The Quest for the Pyramids

*Playing equipment in English printed board games
of the pre-Georgian, Georgian and Early Victorian Eras*

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Loose change and a pair of dice

This chapter is about what equipment was used to play simple race games, in which markers representing the players hurried along a printed track towards the winning space. In Continental Europe, the moves for such games were determined by the throw of dice - but the practice in England was very different, being much affected by the high taxation here on dice between the beginning of the eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth. This period includes the golden age of English printed board games, which reached a high point of beauty and inventiveness during the first half of the nineteenth century. The restriction to simple race games of course excludes discussion of more complicated games such as chess or draughts, whose equipment tells quite another story.

These days when we buy a new board game, it comes in a bright cardboard box containing everything necessary for play. It was not always like that. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, printed games began to spread across frontiers in Western Europe. The pattern for many of these games was the *Game of the Goose*, a simple race game played with dice, originating in Italy in the late Middle Ages. Over the centuries, many variants of this game were invented, the most important developments being in France, where educational race games appeared from the middle of the seventeenth century, to be followed by games on many themes, mirroring much of human activity. These games were sold as printed sheets, it being assumed that every household would have a pair of dice and could find some distinctively different coins to move along the track, to mark the progress of each player. For example, the *Jeu Royal de L'Oye* [Royal Game of the Goose] published about the middle of the eighteenth century by Hoyau in Chartres, France (figure 1) says in the printed rules: *il faut que toutes les marques soient de differente monnoye afin qu'un chacun reconoisse le sien* [All the markers must be of different coins, so that everyone can recognise their own].

Figure 1: *Jeu Royal de l'Oye,* Chartres: Hoyau, about 1750

The Game of the Goose was brought to England in 1597 by John Wolfe, Printer to the City of London, and was registered there at Stationers' Hall. Over the next centuries, several printers produced versions of the game and it would be enjoyed, whether for gambling or for family amusement. It was not an intellectual pursuit, for the rules allowed no choice of move – the dice ruled everything – but it was fast and furious, the players' markers rushing along the track at a great rate, driven by the sum of the points on the two dice thrown together. Indeed, if you landed on a goose, you got your points again and moved still faster. It was a cleverly-designed game, with hazards such as the prison, where you had to wait until someone came to release you and take your place, or the inn, where you had to miss a turn. Landing on space 58, usually marked with a skull, meant that you had to begin the game again – and if you overthrew the winning space at 63, you had to count your excess points backwards, so that you might unexpectedly hit the 'death' space and land back at the start.

Cheating the tax man

However, by the time Queen Anne came to the throne at the beginning of the eighteenth century, gambling in England had become a serious vice. The game of *Hazard* – a forerunner of the American dice game called *Craps* - was especially frowned upon, because large sums could be won or (mostly!) lost in a short time. The Gambling Act of 1710 sought to curb this vice by imposing a substantial duty on both cards and dice: on a pair of dice, 5 shillings was charged, comparable with the weekly wage of a skilled craftsman. The ingenuity of games manufacturers was equal to the problem. The Act imposed the full dice duty on 'all pieces of ivory, bone or other material made or used for any game or play with any letters figures spots or marks thereupon to denote any chance or chances.' But what if the manufacturers supplied something with no marks, for the purchaser to mark up with pen and ink? So was born the idea of a *blank* totum (later called the teetotum or tetotum) – a small spinning top with four, six, eight or even twelve flat sides, that could be numbered up accordingly (figure 2). Spinning tops with marked faces had been in use for gambling from Roman times, at least – the face marked T was short for the Latin *totum,* meaning [take] all the pool, hence the name T-totum.

Figure 2:

Georgian teetotums, showing home-numbered and blank versions

(John Spear collection)

The Late Georgian era, from 1790, saw the development of a wide range of games for education and amusement. They were of high quality, beautifully engraved and often expensively hand-coloured, addressing a newly-affluent middle-class market. Their manufacturers soon realised that this market could be tempted into buying a full set of playing equipment, including special markers as well as the teetotum, all got up in a nicely-labelled box, to go with the printed game sheet, which itself might be mounted on linen and folded – like a pocket map - into an attractive slip-case, or might be mounted on a sturdy paste-board, to protect it from damage.

But just what was in these boxes? The problem is that so few of them have survived – many fewer than the game sheets, though they themselves can be rare enough. Even the few surviving boxes almost never contain their full set of original playing equipment. We know this, because the game rules – whether on the game sheet or in a separate booklet – usually specify what is needed to play the game:

1. For the simple race games discussed here, the first essential piece of equipment would be something to replace dice, at least until 1862, when the dice duty was repealed, and dice gradually came back into favour. Usually, the replacement was indeed a teetotum but alternatively the generation of random moves might be done by drawing numbered cards from a bag. More rarely, a spinning disc might be used.

2. Distinguishable markers were needed for each player, to show their progress along the track, often differently-coloured tokens of some sort. Different manufacturers used different words to refer to these – travellers, pillars, pyramids, marks, figures, counters - and one of the puzzles is to find out what was meant in each case. In particular, interpreting the word 'pyramid' is far from straightforward and – as we shall see – the word 'counter' was used in several different senses.

3. Some of the English games had spaces on which a player was required to stay a specified number of turns – up to four, in some cases. Since players could easily (or deliberately!) forget how long they had stayed, many of these games required the player to put down the specified number of 'counters' beside their marker, removing one at each missed turn.

4. The earlier games, such as the Game of the Goose, were invariably played for stakes, large or small, and one of the first actions of the players was to agree the amount. Landing on a hazard space, or hitting another player's mark, meant that a stake (sometimes called a 'fine') was paid into a pool. The pool would eventually be taken by the winner. For convenience in play, the stakes were often represented by 'counters', whose monetary worth was determined by agreement at the start of play: these were not usually included in the boxed set of equipment for the particular game. However, some of the Georgian and Victorian games, particularly those of educational or moral intent, were not played for money stakes, so that it was simply a matter of which player finished first.

It is clear that the word 'counter' was used for a bewildering variety of purposes. Originally, from the middle ages, 'counters' were discs of metal, ivory, or other material, used in performing arithmetical operations and particularly for reckoning up accounts. These 'reckoning counters' are sometimes called 'jettons' after the French term *jeton*. They were used in England and all over Europe in conjunction with a counting-board with abacus-like markings. Sets of them were normally all the same, so that they would have been of no use as markers on a race game. From the 16th century, the jettons most commonly used in England for reckoning accounts were made in Nuremberg - thin brass discs, about 20 mm in diameter, often marked with an orb and cross on one face.

In English games of chance, including race games, the term 'counter' was generally used for whatever replaced money, though an alternative term was 'fish', a punning reference to the French word *fiche*, meaning a gambling chip of an elongated rectangular shape. In England, some gambling chips were actually made in the shape of a fish, in ivory, bone or mother-of-pearl. More complicated sets of gambling chips, with different shapes or colours to denote

different values, came into use for serious gambling, but these would not have been necessary for the family race games discussed here. With these complexities in mind, we can begin to interpret the equipment lists in the various game rules.

Cupid, Courtship and Matrimony

The earliest surviving English printed board game is a *Game of the Goose*, published in London by John Overton and listed in the Term Catalogue for 1690: its rules, engraved in the centre of the sheet, simply call for a pair of dice and make reference to 'stakes', without further specification. Of about the same date is the *Royall Pass-Time of Cupid or the New and most Pleasant Game of the Snake,* published by John Garett. Its first rule says: 'Having a pare of dice, it must first be agreed upon what to play for, which is to be laid downe & then you must throw who shall play first.' Thus, the winner's pool is begun by each player putting in the agreed stake: the *Goose* games have a similar rule.

Of much greater interest is the equipment for the game of *Courtship and Matrimony*, first advertised in the London Evening Post of 1747 (issue 3041) as a 'new invented entertaining game; to be play'd at not only with Dice as the Snake and Goose, but also with Cards or an Index.' It was a 64-space variant of the *Game of the Goose*, the favourable spaces being denoted by lines from popular ballads of the day. The idea of suggesting alternatives to dice was presumably driven by the introduction of taxes on them. The 'index' suggested would have been a pointer mounted so as to turn in a horizontal circle on a pivot placed at the centre of the playing sheet (figure 3).
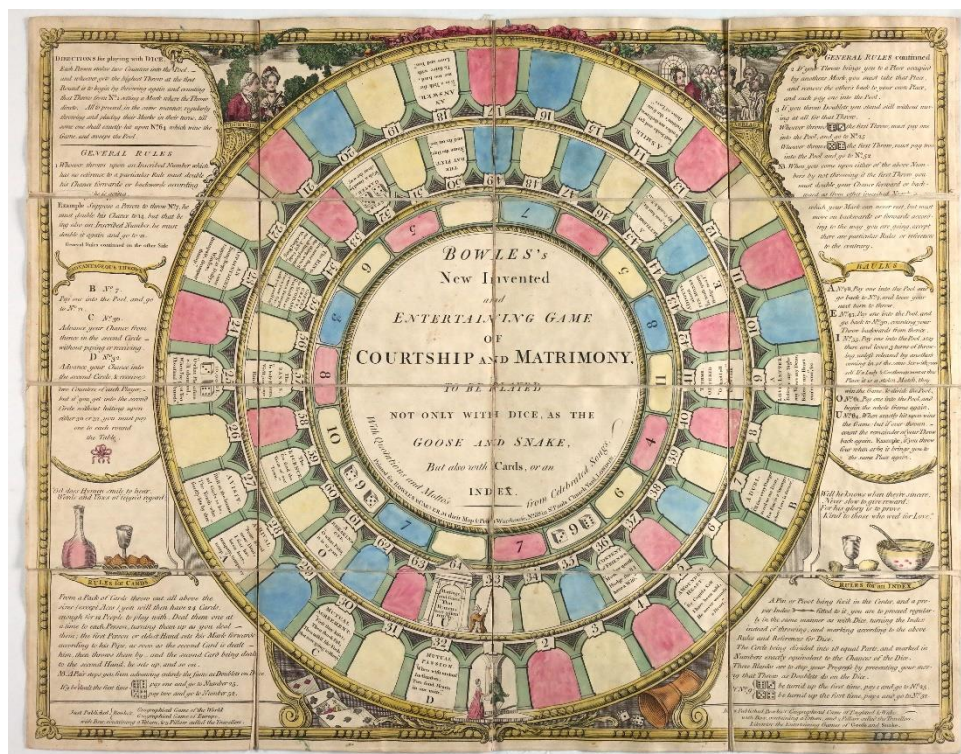

Figure 3: *Courtship and Matrimony,* London: Bowles & Carver, 1795

The throw of dice was thus replaced by a spin of the pointer, the 18 sectors of the surrounding ring providing for all possible outcomes by an ingenious mapping of the 36 (6x6) possibilities for a throw of two dice. All doublets (i.e. outcomes with the same number on both dice) were counted as blanks. Thus, the six possible doublets (each with a probability of 1/36) could be mapped onto only three blank divisions, while the remaining outcomes (each with a probability of 1/18) all had their own divisions. It had no doubt been found by trial that a ring finely divided into 36 sectors would result in disputes as to which sector the pointer was indicating when it came to rest. This was a highly sophisticated approach, showing a perfect understanding of the mathematics of chance.

The alternative method of play, drawing from a pack of cards, used a similar approach. All cards above sixes were removed, leaving 24, including the aces. These were then dealt two at a time and face up, each card giving a number from one to six, as on dice. Pairs were treated as blanks, the same as for doublets on dice.

Making the Grand Tour

An important innovation in English games was based on the Grand Tour of Europe: in these 'cartographic' games, the markers moved along a track of numbered points on a map. The first was *A Journey through Europe or The Play of Geography*, invented by John Jefferys. The only known example is dated 1759, printed for Carrington Bowles of London. The rules speak of a player moving 'his man' according to the spin of a totum. A new version of the tour of Europe game was published in 1768 by Thomas Jefferys (apparently no relation to John). The rules on the game sheet specify a totum with eight faces and explain the other equipment:

> The turned pillars are called the Travellers, who are supposed to make the tour of Europe […] The four Counters of the same colour with the Travellers are to be employed as markers and are called Servants. Whenever a player is directed to wait one turn or more, he is to lay down as many Counters or Servants as he is directed to wait turns (never more than four) and […] instead of spinning he must take up one Servant […] till they are all taken up.

This is the earliest known use of the 'Travellers and Servants' terminology, which was to be used in the rules of many similar 'tour' games in succeeding years. These games were not played for stakes, the only penalties being the requirement to stop for one or more turns on certain spaces. The two examples mentioned above both show derivation from the *Game of the Goose*, in that if you land on a capital city 'where a king lives', you get your points again. Later versions abandoned this link with *Goose.*

An inspired piece of piracy

The cartographic games were somewhat dull and forbidding in appearance. Not so *The New Game of Human Life*, published in 1790 by John Wallis and Elizabeth Newbery (figure 4a), finely engraved and with bright hand-colouring. This important game was a development of

the old game of Goose but instead of using a 63-space track, here there were 84 spaces – seven lots of twelve - corresponding to the Seven Ages of Man. The 'age' spaces were: (12) Youth, (24) Manhood, (36) Prime of Life, (48) Sedate Middle Age, (60) Old Age, (72) Decrepitude; (84) was the winning space, showing the Immortal Man. As in *Goose*, if you land on an 'age' space, you must go on to the extent of your spin. The game was a close copy of an earlier version brought out by the Paris firm of Crépy in 1775. In the copying, several of the characters were changed to represent well-known Englishmen such as: Alexander Pope (the Poet, space 41), Captain Cook (the Geographer, space 47), Pitt (the Patriot, space 55), the Prince Regent (the Ambitious Man, space 57), and Isaac Newton (the Immortal Man, space 84).

Figure 4a: *The New Game of Human Life*, London: Elizabeth Newbery & John Wallis, 1790

High claims were made of the game, that it 'would contrast the happiness of a virtuous and well-spent life with the fatal consequences arising from Vicious and Immoral pursuits': for example, the Studious Youth (space 7) goes on to become the Orator (space 42), while the Complacent Man (space 26) must stay until another takes his place. The moral theme was continued in the instructions printed below the track: 'It is necessary to inform the purchaser that the Totum must be marked with figures 1,2,3,4,5,6 & to avoid introducing a Dice Box into private families, each Player must spin twice, which will answer the same purpose.' The English games manufacturers were not above claiming that their use of the teetotum was driven by moral grounds rather than a need to evade the dice duty.

Although the rules are engraved on the game, a separate slip (figure 4b) exists giving details of how the game was offered to the public: price five shillings on a sheet, six shillings pasted on a board, and six shillings and sixpence on canvas, with a case, including a box with totum and markers. No box survives, and we do not know exactly what markers were supplied.
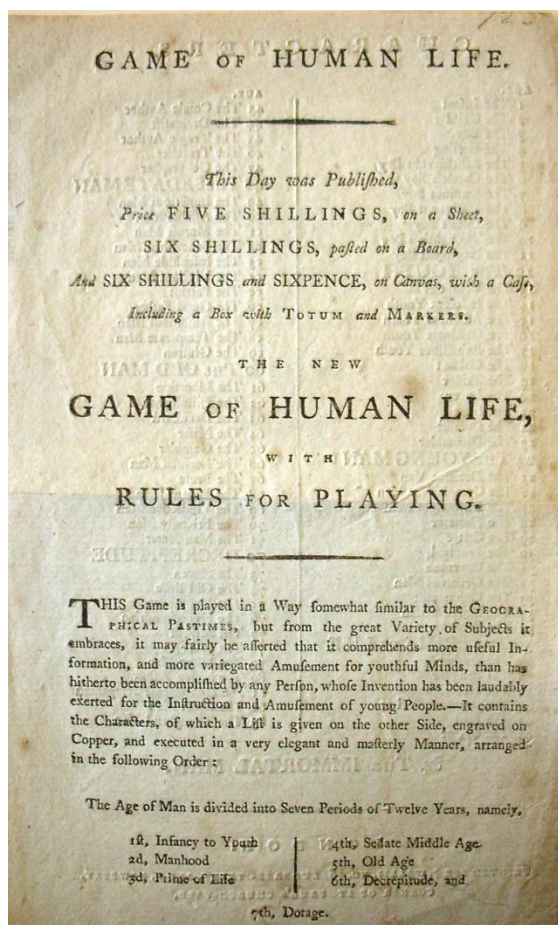

Figure 4b:

Rule sheet for

The New Game of Human Life

However, the rules at the upper right corner of the game sheet are of some help. They say:

> This game may be played by any number of persons at a time; but care must be taken, that each player make use of a different mark to move with & be provided with at least twelve counters each, and agree how much to value them per dozen. Let us then suppose that four Gentlemen agree to play a game together, & stake four counters each. A takes red for his mark, B green, C black and D white.

Presumably the markers in the box were of these colours. It is also interesting that the description is of 'Gentlemen' playing for money, while the game is promoted, in the upper left corner, as being 'most useful' to 'parents who take on the pleasing task of instructing their children' – a claim that would resonate with Elizabeth Newbery's substantial list of publications for children, very much dominated by moral and didactic writing.

Although most of the moral or educational games of the Late Georgian era make no mention of playing for money, some indeed do so, notably Laurie and Whittle's *Mansion of Happiness*, first published in 1800. Its rules prescribe that:

> Each Person who Plays should be furnished with a Dozen of Counters, the Value of which to be agreed on, & when the Amusement is over for the Night, each Person to be accountable for the same; those who want more must buy of A Winner.

This was a highly influential game, in that a modified version was published in the USA by W S & B Ives of Salem, Mass. in 1843 - but with the important difference that the American version was not played for stakes. It became the first board game to be widely diffused there.

An explosion of Late Georgian games

The New Game of Human Life awoke English publishers to the commercial possibilities of attractive printed board games with moral or educational themes. They did not take over the Goose-inspired rules of that game but retained much of the general approach. It is not possible to cover in full the great variety of printed race games that then exploded onto the British market, with a corresponding variety in the lists of equipment set out in their rules. However, there are some regularities in these lists, particularly as the major publishers tended to use similar specifications for several of their games. These regularities have been deduced from a data base summarising the rules of over 130 games of the period, compiled with the help of John Spear. It is useful to distinguish two periods: the first being the Late Georgian era leading up to the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837, the second being the Early Victorian era, up to the repeal of the dice duty in 1862.

We begin our study of the earlier period with the Wallis family. John Wallis I (1745?–1818) was a London publisher, bookseller, print seller and music seller, who also produced games and dissected maps. He was the father of John Wallis II (1779?–1830), who was in the same business but moved from London to Sidmouth in about 1809; and of Edward Wallis, with whom he was in partnership from about 1813, and who continued the business after his father's death, publishing many race games under his own imprint.

John Wallis I was co-publisher with Elizabeth Newbery both of the above-mentioned *New Game of Human Life* and, in 1791, of *The Royal Genealogical Pastime*. Although this is in the form of a genealogical tree, showing the descent of English monarchs, it is in fact a race game. The rules on the sheet explain the use of the totum, making clear that it is the uppermost number that counts when it comes to rest, and go on to say:

> As many persons may play at this game as there are little pyramids, which are to be moved from one number to another as hereafter directed. Each person is to be furnished with four counters of the same colour as his pyramid and with these he is to pay his forfeits. For example, should be happen to get into No. 11, Edwy being a bad prince, the player must put down two of his counters for getting into such bad

company and […] when it comes to his turn to spin the Totum he must only take up one of the counters and the other counter when it shall come to his turn to spin again.

We thus have both an early mention of the term 'pyramid' and a clear statement of the use of 'counters' to keep track of missed-turn penalties, though these penalties are rather misleadingly described as paying forfeits. There are in fact no stakes or payments in this game: the players simply compete to make an exact finish, excess points being counted backwards as in *Goose*.

Exactly the same equipment is specified for John Wallis's *Tour through England and Wales* (1794), though here it is explained that:

Two or three persons may amuse themselves with this agreeable pastime, and, if a double set of Counters and Pyramids are purchased, six may play at it. The totum must be figured 1 to 8 on its several faces, in pen and ink. The pyramids are supposed to be the Travellers who make the Tour; each pyramid having 4 counters of the same colour belonging to it, which are called markers or servants.

This explanation is carried over verbatim to another cartographic game, Wallis's *Complete Voyage Round the World*, first published in 1796, and to a number of games published by Edward Wallis, including *The Wonders of Art* (1820) and *The Wonders of Nature* (1824), both of which have the same equipment as the cartographic games by John Wallis mentioned above. However, for several of his later games, such as *The Produce and Manufactures of the Counties of England and Wales* (1827)*,* Edward Wallis used a different means of generating random movement on the track:

The players are provided with a card, containing nine letters, nine numbers, two crosses and one blank, which are to be cut up on the lines with a pair of scissors. The letters are to be distributed, one to each player, according to the number about to play, and the remainder laid aside. The numbers, crosses and blank are to be placed in a lady's reticule [a small handbag] and drawn in turn by each player, after the manner of a lottery.

If a number was drawn, the player advanced as for a dice throw. But if a cross were drawn, the player had to draw again, until a number was obtained, then moving backwards by that number of spaces. Drawing a blank meant that there was no movement in that turn. A note said that if the players preferred spinning a teetotum, or using dice, the game might be so played, ignoring the rule for crosses and blanks – but the drawing of cards was claimed to be 'more lively', having 'the greater variety'. A cynic might feel that the printed card offered more profit to the publisher than a hand-crafted teetotum!

Second only to the Wallis family in the variety of race games invented were the Dartons, undeniably the greatest of the producers of printed material for children over the long period from 1787 to 1876 at their two London houses, first at Gracechurch Street and then

at Holborn Hill. Their earliest race games were cartographic, beginning in 1809 with *Walker's Tour through England and Wales*, with similar 'tour' games of Europe, Scotland, Ireland, France, and the Eastern & Western Hemispheres following in the next few years. In all these games, the specification of equipment closely resembles that of the Wallis cartographical games noted above:

> Two or three persons may amuse themselves with this agreeable pastime, and, if a double set of counters and pyramids are purchased, six may play at it. The totum must be marked 1 to 8 on its several faces, in pen and ink, or with pencil. The pyramids are supposed to be the travellers who make the tour; each pyramid having four counters of the same colour belonging to it, which are called markers or servants.

The equipment for this game will be further discussed in the section on pyramids below.

The same equipment was specified for the splendid games that the Dartons published in the 1820s, such as in *The Noble Game of the Swan*:

> Two or three persons may amuse themselves with this agreeable pastime, and, if a double set of Counters and Pyramids be purchased, six may play at it. The totum must be marked ONE to EIGHT on its several faces, with a Pen and Ink, or with a Blacklead Pencil.

All reference to travellers and servants is omitted in these non-cartographic games.

The third significant publisher of English race games in the Late Georgian era was John Harris (1756–1846): he was a bookseller, publisher and toyman, with a shop near St Paul's, London. He was initially Elizabeth Newbery's manager but bought her business in 1801. His earliest games were published under a joint imprint with John Wallis I, beginning in 1803 with *The Historical Pastime,* based on events in English History from William the Conqueror to the Accession of George III. An eight-sided teetotum is specified, and the markers are cards showing letters of the alphabet, one each for up to twelve players. There are rewards and fines – unusually, some fines are payable to one of the Kings represented and these are to be placed at the space showing that King, rather than to the Treasury, which is represented by an un-numbered area near the centre of the game. The winner takes all the stakes in the Treasury and all the fines remaining on the board. Presumably counters were used for this purpose but no mention of these is made in the rules.

The earliest game under the single imprint of John Harris is *The Game of Emulation*, which appeared in 1804. The rules call for a 'tetotum' of six faces and continue:

> Each player must be furnished with twelve counters, the value of which may be fixed by mutual consent; and also with another counter which (being chosen of some particular colour) may distinguish him from his companions.

Evidently the counters were supposed to be on hand, rather than supplied with the game. That would be consistent with later advertisements for Harris games, which listed this game without equipment, whereas some others were listed 'with teetotum and counters'. One such game was *The Panorama of London*, which appeared in 1809. The booklet of rules specified:

> Any number of persons may play at this game provided they are furnished with a sufficient number of counters. A Teetotum of Eight Sides is provided which must be marked 1 to 8 with a pen. Six different coloured Markers accompany it; but the players must furnish themselves with pieces of card, to the number deemed necessary for each, noticing them by the colour of the mark each is in possession of.

The rules go on to speak of rewards and fines in the form of 'counters' to be taken from or added to the pool, until the winner arrives at space 50 and 'takes all the stakes'.

There was evidently a broad consensus as to the equipment for Late Georgian race games, apart from the game sheet itself: markers, often called pyramids and/or travellers, usually differently coloured; a blank teetotum or, in some later games, cards to be drawn from a bag; and, if required by the rules, a means of keeping track of missed turns. Even if stakes were played, chips were not supplied. Occasionally, the needs of a particular game required a different specification. Thus, John Wallis's *Arithmetical Pastime* (1798) needed two teetotums of 10 sides, each to be numbered 0,1, 2 … 9 in order to generate two digits to be combined by arithmetic operations to determine the moves.

The mystery of the pyramids

We all have a mental picture of a pyramid – flat triangular sides tapering to a point from a square base. This, though, is probably not what was in the boxes of equipment. Although the term was widely used, there are no surviving Georgian game pieces of that shape. One game box owned by a collector does have some coloured pyramids – but unfortunately the rules for that game clearly specify a different kind of marker and it is feared that an over-enthusiastic dealer may have supplied them to make the set 'complete'.

The word 'pyramid' was evidently in general use also for round objects tapering to a point, as explained in *The Corner Cupboard of Facts for Everybody,* by Robert Kemp Philp, New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1859, which defines them thus:

> Solids which decrease gradually from the base till they come to a point are called pyramids. [...] If the base be a circle [the solid is called] a circular pyramid or a cone.

The current Oxford English Dictionary preserves this usage of 'pyramid' in a horticultural context:

> A pyramidal or conical shape (widest at the base and tapering to the top) given to a tree or shrub by pruning or training.

Fortunately, a number of boxes for the *Tour* games mentioning travellers/pyramids do survive and – even more fortunately – the examples known contain similar pieces. Figure 5 shows the box and its contents for the *Tour through the United Kingdom [and] British Empire*, originally published by John Wallis in 1811, but here a later issue by Edward Wallis. The rule booklet says:

> The apparatus necessary for playing this game consists of a Teetotum (which must be numbered on its several sides, with a pen and ink, from 1 to 8), three pyramids or travellers of different colours, and four counters or markers to each.

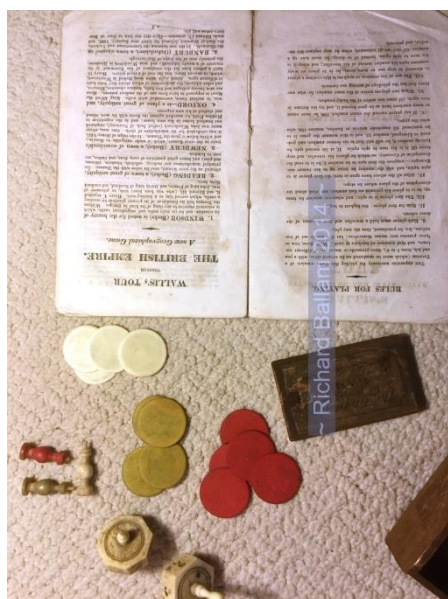This corresponds exactly to the contents of the box, except for an extra teetotum.

Figure 5:

Rule booklet and box with playing equipment for Wallis's *Tour through the United Kingdom [and] British Empire.*

Richard Ballam Collection

Figure 6 shows the box and contents for *Walker's Tour through England and Wales*, published by W & T Darton in 1809. The contents correspond exactly to that prescribed in the rule book (see the extract given earlier) except that six dice have been added, no doubt for safe keeping in the handy box.

Figure 6:

Box and playing equipment for *Walker's Tour through England and Wales*; the box title is slightly different but refers to the same game.
John Spear Collection

Evidently, the term 'pyramid' was being used for a turned piece, tapering upwards from a circular base, but not tapering uniformly as in a cone. This would not be inconsistent with the description of the travellers in the Thomas Jefferys *Tour of Europe* as 'turned pillars'.

North, South, East or West

There was considerable continuity of game types into the Early Victorian era. For example, John Betts maintained the tradition of cartographic games, still referring to 'travellers', though now suggesting that additional players could be accommodated by using a thimble or a small coin. Some publishers economised by providing a card teetotum, as in *Swan Hopping*, by F C Dean of Weymouth (1840):

Figure 7:

Equipment for Dean's *Swan Hopping*, including printed card teetotum with wooden peg. (Bodleian Library)

Similarly, J A Reeves of Dartford, Kent provided a set of six domino-like cards for their *Ride through London* game (1855), these to be drawn in place of dice:
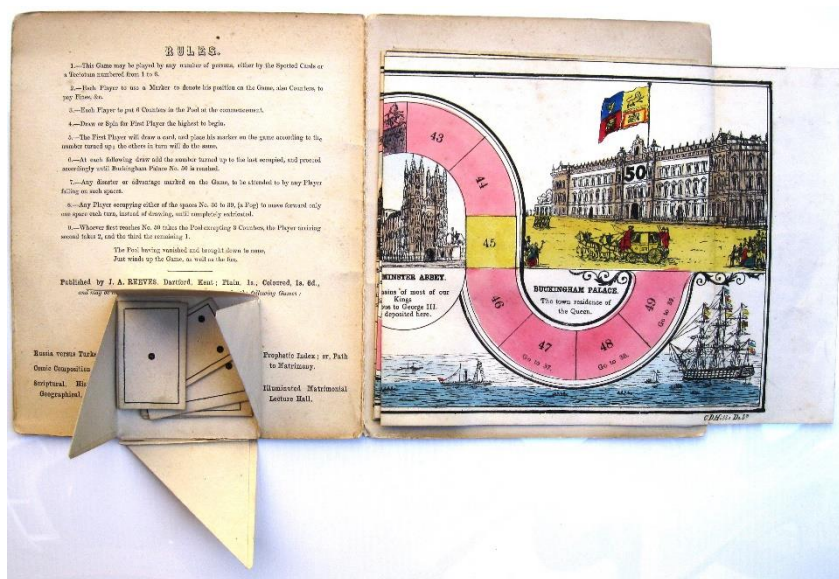

Figure 8: Reeves' *Ride through London*, including spotted cards in place of dice.

However, there were many genuine innovations in race games, with some corresponding changes in playing equipment. Foremost in these developments was William Spooner. His game, *The Travellers, or a Tour through Europe*, was first published in 1842. It is played on a map of Europe, each country being filled in with views drawn in perspective, bearing labels such as 'Perils of the Whale Factory'. Instead of proceeding along a defined track, lines of latitude and longitude are shown and the game is to be played on the intersections of these lines. Movement of each player's marker is determined by the spin of an eight-sided teetotum (figure 9a) bearing the letters N E S W (two of each) for the points of the compass, to give the direction in which the marker is to be moved, as far as the next intersection.

Figure 9a
Box and directional teetotum for Spooner's *The Travellers, or a Tour through Europe*
John Spear collection

The players each have one marker, lettered A, B, C, D, or E. Each player begins from a different starting point and is required to journey to a specified capital city, e.g. player A is an Austrian who starts from Jerusalem and must reach Vienna, while player B is a Russian who starts from Cairo and aims to reach St Petersburg. A city is reached by reaching either adjacent point on the same line as the letter denoting that city (figure 9b). Some moves require a player to pay or take from the pool – a player who loses all his initial 20 counters ('his expenses for the journey') must leave the game. The first player to reach his or her specified city wins the pool.

Figure 9b: Detail of Spooner's *The Travellers, or a Tour through Europe*, showing the destination for player B, St Petersburg.

Like the Game of the Goose, it is a game of pure chance, with no skill and no choice of moves. However, unlike that game, it is a two-dimensional random walk, rather than a one-

dimensional progress. A serious drawback of such games is that the player is as likely to move away from the destination rather than towards it. Chance will ensure that a destination is eventually reached but the process is frustrating. In some later games on the same principle, Spooner modified the teetotum to allow a small element of choice: some of its faces were marked with two different directional letters, and the player could choose which to follow.

Another of Spooner's innovations was a spinning device, using a disc and arrow, to take the place of dice. For example, in *The Journey or Cross Roads to Conqueror's Castle,* published in 1835, the disc (figure 10) was called the 'circle of chance' and was to be placed 'on the wooden pedestal' and fixed 'by passing the peg through the centre of the circle into the aperture in the pedestal, having first placed the arrow on the wooden peg close to the knob. […] The player who begins turns the Circle of Chance and when it stops the division in which the arrow rests specifies the direction in which the player is to move.' Of the twelve divisions, five indicated 'forward', three 'right', three 'left' and only one 'back'. This emphasis on a forward move ensured that on average there was at least some progress towards the goal.

Figure 10: Discs for Spooner games

The instructions for this game seem to indicate that the disc itself was turned, moving against a fixed arrow. The problem is that the surviving discs are too light to spin effectively against the friction of the support, given the comparatively large radius of the central hole. It seems probable that the disc remained stationary while the arrow rotated. Indeed, the only known example of the mechanism is of this kind, though it cannot be verified that it is original. In support of this, David Ogilvy's *Royal Race Course* (1843) speaks of 'a small circle placed on a stand with dart' and specifies that the moves are determined by where the dart stops. Perhaps because of difficulties with the mechanism, or with its cost, Spooner supplied

teetotums in later editions of such games. The teetotums had 8 sides and were lettered FRLBFRFL: 2 right, 2 left, 3 forward, and 1 back, so that preference was again given to forward moves.

The disc shown in figure 11 is for a later game by Spooner, *A Voyage of Discovery, or the Five Navigators*, published in 1836. For this game, there were five separate tracks, each with their own series of pay or take hazards. These tracks were coloured to correspond to the five markers representing naval ships: Prince of Orange, Green Emerald, Royal Purple, Red Rover and True Blue. Their progress was regulated by the disc, here called the 'navigating compass'. Each of the five main divisions of the disc included colour-coded instructions as to how many forward moves each ship was to make at that turn. For example, if the arrow pointed to the upper right sector, the moves would be 5 for red, 1 for green, 2 for purple, 3 for orange and 2 for blue, according to the colour of the small divisions.

Figure 11:
Disc ('The Navigating Compass') for
Spooner's *The Five Navigators*
John Spear collection

Spooner also invented games that were played with a single marker. One such was his *English History*, which presented memorable events along a chain of circles. The teetotum was marked M (for move) with blanks, and the players spun it in turn until an M appeared, when the marker was moved forward to the next circle, and the description of the event was read out. This must have been a boring game, since winning depended entirely on who turned up the M for the final move. Another of his games with a single marker was *The Funnyshire Fox-Chase*, in which the fox was represented by the marker, its movement being controlled by a teetotum marked with S, meaning 'scent – keep to the main path' and F, meaning 'false scent, go along a side path'. At certain points, turning up F meant the elimination of a player, so excitement could be maintained to the end. Spooner's innovations, though ingenious, had no followers and later English race games continued for

the most part to use the numbered teetotum, some continuing even after repeal of the taxation on dice.

The Englishman pays double

A more lasting innovation was that of A N Myers, an importer of fancy goods, and a wholesaler, toymaker and toyseller, active at his London address in Berners Street between 1865 and 1882. He introduced greater realism into race games by providing equipment more closely dedicated to the theme. A good example is his *European Tourist,* which first appeared in 1861 The game sheet was lithographed in colours and folds into a handsome green leathercloth box with red leather label. The game offered a unicursal track of 100 spaces, laid out across a map of Europe, with vignettes along the way, from Tromsoe back up to North Cape. The box contained the game sheet, rules and a 12-sided teetotum - but also held 'passports' with destinations to be filled in by the 'travellers' and printed 'money' for their use (figure 12).

Figure 12: The European Tourist London: A N Myers, 1861

The travellers were represented by eight distinctive die-cast figures denoting an Englishman, a German travelling journeyman, a French naval officer, a Russian, a Turk, a Dutch sailor, an Italian, and a Swede. Each player chose his own figure. In a show of patriotism, the Englishman had to pay double stakes and fines into the pool, receiving a double share of the winnings. By contrast, the German workman played for half stakes. The games of Myers bring us close to our modern concept of what to expect in a boxed race game.

Still no dice?

Once the dice tax was removed in 1862, some manufacturers quickly took advantage of the new freedom. For example, Dewhirst's beautiful game, *The Great Blockade,* provided a dice box as well as dice (figure 13):

Figure 13: *The Great Blockade*, London: Dewhirst, 1863

However, some manufacturers continued to supply a teetotum for their race games well after 1862, for example, in certain of the attractive series of race games manufactured by the London firm of C W Faulkner and Company in the 1890s, where the track was supplied as a set of cards to be laid out on the table. Some of these games were provided with two dice, including the earliest: *Upidee,* on the theme of steeplechasing. Others, including *Bikee*, on the theme of cycling, had a six-sided teetotum – but this was now supplied ready for use, with dots on its faces, rather than to be marked by the purchaser.

One would have thought that the teetotum would have fallen quickly out of use. The tedium of waiting for it to stop spinning compares unfavourably with the almost instant result of a dice throw. Perhaps the stigma of gambling still attached to the dice box, as it did in the USA, where a spinning arrow attached to a printed card was the preferred random generator for board games well into the 20th century. Myers did use such an arrangement for his *Columbus* game (1840), though this was a pay-or-take game, not one of movement on a board. However, in England, popular games of the Late Victorian era, such as *Ludo* and *Snakes and Ladders,* always used dice – and today no-one except the odd game historian remembers the once-ubiquitous teetotum.