

Nine Men's Morris

A strategy game for two players (or two teams) where each side attempts to capture their opponent's pieces.

History

A version of Nine Men's Morris is known to have been played in ancient Egypt and Bronze Age Ireland, as well as by Romans across the Roman Empire and in medieval times. The games were hand-made – carved into stone or pieces of wood and leather. Many Romans game carved their boards into pavements and clay tiles. The game is also known as 'Mill' or 'Windmill' (perhaps because of the shape of the board) and 'Merrels' which comes from the Latin word *merellus*, or "gaming piece".

Evidence

- Ovid mentions the game in *Ars Amatoria* (c.18BC).
- The game's popularity increased during the medieval era and is described in *Alfonso's Book of Games*.
- There is a mention in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c1594).
- There is a board carved onto the roof of an Egyptian temple at Kurna. The temple dates to roughly 1400 BCE but no one knows when the game board itself was carved.

Reconstruction

As with any historical game, rules vary according to interpretation of available evidence. The rules in this version have been simplified for use by children.

Follow-on activity suggestions

1. This is an easy game for children to copy and reproduce themselves.
2. The rules may have changed over the thousands of year's that the game has been played. How else might it be played?
3. Who might have carved the game onto the roof of the temple at Kurna. Did they do it before the temple was built, or after?