

QUOITS AT NANTYGLO

Coming from a farming area I can well remember my father competing in a quoits tournament at a local agricultural show. They did not use the proper closed quoits but horseshoes which was quite common, plenty of blacksmiths around our valley and horses were essential for the farm work. This of course was before tractors and other modern machinery became the norm. (It sometimes frightens me to realise how old I am).



How well he did I can't remember but I do recall seeing the horseshoe spin around the peg but was it one thrown by dad?

The rules of the game are very simple. A peg is driven into the ground at a slight angle and depending on the area you came from it could protrude out of the ground or be flush with the soil. The object is to throw your quoit or horseshoe on to the peg or as near as possible. Soft ground is preferable as the quoit would then dig into the soil.

To find that there was an actual quoit playing area at Nant y Glo and, as I've been told since, in many of the valley towns came as quite a surprise. To have an actual playing area meant the game was well organised and very popular. I am indebted to Don Griffiths who first told me about the pitch, and to Norman Griffiths for providing the following personal memories of the game being played:

“This game was played in the valleys by out of work miners during the 1930s strike. One of the reasons for its growth was it required no expensive outlay for equipment. All that was required was a round iron ring about six inches in diameter easily made out of a round bar by a blacksmith and a peg set in the ground. You took off your coat and played but you also needed the strength to throw the quoits as they could be quite heavy.



Norman Griffiths holds a quoit at Brynmawr Museum.

From a set distance of around thirty feet the thrower had to attempt to pitch the ring over a peg set in a clay pit, the clay would ensure the quoit stayed where it landed. It was a two team game and each member of the team threw their quoit in turn at the peg. At the end of the throws points were given for the nearest to the peg. If the thrower managed to place the quoit over the peg that won the game but if the next thrower placed his quoit over the one already on the peg he would be the winner. The throwers I can recall threw the quoit using a similar action to an athlete throwing the discus. It took a great deal of strength by the thrower to reach the set distance.

During the lock-out miners had very little to do and games were often played against other teams in the area and a league was set up with set rules of play. Not only were the competitive games played against Welsh teams but also with those from England and even Scotland. The quoit ground at Nantyglo was situated off an access road that ran behind King Street from an entrance next to the Nant-y-glo Workingmens' Club to which both teams retired after a match. The ground was set on the edge of a coal tip with raised amphitheatre-type seating on two sides. This enabled spectators to have a very good view, and as a young boy I saw many games. The pitch had been constructed by miners who had, unfortunately, a great deal of time on their hands, and this must have reduced the boredom they were experiencing.

At the outbreak of war and the coming of full employment, the game went into decline although still played at international level at Cwm near Ebbw Vale.

Eifion Lloyd Davies and Norman Griffiths.