

Medieval Board Games

Introduction

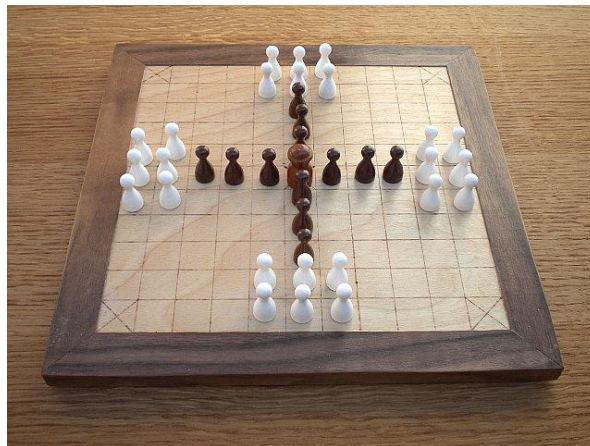
When Glyndŵr was a child, he would have played a number of different games with his friends and family, and many of them are still played today. These games were played for fun - but they were also used to prepare the children for their adult lives.

They played ball games - such as skittles, bowls and cnapan - or games of:

- * Amusement - such as hide and seek, hopscotch, blind man's bluff and tag;
- * Skill and Strength - such as quoits, archery, wrestling and tug of war;
- * Chance - such as dice, 'knucklebones' and pick up sticks;
- * Strategy - such as chess, backgammon and nim.

Games of Strategy

Hnefatafl [Tawlbwrdd]



Tawlbwrdd was the Welsh version of the Viking game, hnefatafl. It was usually played on a square board which was 9 squares wide, although boards could be bigger. In the game, a king and his defenders try to escape from their attackers, and move the king to safety at the side of the board.

A game called gwyddbwyll is often mentioned in the Mabinogion and may have originally been brought to Wales by the Romans. We now use gwyddbwyll as the name for chess, but it also developed into the game of tawlbwrdd.

Tawlbwrdd is mentioned in the Laws of Hywel Dda, where games of it were given as gifts to civil servants - the most expensive games were given to the most important people. Tawlbwrdd was highly respectable at this time but by the sixteenth century the game had lost its status in Welsh society. The word tawlbwrdd is now used for backgammon.

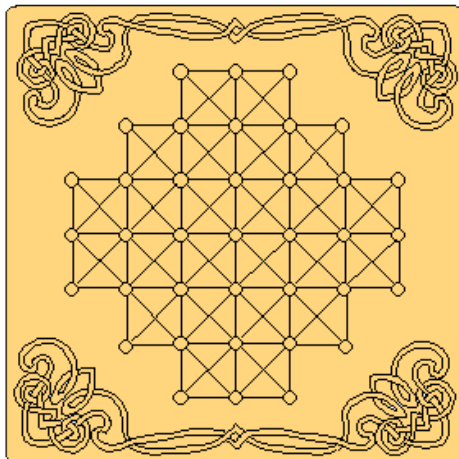
Nine Men's Morris [Nawtwill]



Nawtwill is one of the oldest known board games - its design has been discovered on ancient Egyptian roofing tiles and in Roman and Greek buildings. The game is still popular in many countries - it is one of the row-of-three games, like Noughts and Crosses or Tic-Tac-Toe.

The aim of the game is to capture your opponents' counters and remove them from the board. This is done by forming a straight line of three counters – which is called a 'mill'.

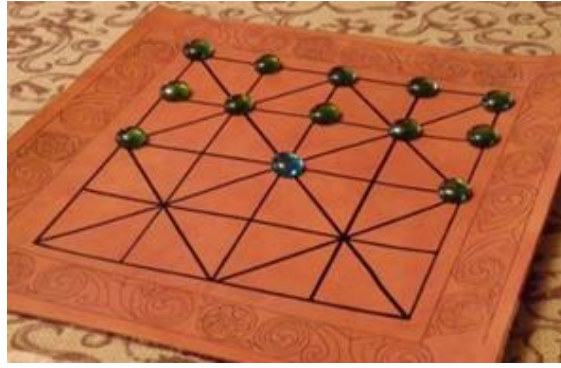
Fox and Geese [Capture Glyndŵr]



This game was probably first played by Vikings that settled in northern Europe. In the game, seventeen geese try to surround a fox, but the fox can stop them by jumping over the geese.

There are modern versions of this game, such as Chinese Checkers and Solitaire.

Corner the Rabbit [Hunting Glyndŵr]



Corner the Rabbit is very similar to the game Fox and Geese but it is played on a square board and has twelve 'hunters'. It may be the earliest recorded hunting game in Europe - Cercar la liebre was described in a book in 1283. The Moors may have taken the game to Spain because it uses the same playing board as the game 'Alquerque'.

The Spanish then took the game to Central and North America and it was played by the American natives. The Papago Tribe of Arizona and the Tew Tribe of New Mexico called it Pon chochotl (or 'Coyote and Chickens'). Cercar la liebre is still popular today in Spain under the name Juego de la liebre.

Alquerque [Draughts]



Alquerque (or 'uncountable') is a strategy board game that was based on the game Qirkat from the Middle East. The game does not appear in literature until late in the 10th century when Qirkat was mentioned in the book Kitab al-Aghani (or 'Book of Songs').

The Moors took the game with them when they invaded Spain, and the rules to Alquerque are included in Libro de los juegos (or 'Book of games') in the 13th century. Spanish settlers in New Mexico later introduced the game to the Zuni Indians.

It is thought that the modern game of draughts was developed from Alquerque.