

Sports & pastimes



Bear-Baiting

The practice of bear baiting was quite cruel but extremely popular. A bear was tied by one hind leg to a tree or post, and hunting dogs were turned loose to taunt and attack it. The “game” went on until the bear was killed, and spectators placed bets on the longevity of certain dogs and the bear.



Archery

Archery was compulsory. Every Englishman between the ages of 16 and 60 was compelled by law to own a longbow and target practice areas were set up (also by law) in every village. Another law required that every father give his son a bow upon his seventh birthday. Like jousting, the sport of archery was intended to prepare men for battle.



Hunting

Nobility enjoyed hunting as a sport. Game included hare (rabbits), hind (deer), wolf, wild bear, and fox. Shooting was done with bows and arrows, or the prey might be pursued by greyhounds (a favorite practice of ladies who often accompanied their lords on a hunt). Another popular form of hunting among the upper class was falconry. These birds of prey were considered so valuable that they were protected by Royal edict. Anyone found guilty of killing a falcon could be put to death.



Embroidery/Tapestries

Women of all classes practiced needlework as a pastime as well as a necessity.



Theatre

There were no movies or television shows. Therefore, theatre was VERY popular. Traveling troupes of male actors (women were not allowed on stage) would visit villages and perform on makeshift stages. The actors depended on the generosity of the villagers for their incomes. A very popular form of theatre was the Commedia d'el Arte, which was very broad, slapstick style of performing (similar to the Three stooges).



Other Games

Many games that are popular today were also popular during the Renaissance. Adult games included dice, chess, bahgammon (called "tables") bowling, tennis. Bocce ball, and cards. Children's game included skipping, leapfrog, marbles, and blind man's bluff.