

# JOSEPH STRUTT – A PIONEERING ENGLISH ETHNOGRAPHER OF SPORT

Agata Maćków,  
(College of Foreign Languages, Poznań, Poland)



## ABSTRACT

Joseph Strutt (1749 - 1802) was an eighteenth century English scholar and erudite who, following the prevailing ideas of the English Enlightenment, became interested in his country's past and decided to study not only its history but mainly its culture. His research resulted in the publication of various books on manners and customs of the English people, on their dresses and the ways they had developed since the early Middle Ages and, most importantly on their sports and pastimes. The last volume in his collection was solely devoted to the ways the English people used to spend their time playing outdoor or indoor games, the many forms of which were scrupulously researched and then described by Strutt. Joseph Strutt, although he did not realize it, began the English ethnographic tradition through his study of the historical development of certain sports and through his detailed analysis of the ways these sports were played and also through pointing to functions that these pastimes played in the society. Such analysis should earn him a title of the pioneer of English ethnography and his name should be known among scholars. Unfortunately, this is not the case and therefore the aim of the following article is to show at least part of his achievements pointing to their value in the ethnographic work concerned with sport.

\* \*

Joseph Strutt was an eighteenth century English scholar and author of various books depicting English culture and history. Born on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1749 in Springfield Mill, Chelmsford, he began his work as an engraver in the Reading Room of the British Museum where he was soon immersed in numerous books and manuscripts depicting different aspects of his country's culture. His interest in such matters resulted in the publication of his own collections, among which we can find: *Manners, Customs, Arms, Habits, & c., of the People of England, Dresses and Habits of the English People* and *Sports and Pastimes of the English People*. Throughout his whole life he gathered materials for his research and the artifacts which he collected at home and which he used for the further descriptions in his books. He spent almost all his life living in London where he could observe people from various walks of life and these observations also proved useful for his later studies of the English customs and sports. He died on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1802 a year after the publication of his most famous volume, namely *Sports and Pastimes of the English People*.

Although his books, and especially the last one, were reprinted many times after his death, Strutt is still treated as a rather neglected eighteenth century English scholar. His works laid the foundations for future historic and ethnographic research in the field of ethnography and created the necessary basis for future reference and for future ethnographic and anthropological studies concentrated on human play.

The amount of research itself should already place him among the most conspicuous English scholars, "to be ranked among the distinguished literary men of the close of the eighteenth century" (Cox 1903: v). Unfortunately, the name of Joseph Strutt surprisingly disappeared from later scholarly work. The general, as well as the sporting encyclopedias, do not mention Strutt at all: the famous *Oxford Companion to World Sports and Games* by John Arlott or the recently published (2000) *Encyclopaedia of British Sport*, edited by Richard Cox, Grant Jarvie and Wray Vamplew, both failed to recognize his existence and his services in the field of sport, and especially English sporting history. In the last encyclopedia Strutt is, in fact, mentioned twice in an occasional context but not in the context of his main work and achievement. This fact was not, however, unnoticed - the failure to mention Strutt in the *Encyclopaedia of British Sport* was criticized by one of the Polish scholarly magazines published in English entitled *Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism*<sup>1</sup>. The above mentioned criticism resulted in the publication, after the years of neglect, of an entry dedicated to Strutt in the following edition of the *Encyclopaedia of British Sport*<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, it will probably be a long time before the other Encyclopedias, not necessarily concerned with sport, stop omitting Strutt. General British encyclopedias since time immemorial have rightly included people connected with sport as those worthy of separate entries. It is, however, very difficult to understand why an ordinary contemporary cricket player or a footballer find their place in these almanacs easier than a person whose accomplishments are far greater than those of the present athletes.

Failure to mention Strutt in various English sources concerning sport becomes even more surprising when the long and noteworthy British, and especially English, sporting traditions are taken into consideration. English authors, e.g. P. McBride (1932) boasted about English sporting traditions being praised by German authors "English games have developed spontaneously and freely through the urge to play (...) The cult of the natural is the deeper sense of all English life. The balance of mind and body is the highest English aim" (McBride 1932 after Kircher 1927: 39). The same author pompously claimed that "our sport, just like our religion, has become a tradition generally accepted (...). We have, so to speak, been brought up to them, they are generally accepted by those we associate with" (McBride 1932: 85). The nation which is proud of having developed specific disciplines and rules concerning them, maintaining the traditions and encouraging playing sport in schools, seems to have completely excluded one of its most outstanding personalities in this field from the ethnographic and anthropological sources. Contemporary scholars definitely chose to ignore the fact that he had achieved something spectacular. It is also difficult to understand why scholars underestimate his accomplishments and his unquestionable input into researching English culture, of which sport is a vital part.

The importance of any kind of play was already noticed by Strutt in the eighteenth century and forcefully expressed in the introduction to his *Sports and Pastimes*...

... in order to form a just estimation of the character of any particular people, it is absolutely necessary to investigate the Sports and Pastimes most generally prevalent among them. War, policy, and other contingent circumstances, may effectually place men, at different times, in different points of view, but, when we follow them into their retirements, where no disguise is necessary, we are most likely to see them in their true state, and may best judge of their natural dispositions (Strutt 1810: i).

Strutt was focused on his own, English, culture and the games prevalent among the Englishmen following the general trend that developed in the seventeenth century, namely antiquarianism or in other words interest in folklore. As has been observed (Lipoński 2003a) the seventeenth century witnessed the beginning of the decline of "folk culture" due to the developments of the industrial revolution. Therefore some avid enthusiasts of country life began to assemble every possible item of country customs, e.g., dances, songs, games and plays. This was considered to be "antiquarian" work, the main aim of which was to rescue what remained and which was worth rescuing. The urge to develop and continue this effort came from earlier stages in English history, namely the attempt to rescue the

---

<sup>1</sup> See review of *Encyclopedia of British Sports*, by W. Lipoński, *Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism*, vol. XI, No 1, June 2004, p. 108-109

<sup>2</sup> See: *Strutt, Joseph*, an entry by John Martin, in: *Encyclopedia of Traditional British Rural Sports*, Tony Collins, John Martin, Wray Vamplew, eds., Routledge, London-New York 2005, p. 253-254.

remnants of culture which were abandoned in the monasteries after they were dissolved by Henry VIII in the sixteenth century. However, it was William John Thomas who first introduced "the term 'Folk-Lore' to replace 'popular antiquities' (...)" (Susina 1988: 303). For him it meant the collection of "... the manners, customs, observations, superstitions, ballads, and proverbs of the common people which had not previously been considered worthy of study" (Susina 1988: 303). Therefore, Joseph Strutt was partly one of the eighteenth century antiquarians who was striving to save some part of his people's heritage. He outlined his aims in one of his letters saying: "I would not only be an Antiquarian, but a refined thinker. I would not only discover antiquities, but would, by explaining their use, render them useful" (Strutt 1896: 21).

When one wishes to look at Strutt as a pioneering ethnographer one has to consider the general features of this kind of study and the ways in which Strutt's work fits to these characteristics. His first innovation was that he decided to write not about distant, savage cultures but about his own, English culture. Following Van Maanen's expectations mentioned earlier, Strutt's task was slightly easier due to his being English and, through his previous studies of the customs, dresses and beliefs, knowing much about his culture. His aim was to rescue English heritage, even if it meant writing about something as common as sport and games. In his introduction to *The Regal and Ecclesiastical Antiquities* he wrote:

The work now offered to the public will (the Author hopes) prove, in some measure, useful to artists, as well as pleasing to the curious-useful because those who have occasion to represent scenes from English history may find the dress and character of ancient times; and pleasing to the curious, because these pictures are the most likely to contain the exact representation of the customs and manners of the earlier era of our ancestors (Strutt 1896: 21).

Moreover, he strived to judge his compatriots as well as himself: "to form a just estimation of the character of any particular people" (Strutt 1810: i). His writings were meant for the general public, for the English people, who knew very little about their own culture. Therefore such work ought "to show cultures, rather than analyze them, (...)" the ethnography must be relatively free of jargon (...), it must present materials a well-read but ethnographically unsophisticated audience would regard as interesting" (Van Maanen 1988: 32). And that is what he did, he was aware of the people who would study his book and he made some reservations concerning his writing at the beginning: "it is my intention, in the following pages, to confine myself as much as possible to positive intelligence, I shall studiously endeavour to avoid all controversial and conjectural arguments" (Strutt 1810: i). Furthermore, by concentrating on the sports and pastimes not only of the aristocracy and upper classes, but also on the popular games of the ordinary people from towns and villages, including children and women, he desired to make his description as thorough as possible and as interesting as possible to every reader.

Secondly, Strutt's "method" was based on two principles: reading and then quoting the descriptions of different games and pastimes he could find in the British Museum collections of manuscripts, in collections of plays, in chronicles, in documents and in works of fiction available, e.g. "I remember also a story recorded in a manuscript, written about the reign of Edward III, of a young man of family, who came to a feast, where many of the nobility were present, in a vesture called a coat hardy, cut short in the German fashion, and resembling the dress of a minstrel" (Strutt 1810: 171). Moreover, he participated in the social life of London, he probably observed his sons playing and from these observations he drew conclusions and descriptions for his work: "I remember in my youth to have seen several persons expert in slinging of stones" (Strutt 1810: 67), "about thirty years back, I saw a grand match at base played in the fields behind Montague House, now the British Museum" (Strutt 1810: 72), "towards the end of last summer I saw three itinerant musicians parading the streets of London" (Strutt 1810: 209), "I have frequently seen the boys for want of both perform it with stones" (Strutt 1810: 340). To represent the ways in which hunting in Norman times, for example, was performed he had no choice but to rely on illustrations from manuscripts. It is no wonder that having studied so many different manuscripts and other texts certain oversights were unavoidable.

He was aware of the imminent faults of his book stemming from the lack of reliable material, and he realized he was not the person who could fully improve the situation. In addition, he tried to justify his decisions in choosing and in using certain sources so as not to be accused of distorting or misrepresenting the data:

all the information that remains respecting the ancient inhabitants of this island is derived from foreign writers partially acquainted with them as a people, and totally ignorant of their domestic customs and amusements; the silence, therefore, (...) leaves us without the power of tracing them with the least degree of certainty (Strutt 1810: i).

The task in truth is extremely difficult; and many omissions, as well as many errors, must of necessity occur in the prosecution of it; but none, I hope, of any great magnitude, nor more than candour will overlook, especially when it is recollected,

that in a variety of instances, I have been constrained to proceed without any guide, and explore, as it were, the recesses of a trackless wilderness (Strutt 1810: xlviii).

In the introduction to another book *The Regal and Ecclesiastical Antiquities* he admitted:

As no work of this kind (viz., in a regular series) has been yet attempted in this kingdom, the Author humbly hopes that the indulgent public will excuse whatever they may find amiss or defective; and he, on his part, begs leave to assure them that he has done, and will always do, the utmost in his power to render the work a perfect copy of the valuable originals (···) (Strutt 1896: 21).

In this way he strived to explain his present and future faults and ask for indulgence if the readers found his work deficient in any way.

Thirdly, the division of *Sports and Pastimes*··· points to the ethnographic approach towards the subject matter. The whole work consists of four Books, each having separate chapters to describe particular groups of sports; Book I portrays the rural exercises of the aristocracy, Book II - the rural exercises of the common people, Book III - the games of the city dwellers and Book IV - domestic entertainment and seasonal games. Almost every game or sport is presented in its historical development throughout the ages, the details of the presentation depending on the availability of sources and on the logical conclusions of the author drawn from the reading of the existing material. The definitions of the games, the rules and the ways in which the games were played and the shows performed are explained in such a way that a layperson could understand them, e.g. "the Forest Charter, insisting that no man should forfeit his life, or his limbs, for killing the king's deer; - but, if he was taken in the fact of stealing venison belonging to the king, he should be subjected to a heavy fine" (Strutt 1810: 8), "the performer stands upon a ladder, which he shifts from place to place, and ascends or descends without losing the equilibrium, or permitting it to fall" (Strutt 1810: 204), "every kind of military combat made in conformity to certain rules, and practised by the knights and their esquires for diversion or gallantry, was anciently called a tournament" (Strutt 1810: 103). Moreover, whenever possible a proper anecdote or a short story appeared, e.g. a story of a Danish chieftain and his hawk and their adventures or "Gaston earl of Foix, a foreign nobleman contemporary with king Edward, kept upwards of six hundred dogs in his castle for the purpose of hunting. He had four greyhounds called by the romantic names of Tristram, Hector, Brute, and Roland" (Strutt 1810: 6).

At this point readers could perhaps turn their attention to the history of the English people's attitudes to sport and entertainment presented in *Sports and Pastimes*···. Such a discussion will help to see the subject through the eyes of the book's author.

Strutt's train of thought in presenting these attitudes was the following: first he illustrated the attitudes and sports of the nobility and other groups of the society and secondly he proceeded to the description of the manners of entertainment of these social groups. The description, nevertheless, shows only what Strutt imagined to be ideal and what he could find in the early manuscripts, which sometimes presented a somewhat distorted portrait of reality. Certain other oversights were unfortunately unavoidable, for example these concerning the role of sport in education. Nevertheless, in order to appreciate the extent of his research and to give the readers a general overview of *Sports and Pastimes*··· a few examples of the games mentioned by Strutt will follow.

One of the most popular forms of entertainment in the early Middle Ages, which might be treated as a perfect example of the changing attitudes towards sport, was the tournament. For a long time the participation in various jousts and tournaments was encouraged by royalty because it strengthened the aristocratic conviction of being a unique part of society and because it simply prepared the people for battle, which was not uncommon in those insecure times. The tournament itself was a highly formalized event. We learn from our author what it looked like in its most traditional form, and he himself found this description in one of the Harleian manuscripts. The event was preceded by an announcement providing the rules of combat and the payment of fees necessary for participating in the competition. The participants had to be of noble origin and they had to be prepared to prove their noble background back to their great-grandfathers (Barber 1974: 170). Two days before the tournament the two sides represented by two noblemen were to be in their tents and each of the tents should be marked by the banner of one of these noblemen. The champions should be ready for combat at ten o'clock in the morning, waiting for the usual check of their arms and the approval to participate in the tournament. They were ordered then to arm themselves and to take their places opposite each other, separated by two cords. The lowering of the cords would mark the beginning of the competition. The tournament ended with the banners being folded up (Strutt 1810: 123-124). As for the prizes they were numerous and depended on the rank of the tournament, say, a rich sword or a valuable helmet. One more, but probably less material, prize for splendid achievement in the tournament was the respect and admiration of the ladies who were as ardent supporters of this pastime as the knights. At some point it appeared to be of crucial importance for a knight to have his favorite lady whom he treated as a paragon of beauty and virtue and who usually acted as judges in the competitions. As summarized by Salzman: "there was much picturesque ceremony and a great display of splendour; the tilting ground was crowded

with onlookers, and the grand stand was full of lords and ladies in their most magnificent costumes; the combatants were gorgeously or fantastically arrayed" (Salzman 1926: 204).

It seems that Strutt's observations concerning the English love for splendor and show were not unfounded. And again we find in his portrayal of this sport a unique two-sided attitude. On the one hand he spoke of tournaments and their rich background using elaborate and elevated language which might mean that he wholeheartedly supported them and thought they were indispensable parts of everyday life. From his description we can also learn that the respect for the ladies paid by the knights was a virtue worthy of praise and worth continuing. On the other hand, he severely criticized the manner of its outrageous development into a pastime devoid of any ideals of chivalry and instead full of unnecessary exaggeration.

However, gradually the interest in violent sports such as tournaments declined as they became associated with the vulgar. Strutt explained this decline by the fact that, with time, tournaments started to provide simple entertainment devoid of any romantic and chivalric background and being that they ceased to be interesting for the main participants, namely the knights. The kings, Henry VII and his son Henry VIII, were concerned to revive the popularity of such exercises in order to avoid idleness "the ground of all vice" (Strutt 1810: xii) and therefore Henry VII was often a patron of the games and Henry VIII set an example taking part in archery or tilting competitions. By outlining briefly the history of jousts and tournaments Strutt was capable of acute observation of the political motives in promoting them, despite the fact they had lost their early splendor. Strutt justly pointed out that during a period of unrest and war, the populace forgot about their misfortunes by being entertained, therefore he said about the royal support for the tournaments: "the sanction of royalty (...) was perfectly political" (Strutt 1810: xi).

When describing popular games, on the other hand, Joseph Strutt first pointed out the common origin of these sports, i.e. the sports most popular among the citizens of towns and country were, in their beginnings, the ones prevailing among the nobility. Whenever it was possible, the people copied these games, sometimes changed the rules and adapted them to the changing weather conditions. Thus different forms of tilting developed (e.g. running at the quintain, human quintain, water quintain), which originally were a part of a tournament and therefore were prohibited to the lower classes.

"The quintain was frequently nothing better than a stake fixed into the ground, with a flat piece of board made fast to the upper part of it, as a substitute for the shield" (Strutt 1810: 109), sometimes instead of a shield "the resemblance of a human figure carved in wood was introduced (...) generally made in the likeness of a Turk or Saracen" (Strutt 1810: 104). The original form of the exercise was to strike the figure with a sword while standing close to it, later on it demanded from the soldier to run at the figure on a horse and try to strike it in such a way that it did not turn away hitting the soldier on his back and throwing him from the horse (Strutt 1810: 104). The quintain, contrary to the tournament and joust, was not prohibited to anyone and in its most simple form it proved very easy and cheap to build: "a moveable quintain (...) consisting only of a cross-bar turning upon a pivot, with a broad part to strike against on one side, and a bag of earth or sand depending from the other" (Strutt 1810: 109). Creativity in inventing different types of this exercise was enormous, Strutt enumerated as many as eight different forms of this pastime and most of his descriptions were based on pictures taken from different manuscripts. The first kind of quintain practiced by Londoners was simply running at it and receiving prizes for the best performance, say, a peacock (Strutt 1810: 109). The second kind was the water quintain practiced particularly by young Londoners and its description was taken from the book by Fitzstephen. The game was played as follows: "a pole or mast (...) is fixed in the midst of the Thames, with a shield strongly attached to it; and a boat being previously placed at some distance, is driven swiftly towards it by the force of oars and the violence of the tide, having a young man standing in the prow, who holds a lance in his hand with which he is to strike the shield" (Strutt 1810: 107-108). The object of the game was to strike the shield in such a way as not to be thrown from the boat. There was one more type of water quintain mentioned by Strutt, the point of which was to run at a barrel full of water and to hit it so as not to overthrow it (Strutt 1810: 111). However, as Strutt pointed out it was only one of the manners of playing the quintain and it was mostly popular in Italy not in England. The fourth type was the so called human quintain, very often omitted by writers, but practiced most often by military men. The point was the same as in any other kind, i.e. to hit the shield with a lance but in this type it was the shield of another person who, in return, had to defend himself (Strutt 1810: 111). This kind of the quintain gave rise to another development, popular among the young, i.e. the living quintain who: "is seated upon a stool with three legs without any support behind; and the business (...) of the tilter, was to overthrow him; while, on his part he was to turn the stroke of the pole or lance on one side with his shield, and by doing so with adroitness occasion the fall of his adversary" (Strutt 1810: 112).

The citizens of England found pleasure especially in various kinds of gambling and baiting of animals. The animals, unfortunately, and to Strutt's great indignation, were mostly used for stage combats between themselves, like bull and bear baiting and cock

fighting “attended only by the lowest and most despicable part of the people; which plainly indicates a general refinement of manners and prevalency of humanity among the moderns” (Strutt 1810: 228). Performances of this kind used to be popular among the nobility and royalty, e.g. Richard III, Henry VIII, Mary and Elizabeth I. They used to watch them in places built specially for that purpose, including the Paris Garden built in 1526 at Bankside on the south of the River Thames. “Bears were considered ideal animals for baiting because of their size and aggressive nature when attacked. They had powerful limbs and long curved claws, and could stand upright on their hind legs” (Billett 1994: 25). The bears were attacked by the dogs: “four to six mastiffs were generally let loose as a pack to attack the bear. It was not unusual for two of the dogs to be immediately killed or badly injured. These were replaced by the unleashing of fresh dogs and the fight continued until the dogs were defeated, or the bear became so injured it could no longer defend itself” (Billett 1994: 28); when bears were killed instantly “fresh ones are immediately supplied” (Strutt 1810: 229). To this Strutt added another cruel pastime of “whipping a blinded bear, which is performed by five or six men standing circularly with whips, which they exercise upon him without any mercy, as he cannot escape because of his chain” (Strutt 1810: 229). When bears were not sufficient to entertain the public other animals started to be used, for example bulls.

Bull-baiting was, however, more widespread and not confined only to bear gardens. Public bull-baiting was encouraged by city authorities, much to Strutt’s disappointment: “which was frequently productive of much mischief by drawing together a large concourse of idle and dissipated persons, and affording them an opportunity of committing many gross disorders with impunity. Indeed a public bull-baiting rarely ended without some riot and confusion” (Strutt 1810: 244).

Sometimes people’s attitudes towards various pastimes coincided with the prevailing attitudes of the society as in the case of baiting of animals. Strutt strongly criticized these forms of entertainment: “pastimes which equally attracted their attention, and manifested a great degree of barbarism” (Strutt 1810: xxxvi). However, this opinion can be fully appreciated only in its full context. There is no denying that these pastimes enjoyed enormous popularity, and moreover, they proved to be lucrative. Strutt’s open criticism was not an exception - he was one of many who tried to protect the animals.

From the sixteenth century through to the late eighteenth century the ancient notion that animals existed only for their usefulness to man or for the pleasure they might afford was increasingly called into question. Scientists began to investigate the natural world in its own right and to consider how animal biology differed from human biology. From theological and philosophical viewpoint it became less acceptable to view the world as made purely for man (Holt 1989: 32).

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were already statutes protecting the animals and cemeteries created specifically for pets. A special organization was even established to take care of the animals, called “the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals” (Lipoński 2003a). “Their concern was not just to stop animal sports but to improve the treatment of working animals and the methods and conditions of slaughter” (Holt 1989: 34). Among those who most ardently supported these views were the Methodists, who saw animal baiting as a part of a sinful way of life, and also the wealthy inhabitants of big cities. They were supported by the nobility “who believed as strongly in the fair treatment of horses as they did in the right to hunt foxes” (Holt 1989: 34). This controversy has continued to this day and it remains to be seen what will happen with traditional English fox hunting.

The fondness of the English concerning the extravaganza began with the upper classes:

the English nobility at all times affected great parade, seldom appearing abroad without large trains of servitors and retainers; and the lower classes of the people delighted in gaudy shows, pageants, and processions. (...) In the middle ages, the love of show was carried to an extravagant length (...) the courts of princes and the castles of the great barons were daily crowded with numerous retainers (...) whole companies of minstrels, mimics, jugglers, tumblers, rope-dancers, and players (Strutt 1810: xx-xxi).

However, this extravagant behavior had its hidden political aims and reflected a change in aristocratic attitudes towards their own role in medieval society. With the beginning of the fifteenth century the general ideal of the knight was very close to the chivalric ideal. Nevertheless, an interesting transition took place: “transition from the warrior to the courtier or administrator became more pronounced” (Wilkinson 1969: 316). With this development the craving for elegance and lavishness gained a new meaning: “it was an expression of aristocratic pride but also an instrument of policy. Far from being simply a sign of decadent chivalry and of a ruling class quite divorced from reality, it was also intended to win friends and adherents by advertising generosity and wealth” (Wilkinson 1969: 316). This is probably one of the most likely interpretations of this phenomenon but certainly one which Strutt, unfortunately, failed to notice.

Moreover, the noblemen and the lower classes were accustomed to the displays of the so called civic shows, which were performed in times of annual festivals, coronation

processions, royal weddings etc. where: "were exhibited variety of entertainments, according to the taste of the times, but in which propriety had very little share; the whole forming a scene of pompous confusion, where feasting, drinking, music, dancing, tumbling, singing, and buffoonery, were jumbled together, and mirth excited too often at the expense of common decency" (Strutt 1810: xxii). The celebrations consisted of various theatrical performances of mythology or chivalric legends, the staging of pageants or musical performances combined with dancing.

Yet dancing, balancing, vaulting and tumbling in their nature posed some difficulties for Strutt. He was mostly confused by numerous examples of these arts and the variety of names attributed to them. He discovered that "the Anglo-Saxon writers frequently used the terms of leaping and tumbling for dancing" (Strutt 1810: 191) and in view of the above he suggested that "no common dancing could have attracted the attention" (Strutt 1810: 191). Therefore the writers used descriptions of the performances they were familiar with, i.e. of tumbling and leaping to denote the dancing which was performed usually at court. Strutt also found many illustrations of dancing which involved leaping or tumbling apart from the examples of dancing in the modern meaning of the word, e.g. "a young man dancing singly to the music of two flutes and a lyre (...) ease and elegance of motion" (Strutt 1810: 194). The general name "dancing" was moreover used to describe tricks which had nothing to do either with dancing or with leaping and which Strutt held in contempt and called "the lowest kind of buffoonery" (Strutt 1810: 192). These were for example: "tumbler in the reign of Edward the Second, who (...) frequently fell from his horse in such a manner, that the king was highly diverted, and laughed exceedingly" (Strutt 1810: 192). The above mentioned examples complicated the general picture even further.

One the most fashionable and admirable dances was the sword-dance which derived its name from the weapons used while performing it. In the oldest way of performing it "young men (...) strip themselves, and dance among the points of swords and spears with most wonderful agility, and even with the most elegant and graceful motions (...) the dancers of the present day, when they have formed their swords into a figure, lay them upon the ground, and dance round them" (Strutt 1810: 195). The English varieties of the sword-dance are called 'linked' or 'hilt and point' dances: "participants hold the handle of their own 'sword' in one hand, and the point of their neighbour's sword in the other, thus making a linked circle" (Simpson, Roud 2000: 350). Strutt's contemporaries did not possess the grace and perfection of the earlier dances, much to his dismay:

about thirty years back, I remember to have seen at Flockton's a much noted but very clumsy juggler, a girl about eighteen or twenty years of age, who came upon the stage with four naked swords, two in each hand; when the music played, she turned round with great swiftness, and formed a great variety of figures with the swords, holding them over head, down by her sides, behind her, and occasionally she thrust them in her bosom (Strutt 1810: 196).

Strutt considered sword-dancing to be a species of military dance and, additionally, he drew a picture of another curious dance of this kind: "two men, equipped in martial habits, and each of them armed with a sword and a shield, are engaged in a combat; (...) the musician acts in a double capacity, and is, together with a female assistant, dancing round them to the cadence of the music" (Strutt 1810: 195). Unfortunately Strutt was at a loss to provide either the name or any other details of this dance. The description was based solely on a picture from a manuscript and this pioneer ethnographer, having no other references, had to rely again on his own judgment.

One cannot forget about one of English most popular pastimes - the ball games. Among the nobility two of the most popular ones were golf and bowling. Golf, or as Strutt wrote it 'goff', was practiced in the northern parts of England it needed to take place on large, open areas. The names of the game were various:

... *paganica*, because it was used by the common people (...). In the reign of Edward III. The Latin name *cambuca* was applied to this pastime, and it derived the denomination, no doubt, from the crooked club or bat with which it was played; the bat was also called a bandy, from its being bent, and hence the game itself is frequently written in English bandy ball (Strutt 1810: 94).

The author of the first ethnographic study of the English sports did not ponder over the origins of golf - he seemed to be satisfied with the claim that the game came from the north of England and he also did not make any reference to it as a game of Scottish origin. He claimed, however, that the seventeenth century was a time when golf was most popular among the nobility, including people of the highest position, e.g. Prince Henry, the eldest son of King James I: "the game consists in driving the ball into certain holes made in the ground; he who achieves it the soonest, or in the fewest numbers of strokes obtains the victory" (Strutt 1810: 95). Strutt, to complete his picture, provided the readers with the description of the bats and the balls as they were used by his contemporaries: "the handle of this instrument is straight, and usually made of ash, about four feet and a half in length; the curvature is affixed to the bottom, faced with horn and backed with lead" (Strutt 1810: 95); "the ball is a little one, but exceedingly

hard, being made with leather, and, (...) stuffed with feathers" (Strutt 1810: 95). In order to emphasize its importance and high esteem this pioneer ethnographer quoted a story from one of the Harleian Manuscripts about prince Henry, the eldest son of king James I who while playing golf: "whilst his schoolmaster stood talking with another and marked not his highness warning him to stand further off, the prince thinking he had gone aside, lifted up his goff-club to strike the ball; mean tyme one standing by said to him, beware that you hit not master Newton, wherewith he drawing back his hand, said, 'Had I done so, I had but paid my debts'" (Strutt 1810: 95). This short anecdote demonstrates not only the popularity of the game but is also a very good example of students' attitudes towards their teachers which, no matter what age they live in, will always be the same.

While the aristocracy had their bowling alleys and billiards, the common people entertained themselves by playing kayles, loggats, nine-pins or half-bowl. Let us focus on the first one mentioned, namely kayles. There were also other names for this game and of course different spellings, e.g. cayles, keiles and clesh, or cloish. It originated in France and was played with pins of different sizes: "in one instance there are six pins and in the other eight, and the form of the pins is somewhat different. One of them in both cases is taller (...) and this was (...) the king-pin" (Strutt 1810: 239). This game was supposed to give rise to the game of nine-pins and the difference between them lay in the arrangement of the pins, in kayles the pins were set in one row, whereas in nine-pins in a square in three rows. Sometimes instead of pins the boys used bones and called the game loggats or kittle-pins. The purpose of this game was to throw at these pins or bones with another, bigger pin or bone (Strutt 1810: 239). There was also another game called skittles, the difference between this game and nine-pins was provided by Strutt:

... the player stands at a distance settled by mutual consent of the parties concerned, and casts the bowl at the pins: the contest is, to beat them all down in the fewest throws. In playing at skittles, there is a double exertion; one by bowling, and the other by tipping: the first is performed at a given distance, and the second standing close to the frame upon which the pins are placed, and throwing the bowl through in the midst of them (Strutt 1810: 240).

The differences between the games also depended on the pins that were used, e.g. Dutch-pins was a game similar to skittles but the pins used were taller and the bowls used to throw at them were made of wood.

Among the inhabitants of the country wrestling was almost as popular as any ball game, however, judging by Strutt's opinions it was not a sport fit for the aristocracy, it was practiced "by those the least civilized" (Strutt 1810: 73). Notwithstanding his prejudices Strutt decided, probably with some amount of reluctance, to focus on different types of wrestling. He mentioned two regions where wrestling was best performed, namely the South West (Cornwall and Devon) and London. The people there used to present their skills in public, e.g. on St James' s day or the feast of St Bartholomew, and they used to fight for different prizes, e.g. a ram or a cock (Strutt 1810: 75). As for the manners of performing Strutt quoted seventeenth century writer Carew:

'The beholders then cast, or form themselves into a ring, in the empty space whereof the two champions step forth, stripped into their dublets and hosen, and untrussed, that they may so the better command the use of their lymmes; and first shaking hands, in token of friendship, they fall presently to the effect of anger; for each striveth how to take hold of the other with his best advantage (...) whosoever overthroweth his mate, in such sort, as that either his backe, or the one shoulder, and contrary heele do touch the ground, is accounted to give a fall. If he be only endangered, and makes a narrow escape, it is called a foyle' (Strutt 1810: 76).

As can be seen, the course of play and the unwritten rules were not too different from present modes of wrestling. However, wrestling contests were conducive to various misunderstandings and sometimes even bitter arguments. The following is a vivid portrait of a typical wrestling contest where the citizens of London fought the inhabitants of Westminster:

a ram was appointed for the prize; the Londoners were victorious, having greatly excelled their antagonists, which produced a challenge from the conquered party, to renew the contest upon the Lammas day following at Westminster: the citizens of London readily consented, and met them accordingly, but in the midst of the diversion, the bailiff of Westminster and his associates took occasion to quarrel with the Londoners, a battle ensued, and many of the latter were severely wounded in making their retreat to the city. This unjustifiable petulance of the bailiff gave rise to a more serious tumult, and it was several days before the peace could be restored (Strutt 1810: 74).

With time wrestling ceased to be popular both among the nobility and among the populace, and in Strutt's times wrestling competitions were only to be seen during fairs or wakes.

Popular entertainment was also a matter of interest for Strutt, among many of its forms a reader can find a rather lengthy description of dice playing. It was both "universally prevalent" and so "pernicious in its consequences" (Strutt 1810: 270) that the people were "not only staking all they were worth, but even their liberty" (Strutt 1810: 271).

Yet, despite his general contempt for the game, Strutt had to acknowledge, albeit unwillingly, there were ten or even more various types of dice; the most common way of playing involved the use of "a hollow cylinder of wood, called the dice-box, into which they are put, and thence, being first shaken together, thrown out upon the table" (Strutt 1810: 271). It very often happened that dice were prohibited due to their gambling qualities: "supposing the play to be fair on either side, the chances upon the dice are equal to both parties; and the professed gamblers being well aware of this, will not trust to the determination of fortune, but have recourse to many nefarious arts to circumvent the unwary" (Strutt 1810: 272); these gamblers used to put a portion of lead into the dice making it heavier on one side and thus ensuring their winning. Again it seems that certain human vices are eternal and no matter how much they are castigated they do not disappear.

The fondness of gambling and the devotion to laziness did not end with dice-playing. Cards were, according to Strutt, equally treacherous and to support his views he quoted a sixteenth century poet:

Att ale howse too sit, at mack or at mall,  
Tables or dyce, or that cardis men call,  
Or what oother game owte of season dwe,  
Let them be punysched without all rescue.  
(Strutt 1810: 289)

Certainly early methods of producing cards were so expensive that they prevented many people from playing. Usually "outlines made upon blocks of wood were stamped upon the cards, and afterwards filled up by the hand; but, soon after the invention of engraving upon copper, the devices were produced by the graver, and sufficiently finished" (Strutt 1810: 290). There were many beautiful examples of such cards which Strutt had seen and presented in his work, i.e. "the King of Columbines, the Queen of Rabbits, the Knave of Pinks, and the Ace of Roses; which answered to the spades, the clubs, the diamonds, and the hearts, of the moderns" (Strutt 1810: 290). Not everyone could afford to buy such an extraordinary set of cards but as production developed cards ceased to be a luxury and "might readily be purchased by almost every class of persons; the common usage of cards was soon productive of serious evils" (Strutt 1810: 287). The evils of course consisted of notorious gambling and riots which often ensued in the places where card-playing was practiced. And again Strutt very seriously expressed his contempt and disappointment, although it probably did not have the consequences he desired. To complete the picture Strutt provided the names of various card games, concentrating on a few and briefly mentioning the rules. The one which he chose to describe in some detail was *primero*. In this game the player had four cards dealt to him one by one, the seven was the highest card in point of number that he could avail himself of, which counted for twenty-one, the six counted for sixteen, the five for fifteen, and the ace for the same, but the two, the three, and the four, for their respective points only. The knave of hearts was commonly fixed upon the quinola, which the player might make what card or suit he thought proper; if the cards were of different suits the highest number won the *primero*, if they were all of one colour he that held them won the flush (Strutt 1810: 291-292).

The pastimes prevalent among children also found their place in Strutt's description. Children willingly entertained themselves playing various board-games. One of them was called the Game of Goose and it was usually played during Christmas. The board was

divided into sixty-two small compartments arranged in a spiral form, with a large open space in the midst marked with the number sixty-three (···) it is played with two dice, and every player throws in his turn as he sits at the table: he must have a counter (···) and according to the amount of the two numbers thrown upon the dice he places his mark (···) moving it the next throw as many numbers forward as the dice permit him, and so on (···) when the number sixty-three is made exactly (···) at every fourth and fifth compartment in succession a goose is depicted, and if the cast thrown by the player falls upon a goose, he moves forward double the number of his throw (Strutt 1810: 295-296).

A similar pattern of a board-game was visible in games such as the game of snake or the game of matrimony, unfortunately only briefly described by Strutt (Strutt 1810: 296). These were only a few of many other popular pastimes, the others included various forms of running and chasing, skipping and swinging.

In his earlier work *A compleat view of the manners, customs, arms, habits, etc. of the inhabitants of England* Strutt explained his motives for dealing with historical subjects: "the very natural affection which generally is in all men to heare of the worthinesse of their ancestors, which they should indeed bee as desirous to imitate as delighted to understand" (Strutt 1775: iv); "was I hereunto moved, by seeing how divers of divers nations did labour to revive the old honour and glory of their owne beginnings and ancestors, and how in so doing they shewed themselves the most kinde lovers of their natural friends and countrymen" (Strutt 1775: iv). Such standpoint was further developed in the *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* where the author added an aim of establishing the truth about the character of the English through one of their most essential features, i.e. sport. The result exceeded his expectations - not only did he

manage to collect the material needed for his study and assemble it into a book but also he unconsciously succeeded in providing the first valuable English ethnographic work of such a scale, which provided a pattern for later ethnographic work not only in the field of sport. His observations concerning the sports of aristocracy, the inhabitants of the cities and the countryside focused on the games themselves but also on what they revealed about the characteristic features of these social groups. When we look closely at what Strutt managed to describe we can be surprised by the discovery of how diverse the world of the past was and we realize how little we know about these amusements. It would take scholars, e.g. Johann Huizinga, another 150 years to notice that games were essential in the development of man - Strutt was the first to acknowledge this fact in a very practical sense by describing the world around him. Sports and games constituted a vital element of culture of all social classes and also proved to be inherently bound with art and literature. The world of aristocratic sports, for instance, was filled with entertainments of every kind. The aristocracy was fond of lavish entertainment such as tournaments or hunting parties; it was essential for them to emphasize their special status in the society therefore they spent inordinate amounts of money on the best armor, the best horses, the best hounds and hawks. Their demand for splendor was insatiable - the hunting parties and tournaments were not enough to fill their leisure time. Hence the development of various outdoor and indoor activities ensued - among them chess and backgammon, billiards and shovel-board, rowing and yachting. These amusements enhanced their feelings of distinctiveness and for a long time provided a sense of belonging which, in turn, led to the creation of a rather stable vision of the world and of the society. This vision permeated every aspect of life, not only the entertainment but also the attitude towards other social groups and other nations. The noblemen were also very protective of their culture and for centuries cultivated their exclusive rights to these sports by influencing the authorities to impose bans and restrictions on, e.g. the rights to hunt. Despite these bans, or due to them, the common people devised their own varieties of the games they were forbidden to play. Such was the development of various games of ball, e.g. trap-ball or tip-cat. Moreover, they were creative enough to invent other forms of entertainment which, for the nobility, were unacceptable (e.g. football). However, the rationale behind these sports was similar - the games served an important unifying purpose, they strengthened the bonds between the inhabitants of a particular village or a town, the victories were a source of pride for the whole community and the losses aroused the feelings of guilt and pity. Entertainment was also especially important in the life of a common man since it provided an escape from the everyday drudgery, from the dullness of mundane existence and from the troubles he or she were faced with. The nobility, on the other hand, never shared similar problems, their lives were sophisticated enough, at least in comparison with the life of a common farmer, therefore their games and entertainments had to be more extravagant than the games and amusements they participated in every day. Strutt provided an excellent example of the extent of the Tudor extravaganza when he accounted for the diversions of Queen Elizabeth I in Kenilworth Castle. Yet both the aristocracy and the common people shared the same love for music and dancing and watching performances - they composed their own songs (unfortunately the names of folk composers escaped Strutt's attention); they listened to more and less famous composers performing for them (e.g. Mozart, Händel); they danced during public holidays and private parties and participated in various Church and local celebrations. Accounting for the variety of these performances was undeniably Strutt's greatest achievement. Although he did not think of himself as an ethnographer and he certainly was not aware of the influence of his work the text itself proved to be advantageous also for the future of ethnographic study. It is high time to acknowledge his work so as the following words would no longer be valid: "Such are the men, indefatigable in work, heroic in disinterestedness, whose labour the country never recognises or rewards. Joseph Strutt, the father of English antiquaries, has never yet received from his native land one single token of its grateful appreciation, though all its libraries, and those of Europe, are enriched by his works" (Strutt 1896: 71).

## References:

- Alasuutari, P. 1995. *Researching culture. Qualitative method and cultural studies*. London - Thousand Oaks - New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Barber, R. 1974. *The knight and chivalry*. London: Sphere Books Ltd.
- Billett, M. 1994. *A history of English country sports*. London: Robert Hale.
- Cox, J. C. 1903. "Preface", in: Strutt, J., v - viii.
- Holt, R. 1989. *Sport and the British. A modern history*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lipoński, W. 2003a. *Dzieje kultury Brytyjskiej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- McBride, P. 1932. *The philosophy of sport*. London: Heath Cranton Limited.
- Salzman, L. F. 1926. *English life in the Middle Ages*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Mitchell, S. (ed.). 1988. *Victorian Britain. An encyclopedia*. Chicago - London: St. James Press.
- Simpson, J., Roud S. 2000. *A dictionary of English folklore*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Strutt, J. 1775. *Manners, customs, arms, habits, & c., of the people of England*. London: sold by Benjamin White, at Horace' s Head.
- Strutt, J. 1810. *The sports and pastimes of the people of England*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). London: printed by T. Bensley, Bolt Court, Fleet Street.
- Strutt, W. 1896. *A memoir of the life of Joseph Strutt, 1749 - 1802*. London: printed for private circulation.
- Susina, J. 1988. "Folklore:", in: Mitchell, S. (ed.), 303-304.
- Van Maanen, J. 1986. *Tales of the field. On writing ethnography*. Chicago - London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Wilkinson, B. 1969. *The later Middle Ages in England. 1216 - 1485*. London: Longmans.