

Description of Knur and Spell

Knur and Spell was one of a family of traditional games in which players attempt to hit a ball as hard as they can – or otherwise swear violently when they miss !

The Knur, the ball used in the game, was made of various hard materials. It was sometimes carved by hand out of a hard wood, such as holly, or engine-turned out of lignum-vitæ; in the Potteries it was commonly made of white Wedgwood material, and usually called a "pottie"; whilst in its most scientific form, the knur was made out of stag-horn weighted with lead.

The knur was fired up in the air out of a mechanical device, called a Trap, that was triggered by means of a lever. While the knur was in the air, a player would takes an almighty swing at it with a stick called a Spell, a slender wooden bat flattened at one end.



Note: Some sources refer to the trap as the spell. Clearly there were local variations in nomenclature.

The object of the game was to hit the knur with the spell and send it as far as possible into the distance - this was known as a Knock. Proficient players were able to knock the knur between 200 and 300 yards.



The match was decided by the longest knock, or the best average in an agreed number of knocks. The course was marked with vertical pegs at intervals of 20 yards to facilitate measurements, which were taken over walls, huts or other obstructions.

Matches were normally between twenty and thirty knocks, with each player taking five consecutive shots in turn. A referee supervised the contest and the rules were observed rigidly.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MR. PAED WOOD

KNURR AND SPELL- GOOSE EYE KEIGHLEY. - 1930

Knur and spell – which has been dubbed "the poor man's golf" – was particularly popular in the North of England in the 19th and early 20th centuries, although it is thought to have been introduced originally by the Vikings. The picture below is an engraving taken from an 1885 book, "The Costume of Yorkshire".



The Northern Traditional Sports Association tried to revive interest in the sport during the 1990s, but the club has since disbanded.

Click to view a [game of Knur and spell that took place in Cowling](#) in 1963 or 1964. Note that this game was played with a hanging knur, rather than having the knur propelled from a trap.

Acknowledgement

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