

QUOITS IN BRYNMAWR

by Eifion Lloyd Davies

(This article is a “work in progress” and much more work is needed for it to be complete. I am hoping that someone reading this will remember something about quoit playing in Brynmawr and may even have photographs tucked away).

In Issue 10 of the Forum Journal I wrote a short article on the quoit pitch at Nant-y-Glo and wondered then if the Brynmawr men also played. This set me on a new task to find out whether the town had a quoit team and how good they were.

I first came across the game of quoits watching my father play at various agricultural fairs and very good he was too. He played with heavy horseshoes and had been playing since he was a young man, horses were his life at that time as it was to most of his friends. Woe betide any child who ran into the field of play as he or she would probably end up in hospital or even worse. Quoit was a game we looked at and occasionally took part in once we could lift the heavy shoe.

The game itself was quite simple though different areas had slightly different rules. Is the peg flush with the ground, protruding out of the ground at an angle or straight? Was there string tied to the peg for ease of measuring and so on? Albert Baker in his article “Quoits as I know it” refers to the game thus:

The dictionary states that "Quoiting" is to throw or pitch a flattish circular ring of iron at an iron pin fixed in the ground but to the present player it is really more than that, because with the march of time the game of quoits has had standard rules and regulations to comply with. It is played on an 18 or 21 yard pitch over which the iron quoit weighing anything from five to 14lbs, must be thrown with accuracy to ring the pin, called the hob, set in stiff clay, surrounded by a box framework.

So far so good but imagine throwing a 14lb ring, (that's 7kg to you youngsters or 7 bags of sugar), over 29 meters to hopefully land on the peg. Naturally there had been discussions about the weight of the quoits; some preferred the heavy ring and those not able to throw that weight, which I imagine were in the majority opposed it.

Not all appreciated the game of quoits, the Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian reported in 1846 (referring to the use of Bibles in schools to teach reading as Bibles were cheap as opposed to other teaching books);

“Some good and conscientious men will tell you, that they do so to familiarise the dear children with the saving knowledge of the blessed word; that to teach them history, natural or political is a device of the devil and savours of mammon; it is the secularising sin of the day; it leads them to think of quoits, marbles, ball playing and other inventions of Satan.”

As reported in the Merthyr Telegraph in 1861 a Reverend gentleman told his church that pitching quoits was the “devil’s work”.

But to get back to Brynmawr and the quoit team. The town itself is quite young probably not much more than 200 years old which puts its birth at around the 1800s. Nant-y-Glo iron works was in full blast as were Clydach and Beaufort, Brynmawr had become a dormitory town for these industrial posts. Nearby there were patch workings for iron stone, quarries to be quarried and tramroads to be maintained making the town a very important centre and social life had taken root.

I have yet to find exactly when the quoit club in the town was first formed or where the quoit pitch was but they were certainly playing competitions by 1891. More often than not quoit pitches tended to be in pub back yards. In August of that year an away match against Pontypridd was abandoned due to the wet conditions but I believe it was a win for the Brynmawr team. By 1892 the club was fully formed and very active, travelling some distance to games. An evening competition held in September 1892 with Brynmawr playing against Hereford ended in a win for the home team. It was reported as “being one of the best contested matches witnessed in the hills”. A very large crowd had gathered to watch the match, a witness to the popularity of the game. In October 1892 a Challenge Shield had been proposed for all quoits playing clubs in South Wales. A meeting was held at the Angel Hotel in Cardiff and the Vice Chair was a Mr. W. H Price from Brynmawr, (see photo below). He was a player of some renown and the leading light of the Brynmawr club. Quoit is often thought of as a working class game but W.H. Price was an auctioneer by trade. At the meeting in Cardiff the assembled had been presented with a copy of the London Quoit Club rules and these, with some changes, were accepted as the rules for the South Wales clubs. It was resolved that a Quoit Club Union be formed with a Mr. Ward from Barry as the secretary.



By January 1893 the South Wales Star reported on another meeting at the Angel in Cardiff of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Quoit Association and among the representatives were members of the Brynmawr club. There were elections of officers and Lord Tredegar was unanimously invited to be president subject to him accepting the post, Mr Ward of Barry was to become general secretary as he had taken the initiative to form the organisation. The laws and rules of the game were read and with very little alterations were accepted. By April though a "Quoit Player" writing in the local paper said that Colonel T. Ward Esq. J.P. of the Gwernyfed Park had accepted the presidency and among the vice presidents we find a Dr. Bevan from Nant y Glo and Mr. W. J. Evans from Beaufort. Among the general committee is Mr. W. H. Price of Brynmawr. There were 23 clubs on the roll but with many enquiries coming in from Western Districts. It seems from the report that quoits was very much an Eastern Valleys and The Marches pastimes.

During June 1895 the Brynmawr Club's new season started with a visit to Hereford to play their quoit team in front of a large number of spectators. Sadly Brynmawr lost the game by 30 points but after the match both teams adjourned to the White Lion (Hereford) where they dined. Mr. Rogers of the Hereford Club presided with Mr. W. H. Price of Brynmawr as Vice Chairman. On giving the toast, Mr. Rogers said "There was no team the Hereford Club felt more pleasure in meeting than the Brynmawr Club, not only because they encountered such jolly good fellows but because they meet men who could play the game" (This was followed with huge applause). Brynmawr responded and the evening's entertainment included songs from Mr. Judd of Brynmawr. It is a shame that somehow or other the Hereford papers decided to call the Brynmawr team "The Brynmawr Conservative Quoit Club".

Another blow to Brynmawr came when they lost to Cwm in the quarter finals of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Quoit Club Cup. But

Brynmawr was not to be left out of the finals as the winning team was presented with the cup by Mr. W. H. Price of Brynmawr.

The town's quoit club may not have won many trophies during 1895 but the Merthyr Guardian reported in September saying that "Brynmawr Club is second to none in Wales" and again in October reports that the "Brynmawr Quoit Club still holds its own. It is undoubtedly one of the finest quoits club to be found anywhere".

In September the team yet again played against Hereford this time at Brynmawr with another win for the home team but there was a far more important match to be played, the final for the marble clock open to members of the Brynmawr Quoit Club. In the pitch were Mr. W. H. Price (captain), J. Charles (vice captain) and W. Corbett. The captain won with a substantial majority and was in splendid form and everybody admired his play. The marble clock incidentally was donated by Mr. Isaac Isaacs. (As an aside it has been suggested this was Barney Isaacs's father or grandfather, if anybody can confirm this I'd be grateful).

In 1896 the Evening Express carried the results of a game played between Brynmawr and Penyrheol Gerrig which is near Merthyr. A very dull, rainy day but a good result as Brynmawr won even though they were without one of their best pitchers, Mr. W. Herbert. Following the match both teams dined at the Griffin Hotel which is now the Brynmawr Social Club. A return match was held in August this time at Penyrheol Gerrig with yet another win for the Brynmawr Team who according to the Merthyr, Dowlais and Aberdare Echo are "an exceedingly strong team. Both Hereford and Cheltenham had recently been beaten by Brynmawr".

By 1896, international matches were being held, Wales against England. In a match held at Cheltenham in September Brynmawr was well to the fore with Mr. W. H. Price as Captain but alongside him were Ivor Cook and W. Herbert, both from the Brynmawr team. It had rained earlier in the day making the pitch nice and soft but the rain cleared up before the start of the match. Both teams were strong and both captains expected victory. A good crowd were there to watch the game and the end result was a win for England by 99 points.

In July 1897 another International match between Wales and England with again Mr. W. H. Price of Brynmawr as Captain, also included in the team were Ivor Cook and W. Herbert and W. Gibbs from the Nant y Glo team. This time it was a win for the Welsh team.

The Evening Express in 1898 carried the report of the executive meeting held in Cardiff. The meeting was to choose the players to represent Wales to play against England at Crystal Palace on Whit Monday. From Brynmawr the following were chosen: Mr. W. H. Price again as Captain, Ivor Cook, W. Herbert and W. Gibbs. I'm assuming that Mr Gibbs had joined the Brynmawr Club from Nant y Glo. The team were to leave Cardiff at 11.25pm on Saturday night and return on the Monday at 11.30pm. A photograph of the team that had beaten England at Bridgend the previous year was presented to Mr. W. Riley J.P. who is now the president of the association.

And that is as far as I've gone with my research. I have yet to find the photograph mentioned above which would include three Brynmawr players and when playing quoits finally stopped in Brynmawr. All that is for another day.

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