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The Ending of the Cotswold Games

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By C.J. BEARMAN

The last years of the Cotswold Games, between 1846 and 1852, seem to provide a familiar story of a long-standing and once-honoured traditional custom overtaken by changing circumstances. The Games, an athletic and social meeting founded or re-established early in the 17th century by Robert Dover,¹ were both typical and exceptional among English traditional customs. Many claimed aristocratic foundation or patronage, together with immemorial antiquity: appeals to past authority and to continuity were part of custom's justification and defence mechanism in the increasingly hostile and utilitarian atmosphere of the later 18th and early 19th centuries.²

In the case of the Cotswold Games the claims had strong foundations. The Games had once enjoyed royal encouragement if not actual patronage, and could claim to be part of the fabric of Church and State.³ Their celebration had been a political act, an assertion of the legitimacy of James I's *Book of Sports* against its Puritan opponents, and Dover's recollection of the name and ceremonial of the ancient Olympic Games seems almost a religious act, a conscious attempt to call in the gods of Olympus to balance the authority of Jehovah. The literary world had recognized their importance: during his lifetime, Dover received the unusual tribute of *Annalia Dubrensia*, a collection of 34 poems in praise of the Games by Ben Jonson, Michael Drayton, and their contemporaries. Suspended during the Civil War and Interregnum, the Games were resumed after 1660, and in the middle of the 19th century they approached their bicentenary of uninterrupted celebration, having long outlived their original purpose and official encouragement. Their suppression provides an opportunity to examine the allegations of disorder which accompanied the ending of so many traditional customs, and to test the veracity of an accepted story which has been repeated for more than a century.

The Games were held on what had become known as Dover's Hill, in the parish of Weston-sub-Edge, Gloucestershire, on the Thursday and Friday of Whitsun week. Dover's Hill, now as then, is pasture land on the slope of an escarpment rising to the top of the Cotswold plateau, between Chipping Campden and the Vale of Evesham. Weston-sub-Edge had not been inclosed and much of the land was farmed under an open-field system. The Games depended on a large area of open land being freely available, and their organiser, from 1845 a Campden publican named William Drury, rented the Hill from the two Fieldsmen who represented the Weston vestry. Drury paid £5 and regained his outgoings from a levy on stalls and booths and presumably from sales of drink.⁴ The sports and diversions of Dover's time had mutated into horse-racing, backsword, and wrestling, and illegal prize-fighting was probably a regular event.⁵ Friday was the Campden Club Day and the festivities concluded with dancing and drinking.

At some time during the 1840s something happened at, or to, the Cotswold Games. E.R. Vyvyan, the editor of an 1878 edition of *Annalia Dubrensia*, was quite specific about when it occurred:

In later years, from 1846 onwards, the Games, instead of being as they originally were intended to be decorously conducted, became the trysting place of all the lowest scum of the population which lived . . . between Oxford and Birmingham. These people came to Dover's Hill and remained there the whole of Whitsun week, creating all sorts of disturbances, and in short demoralizing the whole neighbourhood.⁶

In 1884 the rector of Weston-sub-Edge, the Revd. G.D. Bourne,⁷ made his contribution at a meeting of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society:

No doubt at one time these games were patronized and supported by the gentry of the neighbouring counties, and their presence acted as a restraint to keep the necessary order; but when this influence was withdrawn the gathering became a meeting of the lowest classes merely for debauchery – no longer to witness or take part in manly games and true old English sport, but simply for the indulgence of the grossest wickedness – the most sensual crimes. During Whitsun week, the residuum of the ‘black country’ came there. I have seen as many as 30,000, but I am told that many more were assembled. The whole district became demoralised.⁸

Neither Vyvyan nor Bourne could bring himself to describe what actually happened at the Games, but in 1908 this deficiency was remedied by a contributor to the Notes and Queries column of a local newspaper. G.M. Stratton could claim both a personal interest and eye-witness evidence in that his source was his mother, the wife of an Evesham publican who had conducted a drinking booth at the Games:

No-one was safe from the lawlessness of the crowd of vagrants and criminals of the deepest dye, the riff-raff of society. During the daytime the turmoil was terrible, but all night long it was pandemonium. Cries of murder were often heard, and disorder and rapine held full sway. If the shadow of a person showed through the sheeting of a tent at night he would be struck with a heavy bludgeon from without . . . One year every stall and tent (except my mother’s) was levelled to the ground and their contents pillaged . . . The scenes, she said, were indeed terrible.⁹

Reading these accounts, it is not surprising that respectable opinion refused to put up with this perversion of a once-honoured ceremony. In 1849 a meeting was held to consider the inclosure of the parish, and the open fields and commons of Weston were included in the Annual Inclosure Act of 1850. The last Games to be organised by William Drury were held in 1851 or 1852. There may have been an unofficial celebration in 1853, but the open pasture of Dover’s Hill was inclosed and, according to some accounts, deliberately ploughed up in 1853 or 1854.¹⁰ So ended the Cotswold Games, some 240 years after their foundation.

Subsequent opinion has regretted the passing of the Games but accepted their suppression as necessary and inevitable. C.R. Ashbee in 1904 referred to ‘the scum and refuse of the nearest factory towns shot annually into Campden . . . two or three thousand at a time . . . Kingcombe Lane a whistling Pandemonium of roughs and the pleasant valleys of Saintbury and Weston tramped by armed bands of Birmingham yahoos’.¹¹ The historian of Chipping Campden and the Games summarizes G.M. Stratton’s account and draws a comparison with the peaceful scene at later 20th-century Dover’s Hill,¹² and even the sympathetic modern historian of traditional customs and gatherings quotes Ashbee’s account and comments:

The disruption of Arcadia by urban barbarians must have created a moral panic equivalent to that caused by modern Bank Holiday visitations to seaside towns by the variety of present-day youth factions. The Cotswold Games transcended the specifically local festival and had become an annual attraction for a wide region.¹³

Such summaries and conclusions should not surprise us. The learned editor of an obscure work, the parish clergymen, the local layman, and even Ashbee, the Arts-and-Crafts and Merrie England revivalist, all seem to tell a clear and unimpeachable story which is consistent with similar evidence from elsewhere. Ancient gatherings like the Cotswold Games – Stourbridge

and Bartholomew Fairs, the Forest Fair at Leafield, traditional football at Derby, even Montem Day at Eton College – were being abandoned and suppressed all over England in the 1840s and 50s,¹⁴ many of them for the same ostensible reason: disorder caused an influx of lawless outsiders brought in by improvements in mass transport, who could not be controlled by the traditional means of parish constabulary and gentry influence. G.M. Stratton paints a lively picture of such a traditional gentry figure trying to fulfil his role. He introduces a ‘Lord North’ who was pursued into his mother’s tent, tripped, and obliged to keep his hands in his pocket to prevent robbery, while the mob tickled his ears to make him take them out: ‘The reason of this incident was: Lord North at the head of a squad of police had made a raid upon the thimble-riggers, card-sharpers, etc., overturning their tables, stands, etc., and breaking them up’.¹⁵ Stratton’s story cannot be precisely dated, but on the internal evidence he gives of his father’s background and career it must be placed after 1837 and probably belongs to the new age in rural policing which began in 1839. Unfortunately for a colourful anecdote Dudley North, who as the earl of Guilford’s eldest son used the title ‘Lord North’, was at that time a schoolboy. Having been born in 1829, he was rather young for leading police raids.¹⁶

The blame for the disruption of Arcadia is usually laid on the railways, which in the 1840s were marching across the landscape like the columns of an invading army. To Dover’s Hill, however, the railway was no more than a rumour of war: while the Oxford, Worcester, and Wolverhampton railway was under construction from 1846, the section to Evesham was not opened until May 1852, and that from Evesham to Oxford in June 1853.¹⁷ Before that, the nearest railway, and the only means of mass access from the industrial cities, was the Birmingham–Bristol line. Travellers would have had to disembark at Wadborough, Defford, Eckington, Bredon, or Ashchurch stations and make their own way over the 15 miles or so to Dover’s Hill. This traffic might be expected to provide the historian with some evidence of its passing. Vyvyan and Bourne imply that considerable numbers came from the Black Country, and Ashbee speaks of ‘two or three thousand at a time’. Since the population of Weston-sub-Edge was 362 in 1841, and that of Chipping Campden about 2,000,¹⁸ very substantial numbers would have been necessary to make up an attendance of 30,000. In 1846 there were seven trains each way per day (three on Sundays) between Birmingham and Bristol, but unless the residuum of the Black Country chose to travel first or second class, only one train was open to them – the 6 a.m. from Birmingham which carried third-class passengers.¹⁹ Such a scheduled service could hardly support a traffic of thousands. Excursion trains might have made up the deficiency and Whitsun specials were regularly run and reported by the newspapers. In 1848 the *Worcestershire Chronicle* announced that

On Whit-Monday, pleasure-trips took place up and down on the Bristol line, Chepstow being the ultimate destination of the one, and Birmingham of the other. When the down-train passed Spetchley it consisted of 28 carriages, and the up-train of 21: the total aggregate of pleasure-seekers amounting to nearly 1000. The engines were polished and gaily decorated.²⁰

If two trains, conveying nearly 1,000, could attract such attention, it does not seem likely that the number necessary to convey even a few thousand to Dover’s Hill could have passed unremarked by the *Chronicle’s* vigilant reporter at Spetchley. But if he saw them, he declined to mention them.

There may be a reason for such non-reporting. Local newspapers at 5d. a copy were expensive luxuries and their middle-class readership did not concern itself with the plebeian diversions on Dover’s Hill. Both the *Gloucestershire Chronicle* and the *Worcestershire Chronicle* carried a racing column, but the horse-racing which was the main attraction at the Cotswold

Games was never reported. However, a middle-class readership did concern itself with vagrancy, crime, and disorder. A particular worry in western England at the time was the number of Irish fleeing famine and evictions: in 1849 the *Gloucestershire Chronicle* reported that ‘Irish wandering mendicants continue to visit us by scores; shoals of them pour into our city [Gloucester] daily’, and the following year the enterprising master of the *Resolution* brig of Kinsale was prosecuted for having landed 62 Irish in Gloucester.²¹ In the circumstances, crowds of strangers passing from the railway to Dover’s Hill and back again would surely have attracted attention. They did not pass through an empty countryside, and the populations of Pershore and Evesham could be expected to notice them. Further, the most petty of crimes attracted the attention of both police and newspapers, particularly when the perpetrators were outsiders. When some sheep were stolen from Pershore in June 1851, the men suspected, dressed as navvies, were followed as far as Gloucester by a vigilant and active constable. The same month, a man from Willenhall, just discharged by Worcester magistrates, promptly committed a highway robbery and a youth from Wolverhampton was unwise enough to take a handkerchief from the pocket of the mayor of Stratford-upon-Avon.²² Disorder, both local and minor and distant and larger-scale, was reported. In June 1846 a man named Miller bit a piece out of a constable’s leg during a ‘row’ at Bretforton Wake, upon which the angry policeman ‘nearly killed him by blows to the head’,²³ while the previous month the *Worcester Herald* reported a ‘desperate riot’ between English and Irish labourers at Ramsbottom on the East Lancashire railway.²⁴

Vyvyan, Bourne, Stratton, and Ashbee all depict a drunken, violent, and criminal mob. In their accounts we see the ‘lowest scum’, the ‘residuum of the black country’, a ‘crowd of vagrants and criminals of the deepest dye’, and ‘armed bands of Birmingham yahoos’. Yet this enormous number of undesirables was apparently able to pass through the countryside of Gloucestershire and Worcestershire without anyone noticing anything out of the ordinary. Desperate criminals, by Stratton’s account ready enough to wield the bludgeon, demolish an encampment, and overturn stalls and booths in the pursuit of robbery, together with an accompanying army of pickpockets, card-sharpers, thimble-riggers, and the whole apparatus of Victorian low life, were able to travel to and from Dover’s Hill without leaving a trail of outraged citizens and looted farms in their wake. There are no newspaper reports of disorder at the Cotswold Games, and none of people travelling to and from them. No reported cases of disorder or criminal behaviour connected with the Games came before petty sessions, quarter sessions, or the assizes. According to Bourne, the evils did not cease when the visitors departed. He alleged that ‘the whole district became demoralised’, which presumably means that the locality took to drunkenness, loose sexual morality, and petty crime *en masse*. Bourne was a magistrate and sometimes exercised this part of his ministry at petty sessions in Chipping Campden. The 1851 Games were held on 12 and 13 June, and it happened that Bourne was sitting the following Wednesday, 18 June. But if Bourne, the Law-Giver, like some prophet of old, was chastising his fallen people, it escaped the attention of the *Gloucestershire Chronicle*. The only case reported was that of the Mickleton toll-keeper who had been misguided enough to demand toll from the chief constable, travelling in his gig.²⁵

One possibility remains to be examined. Another of the 19th-century editors of *Annalia Dubrensis* attributed the suppression of the Games to unruly railway navvies who, between 1846 and 1852, ‘converted the gathering into a riotous and dangerous assembly’.²⁶ One of the first works begun on the Oxford, Worcester, and Wolverhampton railway line, and one of the last to be completed, was the Mickleton tunnel just north of Chipping Campden. Christopher Whitfield, the historian of that town, refers to the ‘intrusion of large numbers of navigators [which] caused a rise in the population of some 300, most of them rough strange men . . . who brought an element of lawlessness into the district’.²⁷ Enough has been written about the habits

of railway navvies to make this a plausible comment, and there is confirmation from the local newspapers in the form of regular reports of navy theft and prize-fighting. No account of the Oxford, Worcester, and Wolverhampton is complete without a mention of the 'Battle of Mickleton' in July 1851, when Brunel in the role of Napoleon brought up a force of some 2,000 navvies to evict a failed contractor. However, it must be said that not all of Whitfield's 300 can have been there throughout all the six years. The Oxford, Worcester, and Wolverhampton had financial troubles beyond the ordinary, and work on Mickleton tunnel was suspended several times, the first as early as November 1846. There seems to have been a particularly long break between the summers of 1849 and 1851.²⁸ Neither did the presence of navvies seem to have had much impact on the local festivities reported by the newspapers and in easy reach of the new railway line. Evesham Fair was held on Whit Monday and remained primarily a trading fair, to judge from reports which never mentioned anything other than fatstock and meat prices. Pershore Fair was held at the end of June, and when it was reported, as in 1848, the *Worcestershire Chronicle* had no more to say than that 'shows and pickpockets were scarce'.²⁹

Nevertheless, the presence of a disruptive mob of perhaps a few hundred navvies at the Cotswold Games cannot be disproved and remains the most likely source of the tales of disorder. There is no reason to believe the accounts of 30,000 present, of enormous contingents from the industrial cities, and large-scale riot and mayhem. But whether the riotous crowds were large or small, composed of armed bands of Birmingham yahoos or railway navvies, the most obvious question is why the existing forces of law and order were not assembled to deal with them. Bourne was a Gloucestershire magistrate — a Worcestershire one as well from June 1851³⁰ — and as such had a bounden duty to suppress rioting and disorder. Both Gloucestershire and Worcestershire had county police forces established under the Rural Police Act of 1839. From March 1840 there were seven men stationed at Chipping Campden,³¹ and the Gloucestershire force did not hesitate to intervene at the threat of rioting or to bring in reinforcements for the purpose. The first quarterly report of the new chief constable mentions the despatch of twenty men to keep order at Coleford Fair in June 1840.³² Magistrates could also recruit special constables from their localities. At the first signs of trouble at Mickleton tunnel, Bourne and his fellow magistrate in Chipping Campden held a special petty sessions and swore in 17 special constables. They also sent to the chief constable for twenty policemen. These forces were mustered to deal with some 400–600 navvies. At the Battle of Mickleton eleven days later, a contingent of 35 police armed with cutlasses was present and a body of soldiers was sent for from Coventry.³³ The Cotswold Games were not an unforeseen emergency like the Mickleton disturbances, but an annual event with a fixed date. All the accounts suggest that mass attendance and large-scale disturbances were annual occurrences — at least, after 1846 — and it must be asked why Bourne or his fellow magistrates failed to act on their own initiative. They had the power and adequate means at their disposal. It is in any case beyond belief that the authorities would have allowed a riotous event to continue for several years without making any preparations to deal with it. So far as can be ascertained, they never did so.³⁴

What really happened at the Cotswold Games? Once the allegation has been made, there is no satisfactory way of proving that 30,000 and more people were *not* present, and that mayhem did *not* ensue. Negative evidence — the exploding of the 'Lord North' story, the lack of adequate transport, the silence of the local newspapers, the absence of reported crime or any official attempt to deal with disorder — is never wholly convincing. The only first-hand eye-witness report in circulation has been Bourne's, and since he was an educated man in an honoured and responsible position, it cannot be completely disregarded. But between 1840 and 1843, another educated and responsible man was watching and reporting. Gloucestershire Record Office preserves the duty diary of the police superintendent at Chipping Campden. Most of his time

was taken up with public relations and with touring the countryside on horseback, keeping the constables in remote stations sober and up to the mark. He himself was kept up to the mark by the chief constable, who periodically inspected and signed the diary. During the 1840 Games the superintendent kept his men in Chipping Campden, perhaps because he had fallen from his horse during the week and was nursing an injured leg, but the following year he was up on the Hill:

Thurs. 3rd [June, 1841]. Attended all day with Six Men at the Dovers Hill races and in town from 10 p.m. until 4 a.m. Town disorderly.

Fri. 4th. Attended at Dover's Hill from 1 p.m. to 7 p.m. and in Town from 9 p.m. to 3 a.m. The Town very disorderly.

The next year his main concern was prize-fighting, and this is the only time he reports making any arrests:

Thurs. 19th [May, 1842]. Proceeded to Dovershill with a party of Constables to prevent a Prize Fight that I had received Information would take place. Remained there from 6 p.m. until 9 p.m. all being very quiet and orderly withdrew the Constables. Visited Patrol on Town duty from 10 p.m. until 3 a.m. all passed off quietly.

Fri. 20th. This being the Dovershill races & other sports attended there in order to prevent several Prize Fights that had come to my knowledge were going to take place. Went out at 3 p.m. returned at 9 p.m. left the Hill orderly . . .

And the year after he was blasé about the whole proceeding:

Fri. 9th [June, 1843]. Attended the Dovershill meeting from 2 p.m. until 8 p.m. On Town duty with a party of Constables from 10 p.m. until 5 a.m. all passed off without any riot or disturbance more than is usual at such times.³⁵

One looks in vain here for any mention of 30,000 present, of terrible turmoil, pandemonium, or even the indulgence of the grossest wickedness. These are not the entries of a man who, with only a few constables at his back, was facing a riotous and criminal mob of many thousands. The superintendent treated the Games in exactly the same way as any other village wake in the area, and deployed the same number of men. Mickleton Club Day was held the day after the Games, and he regularly took five or six men there. Admittedly, these entries do not refer to the years in question after 1846, but there is no evidence whatsoever that the Cotswold Games changed their character between 1843 and their suppression eight or nine years later.

Every account of the Games to date has insisted that the inclosure of Weston-sub-Edge was undertaken to suppress them and as a direct consequence of the alleged disorder. The accepted story links Bourne with the earl of Harrowby as the protagonist: Christopher Whitfield summarizes the accounts of Vyvyan, Bourne himself, and Ashbee in stating that 'Canon Bourne, having come to the conclusion that the enclosure of the parish was the only means of suppressing the Games, approached the earl of Harrowby in March 1849 to get his support for another Act of Enclosure'.³⁶ Whitfield goes on to suggest that correspondence between Bourne and Lord Harrowby continued into 1852 and 1853 because delay on the part of the inclosure commissioners was allowing the Games to continue. This is a clear and concise story which neatly couples protagonists with motives, but it is also a complete misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the evidence. The 2nd earl of Harrowby was indeed a natural choice for a local man looking for influential support. After nearly 30 years as an M.P., he had succeeded to

the title in 1847 and was to be a cabinet minister under Palmerston between 1855 and 1857.³⁷ He was a substantial landowner in Gloucestershire. One of his estates, Weston Park, was in Bourne's parish and the agent there, James Keen, was one of the Weston churchwardens. The Harrowby MSS. Trust does indeed contain a number of letters from Bourne to Lord Harrowby, the earliest of them dated 26 March 1849, but this letter does not propose inclosure: that had already been agreed at a meeting held in Weston two days earlier. The correspondence is entirely concerned with Bourne's efforts to get a small area of land set aside for allotments, a new school, and a recreation area, and with Lord Harrowby's attempts to secure an area called 'the Lynches'. There is no mention of the Cotswold Games, of disorder, or indeed of any motive for inclosure.³⁸ Neither was any known to a wider public. The only newspaper report which bears on the Games in any way is a notice in the *Gloucestershire Chronicle* of 1 June 1850:

INCLOSURE OF COMMONS. By the new Inclosure Act, which has received the Royal assent, the following (among other) inclosures are authorized to be proceeded with – Weston Subedge, Gloucester . . .

This notice appeared eight days after the 1850 Games had been held and, since the *Gloucestershire Chronicle* was a weekly paper published on Saturday, in the next issue following the Games. If there was a 'story' behind this notice, let alone a sensational report of mass disorder, it is impossible to believe that the local newspaper would not have mentioned it.

The only guides to the motives behind the inclosure of Weston are the inclosure commissioners' report and the distribution of the newly inclosed land. The report, dated 24 March 1849, states:

For the inclosure of Subedge, open fields, meadow, and common, containing 884a 13r 13p. We consider this proposed inclosure expedient, on the ground that the Common land is divided by the Baulks, and cannot be profitably or conveniently cultivated in their present state, and because the pasture land, at present unproductive, is capable of vast improvement.³⁹

The background to the report is the hostility felt by landowners, and indeed by educated opinion in general, towards commons and uninclosed land of any kind. The inclosure commissioners of 1845, recommending general inclosure, stated that uninclosed lands were 'a source of serious injury to the surrounding neighbourhoods, from their being the resort of idle and disorderly persons'.⁴⁰ This is a late but typical example of a literature which stigmatised common land as poor and over-used, and commoners as lazy and intemperate.⁴¹ This hostility arose because the measure of independence which a smallholding and common rights gave the labourer was seen as a threat to work discipline and a disincentive to paid labour for the tenant farmer. If common land provided space for a traditional gathering, that was a further offence: events like the Cotswold Games were much condemned by contemporary moralists and labour disciplinarians because they provided opportunities for drunkenness, loose morality, and a temporary breaking of the bonds which tied the labourer to this work. If disorder formed one strand of the whip with which respectable opinion lashed popular customs, the other was the idleness and over-expenditure they were said to promote.⁴² This is probably the true meaning of the 'demoralisation' reported by Bourne and repeated by Vyvyan and others.

In the distribution of land which followed the inclosure of Weston, some fifteen individuals received one acre or more (a list of the allotments is given in the Appendix). Of these, at least six belonged to the gentry or professional classes: two were peers, two knights or baronets, one,

John Griffiths, a substantial local gentleman, and one was Bourne himself. If the distribution is any guide to the situation before inclosure, the decision to inclose could have been taken by no more than ten people, because the 1845 Act required the consent of two thirds of those interested by number or value. Once the process had begun, there were few possible impediments. The inclosure commissioners were highly unlikely to give an adverse verdict: one historian of inclosure writes that they conceived it their duty to authorize inclosure wherever possible, and that they actually dealt more drastically with open fields than their predecessors under private Acts had done.⁴³ Until the legislation was amended in 1852, such inclosures by majority consent did not even require specific parliamentary sanction. It is therefore very difficult to see why the powerful influence of the earl of Harrowby should have been needed, except perhaps to give a lead to his neighbours. Inclosure gave tangible benefits to the larger landowners not only through consolidation of holdings and absolute possession, but in the opportunity it gave to buy out poorer neighbours unable to afford the expenses of fencing and drainage. Lord Harrowby began this process of acquisition before the final award was made, and Bourne enlarged his holding after inclosure.⁴⁴ Perhaps the only surprising thing about the inclosure of Weston is that it was so long delayed. There were sufficient self-interested motives to make the Cotswold Games a very minor consideration, and the decision was certainly not a popular verdict on their future, still less the sharp struggle between good and evil which some of the accounts suggest.

To a very large extent, the accepted account of the end of the Games and the inclosure of Weston has a single and rather self-dramatising source. The key year of 1846, when the alleged troubles began, marked not only the beginning of the railway works, but the arrival of Bourne in Weston.⁴⁵ Vyvyan attributes his account to him: 'Through the kindness of the Rev. G.D. Bourne . . . I have been enabled to add much interesting material'.⁴⁶ And Ashbee's fantasies about armed bands of Birmingham yahoos are accompanied by a fulsome eulogy of Bourne, 'who was before all influential in bringing inclosure about, who ruled this part of the county with the firmness of a benevolent despot, and whose word stood for law as it did for truth'.⁴⁷ G.M. Stratton seems to provide valuable independent confirmation, but if credulity can survive the 'Lord North' embroidery it should note that not all his material was imbibed at his mother's knee. He quotes an unidentified historian as saying that the Games had become 'the resort of all the lowest scum of the Black Country and the neighbourhood was demoralised'.⁴⁸ This sounds like a conflation of the Bourne and Vyvyan accounts. Through all the stories surrounding the end of the Games comes the voice of the Revd. G.D. Bourne, insisting that 30,000 people attended the Games, that large numbers from the Black Country came, that riot and mayhem ensued, and that the inclosure of Weston was a public-spirited action provoked and justified by an intolerable nuisance. There is not a single piece of evidence to justify any of these allegations, while the material we have suggests that the Cotswold Games remained a local and small-scale celebration, a magnet perhaps for Campden and the surrounding villages, probably a source of noisy conviviality, but not 'an annual attraction for a wide region', still less the location of a sort of criminal jamboree as thousands camped on Dover's Hill.

At the most charitable assessment, Bourne may have combined the multiplying eye of a medieval chronicler with a vivid imagination and a rigid intolerance of ordinary lapses and over-indulgence. A less charitable assessment might conclude that he was indeed suffering from moral panic: not the genuine alarm arising from injury or outrage but a fearful horror at any assembly of the lower orders, and was willing to repeat gross exaggerations amounting to deliberate lies to convince others of the dangers he felt. A cynic might decide that the whole story was a cover for the more self-interested motives behind the inclosure of Weston. We may find Bourne difficult to understand, but still more so is the lack of enquiry and regard for

plausibility with which his story has been received, even in recent times. The idea that a dissolute and disreputable rabble in their thousands would travel to a distant railhead, and then trek to a remote festivity, laden with camping paraphernalia, should sow some doubts in the historian's mind. So should an apparent decision to allow a riotous and disorderly event to continue for several years until it could be suppressed by inclosure. These unlikelihoods suggest that we should be less willing to take the disorder stories of the 19th century on trust, no matter how respectable their progenitors may have been and how often they have been repeated.

APPENDIX

Under the Weston-sub-Edge inclosure award (Public Record Office, MAF 1/161; Glos. R.O., Q/RI 156) dated 17 July (confirmed 21 July) 1854 a total of 969 acres was distributed among landowners. The names of the beneficiaries are given, together with the area of land allotted to them, in alphabetical order.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Roods</i>	<i>Perches</i>
Bennett,* trustees of the late George	202	1	0
Bourne, Revd. G.D. (glebe)	63	3	3
Drury,* ⁴⁹ James	66	3	35
Fletcher, Richard	76	2	18
Gainsborough, earl of	61	3	12
Greaves, representatives of the late John	64	3	34
Griffiths, John Rodd	38	1	29
Harrowby, earl of	83	1	6 ⁵⁰
" " "	40	1	7
Hiron,* William	11	1	17
Knight, George	7	3	7
Marshall, Charles; Rawlings, Lucy and Harriet; and Griffiths, John Rodd	50	3	17
Phillipps, Bt., Sir Thomas	1	2	29
Smith,* George	161	3	10
Steele, Bt., Sir John Maxwell	5	3	10
" " (quit rents and heriots)	14	2	14
" " (manorial rights)	6	1	37
clerk of the parish	2	2	10
constable of the parish	0	0	25
poor of the parish, allotment for	0	0	12
labouring poor, allotment for	4	0	0
recreation ground	1	1	0
surveyors of the parish highways	2	1	38 ⁵¹

* Surname recorded in lists of the parish overseers of the poor and constables in the Weston vestry minute book (Glos. R.O., P 360/VE 2/1).

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Harrowby MSS. Trust at his home, Sandon Hall, Stone, Staffordshire, and to the archivist there, Mr. Michael Bosson, for his help and kindness in arranging a visit and directing me to the relevant material. Dr. Douglas Reid of Hull University and Dr. Bob Bushaway of Birmingham University very kindly read this paper in draft form and made many useful criticisms and suggestions. Any remaining errors or infelicities are entirely my own responsibility.

Notes

1. The only full-length history of the Cotswold Games is C. Whitfield's *Robert Dover and the Cotswold Games* (London, 1962), which includes an edition of *Annalia Dubrensia*. Good accounts can be found in the same author's *A Hist. of Chipping Campden* (Eton, 1958) and E.R. Vyvyan's edition of *Annalia Dubrensia* (see below, note 6), but the most available general history is probably F. Burns' booklet *Heigh for Cotswold!: a hist. of Robert Dover's Olimpick Games* (Chipping Campden, 1981).
2. General discussion of the assault on popular customs may be found in R.W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700–1850* (Cambridge, 1973); Bob Bushaway, *By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700–1800* (London, 1982); H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1980).
3. Dover is said to have received some clothing from James I to wear when presiding at the Games, and members of the Court are said to have attended: see Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, ed. P. Bliss (London, 1820: first published 1691), 4, 222. As late as 1851 poster advertising claimed that the Games were 'Patronized by Church and State': Whitfield, *Robert Dover*, 76.
4. Weston-sub-Edge field account book 1826–52, reprinted in C.R. Ashbee, *The Last Records of a Cotswold Community* (Chipping Campden, 1904). Payments of £1–£11 are recorded in the years 1827–40. After 1840 the payment was regularly £5 and was by Drury in the years 1845–52.
5. The woodcut frontispiece to *Annalia Dubrensia* is reprinted in most of the literature about the Games, e.g. Whitfield, *Robert Dover*, 69. It shows dancing, backsword, coursing, jumping, wrestling, acrobatics, hunting, tossing the pike, casting the bar, and throwing the hammer. The 1851 poster advertises horse-racing, backsword, wrestling, and dancing, together with 'jingling, bowling, leaping, and running in sacks'.
6. E.R. Vyvyan, *Cotswold Games: Annalia Dubrensia* (London, 1970: first published 1878), p. ix.
7. George Drinkwater Bourne (1821–1901), fourth son of Peter Bourne, esq., of Liverpool; educated Oriel College, Oxford (B.A. 1844, M.A. 1857); rector of Weston-sub-Edge 1846–1901; rural dean 1875; honorary canon of Gloucester 1880: *Alumni Oxonienses 1715–1886*, ed. J. Foster (Oxford, 1888), 138.
8. *TBGAS* 9 (1884–5), 12.
9. G.M. Stratton, 'Reminiscences of the Dover's Hill Sports', *Evesham Journal Notes & Queries* 1906–8, ed. E.A.B. Barnard (Evesham, 1911), 166–9.
10. Bourne and Vyvyan say that the last Games were held in 1851, but Drury paid for the Hill in 1852 and Whitfield cites local tradition that this was the last year. The story that the site was ploughed 'by order of Lord Harrowby' occurs in several sources, e.g. *Annalia Dubrensia*, ed. A.B. Grosart (Manchester, 1877), p. ix.
11. Ashbee, *Last Records*, 26.
12. Whitfield, *Robert Dover*, 76.
13. Bushaway, *By Rite*, 246.
14. For Montem Day, J. Chandos, *Boys Together: English Public Schools 1800–1864* (London, 1984), 206–8; for Derby football, A. Delves, 'Popular Recreation and Social Conflict in Derby, 1800–1850', in E. and S. Yeo (eds.), *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590–1914* (Brighton and New Jersey, 1981), 89–127.
15. Stratton, 'Reminiscences', 168–9.
16. G.E.C. *Complete Peerage*, ed. H.A. Doubleday and Lord Howard de Walden (London, 1926), 6, 218.
17. For railways in the area and opening dates, R. Christiansen, *A Regional Hist. of the Railways of England* (Newton Abbot, 1981), 13, 50, 87–8.

18. Survey of Weston 1842–3: Harrowby MSS. Trust, Ryder Papers vol. cxxvi, item 133; Whitfield, *Hist. of Campden*, 212.
19. Train service details from weekly tables published by both the *Glos. Chronicle* and the *Worcs. Chronicle* (hereafter *G.C.* and *W.C.* respectively).
20. *W.C.* 14 June 1848.
21. *G.C.* 9 June 1849; 25 May 1850.
22. *W.C.* 11, 25 June 1851.
23. *G.C.* 13 June 1846.
24. *Worcester Herald*, 30 May 1846.
25. *G.C.* 21 June 1851.
26. *Annalia*, ed. Grosart, p. ix.
27. Whitfield, *Hist. of Campden*, 212.
28. T. Coleman, *The Railway Navvies* (Harmondsworth, 1968), 110.
29. *W.C.* 28 June 1848.
30. *G.C.* 21 June 1851; *W.C.* 25 June 1851.
31. H. Thomas, *The Hist. of the Glos. Constabulary 1839–1985* (Gloucester, 1987), 17.
32. *Ibid.* 16.
33. Public Record Office (P.R.O.), HO 45/3472/0.
34. *Glos. R.O.*, Q/Y 2/2/1 (chief constable's general orders and circular memoranda). *Ibid.* Q/SM 3 (quarter sessions administrative minutes); Q/AP 17a (returns of charges); Q/AP 18/1 (chief constable's letter book) were examined on my behalf by *Glos. R.O.* staff. The file lists at the P.R.O. (HO 44 and 45) were also searched for any attempt to obtain official assistance.
35. *Glos. R.O.*, Q/Y 2/3/2. Crown copyright material is reproduced by the permission of the controller of H.M.S.O.
36. Whitfield, *Robert Dover*, 79. There had been an attempt to inclose Weston in 1812.
37. *Dictionary of National Biography*.
38. Harrowby MSS. Trust, Ryder Papers vol. cxxvi, items 204, 305, 320–1, 337, 341, 343, 350.
39. Ashbee, *Last Records*, 30.
40. *Ibid.*
41. A representative selection can be found in W.E. Tate, *The English Village Community and the Enclosure Movements* (London, 1967), 163–6.
42. For discussion, Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, especially chapters 6–7.
43. Tate, *English Village Community*, 136.
44. Appendix. By 1873 Bourne held 87 acres in Gloucestershire: *Return of Owners of Land* (H.M.S.O. 1875), I, 5.
45. Bourne was in residence by November 1846, when he presided at a vestry meeting: *Glos. R.O.*, P 360/VE 2/1.
46. Vyvyan, *Annalia*, p. ix.
47. Ashbee, *Last Records*, 29.
48. Stratton, 'Reminiscences', 166.
49. James Drury was nominated for parish office in 1846, but in the inclosure commissioners' report of 1849 he was described as a lunatic. His interests were represented by a Committee and he was the only interested person who did not assent to inclosure.
50. This land ('the Lynches') was allotted to Thomas Rimell but was bought by Lord Harrowby before the final award was made.
51. This land included part of a quarry.