

# A history of cycling in six board games

Board games hold up a mirror to society, so it is only to be expected that they may reflect the enormous popularity of cycling, both as a sport and as a leisure pursuit. However, the sheer number of games having cycling as a theme may come as a surprise: the excellent web site [www.cyclingboardgames.net](http://www.cyclingboardgames.net) devised and maintained by Anki Toner of Barcelona

presents about 500 different games, spanning more than a century, attractively presented and knowledgeably separated into categories. A short article cannot cover this wide field, but the examples described here do reveal interesting cultural insights.

By Adrian Seville

### The Wieler Sport Spel



those who know the author's collecting interests will not be surprised that the first

example has the *Game of the Goose* in its DNA. The development of cycle racing as a competitive sport towards the end of the 19th century was recognised by the publication of the *Wieler Sport Spel* [Wheeling Sport Game] by J Vlieger of Amsterdam in 1891 (1). The game is played with two dice, adding the points thrown, as in the *Goose* game. The two opposing tracks are negotiated by opposing red and blue teams, each aspiring to be first to reach their winning space at number 63 – a number which is sure evidence of descent from *Goose*. The favourable spaces – doubling your points as in the parent game – are denoted by images of single cycles. A collision means that you start again, corresponding to the Death space in *Goose*, whereas a broken or faulty machine loses a turn. The ladies' cycle, post cycle, and water cycle require you to wait until another player joins you – hazards reminiscent of the Well and Prison spaces in the *Game of the Goose*. Of these strange contraptions, the water cycle looks the most fanciful but is in fact based on the Pinkert Navigating Tricycle, invented in 1891, (2) on which the inventor managed to get half-way across the English Channel before needing to be rescued by a passing ship when the tide turned.



2

The initial throw of nine has a special rule, to prevent you from winning at once by hopping forward from one favourable space to the next. Instead, you may advance to space 21 or 42 on your assigned track – and become either 'Champion of the Netherlands' or 'Champion of the World'. Strange to say, at the time this game was on sale, there was no official world championship. It is not known whether the 'champions' depicted are real people.

The game illustrates the state of

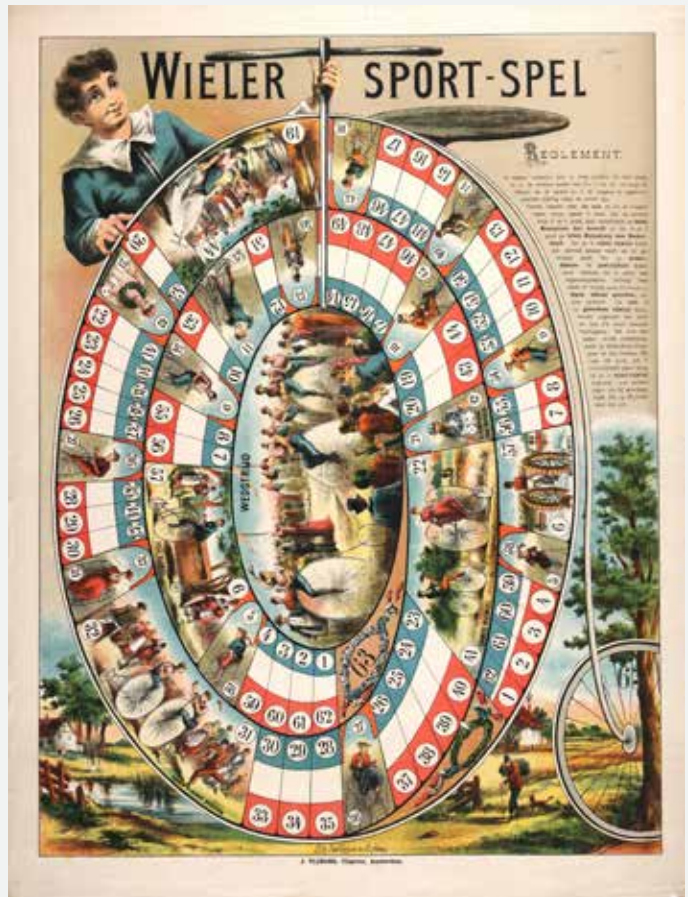
cycling development in the late 19th century, though the racing 'penny-farthing' machines, with their attendant dangers, were by then going out of date. They contrast with sedate three-wheelers of several different geometries. Here, too, are all kinds of headgear, from jockeys' caps to a top-hat – and cycling is clearly being enjoyed by both sexes and a wide range of ages. The American civil rights leader, Susan B Anthony, was quoted in the *New York World* of February 2, 1896 as saying:

*I think [the bicycle] has done more to emancipate women than any one thing in the world. I rejoice every time I see a woman ride by on a bike. It gives her a feeling of self-reliance and independence the moment she takes her seat; and away she goes, the picture of untrammelled womanhood.*

### The Bicycle Race



freedom for 'untrammelled' women to explore the world was not the only advantage that cycling conferred. As a leisure activity open to both sexes, it enabled a form of unsupervised socialising that was not readily available before the Great War. Like roller skating in the Late Victorian era, cycling did much to contribute to the widening of sexual freedom. *The Bicycle Race Game* (3), published by the Finsbury firm of Woolley & Co about 1900, illustrates in its winning space a gathering of cyclists at the Old Salisbury Arms, a hotel in Barnet. *The Wheel World*, a 'bicycling and tricycling monthly magazine', gave a light-hearted account of these tea-time social gatherings in its issue of February 1896, explaining that in October



1  
The *Wieler Sport Spel*. Amsterdam: Vlieger 640 x 485 mm © Seville. From the author's collection

Tokens from The *Bicycle Race Game* © Seville. From the author's collection



‘the ‘Old Sal.’ — as it is termed by the slangy portion of the community — is in its fullest swing, being then the great rendezvous of North London cycling clubs of all grades for their closing runs.’ In the hotel, the author (writing under the pseudonym ‘Katerfelto’) comes upon ‘a mixed cycling club, some of the fair ‘cyclistes’ being neatly and sensibly dressed in serge or cloth, while others [...] are absurdly dressed in cheap black satin, with a profusion of silver ornaments.’

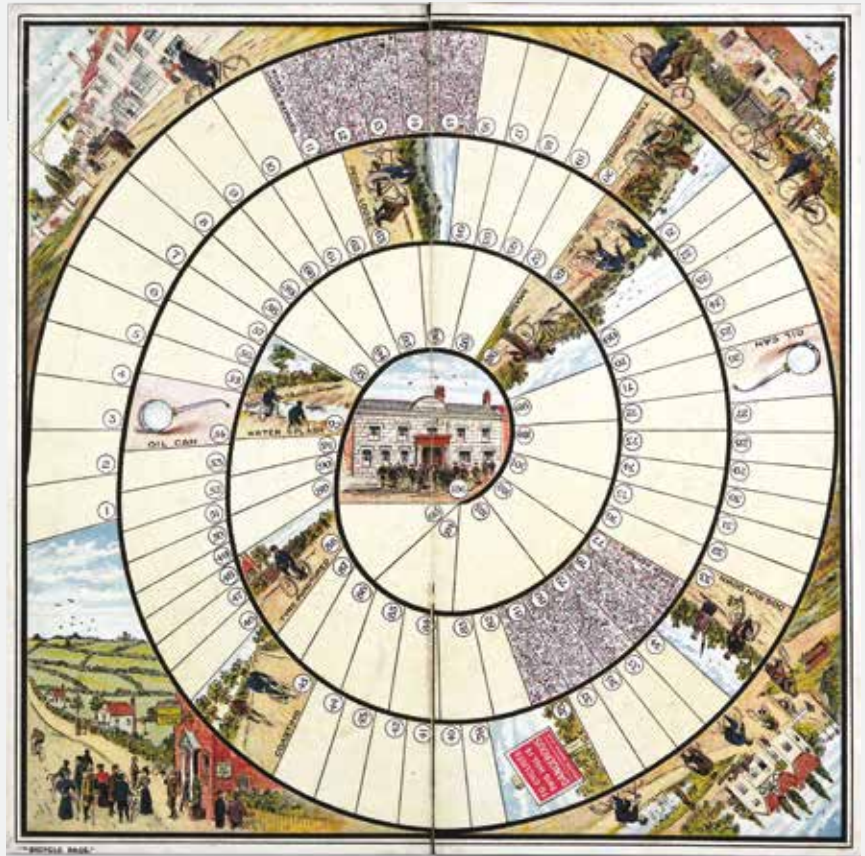
The game itself is not innovative. There are favourable spaces at 26 and 54, where the player, having ‘oiled up’ can advance. The equivalent to the Death space is at 98, where the player, having smashed up his machine must retire from the game. The ‘dangerous hill’ at space 38, where the player must change from double dice to a single die for safe descent, is marked by a notice provided by the Cyclists Touring Club, established in 1878 as the Bicycle Touring club: first renamed in 1883, it still exists, now rebranded as Cycling UK.

### Wheeling

o say that Woolley’s game was not innovative is perhaps too kind. It borrowed several features from one of the best-known cycling games: *Wheeling*, brought out by the London firm of John Jaques and Son in 1896 (4). That game also had a pub as the winning goal, though here it was the Anchor at Ripley, a village in Surrey on the road to Portsmouth, 22 miles southwest of London – then, as now, a favourite destination for cyclists. In that year, *The Hub*, another early cycling magazine, wrote:

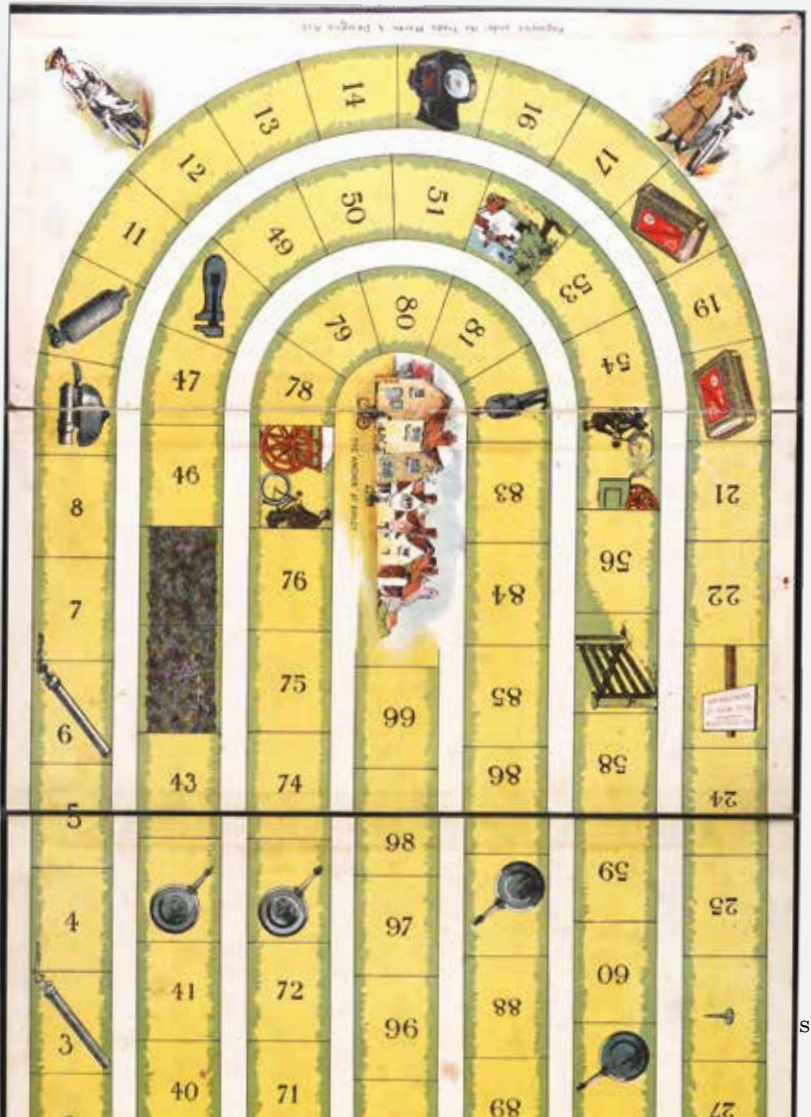
*Of all stretches of highway popular amongst cyclists, the Ripley Road, without dispute, is by far and away the most famous [...] The Ripley Road is known, at least by name, to cyclists in every part of the globe; and particularly in the case of American wheeling visitors ... a ‘run to Ripley’ figures as surely on their programme as does a trip to Stratford upon Avon.*

The game itself was popular over a long period, with later editions stretching into the 1920s. An appealing feature was that players could collect printed tickets bearing the name of equipment useful to overcome obstacles encountered further along the track. Thus, at space 26 (a sharp tack), unless provided with a ‘pneumatic outfit’ ticket, the



3 ^  
The Bicycle Race.  
London: Woolley & Co.  
355 x 355 mm  
© Seville. From the author's collection

4 v  
Wheeling. London: Jaques  
370 x 750 mm  
© Seville. From the author's collection



player must go back and get one. Likewise, at space 38, where an elderly woman is surprised by a bicycle coming from behind, the player must have a ticket either for a bell or for a whistle in order to proceed. The need for this was enshrined in Section 85 of the Local Government Act of 1888, which provided that 'before passing any cart, carriage, mule or other beast of burden, or any foot passenger' a cyclist had to give audible and sufficient warning of approach 'by sounding a bell or whistle, or otherwise'.

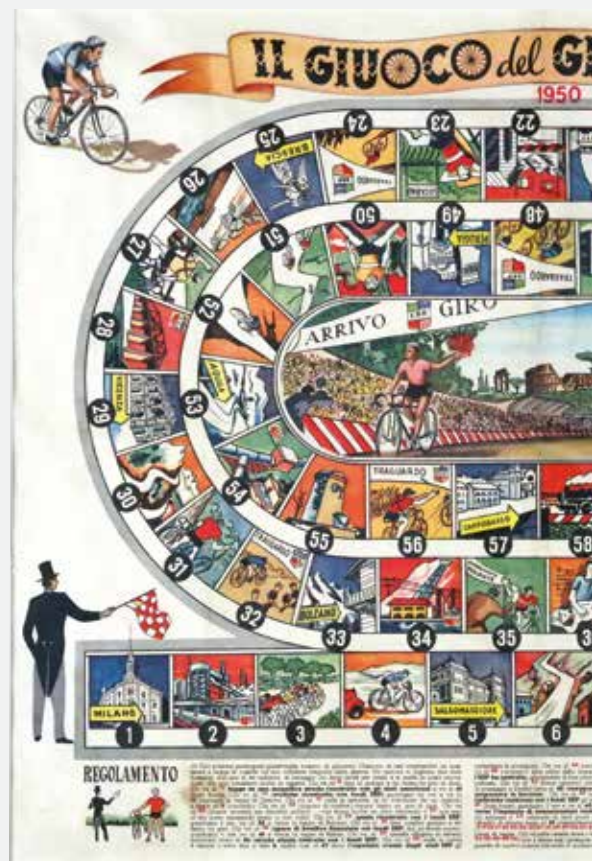
As in *Goose*, there is a series of favourable spaces, but here they each show an oil can, allowing the player to advance by five spaces. At several points, the player is required to 'walk', i.e. must proceed using one instead of two dice: for example, the policeman at space 65 may make the player walk on, unless he is shown a lamp ticket. At space 90, the player has a smash and must retire from the game – as in *Goose*, this final hurdle comes just when the winning space is within reach.

### The Raleigh Cruising Game

In contrast to the Woolley and Jaques games, which came with neatly-boxed playing equipment and were made to last, the *Raleigh Cruising Game* (5) was an ephemeral production, given away free by Raleigh cycle dealers just before the Second World War. Though the game sheet is not uncommon, the cardboard bicycle tokens are hard to find. The stylish young woman pictured on the reverse suggests that the pleasures of owning an up-market Raleigh might not be confined to enjoyment of the countryside. The game itself is technically unremarkable but has some appealing period features. At space 37, the player encounters a 'Stop Me and Buy One' tricycle (6) – a reference perhaps unfamiliar to younger ephemerists. The ice-cream tricycle was introduced by the Acton firm of T. Wall and Son in 1922, with the idea of selling their ice cream direct to the public. The innovation was successful and by 1939 there were no fewer than 8500 Walls tricycles on the road. More enduringly, reference is made at several points to the advantages of the Sturmey-Archer gear, a multi-speed hub first produced in Nottingham by a subsidiary of the Raleigh company but now manufactured in Taiwan.

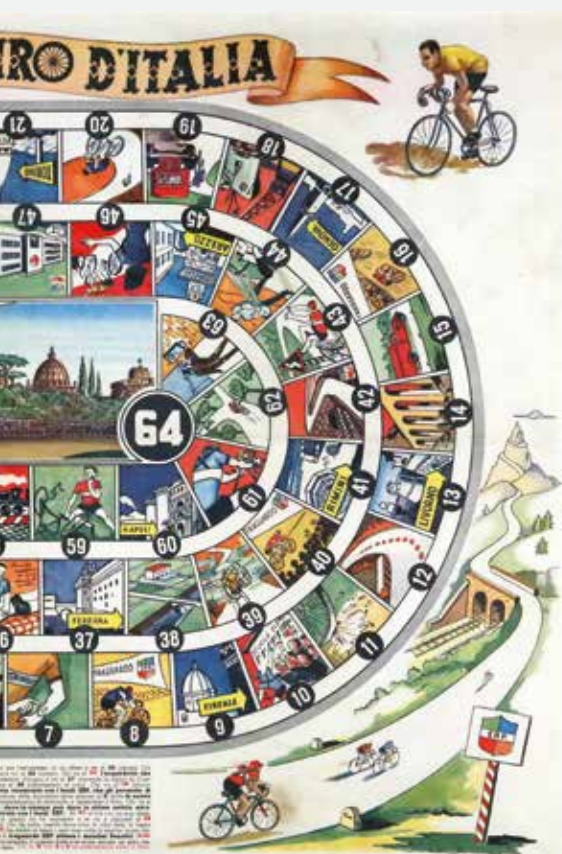


5 ^  
The Raleigh Cruising Game.  
Nottingham: The Raleigh  
Cycle Co. Ltd.  
(cyclingboardgames.net)



7 ^  
The Giro d'Italia game.  
Rome: Allulli Crea  
350 x 500 mm  
© Seville. From the author's  
collection





8 ▽  
 La Classicissima game.  
 Imperia: Agnesi srl  
 500 x 700 mm  
 © Seville. From the author's  
 collection



### The Giro D'Italia

his famous cycle race round Italy – first run in 1909 – is celebrated in the game shown in (7). It dates from 1950, when Europe was recovering from the ravages of the Second World War, with the help of money from the USA under the European Reconstruction Project (ERP)\*. The game sheet includes roundels showing the leading cyclists of the day, to be cut out, mounted on card, and used as tokens on the track. The 64-space track is divided into eight stages, each marked by a banner showing the ERP shield. Landing on one of these doubles your points, as in Goose. But the game is also peppered with favourable references to the Project. From space 12, you fly ahead 'on a magnificent road constructed with American aid' to the final stage. Space 31 shows a viaduct rebuilt with ERP funds, which you use to win the Bolzano stage, advancing to space 38. Space 39 shows a flooded tract, which you surmount by means of an elevated road similarly constructed. Likewise, at 54 you are so refreshed by water from a new aqueduct as to win the Campobasso stage by advancing to space 58. At 59, where your bicycle is smashed, you do not need to retire from the game – instead you go back to space 2, where a new factory supported by the ERP provides you with a fresh mount.

This adulation of all things American is no accident – the game is a none-too-subtle piece of propaganda put out by the ERP with the support of the ruling Christian Democratic Party, which controlled these American funds. The ultimate target was the Communist Party, a real force in post-war Italy. Outlawed during Mussolini's Fascist regime, it had played a major part in the Italian resistance movement and became the strongest party of the Italian left. Campaigning against them, the Christian Democrats sought to celebrate the building of railways, roads and other infrastructure during their time of government. However, they failed to get an overall majority in the 1953 elections, ending a period of eight years of post-war stability.

\*better known to us as the Marshall Plan

### La Classicissima

Our final game (8) also portrays a famous Italian cycle race. La Classicissima is an annual event, on the roads between Milan and San Remo, in Northwest Italy. With a distance of almost 300 km, it is the longest professional one-day race in modern cycling. The game, however, celebrates pasta – specifically, that manufactured by the Agnesi company, the most venerable of pasta factories, founded in 1824. Their characteristic packets (spaces 5, 9, 18 etc) when encountered en route act like *Goose* spaces to double your throw. Additionally, at space 16, having eaten a plate of this admirable pasta, you gain enough energy to conquer Il Turchino [the formidable Turchino mountain pass between the cities of Masone and Mele] and go straight on to Voltri at space 29. Reaching the Agnesi factory at Ognelia, a suburb of Imperia (space 55) also moves you forward.

But, corresponding to the Death space in *Goose*, at the dreaded number 58 you get a push – it is spotted by the stewards, you are disqualified and must start the game again. Contrast this with space 21, where you also receive a favourable push: this one is not spotted, so you move on three spaces. The dubious morality of professional cycling is perhaps accurately implied.

Many of the scenes represented in these games are no more. The exotic tricycles have vanished, along with the wayside policeman hoping to catch the dying flicker of an acetylene lamp. Yet the broad changes in our society to which the leisure passion for cycling contributed in the post-Victorian era are still very much with us. The professional sport is not yet a by-word for fair play. And we are daily challenged by those twin persuaders - propaganda and advertising - that opportunistically latch on to all our activities.

Just as there is more to cycling than a means of travel, there is more to these board games than merely throwing the dice. ♻️

Adrian Seville's book, *The cultural legacy of the Royal Game of the Goose*, published by Amsterdam University Press in 2019, is recognised as the authoritative academic text on these games, while his *Vintage board games*, White Star Publishers, Milan, 2019, presents a nostalgic look at board games of the nineteenth century and their evolution, illustrated by examples from his collection.