

The Game of Aunt Sally

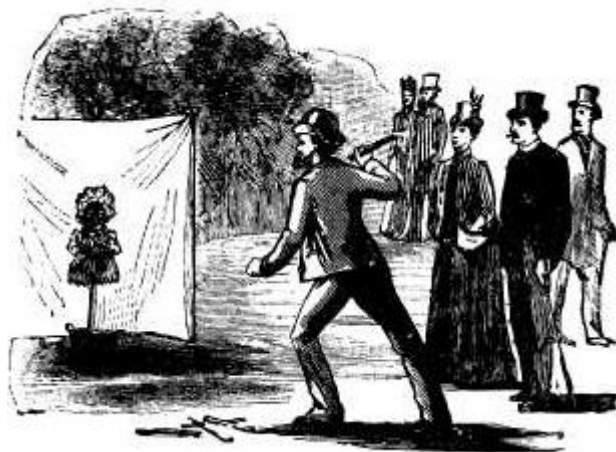
Aunt Sally is a traditional Cotswolds/Oxfordshire summer game, still played in many pubs in the area.

The dolly (a 10cm high ball or skittle) is placed on a metal spike normally around 3 foot tall. Players (typically two teams of 6) take it in turns to throw 6 sticks at the dolly. The aim is to knock the dolly off the spike, without hitting the spike.

It is a fun way to spend a lunchtime or an evening outside at a pub, as you discover just how hard it is! Well worth trying if you're in a pub with a court.

The game of Aunt Sally goes back at least as far as the 17th Century. It may have been introduced by Royalist soldiers during the English Civil War when Charles set up court in Oxford.

The game was traditionally played in British pubs and fairgrounds. An Aunt Sally was originally a figurine head of an old woman with a clay pipe in her mouth, or subsequently a ball on a stick. The object was for players to throw sticks at the head in order to break the pipe. The game bears some resemblance to a coconut shy or skittles, and may have developed from the blood sport of cock throwing, in which a chicken was tied to a post and people took turns throwing *coksteles* (special weighted sticks) at the bird until it died.



Today, the game of Aunt Sally is still played as a pub game in the Cotswolds, Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. The ball is on a short plinth about 10cm high, and is known as a 'dolly'. The dolly is placed on a dog-legged metal spike and players throw sticks or short battens at the dolly, trying to knock it off without hitting the spike.

The term 'Aunt Sally' is in limited use as a political idiom, indicating a false adversary or straw man, set up for the sole purpose of attracting negative attention and wasting an opponent's energy.

Modern rules of play

Two teams of eight players throw six sticks each per leg. The game is played over three legs. The largest number of dolls scored per team wins each leg. If there is a tie in the decisive leg, each team can throw three sticks and then one until there is a decisive result. In the league system, however these days legs can be tied, with two points being awarded for a leg win and one for a draw. If a player fails to score in a leg, it is called a blob with the ultimate embarrassment of a three blob game often being published in the local newspapers sports

section. It is a custom that the winner of the fourth (beer) leg is bought a drink of their choice by a member of the opposing team.