

The Dunse History Society welcomed its chairman Kenny McLean to give the final talk of the season, 'Lord of the Ring – When Quoits Ruled Berwickshire'

Quoits is a game involving throwing iron rings at a marked point on a bed of clay, the winner is the nearest quoit to the marker. Played by Greeks and Romans the game is ancient. The Green, Greenlaw in 1875 is the first evidence of quoits in Berwickshire. The game had its roots in the farming community concentrated around large farms and rows of farm cottages. It would be played after lunch at noon when the horses were having a 2 hour break. Each player had 2 quoits, the pair weighing 20lb. They were thrown from the run up at a pin in the 3 feet square flattened clay bed from a distance of 18 yards. With a clay bed at each end the game was played from alternative ends. The winner being the first of the pair playing to reach 21 points. The quoits were of two styles and were 8 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches in diameter with a central hole also of a fixed size. Quoit playing grounds were known in Duns, where the tennis courts are now located, on Gavinton Green, Greenlaw Moor and Eyemouth golf course. Played from mid May until August it was a highly organised sport with dozens of clubs in every village and farm. Chirnside had 60 clubs just after WW1 in 1918. A game of both skill and strength. Competitions were played at galas, shows and fetes and with professional challenges by visitors. Competitive winners became celebrities and at Reston Flower Show, where 50 people entered, a gold medal is known to have been awarded. The county champion was known as the Quoitee. There was a National Quoiting magazine. More quoiting clubs existed in the county than football or rugby clubs with in some cases up to 450 in attendance at a match. It was the biggest sport in the county but by 1950 only 20 - 30 clubs remained in the county. By the 1960s the club scene had gone and quoiting was restricted to gala shows and special days. Quoiting at the Duns show lasted until 2010 and the last competition in the county was at the Plough Inn, Leitholm in 2017. Reasons for the decline are thought to relate to farm mechanisation resulting in fewer employees and alternative entertainments such as TV, bowling and golf and there was no drive to join in competitions with clubs in wider areas. The Dunnottar club in Stonehaven is the last in existence in Scotland. Thus ended a popular game that was a fine combination of skill and brawn and is now gone.