

= Poohsticks =

Poohsticks is a sport first mentioned in *The House at Pooh Corner*, a Winnie the Pooh book by A. A. Milne. It is a simple sport which may be played on any bridge over running water; each player drops a stick on the upstream side of a bridge and the one whose stick first appears on the downstream side is the winner. The annual World Poohsticks Championships have been held at Day's Lock on the River Thames in the UK since 1984.

= History =

Poohsticks was invented by English author A. A. Milne for his son Christopher Robin Milne. The sport first came to prominence when it was described in the author's book *The House at Pooh Corner* as well as in the Disney animated featurette *Winnie the Pooh and a Day for Eeyore*. Winnie the Pooh, the protagonist of the book, accidentally drops a pine cone into a river from a bridge and, after observing how it appeared on the other side of the bridge, devises the rules for Poohsticks. Pooh continues to play the sport with the other characters, Christopher Robin, Tigger and Eeyore.

The sport was first developed at a bridge located in Ashdown Forest, close to the village of Upper Hartfield, East Sussex, England. Built in 1907 and originally called Posingford Bridge, it is considered to be the bridge on which Milne and his son first played the game. However, it is uncertain whether the sport was first played at the bridge then written into the story, or vice versa. The bridge maintained the public's interest and a campaign to rebuild it in the late seventies was considered important enough to feature on the BBC Nine O'Clock News. The bridge was subsequently reopened by Christopher Robin Milne and officially renamed as Poohsticks Bridge.

The site was so popular that in 1999 the East Sussex county council made an appeal to Disney as the old wooden bridge had been worn down by an overwhelming number of visitors. The company provided a substantial donation towards the estimated £30,000 needed to replace the bridge. Partly rebuilt in 1979, the donations from Disney, building firms and members of the public funded its complete reconstruction. The newly built and modernised bridge retained its precursor's original style. A plaque was also placed to commemorate the occasion and thank those who financially contributed to the project. The sport can still be played in Ashdown Forest to this day and the site regularly attracts tourists from as far afield as the United States and Japan. However, visitors are now advised to bring their own sticks, as previous visitors have caused damage to the trees in the vicinity.

= Rules and strategy =

A sport for two players or more, in the traditional version of poohsticks the participants must drop a stick simultaneously on the upstream side of a bridge and run to the other side. The winner is the player whose stick first appears on the other side of the bridge. Alternatively, players may decide upon a starting point on a river and a finish line farther downstream. The winner is the player whose stick first passes the finishing point.

It is generally agreed that the stick must be made of organic materials, preferably willow, and not of any artificial materials. All participants must drop their sticks at the same time, usually after a referee shouts "drop", "twitch" or any other agreed keyword. Additionally, no advantage may be gained through either dismantling the bridge or the use of any self-propelling stick devices. The stick must be dropped, not thrown, into the water and any player who is deemed to have thrown their stick is disqualified.

Poohsticks is considered to be a sport of chance yet some players claim skill is involved. Some strategies involve the way in which the stick is held before it is dropped and trying to find the fastest route in the river. Author Ben Schott outlined a throwing method as a winning strategy in his third book, *Schott's Sporting, Gaming and Idling Miscellany*, but his method was dismissed as cheating by competition organisers. In any event, the turbulence around the bridge supports make

the path of the stick very difficult to predict and may vary according to the season .

The traditional game has inspired filmmakers and screenwriters and has been portrayed in the 1998 film *Into My Heart* with Rob Morrow and Claire Forlani , BBC sitcom *To the Manor Born* and also in a Marks & Spencer clothes advert where models , including Twiggy and Myleene Klass , played the game . The popularity of the game was underlined when it featured as a question on long @-@ running British quiz series *University Challenge* .

= = World Poohsticks Championships = =

[www.pooh @-@ sticks.com](http://www.pooh@-@sticks.com)

Following the closure of the short @-@ lived Oxford University Poohsticks Society , Poohsticks was brought to a larger audience by the World Poohsticks Championships . The Championships took place annually at Day 's Lock on the River Thames near Dorchester @-@ on @-@ Thames , Oxfordshire and have attracted over 1 @,@ 500 visitors to the event , including many international visitors .

The championships features an individual event and a six @-@ person team event . Players come from a wide variety of countries including the United States , Japan , Kenya , Australia and England . The event took place from Little Wittenham Bridge which is about 100 yards ( 91 m ) downstream of the lock . However , the event is currently looking for a new home .

The sporting event was started in 1984 by the lockkeeper , Lynn David , as a fund @-@ raising event for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution ( RNLI ) . He noticed that people occasionally snapped sticks from nearby hedges to play the sport and he then came up with the idea of a competition to aid the charity . He put out a box of sticks and a collection box and it soon became an annual event . In this version of the game , a finish line is set up farther downstream and the winner is the first to pass this point . The competition originally took place every January , but it was moved to March due to icy weather in 1997 .

The event proved popular with the local community and even attracted the attention of the foreign media . After Lynn David 's retirement , the running of the event was taken over by the Rotary Club of Sinodun , based in nearby Wallingford . Additionally , the funds raised were divided between the RNLI and charitable projects supported by the Rotary Club . Twenty years after its first edition , the event had grown in popularity , attracting visitors from across the globe , and had been broadcast on television in countries including Russia , Japan and Czech Republic . Additionally , VisitBritain , the official British tourist board , named it as a highlight in its collection of " Quirky British Events " . Throughout its existence , it has raised around £ 30 @,@ 000 for the RNLI .

The Championships were at risk of decline when in 2008 the Rotary Club declared that its members were simply too old to stage an annual event of its size . The Sinodun president , David Caswell stated : " The trouble is there is a lot of heavy work staging the event . Some of our members are over 70 , and it was just getting too much " . However , the Rotary Club of Oxford Spire declared that its members would continue hosting the event , thus preserving the competition for future generations . The President of Oxford Spire for 2008 ? 2009 , Liz Williamson , stressed that it should continue as the event was popular locally and demonstrated quirky English nature to a worldwide audience .

Unfortunately during the initial preparations for 2015 event it was realized that the Little Wittenham site was no longer suitable . The reason given was that the logistics had become more difficult over the previous few years , as the event had become more popular and the use of the land had changed . This was announced by the Rotary Club of Oxford Spire on 7 January 2015 .

On 7 June 2015 the World Championships were moved to one of the cycle track bridges over the river Windrush in Langel Common , next to the Cogges Manor Farm Museum in Witney , Oxfordshire . The new location still retains a rural atmosphere while being only a few minutes walk from Witney town centre with its convenient public transport links to Oxford . Car Parking is also much closer than at the original location , which was a factor that influenced the choice of venue . As this was the first year at the new location , the organizers decided not to hold the 2015 team games .

= = = Winners = = =

The winners of both the individual and team events receive a trophy , and the second- and third @-@ placed individuals and teams also receive a smaller trophy . Despite claims that the game involves skill more than luck , no team or individual has ever won the competition more than once . The individual competition usually involves winning three rounds of matches before receiving an entry to the final .

= = Notable Poohsticks Societies = =

= = = Rotary Club of Oxford Spires = = =

Although not a Poohsticks Society as such , the Rotary Club of Oxford Spires is responsible for the World Pooh Sticks Championships held annually since 1983 at Days Lock in Little Wittenham , near Abingdon , on the River Thames . The Championships were voted ' Britain 's Favourite Quirky Event ' by Countryfile magazine readers in 2012 and are carried out with the aim of raising money for a variety of charities .

= = = Magdalen College Pooh Sticks Society = = =

Revival of the Oxford University Pooh Sticks Society has begun thanks to students in Magdalen College , Oxford , with the creation of the Magdalen College Pooh Sticks Society ( MCPSS ) founded in April 2013 which mixes classic Pooh Sticks games with commentary and rules in the style of radio programme I 'm Sorry I Haven 't a Clue . Of late the club has become increasingly well @-@ known inside the University and is no longer a society dedicated purely to members of Magdalen College .

= = = Pembroke College Winnie the Pooh Society = = =

Founded in 1993 , students of Pembroke College , Cambridge , pay homage to the works of A. A. Milne in a variety of ways , including playing games of Poohsticks alongside events such as visits to the ' real @-@ life ' Hundred Acre Wood . The Society has gained significant fame at the University of Cambridge and claims Her Majesty the Queen as an honorary member .

= = Elsewhere in Popular Culture = =

Terry Pratchett mentioned the game in Thud ! as a popular children 's game played in the gutters during Sam Vimes ' childhood in Ankh @-@ Morpork , originally called " turd races " before renaming it " poohsticks " to take the game upmarket .

Julia Donaldson mentioned the game in her children 's book " Stickman " when the protagonist , Stickman , is used by a girl in a game of Poohsticks .

In Season 5 , Episode 7 of Downton Abbey , Tom Branson and young Sybil play a game of Poohsticks , without referencing the game by name , while he is telling her of his idea to leave Downton and move them to Boston .