

FRANCIS WILLUGHBY'S BOOK OF GAMES, David Cram, Jeffrey L. Foreng and Dorothy Johnston, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003, xvi +344, 1-85928-460-4.

This is a fabulous book – by which I mean the subject of the fine editorial work of Cram, Foreng and Johnston, I shall return to their contribution later, but first I want to concentrate upon Willughby's work. This was a work collated over several years in this young author's life, information collected at first hand and received from correspondents during the 1660s. It is sadly unfinished as Willughby died in 1672 aged just 36. This is a work of interest in several ways. It introduces the reader to a collection of games now lost, thankfully in some cases, and as such contributes to the history of culture and pastimes. For this alone it was well worth the considerable effort that the editors put into its reconstruction and presentation, yet this is only a part of the story. Willughby was a member of the Royal Society and moved in the circles of the new breed of investigative scientists – he was a particular friend of the natural historian John Ray. This means that Willughby was not writing down the rules of the games for enthusiasts and 'armchair' participants, but conducting a scientific study of contemporary culture. As such the games were categorised in a way that betrayed Willughby's association with the philosophical language of John Wilkins. The games were divided into a dichotomy and then each of these is divided into a further dichotomy or trichotomy. Games thus become arranged into those of the mind and those of the body: those of the mind being games of chance; chance and skill, and skill, whilst those of the body become of the whole body or of the eye and ear. In some of the games, Willughby exercised his interest in mathematics to deduce that games involving numbers were of ancient origin and betrayed links to astronomical understanding at the time of their origin. Games had been controversial during the century, and some aspects remained so; gambling was continuously frowned upon and games of chance were sometimes seen as involving frivolous calls on

providence. In the pre-civil war years the playing of games on a Sunday was a cause of great controversy and opposition to the crown included attacks on the *Book of Sports* published by James VI and I and propagated again in his son's reign. Willughby seems to ignore this, and perhaps it is a mark of how much reduced in importance such issues were in the face of king-killing and political turmoil; that he could conduct a social-scientific study without comment.

The games included in the book are divided by general categories in the index, such as ball games including football; card games, such as Nodde and Whehee a game that centres upon getting three cards from the same suit and being the eldest player to do so in the event of a tie. As well as duelling and shooting there are early childhood games and hurling which can be played within or between communities. There is a series of games that have perhaps thankfully disappeared collected under the heading 'Tricks to Abuse and Hurt One Another'. Amongst them is Selling of Millstones. In this game a line of boys sits on the floor, with the tallest at the end of the line, with the next in height sat between the first boy's knees and so on down the line. Another boy – the purchaser of the millstones - tests the quality by hitting each of these 'millstones' over the head with a trencher dragged down the line from highest head to lowest. The purchaser then tried to remove each boy-millstone from the line by dragging him away, whilst the boy immediately behind holds him by the ears!

The editors have done an excellent job with this book. The original text is rendered accessible to a wide audience for the first time. This in itself would have been enough for at least one market of readers, but there is so much more. Coming from a range of interests related to Willughby they have produced a multi-layered text with editorial material on the social scientific nature of the work, biographical information, contextualisation of work on games,

all set in a finely wrought set of editorial conventions. I hope that this book gets the wide readership it deserves; it is at once a work of deep scholarship and an entertaining and instructive read.

Martyn Bennett

College of Communication, Culture and Education

Nottingham Trent University.