

# England and it's Odd Traditions



C.E. Holloway

Vol.4



The Danby Quoit Club Team photographs from their win in the Winterschluden Cup, 1923

Quoits has been played in the Esk Valley region of Yorkshire for nearly 150 years and is still played in the same format as it was at the very beginning.

The scoring area in a game of Quoits is referred to as the 'box', a 3' clay square held by boards with a 3" pin in the middle, and the pitch is formed with two of these 11yards pin to pin. The Quoit itself is an 8.1/2" chamfered disc, and the aim is to land the Quoit over the pin to score.

The players must throw from at least 6" from the pin, within a total pitch width of 5" side to side.

There is a great deal of terminology that comes with the game: 'hill-gaiters', 'frenchman', 'pot', and the 'hole-gaiter' are regularly used and mark types of throwing technique and placement used by the player. Although the game is a pastime game, it is taken as seriously as any sport, referee included! His role is often to ensure minimal dispute by measuring the pitch with callipers.



The Quoits lie on the playing surface at the Whitby Club.

---

## Esk Valley Quoits

Two theories exist as to the origin of the game: one is that the game originated with stable lads throwing old shoes for fun, adopted with increasing seriousness over time. The other lies as far back in history as the Battle of Agincourt, a possible and fairly likely explanation following the etymology of the word 'quoit' and the strange terminology used in the game.

The Esk Valley area of Yorkshire is one of the last areas maintaining a strong interest in the game, previously stretching all over the North. Teams of different leagues played games between each other, and older players recall tales of walking in the dark after work to play games by lamplight, with the scorecard being sent off by post after the game.



Riders, from 2018 and 1978 respectively, ride a completely unchanged course on their horses.

Perhaps the most enjoyably enduring tradition, The Kiplingcotes Derby takes place on the third Thursday of March between the start near the Old railway station at Market Weighton and finishes at the post in Londesborough Wold Farm. The race involves any number of local riders, provided they make the 10st weight limit, saddle not included.

The race winner takes the prize of £50, drawn from the entry takings,

and the second place rider often gathers more money for the old stipulation of taking the rest still stands.

The course clerk, Currently 84 year old Guy Stephenson, is paid the traditional sum of five shillings (25p) to maintain the course for the day.

Run over roads, track and fields, the cross country course is a strenuous race and the event remains a genuine challenge.





Visitors gather to support the two horses led along the course to maintain the tradition, 2020.

---

# Kiplingcotes Derby

The Kiplingcotes Derby remains such a special event due to the original stipulations as to how and when the event could take place. Since 1519, the race has taken place every single year, reaching its 500th anniversary in 2019, for if the race fails to run on any occasion it may never be run again.

The first recorded problem was recorded in 1947 where such heavy snow prevented the riders making the start, so a local farmer lead a horse from start to finish of the course where it was declared the winner. The same happened in 2001 with the Foot and Mouth outbreak.



One of the many skiffs used for rounding up the swans, displaying the flags of the Crown and the three other families with Upping rights.

Swan Upping takes place on the River Thames and its upstream estuaries in villages and towns like Marlow, Henley-on-Thames, and Eton.

Originally a practice embraced as a means for rounding up a food source, hence the use of 'upping', the practice involved groups of men in Thames Skiffs and other watercraft herding the unmarked swans of the area to the banks to be claimed for food

The practice has now become something of a spectacle, adopted by the Royal Family as a tradition of their own, one maintaining the interest of the Uppers, Wardens, and Markers and those who maintain the Crown Boats. Now, the tradition is also used for conservation purposes. The swans are given a veterinary check and weighed, then marked with a leg tag to help with the conservation efforts to keep a healthy number of Mute swans on the Thames, a struggle due to the overdevelopment on the river banks.



The Uppers now take great care to keep the Swans calm and act more as conservationists than hunger townsmen.

## Swan Upping

The tradition can be shown to originate from the early 12th Century, from a written account in 1186 detailing the Royal claim to take ownership of any unmarked Mute Swans on the river. A number of the swans were shown in a captive state and were taken by Uppers. There are three other families with a claim to unmarked swans; the Vintners, the Dyers and the Ilchesters, breeding swans at Abbotsbury.

By 1850 the tradition had mostly if not completely died due to the increased availability of domestic fowl for food and the diminishing number of people with rights to care for swans.





Morris Men of Northumberland dance a variation named 'Rapper'.

Morris Dancing, known fondly as 'Morris', is a familial dance form that is held dear by village communities in local and regional variations.

There are six types of Morris considered to be clear distinctions between each other: Welsh Mountain, North-West Clog, Molly-Dance, Rapper, Longsword, and the most commonly portrayed Cotswold. Each dance involves a 'Squire' who organises the performance, the 'Captain' who teaches the steps and movements

and the 'Bagman' who collects to fund the club an acting secretary. The various different styles perform at different times of the year, all of which conform to both the pagan and religious calendar, on Whitsuntide, the annual Rush-bearing, Christmas, the Solstices and Equinoxes.

The Morris Dancers of Bampton-in-the-Bush, Oxfordshire, have managed to maintain their performance for 400 years uninterrupted, although this is documented by word of mouth.



Cotswold Morris is the most recognisable, with rags and bells instead of swords.

# Morris Dancing

Embraced after a resurgence in the early 20th Century after the great folk music researcher and collector Cecil Sharp heard the dancers and their band, intrigued by the songs and ritual, the tradition can be dated back as far the 16th Century, possibly earlier if the etymology of Morris is correctly traced back to the French or Flemish 'morisque' or 'morisch' (to Dance). In 1934, the Morris Ring was founded to unify the growing number of small clubs and groups. The oldest traditional instrument used is the melodic pipe, dated pre 1840, although the fiddle, tabor, accordion, harmonica and occasionally banjo are used. The songs and tunes are often played as jigs in 6/8 time, often at very high speed to encourage an engaging atmosphere.



Left: Viewers look up at the steep gradient

Right: Jem Wakeman, Master of Cheese

Bizarrely and luckily, no one has died in the races at Cooper's Hill, chasing wheels of cheese down a hill with an average 33% gradient, 50% for most of the playing surface

A Smarts Traditional Double Gloucester 8lb Wheel is sent from the top of the hill where it reaches speeds of up to 70mph, on occasion injuring spectators at the bottom. The cheese is given a one second head-start.

The racers then proceed to find the balance between avoiding fatal

injury and winning the race, where they are contorted and bounced around by the various divots and gradient changes in a sea of swirling limbs that would put shame to a cartoon.

There are five races, with a record number of victories taken by Chris Anderson, taking 22 wins in the men's and Flo Early taking 4 wins in the women's. The event is like most danger traditions unsupported and unsponsored, avoiding any possibility of an unwanted law suit: which seems silly as no one is there by accident!



Competitors in a number of shapes and contortions during the roll.

---

# Cooper's Hill Cheese Rolling

In its modern iteration, the event is something more of an excuse for an adrenaline rush, the origins lie before the 18th Century, perhaps further into history. The earliest written account is found in an 1826 message to the Gloucester Town Crier, although local Jean Jefferies can recall family tales that go back to the mid-18th century, even then referencing a tradition that had an older history. Ancient Romans are mentioned as the originators of the practice, hurling objects from a fort placed on the top of the hill, although so too are those practicing Pagan rituals, with a burning bundle of brush standing in for the cheese on New Years Day.





For more Odd English Traditions please see the other volumes. Included are these traditions:

Haxey Hood

Burly Man

Hurling the Silver Ball

Bottle Kicking

Royal Shrovetide Football

Abbot's Bromley Horn Dance

Hare Pie Scrambling

Mayor of Ock Street

Weighing the Mayor

Dwyle Flonking

'Obby 'Oss

Mummer's Dancing

Model Village

Allendale Tar Barrels

## Photographs:

### Esk Valley Quoits

<https://www.amber-online.com/collection/quoits/>

<http://btckstorage.blob.core.windows.net/site13333/Caps%20on.jpg>

<https://drive.google.com/?tab=io&authuser=0>

### Kiplingcotes Derby

<https://photos.google.com/?tab=iq&authuser=0&pageId=none>

[https://sites.google.com/site/jockeypedianovember2018/\\_/rsrc/1561474549076/holmes-ken/paddy.jpg](https://sites.google.com/site/jockeypedianovember2018/_/rsrc/1561474549076/holmes-ken/paddy.jpg)

### Swan Upping

[https://i2-prod.getreading.co.uk/incoming/article9718632.ece/ALTERNATES/s615/0\\_JS68755231.jpg](https://i2-prod.getreading.co.uk/incoming/article9718632.ece/ALTERNATES/s615/0_JS68755231.jpg)

[https://www.visitthames.co.uk/imageresizer/?image=%2fdbmgs%2fSwan%20upping%20\(1\).jpg&action=PageHeader](https://www.visitthames.co.uk/imageresizer/?image=%2fdbmgs%2fSwan%20upping%20(1).jpg&action=PageHeader)

### Morris Dancing

<https://themorrisring.org/publications/morris-tradition>

### Cooper's Hill Cheese Rolling

[https://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2010/03/12/article-1257445-00BCB993000004B0-158\\_468x691.jpg](https://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2010/03/12/article-1257445-00BCB993000004B0-158_468x691.jpg)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/staticarchive/4d003e9392c099892e0bf7183a3511642a13230f.jpg>

[http://inapcache.boston.com/universal/site\\_graphics/blogs/bigpicture/cheeseroll\\_05\\_27/c03\\_19133829.jpg](http://inapcache.boston.com/universal/site_graphics/blogs/bigpicture/cheeseroll_05_27/c03_19133829.jpg)