## Badger baiting

The now illegal practice of badger baiting, where terriers are encouraged to worry and ultimately kill a captive badger, is an activity regarded by many as a sport, though not accepted as such by the British Sports Society. Badgers are very powerful and dogs frequently come off badly in the fights. To even the odds, several may be set on a single badger.

In the Doncaster area during the 1800s Edlington Wood appears to have been something of a Mecca for badger hunting; both for sport and for supplying victims for the popular diversion of badger baiting (Howes 1974).

Blakeborough and Pease (1914) note that Kirkbymoorside is a "Locality in which badgers abound and in which badger baiting is popular."

Markets, fairs and public houses were places of exhibition for specimens kept as curiosities or for baiting purposes. Nicholson (1980) describes how badgers, obtained from woods at Burton Constable were exhibited for baiting at the old Maudlin Fair, an event which used to commence on the 2nd August on Magdalen Hill. A song about this Fair (abolished in 1860) in its heyday included the following verse:-

"All sport and diversion for old and for young
A medley of frolic is this jovial throng,
Shrill whistles and trumpets, bag-pipes jew-jaw
Pots boiling, dogs fighting and games of E.O."

The game of EO refers to badger baiting, the victims of which were housed in barrels on the fairground; sometimes there would be a dozen or more present at once. A dog owner would pay 6d to pit his dog against a badger "but the attempt to draw the badger not unfrequently ended with the death of the dog."

### Badger Baiting Records

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1814 | Edlington Wood, Doncaster Wood | 48lb badger caught + kept at Wood House where the dogs of Earl Fitzwilliam + Mr Foljambe were sent to measure their strength against it. "Afterwards sold at Doncaster where people came from far + wide to buy it for badger baiting" (Hatfield 1866) |
| ?.6.1839 | Edlington Wood | 3 badgers trapped. 2 so badly maimed they were destroyed. Third sent to Rossington + sold for 30s for baiting |
| 1842 | Watchley Crags, Hooton Pagnell | 1 trapped alive, baited + killed in 'distant village' |
| 1870s | Middlesborough Market | 1 exhibited |
| ?.1.1882 | Nr Yarm | 1 caught + exhibited at Craythorn Inn |
| 4.3.1882 | Middlesborough Market | 1 exhibited |
| 1882 | White Horse Inn Wentbridge | 1 exhibited a few years ago |
| c.1905 | Cropton | Badgers advertised for sale |
| 1952 | East Yorkshire | "Old badger kept in a barrel at the back quarters of a public house for the purpose of testing the spirit of young terriers" |
| 1.5.1970 | Kirk Bramwith | I caught in snare, baited with terriers + finally killed by blow on snout with spade. |



## Dogs

The records show 7 incidents of dogs attacking or being encouraged to attack and perhaps kill badgers out feeding. As far as the records show, these events do not involve digging, sending dogs into setts or confrontations with captive animals.

## Shooting

Badgers dug or worried from their setts with a view to their destruction rather than for sport are frequently despatched by shooting. Animals have also been shot after being baited to rescue out-classed dogs from mutilation. Between 1879 and 1968, 25 records of shooting have been uncovered.

## Poisoning and gassing

In the interests of game rearing and stock protection, particularly since the 1950s, badgers have been killed by gamekeepers and farmers laying poisoned baits or by gassing setts, using cyanide preparations such as 'cymag'.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1905 | West Cleveland | At least 1 poisoned. |
| 1952 | Rotherham | Gassing eliminated a colony being watched by R Bramhill |
| 1960s | Wadworth Wood Doncaster | Sett gassed by use of cyanide |
| 1961 | Yorkshire | Badgers have been reported from many districts but have too often been gassed out |
| 1962 | Wykeham Forest, North Yorkshire | Mr M Johnson found 7 setts inactive due to gassing + expressed concern over indiscriminate gassing badger setts in the North York Moors NP area, including land owned by Forestry Commission. |
| 1964 | Wentworth Woodhouse estate | Badger setts still being gassed by keepers |
| 1964 | Knaresborough area | Several setts poisoned |
| 1966 | Brockdale | A sett still inactive after poisoning |
| 1968 | Ledsham | 5 month old female gassed at sett. Cymag crystals found on site |
| 1970 | Yorkshire | Examples of illegal gassing widely reported |
| 1970 | Yorkshire | Resistant use of poisoned eggs reported on some estates |

### Other methods

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1960s | Rotherham area | Sett destroyed by farmer using explosives |

## Caught/killed, methods not stated

Between 1800 and 1977, 49 records have been found of incidents where badgers have been captured or killed, though the specific methods have not been stated.

## In conclusion

Sadly, the chronological and geographical range of these catalogues suggests that cruelty to badgers is as much a part of our Yorkshire traditions as Yorkshire pudding and On Ilkla Moor b'aht 'at!