

THE SEASON

Since time immemorial, the game of crosse has been played during the winter season. In the medieval calendars, as part of books of hours, the illuminations of crosse players are always depicted in winter months.

In the following centuries, when the gentry started to play their version of crosse on beaten tracks in summer, farmers and shepherds worked long hours on the fields. They only had time to play in the winter months.

In the 18th and 19th century, crosse tournaments were held during carnival, on the name days of Saint Anthony and Saint Joseph, on Easter Monday, etc.



Crosse is a winter game. In summer, on most crosse fields, it is impossible to hit the choulette out of the long grass, to say nothing about being able to find the choulette.

The crosse tournament in the tale ‘Le Grand-Choleur’ from Charles Deulin (1873) took place on Shrove Tuesday.

Emile Zola describes a partie of crosse in his book ‘Germinal’ (1885) on frozen land.

Alexandre-Joachim Desrousseaux confirms in his study ‘Mœurs Populaires de la Flandre Française’ (Popular customs of French Flanders), 1889, that the Lent period in winter was the most appropriate period for playing the game of crosse, because the winter was the period for some relaxation in the country side. “There was less work to do for the farmers. Additionally because the game of crosse was an excellent activity to resist the cold and to celebrate the end of the winter and the rapid approach of spring.”

The annual ‘Great Match of Crosse’ in Belœil, Belgium, was organised in March, while the final match was held on Easter Monday.

Also ‘La bonne partie de crosse’, written by Achille Delattre (‘Histoires de nos corons’ (Stories from our mine villages), 1939), took place on the eve of carnival.

Pierrard describes in his ‘La vie quotidienne dans le Nord au XIX siècle’ (Daily life in the North in the 19th century), 1976, that in French Hainaut the final of the big concours of the ‘soule’ was held on Ash Wednesday in Maubeuge.

Robert Leclercq describes in his ‘En Avesnois ... au fil des saisons – 1919-1939’ (In Avesnois ... in the course of the seasons), 1985, that from November until 19th March, the name day of Saint Joseph, the pastures of Avesnois were really suited for playing crosse. During this winter period friendly farmers allowed crosseurs admittance to their fields; often the farmers themselves were addicted crosseurs.



In spring, the young leaves of the dandelion were eaten as salad or a kind of spinach. It is the first fresh freely available vegetable of the new season. Crosseurs had to leave the fields, so that the herb could be picked.

At the end of March, when dandelion leaves could be picked, council ordinances forbade playing the game in the fields. The village constable proclaimed the decision, walking through the streets, ringing his bell or beating the drum.

Sad to say that this tradition does not exist anymore.