

Sports in Scottish Burgh and Notarial Records, 1500–1700, Part 1

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Most of modern Scottish sports scholarship has relied heavily on published sources. The present article aims to redress that imbalance and fully engage with the manuscript sources for both the burgh and notarial records of the period from 1500 to 1700, covering the following sports: football, golf, *cachepell*/tennis, bowling, horse racing, archery, and fencing. This study highlights sporting activities in the Scottish burghs and their many features (players, conditions, locations, legislation), clarifying established themes and exploring new ones within sports in early modern Scotland. A key underlying theme is the growing institutionalisation and professionalisation of early modern sport. At the same time, the social interaction of participants is clearly visible as is a greater social mixture between the sporting and working/residential environments for a number of sports. The burghs were keen to capitalise on these transferable skills of a geographically mobile and multi-activity sports workforce but also to attract audiences to town. The first part of this paper covers the sports of horse racing, archery and fencing. Part 2 covering golf, *cachepell*/tennis, football and bowling will appear in Volume 28 of *Scottish Archives*.

The early modern period saw the elaboration of a distinctive leisure culture across Europe.¹ To illustrate this phenomenon in a more constricted geographical space, let us turn to Scotland and investigate one such leisurely facet, namely sports. Research into sports in early modern Scotland has gathered pace in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries after the isolated efforts of Victorian antiquaries.² Most of this modern scholarship has relied heavily on published sources and particularly the convenience of the extracts of the burgh records produced by the nineteenth-century clubs and societies and their twentieth-century successors.³ There have been limited instances of sustained scholarly engagement with the actual manuscripts of the burgh and notarial

¹ A. Arcangeli, *Recreation in the Renaissance: Attitude towards Leisure and Pastimes in European Culture, c.1425–1675* (Basingstoke, 2003).

² The references for these are mentioned in the various footnotes of the present article. The most recent historiography on the subject only mentions Burnett's *Riot, Revelry and Rout*, quoted below, as a relevant study for the early modern period: M. L. McDowell, 'Records, Language and Discourses: New Histories of Scottish Sport. An Introduction and Historiography', *Sport in History*, 36 (2016), 295–304.

³ First and foremost in this respect are the extracts edited by the Scottish burgh records society for Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Lanark, Paisley, Peebles, and Stirling.

records.⁴ One of the obvious reasons behind this reticence is that the task is heavily time-consuming and that the returns are relatively poor in numerical hits per se. Scotland's urban network was organised along a tripartite division based on burghal status (royal, ecclesiastical and baronial), depending on whether the overlord was the king, an abbot or bishop, or a magnate. This article will be restricted to the royal burghs, which enjoyed trading privileges and parliamentary representation, but they were also taxed by the Crown. The records consulted for the present article come from the burghs' civil and criminal courts as well as their financial registers. The selected burghs (sixteen in number) reflect a variety in terms of their size and their geographical location within Scotland.⁵ Complementing these urban sources is the work of the notaries whose protocol books containing summaries of notarial instruments of a diverse nature are a rich source of information for social, urban and sports historians. Many notaries were based in towns and acted as towns' clerks, and these manuscripts are all the more important given the poor survival rates of some types of town record.⁶

The present article aims to redress the imbalance, in relation to printed material, and fully engage with these rich manuscript sources for both the burgh and notarial records of the period from 1500 to 1700. This chronological range is dictated in part by the records themselves with the gradual emergence of sports featuring in them and a growing survival rate of the material after 1500. As will become apparent, the majority of the archival references date from the reign of King James VI, which on the one hand illustrates the richness of the sources for that period and on the other is indicative of a larger quantity of sport at the time (such as horse racing, for example). Equally, the period 1500–1700 saw a moving away from medieval sports which taught skills for battle/tournament and food gathering. It witnessed an evolution and transition from the country's Catholic regime alongside the Protestant kirk's religious reformation that stressed Sabbatarianism, tried to crack down on traditional leisure activities and emphasised hard work. The eighteenth century would usher in a new era, shaped in part by the 1707 Act of Union that established a new political and societal environment. As with any exercise of this type, the coverage in terms of sports, burghs, time, and geography is by no means universal but merely illustrative. The selected approach has been to treat each sport separately, primarily because these sports are still not well understood in some of their key defining features (such as their organisation, conditions, players, locations, etc.)

⁴ E. Williamson, 'Horse-Racing in Scotland in the Sixteenth and Earlier Seventeenth Centuries: Peebles and Beyond', *Review of Scottish Culture*, 14 (2001–02), 31–42, has worked intensively with both the Peebles and Haddington burgh manuscript sources.

⁵ For an overview, consult D. Murray, *Early Burgh Organization in Scotland*, 2 vols (Glasgow, 1924–32); D. Robertson, 'Burgh court records, 1319–1834', in (ed.) H. McKechnie, *An Introductory Survey of the Sources and Literature of Scots Law* (Edinburgh, 1936), 98–110.

⁶ W. Angus, 'Notarial protocol books, 1469–1700', in McKechnie, *Introductory Survey*, 289–300; E. Ewan, 'Protocol books and towns in medieval Scotland', in (ed.) W. Prevenier and T. de Hemptinne, *La Diplomatie Urbaine en Europe au Moyen Age* (Louvain, 2000), 143–56.

in that very early period. This strategy is crucial to give access to a deeper and better knowledge of these sports in this early stage of their development.⁷ The sports will be grouped into two broad categories. The first deals with horse racing, archery, and fencing – sports that developed from that medieval milieu of battles and tournaments, and evolved with the broader military context and martial art of the Renaissance. The second cluster tackles ball games: golf, *cachepell*/tennis, football, and bowling.⁸ This study will shed light on sporting activities in Scottish burghs and their many features, clarifying established themes and exploring new ones within sports in early modern Scotland and in relation to the Scottish *homo ludens*.

Horse racing

The Scottish nobility, including the Highland clan élite, devoted themselves to hunting and horse racing, which constituted occasions for social gatherings. Besides, they were a marker of status and strengthened hierarchy.⁹ Horse-riding was a prominent activity among the gentry and nobility. Occasionally, it was practised within a different setting and by a more random group of people, such as the horse race organised on Leith sand by the men holding Edinburgh castle during the civil war of the early 1570s.¹⁰ The establishment of equine competitions gradually emerged and grew in Scotland from the reign of King James IV onwards. Horse racing is recorded in the sixteenth century in Scotland, in association with isolated races, such as at Leith in 1504 or at the ‘annual’ race at Haddington in 1552.¹¹ It took off especially under the reign of King James VI

⁷ There are various angles to approach the topic. For instance, the individual treatment of sports has been the viewpoint adopted by James Kelly in his *Sport in Ireland, 1600–1840* (Dublin, 2014).

⁸ This will follow in Part 2 to appear in the next volume of *Scottish Archives*.

⁹ J. Fraser, *Chronicles of the Frasers*, ed. W. Mackay (Edinburgh, 1905), pp. xxxviii–xli, 247, 447–9; M. M. Meikle, *A British Frontier?: Lairds and Gentlemen in the Eastern Borders, 1540–1603* (East Linton, 2004), 186–7; D. Howard, ‘Chasse, sports et plaisirs autour des châteaux d’Écosse’, in (ed.) J. Guillaume, *Architecture, Jardin, Paysage: L’Environnement du Château de la Ville aux XV^e et XVI^e Siècles* (Paris, 1999), 295–6. A contemporary aptly silhouetted the social value of hunting in that ‘he who does not exercise himself in hunting and take special delight therein is considered a man of no worth’: (ed.) W. Macfarlane, *Geographical Collections Relating to Scotland*, ed. A. Mitchell, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1906–08), II, 455. This was a view shared in Elizabethan England: M. Huggins, ‘Sport and the British Upper Classes, c.1500–2000: A Historiographic Overview’, *Sport in History*, 28 (2008), 364–88, 365. Similarly, Sir Thomas Urquhart commented upon a gentlemanly praise of the exercise of the body and love of sports whereas his own fascination with intellectual development was not understood by his peers. Nonetheless, Urquhart practised horse-riding: (ed.) T. Maitland, *The Works of Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty, Knight* (Edinburgh, 1834), 331–2.

¹⁰ S. Mowat, *The Port of Leith: Its History and Its People* (Edinburgh, 1994), 132; also J. Fairfax-Blakeborough, *History of Horse Racing in Scotland* (London, 1973), 40.

¹¹ R. S. Fittis, *Sports and Pastimes of Scotland* (Paisley, 1891), 109–10; J. Burnett, ‘The Sites and Landscapes of Horse Racing in Scotland’, *The Sports Historian*, 18:1 (1998), 55–75, 56.

with the organisation of annual competitions. The urban setting (or its vicinity) of these races is undeniable, so much so that by the Restoration almost all were held in royal burghs, with racing taking place along the sands, links, or river meadows.¹² It is worth pointing out the distinction between annual organised events and regular recreation. As this section will make clear, horse racing stands out from the other sports discussed in the article in that these yearly competitions drew all the attention and concern of urban authorities, notably planning and regulations, whereas town councils generally only facilitated regular recreation.¹³

In Irvine, the annual horse-racing competition, the race of the silver bell, took place on 10 May. As such, it was the forerunner of Irvine's famous Marymass (15 August) races held in August, which gradually developed later.¹⁴ The town council put in place a safety mechanism to ensure the production of the bell from one year to the other through the imposition of sureties. In May 1601, Matthew Wallace, certainly that year's winner and current holder of the bell, found caution 'to p[ro]duce ye bell as ye forme is', meaning that by then it was an already well-established practice, hence dating the creation of the race at least to the closing years of the sixteenth century, if not earlier.¹⁵ In May 1627, William Caldwell became surety for James Weir, brother to the laird of Stonehouse (South Lanarkshire), to produce 'the silver bell' run on that day (10 May) 'wtin the burt of Irune' in a year's time on 10 May 1628, under the penalty of 300 marks to be paid to Alexander Montgomery, sixth Earl of Eglinton. This was to ensure that 'the same [i.e. the race] may be run at the nixt yeir conforme to the ordour observit yranent'.¹⁶ This showed that the usual practice was to deliver the silver bell to the winner of the race who was then able to keep it until the running of the race the following year. James Weir would have been that year's winner and found surety to hand over the silver bell the following year. If leisure activities were under the control of municipal authorities, the potential indemnity to Eglinton demonstrated that the social élite exercised their patronage and sponsorship of these events.¹⁷ The landed

¹² J. Kay and W. Vamplew, 'Horse-racing', in (ed.) G. Jarvie and J. Burnett, *Sport, Scotland and the Scots* (East Linton, 2000), 160; Burnett, 'Sites and Landscapes', 56, 59–60.

¹³ The same obviously held true for other annual competitions, such as papingo shoots or the various contests for the silver arrow.

¹⁴ J. Burnett, *Riot, Revelry and Rout: Sport in Lowland Scotland before 1860* (East Linton, 2000), 120–4. The date of 10 May was also that of the Haddington race. Despite its title, the following is informative for the races, their organisation, prizes, and winners across Scotland: P. Baxter, *The Turf of Perth, or, Horse-Racing in Bonnie St Johnstoun, from 1201 to 1901* (Perth, 1901), 21–6.

¹⁵ National Records of Scotland (hereafter NRS), B37/12/1, Irvine Burgh Council Records, p. 60. James Mowat of Busbie became surety in relief, that is, to relieve Wallace's surety, Thomas Cumming.

¹⁶ NRS, B37/11/1, Irvine Burgh Court Books, fol. 92v. Unless otherwise stated, all prices are in Scottish money. One mark was equivalent in value to two-thirds of a pound.

¹⁷ The compensation seems to imply that Eglinton was the owner of the bell, just as the Seton Earls of Dunfermline possessed the one in Dunfermline, rather than a sum offered

élite was actually the main drive behind the establishment of the ‘bell race’ in Tain (Ross-shire) in 1616 as was George Gordon, fourth Marquess of Huntly, for the Huntly races in 1695.¹⁸

Standard practices as seen in Irvine were also found at other races across Scotland at the time.¹⁹ One of them was at Ayr. Indeed, Ayr and Irvine did not merely share a code of practice: James Mowat of Busbie might have entered the race in Irvine himself; what is certain is that he did so in Ayr a few years later. Table 1 shows the annual race at Ayr with the name of the winners, their sureties and the prize between 1606 and 1620.

A salient point of Table 1 is the glory era of Alexander Barclay, a merchant of Edinburgh, who won the race on 20 May 1609. Barclay triumphed for a third time in a row in 1611 and retained the trophy.²⁰ The 1613 winner Robert Fairlie of that ilk (south of Largs) broke with the tradition of a yearly

to Eglinton for having the race run through part of his estate as seen at Peebles with the Tweedie family: Williamson, ‘Horse-Racing’, 31–3, 37; K. M. Brown, *Noble Society in Scotland: Wealth, Family and Culture, from Reformation to Revolution* (Edinburgh, 2004), 215, for nobles as race patrons; and more generally, J. Williams, ‘Sport and the Elite in Early Modern England’, *Sport in History*, 28 (2008), 400; Huggins, ‘Sport and the British Upper Classes’, 370–2, for the social élite’s patronage of sports. The promotion of the sport in the burghs through the assistance of the landed élite is partly explained by the fact that some of the latter held civic positions in towns, as the earls of Abercorn in Paisley: A. J. S. Brook, ‘Notice of the Silver Bell of Lanark, a Horse-Racing Trophy of the Seventeenth Century’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 25 (1890–91), 174–88, 180.

¹⁸ When all the leading chiefs of the northern Highlands – bar George Sinclair, fifth Earl of Caithness – congregated towards Beaulieu (west of Inverness) in January 1616, one might have expected that something sinister was afoot. Instead, they established the annual horse race at Tain, known as the ‘ye bell race of tayne’. These seventeen contractors became bound to appear themselves or by a representative on the third Tuesday of April annually. The race was to be run from ‘ye blakhill’ of Lochslin (present-day Knock Dhu) to the part of the lands of Kirksheaf (‘kirkskeith’) near Tain, which is alongside low-lying coastal grounds. Each was to pay one angel of gold to the provost or a bailie of Tain as entry fee to be delivered to the winner; the winner was bound to present ‘ye bell’ at the next race; the non-payment of the angel fee carried a £20 debt to the winner; the race was open to any ‘extranean’, i.e. outsider; any outsider winner could only win back his angel fee; the custody of the bell was to be redelivered with augmentation ‘as vse is’. The dating of the race did not coincide with any known Tain fairs: NRS, RD11, Register of Deeds, Warrants, 1st ser., registered 7 May 1617; John Ballantyne deserves much gratitude for this reference. Compare J. How, ‘The Huntly race and its trophies’, in (ed.) A. O’Connor and D. V. Clarke, *From the Stone Age to the ‘Forty-Five* (Edinburgh, 1983), 491–3.

¹⁹ J. Burnett, ‘Paisley Horse Races and the Silver Bells’, *Renfrewshire Local History Forum Journal*, 8 (1997), 1–2.

²⁰ If there was the same winner for three years in succession, it was usual for them to be regarded as having won the trophy outright, and it was fairly common for such a winner to give a new prize in replacement: Williamson, ‘Horse-Racing’, 35.

Table 1 Annual race at Ayr with winners, sureties and prize, 1606–1620.

Year	Winner	Surety	Prize
1606	James Mowat of Busbie	John Wallace, son of the late Cuthbert Wallace, burges of Ayr	one great bell and seven small bells, 16 ¹ / ₄ oz. ¹
1607	George, master of Loudoun (east of Kilmarnock) and son of Hugh Campbell, first Lord Campbell of Loudoun	John Jameson, burges of Ayr	one great bell and eight small bells, 18 oz. ²
1608	George, master of Loudoun (east of Kilmarnock) and son of Hugh Campbell, first Lord Campbell of Loudoun	John Dunbar, burges of Ayr	one great bell and nine small bells, 21 oz. ³
1609	Alexander Barclay, merchant in Edinburgh	David Fergushill, burges and late provost of Ayr	one great bell and nine small bells, 21 oz. ⁴
1610	Alexander Barclay, merchant in Edinburgh	David Fergushill, burges and late provost of Ayr	one great bell and nine small bells, 22 ³ / ₄ oz. ⁵
1611	Alexander Barclay, merchant in Edinburgh	David Fergushill, burges and late provost of Ayr	ten bells, 23 ³ / ₄ oz. ⁶
1612	Mr Mathew Ross of Haining	William Shaw of Mainholm, William Law, merchant of Ayr; and Hugh Nesbit, saddler of Ayr	one great bell and eight small bells, 19 ¹⁵ / ₁₆ oz. ⁷
1613	Robert Fairlie of that ilk (south of Largs)	Duncan Crawford of Drumsic	one great bell and nine small bells, 21 ¹ / ₁₆ oz. ⁸
1614	George Crawford of Lefnores (present day Dumfries House)	Alexander Cunningham, burges of Ayr	one great bell and nine small bells, 21 ¹ / ₁₆ oz. ⁹

1615	James Dalrymple, brother of the late John Dalrymple of Stair	John Macmartin, merchant of Ayr	one great bell and nine small bells, 21 ¹ / ₁₆ oz. ¹⁰
1616–1619	No winners listed in the register		
1620	George Campbell, younger of Horsecleugh (south of Cumnock)	John Dunbar, merchant of Ayr	one great bell and nine small bells, 21 ¹ / ₁₆ oz. ¹¹

Notes

- ¹ Ayrshire Archives [AA], B6/13/1A, Ayr Register of Acts and Decrets, fol. 99v. Perhaps Wallace was related to Irvine's winner Matthew Wallace but the biographical information on the identity of the latter is lacking. A racing competition was already taking place in Ayr in 1576: Fairfax-Blakeborough, *History of Horse Racing*, 1.
- ² AA, B6/13/1A, fol. 140r–v. The master of Loudoun would have been in his late twenties or early thirties.
- ³ AA, B6/13/1A, fol. 177r.
- ⁴ AA, B6/13/1A, fols 206v–7r.
- ⁵ AA, B6/13/1A, fol. 230r–v. This is the only instance in the register when the entry for the race is dated 21 May as opposed to 20 May in all the other years.
- ⁶ AA, B6/13/1A, fol. 251r.
- ⁷ AA, B6/13/1A, fols 274v–5r.
- ⁸ AA, B6/13/1A, fol. 291v.
- ⁹ AA, B6/13/1A, fol. 301v. Crawford won that race 'wt ane meir [mare]'.
- ¹⁰ AA, B6/13/1A, fol. 310v.
- ¹¹ AA, B6/13/1A, fol. 336r.

addition (though George, master of Loudoun, had already done so in 1608–09) and set a precedent. This was seized upon by a few of the subsequent years' champions right through to the early 1620s at the very least. The race in Ayr was run on 20 May annually at least for a while. The additions to the prize bell were also a standard practice at the time, as will appear below in the case of Perth's horse race. Perhaps more importantly, these records help historians establish the creation of Ayr's annual prize to around 1599/1600 if not earlier.²¹

Irvine's and Ayr's codes of practice vis-à-vis their horse racing was not unusual. Perth adhered to a comparable procedure. The race date actually varied between late March and mid-April as it was set for Palm Monday. In 1613, Perth's race was run on 30 March at 11 a.m. as can be adduced by the following entry. On that day, John Graham of Bogside produced the silver bell which was delivered in his name by Ninian Graham of Garvock. Bogside might actually not have been the previous winner of the race because of a formal assertion or reservation made that the bell had not been presented the year before. The bell was delivered to Hugh Moncrief of Coates (of Elcho), himself a burgess, who was to deliver it back to the local bailies until an oath be made for its presentation the following year in 1614. The race was no mean event, and the proof that the town held it in its highest esteem was that the penalty for not producing the bell was set at a hefty £100.²²

This Moncrief did, duly handing the bell over the following year. The race was run on 18 April 1614, between the gibbet of Methven and the cross of Ruthven, some 7–8 km on the old Perth to Methven road, with the race thus ending at the Burghmuir. This was no coincidence. Instead, it reflected the common association of horse races with fair sites.²³ On that day, the town council entered into a contract with the winner, maltman John Ross.²⁴ The document shows that the bell weighing 9³/₁₆ oz. was made up of two bells (one large and one small) hung together with a silver chain. As the 1614 champion, Ross pledged to deliver it to the town magistrates, but could enlarge the trophy at his own discretion. The race was set for Palm Monday 1615, this time to be run as a head-to-head race, each competitor weighing eight stone (counting sixteen

²¹ Based on the 1606 winner James Mowat of Busbie and his seven small bells.

²² Perth and Kinross Archive (hereafter PKA), B59/16/1, Register of Acts of Town Council, p. 423. This Hugh Moncrief was the same man who was wounded as he tried to save his host during the Gowrie conspiracy. He later received a royal pardon.

²³ This is the Goodlyburn Cross that currently stands in the grounds of Dupplin Castle: I. Fraser, M. A. Hall and I. G. Scott, 'From Holy Rood to Estate Folly: Chapters in the Cultural Biography of the Goodlyburn Cross, Perthshire', *Review of Scottish Culture*, 23 (2011), 1–19, especially 10–13.

²⁴ PKA, B59/15/1, Perth Burgh Records, Registers of Arrestments and Lawburrows, fol. 138r–v. Seaside burghs had the benefit of the seashore and the links to run the race, while inland towns, such as Perth, relied on flat meadows by a river: Burnett, 'Sites and Landscapes', 63.

pounds per stone) including the horse equipment. The penalty yet again was set at £100.²⁵ Unlike the assumption of a distinction between high and low, or élite versus popular culture, the horse race in Perth, and elsewhere, illustrates a shared common culture in that the participants came from various social backgrounds. These two winners, the laird of Bogside and maltman John Ross, additionally illustrated the mixture of the rural and urban worlds gathering together for the enjoyment and social reward of the sport. Sport played a role in early modern socialisation and social interaction.²⁶

The race was run on 18 April 1615 along the same course, between the gibbet of Methven and the cross of Ruthven for the same winning prize (as Ross had made no addition). The 1615 champion was Robert Hamilton, a royal customs officer. The 1616 race was set for 25 March and the obligation sets the same conditions: the public proclamation advertising the race fifteen days prior to it; the eight-stone limit for the rider; the optional addition to these bells at the champion's discretion; and the £100 fine.²⁷ In the interim, in the autumn (November 1615), the council made modifications and improvements to the course itself. It notified the wrights' deacon to set 'sa mony stais in ye south Inche for ye horss races'. These posts would have been used as markers for the course to line off the South Inch rather than as jumping obstacles or to cordon off the course for spectators. The South Inch is the large public green, west of the river Tay by the train station. The entry also adds an element to the actual layout of the racecourse between Methven and the Burghmuir in that it would seem to double back on the South Inch. This meant that the route just edged the centre of Perth across the South Inch, which would be a highly beneficial element in terms of attracting large audiences. However, it would be wise to consider that perhaps the South Inch was used as a separate site for races, as seems to suggest the 1631 race below. This is something worth investigating.²⁸

A note in the margin facing that 1615 entry in the register informs us that on the day of the 1616 race (25 March), John Falconer, servitor to the said customs officer Robert Hamilton younger in the Haugh, delivered the bell to the Perth

²⁵ The text does not specify whether eight stone was a minimum or maximum weight limit. Although the entry mentions 'for ru[n]ing of ye sami[n] owir againe', this was not an 'eferschot' (second) race as the 1615 entry makes clear. There was an 'eferschot' race at Peebles and Paisley, for example: Williamson, 'Horse-Racing', 33–5; Burnett, 'Paisley Horse Races', 2.

²⁶ Williamson, 'Horse-Racing', 31–2, for the social mixture of the audience. This social interaction is also noted in Brown, *Noble Society*, 215.

²⁷ PKA, B59/15/1, fols 157v–8r. See the similar public proclamations at Selkirk: Fairfax-Blakeborough, *History of Horse Racing*, 218–19.

²⁸ PKA, B59/16/1, p. 591. When the North and South Inch came to be auctioned in 1632 the council imposed some restrictions on the process, reserving as sacrosanct the traditional 'pastyme and playing yrin of archere golf and wyeris': PKA, B59/16/2, fols 93r, 102r. In Irvine, the 1636 race established by Alexander, sixth Earl of Eglinton, was run twice round eight posts set in a flat heath ground: Fairfax-Blakeborough, *History of Horse Racing*, 195–8.

authorities. Hamilton had added another bell to the prize, making it three bells in total. The rider's weight limit, the public proclamation, and the structural alterations point towards a greater formalisation and codification as occurred elsewhere in Scotland.²⁹

A terse entry in the council minutes for 10 April 1626 commented that former bailie Andrew Conqueror handed over '[t]he tua litill siluer raice bellis' to the town treasurer. Conqueror would have been the previous year's winner of the race, that is when he was still a bailie.³⁰ But within five years, the council decided to renew the trophy. In March 1631, it lamented that the race had become 'onp[ro]ffitabill' to the town these past years, blaming it on the absence of 'benefeit' for the riders. Already, a month before in February 1631, the 'mekill bell' was to be recast into a seven-ounce cup for the race on Palm Monday 1631 and the two 'litill bellis' handed over for the town's use. Then in March, so as to attract members of 'ye gentrie and wyeris' to come to town, the council introduced that prize cup to be retained by the winner. The (21 March) 1631 winner of the three-horse race was Thomas Tyrie, apparent of Drumkilbo, on a horse called Kildair.³¹

These large sums were in a way commensurate with the money spent within the sport. It is worth bearing in mind that horse owners went to financial extremes to enjoy the best horses in their stables. In the early seventeenth century a good

²⁹ Williamson, 'Horse-Racing', 32; Fittis, *Sports*, 114–15. The rider seems to have been the Dundee merchant Robert Hamilton who as a citizen of Glasgow was enrolled as burghess of Dundee in 1612 because of his public service. As a citizen of Glasgow, he had already received a tack of the wine customs in 1609 for five years, which was renegotiated in 1611 for another five years, and again in 1616. Later on, Hamilton was appointed tacksman of the wine customs for the Tay river in 1619. He belonged to the Mauchlinehole (an area of present-day East Kilbride) branch of the family: J. C. Watson, 'Scottish Overseas Trade, 1597–1645', 2 vols (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2003), I, 12–13; NRS, E75/20, Exchequer Records: Customs Miscellanea, according to the online catalogue; J. Anderson, *Historical and Genealogical Memoirs of the House of Hamilton* (Edinburgh, 1825), *321.

³⁰ PKA, B59/16/2, fol. 41v. This does not explain the absence of the large bell. In all likelihood, Andrew Conqueror was the local merchant burghess of that name and a landlord, being known as 'of Ballinhard', who died within five years: PKA, B59/13/5, Perth Burgh Records, Register of Acts and Decrees, fols 310r–v, 319v. Subsequent developments concerning the Perth races are presented in Baxter, *Turf of Perth*, 51–3.

³¹ PKA, B59/16/2, fols 83v–4r. The race was to be run 'Thryss about ye stoupis in ye southe inche and in to ye bridge'; every rider had to be 'bell wecht [weight]' and weigh at the town weigh-house by 9 a.m. and pay an entrance fee of a single gold angel. Another requirement for the race was that there be a minimum of two horses competing. The two other racers in 1631 were Livingstone of Dunipace ('dunypeace'), either Sir David or his son Sir John, on Dragon and George Rutherford on Draw near him. The 1633 prize cup, stamped with the town's armorial lamb, was worth £40, and the two little silver bells were eventually added ('eikit') to the cup in February 1634: PKA, B59/16/2, fols 97r, 104r. The source does not enable one to decide whether the lamb was engraved or a punched hallmark.

courser would fetch £100 and over. In June 1603, a local resident of Edinburgh, Mr John Edmeston, purchased 'ane gray Cursar horss' from Uchtred Macdowall of Mindork (Dumfries and Galloway) for £130 which Edmeston had still not paid a year later.³² This goes a long way into underlining the economic and thereby social restrictions applying for horse racing but only up to some extent. Such coursers were beyond the means of most people except the landed élite and the wealthiest merchants and burgesses, and additionally perhaps to servitors to the nobility and gentry courtesy of their employers. Conversely, members of lower social ranks could still participate and, in some instances such as maltman Ross above, win.

Returning to the west coast, although horse racing does not feature as prominently in the Glasgow records as it does in other burghs in that area, the town still organised its own race. Few details emerge concerning this annual event. However, this meagre information readily tells us that, as in Irvine, the race was run in early May (on or prior to 18 May). It also makes it clear that the town council awarded the winner prize money. The winner in May 1606 was an individual named Thomas Pettigrew and for his victorious run, he received £12 as he 'wan ye bell reace'.³³ The town also contracted local craftsmen to produce horse equipment for the annual race, undoubtedly as a main or additional prize as at Peebles, Paisley, Haddington, and Lanark. In the same year, in late May 1606, Glasgow council paid £9 9s. 8d. to John Stirling for 'ane reid seadill [red saddle]' which Stirling made for 'ye bell reace'.³⁴ The municipal authorities in Glasgow were running the show at that time and had control of the organisation of the race. Events open to general participants attracted contestants (for those who could afford a good horse) with the promise of public prestige and valuable prizes. In return, these events promoted a city's prestige. The holding of horse races during burgh fairs presented economic and commercial benefits with even larger audiences (than the limited number of competitors) in attendance and were mutually reinforcing.³⁵

As the sport developed throughout the seventeenth century, there emerged professional niches catering for the various aspects of horse racing. One such position was that of horse racer: that is, the person in charge of keeping horses

³² Edinburgh City Archives (hereafter ECA), SL 234/1/6, Edinburgh Burgh Court, Register of Decrees, 1603–1606, 31 May 1604. Edmeston was very likely the grandson of Sir John Edmeston of that ilk: A. Edmonstone, *Genealogical Account of the Family of Edmonstone of Duntreath* (Edinburgh, 1875), 94.

³³ Glasgow City Archives (hereafter GCA), C1/1/6, Glasgow Town Council Minutes, fol. 103v.

³⁴ GCA, C1/1/6, fol. 104r. There was an additional payment of 2s. to James Brewhouse for 'carying ye drwme to ye bell reace': *ibid.*, fol. 106v; Williamson, 'Horse-Racing', 32, 36; Brook, 'Silver Bell of Lanark', 177.

³⁵ W. Behringer, 'Arena and Pall Mall: Sport in the Early Modern Period', *German History*, 27 (2009), 351–2. On the role of fairs in recreational England, consult E. Griffin, *England's Revelry: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes, 1660–1830* (Oxford, 2005), 27–33, 52–3.

for racing as opposed to a professional jockey. An early figure in that trade was a Robert Davie in Glasgow. He is recorded during a local burgh court hearing held in December 1658 where he appeared as a ‘horscourser’.³⁶

Archery

In the Middle Ages, archery was a key military skill until the advent of firearms and gunpowder gradually rendered bows obsolete. The activity emerged as a sport and pastime alongside its military use as an obvious benefit to the latter. In Scotland, King James I made this civilian exercise compulsory in 1424, with the practice to take place after Mass and having the burghs set up butts. Subsequent Scottish rulers repeated the instruction and leisurely competitions were organised from the early years of the seventeenth century.³⁷

Bow-making goes back a long way and yew timber has long been associated with its Scottish process. In 1565, two Inverness residents made arrangements for the loan of such a yew bow.³⁸ On the other side of the country, at the time of his death prior to September 1548, Ayr burgess Alexander Farquhar enjoyed various arms including ‘ane bow of ew’ with an arrow bag and a crossbow (complete with its winch mechanism and bolts).³⁹ But the fact that in 1547 a Perth bow-maker could produce bows using Hungarian ‘stings’, that is staves of wood for making into a bow, is fascinating to say the least. In mid-sixteenth-century Perth, local merchants thus had access to such an import, whichever channels they used.⁴⁰ In fact, the import of bowstaves at the time was not unusual as can be seen from a consignment of one hundred ‘bowsteingis’ coming from Norway by October 1551.⁴¹ Like any other goods, raw sporting material was a casualty as part of the cargo of prized ships, as happened at the expense of St Andrews citizens in 1545, only for that prized ship to be ultimately declared

³⁶ GCA, B1/1/5, Glasgow Burgh Court, Diet Book, fol. 186r. Incidentally, the profession is not listed in (ed.) W. A. Craigie *et al.*, *The Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue: From the Twelfth Century to the End of the Seventeenth*, 12 vols (Chicago, London, 1937–2002), <https://dsl.ac.uk>. One can see in the position the emergence of the ‘trainer’ of later years.

³⁷ J. Burnett and R. H. J. Urquhart, ‘Early Papingo Shooting in Scotland’, *Review of Scottish Culture*, 11 (1998–99), 5–7; M. Buchanan, *Archery in Scotland: An Elegant and Manly Amusement* (Glasgow, 1979), 4–5.

³⁸ Highland Council Archives, BI 1/1/1, Inverness Burgh Court Books, fol. 314v.

³⁹ AA, B6/12/2, Ayr Court Books, p. 55.

⁴⁰ T. Brochard, ‘Archery in Perth from the Fifteenth to the early Seventeenth Centuries’, *Friends of Perth & Kinross Archive*, 48 (2020), 13. Certainly, contacts with Hungarians, even if loosely defined, were not unheard of: Aberdeen City Archives (hereafter ACA), CA6/1/1/3, Aberdeen Burgh Treasury Accounts, fiscal year 1593–94; CA7/2/1, Aberdeen Guildry Accounts, fiscal years 1613–14, 1627–28.

⁴¹ Dundee City Archives (hereafter DCA), Dundee Burgh and Head Court Book, II, 1550–54/55, fols 102r, 106r. The import of these bowstaves continued in the seventeenth century, such as those brought from Norway as recorded in the 1670s: J. B. Paul, *The History of the Royal Company of Archers* (Edinburgh, 1875), 31–2. For other imports of archery equipment from the Netherlands, consult Burnett, *Riot, Revelry and Rout*, 13.

unlawful. That same notarial entry noted that the bowstaves were actually taken in a Gdańsk ship loaded with English goods.⁴²

These records also shed some light on the clientele for these urban bows.⁴³ Suffice to say that a well-crafted piece could fetch a vast sum. At Lammas (1 August) 1600, Mr George Bodie, burghess of Aberdeen, borrowed ‘ane hand bow’ from Aberdeen burghess Gilbert Chalmers. The following April (1601), the burgh court sentenced Bodie to restore it to Chalmers or compensate him to the amount of £100 for it. Bodie complied and made a compensation by June of that year.⁴⁴ Among the customers of the urban craftsmen appear rural buyers. In Glasgow in February 1595/96, as a surety for Duncan Macinturner ‘hyland ma[n]’, John Muir confessed his debt to Andrew Spang, presumably merchant. Macinturner had placed a relatively large order for ‘c[er]tane hew bowis’ with Spang but failed to pay him so that Macinturner was left with a hefty 260-mark arrear which Spang tried to collect from Muir.⁴⁵ Highland clansmen thus sourced part of their hunting/fighting equipment from town merchants as opposed to relying on their local skilled professionals or even manufacturing it themselves.

These customers, whether urban or rural, were nonetheless not the only archers to feature within the aged-yellowed pages of these registers. Archery shooting was a key activity of the education of the youth.⁴⁶ An incident occurred in early 1591 when Mr John Cauldcleuch, a professor at St Mary’s College in St Andrews, shot an arrow at David Turnbull, a local citizen, and killed him. The tragic event happened when Cauldcleuch was practising at the target set up in the garden of the college by the divinity students.⁴⁷ Competitions flourished both at schools and in Scottish burghs, the latter gradually organising their own archery prizes throughout the seventeenth century.⁴⁸

⁴² NRS, NP1/9, Protocol Book of Sir Robert Rollock, fol. 53r. A prized ship was one captured by virtue of the rights of war or by authority of letters of marque.

⁴³ These urban archers demonstrated their dexterity and archery skills during the popular papingo shooting, which illustrated the development of recreational archery in a number of Scottish towns: W. L. Ker, ‘The Papingo’, *Transactions of the Glasgow Archaeological Society*, new ser., 2 (1894), 324–39; Burnett and Urquhart, ‘Early Papingo Shooting’, 4–12.

⁴⁴ ACA, CA1/1/39, Aberdeen Council, Baillie, and Guild Court Registers, p. 982. Standard yew bows were less expensive.

⁴⁵ GCA, C1/1/4, fol. 95r.

⁴⁶ This educational role is present in Williams, ‘Sport and the Elite’, 395.

⁴⁷ University of St Andrews, Special Collections (hereafter SAUL), B65/8/1, St Andrews Burgh Court Books, 4 June 1591, but Turnbull was dead prior to 29 March 1591 as can be seen in an entry under that latter date; T. M’Crie, *Life of Andrew Melville*, ed. T. M’Crie (Edinburgh, 1856), 154. A 1533 statute of the University of St Andrews licensed its students to engage in virtuous sporting activities such as golf and archery: E. Edwards *et al.*, *Bats, Balls & Bows: A History of Sport in the University of St. Andrews* (St Andrews, 1998), 8.

⁴⁸ Buchanan, *Archery in Scotland*, 5–7. With respect to terminology, a debt for ‘ane shooting board’ is recorded in Elgin in 1651: Moray Archives (hereafter MA), ZBEL, B2/14, Elgin Town Council Court Book, p. 211. The context does not add any detail as to whether this

Further research needs to be done concerning urban archery marks, particularly concerning the sensitive issues of their location and financing. In Ayr, the location of the shooting range might have been subject to discussion and potential relocation. However, in May 1551, when a petition was presented to the council by a local citizen to get a tenancy on some town lands, the council declined. The lands in question, known as the burgh's 'Iyle of land in cwnyngseark', was not to be set in feu to the petitioner (William Lockhart) nor to anyone in the future because 'ye samy[n] may not be forborne for ye making of ye townis buttis y[r]of'.⁴⁹ The council had thus earmarked this piece of ground as the location of the town's archery site. When a generation later the important process of riding the marches took place, the town magistrates perambulated the various areas of the burgh. The town officials passed the lands of 'ye auld buttis' in its May 1582 exercise.⁵⁰ This is confirmed by an entry in the burgh accounts when 20s. was granted to John Chalmers 'to help the bigging of ye buttis' during the 1585–86 fiscal exercise.⁵¹ As the Ayr instance shows, the granting in feu of the town's common was one occasion when the archery site came to life in the records, usually as a boundary marker. In September 1563, Aberdeen renegotiated these feus with the tacksmen of the town's common. Some of these pieces of lands and crofts were bounded by 'ye tovnis buttis'.⁵² In Glasgow, these archery marks had seen better days by the time of the fiscal year 1633–34 as the council allocated £20 10s. 8d. to be spent for 'repairing of ye buttis'.⁵³ In sharp contrast to *cachepells*, these urban archery targets were located at the periphery for obvious safety reasons.

was for the use of a bow or for something else. The *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* does not contain any such entry.

⁴⁹ AA, B6/12/3, fol. 10r. The area referred to is known as the Common Isle, a portion of present-day Cunning Park: J. Strawhorn, *The History of Ayr: Royal Burgh and County Town* (Edinburgh, 1989), 47.

⁵⁰ AA, B6/11/1/1, Ayr Burgh Court and Council Records, fols 52v–3r; and B6/18/1, Ayr Town Council Minutes, 1598–1611, 18 October 1603. In April 1644, Cullen town council decided to divide the Castle Hill and the surrounding grass and sea banks from its current four parts into eight, to be set to tacksmen. William Stevenson bought the tack for the grass 'bezond ye burne besyd the buttis', that is the area west of the Burn of Cullen, perhaps on the site of the present-day Cullen Links Golf Course: MA, ZBCu, B2/4, Cullen Court Book, fol. 175r.

⁵¹ AA, B6/11/1/3, fol. 389v. There was an additional payment for 'turfis' brought to these marks.

⁵² ACA, CA1/1/25, pp. 77–81.

⁵³ GCA, C1/1/9, 22 November 1634.

Fencing

A sportification of both the military exercises and the tournament as well as popular games occurred in the Renaissance era. For such martial arts forms as fencing and wrestling came the first printed instructions with their tradition of written textbooks dating back to the late Middle Ages.⁵⁴

Scottish students abroad enjoyed the facilities and opportunities presented to them during their stay at foreign universities. One such new trend was to attend fencing classes and a niche market similarly developed back home in Scotland. Fencing-master John Rodger is an interesting case. He established himself in Edinburgh to teach the art of swordsmanship over the period 1591–94 and by March 1597 he can be found offering his professional skills in the Canongate. Rodger actually achieved literary fame and immortality when merchant-poet John Burel took him as the subject for his broadsheet satirical sonnet published in 1601.⁵⁵ However, it is now possible to add an extra piece of biographical information for this expert blade. Prior to his move to Edinburgh, Rodger can be found as a ‘m[aster]r off fens’ in St Andrews in March 1588/89, when he appeared in front of the burgh court in a legal claim he pursued against maltman John Downie.⁵⁶

Rodger’s successor in Edinburgh was John Anderson. At some point in 1598, Anderson entered into a financial obligation worth £80 with local goldsmith James Crawford, with Crawford having advanced the money to a third party on Anderson’s behalf.⁵⁷ Another case emerges in which a fencing-master acted as a creditor. Within a year prior to June 1614, James Bannatyne, ‘m[aster]r of defence’ in Edinburgh, loaned £20 to Robert Ross, son of local merchant Thomas Ross. Not being forward with his money, the bailie court instructed Ross to clear his debt.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Behringer, ‘Arena and Pall Mall’, 331–2; J. McClelland, *Body and Mind: Sport in Europe from the Roman Empire to the Renaissance* (London, 2006), chaps 6–8, for the broader articulation of the phenomenon.

⁵⁵ J. Durkan, *Scottish Schools and Schoolmasters 1560–1633*, (ed.) J. Reid-Baxter (Woodbridge, 2013), 175, 286–7, 293; J. Reid-Baxter, ‘Politics, passion and poetry in the circle of James VI: John Burel and his surviving works’, in (ed.) L. A. J. R. Houwen *et al.*, *A Palace in the Wild* (Leuven, 2000), 203. Rodger died of the plague in July 1606 in the lands of Sciennes on the Burgh Muir by Edinburgh, which was then used for those infected with the disease: NRS, CC8/8/42, Commissariat of Edinburgh, Register of Testaments, pp. 476–80.

⁵⁶ SAUL, B65/8/1, 4 March, 11 March 1588/89. The following references might be relevant depending on Rodger’s wife’s/wives’ name(s): SAUL, B65/8/1, 16 November 1591 (Christian Elder); ECA, Edinburgh Burgh Court, Diet Book, December 1601–October 1603, 16 June 1603 (Bessie Henrysone).

⁵⁷ NRS, B22/8/8, Edinburgh Register of Deeds, fol. 361r–v. In August 1603, Harry ‘demingo maist[er] of armes’ likewise stood in debt of 20 marks Scots to Aberdeen burgess Richard Irving: ACA, CA1/1/41, p. 300.

⁵⁸ ECA, SL 234/1/8, 14 June 1614.

Town councils granted a licence for fencing-masters to operate in town and teach their art. In September 1630, Edinburgh conferred such a licence upon John Cameron ‘maister of defence’ to hold ‘ane scoole of fence’ in town during the council’s discretion as long as he behaved ‘honestlie in all things’.⁵⁹ Once established, town councils paid these swordsmen their salaries, just as for other teachers or the ministers. Edinburgh gratified Gilbert Bannatyne, ‘m[aster]r of fenss’, with a £20 payment in its fiscal year 1610–11.⁶⁰ These salaries should be set against the price of equipment, which was not cheap. For budding or experienced swordsmen, a ‘pair of fensing swords’ could be had for £8 in early 1598 in Edinburgh. This was the price charged to William Rae younger who purchased his swords from the local goldsmith James Crawford.⁶¹ On top of these teachers’ fees, the local authorities covered further costs. In addition to his above-mentioned £20 fee, Gilbert Bannatyne received annually £40 towards the rent of his ‘fence schole for Instructing ye zowt [youth]’.⁶² Hence when in August 1626 and August 1627, St Andrews’ town council awarded £40 to William Scrimgeour, the local ‘maister of fence’, this may well have been to cover his rent rather than for his fee.⁶³

But there was more. Burgh records noted other emoluments still to their local fencing-masters, such as £8 given to Thomas Ballantyne by the Aberdeen guildry in late May 1599.⁶⁴ In this case, a correlated source explains the occasion behind that remuneration. Earlier that month, Ballantyne had been busy ‘in Instructing of certan zoung men & nichtbors of the town to handill their hagbuttis and pickis in the linkis of this burgh’.⁶⁵ This was by no means an isolated instance. In Perth, in August 1626, the town treasurer was instructed to pay a double angel-noble to an unnamed ‘m[aste]r fensar’ to come to Perth when required ‘to be m[aste]r dreillar’ in the burgh.⁶⁶ Burghs demonstrably valued and promoted the transferable skills of military training and discipline that fencing-masters had to inculcate into the inhabitants.

But with fencing developing and attaining such prominence on the Continent, it is no surprise to find European expatriates teaching their art in Scotland, as with the aforementioned Harry ‘demingo’ in Aberdeen in 1603. In

⁵⁹ ECA, SL1/1/14, Edinburgh Town Council Minutes, p. 953.

⁶⁰ ECA, Edinburgh Town Treasurer’s Accounts, 1596–1612, p. 1156.

⁶¹ ECA, SL 234/1/5, 12 February 1600.

⁶² ECA, SL1/1/12, p. 58. The first instalment was to begin on 11 November 1610.

⁶³ SAUL, B65/19/1, St Andrews Treasurer’s Accounts, no. 11, August 1626; no. 12, 2 August 1627. The fact that these were granted by an Act of council suggests rent money. Interestingly, in both years, the entry comes immediately after payments made in connection with the wappenshaw (muster or review of the men under arms). So, these may well have covered his service (among others) at these military musters, just as with the contemporary Perth fencing-master mentioned below.

⁶⁴ ACA, CA7/2/1, accounts 1598–99, discharge 31 May 1599.

⁶⁵ ACA, CA1/1/38, p. 525.

⁶⁶ PKA, B59/16/2, fol. 49v.

towns, foreign fencing-masters offered their services, at times cumulating various disciplines to reach out to their clientele. Frenchman James Bernardon, professor of 'the french tongue dancing & ffencing' presented a supplication to Glasgow council to hold classes in town. This the council licensed him to do in November 1663. The burgh magistrates went even as far as granting him the monopoly of such classes for five years and a corresponding tax exemption, highlighting the critical shortage of skilled trainers in these fields. They also awarded him a modest annual salary of 40s. sterling (£24 Scots).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ GCA, C1/1/14, 21 November 1663, 7 May 1664.