

DOVERS GAMES – AS REPORTED

The earliest account so far found of the Dovers Meeting can be seen on www.britishnewspaperonline. The transcription, by a CCHS volunteer, reads:

OXFORD JOURNAL 22 May 1790

Olympick Games, upon Cotswold Hills. The Anniversary Sport and Assemblies of that great Inventor and Champion of the English Olympicks will this Year be renewed by the Youth of Cotswold, in Honour of that renowned and heroic Gentleman, Mr. Robert Dover, upon that well known Hill called Dover's Hill, near Campden, on Thursday in the Whitsun-Week, where a Purse of Five Guineas will be given to be played at Backswords for real Gamesters, on a Stage erected for that Purpose, Eleven or Thirteen on a Side, to shew Sides upon the Stage by One o'Clock ; but if no Sides appear by that Time, to be then played for by Pairs, the Blood to run one Inch. Likewise Wrestling, and many other rural Pastimes too numerous to be mentioned in this Advertisement. Also an Ox to be roasted, and a Ball at the George Inn, in Campden, the same Evening, as usual. Richard Hands, John Darby, Robert Atkins, Managers.

N. B. There will be other Sport on Friday, as expressed in the Hand Bills.



This sketch is held in the CCHS Archives, and efforts have been made to trace the protagonists and the story, without success.

BACKSWORDS

This originated in the Tudor period and is characterised by a long straight blade, usually single edged, with a complex hilt to protect the hand.

The backsword went through various forms, and is closely related to the singlestick or cudgel – a hazel or willow stave with a hardened leather hilt. These were used at country fairs as a safer form of competition, though split heads, and concussions were extremely common. There are a number of historical sources for Backsword fighting, one of the earliest of which is that of George Silver's 1599 work, *Paradoxes of Defence*.

30 April 1803

Oxford Journal 30 April 1803 - transcription

DOVER's HEROIC MEETING, 1803 THE Prizes for the famous -annual Sports on The Cotswold Hills are this Year as follow, that is to say, on THURSDAY- in the Whitsuntide Week there will be, on DOVER's HILL, the Sum of Five Guineas to be played for at Backswords, by eleven or nine Gamesters on a Side upon a Stage to be erected for that Purpose. If no Sides appear on the stage by Three o'clock in the Afternoon the Money will be played for by Pairs. Also a Hat and Belts to be wrestled for, Gloves and Ribbons to be danced for; likewise a Pig to be run for by Men, and the first Man who catches him by the tail, and holds him one Minute, is to have him. The Prizes for Bowling, Grinning, and Racing, as well as numerous other ancient pastimes, will be as usual.

On FRIDAY those celebrated Sports will be much the same as on the preceding Day. Much Sport is expected. Ordinaries will be provided at the principal Inns in Chipping Campden, as usual, each person who erects a Booth or Shed, in order to sell Wine, Beer, Ale, Cyder, or any Spirituous Liquors, must pay 10s. 6d. toward the Sports. Conductor, Mr. T. CHAMBERLAIN. Chipping Campden, April 19, 1803.

Dover's Meeting

1818.

The high estimation in which this truly laudable Festival is held (being so famed for the celebrated Olympic Games,) is fully evinced by its having been the Admiration of every true and undesigning Briton for more than two Centuries, and is now patronised by the Noble Heroes of the present Age, and by every well wisher for the prosperity of the British Empire.

On **THURSDAY**, in the **WHITSUNTIDE WEEK**,
UPON THAT NOTED AND MOST BEAUTIFUL SPOT,
Called,

DOVER'S HILL,

NEAR CHIPPING CAMPDEN, GLOUCESTERSHIRE,
THE SPORTS WILL COMMENCE WITH
A GRAND MATCH AT BACKSWORDS,
FOR A PURSE OF
TWELVE GUINEAS,

To be played for by Men, either by Sides or by Pairs, as shall be agreed upon, to begin play at three o'clock in the afternoon ;
AND TO BE SUCCEEDED BY

Wrestling, for a Handsome Silver Cup,

BY NINE MEN ON A SIDE; ALSO, THERE WILL BE SEVERAL

Elegant Favors to be Danced for, & an excellent Band of Music will attend;

THE PRIZES TO BE GIVEN FOR

JINGLING, LEAPING, and RUNNING in SACKS, &c. &c.

WILL BE NUMEROUS AND LIBERAL; LIKEWISE THERE WILL BE

A PONEY RACE,

For a **HANDSOME PRIZE**, and a great variety of **Athletic Exercises and Manly Diversions**, not to be described within the limits of a Bill, will conclude the Sports of this day.

And on **FRIDAY**, the Sports will commence with a

HORSE RACE,

FOR A SWEEPSTAKES OF FIVE GUINEAS EACH, WITH THIRTY GUINEAS ADDED THERETO,

For Horses not thorough bred, which have never started against a thorough bred one, or won a Plate, and which have been Hunted the last season, either with *Colonel Berkeley's, Lord Middleton's, the Duke of Beaufort's, or the Worcestershire Fox Hounds*. Four years Old, to carry 10 stone and 5lb. Five years Old, 10 stone and 12lb. Six years Old, and Aged, 11 stone and 2lb. the best of Three 2 Miles and a Quarter Heats; the Horses to be Named at the House of Mr. ANSTONS, the Old King's Arms Inn, in Chipping Campden aforesaid, on or before Wednesday, in the Whitsuntide Week, being the 13th day of May. A Certificate of the Age and Qualification must be produced, if required, as it will be useless for any Gentlemen to attempt to enter a Horse after the time appointed under any pretence whatever; therefore, Gentlemen are requested to observe the Articles, as they must be attended to; four Subscribers or no Race; all Stakes to be paid to the Clerk of the Course, before starting. To be followed by an immense variety of

The Cotswold Amusements and Ancient Sports,

PECULIAR TO THIS RENOWNED MEETING.

N. B. The Horses will be started precisely at four o'clock in the Afternoon, and if any dispute arise, the same shall be finally settled by the Steward, (who will be appointed by the Gentlemen of Chipping Campden, at their Meeting, previous to the Race, as usual). Proper persons will be employed to keep the Course clear, and all Dogs seen thereon will be destroyed. No person will be allowed to erect a Booth or Shed to sell Wine or any sort of Beverage in without previously paying one Guinea to the Conductor of the Sports. A Main of Cocks will be fought each Morning, in Campden, to begin at 10 o'clock. An excellent Company of Comedians will perform at the old Theatre, in Chipping Campden, each Evening. Also, Ordinaries, Balls, Concerts each day, as usual. Tickets for the Stewards Ball, on Friday evening, at the Noel Arms Inn, Ladies' 5s. Gentlemen's 10s. 6s. to be had at the Bar. On Saturday a Wake will be held in Campden, and all Diversions as usual.

Chipping Campden, April 13th, 1818.

R. ANDREWS, Clerk.

Stratford, Printed at Barnacle's Letter-press and Copper-plate Office, where Engraving is executed in the best style of Workmanship, and Books neatly bound.

Transcription of 1818 poster

For horses not thoroughbred which have never started against a thoroughbred one, or won a Plate, and which have Hunted the last season, either with Colonel Berkeley, Lord Middleton's, the Duke of Beaufort's or the Worcestershire Fox Hounds. Four Years Old, to carry 10 stones and 8 lb. Five years Old, 10 stones and 12 lb. Six years Old and Aged, 11 stone and 2 lb., the best of Three 2 Miles and Quarter Heats, the Horses to be named at the House of Mr. Andrews, The old Kings Arms Inn, in Chipping Campden aforesaid, on or before Wednesday in the Whitsontide Week, being the 13th day of May. Certificate of the Age and Qualification must be produced if required as it will be useless for any Gentleman to attempt to enter a Horse after the time appointed under any pretence whatsoever, therefore Gentlemen are requested to observe the Articles as they must be attended to. Four subscribers or no Race, all stakes to be paid to the Clerk of the Course before starting. To be followed by an immense variety of COTSWOLD AMUSEMENTS AND ANCIENT SPORTS

Peculiar to this renowned meeting

NB The horses will be started precisely at four o'clock in the afternoon and if any dispute arises the xxx will be finally settled by the Steward who will be appointed by the Gentlemen of Chipping Campden at their meeting previous to the event as usual. Proper persons will be employed to keep the course clear and all dogs seen thereon will be destroyed. No person will be allowed to erect a Booth or shed to sell wine or any sort of beverage without previously paying one Guinea to the Conductor of the Sports. A Main of cocks will be fought each morning in Campden, to begin at ten o'clock. An excellent Company of comedians will perform at the old Theatre in Chipping Campden each evening. Also Ordinaries, Balls, concerts each day as usual. Tickets for the Stewards Ball on Friday evening at the Noel Arms Inn. Ladies & Gentlemen 10s, to be had at the Bar. On Saturday a Wake will be held in Campden and all Diversions as usual.

Dover's Meeting

1822.

On **THURSDAY**, in the **WHITSUNTIDE WEEK**,
UPON THAT HIGHLY ADMIRERD AND MATCHLESS SPOT
Called,

DOVER'S HILL,
NEAR CHIPPING CAMPDEN, GLOUCESTERSHIRE,

The Sports of this renowned Meeting will commence with

A MATCH at BACKSWORDS,

BY MEN,

FOR A PURSE OF TEN GUINEAS,

To be played for as shall be agreed upon, and to begin play at THREE O'CLOCK in the Afternoon;

TO BE SUCCEEDED BY

Wrestling, by Skilful Men,

FOR VERY LIBERAL PRIZES;

Also, Dancing for Elegant Favors,

AND EXCELLENT BANDS OF MUSIC WILL ATTEND, TO PLAY ALTERNATELY;

THE PRIZES FOR

JINGLING, BOWLING, RUNNING IN SACKS,

WITH AN INNUMERABLE VARIETY

Of the celebrated Olympic Games,

Peculiar to this Ancient Meeting, will be equal if not superior to those of last Year.

And, on **FRIDAY**, the Sports will commence with a

Poney



Race,

FOR A HANDSOME PRIZE;

To be run for by Ponies not more than twelve Hands and a Half High, the best of three Heats; not less than three to start; to start precisely at four o'clock. To be followed by

BACKSWORD PLAYING,

And an immense number of the justly famed Cotswold Sports,

FOR WHICH THIS MEETING IS DECIDEDLY PREMINENT.

N. B. The Ponies must be entered at **MR. THOMAS CHAMBERLAIN'S**, in the High-street, Chipping Campden, on the day preceding the Race, between the hours of twelve and three in the afternoon. No Person will be permitted to erect a Booth on the Hill, to sell Wine or any sort of Liquor in, without previously paying fifteen Shillings each, to the Conductor of the Sports. A Main of Cocks will be fought, each Morning, at the Hare and Hounds Inn, in Campden. Also, excellent Ordinaries, Plays, Balls, and Consorts, each day, as usual. On Saturday a Wake will be held in Campden with numerous Diversions.

Chipping Campden, April 27th, 1822.

MR. T. CHAMBERLAIN, CONDUCTOR.

Stratford: Printed by W. Barnacle, Appraiser and Auctioneer.

DOVER'S MEETING 1849.

It is now Two Months and Thirty-eight years since that noble, generous, and heroic gentleman, Mr. ROBERT DOVER, instituted the highly celebrated and successful Orange Races, for which this race and distinguished Favourite, whose proceeds of all events, and which are now patronized by Charles and Marie, and sustained by all ranks, are, and have ever been, the chief support and main support for which the Kingdom is so fully famed.

ON THURSDAY IN THE WHITSUN WEEK

The good old times will be revived with a spirit of hilarity, and a generous subscription for the amusement of Her Majesty's subjects, commencing at Two o'clock, with

CLIMBING A POLE FOR A LEG OF MUTTON!

Scene 2nd.—Will be a **DONKEY RACE**, open to all comers, for a Bridle and Whip, value 15s., no Gentleman to start more than one Donkey, and three to start or no race. To be rode by **GENTLEMEN JOCKEYS**.

Scene 3rd.—Boys and Girls to dip for Oranges, and to eat Buns dipped in treacle with their hands tied.

AFTER WHICH TWO DOZEN OF

BELTS WILL BE WRESTLED FOR,

TO CONTEND FOR WHICH, BONS OF KING BLOOD AND METAL ARE REQUIRED TO BE ON THE TUB.

The Sports of the day will conclude with **Dancing for Ribbons, Jumping in Sacks**, and various other Amusements, too numerous to particularize.

ON FRIDAY, AT TWO O'CLOCK,

THE SPORTS WILL COMMENCE WITH A

WRESTLING MATCH FOR A SILVER WATCH!

To be contended for by five men on each side; after which

A HURDLE RACE

FOR
A HANDSOME SILVER CUP, of the Value of £6 6s.

There, seven round Dover's Hill, over four flights of fair leaping hurdles, each round, to carry eleven stone weight each. Entrance, Ten Shillings. A winner of any race previous to the day of racing, to carry 17lb. extra; three under eleven hands high to be allowed 15lb. for every inch, the horses to be entered at Mr. Wm. Drury's, Swan Inn, Compton, before twelve o'clock on the day before the race. Open to horses of all descriptions.

AFTER WHICH

A SWEEPSTAKES

Of Five Shillings each, with a Prize and the entrance money for the Cup added, to be run for by the horses bred in the five races, to carry ten stone each. There, seven round Dover's Hill, over five flights of Hurdles. The winner of the five races to pay five shillings for stakes, &c., and of the second race ten shillings and sixpence.

A Respectable Person will be appointed as UMPIRE.

A GRAND DISPLAY OF BACKSWORDS!

For a Silver Laced Hat, with a purse added, by ten men on each side. After which will be

A DONKEY RACE:

Subject to the same conditions as on Thursday. Prizes to be contended for with single pairs of Backswords, and various other interesting sports will take place.

The elegant Evening will be ushered in by a **BERRY DANCE**, to commence at Nine o'clock.

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN!

EXCELLENT BANDS of MUSIC will ATTEND EACH DAY.

At Dover will be appointed to read a Book upon the Hill, for the sale of all sorts of Liquors or Ale, without paying 4d before Monday, 26th day of May, or 4d extra will be charged (which will free him from any other demand) to be paid to Mr. DRURY, Swan Inn, Compton. All STALLS for Cakes, Oranges, &c. to be paid for according to their rates. A Person will be appointed to conduct the Sports, and his decision shall be final, or whom he may appoint. Printed at 52, St. PAUL'S CHURCH, BIRMINGHAM.

Poster in the CCHS Archives

Josephine Griffiths recounts in one of her journals:

A few evenings later on, [c.1900] when we were all sitting together again, father's thoughts and conversation reverted once more to his young days,. Like most old folks, he can remember the times of long ago, as though the events had happened the week before last. This special evening, The Dover's Hill Sports played part in the narrative.

It appears that the eminence now called Dover's Hill, was in his young days known as the Pasture. It was a damp swampy place full of rivulets, streams and marshes. "many a snipe have I shot there", adds father, with a certain amount of feeling, that such good sport was not now forthcoming.

"You must remember, that in those days', he continued, "there was no hedge at the top of the hill; and of course I am speaking of the last twenty five years the Games existed. It was the navvies who brought them into discredit; and they were such an awful set of fellows, that Canon Browne [sic] (Bourne) very rightly, got their sport stopped. This was in 1851, when the navvies, who mostly came from the Black Country, were laying down the railway here.

The Games were held on the ploughed fields between Kingcombe Road, and what is now called Dover's Hill. i.e. the Pasture, which in those days was an open common covered with turf and gorse, and a famous place for an exhibition of that kind. I have known these Games bring thousands of people into the place, and we, like other big houses, had a kind of house party for them, and invited our men friends".

"The backword play was marvelous, and reminded one of sword exercises in the army, but after the navvies came here, some of the fights were awful. They fought till all was blue! I can remember, quite well, on a Sunday afternoon, seeing five fights in the street, between our house and the George and Dragon Inn, all going on at the same time. It was a usual occurrence".

The Cotswold Games were instituted (or revived) by Robert Dover about 1610, who gave his name to the hill, on which they were held. They consisted of coursing, racing, backword play and other sports, and were held from Thursday to Saturday in Whitsun week, the lastnamed day culminating in a Wake at Campden, still carried on, under the name of Scuttlebrook Wake.

These Games were dropped in the Civil Wars, revived at the Restoration 1660, and finally stopped in 1852, in which year the enclosure of the common land was carried

out, and the large space where the Sports had been held were awarded to those, who had been owners of rights in the common.

In the first half of the nineteenth century it has been reported that people would travel by coach, or ride sixty miles to be present at these Games; and it was a great holiday time, during Whitsun week, for all the young people for miles around. Father used to say, the place covered with brooks, on the south side of Weston Park, looked like a village; and it was estimated, that about thirty thousand people were gathered together on that occasion. One or two other old folks have mentioned the fact, of being particularly impressed with the huge crowds, when as youngsters they were taken there, by their elders.