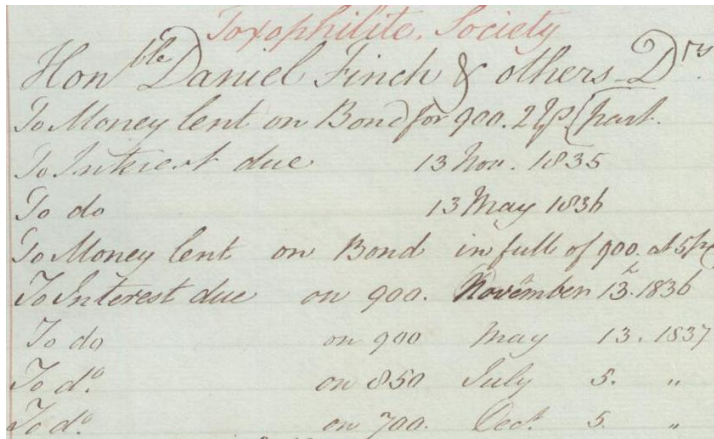


Manuscript of the Month July 2012

Loan ledger showing the Royal Toxophilite Society's account, 1835-36



Toxophilite Society			
To Money lent on Bond for 900. 2 ^d 1/2			
To Interest due	13 Nov.	1835	
To do	13 May	1836	
To Money lent on Bond in full of 900. 2 ^d 1/2			
To Interest due on 900.	November 13.	1836	
To do on 900	May	13.	1837
To d ^o on 950	July	3.	"
To d ^o on 700	Oct.	5.	"

As the Olympic Games get underway in London this week, Lord's Cricket Ground will play host to one of the oldest of all sports: archery. Despite its antiquity, however, archery's inclusion as an Olympic sport is relatively recent – after appearances in the Games of 1900, 1904, 1908 and 1920 it was dropped from the Olympic schedule until 1972. And its popularity has waxed and waned throughout history. At its peak in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

the sport attracted thousands of followers, including members of the Hoare family.

Archery in medieval times was much more than just a sport. Longbow men formed an integral part of England's armed forces and played a pivotal role in some of the period's greatest battles, notably Crecy (1346), Poitiers (1356) and Agincourt (1415). By Stuart times, however, the spread of gunpowder and muskets had rendered the longbow obsolete and archery became the preserve of a small number of dedicated amateurs.

Archery's revival during the 1780s is attributed to two men, Sir Ashton Lever and his secretary Thomas Waring, who set up the Toxophilite Society in 1781. The latter was particularly keen to promote the health benefits of archery, describing it as *the most healthy exercise a man can pursue, strengthening and bracing the bodily frame, without that laborious exertion common to many games* (A Treatise on Archery, 1814). Waring's Treatise, a minor classic that went through several editions, was packed with advice for the amateur archer: how to string a bow, feather an arrow or score a competition. And it covered all eventualities: *If the Butts are built in a field or pasture where sheep are suffered to graze...during the shooting, the sheep should be penned up to prevent accidents*. For most people, though, the romance of archery – conjuring up as it did images of Robin Hood or the glories of Agincourt – outweighed any possible health benefits. And when the Prince of Wales agreed to become the Toxophilite Society's patron in 1787, the sport's future seemed assured. Archery societies sprang up all over the country as the fashionable scrambled to follow the Prince's lead.

At first the Toxophilite Society was based at Lever's home in Leicester Square, London. Shooting butts were erected on the lawns and meetings took place twice weekly in summer and monthly during the winter. Additionally, there were three competitions or Target Days: the Easter Target, held on St George's Day; the Whitsun Target, held on George III's birthday and the Annual Target, held on the Prince of Wales's birthday. And by the time twenty year old Charles Hoare and his twenty five year old brother Hugh joined the Society in 1787, an elaborate set of rules had evolved. Prospective members had to be nominated by an existing member before submitting to the ordeal of a ballot. Those who survived this process – three black balls spelt disaster – then had to furnish themselves not only with the requisite bow and arrows but also with the Society's uniform – a green single-breasted coat trimmed with gold buttons, worn over a white waistcoat and breeches and topped off by a hat, turned up over one eye, from which a single black feather sprouted.

Before long archery societies had become known as much for their conviviality as for their prize shooting. Target Days were invariably followed by dinners or balls, at which ladies were encouraged to enter into the spirit of the occasion by dressing in green. But despite such sociability, this first flirtation with archery lasted just a few years. As the onset of the Napoleonic Wars in the mid 1790s dampened public spirits and squeezed disposable incomes, membership of the Royal Toxophilite Society collapsed from nearly 150 in 1792 to just 25 by 1800, while many other societies disappeared altogether. The Hoares too lost interest. Hugh Hoare does not appear to have renewed his subscription after 1791, while Charles Hoare allowed his to lapse in 1793.

By the 1820s, however, archery was back in vogue. So much so that the Royal Toxophilite Society was able to lease a six acre site in Regent's Park and erect a new headquarters. According to Waring, Archer's Hall was set on extensive lawns and built in the 'Swiss or Rustic Gothic' style. A veranda hugged the Hall's exterior, while the interior was decorated with bows and arrows, coats of arms, stags' antlers and the stuffed head of a cockatoo called Charley, a relic from Lever's extensive natural history collection. To fund its new Hall, the Society took out over £4,000 (c.£300K today) in loans, £1,200 of which came from Hoare's Bank. The loans were repaid within a few years, but the Society remained customers of the bank until the early twentieth century.

This renewed interest in archery led to the formation of countless local archery societies. Meetings were still sociable affairs, but they now held an additional attraction, for archery was one of the few sports deemed suitable for women. Not only could women compete on equal terms with men, but their costumes, their grace, their poise all added a distinct charm to the proceedings. Archer's Hall even installed a Ladies' Room: *for though there are no Lady Members, yet the Ladies belonging to many of the Members' families often shoot on such days as are not appropriated to the Members, and on the Ladies' Day numbers of fair Archeresses grace the festive scene, therefore the Society has studied their comfort and convenience also.*

One of the local societies to emerge at this time was the Selwood Foresters. Established in 1832 along the Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire borders, the Foresters by 1835 boasted nearly 200 members. During the summer months, meetings were held at Stourhead, Wiltshire, home of the Foresters' patron, Sir Richard Colt Hoare Bt, who erected shooting butts along the sheltered terrace and marquees on the lawn. That of 15 August 1832 was typical: *The weather was most propitious, and the company consisted of all the rank and fashion of the neighbourhood. There was much skill displayed by the fair archeresses, and the ladies' prize, which was a gold bow and arrow, forming an ornament for the neck, suspended by a green ribbon, was won by Miss Doveton, of Mells' Rectory; and the gentlemen's prize (a gold shirt pin in the form of an arrow) was gained by the Rev B Doveton...Two hundred and ten sat down to a dinner, consisting of all the delicacies of the season and the evening concluded with dancing, which was kept up till a late hour* (The Bristol Mercury, 18 Aug 1832). Lavish prizes, donated by patrons or by the members themselves, were a general feature of such competitions. Those on offer at a later meeting of the Selwood Foresters included an embroidered cap, a locket, a set of turquoise combs and *a rare Scotch Thistle, fresh from Cairn Gouram, bedewed and glittering in its native gems*, while a Royal Toxophilite Society contest in 1836 saw the snuff takers take on the non-snuff takers for, of all things, a gold snuff box.

Evidence of archery's popularity can be found in the art and literature of the period. Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1820), Rossini's *William Tell* (1829), William Powell Frith's *The Fair Toxophilites* (1872) and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) all feature archery contests. The press, too, began to cover the sport. But by the 1870s archery's star was once again on the wane as first croquet and then lawn tennis caught the public imagination.