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Entertainment in some of Wakefield's public houses and inns.

It seems very likely that from medieval times at least, inns and public houses have provided entertainments of many kinds to draw customers (perhaps from their rivals) and to encourage extensive eating and, more especially, drinking. Chaucer refers in his *Pardoner's Tale* (c1390) to a group of licentious young men who spent their time in taverns dancing, playing at dice or other games of chance, and being entertained by dancing girls, or singers, accompanied by harps or guitars.

To these pastimes must be added blood sports, such a cock fighting or bull or bear-baiting, not to mention climbing greasy poles.

But what can be known of the fare provided in Wakefield's hostelries? The first reference I have found is to cock-fighting. In June 1770 a contest was held at Thomas Dawson's new pit at the George and Crown between the gentlemen of Wakefield and the gentlemen of Leeds. They were to provide fifty cocks on each side with a weigh-in on Saturday 16 June and the actual fighting on the following Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. The prize was 10 guineas a battle and one hundred guineas for the 'main'. (*The Leeds Intelligencer* 5.6.1770)

Inventories can be a good source of information about the items to be found in inns and public houses for the amusement of their clients. An 1855 inventory for the large commercial Wainwright's hotel in Kirkgate lists a bagatelle board with two cues, 9 balls and a marking board. An inventory of 1860 for the Golden Lion in Westgate lists a box and dominoes in the bar and a bagatelle table and balls in the kitchen. (*The John Goodchild Collection.*)

When the contents of the Great Bull Hotel in Westgate were up for auction in 1906, a room identified as the billiard room contained two full-size billiard tables, one made by the London firm of Burroughs and Watts. Each with 13 cues and its own marking board. There were also sets of ivory pool balls and of billiard balls, and a mahogany marking board for the game of pool.

Inventories were made when one tenant of a public house succeeded another. In 1907, when F W Illingworth relinquished the Scarboro Arms, Alverthorpe, to C Marshall, he left two boxes of dominoes in the bar valued at 3 shillings and in the tap room a dart board worth 12 shillings and sixpence, a piano (£12) and a polyphon which, with 26 tunes, was valued at £11. The polyphon might be

regarded as a forerunner of the juke boxes which became popular – almost essential – features of public houses from the mid 20 century.

An inventory made in 1934 for the Black Swan showed the bar parlour as having a dart board and three sets of dominoes and the filling bar as having darts and two cribbage boards. In one of the bedrooms were three cases of stuffed birds but they can scarcely have proved entertaining!

Among outdoor games, skittles seem to have had the longest history and the phrase ‘life isn’t all beer and skittles’ shows their clear association with the public house. The phrase is first recorded in Charles Dickens’ *Pickwick Papers*.

The survival of a lawyer’s brief from 1789, now in the John Goodchild collection, shows that a game of ‘keys’ was played at that time in the yard of the Saw Inn in Little Westgate. There was a key alley and from the evidence of witnesses recorded in the brief, it seems that an object named a key was in some way to be thrown. The misfortune of the landlord, which occasioned his trial at the assizes in York, was that he had thrown a key at an abusive passer by. The full story is given in *Foul Deeds and Suspicious Deaths in Wakefield* (2001)

The rather more gentlemanly sport of bowls was available at the Castle Inn, Sandal, from at least 1836. (*Newspaper advertisements*)

Another court case, of 1910, demonstrates that public house games, or the bets laid on the players, might lead to a fatality. Two miners playing at the Dusty Miller, came to blows with one of them dying as a result. The account is to be found in *More Foul Deeds and Suspicious Deaths in Wakefield* (2003)

Kate Taylor, April 2015