

Chillesford's
quoits team circa
1898.



Steel quoits

We seem to like difficult games in this area, and one is steel quoits. Most probably it originated hundreds of years ago when someone perceived the possibility of making competitive sport from hurling horseshoes at a peg or stake in the ground. Indeed, this form of the game is played in America today. An early record of quoit-playing comes from a parish in Wiltshire. In 1409 a miracle was attributed to St Osmund of Salisbury. A carelessly thrown quoit struck a girl on the head. She recovered and brought the quoit to the shrine as an offering. Reading this, one of the authors uncomfortably recalled a similar incident at Butley in the 1980s when an onlooker asked to try pitching a quoit which flew dangerously wide.

Quoits was the favourite game in the Sandlings, where men would often practice in their gardens, using the clothes-line as a guide for the height to throw them. The game has a basic quality that is rooted in the timeless earthy activities of the village – its elements are

steel, clay, sand and water. The quoits are pitched on to a bed of clay kept soft by water, and the sticky clay is removed by rubbing on a cloth with the aid of sharp sand. To keep his pair of quoits bright during the close season, a horseman would drag them through the sandy soil tied to his plough.

Quoit beds are set 18 yards apart, and the quoits, weighing 7¼ lbs a pair, are thrown from each end in turn. In the centre of the bed is buried a steel pin, and its position is marked by a piece of paper, called a light. It does not matter whether a quoit lands flat or remains at an angle in the clay, but on no account must it 'turn a woman', or it is eliminated and removed from the bed. A 'woman' is a quoit that alights with its outer curved side nearer the clay. A quoit encircling the pin scores two points and is removed immediately, otherwise the scoring is like bowls. It can be played as singles, pairs, triples or teams of six.

Sixty years ago boys began playing quoits using old horseshoes made into a ring by a blacksmith. They were passed down in families. Reg Snowdon of Chillesford

Old quoit forged
from a horseshoe.

