

However today the standing area is concrete or paving slabs with a toe-board in front. The clay is boxed in by wood, railway sleepers being ideal, or by an iron ring perhaps from an old wagon wheel. The clay should be soft enough for the quoits to stay more or less where they land and is kept in this state between games by covering it with soaked sacks, old carpeting, polythene sheeting and a heavy metal or wooden cover.

It appears that the game became organised initially in Ipswich, the only town of any size in Suffolk. Charles Cullingham presented the Suffolk Challenge Cup in 1888 and the first winners were Waterside Works of Ipswich. In 1913 they won the cup outright, being the winners for three successive seasons. Today we play for the fourth cup, presented by Tollemache Brewery in 1957, but it cannot be won outright. There are few sponsors these days for a minority sport!

The East Anglian Daily Times, in a lyrical passage quoted below, recorded the victory of Ipswich Friends' Adult School, over Crowfield in 1891. 'It fully deserves its revival for the game brings into full play all the qualities admired and coveted by Englishmen as much now as in the brave days of yore – a steady hand and arm, a well-trained observant eye, and above all a cool head, for woe-betide the player who allows nervousness to grip the master hand ere the light iron circlet has started on its way.'

Just before the First World War there was a move to promote the game further in villages, although the first leagues had been formed soon after the new century began. Lord Rendlesham presented the magnificent silver cup in 1914, which is still competed for today. The first year the competition at Saxmundham attracted a hundred players, but only one team from Ipswich. Few men entered this competition as well as the Challenge Cup. The local newspaper reported that, 'working men cannot afford to lose two days so close to one another, even though they love the sport'. Waterside Works lost to Saxmundham in one semi-final, and the hosts went on to beat Leiston in the final. Lord Rendlesham himself presented the three winners with the cup. The advent of the war meant the next tournament was not until 1922, and thereafter this competition and the game generally flourished until the 1970s.

Today there are just two leagues of five teams each, centred on Hadleigh and Stoke-by-Nayland. The latter includes teams from across the Stour Valley in Essex. The County of Suffolk Steel Quoits Association, reconstituted in 1985, arranges several tournaments – singles, pairs and triples – and is the umbrella organisation for the leagues. All county games are 21-up, but League rules may differ.

The Woodbridge League Minute Books, dating from its inception in 1904, reveal that there were several ways teams might be organised. However, there were always six players in a team, and usually they played as two sets of three or as three pairs. Leagues could not contain too many teams because, in country areas, the season had to finish before harvest. Games began at six o'clock, normally on Saturdays, and half an hour was allowed for late arrival due to accident. It is clear that, sometimes, matches went on until it was dark, and at the General Meeting held in March 1909, it was agreed that a lamp could be used to illuminate the beds if required. The first teams were from Woodbridge and the villages of