‘Beastly furie, and exstreme violence’: pain, injury and death resulting from football and other ball games played in the British Isles before the Reformation

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Ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have been wont to call war a game … Indeed, all fighting that is bound by rules bears the formal characteristics of play by that very limitation.[1]

I.

Following an unruly Shrove Tuesday football match at Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey in 1797 several players were indicted and convicted at the assizes for kicking a football through the town’s streets, although a judge subsequently respited their sentence. Two years later during the annual Shrove Tuesday game the local magistrates, fearing the disintegration of public order as a great number of people were kicking a ball about in the market place, read the Riot Act to disperse what they called a mob.[2] It was following one of these riotous games at Kingston in the 1790s that some townspeople successfully defended themselves by claiming they were observing an ‘immemorial custom’. In short, their game supposedly commemorated the defeat of Danish forces by Kingston’s inhabitants several hundred years before: the invader’s captain was killed and ‘his head kicked about by the people in derision, the custom of kicking a Foot Ball on the anniversary of that day has been observed ever since’.[3] This was of course a legend, although in the mid-nineteenth century an attempt was made to link it to the outcome of a battle in 755 between the feuding King Cynewulf of

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[1] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (1949; reprinted, London, Boston & Henley, 1980), p. 89.

[2] The National Archives, London, HO 42/46, fol. 128, printed in Robert Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700–1850* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 139-40.

[3] W.D. Biden, *The History and Antiquities of the Ancient and Royal Town of Kingston-upon-Thames* (Kingston, 1852), pp. 58–59.

Wessex and Prince Cyneheard recorded in the Anglo Saxon Chronicle.[4] Moreover, kicking the severed head of a defeated enemy was occasionally described in literature. Thus in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (late 14th century) the eponymous knight’s decapitated head is kicked about probably, in the words of a literary critic, ‘to keep the head from rejoining the body’.[5] Once more, in John Webster’s *The White Devil* (1612) we have the lines:

> Like the wild Irish, I’ll ne’er think thee dead
> Till I can play at football with thy head.[6]

This English denigration of supposed Irish barbarity is repeated about fifty years later by another author who writes of their age-old determination ‘Never to hold themselves secure from their Foe, till they might play at foot-ball with his head’.[7] As Patricia Palmer has observed, Webster’s dramatic depiction may have been influenced by stories of seemingly real events.[8] Thus in 1593 at the outset of the Nine Years’ War soldiers under the command of the English sheriff, Captain Humphrey Willis, ‘having killed one of the best gents in the country named the son of Edmund Mac Hugh Maguire’ cut off his head and then ‘hurled it from place to place as a football’.[9] Again, in 1597 following the death in battle of Sir John Chichester, governor of Carrickfergus, his severed head was sent as a trophy to the victors’ camp in Tyrone where, according an historian writing in the early twentieth century, ‘it was made a football by the rude gallowglass of the army’.[10] Three years later the mayor and townsmen of Limerick killed the Constable of Limerick castle, ‘cut off his head … and played at football with it’.[11]

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[4] Biden, *History*, p. 59 note c.

[5] R.A. Waldron (ed.), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London, 1970), p. 48, fitt I, lines 420–36; L.D. Benson, ‘The Source of the Beheading Episode in “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”’, *Modern Philology*, 59 (1961), p. 6; cf. J.E. Wülfing (ed.), *Laud Troy Book*, Early English Text Society, 121–22 (1902–03), p. 373; Harriet Hudson (ed.), *Four Middle English Romances* (Kalamazoo, MI, 2006), ‘Octavian’, lines 1386–87, <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/hudson-octavian>.

[6] John Webster, *The White Devil* (1612), sig. Gv [Act iv, scene i, lines 136–37].

[7] Richard Brathwait, *The captive-captain* (1665), p. 108.

[8] P. Palmer, ‘“An headlesse Ladie” and “a horses loade of heades”: Writing the Beheading’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 60 (2007), pp. 25–26.

[9] Lambeth Palace Library, London, MS Carew 617, fol. 286, calendared in J.S. Brewer and William Bullen (eds.), *Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts, preserved in the Archiepiscopal Library at Lambeth* (6 vols., 1867–73), vol. 3, p. 156, and printed in Mary O’Dowd, ‘Maguire, Sir Hugh [Aodh Mág Uidhir], lord of Fermanagh (*d.*1600)’, *ODNB*.

The Scots too had a reputation for brutality. Hence Thomas Walsingham (*c*.1340–*c*.1422), a monk of St Albans and chronicler recounted how in summer 1379 during an outbreak of bubonic plague known as the ‘fourth pestilence’ the Scots, ‘like inhuman brutes or ravening beasts’, launched a raid on northern England during which the invaders put to the sword ‘all the able-bodied men’ who had not yet succumbed to disease. They ‘beheaded many people and then – carried away by their savage nature – were not ashamed to kick the heads backwards and forwards as though playing football with them’.[12]

A local custom, some literary references and alleged atrocities aside, the words of two men – both apparently drunk – were reported to Thomas Cromwell in 1535. One called Henry VIII a knave, adulterer and heretic, boasting that, if it were possible, he would ‘play at football’ with the king’s crown. The other likewise denounced Henry as an adulterer and hoped to see ‘the King’s head run upon the ground like a football’.[13] These were treasonous words liable to be punished with death. They stemmed from imagination. Yet there are a couple more reports concerning actually playing football with someone’s head. For instance, during an enquiry conducted in October 1320 into the murder of a monk committed in Darnhall, Cheshire it was stated that the perpetrators played football with the deceased’s head.[14] Another gruesome tale dates from August 1642, on the eve of the English Civil War. A Catholic missionary priest named Hugh Green, having suffered five months imprisonment, was hung and quartered in Dorchester. The local barber surgeon, however, botched the job and the priest was put out of his misery by decapitation. A mob then got hold of Green’s head and used it as a football for several hours. Exhausted by their entertainment they eventually put sticks in the eyes, ears, nose and mouth and then buried it near the body. They did not place the head on the town gate because they feared an outbreak of plague – possibly as divine retribution for their actions.[15]

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[10] F.J. Bigger, ‘Sir Arthur Chichester, Lord Deputy of Ireland’, *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 10 (1904), p. 6; John McCavitt, ‘Chichester, Arthur, Baron Chichester (1563–1625)’, *ODNB*; cf. *CSP Ireland 1596–97*, pp. 444–45.

[11] *CSP Ireland 1600*, p. 13.

[12] Henry Riley (ed.), *Thomae Walsingham, quondam monachi S. Albani, Historia Anglicana. Vol. 1. A.D. 1272–1381* (London, 1863), vol. 1, pp. 409–10. English translation in Rosemary Horrox (ed.), *The Black Death* (Manchester, 1994), p. 89.

[13] *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, 1535*, vol. 8, pp. 114, 275–76.

[14] British Library, London, MS Harleian 2064, fol. 256, calendared in George Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester* (2nd edn., ed. Thomas Helsby, London, 1882), vol. 2, p. 162, ‘ad modum pilæ cum pedibus suis conculcaverunt’.

These are extreme examples – only two of which date from before the sixteenth century. They have been used to illustrate the common opinion among English social elites and religious moralists that football was a violent, disorderly activity played by the lower elements of society. Indeed, there is a bloody red thread running through the game’s early history. From kickabouts with severed heads to accidental stabbings, participants getting killed or knocked unconscious, riots, brawls, quarrels, broken bones and terrible cuts, football once had a well-earned reputation as nothing but ‘beastly furie, and exstreme violence’; a bloody pastime which resulted in wounded men nursing their ‘rancour and malice’.[16] Accordingly, the focus of this essay is on pain, injury and death resulting from playing football and other ball games in the British Isles before the Reformation. That is a large time frame spanning, in the main, from the 1260s to the 1530s. Since this is not the place to become embroiled in an historical controversy as to when the English Reformation began, I have merely selected an approximate date for what was a process rather than an event. Indeed, the endpoint of this study invites further research on the interrelated questions of whether there was a significant change of attitude among social, cultural and religious elites towards football during the so-called ‘Long Reformation’, and whether games generally became less violent. That is something I intend to work on in an accompanying piece. Here the intention is to be as comprehensive as possible while acknowledging that new sources will undoubtedly come to light. Developments during this period will be documented through a wide variety of primary sources – notably parliamentary rolls, close rolls, plea rolls, coroners’ inquests, justiciary rolls, manorial court rolls, tenurial documents, papal registers, chartularies, episcopal registers, diocesan visitations, civic and livery company records, university statutes, financial accounts, chronicles, sermons, poems and early printed texts. In addition, there is some pre-existing secondary literature on aspects of medieval and early modern football. This includes a few general histories,[17] as well as studies focussed on local and regional variations,[18] calendar customs,[19] land use,[20] literary references,[21] and what has been called ‘a different stage in the civilising process’.[22]

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[15] Richard Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests, and other Catholics of both Sexes, that have suffered death in England on religious accounts* (2 vols., Manchester, 1803), vol. 2, pp. 113–19.

[16] Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke named the Gouernour* (1531), p. 99v; reprinted in Henry Croft (ed.), *The Boke named the Gouernour* (2 vols., London, 1883), vol. 1, pp. 295–96.

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[17] Montague Shearman and James Vincent, *Foot-Ball: Its History for Five Centuries* (London, 1882); Konrad Koch, *Die Geschichte des Fussballs im Altertum und in der Neuzeit* (Berlin, 1895); Francis Magoun, *The History of Football: From the beginnings to 1871*, Kölner Anglistische Arbeiten 31 (Bochum-Langendreer, 1938); Geoffrey Green, *The History of the Football Association 1863–1953* (London, 1953); Morris Marples, *A History of Football* (London, 1954); E.G. Dunning, ‘Football in its early stages’, *History Today*, 13 (1963), pp. 838–47; Percy Young, *A history of British football* (London, 1968); Adrian Harvey, *Football: The First Hundred Years. The untold story* (London & New York, 2005).

[18] T. Arthur, ‘Old-Time Football’, in William Andrews (ed.), *Bygone Derbyshire* (Derby, 1892), pp. 216–23; M. Peacock, ‘The Hood-game at Haxey, Lincolnshire’, *Folklore*, 7 (1896), pp. 330–50; F.P. Magoun, ‘Scottish Popular Football, 1424–1815’, *American Historical Review*, 37 (1931), pp. 1–13; R.W. Ketton Cremer, ‘Camping – a forgotten Norfolk Game’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, 24 (1932), pp. 88–92; V. Allan, ‘East Anglia called it “camping”’, *East Anglian Magazine*, 6 (1947), pp. 358–62; John Robertson, *Uppies & Doonies: the story of the Kirkwall ba’ game* (Aberdeen, 1967); L. Fournier, ‘The Embodiment of Social Life: Bodylore and the Kirkwall Ba’ Game (Orkney, Scotland)’, *Folklore*, 120 (2009), pp. 194–212.

[19] F.P. Magoun, ‘Shrove Tuesday Football’, *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, 13 (1931), pp. 9–46; E. Sellick, ‘Dorking – Shrove Tuesday Football’, *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, 54 (1955), pp. 141–42; A. Hellawell, ‘Shrove Tuesday Football Match Played at Atherstone, Warwickshire’, *Folklore,* 71 (1960), pp. 195–96; M. Alexander, ‘Shrove Tuesday football in Surrey’, *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, 77 (1986), pp. 197–205; David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London, 1989), pp. 18–19; Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority. Formative Experiences in England 1560–1640* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 147, 152–53; Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun. A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 154–55, 159–63; Taylor Aucoin, ‘“When the Pancake Bell Rings”: Shrove Tuesday and the Social Efficacy of Carnival Time in Medieval and Early Modern Britain’, Unpublished University of Bristol Ph.D., 2019, pp. 98–147.

[20] J.W. Anscomb, ‘An eighteenth century inclosure and football-play at West Haddon’, *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 4 (1968–69), pp. 175–78; D. Dymond, ‘A Lost Social Institution: The Camping Close’, *Rural History*, 1 (1990), pp. 165–92.

[21] F.P. Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England and in Middle-English Literature’, *American Historical Review*, 35 (1929), pp. 33–45; F.P. Magoun, ‘Sir Gawain and Medieval Football’, *English Studies*, 19 (1937), pp. 208–09; P.S. Fairman, ‘The bewties of the fut-ball: Reactions and references to this boysterous sport in English Writings, 1175–1815’, *Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad Complutense*, 2 (1994), pp. 47–57.

[22] E.G. Dunning and N. Elias, ‘Folk Football in Medieval and Early Modern Britain’, in Dunning (ed.), *Sociology of Sport*, pp. 116–32 (at p. 120); D.A. Reid, ‘Folk Football, the Aristocracy and Cultural Change: A Critique of Dunning and Sheard’, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 5 (1988), pp. 224–38.

Starting with accounts of games that ended in fatalities, both accidental and intentional, this essay will proceed by examining cases of severe and minor injuries, as well as small-scale fights and large-scale disturbances. It will suggest that while it is difficult to generalise players nonetheless seem to have known the risks involved, and that sometimes the multiple variants of football then played were used as cover to settle long-standing disagreements and grievances. Certainly on several occasions men were openly killed or else badly maimed. At the same time, however, it is worth observing that the nature of the surviving evidence focusses our attention on atypical incidents and that there must have been a number of relatively uneventful football matches about which nothing is recorded. Even so, the perception remained that football was a ‘freendly kinde of fight’ and, having briefly discussed the widespread disapproval of this sport, in the conclusion to this essay I will offer some explanations for the apparent pervasiveness of violence during pre-Reformation football matches.[23]

II.

To begin with, we need to clarify what was meant by football. In Britain, the first post-Roman literary reference to a ball may be a ninth century chronicler’s remark that at Maes Elledi in the region of Glywysing (Glamorgan), ‘boys were playing ball’.[24] This can be supplemented with the Benedictine schoolmaster Ælfric Bata’s *Colloquies* (*c*.1000), the seventh of which described boys’ open-air games: ‘Let’s all go together to play outdoors with our sticks and our ball or hoop … If you want to play with a ball, I’ll lend you both my ball and my stick to play with’.[25] Archaeological evidence from Winchester and London indicates that from roughly the tenth to mid-twelfth centuries balls were small and could be caught in the palm of a hand. They were made by sewing shaped pieces of leather around a core of tightly packed moss and somewhat resembled modern tennis balls.[26] Before the end of the thirteenth century ball games were being played throughout northern Europe; notably

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[23] Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), p. 120.

[24] Nennius, *British History and The Welsh Annals*, ed. and trans. John Morris (London, 1980), p. 30.

[25] Scott Gwara (ed.), and David Porter (trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Conversations. The colloquies of Ælfric Bata* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 1, 94, 95.

[26] Derek Keene, *Survey of Winchester* (2 parts, Oxford, 1985), p. 393; Martin Biddle (ed.), *Object and Economy in Medieval Winchester* (Oxford, 1990), p. 707; Geoff Egan, *Medieval Finds from Excavations in London: 6. The Medieval Household Daily Living c.1150–c.1450* (London, 1998), pp. 295, 296.

sollen in Flanders, *soule* in Brittany, *kolven* in the Netherlands, *keatsen* in Friesland and *pärkspel* in Gotland.[27] Indeed, several medieval illuminated manuscripts – mostly of continental origin – show that various ball games were popular at this time.[28] Moreover, about 1174 the cleric William *fitz* Stephen noted that on Shrove Tuesday after lunch the youth of London would go out beyond the city walls into the fields – possibly Moorfields – to play ‘the famous game of ball’. The scholars of each school had their own ball, while the followers of each trade [i.e. apprentices?] had theirs.[29] This passage has been much debated and probably refers not to football, as has occasionally been suggested, but to a form of handball.[30] My reading is supported by the absence of the Latin for ‘foot’ in the original text, as well as the archaeological evidence. In addition, later descriptions of footballs as ‘large’ serve to contrast them with balls that could be easily caught in or hit with one hand. So it could be that these youngsters, each of whom possessed their own ball, were engaged in *jeu de paume* – essentially an early type of tennis played in cloisters and elsewhere with the palm of the hand instead of a racquet. But whether or not participants used their feet as well as hands, it is clear that unlike expensive courtly pursuits such as jousting, these ball games – which sometimes also used bats – required no specialized equipment and were thus open to all social classes. In addition, Gillmeister in his history of tennis has plausibly suggested that the innovation of a goal (usually a prominent local landmark) may have derived from the chivalric passage of arms, a military exercise in which a group of knights attempted to defend the gate of a castle or town from attack.[31]

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[27] H. Gillmeister, ‘Medieval Sport: Modern Methods of Research – Recent Results and Perspectives’, *International Journal for the History of Sport*, 5 (1988), pp. 54, 61–63.

[28] BL, MS Royal 10 E.IV, ‘The Decretals of Gregory IX’ (*c*.1300–*c*.1340), fols. 94v, 95r, 98v; BL, MS Royal 14 B.V, ‘Genealogy of Kings of England (late 13th century)’, fol. 4r; Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Bodleian 264, ‘Romance of Alexander’ (1338–44), part 1 fols. 22r, 63r; Bodl., MS Douce 62, ‘Book of Hours’, fol. 96r; Bodl., MS Douce 135, ‘Book of Hours’, fols. 7r, 87v; Bodl., MS Douce 276, ‘Book of Hours’, fol. 12r; University College, Oxford, MS 165, Bede, ‘Life of Cuthbert’ (12th century), fol. 8.

[29] William *fitz* Stephen, ‘Descriptio Nobilissimae Civitatis Londinae’ (*c*.1173–74), printed in James Robertson (ed.), *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, Rolls Series (London, 1877), vol. 3, p. 9; and in John Stowe, *A Survey of London*, ed. Charles Kingsford (2 vols., Oxford, 1971), vol. 2, p. 226; with English translations in Samuel Pegge, *Fitz-Stephen’s Description of the City of London, newly translated from the Latin Original* (London, 1772), pp. 45–46, Charles Knight, *London* (6 vols., London, 1841–44), vol. 1 p. 181, Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, p. 34, Stowe, *Survey of London*, ed. Kingsford, vol. 1, p. 92, and Nicholas Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London, 1973), p. 132; see also, A.J. Duggan, ‘William *fitz* Stephen (*fl*.1162–1174)’, *ODNB*.

[30] Cf. Joseph Strutt, *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (1801; London, 1876 edn.), pp. 159–60; John Brand, *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*, ed. Sir Henry Ellis (3 vols., London, 1849), vol. 1, p. 70; *Notes & Queries*, 6th series, 11 (1885), p. 436; A.F. Leach, *The Schools of Medieval England* (London, 1915), p. 140; L.F. Salzman, *English Life in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1927), p. 82; Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, pp. 33–34; Marples, *History of Football*, pp. 16, 19–21; A.L. Poole, ‘Recreations’, in Austin Lane Poole (ed.), *Medieval England* (2 vols., Oxford, 1958), vol. 2, p. 614; Timothy Baker, *Medieval London* (London, 1970), p. 39; Mary Borer, *The City of London: A History* (London, 1977), p. 74; Aucoin, ‘“Pancake Bell Rings”’, p. 108.

Our earliest set of examples from the 1260s to the 1320s concern fatalities and serious injuries sustained from sharp objects during ball games.[32] Thus about 1261 at Bicester Priory in Oxfordshire two children, Stephen le Tailor and William Stirchup, were playing at ball. Stephen ran after the ball but tripped and fell upon his left side, wounding himself on his scissors. He died five days later, aged less than ten.[33] Roughly five years later on Sunday, 18 April 1266 in the wapentake [administrative division] of Strafford (West Riding of Yorkshire) two men, Alan and Walter de Wyndhul, were playing at ball. Both were running, trying to get the ball first. Instead they collided, catching each other on the shoulder and fell to the ground. Alan received a wound on his arm between the shoulder and the elbow from Walter’s sheathed knife. Despite getting up and resuming their game, even going to a tavern afterwards to drink new ale, Alan’s arm swelled up. He sent for a leech but the treatment was ineffectual. Alan died the following Saturday and Walter then absconded.[34] Similarly, an inquisition before the sheriff and coroners of Northumberland at Newcastle-upon-Tyne concerned a fatality resulting from playing at ball in the village of Ulgham on Trinity Sunday, 16 June 1280. In this instance a player was struck in the belly by the point of a sheathed knife following a heavy collision when running to the ball. The verdict was death by misadventure.[35] Across the Irish Sea at Dublin in 1308 the jury of a Court of Justiciary deliberated a plea of trespass arising from an incident at a ball game played at Newcastle Lyons on the Sunday after the Nativity of St John the Baptist (24 June). Here a spectator named John McCorcan ran towards the ball pursued by his friend William Bernard who meant to hit it. The impact happened so quickly that William was wounded in the upper part of his right leg by John’s knife, which had pierced its sheath. The jury accepted that John had not intended to wound William and the injured party was awarded five shillings damages.[36] Again, in May 1321 William de Spalding, canon of Shouldham, Norfolk of the Gilbertine order of Sempringham, was granted a dispensation following the accidental death of his friend after a game at ball. As William kicked the ball his friend ran against him, suffering a severe wound from William’s sheathed knife from which he subsequently died.[37]

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[31] Heiner Gillmeister, *Tennis. A Cultural History* (London, 1998), pp. 6–7, 90–91.

[32] Although there is no mention of a ball, an earlier continental example still concerns the death in 1137 of a child crushed during the ‘so-called game of children’ at Petersberg Abbey, an Augustinian monastery near Halle. A remorseful monk refused to be promoted to a higher rank as a consequence. See Ernestus Ehrenfeuchter (ed.), ‘Chronicon Montis Sereni’, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Hannover, 1874), pp. 144–45 <https://www.dmgh.de/mgh_ss_23/index.htm#page/144/mode/1up>.

[33] Adrian Jobson, ‘The Oxfordshire eyre roll of 1261’, unpublished King’s College, University of London PhD, 2005, vol. 1, p. 76, vol. 2, p. 406.

[34] *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous (Chancery)* (London, 1916), vol. 1, p. 567.

[35] *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous (Chancery)*, vol. 1, p. 599; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward I 1272–1281* (London, 1901), vol. 1, p. 397.

In a chapter on ‘Sports violence’ in his study of *Medieval Games* John Marshall Carter remarked upon the ubiquity of weapons during this period, observing that ‘everyone in English medieval agricultural society carried a knife’. Emphasising the ‘extremely violent’ nature of thirteenth-century English society, Carter noted that in his examination of selected legal records spanning from 1202 to 1276 almost half of the 66 instances of sports and recreations that he found were associated with warfare. These activities included hunting, boxing, water tilting, fighting, archery and wrestling. Indeed, more than 75% of his 66 cases ‘resulted in the death of one or more participants or spectators’ and excessive drinking may often have been a contributing factor.[38] Besides alcohol, gambling too may have occasionally exacerbated matters. Hence not just archery and wrestling but throwing the stone and even quarrelling over chess sometimes culminated with violent death or serious injury.[39] Yet the nature of these sources cautions against drawing wider conclusions since they largely concerned adult males lower down the social scale engaged in activities with fatal or harmful outcomes. Consequently, it is difficult to judge to what extent our next examples were typical or unusual within the context of widespread violence.

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[36] Herbert Wood and Albert Langman (eds.), revised Margaret Griffith, *Calendar of the Justiciary Rolls or proceedings in the court of the Justiciar of Ireland I to VII years of Edward II* (Dublin, 1905), p. 103.

[37] W.H. Bliss (ed.), *Calendar of entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland. Volume II. 1305–1342* (London, 1895), p. 214; reprinted in G.G. Coulton, *Social Life in Britain from the Conquest to the Reformation* (Cambridge, 1918), p. 400.

[38] John Marshall Carter, *Medieval Games: Sports and Recreations in Feudal Society* (Westport, CT, 1992), pp. 95–121 (at pp. 108, 109, 110).

[39] John Giles (ed.), *Roger Wendover’s Flowers of History* (2 vols., London, 1849), vol. 2, pp. 439–41; C.A.F. Meekings (ed.), *Crown Pleas of the Wiltshire Eyre, 1249*, Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, Records Branch, 16 (Devizes, 1961), pp. 175, 218, 233; Martin Weinbaum (ed.), *The London Eyre of 1276* (London, 1976), nos. 48, 151; William Baildon (ed.), *Court Rolls of the Manor of Wakefield. Volume I. 1274–1297*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, 29 (1900), pp. 134, 145; *Calendar of Inquisitions*

Thus at York in September 1268 there was an inquisition concerning a fatality at Byram. An argument had ensued after a marriage in which resident villagers were allegedly attacked by drunken wedding guests armed with axes, bows and arrows. Interestingly, the affray had apparently arisen from a quarrel about the customary gift at such nuptials: a ball. This suggests that at Byram locals celebrated weddings with a ball game.[40] Then in June 1277 an order was issued for another inquisition, this time at Lincoln, concerning the death of a twelve-year old boy named Robert during a ball game. He had been accidently killed by Geoffrey, a ten-year old from Scottlethorpe, Lincolnshire. The children had been playing a bat and ball game, likely a form of hockey, when Geoffrey struck the ball so that it bounced up and together with his stick hit Robert under the ear, an injury from which Robert died three days after.[41] About eighteen months later in January 1279 at Chippenham, Wiltshire it was recorded that a freeman called Adam Crok had attempted to hit a ball with a staff but instead struck another man on the head, from which he died immediately. Adam fled at once and was outlawed.[42] Again, about 1313 a female child was accidently killed during a ball game at St Nicholas’ in Sturry, Kent when she was struck below the ear by a player trying to rebound the ball – possibly with a bat.[43] Meanwhile, in 1283 a man called Roger had been accused of striking a fellow-player with a stone during a game of *soule* in Cornwall. The blow proved fatal.[44] Also in Cornwall, about the beginning of the fourteenth century, in the hundred [administrative division] of Trigg, a man died after being tripped and knocked unconscious in what has been described as a game of football but could equally have been

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Miscellaneous (Chancery), vol. 1, pp. 49, 80, 109, 597–98, 618, 643; *Calendar of Close Rolls, Edward I. Volume IV. 1296–1302* (London, 1906), p. 72; Charles Gross (ed.), *Select Cases from the Coroners’ Rolls A.D. 1265–1413*, Selden Society, 9 (London, 1896), pp. 62, 68–69.

[40] *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous (Chancery)*, vol. 1, p. 121.

[41] *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous (Chancery)*, vol. 1, p. 592.

[42] R.E. Latham and C.A.F. Meekings (eds.), ‘The Veredictum of Chippenham Hundred, 1281’, in N.J. Williams (ed.), *Collectanea*, Wiltshire Archaeological Society, Records Branch, 12 (1956), pp. 85, 109.

[43] Frederic Maitland, Leveson Harcourt and William Bolland (eds.), *Year Books of Edward II. Vol. V. The Eyre of Kent 6 & & Edward II. A.D. 1313–1314* (London, 1910), p. lxxxvii.

[44] Leonard Elliott-Binns, *Medieval Cornwall* (London, 1955), p. 228.

soule. The perpetrator ran away and had his goods confiscated while three more players, all of whom were freemen, were named in subsequent legal proceedings.[45]

Another incident concerned the murder of Adam de Sarum, a student at Oxford, on the vigil of the feast of the Annunciation, Sunday 24 March 1303. He had been ‘playing at ball’ after vespers in the High Street near the East Gate when he was viciously attacked by three Irish lads (probably students), one of whom punched him in the head after which another struck him with a long knife in the face and shoulder. Whether or not this game was football is unclear. But other contemporary records indicate that Oxford was a site of ludic activities. Hence a complaint was made against two townsmen who on the feast of St Gregory, Wednesday 12 March 1292 played ‘in the street with a club and a great ball’ before damaging some mercer’s goods and then assaulting the husband and wife selling them. Moreover, certain clerks played ‘games in the open fields’, while eight clerks were accused of creating a disturbance by breaking into a woman’s house in St Aldate’s on the evening of the feast of St Bartholomew, Tuesday 24 August 1305, following their return from a game played in Coumede, a meadow to the south.[46]

The first unambiguous reference to football in England is a proclamation for preserving the peace in London during the mayoralty of Nicholas de Farndone about April 1314. Issued at a moment when Edward II could ill-afford civil disorder with Robert the Bruce seizing settlements and castles in Scotland (Edward’s army would suffer a heavy defeat at the Battle of Bannockburn two months later), this condemns the ‘great disturbance in the City, because of certain tumults arising from the striking of large footballs *en prees du poeple* from which many evils perchance may arise’. Accordingly, football was banned within the city on pain of imprisonment.[47] Nonetheless, there is a difficulty with this passage that has rarely been remarked upon: where were the footballs being kicked? The commonly accepted and most plausible translation of the French ‘en prees du poeple’ renders prees as fields and thus implies that the game took place either in a green space within the walls such as the gardens of Austin Friars or else beyond the walls – perhaps in Moorfields or alternatively near the Hospital of St Katharine (a site used for wrestling). Yet the proclamation concerns a commotion within rather than outside the city. So here another possibility, albeit less likely, is that phrase means in the crowd of people; i.e. football was being played on the streets of London.[48]

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[45] James Whetter, *Cornwall in the 13th Century: A Study in Social and Economic History* (Lostwithiel, 1998), pp. 210–11.

[46] H.E. Salter (ed.), *Records of Mediaeval Oxford* (Oxford, 1912), p. 11; J.E. Thorold Rogers (ed.), *Oxford City Documents Financial and Judicial* (Oxford, 1891), pp. 167, 176–77.

[47] Henry Riley (ed.), *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis, Liber Albus, Liber Custumarum, et Liber Horn* (London, 1862), vol. 3, pp. 439–41; Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, p. 36. The proclamation follows a writ directed to the Mayor and Sheriffs of London dated 13 April 1314. I have not entirely followed Riley’s translation here and am grateful to Lionel Laborie for his helpful observations.

Over the next two centuries there were a number of further prohibitions against football in specific places, often in conjunction with other pastimes such as hurling stones, quoits, skittles, tennis, bowls, handball, club ball, cambuc [i.e. hockey or possibly golf], cock fighting, cock-thrashing, dice and cards.[49] In the period following the devastation of the Black Death these included royal and thence civic directives concerning, amongst other cities and towns, London (1363, 1365, 1414),[50] Walsall (1422?),[51] Halifax (1450, 1454),[52] Leicester (1467, 1488),[53] London again (1479),[54] and Northallerton (1495).[55] Furthermore, ball games

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[48] *Notes & Queries*, 7th series, 2 (1886), pp. 27, 73, 116; cf. Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘The Wife of Bath’s Prologue’, line 532, ‘Greet prees at market maketh deere ware’ [A great crowd at the market makes wares expensive], <https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/wbt-par.htm>; *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘pree’, meaning meadow.

[49] For unspecified games at the Palace of Westminster during Parliament (1331–32), see *Rotuli Parliamentorum; ut et Petitiones, et Placita in Parliamento tempore Edwardi R. III* (1769), vol. 2, p. 64.

[50] Reginald Sharpe (ed.), *Calendar of Letter-Books preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London. Letter-Book G. Circa A.D. 1352–1374* (London, 1912), p. 154; Thomas Rymer (ed.), *Foedera* (3 vols., London, 1816–25), vol. 3, part ii, p. 770; *Calendar of Close Rolls, Edward III. Volume X. 1364–1368* (London, 1910), pp. 181–82, reprinted in Sir Walter Besant, *Medieval London* (London, 1906), vol. 1, p. 74; Reginald Sharpe (ed.), *Calendar of Letter-Books preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London. Letter-Book I. Circa A.D. 1400–1422* (London, 1909), p. 125.

[51] E.L. Glew, *History of the Borough and Foreign of Walsall* (Walsall, 1856), p. 103; Frederic Willmore, *History of Walsall and its neighbourhood* (Walsall & London, 1887), pp. 166–67.

[52] H.L. Roth, *The Yorkshire Coiners 1767–1783. And notes on Old and Prehistoric Halifax* (Halifax, 1906), p. 141.

[53] William Kelly, *Notices Illustrative of the Drama, and other popular amusements* (London, 1865), pp. 185–86; Mary Bateson (ed.), *Records of the Borough of Leicester. Volume II. 1327–1509* (London, 1901), vol. 2, pp. 290, 317–18.

[54] Reginald Sharpe (ed.), *Calendar of Letter-Books preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London. Letter-Book L. Temp. Edward IV – Henry VII* (London, 1912), pp. 140, 163–64.

– usually unspecified – often together with one or more of the following boisterous activities, namely shooting missiles at birds, throwing stones, performing shows, juggling, dancing, ballad singing and telling jokes, were prohibited in the churchyard of Kingston-upon-Thames,[56] the graveyard of Winchester Cathedral (1384),[57] St Paul's Cathedral (1385),[58] the graveyard of Lincoln Cathedral (1410) [football/handball],[59] Salisbury Cathedral (1448),[60] the churchyard of Ottery St Mary, Devon (1451) [tennis],[61] the cemeteries of Salton and Market Weighton, Yorkshire (1473) [football/handball],[62] and the churchyard of Chesham, Buckinghamshire (1521).[63] In the same vein, monks resident at the Benedictine abbey of St Peter's, Gloucester complained that the lawns of their cloisters had been trampled down during ball games and wrestling which provided entertainment during Richard II's parliament (1378).[64] Since the early thirteenth century there had also been injunctions against the clergy participating in various games and entertainments like dice, juggling, stage plays and

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[55] Christine Newman, *Late Medieval Northallerton. A Small Market Town and its Hinterland c.1470–1540* (Stamford, 1999), p. 128.

[56] Daniel Lysons, *The Environs of London* (4 vols., London, 1796–1800), vol. 1, p. 248; S. Denne, 'An Attempt to illustrate the figures carved in stone on the porch of Chalk Church', *Archaeologia*, 12 (1796), p. 20 n.; Biden, *History of Kingston-upon-Thames*, p. 58.

[57] Thomas Kirby (ed.), *Wykeham's Register* (2 vols., London, 1896–99), vol. 2, p. 409–10.

[58] David Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae* (4 vols., London, 1737), vol. 3, p. 194, reprinted in W. Sparrow Simpson (ed.), *Registrum Statutorum et Consuetudinum Ecclesiae Cathedralis Sancti Pauli Londiniensis* (London, 1873), pp. 391–92. English translation in Edith Rickert, *Chaucer's World* (Oxford, 1948), pp. 48–49, and W.O. Hassell, *How they lived: An Anthology of original accounts written before 1485* (Oxford, 1962), p. 106.

[59] Margaret Archer (ed.), *The Register of Bishop Philip Repingdon 1405–1419*, Lincoln Record Society, 57 (1963), pp. 182–83.

[60] C. Wordsworth and Douglas Macleane (eds.), *Statutes and Customs of the Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Salisbury* (London, 1915), p. 332.

[61] John Wasson (ed.), *Records of Early English Drama. Devon* (Toronto, 1986), pp. 15–16; Gillmeister, *Tennis*, pp. 32–33.

[62] James Raine (ed.), *The Fabric Rolls of York Minster*, Publications of the Surtees Society, 35 (Durham, 1859), pp. 255, 257; James Raine, *The Priory of Hexham* (2 vols., Durham, 1864–65), vol. 2, p. 156.

[63] F.W. Ragg, 'A Record of the Archdeaconry courts of Buckingham during part of 1521', *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 10 (1916), p. 314. Here ball games have been assumed, although they were not specified.

[64] Benjamin Williams (ed.), *Chronique de la Traison et Mort de Richart Deux Roy Dengleterre* (London, 1846), p. xlviii note 2; William Henry Hart (ed.), *Historia et Cartularium Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucesteriae* (Cambridge, 2012), vol. 1, p. 53.

drinking in taverns since they encouraged gambling, blaspheming and licentiousness.[65] Such prohibitions, for example, were issued at the Synod of Ely (1364), the provincial councils of Cashel (1453) and York (1466, 1518), and by Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (1519).[66]

Moving from ecclesiastical spaces to the universities, ball games and associated pastimes were prohibited by statute at several Oxford colleges: New College (1400), All Souls (1443), Magdalen (1479), Corpus Christi (1517) and Brasenose (1521).[67] Doubtless an unnamed preacher had these statutes in mind when admonishing his hearers during a sermon for playing ball games within their colleges.[68] Football, however, was first specifically banned at St John’s (1555).[69] For its part, Cambridge University explicitly forbade football in 1557 – except at those times when it was permitted by college statutes for exercise.[70] This was considerably laxer and later than St Andrews, which had prohibited football under penalty of excommunication in November 1497.[71]

Evidently the primary concern of authorities was to preserve public order and prevent property damage in urban areas – particularly the breaking of expensive glass windows and sculptures in places of worship and education – as well as, in the case of the church, regulate the morality of its clergy.[72] But the crown also wanted able-bodied men to avoid such activities and instead devote their leisure time on Sundays and festivals to practising archery since this would benefit the king during wartime. Yet despite a royal proclamation to that purpose issued on 1 June 1363 (reaffirmed 12 June 1365),[73] followed by a statute of 1388 (reaffirmed 1410) forbidding agricultural workers, labourers, and the servants of craftsmen and victuallers from playing at ‘Hand-ball’ or ‘Foot-ball’ as well as other unsuitable games, the sport’s popularity endured. It also remained potentially dangerous – even though the statute of 1388 prohibited the lower social orders from bearing bucklers, swords and daggers in peacetime under penalty of arrest and forfeiture of their weapons (subsequently clarified as six days imprisonment by statute of 1410).[74] Following these royal initiatives, during the early fifteenth century there were prohibitions issued in London against collecting money to pay for footballs and cock-thrashing – particularly on Hock Days (the second Monday and Tuesday after Easter Sunday). Funds would be raised by ‘capturing’ brides and grooms on the occasion of their marriages and requesting payment for their release.[75] This suggests that football and cock-thrashing were customarily part of wedding celebrations at this time of year.[76] More than sixty years later, during the second reign of Edward IV, archery was again encouraged at the expense of unlawful games by statute of 1478 under penalty of swingeing fines and lengthy imprisonment for those engaged in certain of these illicit activities. The punishment for playing football, however, was unspecified in the statute.[77] Early Tudor legislation too promoted archery and restricted the playing of unlawful games to the twelve days of Christmas (1496, 1504, 1512, 1515, 1542), but without mentioning football.[78]

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[65] Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae*, vol. 1, pp. 574, 612, 673, 676, 706, 707; vol. 2, p. 280; John Dalton, *The Collegiate Church of Ottery St Mary* (Cambridge, 1917), pp. 187–88.

[66] Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae*, vol. 3, pp. 60–61, 68, 214, 567, 605, 667, 669, 687. Partial English translations in Richard Hart (ed.), *Ecclesiastical Records of England, Ireland, and Scotland, from the fifth century till the Reformation* (Cambridge, 1846), pp. 115, 170, 286.

[67] E.A. Bond (ed.), *Statutes of the Colleges of Oxford* (3 vols., Oxford & London, 1853), vol. 1, New College, pp. 48–49, 99–100, All Souls, pp. 44–45; vol. 2, Magdalen, pp. 42–43, Corpus Christi, pp. 68–69, Brasenose, p. 27; see also, H. Rashdall, ‘New College’, in Andrew Clark (ed.), *The Colleges of Oxford* (London, 1891), p. 158; Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities in the Middle Ages* (2 vols., Oxford, 1895), vol. 2, pp. 669–71; Poole, ‘Recreations’, in Poole (ed.), *Medieval England*, vol. 2, p. 626.

[68] Siegfried Wenzel, *Latin Sermon Collections from Later Medieval England. Orthodox Preaching in the Age of Wyclif* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 145.

[69] Bond (ed.), *Statutes*, vol. 3, St John’s, pp. 65–66; P. Manning, ‘Sport and pastime in Stuart Oxford’, in H.E. Salter (ed.), *Surveys and Tokens*, Oxford Historical Society, 75 (1920), p. 105.

[70] John Lamb (ed.), *A Collection of Letters, Statutes, and other documents* (London, 1838), p. 246, translated in James Heywood (ed.), *Collection of Statutes for the University and the Colleges of Cambridge* (London, 1840), p. 243.

[71] Annie Dunlop (ed.), *Acta Facultatis Artium Universitatis Sanctiandree 1413–1588*, Publications of the Scottish History Society, 3rd series, 55 (Edinburgh, 1964), vol. 2, pp. 265–66.

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[72] Cf. Stuart Moore (ed.), *Letters and Papers of John Shillingford, Mayor of Exeter 1447–50*, Camden Society, new series, 2 (1871), p. 101; William Hudson and John Tingey (eds.), *The Records of the City of Norwich* (2 vols., Norwich, 1906–10), vol. 2, pp. 316–17; Mary Harris (ed.), *The Coventry Leet Book: or Mayor’s Register*, Early English Text Society original series, 134 (1907), p. 271; W.H. Stevenson (ed.), *Records of the Borough of Nottingham. Volume II. 1399–1485* (London, 1883), p. 265.

[73] Rymer (ed.), *Foedera*, vol. 3, part ii, p. 704; *Calendar of Close Rolls, Edward III. Volume IX. 1360–1364* (London, 1909), pp. 534–35; Sharpe (ed.), *Letter-Book G*, p. 194; *Notes & Queries*, 2nd series, 9 (1860), p. 121; Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, pp. 37–38.

[74] A. Luders, T.E. Tomlins, J. France, W.E. Taunton and J. Raithby (eds.), *The Statutes of the Realm* (London, 1810–28), vol. 2, pp. 57, 163; *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, vol. 3, p. 643; Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, pp. 38, 40.

[75] Henry Riley (ed.), *Memorials of London and London Life, in the 13th, 14th and 15th Centuries, 1276–1419* (London, 1868), p. 571; Sharpe (ed.), *Letter-Book I*, p. 72; A.H. Thomas (ed.), *Calendar of Select Pleas and Memoranda of the City of London. A.D. 1381–1412* (Cambridge, 1932), pp. 291–92; Aucoin, ‘“Pancake Bell Rings”’, pp 110–11.

[76] Cf. W.E. St. Lawrence Finny, ‘Mediaeval games and gaderyngs at Kingston-upon-Thames’, *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, 44 (1936), pp. 108–10.

Meanwhile the Scottish Parliament enacted legislation forbidding the playing of football (1424, 1458, 1471, 1491), similarly to little effect.[79] Over in Ireland, the statute of Kilkenny (1367) forbade English colonists from ‘horlings, with great sticks [and a ball] upon the ground’, because of the ‘great evils’ and injuries that had arisen. It is unclear though whether an antecedent of hurling or a precursor of hockey was meant.[80] A hundred and sixty years later a Galway statute (1527) was more specific: townsmen should practice shooting longbows, crossbows and throwing darts rather than wasting their time ‘horling of the litill balle w^th hockie sticks or staves’ beyond the town walls. Only playing with ‘the great foote balle’ was permitted, on pain of an 8*d*. fine.[81] While the statutes of Kilkenny and Galway affected the laity, William Rokeby (*d*.1521), archbishop of Dublin, issued an injunction concerning the clergy at a provincial council held at Dublin in 1518: clerics were forbidden to play football and liable for a fine for each transgression (40*d*. to the ordinary and 40*d*. for repair of the church).[82]

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[77] *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, vol. 6, pp. 156, 188; *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 2, pp. 462–63; Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, p. 42; cf. Marjorie McIntosh, *Controlling misbehaviour in England, 1370–1600* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 99.

[78] *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 2, pp. 569, 657, vol. 3, pp. 25–26, 123–24; Joseph Keble (ed.), *The Statutes at large* (1684), pp. 318, 542; see also, *The statutes vvhiche the ivstices of peace, Mayres, Shyryffes, Baylyffes, Constables, & other officers were of late commaunded by the Kynges Maiestye to put in execution* (1534), sigs. Aii^{r}–Aiiii^{r-5}.

[79] *Acts of the Parliament of Scotland (1424–1567)*, vol. 2, pp. 5, 48, 100, 226, with modern translation at <https://www.rps.ac.uk/>; *Notes & Queries*, 7th series, 2 (1886), p. 315; Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, p. 45; Magoun, ‘Scottish Popular Football’, pp. 1–2; Marples, *History of Football*, pp. 38–39.

[80] James Hardiman (ed.), *A Statute of the Fortieth Year of King Edward III., enacted in a Parliament held in Kilkenny, A.D. 1367* (Dublin, 1843), pp. 22–23; J.A. Watt, ‘The Anglo-Irish colony under strain, 1327–99’, in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *A New History of Ireland: Volume II, Medieval Ireland 1169–1534* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 388–89; Paul Rouse, *Sport & Ireland. A History* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 16–18.

[81] James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway, Liber A, Galway Corporation, 1485–1711, fol. 33 <http://nuigarchives.blogspot.com/2012/10/a-ban-on-ye-small-ball.html>; printed in *Historical Manuscripts Commission. Tenth Report. Appendix, part V* (London, 1885), p. 402.

III.

Since the first British references to football are in French and Latin, it is not until the early fifteenth century that we have the earliest recorded English usages: ‘fote-bal’ (*c*.1400),[83] ‘foot bal’,[84] ‘fott ball’,[85] ‘foteball’ (1409, 1422?, 1477),[86] ‘ffootballepleyers’ (1421–23),[87] ‘foot-balle’ (before 1425),[88] ‘foteballe’ (*c*.1440),[89] ‘foot-ball’ (*c*.1461–85),[90] ‘Fute balle’ (1483),[91] ‘ffoteballs’ (1483),[92] and ‘fote ball’ (1486).[93] Interestingly, a variant played in Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk was known as ‘campyng’ (*c*.1320, 1421, *c*.1460), ‘Kampyn’ or ‘campar’ (*c*.1440).[94] This is significant because since the seventeenth century philologists have derived its meaning from the Anglo-Saxon for ‘striving’ or ‘contending’, or the Old English

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[82] Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae*, vol. 3, p. 660; *HMC. Tenth Report, part V*, p. 223 n. 3; Alan Fletcher (ed.), *Drama and the Performing Arts in pre-Cromwellian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 433, 585 n. 815; Gerald Bray (ed.), *Records of Convocation XVI. Ireland, 1101–1690* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 328.

[83] Wülfing, *Laud Troy Book*, p. 373.

[84] Fredrick Furnivall and Israel Gollancz (eds.), *Hoccleve’s Works*, Early English Text Society extra series, 61 (2 vols., London, 1924–25), vol. 1, p. xxix, vol. 2, p. 38.

[85] Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 103, fol. 126v, printed in Edward Peacock (ed.), *Instructions for parish priests by John Myrc*, Early English Text Society original series, 31 (1868), p. 11 n. 2.

[86] Sharpe (ed.), *Letter-Book I*, p. 72; Willmore, *Walsall*, p. 166; *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, vol. 6, p. 188.

[87] London Metropolitan Archives, CLC/L/BF/A/021/MS05440, William Porlond’s Minute Book (Brewers’ Company, 1418–1440), fols. 84, 105, 153v, 158, printed in Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, p. 40 and in Raymond Chambers and Marjorie Daunt (eds.), *A book of London English 1384–1425* (Oxford, 1931), p. 148.

[88] Thomas Arnold (ed.), *Select English Works of John Wyclif* (3 vols., Oxford, 1869–71), vol. 2, p. 280; *OED*, s.v. ‘football’, 4.

[89] Francis McSparren (ed.), *Octovian*, Early English Text Society original series, 289 (1986), line 1244.

[90] John Manly (ed.), *Specimens of pre-Shaksperean Drama* (2 vols., Boston, 1897–98), vol. 1, p. 343.

[91] Sidney Herrtage (ed.), *Catholicon Anglicum, an English-Latin Wordbook* (London, 1881), p. 146.

[92] TNA, KB 9/365/22.

[93] [Juliana Berners?], *The Boke of St. Albans* (1486), sig. e iiii^{r-2}.

[94] Dymond, ‘Lost Social Institution’, p. 189 n. 22; Fredrick Furnivall (ed.), *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man, Englisht by John Lydgate*, Early English Text Society extra series, 83 (1901), part ii, p. 306; James Halliwell (ed.), *A selection from the minor poems of Dan John Lydgate*, Percy Society (2 vols., London, 1840), vol. 2, p. 200; Albertus Way (ed.), *Promptorium Parvulorum sive Clericorum, Lexicon Anglo-Latinum Princeps*, Camden Society 25, 54, 89 (1843–65), pp. 60, 269.

‘campian’ meaning ‘fight’.[95] So it is against this backdrop that we should situate our next pre-Reformation examples.

At a court leet held on 14 June 1320 in the coastal village of Hollesley, Suffolk four pairs of men were charged with ‘bloody assaults’ during what a later hand clarified as ‘campyng’. John Ridgard, who discovered the entry in the court rolls, has suggested that the men had been involved in one or more camping matches that may have been played during Whitsuntide. Furthermore, two of the players were brothers, members of an influential villein family. Yet apparently they represented opposing sides.[96] Further north outside the town of [King’s] Lynn, Norfolk a boy accidently died in the mid-fourteenth century as a result of playing a ball game, while a man was murdered following a quarrel arising from football.[97] Sometime later in 1421 one Thomas Stowne of Copford, Essex was tried for assaulting Richard Stogg with ‘quodam campyngrock’.[98] Moving from East Anglia to London, a coroner’s inquest in June 1337 heard how on Tuesday in Pentecost week the son of a chandler ‘got out of a window … to recover a ball lost in a gutter at play’. But the boy slipped and fell, injuring himself so badly that he died the next Saturday.[99] Again in London, in 1373 eight men were brought to the Mayor’s court to answer a charge that they, together with others:

> with force and arms, to wit, swords and knives, made an assembly, under colour of playing with a football, in order to assault others, occasion disputes, and perpetuate other evil deeds against the peace in Sopers Lane, Cheap and Cordwainer Street.

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[95] Samuel Daniel, *The collection of the history of England* (London, 1634), p. 44; John Ray, *A Collection of English Words not generally used* (2nd edn., London, 1691), preface; Francis Blomefield, *An Essay towards a topographical History of the county of Norfolk* (London, 1805), vol. 1, p. 177; Edward Moor, *Suffolk Words and Phrases* (London, 1823), pp. 63–66; J.M. Jephson, ‘The East Saxon Dialect’, *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, 2 (1863), p. 183; Joseph Wright (ed.), *The English Dialect Dictionary. Volume 1. A–C* (London, 1898), p. 500; James Halliwell, *A Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words* (London, 1904), p. 229; Hans Kurath, Sherman Kuhn, *et al*. (eds.), *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1959), p. 28.

[96] J. Ridgard, ‘Suffolk’s earliest football match at Hollesley in 1320 (in Whitsuntide week?)’, *Suffolk Review*, 59 (2012), pp. 23–27.

[97] Dorothy Owen (ed.), *The Making of King’s Lynn: A Documentary Survey* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 19, 428.

[98] Essex Record Office, Chelmsford, D/DHt M 144, printed in Dymond, ‘Lost Social Institution’, p. 189 n. 22.

[99] Reginald Sharpe (ed.), *Calendar of Coroners Rolls of the City of London, 1300–1378* (London, 1913), p. 191; Rickert, *Chaucer’s World*, p. 99; Hassell, *How they lived*, p. 108.

Two of the men were pelters and six were tailors, so they may have had common commercial interests dealing or working with animal skins. While one pelter and one tailor pleaded not guilty, the remainder claimed that although they had played football they had ‘done no harm’. Nonetheless, one was mainprized and the rest committed to prison.[100] Whether these men were guilty of using a football match as cover for instigating a riot in the streets of London or whether this contest got out of hand resulting in the assault of non-participants is difficult to establish. But the charge clearly links football with violence. Moreover, Taylor Aucoin has shown that the match took place on Shrove Tuesday.[101] This is important because it is the earliest known example of football played on that day, and one of only a handful before the Reformation.

Heading north, between 1377 and 1383 a number of villagers who were tenants of the prior and convent of Durham were warned against playing a ball game under penalty of a fine. Thus the constables of Aycliffe, Ferryhill, Heworth and East Merrington were threatened with a 20*s*. or 40*s*. fine if they permitted any ball play. Even so, at Southwick in 1381 there was an affray when the prior’s tenants were menaced by those of a local lord so that they were ‘in grievous peril of their bodies’. The cause was a ball game which precipitated ‘grievous contention and contumely’.[102] Again, at Aycliffe in 1383 seven men including William Colson and John de Redworth – presumably constables – were presented and threatened with a 20*s*. fine for failing to report ball playing in their village. Under pressure from Redworth’s wife Alicia, who would not keep quiet, they in turn presented eighteen men for ball playing (including a member of Colson’s family). It has been suggested that these Durham villagers had been playing football.[103] This is very likely, because in 1446 an elderly villager originating from the barony of Brancepeth in Durham recalled that one day he saw around sixty people ‘playing football at Helmington Row in the barony’. They all shared the same surname (Oll) and were accounted ‘among the best’ valets [attendants] and freemen of the barony; certainly not of servile status.[104] Furthermore, in spring 1386 some villagers of Billingham were amerced for playing football,[105] while in spring 1467 sixty-two tenants of Billingham, Wolviston and Aycliffe were amerced for the same offence.[106] Again in spring 1478, in accordance with legislation enacted earlier that year, all Aycliffe tenants, of which eight were named (doubtless constables), were warned against playing prohibited games – notably dice, cards and football – under penalty of a 20*s*. fine. Later still, in spring 1492 an injunction permitted football to be played at Billingham twice a year while stipulating that ‘he who makes an affray on those days forfeits to the lord forty shillings’.[107] According to Peter Larson, for its part Durham Priory ‘cracked down on the game only sporadically’. This indicates that ‘the bursars usually tolerated football despite its illegal status’. Even so, the Priory issued an injunction against football in spring 1506 suggesting that this had been prompted by increased violence.[108]

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[100] LMA, CLA/024/01/19, mem. 3r, reproduced in Aucoin, ‘“Pancake Bell Rings”’, p. 112, and summarised in A.H. Thomas (ed.), *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls … of the City of London … 1364–1381* (Cambridge, 1929), p. 152.

[101] Aucoin, ‘“Pancake Bell Rings”’, pp. 109–10, 112.

[102] W.H. Longstaffe and J. Booth (eds.), *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, Publications of the Surtees Society, 82 (Durham, 1889), pp. xxx–xxxi, 138, 161, 166, 168, 171, 175; G.G. Coulton, *The Medieval Village* (Cambridge, 1926), pp. 93–95.

[103] Longstaffe and Booth (eds.), *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, p. 180; M. Bailey, ‘Rural Society’, in Rosemary Horrox (ed.), *Fifteenth-century attitudes. Perceptions of society in late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 164; Mark Bailey, *The English Manor c.1200–c.1500* (Manchester, 2002), p. 1.

Moving from Durham to Yorkshire, in 1409 members of the lower clerical orders and others were reproved for playing ball games within the close of York Minster.[109] In 1422 a woman from Wistow deposed that a couple had contracted their marriage, in the words of Jeremy Goldberg, ‘on Ash Wednesday at the time when the men of Wistow play football’.[110] Such testimony, however, is problematic and should not be taken at face value. This can be seen from a similar case the next year at Church Fenton when one Thomas Newby claimed that he could not have married Beatrice Pulayn on Sunday, 4 July 1423 because that particular afternoon he was playing football in nearby Barkston until sunset and then went drinking. Yet the likelihood of mendacious witness testimony and Newby’s own evasions suggest that his alibi may not have been watertight.[111] Seemingly more straightforward is an inquest into a murder committed some forty or so years later. During a football match at Pontefract on Shrove Tuesday 1477 one Leonard Metcalf accidently hit Robert Pilkington with his ball. Pilkington drew his dagger worth 20*d.*, prompting Metcalf to apologise. Metcalf then attempted to resume his game, at which point Pilkington knifed him in the heart. Pilkington had also set fire to a chapel and stolen cattle, for all which crimes he was sentenced to hang. Nonetheless, he was reprieved after claiming benefit of clergy.[112] Less violent were several incidents connected to a dispute about access to land in the vicinity of Shap, Cumberland. A tenant of Sir Thomas Curwen, one of the contending parties, had been ‘sore hurt att ye foteball’ by a servant of Thomas Salkeld, the opposing party. Consequently Curwen was awarded 2*s*. compensation in a judgment of February 1474 which noted that another tenant had likewise been beaten and ‘sore hurte’.[113] There is also the presentment of two Northallerton men, one of whom afterwards became a borough court juror, who in 1495 were fined 3*s*. 4*d*. for causing an affray during a football game played on the Applegarth just outside the town. At the same time the steward imposed an ordinance, mandated by the bishop, forbidding the playing of football on penalty of a 6*s*. 8*d*. fine.[114] Similarly, in 1500 football was prohibited at Hartley, Northumberland under penalty of a 6*s*. 8*d*. fine.[115] Several years later in 1519 parishioners at Salton, Yorkshire were threatened with excommunication for playing various ball games with their feet and hands in the churchyard – namely tutts, handball and penny-stone.[116]

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[104] Durham Cathedral Archive, GB-0033-DCD-Regr-4, fols. 34r–36v <http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s15999n339g.xml&toc.id>; Willielmus de Chambre, *Historiae Dunelmensis scriptores tres*, Publications of the Surtees Society, 9 (London, 1839), p. cclxxx; see also, R.B. Dobson, *Church and Society in the Medieval North of England* (London, 1996), pp. 59–60.

[105] Peter Larson, *Conflict and Compromise in the late Medieval Countryside. Lords and Peasants in Durham, 1349–1400* (New York & London, 2006), p. 208.

[106] Richard Lomas, ‘Durham Cathedral priory as a landowner and a landlord, 1290–1540’, unpublished University of Durham PhD, 1973, pp. 58–59.

[107] P.L. Larson, ‘Local Law Courts in late Medieval Durham’, in Christian Liddy and Richard Britnell (eds.), *North-East England in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 104–05; Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, p. 209.

[108] Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, pp. 189–90.

[109] Raine (ed.), *Fabric Rolls of York Minster*, p. 244; cf. Gerald Aylmer and Reginald Cant (eds.), *A History of York Minster* (Oxford, 1977), p. 88.

[110] Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York, CP.F.133, cited in P.J.P. Goldberg, ‘Masters and men in later medieval England’, in Dawn Hadley (ed.), *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (London, 1998), p. 65.

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[111] BIHR, CP.F.137, cited in Goldberg, ‘Masters and men’, p. 65, and Christopher Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 153–54.

[112] R.C.E. Hayes, ‘Ancient Indictments for the North of England 1461–1504’, in A.J. Pollard (ed.), *The North of England in the Age of Richard III* (New York, 1996), p. 42.

[113] Cumbria Archive Service, Carlisle, D/Lons/L SH25, printed in ‘Award by Richard Redmayne, Bishop of St. Asaph and Abbot of Shap’, *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society*, new series, 9 (1909), p. 280.

[114] Newman, *Late Medieval Northallerton*, p. 128.

[115] H.H.E. Craster, *A History of Northumberland. Volume IX. The Parochial Chapelries of Earsdon and Horton* (Newcastle & London, 1909), p. 119.

Down south, between 1422 and 1423 the Brewers’ Company in London let their hall to seventeen different fraternities including on three occasions to a group of football players for 1*s*. 4*d*.[117] This contrasts with the censorious attitude of certain London citizens who in July 1446 complained about the erection of several places where people played at ball [tennis?], ‘cleche’ [closh?] and dice, adding for good measure that these structures served as brothels.[118] Even so, tennis continued to be played in London as attested by the fame of a skinner named Richard Steris, accounted one of the ‘cunnyngest players’ in England, but whose remarkable agility did not save him from being beheaded for treason at Tower Hill in 1468.[119] Over in Suffolk, Robert Cook, rector of Martlesham was the subject of several complaints: gambling, assaulting a woman and playing tennis in his shirt and breeches in the market square at Woodbridge on the Sunday after Midsummer Day, 1431.[120] To the north in the same county, John Hardgrave of Beccles recorded in the early 1430s that:

> The men who played at football on the ice and sank through have caused great misery by their deaths to their friends, who propose to hold their funeral rites next week.

However, since Hardgrave was then likely a teenage student of Latin grammar it is unclear whether this referred to an actual event or was merely a school exercise.[121]

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[116] Raine (ed.), *Fabric Rolls of York Minster*, pp. 270, 349; Raine, *Priory of Hexham*, vol. 2, p. 157; *OED*, s.v. ‘tut’, ‘penny-stone’.

[117] George Unwin, *The Gilds and Companies of London* (London, 2nd edn., 1925), p. 181; Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, pp. 40–41; Mia Ball, *The Worshipful Company of Brewers: A Short History* (London, 1977), p. 48.

[118] Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas (ed.), *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England* (7 vols., London, 1834–37), vol. 6, pp. xix, 50.

[119] A.H. Thomas and I.D. Thornley (eds.), *The Great Chronicle of London* (London, 1938), p. 207; John Giles (ed.), *The Chronicles of the White Rose of York* (London, 1843), pp. 20–21.

[120] H.R. Lingwood, ‘The rectors of Martlesham’, *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, 25, part 2 (1950), p. 194; Bailey, ‘Rural Society’, p. 164.

[121] Cambridge University Library, Add. MS 2830, fol. 98v, printed with English translation in N. Orme, ‘Beccles school in the 1430s’, *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, 42, part 3 (2011), p. 337.

Elsewhere, there were prohibitions against playing handball or quoits and then ball games generally at Tamworth, Staffordshire (1424, 1436, 1446);[122] against club ball, football and handball at Castle Combe, Wiltshire (1447, 1452);[123] against handball and dice at Wimbledon (1464);[124] and against tennis, quoits and dice at Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire (1469).[125] Moreover, there were fines issued at Carshalton, Surrey for playing at handball (1446, 1447),[126] and likewise at Pagham, Sussex (1482),[127] while in August 1450 a currier, barber and glover swore on the Gospels to abjure the game of tennis within Oxford and its precincts.[128] Furthermore, four parishioners of Tillingham, Essex were presented for playing dice and a ball game during divine service (1458).[129] Moving forwards, tennis, bowls, closh, dice and cards were prohibited at Worcester under penalty of imprisonment (1496); a dozen men were fined for playing tennis at Ampthill, Bedfordshire (1502); and servants were banned from playing tennis or unlawful games on work days at Rye, Sussex (1504).[130] At Wells Cathedral two perpetual vicars were admonished in July 1507 for playing handball instead of coming to matins on the vigil of the translation of St Thomas the Martyr.[131] At the manor of Kirton in Lindsey, Lincolnshire a jury presented one William de Welton in April 1510 for misbehaving himself in playing football and other unlawful games.[132] Master

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[122] M.K. Dale (ed.), ‘Tamworth Borough Court Rolls’ (typescript, 1952), pp. 153, 156, 161.

[123] G. Poulett Scrope, *History of the manor and ancient barony of Castle Combe, in the county of Wilts* (privately printed, 1852), pp. 244, 245.

[124] Philip Lawrence (ed.), *Extracts from the Court Rolls of the Manor of Wimbledon* (London, 1869), part 3, p. 24.

[125] Joyce Godber, *History of Bedfordshire 1066–1888* (Luton, 1969), p. 169.

[126] D.L. Powell, Hilary Jenkinson and M.S. Giuseppe (eds.), *Court Rolls of the Manor of Carshalton. From the Reign of Edward the third to that of Henry the seventh,* Surrey Record Society, 2 (London, 1916), pp. 59, 62, 65.

[127] Lindsay Fleming, *History of Pagham in Sussex* (3 vols., privately printed, 1949–50), vol. 2, p. 344.

[128] H.E. Salter (ed.), *Registrum Cancellarii Oxon*, Oxford Historical Society, 93 (1932), vol. 1, pp. 213–14. English translation in Leonard Astley, *Elizabethan popular culture* (Bowling Green, OH, 1988), p. 277.

[129] W. Sparrow Simpson (ed.), *Visitations of Churches belonging to St. Pauls’ Cathedral in 1297 and in 1458*, Camden Society, (1895), pp. 77, 78.

[130] Valentine Green, *The History and Antiquities of … Worcester* (2 vols., London, 1796), vol. 2, pp. liii–liv; Godber, *History of Bedfordshire*, p. 169; Graham Mayhew, *Tudor Rye* (Falmer, 1987), p. 50; P.R. Cavill, ‘The problem of labour and the Parliament of 1495’, in Linda Clark (ed.), *The Fifteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 153–54.

[131] *HMC. Calendar of the manuscripts of the Dean and Chapter of Wells* (London, 1914), vol. 2, p. 205.

[132] *Notes & Queries,* 1st series, 12 (1855), pp. 326, 392; E. Howlett, ‘Games in Churchyards’, in William Andrews (ed.), *Antiquities and curiosities of the Church* (London, 1897), p. 220.

Richard, the curate of St Mary’s in Hawridge, Buckinghamshire was suspended in 1519 for, among other things, playing dice and being a ‘common player at football in his alb’.[133] And the inhabitants of Hayes, Middlesex were charged by their parson in 1534 with playing unlawful games: bowls, football, dice and cards as well as with committing riots – though no blows were given or weapons drawn.[134] By contrast, the churchwardens of Heybridge, Essex received 18*s*. 3*d*. for the ‘campyng sporte’ in 1518–19, while their counterparts at Cratfield, Suffolk spent 4*d*. ‘for a ball to camp wyth’ in 1534.[135]

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Thus far questions as to the extent to which we can rely upon witness testimony, not just recollections of sporting injuries and fatalities but even memories of when and where games were played, has largely been avoided. With the deceased unable to have their say in court, defendants who appeared personally would have had to contend with versions of what happened presented by other eyewitnesses (some of whom may have been the deceased’s friends and family) when framing what would doubtless have been self-serving narratives. Yet despite this caveat too many scholars appear to have readily accepted as genuine all or most aspects of events recounted at coroners’ inquests and the like. The same can be said of equally – if not more – problematic evidence: proofs of age. Essentially for our purposes they were legal proceedings to determine someone’s age and hence their inheritance rights. This is particularly important with regard to football since on the face of it there are a dozen known cases involving witnesses claiming to remember a game played several years previously on the day of the prospective heir’s birth or baptism. Two such proofs of age from Sussex early in the reign of Henry VI are well known, having been published in the 1860s.[136]

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[133] Alexander Thompson (ed.), *Visitations in the Diocese of Lincoln 1517–1531* (Hereford, 1940), vol. 1, pp. xxxv, 44; John Thomson, *The Early Tudor Church & Society 1485–1529* (London, 1993), pp. 167–68. An alb was a white vestment worn by clergymen which reached their feet.

[134] *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, 1534*, vol. 7, p. 208.

[135] J. Nichols, *Illustrations of the manners and expences of antient times in England* (London, 1797), p. 161; William Holland (ed.), *Cratfield: A Transcript of the Accounts of the Parish, from A.D. 1490 to A.D. 1642*, ed. John Raven (London, 1895), p. 51.

[136] W.D. Cooper, ‘Proofs of Age of Sussex Families’, *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 12 (1860), p. 43; 15 (1863), p. 213.

Indeed, their similarity has been noted though their content was assumed to be true.[137] Since then many more examples have come to light, all but one helpfully collected and made accessible through the *Mapping the Medieval Countryside* project.

Taken together, proofs of age seemingly provide evidence for football being played at Wolviston, Durham (Shrove Tuesday, 1380);[138] Stamford, Lincolnshire (feast of the Annunciation, 25 March 1397);[139] Chelmsford, Essex (Tuesday, 22 June 1400);[140] Little Laver, Essex (Tuesday, 18 October 1401);[141] Thorpe-le-Soken, Essex (Tuesday in Pentecost week, 16 May 1402);[142] Layer Marney, Essex (Monday, 14 August 1402);[143] Wilcote, Oxfordshire (Wednesday, 1 August 1403);[144] Selmeston, Sussex (Friday, 24 August 1403);[145] Chidham, Sussex (Tuesday, 23 September 1404);[146] Odell, Bedfordshire (Sunday, 28 September 1410);[147] Dry Drayton, Cambridgeshire (Sunday, 21 February 1417);[148] and Sproughton, Suffolk (feast of St Nicholas, 6 December 1421).[149] Moreover, in seven instances – at Chelmsford, Little Laver, Thorpe-le-Soken, Layer Marney, Selmeston, Wilcote and Chidham – a man supposedly broke his left shin; at Sproughton his right shin; at Wolviston and Odell an unspecified shin; and at Dry Drayton his left arm.

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[137] W. Carew Hazlitt, *Faiths and Folklore* (2 vols., London, 1905), vol. 1, p. 243; Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, p. 39; Marples, *History of Football*, pp. 27, 36; Fairman, ‘Bewties of fut-ball’, p. 52.

[138] Durham Cathedral Archive, GB-0033-DCD-Regr-1, Register I, fols. ii. 94v–95r <https://iiif.durham.ac.uk/index.html?manifest=t1mjd472w442&canvas=t1tg445cd46f>, <http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1pz50gw11v.xml&toc.id>.

[139] TNA, C 138/37/29 mems. 9-10 <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/21-216/>.

[140] TNA, C 139/7/54 mems. 15-16 <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/22-189/>.

[141] TNA, C 139/13/51 mems. 1-2 <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/22-360/>.

[142] TNA, C 139/13/52 mems. 1-2 <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/22-361/>.

[143] TNA, C 139/13/55 mems. 1-2 <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/22-364/>.

[144] TNA, C 139/20/48 mems. 1-2 <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/22-528/>.

[145] TNA, C 139/20/51 mems. 1-2 <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/22-531/>.

[146] TNA, C 139/26/42 mems. 9-10 <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/22-665/>.

[147] TNA, C 139/67/57 mems. 1-2 <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/24-272/>; printed in J.L. Kirby and Janet Stevenson (eds.), *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem … Volume XXI, 6 to 10 Henry V (1418–1422)* (London, 2002), p. 62.

[148] TNA, C 139/97/16 mems. 1-2 <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/25-351/>.

[149] TNA, C 139/104/50 mems. 1-2 <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/25-528/>.

Even so, research by Matthew Holford has shown how during the first half of the fifteenth century ‘fictional testimonies became ever more common’ and that from 1418 to 1447 an increasing number of proofs of age were copied or adapted from earlier proofs (ranging from 20% to 46%).[150] In this light, the four Essex cases can immediately be identified as fictitious since they share too many similarities. This was recognised more than a century ago by R.C. Fowler who observed that recollections of supposed events at Chelmsford, Little Laver, Thorpe-le-Soken and Layer Marney contained twelve common elements. Among them were apparent memories of someone dying and being buried; being injured at football; holding a burning torch at a baptism; falling off a cart laden with hay and breaking their left arm; seeing their house burnt; and someone else hanging themselves.[151] The Oxfordshire and Sussex cases are likewise fictitious since these witness testimonies very closely resemble those from Essex, although the two Sussex proofs of age supply an interesting variant: a man’s servant captured by the French and carried away to Harfleur. At the same time, these cases should not be collectively discarded since their evident plausibility is also revealing: it must have been considered unremarkable to pretend in court that football was played in these regions of England at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Moreover, it must have seemed credible that an adult male could have had their shin broken in a game played after the baptism of an infant.

The remaining five cases differ from the Essex, Sussex and Oxfordshire examples, as well as from each other. Comparing them with proofs of age that do not refer to football, they contain varying degrees of non-replicated testimony. Of these, the recollected events at Dry Drayton and to a lesser extent at Sproughton are the most dubious since they include common motifs: celebration of first mass; strong wind damaging the church belfry or someone’s house; fatalities; and suicide. Nevertheless, each incorporates sufficiently original testimony for it to remain plausible that at Dry Drayton William Burbage, then aged 25, broke his left arm while playing football with his associates on the Sunday following the feast of St Valentine 1417; and that at Sproughton John Halle, aged 26, was playing football and broke his right shin on Saturday, 6 December 1421. At Odell it is quite possible that on Sunday, 28

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[150] M. Holford, ‘“Testimony (to some extent fictitious)”: proofs of age in the first half of the fifteenth century’, *Historical Research*, 82 (2009), pp. 635–54 (at pp. 637, 638).

[151] R.C. Fowler, ‘Legal Proofs of Age’, *English Historical Review*, 22 (1907), pp. 101–03; see also, M.T. Martin, ‘Legal Proofs of Age’, *EHR*, 22 (1907), pp. 526–27; A.E. Stamp, Legal Proofs of Age’, *EHR*, 29 (1914), pp. 323–24.

September 1410 there was a lot of football played and that William Ballard broke John Cook’s shin. At Stamford there seems little reason to doubt that on Sunday, 25 March 1397 John Upton was playing football at the ‘Old Bull Pyt’. And at Wolviston it seems likely that Thomas Marshall was hit on the shin and gravely injured while playing football with others on Shrove Tuesday 1380.

While proofs of age provide us with one type of testimony that must be used cautiously in our chronological and geographical mapping of sporting injuries, recollections of miraculous healing gives us another. There are two examples. The first was presented as part of the evidence to support the canonisation of Osmund (*d.*1099), a former bishop of Salisbury. This was formally examined by three Cardinals in 1424. It concerns the testimony of John Combe aged 50 of Quidhampton, Wiltshire who remembered ‘playing at ball with great clubs’ ten years before in the nearby village of Bemerton. A quarrel ensued during which Combe was struck on the head and right shoulder with a club. So violent was the blow that he was apparently unable to hear or see nor move his head or arm for more than three months. Then Combe beheld a vision of a man clothed in white, shining brightly, who instructed him to make a wax model of Combe’s head and shoulder indicating on it where his wounds were. Combe was to make an offering to Bishop Osmund of this crude replica (an *ex-voto*). On awaking Combe swiftly recovered and thereafter offered his prayer and thanks at Osmund’s tomb in Salisbury Cathedral. This supposed miracle was corroborated by a witness.[152]

The second example derives from an attempt by Henry VII to legitimate his rule by having his murdered half-uncle Henry VI canonized. Vernacular accounts of purported miracles attributed to the dead Lancastrian king seem to have been collected at Windsor Castle, the site of Henry’s reinterred remains, between 1484 and 1500. Amounting to at least 445 cases, 172 of these were translated into Latin by a monk, likely based at Canterbury, who added his own touches. Completed in 1500, this compilation was intended for papal commissioners.[153] Among the extant alleged miracles was an uninvestigated and undated case concerning

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[152] A.R. Malden (ed.), *The Canonization of Saint Osmund from the manuscript records in the muniment room of Salisbury Cathedral* (Salisbury, 1901), pp. xiv–xv, 71–73.

[153] Ronald Knox and Shane Leslie (eds.), *The Miracles of Henry VI. Being an account and Translation of Twenty-three Miracles* (Cambridge, 1923), pp. 16–23; J.M. Theilmann, ‘The Miracles of King Henry VI of England’, *The Historian*, 42 (1980), pp. 456–71; Bertram Wolffe, *Henry VI* (New Haven & London, 2001), pp. 351–58.

William Bartram. He had been playing football with an unruly crowd of people on a field in the vicinity of Caunton, Nottinghamshire. During this game Bartram was kicked in his ‘intimate parts’. As a result he ‘suffered long and unbearable pain’ until he saw ‘the glorious King Henry in a dream’, at which point the devout Bartram ‘immediately recovered the benefit of health’. The anonymous monk’s disapproving comments about ‘the game at which they had met for common recreation’, ‘called by some the foot-ball game’, remains our fullest pre-Reformation description:

> It is one in which young men, rural and unrestrained, habitually propel a huge ball not by throwing it into the air but by striking and rolling it along the ground, and that not with their hands but with their feet. A game, I say, abominable enough, and (in my sound judgment), more common undignified, and worthless than any kind of game, rarely ending but with some loss, accident, or disadvantage to the players themselves. But what? The boundaries had been marked and the game had started; and, when they were striving manfully kicking in opposite directions, and [our subject] had thrown himself into the midst of the fray, one of his fellows, I do not know which one, came up against him from in front and kicked him by misadventure, missing his aim at the ball.[154]

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One noteworthy aspect of these sources is the absence among the laity of any adult males of elite social status. This is because they were exempt from the legislation regulating various games discussed earlier. Yet there is evidence that besides tournaments and hunting with hounds and hawks, some aristocrats and members of the royal family also played ball games. This can mainly be found in their household accounts, which tend to link these diversions with gambling. Thus in 1300 Edward I’s chaplain was provided with 100*s*. for the use of a teenage Prince Edward to facilitate his ludic pursuits, including what may have been a bat and ball game.[155] Again, in 1387 Henry Bolingbroke, afterwards Henry IV, lost 26*s*. 8*d*. playing handball with two of the Duke of York’s men.[156] In 1414 Bolingbroke’s youthful son was the recipient of a gift of tennis balls from the Dauphin of France, an insult calculated to impugn the young king’s martial ambition. This incident was recorded in several chronicles and subsequently popularised in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, where it served as part of an opening scene before the Battle of Agincourt.[157] Twenty-five years later in mid-July 1439, during an interlude in peace negotiations between England and France, Renaud de Chartres, Archbishop of Rheims, hurt his foot playing at ball near Calais. It is unclear whether this happened in a game with fellow ambassadors, but if so then this could be the earliest recorded instance of a match played between people of different nationalities.[158] Moving forward to Tudor monarchs, Henry VII lost money at tennis between 1494 and 1499,[159] while his son Henry VIII was a passionate player who built the Chief Close Tennis Court at Whitehall.[160] Indeed, the king played tennis well into middle age, losing a staggering £46-13*s*.-4*d*. in October 1532 to two French dignitaries.[161] Interestingly in 1525 Henry also had a pair of shoes made for playing football costing 4*s*.[162] Over in Scotland, James I played tennis.[163] James IV played caich (at which he staked large sums), golf and football, as shown in the expenditure of 2*s*. on 22 April 1497 to purchase ‘fut ballis’ for the King.[164]

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[154] BL, MS Royal 13 C VIII, fols. 62v–63r <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=56515>, printed in Paul Grosjean (ed.), *Henrici VI Angliae regis miracula postuma. Ex codice Musei Britannici regio 13. c. viii*, Subsidia hagiographica, 22 (Brussels, 1935), pp. 159–60; partly printed and translated in Knox and Leslie (eds.), *Miracles of Henry VI*, pp. 130–32. I have not entirely followed Knox’s translation here and am grateful to Diego Lucci for his helpful observations.

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[155] J. Topham (ed.), *Liber quotidianus contrarotulatoris garderobae. Anno Regni Regis Edwardi primi vicesimo octavo* (London, 1787), pp. xliii, 157; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 58, part I (1788), pp. 189–90; James Pycroft, *The Cricket Field* (2nd edn., London, 1854), p. 13; *Notes & Queries*, 2nd series, 6 (1858), p. 133.

[156] James Wylie, *History of England under Henry the Fourth* (4 vols., London, 1884–98), vol. 3, pp. 325–26, vol. 4, p. 158.

[157] *HMC. Report on the records of the city of Exeter* (London, 1916), p. 352; Nicolas (ed.), *Proceedings and Ordinances of Privy Council*, vol. 2, p. 340; Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas (ed.), *A chronicle of London, from 1089 to 1483* (London, 1827), pp. 216–17; F.W.D. Brie (ed.), *The Brut or the chronicles of England*, Early English Text Society, 131 (1906), p. 374; Edward Hall, *The union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke* (1548), fol. ix^{v}; William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act I, scene ii; Julian Marshall, *The Annals of Tennis* (London, 1878), pp. 56–57; Gillmeister, *Tennis*, pp. 110–17.

[158] Nicolas (ed.), *Proceedings and Ordinances of Privy Council*, vol. 5, preface p. liv; chronology, p. xix; p. 363.

[159] Samuel Bentley (ed.), *Excerpta Historica, or, illustrations of English History* (London, 1831), pp. 87, 98, 101, 102, 108, 113, 122; Marshall, *Annals of Tennis*, pp. 60–61; Gillmeister, *Tennis*, pp. 21–22.

[160] Marshall, *Annals of Tennis*, pp. 58, 63–67; George Dugdale, *Whitehall through the centuries* (London, 1950), p. 24.

[161] *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, 1531–32*, vol. 5, p. 749; Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas (ed.), *The Privy Purse Expences of King Henry the Eighth* (London, 1827), pp. xxiii–xxiv, 134, 268, 283; *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, 1534*, vol. 7, p. 564; Croft (ed.), *Gouernour*, vol. 1, pp. 292–93 note.

Although the football played by James IV and Henry VIII may have differed considerably from the variants of the game played outside their courtly circles, the almost complete absence of royal and aristocratic participation in the sport prior to the early sixteenth century requires explanation; particularly since there is evidence of Scottish and, to a lesser extent, English noblemen playing football thereafter. It cannot have been because indulging in sport demeaned authority. On the contrary, such activity may have served as an affirmation of physical prowess and as male bonding exercises – especially when played among peers. Nor can it have been because playing football might lead to injury: Henry VIII was involved in serious jousting accidents in March 1524 and January 1536, while hunting could also be exceedingly dangerous. Rather, it seems that football was frowned upon because it was generally regarded as a game for commoners. Hence in his discussion of the forms of physical exercise appropriate for young men being groomed for governance, the humanist and diplomat Sir Thomas Elyot (*c*.1490–1546) declared that football, along with skittles and quoits, was an utterly unsuitable recreation for noblemen.[165] In addition, it may be that the unregulated nature of football contrasted markedly with the elaborate rituals associated with tournaments and hunting, not to mention the formalised nature of tennis with its structured passages of play and widely understood scoring system.[166]

Away from the courts of Henry VII and Henry VIII, our next half-dozen examples concern the deaths of their subjects during ball games. Most of these references were uncovered by Steven Gunn, firstly in his work on archery and then his larger project on accidental death in sixteenth century England.[167] Thus on Sunday, 20 February 1508 Thomas Bryan was playing ‘ffoteball’ at Yeovilton, Somerset when he inadvertently fell on his knife, which was hanging from his belt. The blade pierced his body and Bryan died immediately.[168] The following year on Sunday, 4 February 1509 about sixty people gathered at Tregorden, Cornwall to play hurling according to the customary manner. Among them was John Coulyng who, holding a ball in his right hand, ran swiftly and strongly until he collided with Nicholas Jaane, labourer of Benboll. After a tussle Jaane threw Coulyng to the ground, breaking his left leg. Within three weeks Coulyng died from this injury at Bodieve, Cornwall.[169] On Tuesday, 9 January 1515 Thomas Blyth of Barley, Hertfordshire accidently killed Andrew Royston with a sheathed knife while playing football; Blyth was pardoned six months later.[170] Then on Sunday, 8 February 1523 William Merten, husbandman of Great Shelford, Cambridgeshire was playing football at Waterbeach on the common green when he was forcefully obstructed by William Hay, servant of a Cambridge brewer. Merten died as a consequence of his fall, prompting Hay to flee. Hay was apparently poor since the inquest recorded that he had no goods or chattels.[171] Twelve days later on Friday, 20 February 1523 John Langbern of Allerston, Yorkshire was playing football with Roger Bridkirk, labourer, and many others. They both ran after the ‘foteball’ before crashing into each other. Roger fell on top of John and crushed him to death on the spot.[172] Finally in August 1526 John Hasapote, joiner, and William Kynge, labourer, together with some boys and girls were playing handball (‘Cacche’) on the King’s Road in Wheatley, Oxfordshire. Hasapote fell on the ball and then Kynge fell on top of him, accidently wounding Hasapote in the right side of his body through to the heart with a knife that he had in his pouch.[173]

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[162] TNA, E 36/224, p. 53, calendared in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, 1524–30*, vol. 4, pp. 747–48, and discussed in Maria Hayward, *Dress at the Court of King Henry VIII* (Abingdon, 2007), p. 113.

[163] Gillmeister, *Tennis*, p. 21.

[164] Thomas Dickson, Sir James Balfour Paul, *et al*. (eds.), *Compota Thesaurariorum Regum Scotorum* (11 vols., Edinburgh, 1877–1916), vol. 1, pp. ccliv–cclv, 275, 277, 330, 360, 386, 389 (at p. 330); vol. 3, pp. 187, 206; vol. 4, pp. 111, 132; Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, p. 45.

[165] Elyot, *Gouernour*, p. 99v; reprinted in Croft (ed.), *Gouernour*, vol. 1, p. 295.

[166] John Frith, *An other boke against Rastel* (1537?), no pagination; Gillmeister, *Tennis*, p. 49.

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[167] S. Gunn, ‘Archery practice in early Tudor England’, *Past & Present*, 209 (2010), p. 65 n. 69; S. Gunn and T. Gromelski, ‘Sport and Recreation in Sixteenth-Century England: the Evidence of Accidental Deaths’, in Rebekka von Mallinckrodt and Angela Schattner (eds.), *Sports and Physical Exercise in Early Modern Culture* (London & New York, 2016), pp. 49–64.

[168] TNA, KB 9/448/44, <http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT7/KB9/KB9no448/IMG_0088.htm>.

[169] TNA, KB 9/451/11, <http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT7/KB9/KB9no451/IMG_0023.htm>.

[170] *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, 1515–18*, vol. 2, p. 178. There was a piece of ground called Playstow in Barely, Hertfordshire assigned as a playground for children under a deed of 1638; see John Field, *A History of English Field-Names* (London, 1993), p. 242.

[171] TNA, KB 9/494/47, <http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT6/KB9/KB9no494/IMG_0098.htm>.

[172] TNA, KB 9/490/54, <http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT6/KB9/KB9no490/IMG_0107.htm>.

[173] TNA, KB 9/973/18.

IV.

It would be fair to say that prior to the Reformation we know more about where, when and by whom various ball games were played, as well as what happened when players were seriously injured or even killed, than what these games consisted of. This includes the various forms of football under discussion. Nor should this surprise us since there were no written rules at this period, with local knowledge of these ball games doubtless passed down to succeeding generations through oral tradition. In short, the manner in which football was played depended upon custom, memory and perhaps also innovation.[174] To recap, it appears that unspecified ball games were played in Hampshire (Winchester); Surrey (Kingston-upon-Thames); London; Essex (Tillingham); Norfolk (King’s Lynn, Shouldham); Oxfordshire (Bicester Priory, Oxford); Wiltshire (Salisbury Cathedral); Gloucestershire (St Peter’s, Gloucester); Staffordshire (Tamworth); Yorkshire (Byram, wapentake of Strafford, York Minster); Northumberland (Ulgham); and Ireland (Dublin, on the frozen River Liffey in 1338).[175] This assumes a correlation between prohibiting ball games and the likelihood of someone having played them. With that caveat and at the same time acknowledging the problematic nature of testimony – particularly proofs of age – it seems that football was played in London; Middlesex (Hayes); Suffolk (Beccles, Sproughton); Norfolk (King’s Lynn); Bedfordshire (Odell); Buckinghamshire (Hawridge); Cambridgeshire (Dry Drayton, Waterbeach); Hertfordshire (Barley); Lincolnshire (Lincoln Cathedral, Lindsey, Stamford); Wiltshire (Castle Combe); Somerset (Yeovilton); Leicestershire (Leicester); Nottinghamshire (Caunton); Staffordshire (Walsall); Yorkshire (Allerston, Barkston, Halifax, Market Weighton, Northallerton, Pontefract, Salton, Wistow); county Durham (Aycliffe, Billingham, Ferryhill, Helmington Row, Heworth, East Merrington, Southwick, Wolviston); Cumberland (Shap); Northumberland (Hartley); Scotland (St Andrews University); and Ireland (Dublin, Galway). Moreover, there was *soule* in Cornwall (Trigg?) and camping in Essex (Copford, Heybridge) as well as Suffolk (Cratfield, Hollesley). In addition, and besides handball, *jeu de paume* and tennis, what appears to have been bat and ball games were played in Cornwall

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[174] Cf. E.G. Dunning and N. Elias, ‘Folk Football in Medieval and Early Modern Britain’, in E.G. Dunning (ed.), *The Sociology of Sport: A Selection of Readings* (London, 1971), pp. 124–25.

[175] John Gilbert (ed.), *Chartularies of St. Mary’s Abbey, Dublin* (2 vols., 1884; reprinted, Cambridge, 2012), vol. 2, p. 381; cf. William Stubbs (ed.), *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II* (London, 1882), vol. 1, p. 158.

(Tregorden), Wiltshire (Bemerton, Castle Combe), Oxfordshire (Oxford), Kent (Sturry), Lincolnshire (Scottlethorpe) and Ireland (Galway, Kilkenny, Newcastle Lyons).

This imperfect picture of the geography of ball games in the British Isles before the Reformation can be improved upon through further sources still, notably probate bequests, deeds, tithe maps and place names. David Dymond’s pioneering work on camping closes has brought much of this material together. Thus at Hawstead, Suffolk the ‘camping pightel’ or small field adjoining the eastside of the churchyard was leased along with the church-house for 13*s*. 4*d*. a year in the late fifteenth century.[176] At Fornham St Genevieve, Suffolk a lease dated May 1519 and a deed dated 25 March 1540 both specified a parcel of land called ‘le Camping close’.[177] Staying in Suffolk, there was a camping close at Debenham (1476), Felixstowe (1499) and Walsham-le-Willows (1509); camping land at Hopton (1532) and Stanton (1452); and a ‘campynghyll’ at Blythburgh (1526).[178] Over in Swaffham, Norfolk there was a 3-acre field abutting the churchyard called the camping close. This enclosure was originally known as ‘le Churchcroft’. It was administered by trustees and had been bequeathed to the town by the rector Dr John Botryght [Botwright] (*d.*1474), who was also Master of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.[179] In Cambridgeshire too there was ‘le Campingplace’ at Fulbourn (1540).[180] It seems that in rural areas many of these customary places for camping were either on land abutting or nearby the churchyard or else, as Dymond says, in nucleated villages ‘lying behind a row of houses or at one end of the street’.[181] As we have seen, judging from various prohibitions a number of churchyards were also sites of ball games and this contested space, which was sometimes also used to stage plays and pageants, has likewise been explored by Dymond.[182]

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[176] Sir John Cullum, *The History and Antiquities of Hawsted, and Hardwick, in the County of Suffolk* (1784; 2nd edn., London, 1813), pp. 124–25; Edward Moor, *Suffolk Words and Phrases* (London, 1823), pp. 65–66; Robert Forby, *The Vocabulary of East Anglia* (London, 1830), p. 53; Field, *History of English Field-Names*, p. 245.

[177] Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds, 449/2/225; John Gage, *The History and Antiquities of Hengrave, in Suffolk* (London, 1822), pp. 10–11, 107, 171.

[178] Dymond, ‘Lost Social Institution’, pp. 167–69, 178–79; Katherine Jewell, ‘Festive Culture in Pre-Reformation Rural Suffolk’, Unpublished University of East Anglia Ph.D., 2013, pp. 183–86.

[179] Norfolk Record Office, Norwich, PD 52/273–78, quoted in H. Falvey, ‘Communal Leisure in Late-Medieval England’, *The Ricardian*, 10 (1995), p. 196; Zachary Clark, *An Account of the different charities belonging to the poor of the county of Norfolk, abridged from the returns* (Bury St. Edmunds, 1811), pp. 231–32; Forby, *Vocabulary of East Anglia*, p. 53; Dymond, ‘Lost Social Institution’, pp. 166, 167, 171.

[180] P.H. Reaney, *The Origin of English Place-Names* (London, 1960), p. 160; Field, *History of English Field-Names*, p. 245.

[181] Dymond, ‘Lost Social Institution’, p. 166.

Yet sometimes clergymen sided with their parishioners in disputes about how land was used. An important example was discovered by the late Lesley Boatwright. This concerned a piece of land in Bethersden, Kent called Courtfield which was held by the prior of St Gregory’s, Canterbury. On Saturday, 10 February 1481 a farmer named Richard Carpenter prepared to plough this field on the morrow. This would have been a breach of the Sabbath but of greater concern to the vicar, Alexander Syda, was that Courtfield was where locals played football. Accordingly, Syda was accused of having ‘cunningly plotted maliciously to harm, frustrate and disturb’ Carpenter by causing ‘to be made various foot balls called ffoteballs’ and on Sunday, 11 February:

> which was a holiday but not a feast day, gathered together into his company as many unknown evil-doers and disturbers of the peace … as he possibly could, to the number of 20 persons, who helped him in a riotous manner, with force of arms, namely with staves and knives, and he entered the aforesaid piece of land and then and there played at football … for a greater part of the same day with the aforesaid malefactors, and trampled and ruined the grass ... by walking on it with his feet and beating it, riotously singing, exclaiming, and making a hue and cry and keeping on openly and publicly, and saying in these words ‘This is the comen Grounde and comen pleiyng place for all men of this p[ar]isshe. I wold the priour or his [tenant] were now here to let us to pleie here and if he or his [tenant] wold now begyn to [plough] this grounde to let us of our pleiyng place in good feith we shall tere ther hodis’.

Thereupon Carpenter’s farming equipment, including his plough, was broken and ‘ripped to pieces’ then scattered about various parts of Courtfield with the wheels hung high in the trees. Apparently ‘the game of football had not been seen or played in that said parish for many years before then’.[183] Clearly the legal language here is formulaic and the narrative framed from the plaintiff’s perspective. Nonetheless, that the incident resulted in a judicial inquiry indicates both how infringing customary rights could exacerbate local tensions and how football could be used as a pretext to assert or reclaim those threatened rights. Indeed, during the seventeenth century there were a number of riots in eastern rural areas linked to football; notably in the Fens of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Lincolnshire where there was strong opposition to land reclamation through drainage schemes as well as to enclosures.

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[182] D. Dymond, ‘God’s Disputed Acre’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 50 (1999), pp. 464–97.

[183] TNA, KB 9/365/22, <http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT7/KB9/KB9no365/IMG_0044.htm>, printed with English translation in L. Boatwright, ‘A Fifteenth-Century Football Hooligan’, *Ricardian Bulletin* (Autumn 2007), pp. 27–28.

Turning from where to when, we have 26 specific dates for when ball games were played in the British Isles before the Reformation. Of these at least 16 concern football. The most common days of the week were Sunday (14), Tuesday (7) and Wednesday (2), with one occurrence on a Monday, Friday and Saturday. The most common months were February (9), March (5), June (3), April (2) and July (2), with one occurrence in January, May, September, November and December. There is also evidence for calendar customs, notably Shrove Tuesday (London, Wolviston, Pontefract);[184] Ash Wednesday (Wistow); feast of St Gregory (Oxford); vigil of the feast of the Annunciation (Oxford); feast of the Annunciation (Stamford); Hock Days (London); Jubilate Sunday (wapentake of Strafford); Pentecost week (London); Trinity Sunday (Ulgham); vigil of the translation of St Thomas the Martyr (Wells Cathedral); feast of St Katherine the Virgin and Martyr (Bicester Priory);[185] and feast of St Nicholas (Sproughton).

As for whom, we have seen that boys and adolescents – including students and possibly apprentices too – played ball games, but that girls seem mostly to have watched.[186] However, there is continental visual evidence of female participation, notably a French manuscript with illustrations by Jehan de Grise of Bruges entitled the ‘Romance of Alexander’ (1338–44) [Figure 7a, 7b], as well as a couple of Flemish Psalters (*c*.1320–1330) [Figures 8, 9]. Though there is no indication that women played football before the Reformation, they may have been spectators. Indeed, there is the later example of Mary, Queen of Scots. In June 1568, having abdicated and fled to England, she watched a football match played by about 20 of her retinue on a ‘playing-greene’ somewhere between Carlisle Castle and the Scottish border.[187] With regard to the social status of adult male footballers, this varied. But the vast majority were commoners, an impression reinforced by a derogatory half-line from Shakespeare’s *King Lear*: ‘you base Foot-ball plaier’.[188] Thus we know of pelters, tailors and tapissers [weavers] in London. While in rural areas we have seen mention of labourers, servants, attendants, tenant farmers, villeins and a husbandman – but no yeomen. Minor clergy also played games despite various injunctions; including a canon, clerks, a curate, a rector and vicars. Determining the age of these adults is more difficult but, judging mostly from testimony, between 20 and 40 seems a reasonable inference.

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[184] Cf. John Abernethy Kingdon (ed.), *Facsimile of the first volume of the MS. archives of the Worshipful company of Grocers of the city of London, A.D. 1345–1463* (London, 1886), part ii, p. 230, paid to ‘the Bachelers reuell’ at Shrovetide, 3*s*. 4*d*. (1433–34).

[185] White Kennett, *Parochial Antiquities attempted in the History of Ambrosden, Burcester, and other adjacent parts* (Oxford, 1695), ed. B. Bandinel (2 vols., Oxford, 1818), vol. 2, p. 259.

[186] For literary treatment of a girl (symbolising youth) playing at ball, see Furnivall (ed.), *Pilgrimage of Life of Man*, part ii, p. 303.

As for how many, there is a mixture of literary and legal evidence. Hence one poem has ‘iij hedles playen at a ball / on hanles man served hem all’.[189] There is also an anti-Jewish ballad, possibly dating from the fifteenth century, which expands upon the alleged ritual murder of Hugh of Lincoln in 1255. This survives in several versions and contains the lines:

> Four and twenty bonny boys / Were playing at the ba, …
> He kickd the ba with his right foot, / And catchd it wi his knee.[190]

More promising is a Latin sentence with English translation recorded in a school book in the early 1480s by William Ingram, afterwards a monk at Canterbury Cathedral: ‘Viginti un*us* ho*min*es cu*r*ru*n*t ad pila*m* pedalem. XXj me*n* ren at y^{e} fote bale’.[191] But this may have been merely an educational exercise. So we are on firmer ground with legal proceedings. Thus we know of four players in Trigg; eight at Hollesley; eight at London; 18 at Aycliffe; 20 at Bethersden (although this is a suspiciously round number) and roughly 60 at Tregorden. Moreover, we have testimony of about 60 at Helmington Row (all surnamed Oll) and 62 fined at Billingham, Wolviston and Aycliffe. If the last example concerns a single rather than multiple events then it suggests a football match involving players drawn not just from two neighbouring villages, but from an additional rural community more than a dozen miles away. This is certainly possible since we have seen that a man from Great Shelford played at Waterbeach, nearly ten miles distant from his home.

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[187] BL, MS Cotton Caligula B. ix, fol. 291, printed in *Victoria County History. Cumberland*, vol. 2, pp. 276–77.

[188] William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (1605), Act i, scene iv, line 95.

[189] Bodl., MS Eng. poet. e. 1, fol. 26v <https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=2262>, printed in Thomas Wright (ed.), *Songs and Carols from a manuscript… of the Fifteenth Century,* Percy Society, 23 (London, 1847), p. 35.

[190] Francis James Child (ed.), *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (5 vols., Boston, 1882–98; reprinted, 3 vols., New York: Folklore Press, 1957), vol. 3, pp. 243, 245; Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, p. 41; G. Langmuir, ‘The Knight’s Tale of Young Hugh of Lincoln’, *Speculum*, 47 (1972), p. 460.

[191] BL, MS Harleian 1587, fol. 71r, printed in N. Orme, ‘School exercises from Canterbury, *c*. 1480’, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 131 (2011), p. 119.

We do not know how football games were won or lost before the Reformation. Nor, unlike tennis, is there evidence for a scoring system. While Gillmeister may be correct that the innovation of a goal derived from the chivalric passage of arms, it is worth emphasising that although the earliest recorded usage of ‘gol’ – in the sense of a boundary or limit – derives from the mid-fourteenth century, it was an exceedingly rare term. Indeed, the word does not commonly occur until the Tudor period, when its meaning included the finishing or starting point of a race; an aim or outcome; a prize for success; and an objective to attack or defend in a ball game.[192] Only in February 1582 is there a specific reference to ‘le goal’ in connection with football, when an unfortunate husbandman of Gosfield, Essex – whose role was to guard that goal – was accidentally killed as the result of a violent collision.[193] Accordingly, we should be wary of inferring how the outcomes of pre-Reformation football contests were determined. It may, moreover, be anachronistic to speak of a ‘football match’ during our period since the first known association of football with a ‘match’ dates from May 1581.[194] What can be said with confidence is that the camping closes of East Anglia were demarcated spaces, while the anonymous and likely Canterbury-based monk who commented upon the case of a supposed miraculous recovery from an agonising football injury, observed that ‘boundaries were marked’ and a ball kicked in opposite directions. So perhaps the earliest goals in rural contests were the limits of a field, with the objective to get the ball to one end or the other.[195] As for duration, this seems to have varied. While the spectacle Mary, Queen of Scots watched reportedly lasted about two hours, some pre-Reformation games apparently only terminated with sunset. Since many were played in February and March, daylight hours would have been shorter than in summer.

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[192] *OED*, s.v. ‘goal’; Elyot, *Gouernour*, p. 208v, ‘passyng the gole’; Hall, *Union of Lancastre [and] Yorke*, ccciiij^{v}, ‘gott the gole before me’; Richard Stanhurst, ‘A Treatise conteining a plaine and perfect description of Ireland’ (1577), in Raphaell Holinshed, *Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (6 vols., London, 1807), vol. 1, p. 10, ‘to cope and buckle with him herein: and before he beare the ball to the goale, to trip him if I may in the way’.

[193] TNA, ASSI 35/24/1, mem. 44, in J.S. Cockburn (ed.), *Calendar of Assize Records: Essex Indictments. Elizabeth I* (London, 1978), p. 227.

[194] BL, MS Lansdowne 33, fol. 58, printed in James Heywood and Thomas Wright (eds.), *Cambridge University transactions during the Puritan controversies of the 16th and 17th centuries* (2 vols., London, 1854), vol. 1, p. 305.

Regarding victors’ rewards, commoners – like their social superiors – gambled on the outcome of ball games. Triumph may also have wrested bragging rights. In addition, there is Sir David Lyndsay’s 1550 verse eulogy to his friend William Meldrum. Written in the form of a chivalric romance, it describes how squire Meldrum ‘wan the pryse above them all’ both at archery and football.[196] But prizes for hurling and football in the form of tangible goods such as a silver ball, barrels of ale or hats seem to have been awarded mostly from about the beginning of the seventeenth century.[197] Innkeepers too may have offered gifts as a way of increasing custom from players and spectators alike. Some may even have owned footballs for that purpose. There is a hint of this in a line from the morality play *Mankind* (*c*.1475): ‘What, how! ostler, hostler! lende ws a foot-ball!’[198]

Turning to costume, besides the specialised footwear made for Henry VIII there is some visual evidence. This comes from illuminated manuscripts and a couple of misericords; i.e. wooden carvings on the underside of a hinged seat in a choir stall. Misericords are extremely difficult to date accurately. Nonetheless, an example from the mid-fourteenth century at Gloucester Cathedral clearly depicts a ball game, while one from the mid-fifteenth century at All Souls College, Oxford seems to show football [Figures 17, 18].[199] What is noteworthy here is the absence of robust protective equipment, particularly for the shins and upper body. Thus according to Oscar Clark, the carving at Gloucester depicts:

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[195] Cf. F.E. Halliday (ed.), *Richard Carew of Antony. The Survey of Cornwall* (London, 1953), pp. 147–150.

[196] David Laing (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Sir David Lyndsay* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1879), vol. 1, p. 193; J.K. McGinley, ‘Lyndsay [Lindsay], Sir David (*c*.1486–1555)’, *ODNB.*

[197] Halliday (ed.), *Survey of Cornwall*, pp. 148–49, 151; *The Weekly Intelligencer*, no. 329 (25 April – 2 May 1654), p. 240; *The Moderate Intelligencer*, no. 176 (26 April – 4 May 1654), p. 1385; Bodl., MS Rawlinson D 71, fol. 15r; BL, Add. MS 28,554, fol. 137; Matthew Concanen, *A Match at Foot-ball* (Dublin, 1720), p. 11; R.W. Ketton Cremer, ‘Camping – a forgotten Norfolk Game’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, 24 (1932), p. 91; cf. Lawrence Clopper (ed.), *Records of Early English Drama: Chester* (Manchester, 1979), pp. 40–41.

[198] Manly (ed.), *Specimens of pre-Shaksperean Drama*, vol. 1, p. 343; F.J. Furnivall and Alfred Pollard (eds.), *The Macro Plays*, Early English Text Society, extra series, 91 (London, 1904), p. 27; Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, p. 41.

[199] Phillis Cunnington and Alan Mansfield, *English Costume for Sports and Outdoor recreation from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1969), p. 48 & plate 9 [between pp. 52–53].

> Two youths playing with a large ball, wearing tight leggings and pointed shoes; both have jupons reaching to the knee, jagged at the bottom, and buttoned with close-set buttons down the front; their buckled belts sustain their gypcyeres (wallets); they wear their hoods, jagged or escalloped … at the borders, and have very long and sharp liripipes hanging down behind.[200]

How participants identified which players were on their side is an open question. Presumably many knew each other by sight. Yet it is not until considerably later that we have accounts of distinguishable teams. Thus newsbook reports of a 50-a-side Cornish hurling match played with a silver ball at Hyde Park on Monday, 1 May 1654 – with the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell attending – indicate that one ‘party’ of ‘Gentlemen’ wore white caps, and their opponents red.[201]

Perhaps surprisingly, little can be said about footballs before 1500. We have seen that they were described as large or huge, which would have made them suitable for kicking. Yet how big is difficult to say, since surviving visual representations may not have been to scale. There are also two fifteenth-century similes that attempted to humorously compare the spherical dimensions to parts of a woman’s form. One was by the poet and clerk Thomas Hoccleve (*c*.1367–1426): ‘Hir comly body / shape as a foot bal’.[202] The other by the Suffolk-born poet John Lydgate (*c*.1370–1449/50?) was a satirical description of his ‘fayr lady’. She wore a green hood and had two small breasts that when squeezed together appeared like a large camping ball:

> This fair floure of womanheed / Hath too pappys also smalle,
> Bolsteryd out of lenghth and breed, / Lyche a large campyng balle.[203]

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[200] O.W. Clark, ‘The Misereres in Gloucester Cathedral’, *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 28 (1905), p. 84. A liripipe is a long tail hanging from the back of a hood.

[201] *Weekly Intelligencer* (25 April – 2 May 1654), p. 240; *Moderate Intelligencer* (26 April – 4 May 1654), p. 1385.

[202] Furnivall and Gollancz (eds.), *Hoccleve’s Works*, vol. 2, p. 38; Magoun, ‘Football in Medieval England’, p. 40.

[203] Halliwell (ed.), *Minor poems of Lydgate*, vol. 2, p. 200.

Besides their size, footballs and camping balls were comparatively expensive. We have seen that in the early fifteenth century attempts were made in London to prevent the collection of money to purchase footballs on Hock Days. Moreover, the churchwardens of Cratfield spent 4*d*. on a camping ball in 1534. Far costlier was the leather football customarily used during the annual Shrove Tuesday match at Chester. According to an entry in the assembly books of the city’s corporation dated January 1540, it had traditionally been given as a gift by the shoemakers. Made of leather, it was valued at 3*s*. 4*d*.[204] I will discuss elsewhere the attempt by Chester’s mayor and magistrates to suppress this Shrove Tuesday game. Here I want to focus on the link between shoemakers and football. For in March 1409 six tapissers and two parishioners of St Dionis Backchurch, London gave sureties for their good behaviour to the Cordwainers that they would not collect money to pay for a football or for cock-thrashing.[205] Given their expertise in working leather, this suggests that the shoemakers of London and Chester made footballs. But whereas archaeological evidence from Winchester and London indicates that smaller leather balls dating from the tenth to mid-twelfth centuries were packed with moss, we do not know what leather footballs were stuffed with before the sixteenth century. Nor should we push the connection between shoemakers and football manufacture too far, since from about 1460 to 1535 the London Ironmongers’ Company were a major retailer of tennis balls.[206]

Nicholas Orme has suggested that the customary slaughter of pigs on All Saints Day, 1 November ‘may have inaugurated the football season’ by ‘providing bladders for ball games’.[207] Yet we have noted that slightly more than half of the pre-Reformation ball games for which we have a specific date were in February and March, with only single instances in November, December and January. All the same, there is additional literary evidence depicting certain ball games as winter pastimes. This comes from the fifth eclogue of Alexander Barclay (*c*.1484–1552), parts of which were written in 1513 or 1514, but which was not published until 1518. Besides being a poet, Barclay was also a clergyman and he was briefly employed at Ottery St Mary, Devon – where, it will be recalled, a complaint had been made against playing tennis.[208] According to one of his characters:

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[204] Clopper (ed.), *Chester*, pp. 40–41; Magoun, ‘Shrove Tuesday Football’, pp. 11–14.

[205] Thomas (ed.), *Calendar of Select Pleas*, pp. 291–92.

[206] Marshall, *Annals of Tennis*, pp. 58–59.

[207] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven & London, 2003), p. 187.

[208] Nicholas Orme, ‘Barclay, Alexander (*c*.1484–1552)’, *ODNB*.

Eche tyme and season / hath his delyte and joyes,
 Loke in the stretes / beholde the lyttel boyes
How in fruyte season / for joye they synge and hope
 In Lent echeone / full busy is with his tope
And now in wynter / for all the greuous colde
 All rent and ragyd / a man maye them beholde
They haue great pleasure / supposynge well to dyne
 Whan men ben busyed / in kyllynge of fat swyne
They get the bladder / and blowe it grete tand thyn
 With many beanes / or peasen bounde within
It ratleth / soundeth / and shyneth clere and fayre
 whyle it is throwen / and cast vp in the ayre
Echeone contendeth / and hath a grete delyte
 with fote or with hande / the bladder for to smyte
yf it fall to grounde / they lyfte it vp agayne
 This wyse to labour / they count it for no payne
Rennynge and lepynge / they dryue a waye the colde
 The sturdy plowmen / lusty stronge and bolde
Ouercometh the wynter / with dryuynge the fote ball
 forgetynge labour / and many a greuous fall.[209]

Here two distinct games are described. Firstly one played by little boys which involved using their feet and hands to strike a ball into the air. This shiny ball was made from the bladder of a slaughtered pig. The bladder was blown to a great size and then stuffed with beans or peas so that it made a rattling sound. It was presumably quite light so that boys could hit it. Secondly, a more violent game involving ‘sturdy’ ploughmen who overcame winter’s cold by driving the football (i.e. forcing it along), suffering many knocks to the ground in the process. The former children’s game described by Barclay has similarities with a sentence from a school textbook by William Horman (1457–1535), sometime headmaster of Winchester and afterwards a fellow of Eton College: ‘we wyll pley with a ball full of wynde. Lusui erit nobis follis pugillari spiritu tume[n]s’.[210] This game has been mistaken for football. Yet it is clear both from the Latin and Sir Thomas Elyot’s *Dictionary* (1538) that it was not. Rather, this lighter – and likely smaller – type of ball was called ‘Pugillatorius follis’; that is ‘a ball fylled onely with wynde, which is stryken with a mans fiste, and not with the palme’. Elyot was quite certain about the difference, since he classified what was called ‘Sphennida’ as ‘a balle made of lether or cloth, greater than a tenyse balle’.[211]

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[209] Alexander Barclay, *The fyfte Eglog of Alexander Barclay of the Cytezen and uplondyshman* (London, 1518), sig. Aiii$^{r–v}$.

About the same time that Elyot was writing a ball was placed, kicked or thrown in the rafters of the Queen’s chamber in Stirling Castle. We are fortunate that it was discovered in 1981. It has been suggested that this is the oldest surviving football in the world. Dating from the 1540s, it was apparently made from a pig’s bladder, covered in cow leather, stitched and measured about 150mm in diameter [Figure 19]. That seems rather small for a football. Yet it is still much larger than balls that were used for caich, with some examples found at St Andrews ranging from 40mm to 65mm in diameter. These probably date from the eighteenth or early nineteenth century and consist of tightly wound yarn with leather covers.[212] Other caich balls, possibly older, have been found at Edinburgh [Figure 20]. The Stirling ball, moreover, accords with a report of the game played by Mary Stuart’s retinue in 1568, which remarked upon the fair play resulting from ‘the smallnes of theyr balle’.[213]

So far we have noted instances of clerical participation, encouragement, facilitation or tolerance of a variety of ball games. Another example may be added, notably a gift of 4*d*. from the prior of Bicester to several football players on Sunday, 25 November 1425 to celebrate the feast of St Katherine the Virgin and Martyr – four pence may have been sufficient to purchase a ball.[214] Perhaps these clergymen wanted to maintain cordial relations with their parishioners by giving them licence to enjoy themselves, so long as it was not within the church or churchyard, nor during the hours of divine service. We have seen that where and when ball games were played was important, and that the desire by churchmen to prevent the profanation of consecrated ground was reinforced by injunctions, monitions and threats. These messages were communicated directly both to the laity and minor clergy. Thus about 1400 a preacher warned his flock to refrain from dancing, worldly songs, interludes, casting the stone, playing at ball, idle japes and plays in either the church or churchyard.[215] Similarly, John Myrc (*fl. c*.1400), a canon of Lilleshall priory, Shropshire, enumerated those games which could not be played in the church or churchyard.[216] But a few condemnations went further. Reginald Pecock (*c*.1392–1459?), sometime bishop of Chichester, asked where it was permissible in Scripture for men to play in words by making jests, or in deeds by running, leaping, shooting, sitting down to merels [nine men’s morris] and casting quoits.[217] Again, in a sermon falsely attributed to the Dominican Albertus Magnus (*d*.1280) published at Augsburg in the 1470s, it was declared that:

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[210] William Horman, *Vulgaria uiri doctissimi* (London, 1519), fol. 282v; Nicholas Orme, ‘Horman, William (1457–1535)’, *ODNB*. The preceding sentence is ‘He hyt me in the yie with a tenys balle’.

[211] Sir Thomas Elyot, *The dictionary of syr Thomas Eliot* (London, 1538), no pagination; Sir Thomas Elyot, *Bibliotheca Eliotiae* (London, 1542), sig. Ii.iiii; cf. Niccolò Perotti, *Cornucopia* (Basel, 1532), col. 601; see also Thomas Fosbroke, *Encyclopaedia of Antiquities* (2 vols., London, 1825), vol. 2, p. 606.

[212] I. Carradice, ‘A group of *cache* balls from St Andrews’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 132 (2002), pp. 521–28.

[213] BL, MS Cotton Caligula B. ix, fol. 291, printed in *VCH. Cumberland*, vol. 2, pp. 276–77.

[214] Kennett, *Parochial Antiquities*, ed. B. Bandinel, vol. 2, p. 259.

> The Lord goes before us with the staff of his cross, and we ought to follow his steps; but those who attend dances or chase balls, do not follow the steps of Christ but of the devil.[218]

Thomas More (1478–1535) too associated brothels with wine shops and alehouses, condemning the latter as places where people emptied their purses by gambling at ‘crooked games of chance’ such as ‘dice, cards, backgammon, ball, bowling, and quoits’.[219] The Bridgettine monk Richard Whitford (*d*.1543?) likewise denounced common pastimes: bearbaiting, bullbaiting, football, tennis, and bowls, as well as unlawful games such as cards, dice and closh. For Whitford such recreations inevitably led to breach of the Sabbath.[220] Moving firmly into the Reformation period there is also Sir David Lyndsay’s morality play *Ane Pleasant Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* (1552), in which Catholic indulgence of ball games and gambling is censured through the character of a Popish parson who boasts that although he cannot preach, he can ‘play at the caiche’ and furiously at ‘the fut-ball’ as well as at cards, tables and dice.[221]

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[215] Lawrence Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game. English Festive culture in the Medieval and early modern period* (Chicago, 2001), p. 17.

[216] Peacock (ed.), *Instructions for parish priests*, p. 11.

[217] Reginald Pecock, *The Repressor of over much blaming of the Clergy*, ed. Churchill Babington (London, 1860), vol. 1, p. 120.

[218] ‘Sermones notabiles et formales magistri Alberti ordinis praedicatorum’, in *Sermons de tempore et de sanctis* (Augsburg: Johann Wiener, *c*. 1476–80), p. 214v, with a slightly different English translation in Hart (ed.), *Ecclesiastical Records*, p. 73.

[219] Edward Surtz and J.H. Hexter (eds.), *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More. Vol. IV. Utopia* (New Haven, 1965), pp. 68, 69; cf. Sir Thomas More, *The co[n]futacyon of Tyndales answere* (1532), p. cxvi, ‘For so he maye translate the worlde in to a foteball yf he ioyne therwyth certeyne cyrcumstaunces, and saye this rownde rollynge foteball that menne walke vppon and shippes sayle uppon’.

Turning from morality to medicine, we have noted a denunciation of football as nothing but ‘beastly furie, and exstreme violence’. These were Thomas Elyot’s words, although they have not been adequately explained. As a humanist Elyot had read a second century Latin treatise on hygiene (‘De Sanitate Tuenda’) by Galen of Pergamum (129?–199/216), otherwise known as ‘On the preservation of health’. Drawing on book two of this work, Elyot distinguished between valiant and vehement exercise. The former required power and tended towards violence; the latter was a mixture of strength and celerity. To maintain a healthy body required moderate exercise, which was a mean between every extreme. But whereas tennis was ‘a good exercise’ for young men, Elyot nonetheless scorned the ‘mediocritie’ (i.e. intermediate state) of bowls, closh, nine pins and quoits. As for the ‘exstreme violence’ of football, this was not only a commentary on the consequences of the game but also an understanding of it in Galenic terms: as vehement exercise.[222] These ideas were developed in Elyot’s *Castel of helthe* (1539) where, having approved wrestling as suitable for young men training for warfare, he included tennis and throwing of the ball among swift exercises ‘without violence’. By contrast, Elyot considered ‘footeball play’ as vehement exercise – that is a mixture of both violent and swift exercise.[223] In the same vein, the physician Christopher Langton (1521–1578) enumerated permissible exercises, including hunting, dancing, running, jumping, tennis and football, recommending those activities which exercised all parts of the body equally.[224] Slightly beyond our period another physician, John Caius (1510–1573), discouraged camping. He considered it more suitable for breaking legs than exercise – although Caius did not condemn camping completely if hurt could be avoided.[225]

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[220] Richard Whitford, *A werke for housholders* (London, 1530), sig. Diii^{r-2}; J.T. Rhodes, ‘Whitford, Richard (*d.*1543?)’, *ODNB*.

[221] Douglas Hamer (ed.), *The Works of Sir David Lindsay of the Mount 1490–1555* (Edinburgh & London, 1931–36), vol. 2, p. 317.

[222] Elyot, *Gouernour*, pp. 98r–99v; reprinted in Croft (ed.), *Gouernour*, vol. 1, pp. 289–97.

[223] Thomas Elyot, *The castel of helthe* (London, 1539), pp. 50v–51.

[224] Christopher Langton, *An introduction into phisycke* (1545?), fol. lxxvii^{r-v}.

*

To conclude we need to provide some explanations for the association of ball games – particularly football – with pain, injury and death. Unfortunately there is insufficient material to state anything confidently. Indeed, it is only for the later period, which is much more fully documented, that we can begin to say anything with a measure of assurance. And while it would be foolish to think that evidence from the ‘Long Reformation’ is directly applicable to the pre-Reformation period, there are nonetheless several questions worth investigating. Firstly, was playing ball games one of the ways in which people affirmed their identity, whether parochial or guild? At present there is no evidence to support this, so it must be left open. Secondly, were certain ball games largely specific to particular regions? David Underdown suggested that broadly speaking during the early modern period ‘the football played in much of the midlands and southern England was a communal, collectivist game’, whereas camping in East Anglia was ‘more structured’.[226] Again, there is no evidence to support this, although the comparative absence of football in western counties and especially in Wales before the Reformation is striking. Whether that was due to different agricultural practices and indeed rates of economic development, or whether this picture merely reflects surviving records and the current state of knowledge is difficult to say. Thirdly, can football be linked to the maintenance of territorial boundaries? Tony Collins suggested that in ‘rural towns and villages’ playing ‘folk football’ may have been linked to rogationtide festivities around Ascension Day, when many parishes observed the custom of beating the bounds.[227] Once again, there is no evidence to support this. Indeed, we have seen that the camping fields of East Anglia did not mark the limits of a parish but rather were generally situated close to the churchyard or else behind the houses of a nucleated village. All that can be said is that some rural folk travelled up to ten miles to play football, suggesting that through word of mouth news of a game could spread quite widely. Fourthly, were ball games intimately linked to local calendar customs? This generated some unwarranted speculation during the early part of the twentieth century. One scholar, for example, thought that some of the most popular and enduring village rites may have originated as animal – or even human – sacrifice, ‘the object being to propitiate the powers of evil which affect the fertility of the crops or injure children or cattle’.[228] Similarly, in his study of *The Mediaeval Stage* E.K. Chambers suggested that in hockey and football ‘the ball is nothing else than the head of the sacrificial beast, and it is the endeavour of each player to get it into his own possession, or, if sides are taken, to get it over a particular boundary’.[229] Again, in a brief article entitled ‘Football a survival of magic?’, W.B. Johnson associated Shrove Tuesday with ancient fertility rites, going so far as to propose that ‘the kicking to and fro of a ball was a piece of play-acting based on the idea of contest between winter and summer for the possession of the sun, its heat and its generating properties’.[230] Putting these far-fetched notions aside, we have several feast days and a couple of vigils during which ball games were played. So this certainly merits further research.

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[225] John Caius, *A boke, or counseill against the disease commonly called the sweate* (1552), p. 29.

[226] D. Underdown, ‘Regional Cultures? Local Variations in Popular Culture during the Early Modern Period’, in Tim Harris (ed.), *Popular Culture in England c.1500–1850* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 37–39.

[227] T. Collins, ‘Football’, in Tony Collins, John Martin and Wray Vamplew (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Traditional British Rural Sports* (London & New York, 2005), p. 116.

Our attempts to answer these questions, however, still does not account for the prevalence of violence. Previously we noted the likelihood that excessive drinking and gambling could heighten tensions. But there is also the assertion of masculinity to consider. Thus there is some Scottish and Irish evidence from the mid-seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries linking football with ‘manlye exerceisses’.[231] This invites a further question, was there a connection between being a good footballer and the esteem in which a man was held by his local community? There is a suggestion of this in Matthew Concanen’s mock-heroic poem *A match at foot-ball* (1720), concerning a game between teams from Swords and Lusk in county Dublin.[232] But evidence for the pre-Reformation period is lacking. Again, Concanen linked male prowess on the football field with female admiration. In short, successful players could attract sexual partners.[233] Once more, there is no evidence before the Reformation to support this.

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[228] W. Crooke, ‘The Legends of Krishna’, *Folklore*, 11 (1900), p. 21.

[229] E.K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (2 vols., Oxford, 1903), vol. 1, pp. 149–51.

[230] W.B. Johnson, ‘Football a survival of magic?’, *The Contemporary Review*, 135 (1929), pp. 225–31 (at p. 229).

[231] *HMC. Earl of Mar & Kellie. Supplementary* (London, 1930), pp. 71–72; William Lithgow, *Scotlands Welcome to her native sonne* (Edinburgh, 1633), sig. D^v; Concanen, *Match at Foot-ball*, pp. 11–12.

[232] Concanen, *Match at Foot-ball*, p. 11; P. Fagan, ‘A Football Match at Swords in the early 18th Century’, *Dublin Historical Record*, 57 (2004), pp. 223–27.

We are left therefore with the simplest of explanations. Football was violent because violence was endemic in society. Contrary to the thesis of Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, with regard to football there was no ‘civilising process’ – before the Reformation at any rate. The material presented here, which draws on a far wider range of sources than the few utilised in their study, makes that clear.[234] Moreover, we have seen that during the early Tudor period players of humble status still entered the bounds of football and camping fields bearing knives, suggesting that legislation prohibiting the lower social orders from carrying weapons during peacetime had fallen into abeyance. These men, or at least many of them, must have been aware that removing their knives before a game would reduce the risk of serious injury, whether to themselves, their friends or their opponents. Yet in the handful of documented cases that we have, they did not do so – because the result was death or serious injury (supposedly accidental). The likelihood is that they retained possession of these weapons for self-defence. Why? Because it was probably understood that during football and camping contests men might use the accepted violence of these games as cover to settle scores. We know this was sometimes the case during the ‘Long Reformation’ and indeed well into the nineteenth century. The field of play as an outlet for various emotions – doubtless pride and anger among them – invites further questions still. So too does the relative success or failure with which civic and ecclesiastical authorities were able to maintain public order and prevent damage to private property as well as places of governance, education and worship. This will all be tackled in an accompanying essay. But the last words, for now at least, must go to an anonymous sixteenth-century Scottish quatrain against football:

> Brissit brawnis and brokin banis [*Bruised muscles and broken bones*]
> Stryf discorde and waistie wanis [*Strife discord and futile blows*]
> Cruikit in eild syn halt with all [*Lamed in old age, then crippled withal*]

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[233] Concanen, *Match at Foot-ball*, pp. 12–13, 22; cf. *The Spectator*, no. 161 (4 September 1711), reprinted in Donald Bond (ed.), *The Spectator* (5 vols., Oxford, 1965), vol. 2, p. 132.

[234] Cf. Dunning and Elias, ‘Folk Football’, pp. 116–32 (at p. 120).

Thir are the bewteis of the fute bale [*These are the beauties of football*].[235]

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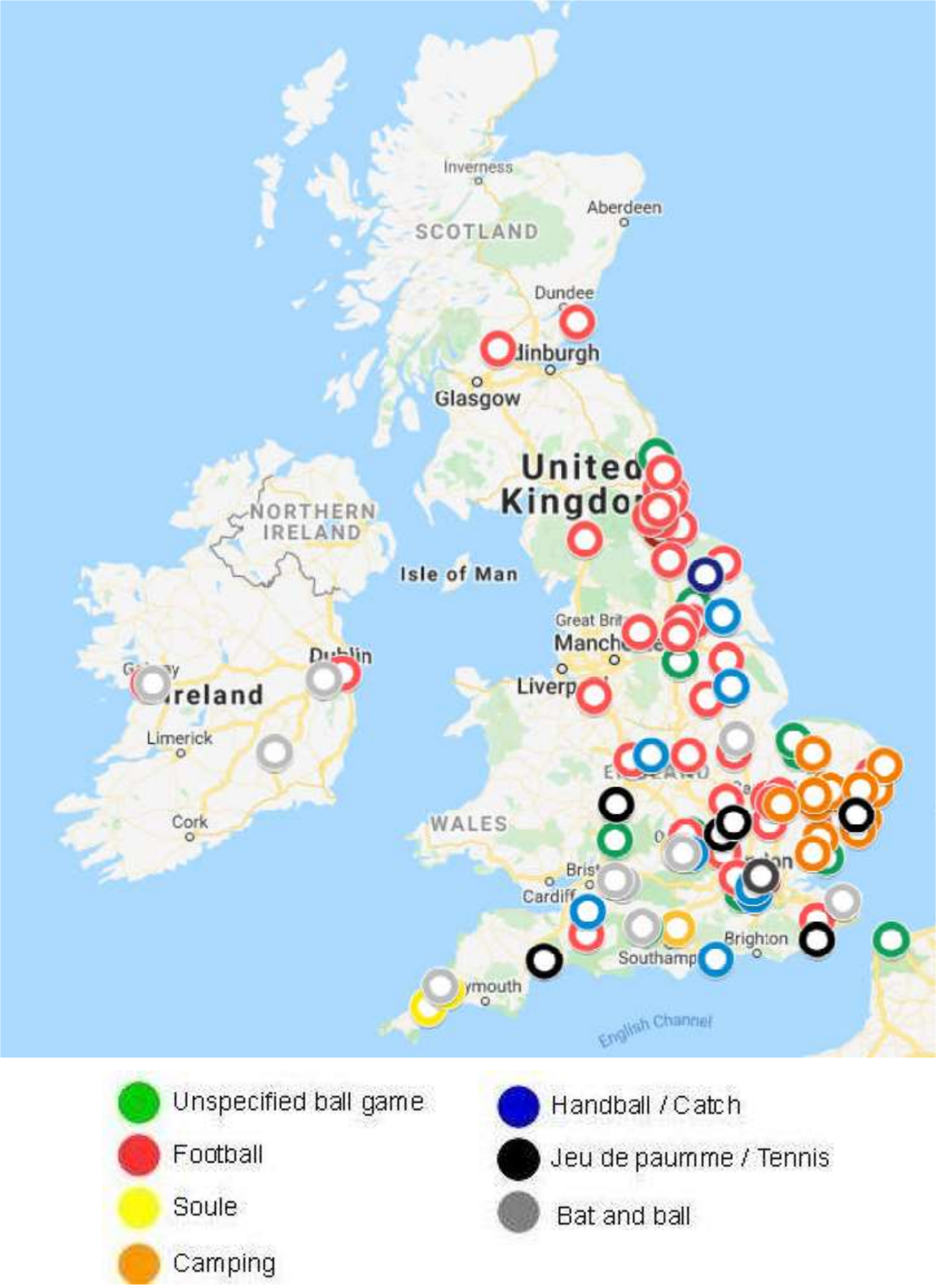
[235] W.A. Craigie (ed.), *The Maitland Folio Manuscript* (Edinburgh & London, 1919), vol. 1, p. 242; Francis Magoun, *The History of Football. From the beginning to 1871* (Bochum-Langendreer, 1938), pp. 89–90; cf. John Small (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Gavin Douglas* (Edinburgh, 1874), vol. 1, pp. 118–19.


Inverness
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Liverp
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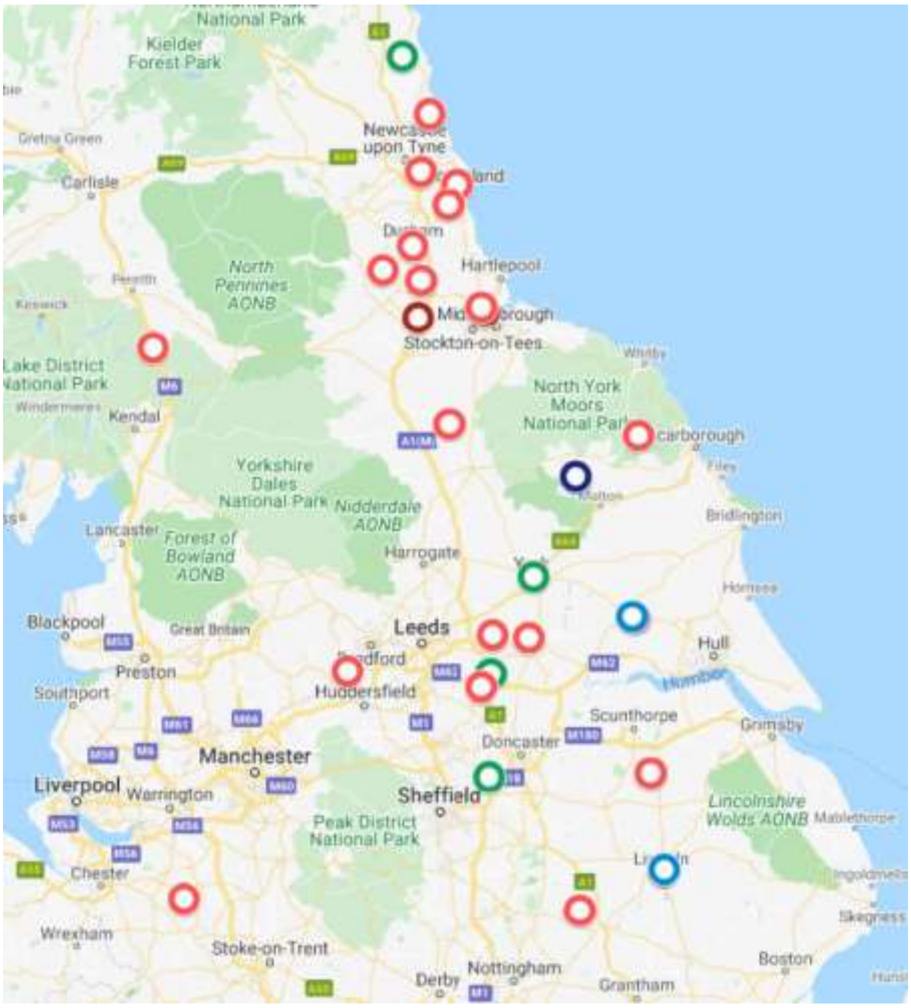
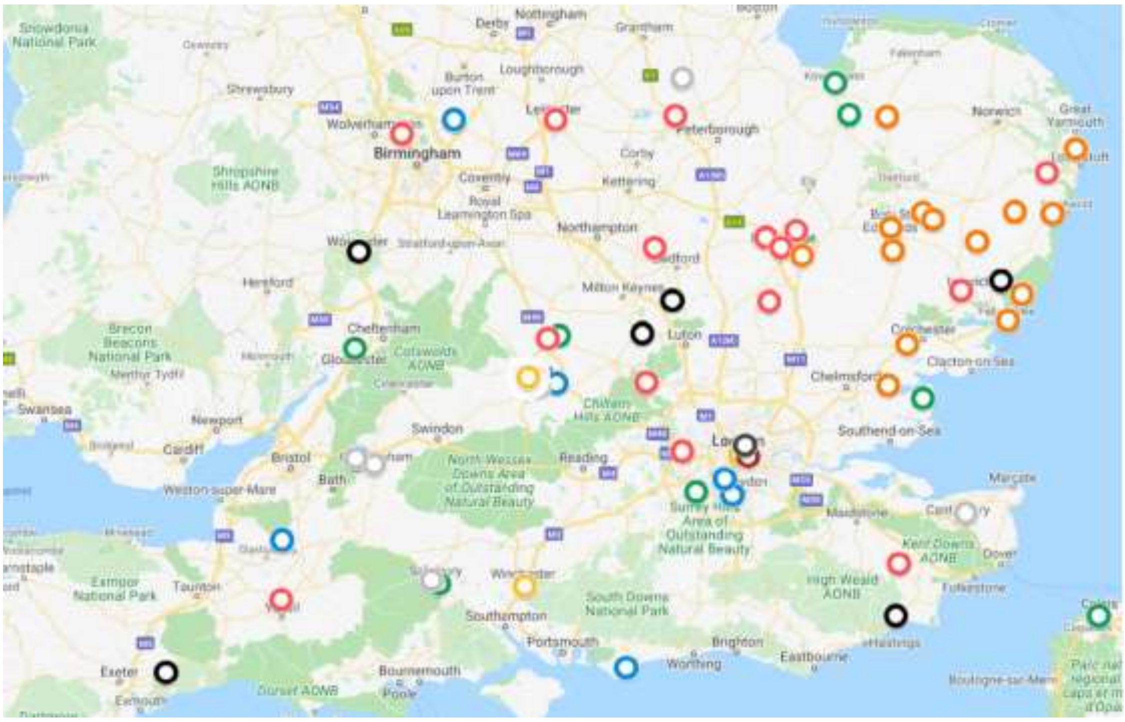
Cardiff
Southamp
Brighton
ymouth
English Channel
Unspecified ball game
Football
Soule
Camping
Handball / Catch
Jeu de paumme / Tennis
Bat and ball

The geography of ball games in the British Isles before the Reformation



The geography of ball games in the British Isles before the Reformation (north of River Trent)



The geography of ball games in the British Isles before the Reformation (south of River Trent)

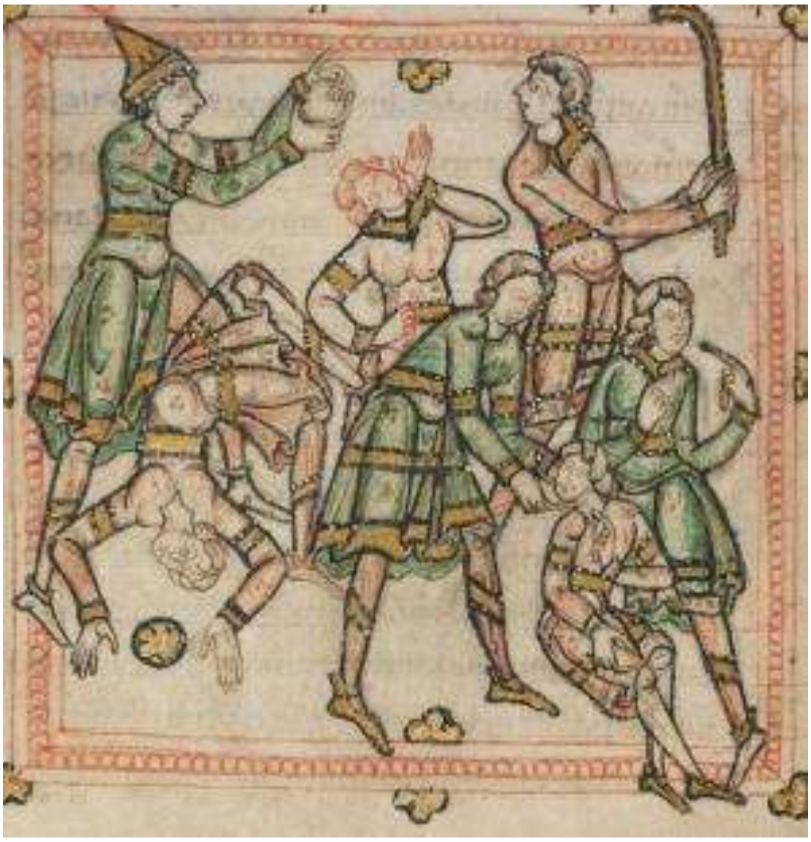


Figure 1. University College, Oxford, MS 165, Bede, ‘Life of St Cuthbert’, (12th century) fol. 8

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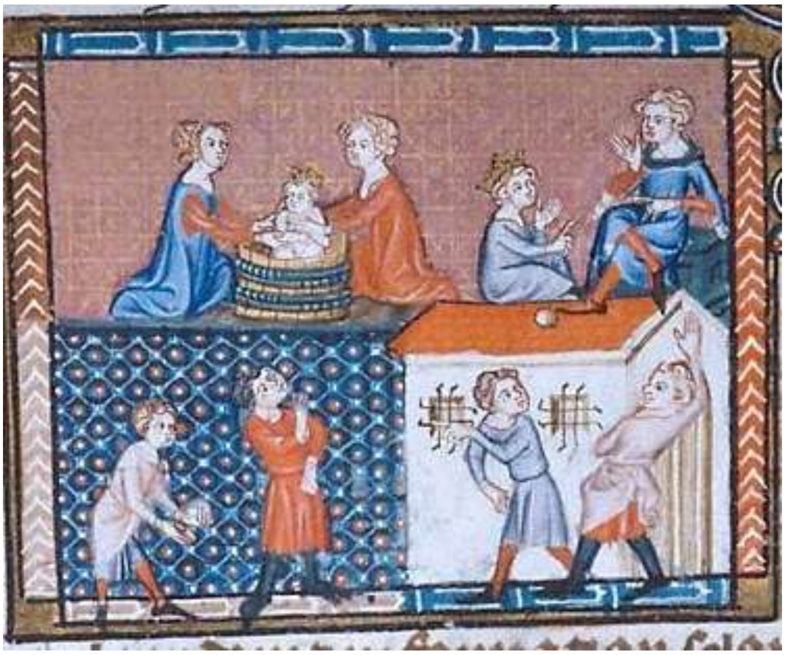

Figure 2. The Morgan Library & Museum, MS 456, ‘Avis au Roys’ [French] (1347–1350), fol. 68v

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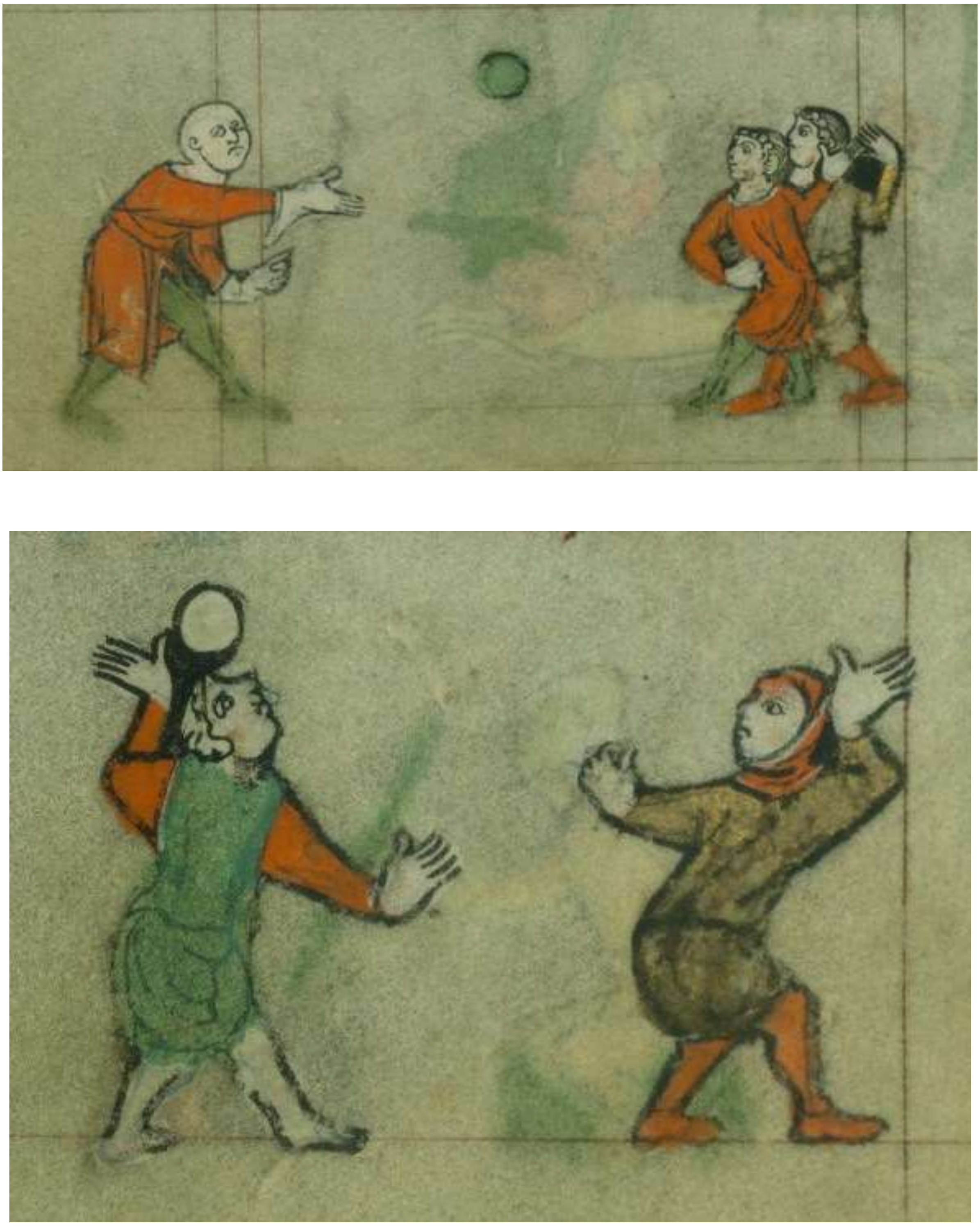

Figure 3. Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, MS W.88, ‘Book of Hours’ [Franco-Flemish] (*c*.1300–1310), fols. 59v, 70r

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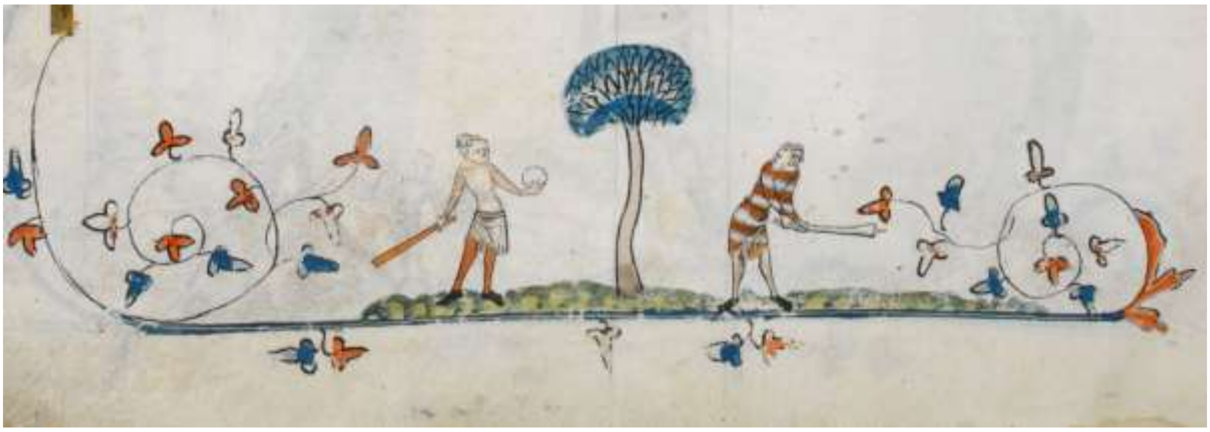

Figure 4a. British Library, Royal 10 E.IV, ‘The Decretals of Gregory IX’ [London] (*c*.1300–*c*.1340), fol. 94v

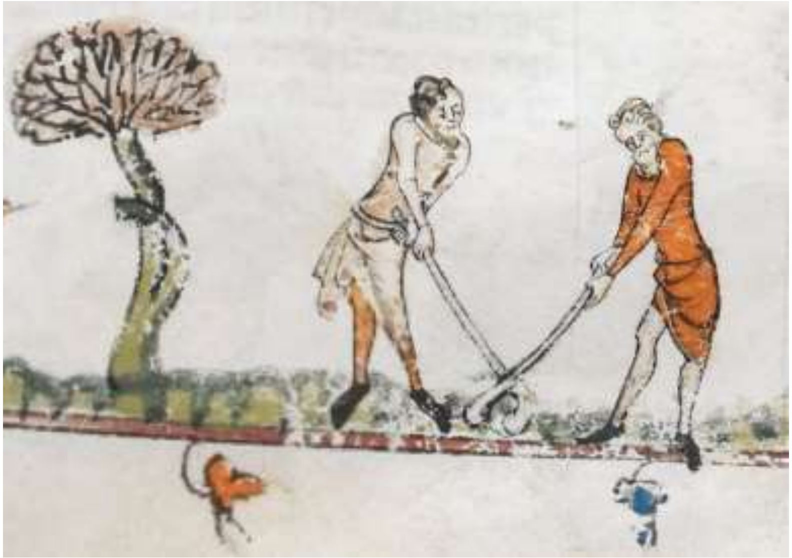

Figure 4b. BL, Royal 10 E.IV, ‘The Decretals of Gregory IX’ [London] (*c*.1300–*c*.1340), fol. 95r

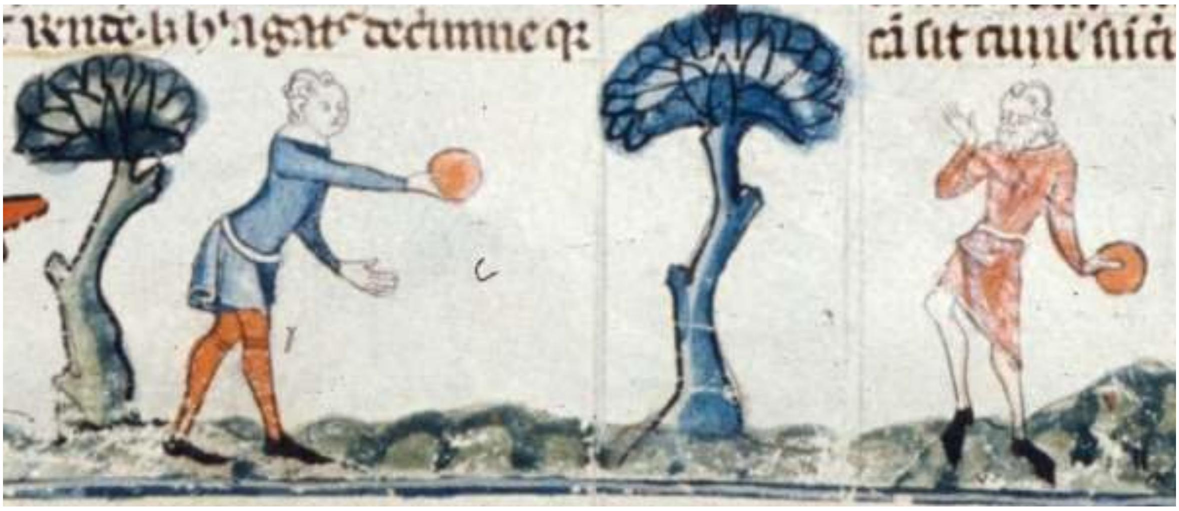

Figure 4c. BL, Royal 10 E.IV, ‘The Decretals of Gregory IX’ [London] (*c*.1300–*c*.1340), fol. 98r

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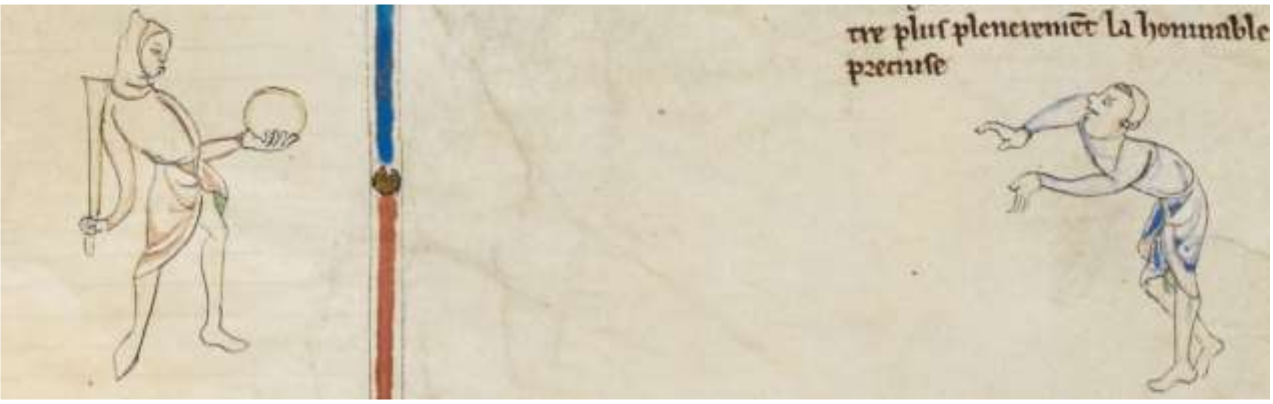
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Figure 5. BL, MS Royal 14 B.V, ‘Genealogy of Kings of England’ [English] (late 13th century), fol. 4r

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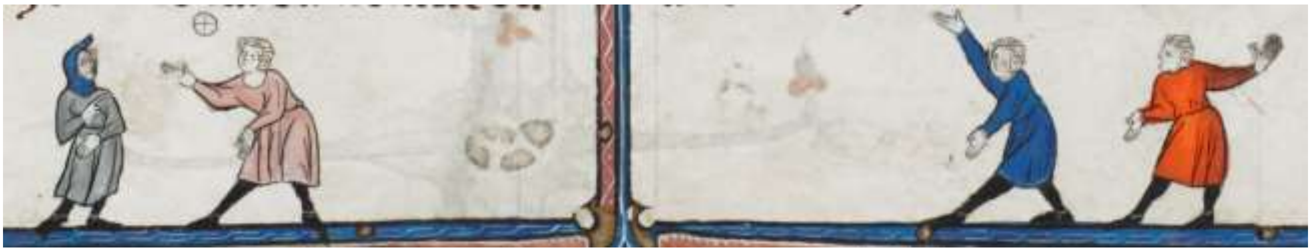

Figure 6a. British Library, MS Royal 20 D.V, ‘Lancelot du Lac’ (1300–1380), fol. 207r

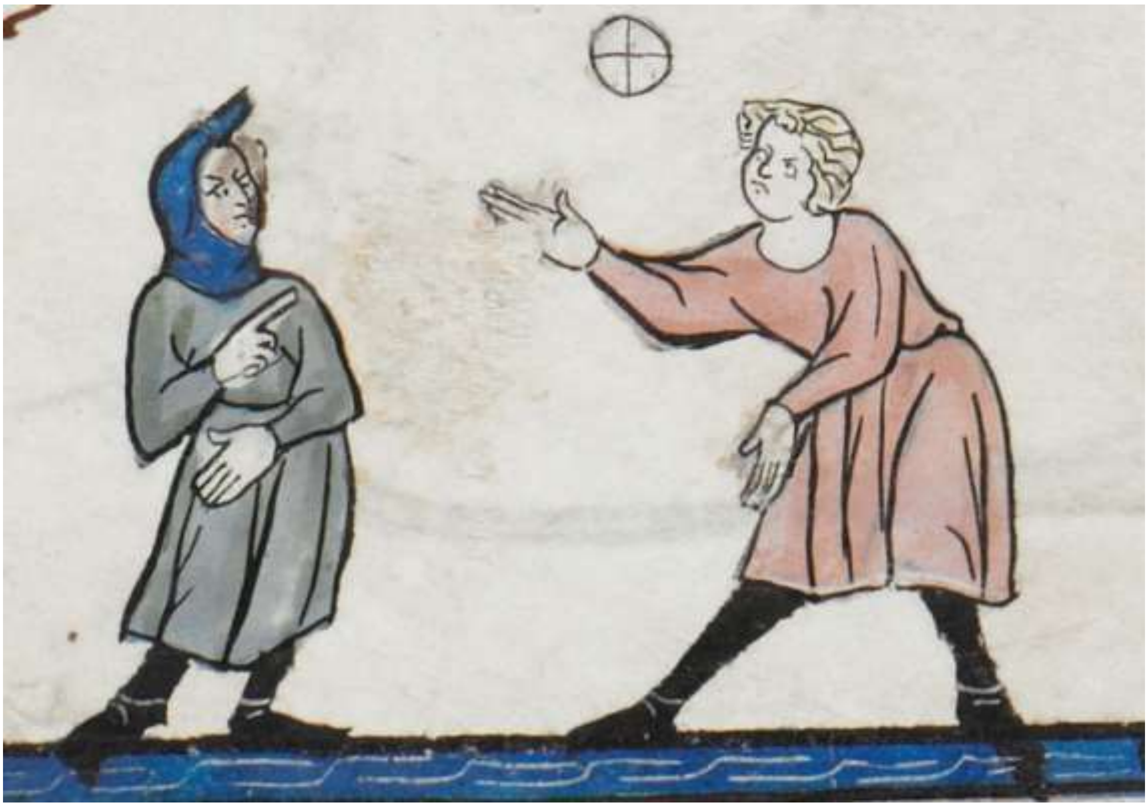

Figure 6b. British Library, MS Royal 20 D.V, ‘Lancelot du Lac’ [French] (1300–1380), fol. 207r

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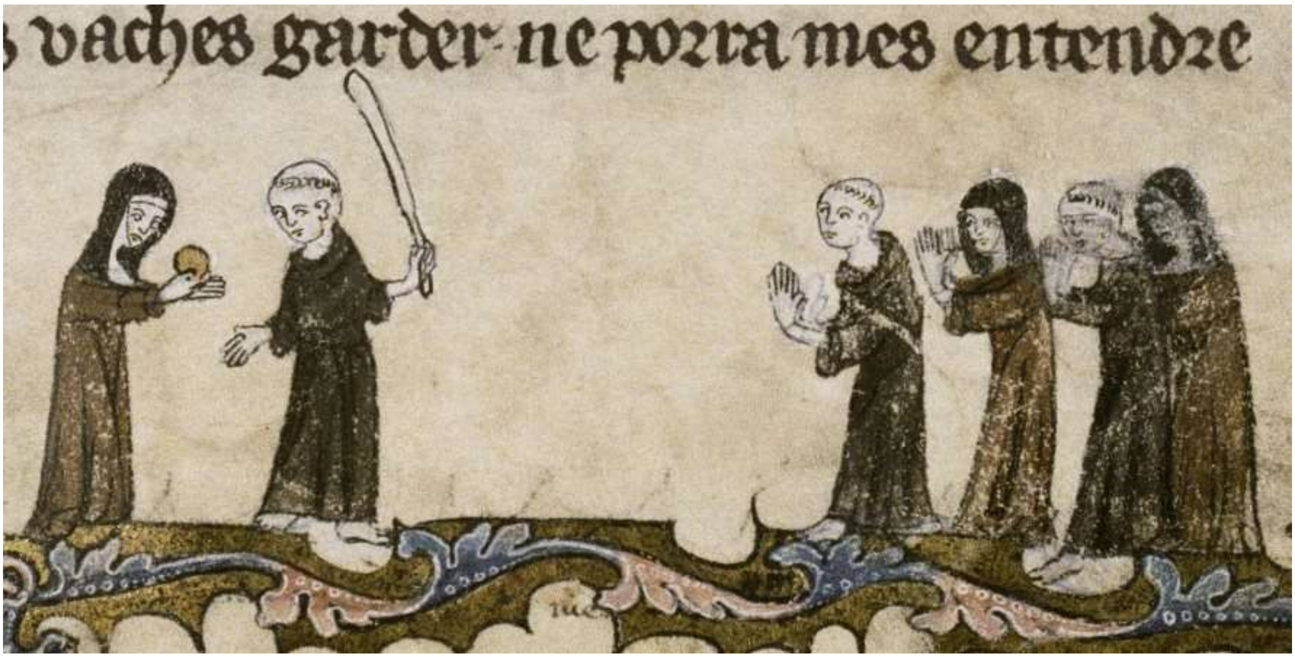
vaches garder ne porra mes entendre

Figure 7a. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Bodleian 264, ‘Romance of Alexander’ (1338–44), part 1 fol. 22r
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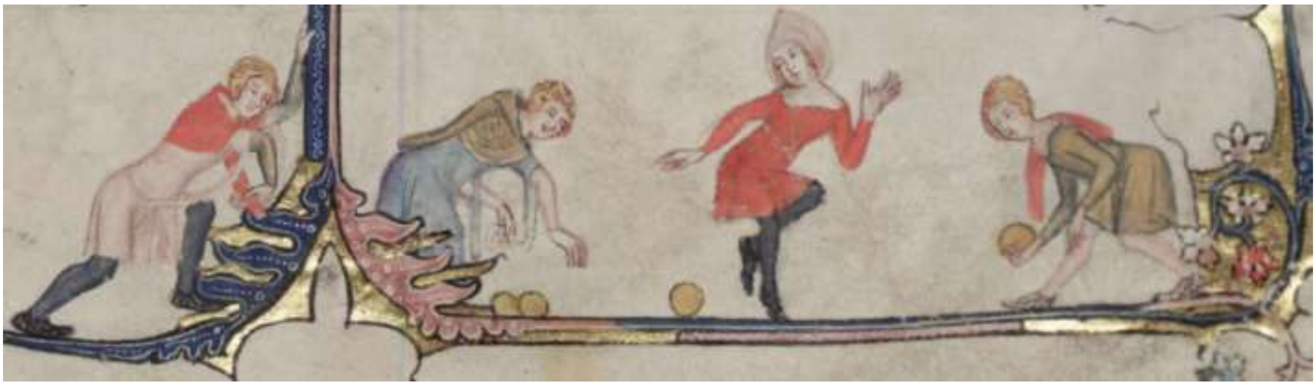

Figure 7b. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Bodleian 264, ‘Romance of Alexander’ (1338–44), part 1 fol. 63r
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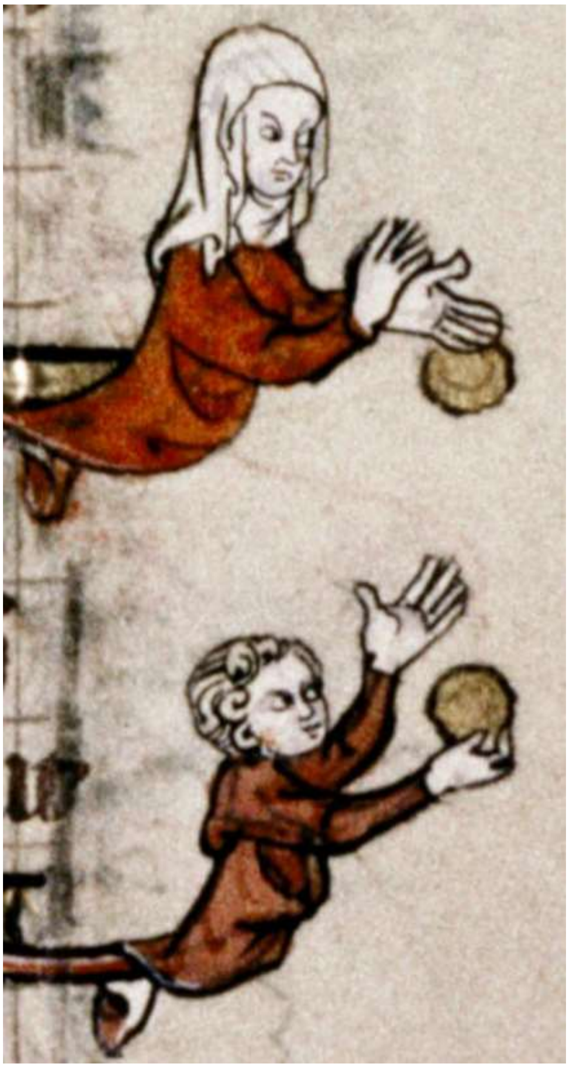


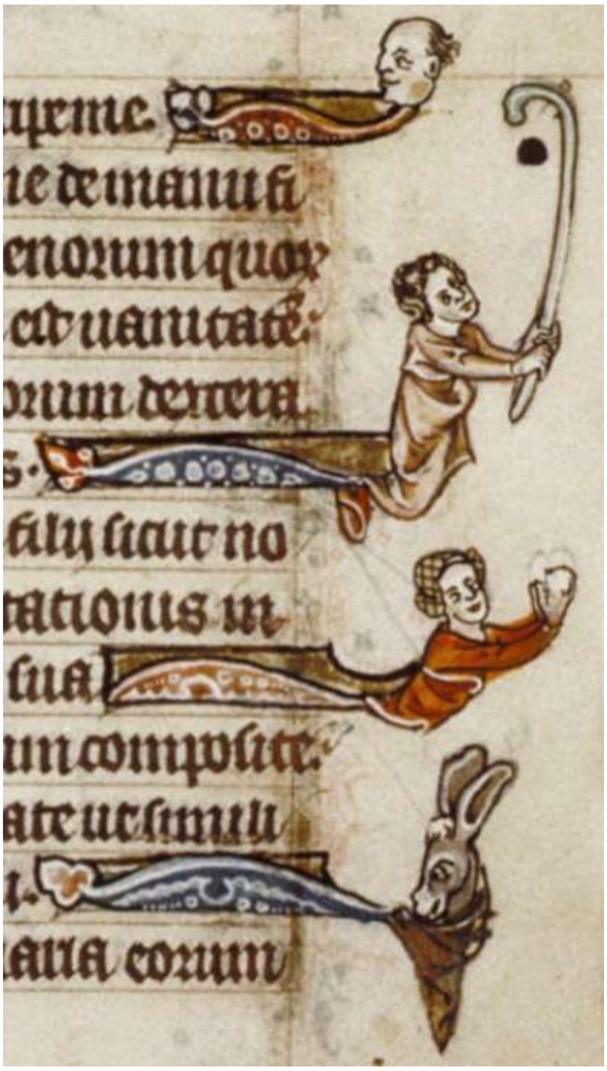


Figure 8 [left]. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 5, ‘Psalter’ (*c*.1320–1330), fol. 123r

https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/ffa96f42-fde8-4f82-93e5-0c645f7f1b94/surfaces/71169b0a-1d1e-4e80-ab28-7f5ae78cc6cf/

Figure 9 [right]. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 6, ‘Psalter’ (*c*.1320–1330), fol. 148r

Figure 10. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 62, ‘Book of Hours’ (late 14th century), fol. 96r

https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/8daf7bf8-31d8-474d-baf9-ddaf79eefb85/surfaces/cdad248e-1386-47ca-9d63-25aae5242ce2/

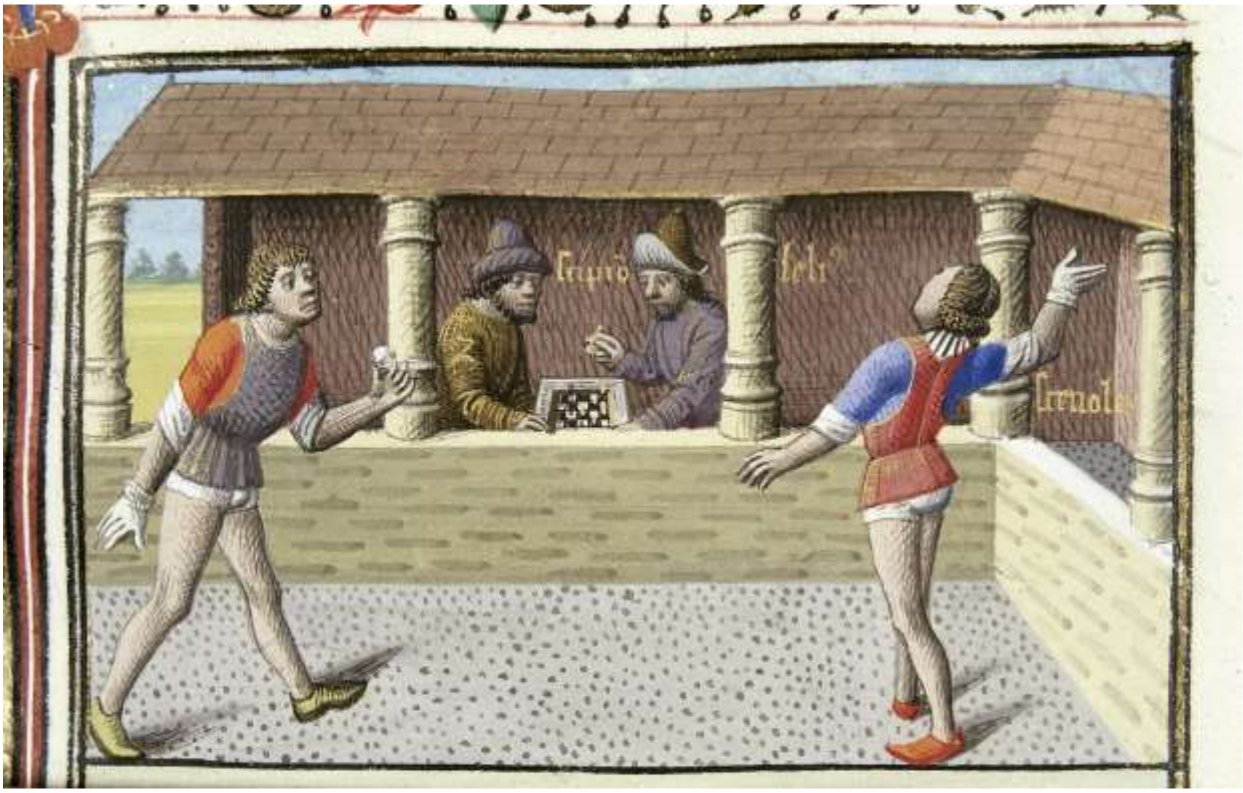


Figure 11. British Library, MS Harleian 4375, Valerius Maximus, ‘Les Fais et les Dis des Romains et de autres gens’ [1473–*c*.1480], fol. 151v, Scaevola plays *jeu de paume* https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=28351

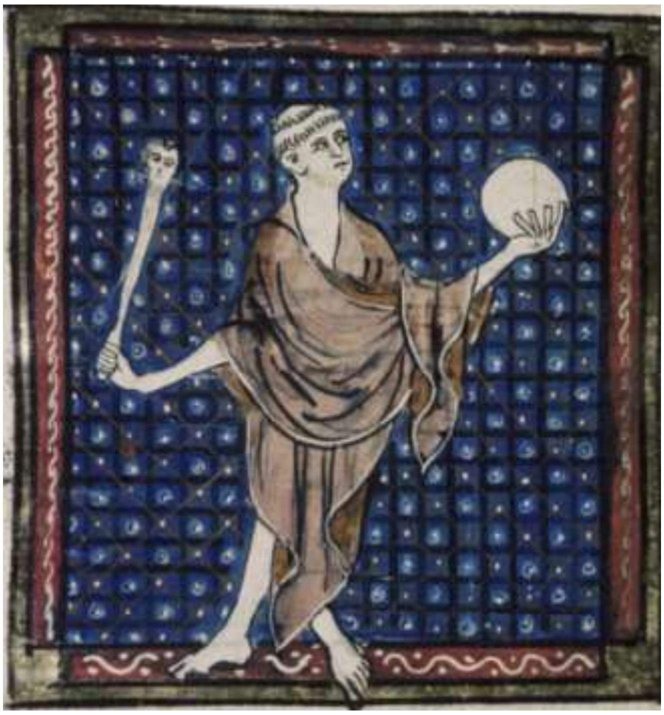


Figure 12. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 211, Petrus Comestor, ‘Bible historiale’ (first quarter of 14th century), fol. 258v

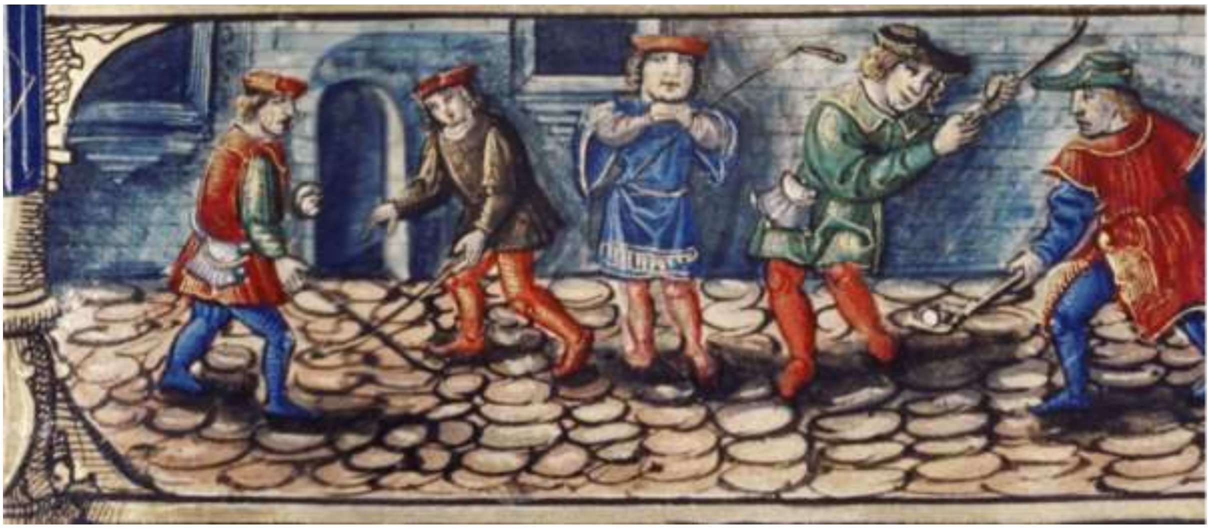


Figure 13a. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 135, ‘Book of Hours’ (first half of 16th century), fol. 2r

https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/4eb2e2d9-1dea-4feb-8c72-c6d36292cce9/surfaces/c25ecbf0-0135-415f-8b7c-700c609cd99f/

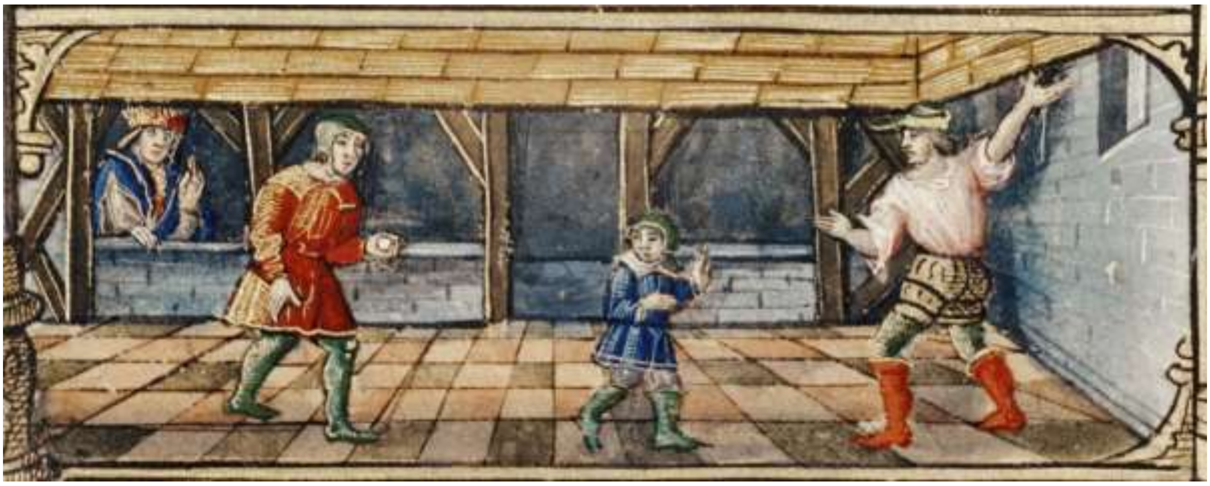


Figure 13b. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 135, ‘Book of Hours’ (first half of 16th century), fol. 7r

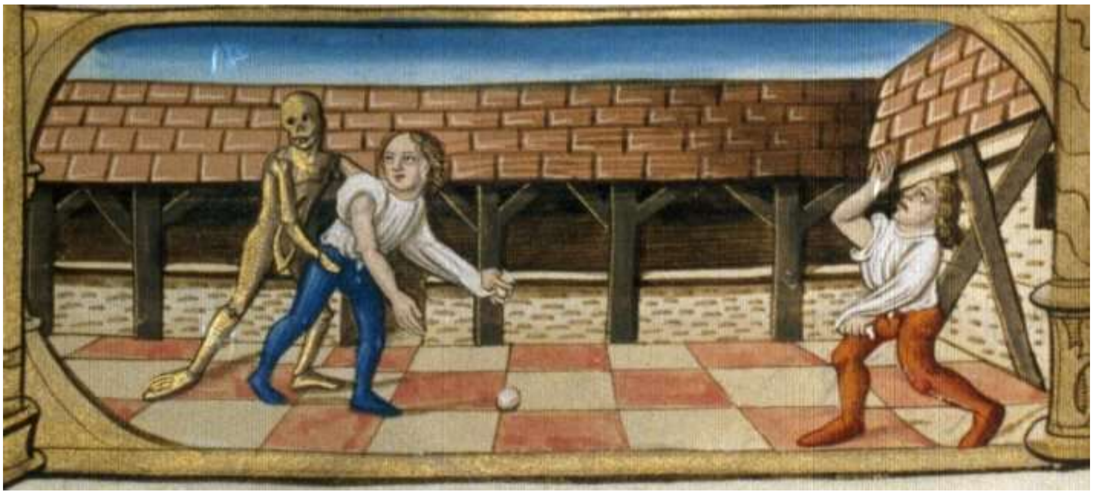


Figure 13c. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 135, ‘Book of Hours’ (first half of 16th century), fol. 87v

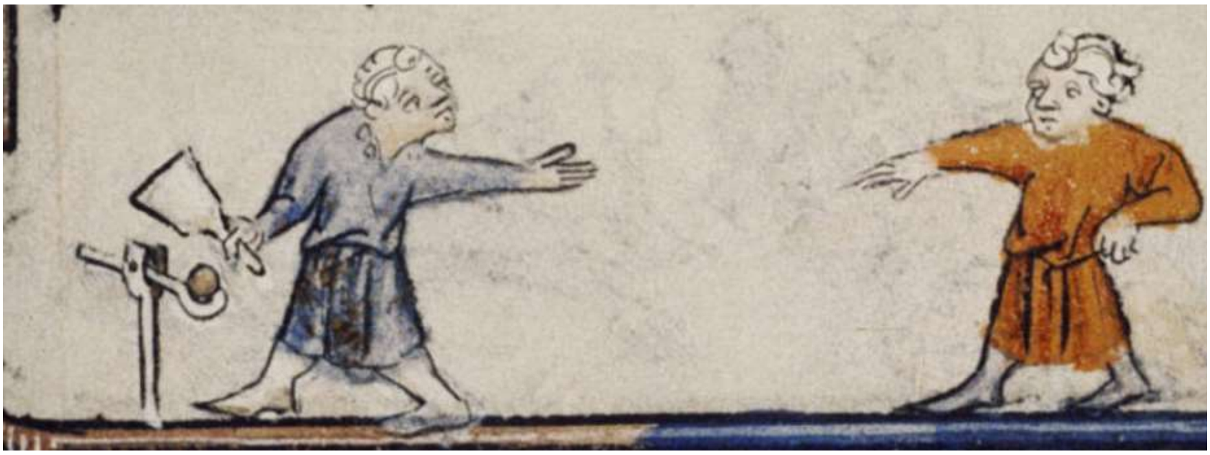
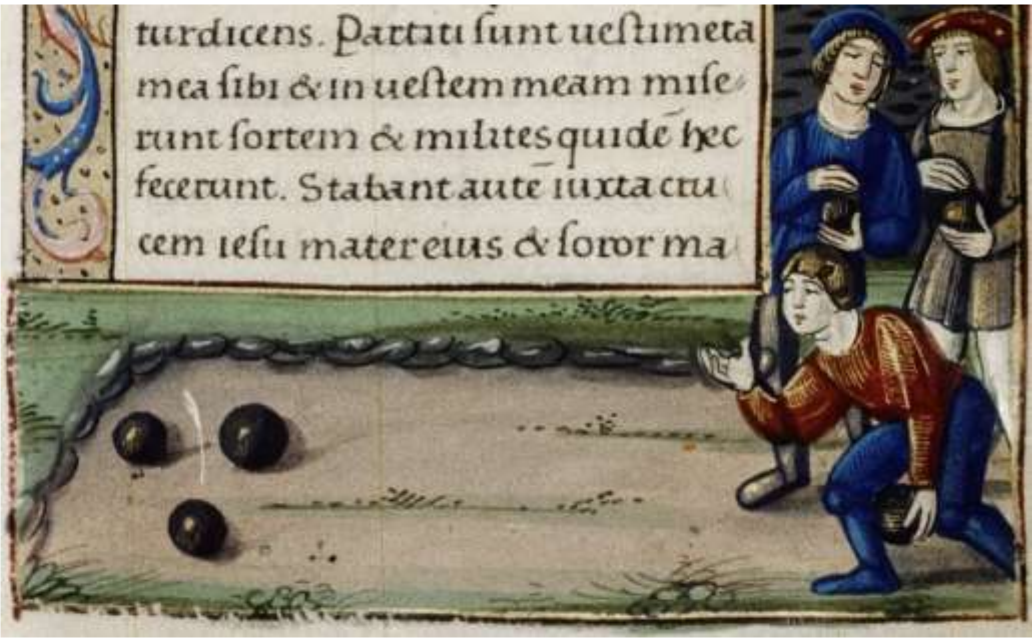


Figure 14. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 62, ‘Book of Hours’ (late 14th century), fol. 122r



turdicens. Partiti ſunt ueſtimeta
mea ſibi & in ueſtem meam miſe
runt ſortem & milites quidē hec
fecerunt. Stabant autē iuxta cru
cem ieſu mater eius & ſoror ma

Figure 15. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 276, ‘Book of Hours’ (second half of 15th century), fol. 12r

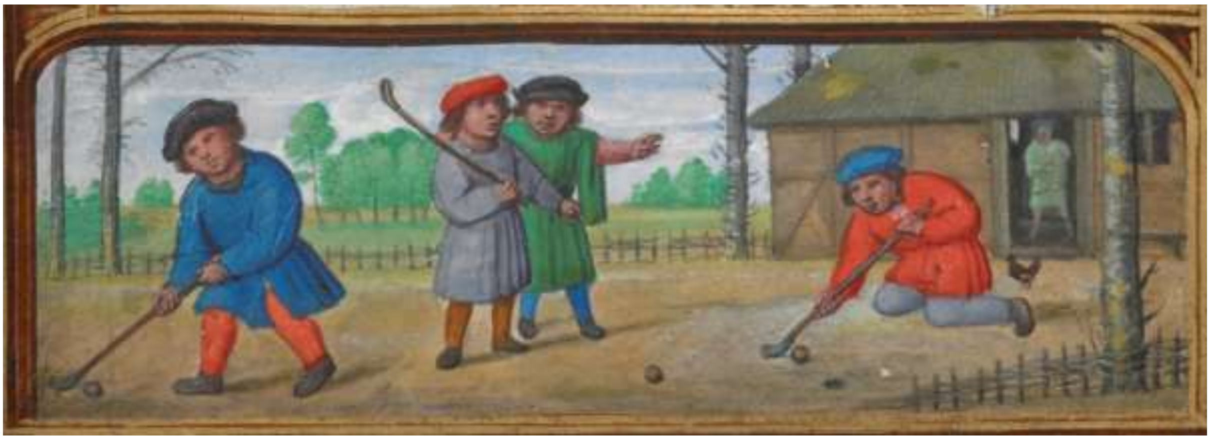


Figure 16. British Library, Add. MS, 24,098, ‘Book of Hours’ [Bruges] (*c*.1540), fol. 27r

http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_24098

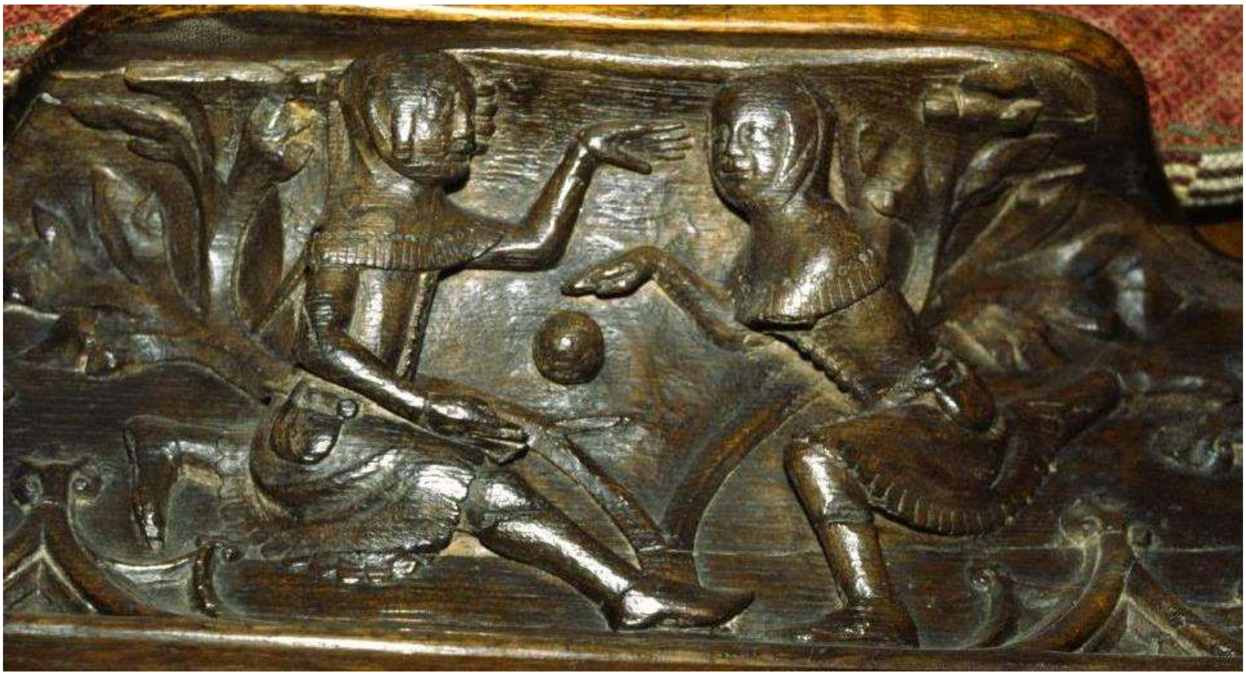


Figure 17a. Misericord, Gloucester Cathedral (mid-14th century) [No. 33]

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www.misericords.co.uk/images/Gloucester/Gloucester 33.13.JPG

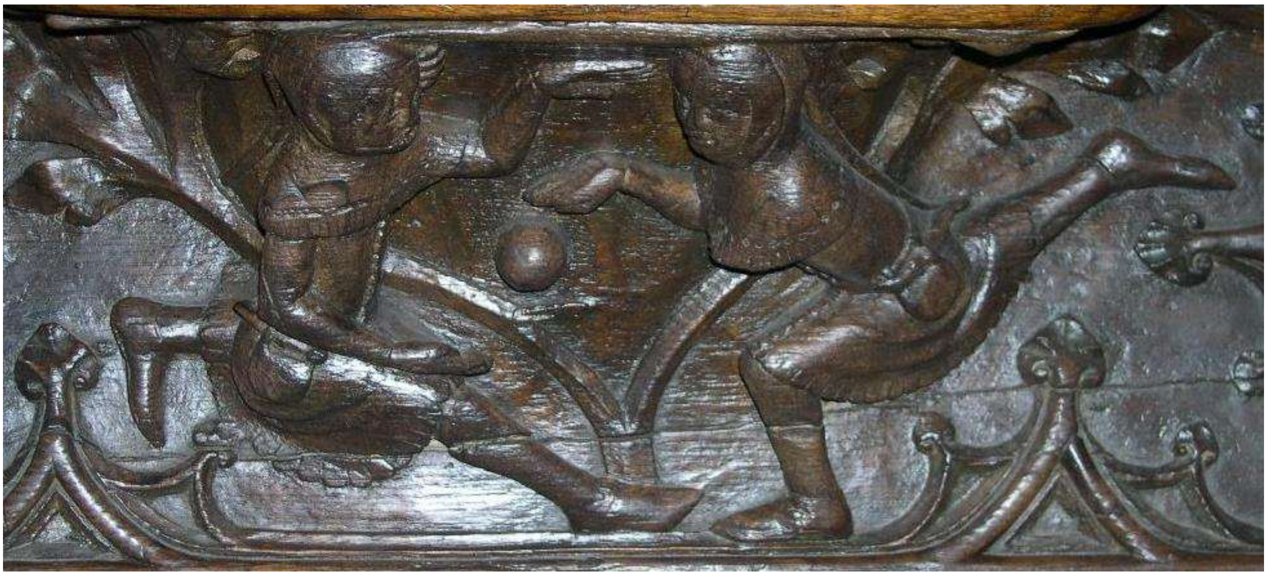

Figure 17b. Misericord, Gloucester Cathedral (mid-14th century) [No. 33]

www.misericords.co.uk/images/Gloucester/Gloucester 33.6.jpg

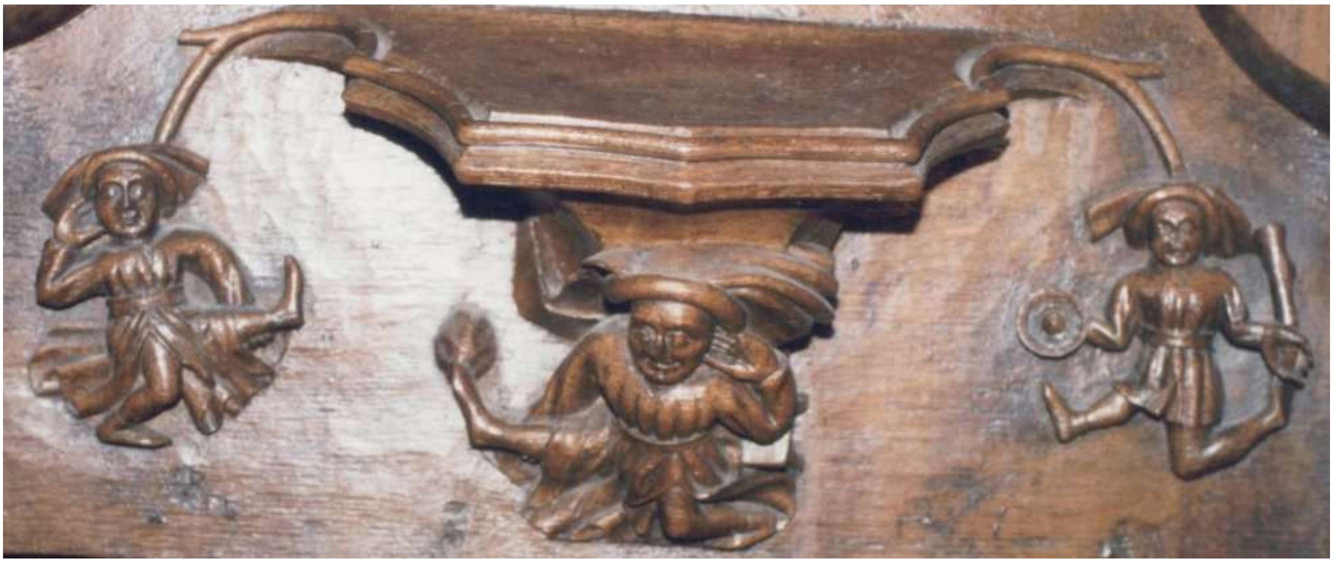

Figure 18a. Misericord, All Souls College, Oxford (mid-15th century)

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http://www.misericords.co.uk/images/All%20Souls-Oxford/N19.jpg

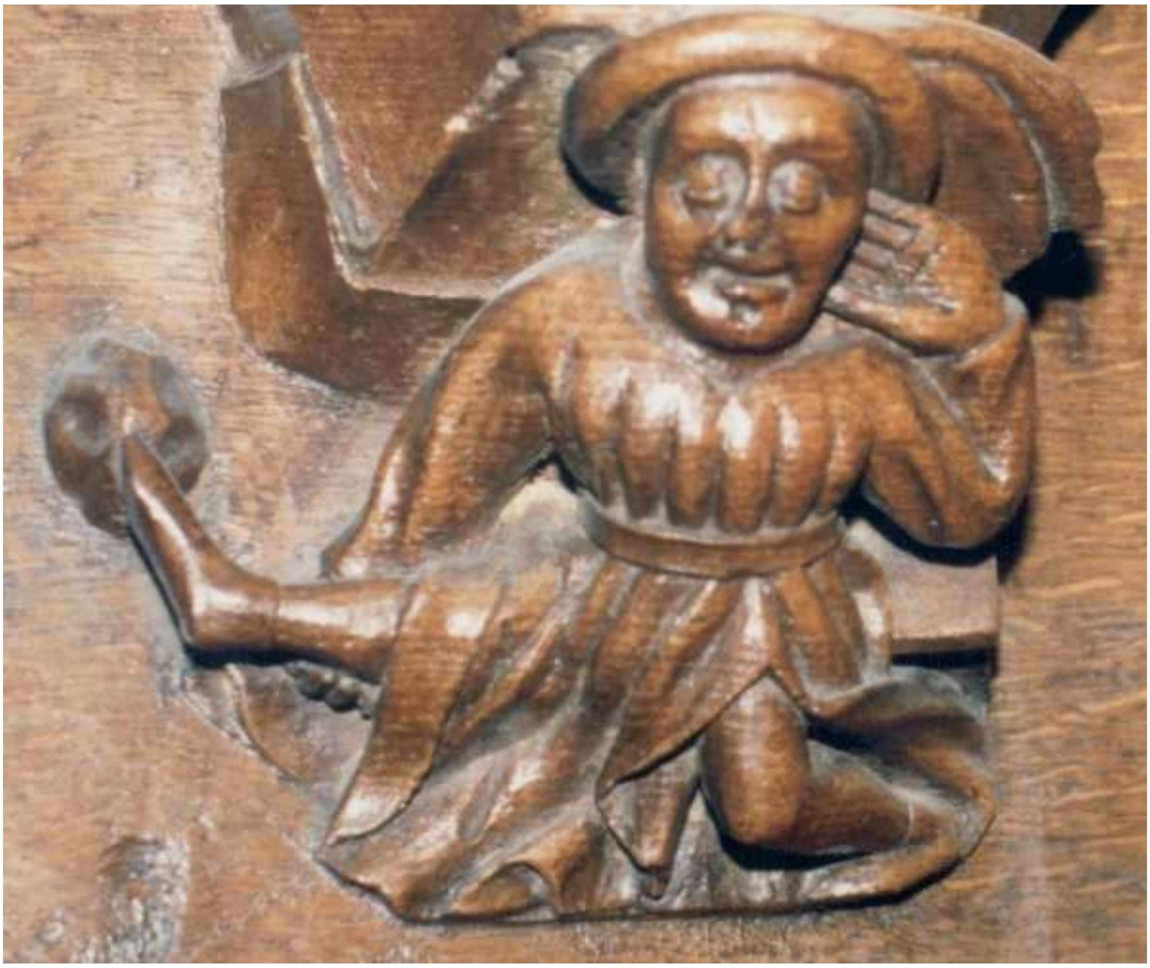

Figure 18b. Misericord, All Souls College, Oxford (mid-15th century) [detail]

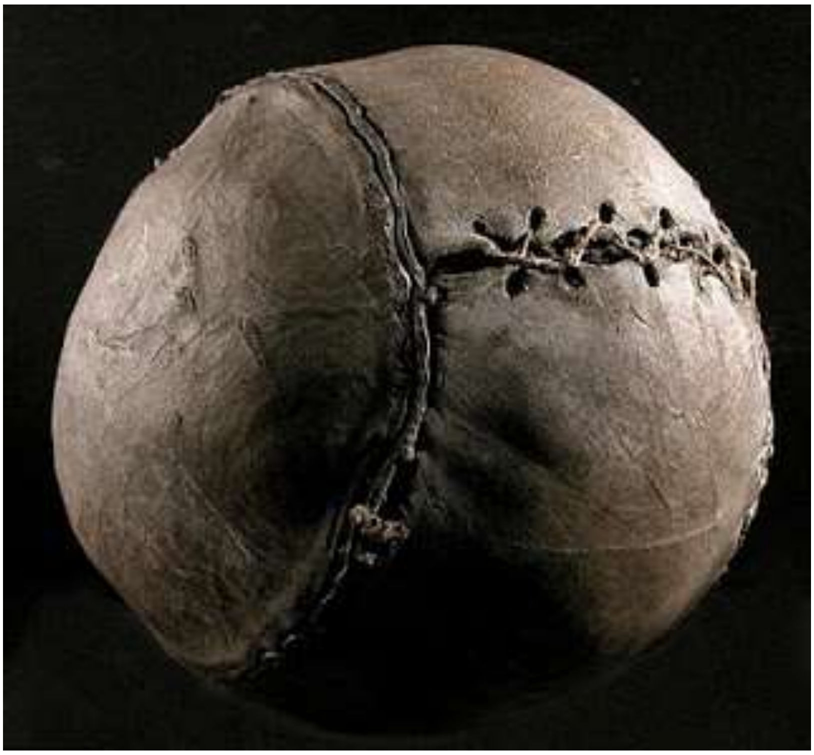

Figure 19. Ball preserved in rafters of the Queen’s Chamber in Stirling Castle in the 1540s; it was apparently made from a pig’s bladder, covered in cow leather, stitched and measured about 15cms in diameter. It was discovered in 1981 and is now held at the Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum
http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/dYJ9eIf5QVagcSv4vUAh0Q
https://emotions3d.wordpress.com/portfolio/worlds-oldest-football/

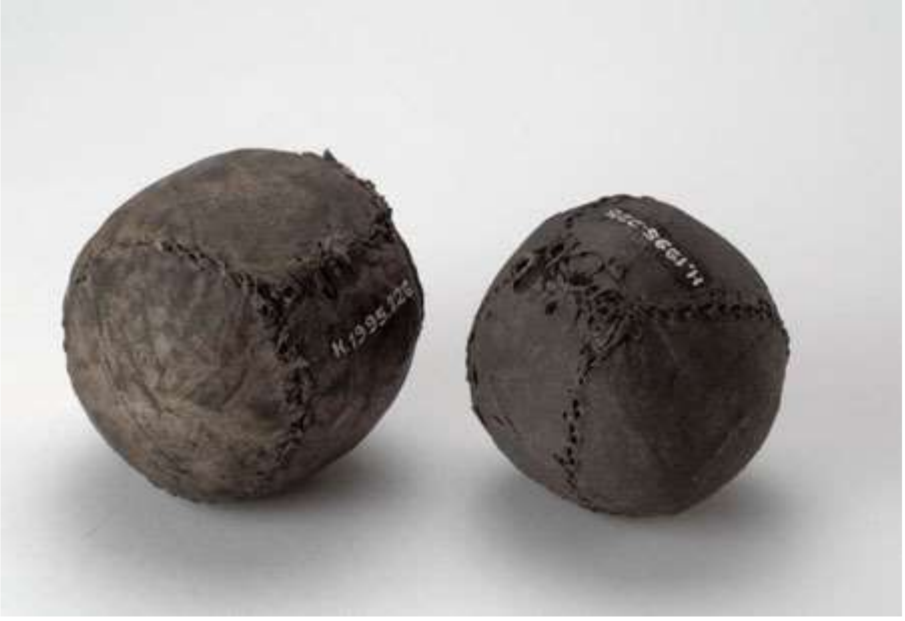

Figure 20. Caich Leather balls (*c*.1600–*c*.1800). They were found in Advocates Close, Edinburgh. The balls are hand sewn and stuffed with straw
http://nms.scran.ac.uk/database/record.php?usi=000-100-103-137-C