



Singlestick players

SINGLE STICK

THERE will be A MATCH played at SALISBURY, on WEDNESDAY and THURSDAY MORNINGS, July the 27th and 28th, being the two last days of the Races, for TWENTY GUINEAS each day.

To play without pads Wednesday,

And with pads THURSDAY, IN ORDER that the Somersetshire men may have an opportunity of playing in the practice of their county as well as the Wiltshire.

The play to be conducted by able judges, and the greatest care taken that the prizes be properly contested and fairly won.

Each Player to enter his name at the Cross Keys Inn, early on the morning of playing, as the play must be arranged so as to terminate before one o'clock, when the Races begin.

Salisbury and Winchester Journal, Monday, 11 July 1808

An Extract from “The every-day book and table-book” By William Hone:

The text of a letter dated October 20, 1826, received by the editor is included. The writer of the letter, C.T. refers to the Hungerford Revels, which he attended in 1820:

“Wiltshire consists of beautiful and extensive downs, and rich meadow and pasture lands, which support some of the finest dairies and farms in the Kingdom. The natives are a very strong and hardy set of men, and are particularly fond of robust sports; their chief and favourite amusement is backswording, or

singlestick, for which they are as greatly celebrated as the inhabitants of the adjoining counties, Somersetshire and Gloucestershire.

At this game there are several rules observed. They play with a large round stick, which must be three feet long, with a basket prefixed to one end as a guard for the hand. The combatants throw off their hats and upper garments, with the exception of the shirt, and have the left hand tied to the side, so that they cannot defend themselves with that hand. They brandish the stick over the head, guarding off the adversary's blows, and striking him whenever an opportunity occurs. Great skill is often used in the defence. I have seen two men play for upwards of half an hour without once hitting each other. The blood must flow an inch from some part of the head, before either party is declared victor.

Backford, the backsword player, was a butcher residing at Swindon; he died a few years ago. His "successor" is a blacksmith at Lyddington, named Morris Pope, who is considered the best player of the day, and generally carries off the prizes at the Hungerford revel, which he always attends. This revel is attended by all the best players in Wiltshire and Somerset, between whom the contest lies. To commence the fray, twenty very excellent players are selected from each county; the contest lasts a considerable time, and is always severe, but the Wiltshire men are generally conquerors. Their principal characteristics are skill, strength, and courage – this is generally allowed by all who are acquainted with them."