

# Bowling for a Pig?

*Village Voices*, (Hollisley and adjoining parishes), November 2023.

The first Butley Flower Show and Fete I attended was on 31st July 1971. The Show had come into being just after the end of the war in 1946 and the fete included five-a-side football, steel quoits, and a three-pin bowling game among other entertainments. I was most interested in watching the steel quoits competition for the Sir Peter Greenwell cup, and do not recall seeing the bowling game. A poster attached to the end wall of Mr. Large's workshop, facing the Street, mentions neither it, nor the quoits. Talking to men at Butley Oyster later, I learned that it had been played behind the pub in the past, and boys were paid a penny for standing the skittles up again, after they had been struck down. Also, Vera Noble, the landlady, near show-time, put the iron-shod bowl in water to stop the wood shrinking and dislodging the ring.

Vera's family had lived at the Oyster since 1916, and an inventory was taken of the contents of the inn, which included the following: 'A boarded and tiled piggery with court and fowl house and partition in the shed – ten pin board, triangle, 3 pins, bowl, shy at back, 12 sleepers, 5 water tubs, paled lift gate by garden.' I believe whoever wrote the inventory assumed the triangle and pins were for the ten pin game. The mention of 'ten pin board' must refer to the two planks which fitted the triangle.

The game was stored for many years under a wooden building next door to the pub, occupied by George and Freda Smith, Vera's brother and sister-in-law, and their children Don, Ron and Marie, and it was brought out for the annual fete in Butley. When a new house was built for them, Marie gave the game to Orford Museum which had nowhere to place it on display or even store it due its size. So Rachel Massey, of Hill Farm, Chillesford was asked to look after it and it formed part of the display of her bygones for eleven years.

Ten pin bowls was a widespread game in England and the States in the 19th century. Rachel believes that the 3-pin version is possibly a local variation. It was known as Bowling the Pig as the prize was a pig. Siting the storage place above the Oyster Inn's piggery may suggest where the donated prize came from. Daphne and John Gant recall the game as it was played in villages in the area in the 1950s. For the winner there was a £5 prize alternative to the donated piglet. A Leiston man won so often at the fetes in those villages, that the game was changed to bowling through hoops and this allowed ladies to play.

The cumbersome Butley game seems to be a rare survival and of some age. The 7-inch-wide thick pine planks extend to thirty feet and lengths of steel pipe serve as dowels to lock them together. The triangle is an integral part of one plank making it thirteen feet long. Rachel was told that William Large (1881-1981) the Butley Street wheelwright made a replacement for one of the pins. They are made of elm with an iron foot ring and will have been turned on a lathe needed for making the elm hubs of carts. Interestingly the three heavy iron bands applied to the upper surface of the triangle are reworked wagon tyres. The games were most probably made by village wheelwrights. I am grateful to Valerie Fenwick for the evidence from Mr. and Mrs. Gant and the description of the various parts of the game and the craftsmen who made it and others.

I thought the Suffolk Punch Trust the ideal place for the game to be put on show to the public because some ten years ago they had accepted the Lord Rendlesham steel quoits cup (presented in 1914) and other quoits equipment and memorabilia from me. I am pleased that Orford Museum and the Trust agreed to the transfer of the game recently, after it had been cleaned and treated for woodworm by local volunteers.

Vic Harrup