beheaded.

The next in the line of succession was Mary the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. The public gave its committed support to Mary I, who swore to return England to Catholicism. She was known as '*Bloody Mary*' because of the number of people executed for being Protestants. Mary died in 1558, probably of cancer of the womb.

After her sister had Mary died without an heir, Elizabeth, the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, became Queen and her will was the law. Known as the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth did not marry, and when she died in 1603 the Tudor dynasty came to an end.



Mary I



Elizabeth I

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Roy Case

Roy Case was born in Nottinghamshire at the start of the Second World War. He retired from work at the age of 55 in order to devote his time to his true passion for sport. In 1982 he founded the McGregor Trophy, which was later adopted by England Golf, as the English Boys [Under 16] Open Amateur Stroke-

play Championship. Case was presented with the Gerald Micklem Award for outstanding service to amateur golf in the Millennium year, and was elected President of England Golf in 2008. A keen follower of cricket, he is a member of the Nottinghamshire County Cricket Club and the Association of Cricket Statisticians and Historians.