

Painful pastime versus present pleasure:

Tudor Archery and the Law

by

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‘In every countie good men and lawfull, that ben no maynteiners of yvell...shall be assigned to be Justyces of the peace’.¹ So begins *The Boke For A Justyce of Peace: never soo welle and diligently set forthe*, published by the royal printer Thomas Berthelet in London in 1534.² This handy compendium of useful information dealing with everything from heresy to the stealing of *Haukes egges* provided the guidance for Justices of the Peace throughout much of the rest of the Tudor age.³ The longbow or *bow*, as it was referred to was still the main missile weapon of the English. The rallying cry for the besieging Royal Army at Boulogne in 1545 was ‘archers’, and the archer represented the archetypal English soldier. The purpose of *The boke* was to ensure that England would continue to provide strong-shooting archers, well equipped and well-able to perform their duty.

The historical context in which *The Boke* was written was one which would give every encouragement to those who valued the long bow. The English triumph over the Scots at the battle of Flodden (1513) was achieved, in part, due to the long bow. The bow’s performance in a very different, continental, context at the Battle of

¹ I have left all quotations in the original English, except for the substitution of a modern v and j for u and i where appropriate.

² Reprinted W T Wiggins-Davies, Bracebridge Press, 1942.

³ It was supplemented in 1579 by a collection of all the statutes from Magna Carta onwards.

the Spurs was also impressive. In subsequent expeditions in 1522/3 the long bow was not seen as a handicap. In 1530 there had been a very impressive demonstration of three thousand archers who, after marching from the Merchant Taylors' Hall, assembled at Smithfield to shoot. In 1537 Henry VIII founded the Guild of St. George for the encouragement of shooting of all sorts, and in 1545 in the final great expedition to France the archers remained the most prominent feature of his army with only 7% of the English forces equipped with firearms. In Europe the crossbow was giving way to the arquebus at the battles of Bicocca 1522 and Pavia in 1525 established the European supremacy of the pike and arquebus combination. In England however, despite the widespread purchases of handguns by the king,⁴ and the critics who bemoaned the decline in the English Bowman, archery was still the chief defence of the realm regarded as a 'gift of God'⁵ to the English, a source of collective pride and a regular recourse for recreation and competition. Firearms were purchased as a modern addition to the national armoury to supplement and not replace the bow. The King's army was to be 'modernised' according to continental practice. As late as 1588 of the 79,798 men of the Trained Bands 42%, were equipped with firearms and 18% were still equipped with bows.⁶

How far the numerous laws defending the practise of archery and the provision of archery equipment, referred to in *The Boke* were applied, is of course another question. This concern for the decline of archery training in the face of competing sports and pastimes had an ancient origin. The legislation referred to in *The Boke* dated back to the reign of Henry IV, and even before that in 1369 Edward III ordered the citizenry of London to 'learn and exercise the art of shooting', banning the 'throwing

⁴ Henry possessed 6,700 handguns in the Tower in 1547.

⁵ Sermon of Bishop Latimer reprinted in A E Hodgkin, *The Archer's Craft*, Llanerch Press 1995, p.54.

⁶ J Tincey, *The Armada Campaign*, Osprey.1996 p. 47.

of stones, wood, iron, handball, football, bandyball, cambuck, or cockfighting, nor other such like vain plays'.⁷ Although banning outdoor rather than 'indoor' games it would suggest that the perceived problem of ensuring regular practice at the butts was a perennial one. In 1528 both outdoor and indoor sports and pastimes were banned as being detrimental to the proper and lawful pursuit of archery.

It was the responsibility of the Justices to enforce legislation. In the proclamation of 1528 to enforce the practise of archery the Justices of the Peace were criticised:

For lack of good and effective execution of the laws and statutes, the said archery and shooting in long bows is sore and marvellously decayed and in manner utterly extinct; and specially by the newfangled and wanton pleasure that men now have in using of crossbows and handguns.⁸

In 1549 Bishop Latimer castigated the Justices before the King and his Council in a public sermon.

'I desire you, my lordes, even as you love honoure, and glorye of God... let there be sent fourth some proclimacion, to the Justices of Peace, for they do not thyr dutie. Justices be now no Justices; ther be many good actes made for thys matter already. Charge them upon their allegiance, that this singular benefit of God may be practised; and that it be not turned into bollyng, and glossing, and horing, within the townes; for they be negligente in executyng these lawes of shutyng'.⁹

Sir John Smythe in 1590 condemned the magistracy in his great defence of archery asserting that: 'Archers in numbers are greatlie decaied...: Howbeit, that hath chieflie proceeded through the great fault and negligence of divers sorts of

⁷ R Hardy, *The Longbow; A Social and Military History*, London 1995 p.97. In later years the games of closh, quoits, half bowl, hand-in, hand-out, quickboard and kailes were included as well.

⁸ Paul H. Hughes and James L. Larkin: *Tudor Royal Proclamations*. New Haven, 1964-69: Yale University Press. proclamation 275. vol. 1, p177 Westminster, 4 December, 20 Henry VIII

⁹ .Hodgkin, *The Archer`s Craft*, p.55.

magistrates, who having excellent statute and penal lawes established in other kings times for the increase and maintenance of Archerie... hath so neglected, or rather contemned the due performance & execution of those lawes'¹⁰

Certainly there is evidence that the law was applied rather haphazardly. In 1573 forty-two men appeared in Essex for failing to shoot in the bow, and one Robert Lambard stated that 'he shotte not of one hole yeare',¹¹ which would suggest that his prosecution was evidence of occasional enthusiasm for the enforcement of the legislation rather than a systematically applied policy.

There is also evidence of a reduction in the availability of shooting grounds. The minimum practice distance laid down in Henry VIII's reign was 220 yards, although some grounds do appear to have been shorter. Large areas of ground set aside for irregular practice would soon fall foul of farmers and developers in a period when there was a serious land hunger, especially near growing towns.¹²

Enforcement seemed to depend on the enthusiasm of counties. Buckinghamshire, for example, appointed two men in each town to enforce the legislation on the provision of bows and their regular practice. Wiltshire averred that they would 'mainteine and brede' archers.¹³

The first reference to archery in *The Boke* is contained in a ban on *Unlawfull games*:

Also by the same statute afore rehearsed, and the said Chapytyre, no labourer, nor servaunt of artificer, shall playe at the tenys, caylles, foteball, &c. But to have bowes and arowes, and them use on holy days. The statute of Henry the fourth confermeth this statute and wyll, that the Maire, Baylies, and constables have power to arrest such men, and enprison them by the space of sixe dayes.¹⁴

¹⁰ J Smythe, *Certain Discourses, written by Sir John Smythe, Knight: Concerning the formes and effects of divers sorts of weapons* London 1590

¹¹ Lindsay Boynton, *The Elizabethan Militia, 1558-1635*, Newton Abbot, 1971, p.68

¹² Boynton, *Elizabethan Militia* p.68

¹³ *ibid* p.66

¹⁴ *The Boke* p.19

Cruickshank has argued that ‘The change in the government’s attitude to archery, ... is now regarded as a social rather than a military problem, [that] is further reflected by the legislation on gambling, and the civilian use of firearms’.¹⁵ He also asserted that: ‘There is, in fact, good reason to believe that, as time went on, the reasons for enforcing the archery regulations were less military than moral and mercenary’.¹⁶ He seems to accept the view that the bow was an ‘obsolete weapon’ retained for social rather than military reasons, although its obsolescence was due more to neglect by military experts whose experience of warfare was primarily European where the bow, and especially the crossbow, had been replaced by the gun in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.¹⁷

Boynton’s assertion that ‘It [archery] had been moribund in the age of Henry VIII, whose ‘artillery’ laws were designed to stop the rot’,¹⁸ is difficult to support in the light of the high proportion of archers in the expeditions to France and their continued successes. Henry’s was an enthusiastic supporter and user of bow and gun in his personal armoury and this was carried through to national provision. His heavy commitment to the purchase and maintenance of military archery (as well as to firearms) would suggest that he was not simply a conservative romantic who rejected modernity, but that his support for both was based upon experience and calculation. If there is something to be said for the decline of archery in the latter years of Elizabeth’s reign, it is difficult to concur with in this earlier period. I have elsewhere

¹⁵ C G Cruickshank, *Elizabeth’s Army* Oxford, 1966 p.104.

¹⁶ Boynton, *Elizabeth’s Army*, p.68

¹⁷ Boynton, *Elizabeth’s Army*, p102-107

¹⁸ *ibid*, p.65

presented an argument for the lively survival of archery well into Elizabeth's reign, the period of and reason for its decline lying in the second half of the century.¹⁹

Lindsay Boynton has also argued that this was a time when

Training in particular was becoming ever more comprehensive and the specious argument that firearms required less, not more training, bears all the marks of a propagandist's sophistry.²⁰

This is a comment that displays his ignorance of the archer's craft and the skill of the marksman. I have been fortunate to have been trained and have trained others in the use of bow and gun, including, caliver, arquebus and musket as well as modern weapons. It is much easier and quicker to train a competent marksman than an archer. The training of shot at the time of the Armada took 6 days.²¹ For the first three days 'false fire' would be used, that is only using powder to prime the pan. This was to train the embryonic marksmen to keep their eyes open 'Without Winking, and then he is half a good harquebussier' an appreciation that speaks volumes for the low expectations that officers had of their men and their equipment.²² A Total of 3lbs²³ of powder was allocated for training which with perhaps 1lb devoted to false firing would permit the caliver to discharge about fifty bullets and the musket twenty, hardly enough to prepare the unfortunate man for combat with a veteran Spanish tercio. The unpreparedness of some troops sent into battle is exemplified by the Brittany expedition (1599). Men were landed on a hostile shore without having

¹⁹ J P Davies, 'The decline of the longbow in Elizabethan England', *Journal of the Society of Archer-Antiquaries* vol. 42, 1999

²⁰ Boynton, *Elizabethan Militia*, p.113 'The fierie shot,... being not in the hands of the skilfull, may do unto themselves more hurt than good: wherefore the same is often to be practised, that men may grow perfect and skilfull therein'. Robert Barret, *The Theorike and Practike* London, 1598, p.3

²¹ Foljambre f88b 16 4 1586

²² Lansdown MSS 56 f50 A statement that says a lot for current expectations of their capability!

²³ Foljambre f88b 16 4 1586

handled weapons, and the shortage of powder allowed them only two practice rounds.²⁴

The introduction of complex drill in the process of loading, by Jacob de Gheyn and others, was not because the process itself is complex but because it was necessary to enable the unskilled recruit to operate as part of a collective body, and as an automaton in action, when fear could overcome memory. The same is true for the modern soldier when performing IAs or Immediate Actions to deal with stoppages, the process should become automatic not requiring the individual, already under great stress, to think about the process. There is an assumption that the training required to fire modern weapons is less than that for black powder firearms, this is not the case. The handling of modern weapons requires considerable manual dexterity and understanding of a complex machine.

Even Boynton acknowledges that ‘The bow demanded fine physique and long practice’, and that the best archers were ‘bothe Lustye in bodye, & able to abyde the wether, & can Shoote a good Stronge Shoote’. To learn to draw a war bow let alone shoot it accurately requires many months if not years of training.²⁵ The detailed study of the skeletons at the Towton battlefield site and the excavation of the Mary Rose have all shown incontrovertible evidence of skeletal and muscular changes brought about by long years practise of archery resulting in physiques close to that of ‘athletes in modern times’.²⁶ I have brought up my son to shoot in the bow from the age of seven, at fourteen he could shoot instinctively a bow that would

²⁴ John S Nolan. *Sir John Norreys and the Elizabethan Military World*, (UEP 1977). pp. 183-4

²⁵ Boynton, *Elizabethan Militia*, p,67

²⁶ A J Stirland, Raising the Dead. *The skeleton crew of King Henry VIII's Great Ship, the Mary Rose*, (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. 2000) pp.118-134. ed V Fiorato, A Boylston, C Knüsel, *Blood Red Roses, The Archaeology of a Mass Grave from the Battle of Towton AD 1461*, (Oxbow Books 2000) pp.103-116.

normally suit only grown men. I have come later to the bow but only after assiduous practice have I been able to shoot a heavy bow, suitable for war. There is no substitute for practical experience in the handling of weapons. Boynton's dismissive attitude towards the bow therefore makes it inevitable that he should see legislation in favour of it as primarily social in purpose.

He is, I am sure, right in making the connection between archery and its arch rival, indolence and vice, because it is explicitly made in the legislation itself, and in Latimer's sermon previously referred to. The Tudor legislators saw archery as not only maintaining a useful weapon, but also the correct social order. Ascham summarised the distinction between the two activities thus:

Gaming hath joined with it a vain present pleasure; but there followeth loss of name, loss of goods, and winning of an hundred gouty, dropsy, diseases, as every man can tell. Shooting is a painful pastime, whereof followeth health of body, quickness of wit, and ability to defend our country, as our enemies can bear record.²⁷

The bow was the weapon of the English man, it encouraged physical fitness and healthy competition in an activity that bound all members of society together in defence of their country, irrespective of their order or rank. Bishop Latimer talked with feeling of the place that archery played in society:

The art of shutynge hath been in tymes past much esteemed in this realme, it is a gyft of God, that he hath given us to excel all other nacions wythall. It hath bene Goddes instrumente, whereby he hath given us manye victories against oure enemyes.²⁸

Much later it was asserted that 'the use of archery not only has ever been but also yet is, by God's special gift to the English nation a singular defence of the realm'.²⁹ The dispassionate observer Giovanni Michiel of the Venetian Embassy

²⁷ R Ascham, *Toxophilus*, Butler and Tanner Ltd. 1985, p.39

²⁸ Hodgkin, *Archer's Craft*, p.54

²⁹ Cruickshank, *Elizabeth's Army*, p.104 8 Elizabeth I, c.10.

reported in 1557 that ‘Above all, their [the English] proper an natural weapons are the bow and arrows’.³⁰ For the English the bow represented more than an effective weapon, it was God’s gift to the Englishman to defend himself and his religion, to stray into the sinful ways to be found in inn and brothel was to betray God. What Latimer feared came to pass in that the army that was mobilised in the war against Spain and in Ireland 1585-1604 was ‘proletarianised’, a term used by Bert Hall to describe the decline in competence and status of the soldier in the sixteenth century.³¹

The massive demands for men after 1585 led to the widespread collection of human flotsam and jetsam in the gutter, inns, bridewells and clinks. These new recruits were described by the pugnacious and loquacious Sir John Smythe, a captain of great experience, as ‘rogges’, ‘theeves’, the ‘scommie of England’, ‘malefactors’ and ‘base minded men’.³² There were numerous complaints from commanders that troops raised in such ways were worse than useless, but the retort of the civilian authorities was contained in the reply of the constable to the complaining officer that

God defend that any man of honest reputation be levied just to be extorted! Besides the exactions of the victuallers they shall be infected with unwholesome and unseasonable provisions, oppressed by the provision master, cheated by so many scraping officers that it makes you mad to think of it. Let me tell you therefore that we learned long ago to seek out useless men for useless errands. When the wars shall be reformed and reduced to a more honourable course we will endeavour ourselves to find out men of better wort’.³³

The author of this piece, Barnabe Rich, was an experienced captain and his own critique damning. The archer was not only master of a skill but a member of a martial caste expected to perform his duty on the field or in a siege. The late sixteenth

³⁰ Hodgkin, *Archer’s craft*, p.55

³¹ B S Hall, *Weapons and Warfare in Renaissance Europe*, John Hopkins University Press, 1997, p.235

³² Sir John Smythe, *Concerning the formes and effects of divers sorts of weapons*. London. 1590

³³ Barnabe Rich *A Path Way to Military Practise*, London 1587

century saw the recruitment of those who had neither the skills or attitudes of soldiers, the consequence of a decline in archery. English society saw service in the army as a means of off-loading its criminals and ne'er do wells, whose absence would be a blessing rather than a blight.

The second reference in *The Boke* is to the bow in the context of *Arraye in defence of the realm*:

Also that every man shall have arraye according to his degree, in the defence of the realme, and that every men between sixty and fifteen shal be sworne to have competent array with him.³⁴

The equipment that he was required to possess was directly related to the value of his land and goods. The wealthiest had to provide the equipment for the provision of horse, the poorer the foot.

And a man of an hundred shyllinges of land, a speare, bowe, arrows, and swerde; a man of forty shyllinges of lond and above an hundred shyllinges of lande, bowe, arrows, speare, and swerde.

Those with less wealth had to provide 'gisarmes', a polearm, 'and other smalle wepons. And they without the forest bowes and arrows. And they within the forest, bowes and palettes, the statue thereof is Wynchester'[1285]. We can assume that pellet bows, with a pouch used for shooting pellets or balls of stone, lead or clay were suitable only for small game, and could therefore not be used illegally against royal game, especially deer. This legislation was further developed in the reign of Mary I when the 'Act for the taking of musters' and the 'Act for the having of horse armour and weapons' were both enacted in 1557, eight months before her death. These extensive pieces of legislation divided the population into ten income groups prescribing precisely what equipment they should possess and maintain. It included all males between 16 and 60 excluding from it only nobility of baronial rank, who

³⁴ *The Boke* p.29

were expected to raise their own contingents, and the clergy, who were expected to make their own contribution.

The legislation pointed to the bow being a ‘popular’ rather than an elite weapon, the weapon provided by those of lesser means, but whereas in 1534 no firearms of any sort were mentioned by 1557 they had been included in a much more thorough table of equipment related to a rate of seventeen different land and goods values. Arquebuses were required by all except those with land of less value than £10 or goods and chattels less than £200. The bow had officially become the weapon of the poor, a social affliction that would have very significant impact upon its perception in the future.

Surprisingly there is no reference to bowyers or fletchers in *The Boke*. The wages of bowyers, fletchers and long bow stringmakers were however all set as part of Tudor legislation to control wages and prices. Proclamations of 1578 and 1585³⁵ set them all at £4 per annum if meat and drink were provided by their employer, or 8 to 9d if paid by the day.³⁶ This compares with other skilled crafts such as plasterers and carpenters. There is in *The Boke* a detailed reference to the quality of work expected from *arrowhed makers*.

Also ye shall enquire of all them that ben Smythes that make arrowhedees or quarrelhedes, if they be well steled and brased, and harde at the poynt, and eche of then have a marke, and token who made them, upon pain to forfayte the same hedes and quarrels to the kynge, and shal be also imprisoned, and make a fyne at the kynges wyl.³⁷

This concern for the hardness of the points of arrows and quarrels was clearly an ancient concern. In the Ordinance of Fletchers (1403) wardens were required ‘to see that all arrows and quarrels are made...that the heads of the arrows and quarrels

³⁵ *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, volume II pp.423, 512. Westminster, 28 July 1578, 20 Elizabeth I. Weald hall, 16 August 1585, 27 Elizabeth I.

³⁶ 12d a day if food and drink were not provided.

³⁷ Legislation dating to 1405/6. 7 Henry IV c.7

are hard'.³⁸ This reference and the legislation of 1405/6 would suggest that the points needed to be of 'hardened' iron, that is of phosphoric iron or steel, or with a steel insert. In a recent article³⁹ David Starley has argued that medieval arrow heads⁴⁰ from the fourteenth century onward would have had hardened points to be effective against plate armour and brigandines.⁴¹ Ascham appreciated the importance of this feature of the arrowhead when he declared 'I would wish that the head-makers of England should make their sheaf arrows more harder pointed than they be, for I myself have seen of late such heads set upon sheaf-arrows, as the officers, if they had seen them, would not have been content withal'.⁴²

The final reference is by far the longest and refers to *Shotynge in longe bowes*.⁴³

Item whether the kynges subjectes, not lame nor havynge no lawfull impedment, and beinge within the age of sixty yeres, except spirituall men, Justices, &c. and barons of the eschequer, use shotyng in longe bowes, and have a bowe continually in his house, to use himself. And that fathers and governours of children teche them to shote, and that bowes and arrows be bought for children under seventene and above seven yere, by hym that hath such a child in his howse, and the mayster may stoppe it ageyne of his wages, and after that age he to provide them hymselfe: and who that is founde in defaute, in not having bowes and arrows, by the space of a moneth, to forfait twelve pence.⁴⁴

³⁸ 1403: Riley 1868: p. 556-7

³⁹ David Starley. 'Metallurgical analysis of medieval quarrel heads and arrowheads' *Royal Armouries Yearbook*, Volume 5, 2000

⁴⁰ Quarrel points depended upon the mass of the head to achieve penetration.

⁴¹ He also writes that 'considerable expense and effort was expended on the development and mass production of the highly standardised Type 16 arrowhead'. A view that supports my own contention of the type of arrowhead used in Tudor England. J P Davies, 'Some thoughts on Tudor military arrowheads', *Symposium Journal of the Society of Archer-Antiquaries* 2002

⁴² Ascham, *Toxophilus*, p135

⁴³ I have separated the whole of this portion into separate sections to facilitate analysis.

⁴⁴ *The Boke* p33

This legislation is a repetition of a 1512 Act and is perhaps the best known injunction to fathers and ‘governors’ to the practise and teaching of archery. This reflected common practice if Bishop Latimer and Ascham are to be believed. Latimer described how he himself was taught thus:

In my tyme, my poore father was as diligent to teach me to shute, as to learn any other thyng; and so I think did other menne dyd thyr children. He taught me how to draw, howe to lay my bodye in my Bowe, and not to drawe with strength of armes, as other nacions do, but with strength of bodye. I had my Bowes brought me according to my age and strength, as I increased in them so my Bowes were made bigger and bigger, for men shall never shute well, except they be brought up in it'.⁴⁵

Roger Ascham records a more homely and touching episode that highlighted the importance of adult supervision and encouragement in a touching reminiscence of his own patron Sir Humphrey Wingfield:

This worshipful man hathe ever loved and used to have many children brought up in learninge in his house, amongst whom I myself was one. For whom at terme time he would bring down from London both bowe and shaftes, and when they should playe, he would go with the himselfe into the felde, and see them shoote, and he that shotte fairest, should have the best bowe and shaftes, and he that shotte ill favouredly, should be mocked of his fellows , til he shot better.⁴⁶

The age range of the archers and their social inclusivity is important. As virtually all practised archery it would encourage a sense of homogeneity and give to the male population a common purpose and identity. It would also enable those who commanded archers to appreciate the worth and capabilities of the weapon they employed. The youth of the archers is also important as it would breed them up to be natural archers. Technique could be taught early which would make up for a lack of strength in the arm, and instinctive aiming would come naturally. As I have taught my own son from the age of seven in the manner described by Latimer I can assert that it works and he is now an excellent instinctive archer.

⁴⁵ Hodgkin. *Archer's Craft*, p.54

⁴⁶ Ascham, *Toxophilus*, p.135

Women were not excluded from archery practice. There are numerous representations of women archers, and in the 1480s the Venetian ambassador referred to men and women attending archery practices in London. Henry VIII purchased four bows for Anne Boleyn in 1534, Edward VI was a keen archer and Elizabeth I was a keen huntswoman, with a crossbow, and as Ascham's pupil may have been expected to have practised with the long bow.

To quote further from *The Boke*:

And bowyers for every bowe of ewe, to make two of elme wyche, or other woode of meane price, and if they be founde to do to the contrary, to be commytted to warde, by the space of eighte dayes or more.⁴⁷

This legislation was to ensure the ready availability of bows for practice, as war bows were almost exclusively of foreign yew. In 1542⁴⁸ the requirement was that four bows should be made for each yew bow. The cost of the bow was also regulated so that in 1542 a bow suitable for a fourteen year old boy should cost no more than a shilling, still a considerable amount.⁴⁹ The cost of the best bow was set at 3s 4d, a bow of the 'second sort' 2s 6d, a sheaf of livery arrows 2s, a gross of bowstrings 3s 4d a leather case at 6d and a girdle at 2d. The full cost of an archer, fully equipped with bow, sheaf of arrows would then be about 6s only 8d less than a full set of 'almain rivet' cheap but serviceable armour suitable for a pikeman. In 1566 the price of bows was again set with the best foreign yew at 6s 8d and English yew bows at 2s, reflecting the inferior nature of the English yew which grows too quickly and ill shaped in our mild climate.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *The Boke* p.33

⁴⁸ *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, volume I. P.313. Westminster, 31 August, 34 Henry VIII

⁴⁹ Two days pay for a common soldier.

⁵⁰ The best yew grows in sheltered valleys with reasonable rainfall. This encourages a slow growth in a straight trunk, those from the Mary Rose appear to have come from Switzerland and Poland.

And that buttis be made in every citie towne and place accordynge to the lawe of ancient tyme used, and the inhabytauntis and dwellers in every of them, to exercise them self with longe bowes in shotynge at the same, and els where on holy dayes and other tymes conveniente.⁵¹

The availability of butts was certainly an issue in the latter part of the century, in 1611 James I established a commission⁵² to restore the butts and archery practice was clearly an attempt to raise fines and what was a dying if not dead activity. In 1599 Peterborough and its parish constables were fined for not shooting on fast days, and fines continued to be levied up until the outbreak of the Civil war.⁵³ The range required for practice for all men over twenty four was 220 yards, which would have required a considerable amount of space. In 1587 Norwich gained the support of the council in the condemnation of enclosing archery fields, and other places, Alhamstone, Shalford, High Easter, Wethersfield and Sittingbourne complained of enclosure of shooting grounds in the last quarter of the century through enclosure.⁵⁴ The magnificent engraving of Moorfields in 1559 showing archers practising on the Finsbury marks also shows the dangerous encroachment of the city that would lead to its gradual diminution and final closure. The proximity of archers and public was not always a happy one: Dame Alice Owen was nearly struck by an arrow and founded a grammar school in 1613 named after her, in thanks for her salvation from a premature end.⁵⁵ In 1598 Stow wrote of archery practice in London that:

For by the means of closing in common grounds, our archers, for want of roome to shoote abroad, creepe into bowling-alleys, and ordinarie dicing houses, near home, where they have room enough to hazard their money at unlawful games⁵⁶

⁵¹ *The Boke* p.33

⁵² Hodkin, *Archer's Craft*, p.200

⁵³ Boynton, *Elizabethan Militia* p.68

⁵⁴ Boynton, *Elizabethan Militia* p.68

⁵⁵ The arrow apparently hit her hat, missing her by a hairsbreadth.

⁵⁶ James Partridge, *Ayme for Finsburie archesr*, W.C. Books, 1998. p.179

However even at the end of the sixteenth century the Finsbury grounds could still boast 194 marks set around a very substantial area.

There was naturally concern for the quality of bows as military archery would have challenged the integrity of even the best yew staves. In *The Boke* it was stated ‘And that all bowstaves of yew, be open and not solde in bundles nor close’, a clear prohibition on sharp practice. The required length of bowstaves was at first seven feet, later reduced to six foot six. Even this must have required outstanding staves on the basis of current experience where often yew bows are spliced together as upper and lower limbs. The statute of 1472 established that each stave must be ‘three fingers thick, and squared, and seven foot long; to be well got up, polished and without knots’.⁵⁷

The prohibition on export of archery equipment would appear to be unnecessary, as all the best yew wood was already imported, although the export of what might be considered to be a strategic resource was obviously of concern to the government. However it was found necessary to include reference to the export of staves in *The Boke*:

And that no stranger, not being denysen, shall conveye out of the kings obeisance any bowes, arrows, or shaftes, without the kynges special licence upon payne of forfayture, and also imprisonment: nor use shotyng in a longe bowe, without the kynges licence, upon payne to forfait the bowes and arrows to the kynges subjectis that wyll sease them. The statute ther is of [1515]⁵⁸

Henry VIII imported 40,000 staves through Venice in 1510, although the laws of Venice forbade it,⁵⁹ and he depended entirely upon foreign yew for his military bows.⁶⁰ The manufacture of both bows and arrows was by no means an English

⁵⁷ Hardy. *The Longbow*, Patrick Stephens Ltd 1995, p.129

⁵⁸ *The Boke* p.33

⁵⁹ The Doge was prepared to waive the law on this occasion.

⁶⁰ The principal exporters of bows to England in 1572 were Salzburg, Basel, Danzig and the Hanse ports and Venice.

monopoly. Both France and Scotland had considerable numbers of archers, encouraged by royal support.⁶¹

In a little-known French treatise on archery,⁶² written in the very early sixteenth century, the author describes archery in much the same detail and with much the same enthusiasm as Ascham. Where he greatly differs from the English model is in the drawing of the bow, a procedure which he describes minutely but which I have had no luck in executing. Perhaps Latimer was right when he said that he used to 'lay my bodye in my Bowe, and not to drawe with strength of armes, as other nacions do'.⁶³

In 1472 it was recorded, 'that great scarcity of of bowstaves is now in this realm, and the bowstaves that be in the realm be sold at an excessive price whereby the feat of archery is greatly discontinued and almost lost'.⁶⁴ In the Statute of Westminster (2 Edward IV.,cap4) Edward IV ordered that for every ton weight of merchandise brought from a country, from which yew was exported, four bowstaves should also be imported. Perhaps the injunction was more to do with the concern that the authorities had for maintaining the semi-mystical predominance of the English archer than a practical concern for the loss of materiel or the transfer of skills.

The complement of the encouragement to shooting in the long bow was the active and punitive discouragement of 'Shotinge in cross bowe or handegunne',

⁶¹ The King of France had a company of Scottish archers as his personal body guard. This did not help Henry II who was killed by their captain, accidentally, in a tournament to celebrate the end of the Hapsburg-Valois wars in 1559 at the Treaty of Cateau Cambresis.

⁶² *The Art of Archery*, an anonymous but authoritative study of French archery practice, probably produced in Picardy in the early sixteenth century, although it has also been dated to the late fifteenth century. I am indebted to H D Soar for allowing me access to his unpublished study of this fascinating document. English translation by H.Walrand *Archer's Register*, 1903, pp. 264-274

⁶³ Hodgkin, *The Archer's Craft*, Llanerch Publishers 1995 p.54

⁶⁴ Hardy, *Longbow* p.128.

supported by a proclamation issued in 1526.⁶⁵ Possession and use of either crossbows or handguns was only open to men who owned substantial estates to the value of three hundred marks yearly, and their wives. This reference to wives suggests that bows were deemed appropriate for women to enable them to participate in the hunt. This legislation is a repetition of a similar law passed in 1503 but only with reference to crossbows and with the permissive value of land set at 200 marks. The cross bow was not used extensively in England as a military weapon as an analysis of the Inventory of Henry VIII has made clear and to discourage its use was therefore an encouragement to practise with the proper bow. Guns were highly suitable as a poacher's tool, able to take birds or other game with greater ease and less skill than a bow.

There is very little evidence for the use of crossbows in any significant number for military uses. In my analysis of Henry VIII's Inventory of 1547 there were only two armouries containing crossbows. In the Tower of London there were to be found a grand total of seven and in the 'Longe Bowe Chambre and Crossbowe Chambre' of Calais 110.⁶⁶ This compares to the 18,513 bows and 1,330,824 arrows held in armouries and palaces throughout the realm. The crossbow would be seen as an irrelevance in war, and an encouragement to poaching.

Cruickshank has also argued that 'The campaign for the bow was ...partly a campaign against the non-military use of the new weapons'.⁶⁷ One reason for the distrust of the gun and therefore the encouragement of the bow was that the gun was seen as posing a far greater danger to the right social order, as well as providing new opportunities for criminality. In England there was systematic legislation in the reign

⁶⁵ *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, volume I. p.152. Westminster, 10 April 1526, 17 Henry VIII

⁶⁶ D Starkey ed, *The Inventory of King Henry VIII* Vol I (London, 1998)

⁶⁷ Cruickshank, *Elizabeth's Army* p.103

of Henry VIII in 1515, 1524 and 1542. On each occasion, possession of firearms was limited to the wealthy, the final legislation making it clear why only those with an income of £100 per annum should possess such weapons. For the Act asserted that ‘murders, robberies, felonies, riots and routs with crossbows, little short handguns and little harquebus have become rife to the great peril of the King’s loving subjects’.

This fear of the possession of firearms was not mirrored by fear of the bow, in many ways a superior weapon, as the bow was associated with national defence and its practice not only encouraged but required by law. In Europe there was similar legislation especially against the ‘stone gun’ or wheel lock pistol, The absence of the telltale glow and smell of the match made it especially suitable for those bent on nefarious purposes, as did its potentially small size. In 1517, Emperor Maximilian I banned the manufacture of wheel locks, and in 1523 the City of Ferrara banned the carrying of such weapons. In 1542 the Venetian authorities objected to any weapon small enough to be hidden in a sleeve. In similar legislation in England in 1537 all handguns had to have a stock of at least two and a half feet in length, making them difficult to conceal. In 1572 the possession of pistols was prohibited except for gentlemen and their servants, and then to be carried openly on their saddle bow of their horses for their public protection. This was because of ‘heinous robberies and murders.. committed in the highways’ by these easily hidden weapons. The bow encouraged the freeborn Englishman to healthy outdoor exercise in preparation for the defence of the realm, the gun was the weapon of the poacher and the footpad.⁶⁸

The Boke reflects the concern of the authorities for what was not only a weapon of war but a symbol of social cohesion and a gift from God. The continued defence of the long bow was based upon a historic experience that generated a

⁶⁸ The matchlock is still used with great success to shoot clay pigeons with small shot.

mythology; particularly useful at a time when England was re-inventing itself during a time of immense social and religious change. The long bow represented an honourable tradition, a sense of what it was to be English and a way of ensuring social harmony. *The Boke For A Justyce of Peace* gives us an invaluable insight into this mindset.