

## The History of Petanque

Two balls and a jack were unearthed in the sarcophagus of an Egyptian Prince of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Century BC. Thus there is archaeological evidence that a form of petanque was played over seventy centuries ago.

Recorded in ancient Greece and then modified by the Romans to a 'target' game, the early versions of Boule were stones. Large stones were thrown at a smaller target stone and the closest stone won! Vast sums of money were wagered on the game. This simple game featuring stones and wagers, crossed the centuries and indeed the game of 'stone throwing' was banned in England by Edward III in 1369, just one of the many times that the game has been outlawed in the UK.

Playing a target game with balls remained such a popular leisure activity it was again made illegal by Henry V in 1415 so that the English population could focus on defending their country and practice archery instead. Therefore, whilst the English bent their bows the French carried on playing Boule. Stones were replaced by small cannon balls in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century and this leads us to one of England's most discussed sporting event of modern age.

Not 1966 but 1588.

In 1588, legend has it that Sir Francis Drake was playing Bowls on Plymouth Hoe. If one examines the contemporary paintings it can be seen that Drakes group were playing with small metal cannon balls on a gravel surface. Some paintings even show Sir Francis tossing the ball, NOT rolling it.

This is more like playing BOULE than bowls.

Boule was so popular in England within the working classes that it was outlawed ( again ) by an act of Parliament. Perhaps this would explain why the sport died out in England and became popular in France where they played and adapted the game to Petanque as it is known today.

In 1907 a new version was developed in a small town near to Marseilles. Interestingly it was adapted from a similar game of the time, to enable any handicapped players to participate.

A master of the sport of Lyonnaise suffered from arthritis in his later years and found that running and throwing difficult to maintain with accuracy. So, in 1910 he devised a game where you stood with your feet together in a circle – thus **PETANQUE**, from the French for "feet together".

With no run up allowed, the game was played between six and ten metres from the circle. The game caught on very quickly and the game of Petanque was born. One of the few sports played at World championship level that was created by a disabled person.