Tudor pastimes

Carved panel showing Apollo and the Muses, c.1580 (V&A: A.12–1924)
Stained glass panel showing 'A Mery May', 1550–1621 (V&A: C.248–1976)
The Tudors - Resources

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Letter from Thomas Bedingfield to Elizabeth I, 1592 (The National Archives: SP 12/243 item 58)

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Simple Transcript [with explanations]

[Thomas Bedingfield (TB) wrote a letter to Queen Elizabeth I in 1592 asking her]

...to give permission to keep certain houses and places for ...bowling and tennis within London and Westminster ...

On condition that no man is allowed to play on the morning of any Sabbath day [Sunday] or during evening or morning prayer on any holy day [holiday].

TB shall not allow any bad language in any of the houses or places, and shall sharply tell off any offenders who do that, and if that will not work, ban them...

Transcript in Modern English [with explanations]

[This document is an letter by Thomas Bedingfield to Queen Elizabeth asking to be allowed to be the only person in London and Westminster who can run gaming houses.]

Considerations to move Her Majesty to grant licence to keep certain houses and places for dice play, carding, table plays, bowling and tennis within London and Westminster and suburbs of either of them. And to grant the forfeitures of others there shall keep such houses or places and use any such plays contrary to the statute.

First the statute appoints that Her Majesty may grant licence in such cases. The number of houses and places for such comport at this present is very great, and many of them kept by persons to whose houses the honester sort will not resort whereby the worst sort have great liberty to do evil.

Therefore it is mete to reduce them to a convenient number and to appoint good order there and to forbid such from such places as are not mete to be suffered to play.

Hereby guileful and deceitful plays may be suppressed, many young gentlemen kept from spoil and many poor men driven from unlawful exercises to live upon their lawful labours and interest and many other much wicked men reformed and all means made to cause men to revive the ancient exercise of shooting, now greatly in decline.

The licence to be granted to TB to his deputies and assigns being men reputed of good form (and none other) to keep such houses and places of such games as aforesaid within the cities aforesaid etc for all persons being of good fame to resort unto the same to continue for term of [blank] etc

A proviso that the number of houses for dice play, cards and table play in London exceed not [blank] at one time. Bowling alleys, tennis courts [blank] at one time. And in Westminster for dice, cards and table place but [blank] at one time. And there to keep no bowling alley or tennis court.

A proviso that this licence excuse no man for play in the forenoon of any Sabbath day or in the time of evening or morning prayer on any holy day [holiday].

A charge to be contained in the letters patents that the said TB his deputies or assigns shall not suffer any swearing or blaspheming in any the houses or places aforesaid but shall sharply admonish the said offenders in that behalf, and if that will not serve, banish them from there houses. Also to suffer no affrays there but to complain to the magistrates for reformation.
Also a promise that the said TB by virtue hereof shall not have power to make any deputy or assignee other than such as before they put anything in execution by virtue hereof shall become bound by recognisance in the Chancery with sureties in such same as the Lord Keeper or Lord Chancellor shall appoint; that they shall not use or become themselves in any thing contrary to the true intent of this licence, nor shall directly nor indirectly use, cause, procure or wittingly suffer in their said houses or places any falsehood, guile or deceit in any the games aforesaid.

Also by virtue of this licence none shall be suffered to play within any the houses aforesaid, other than noblemen, gentlemen, merchants and such others as shall be ceased in the book of subsidies at £10 in lands of goods.

In consideration whereof Her Majesty to grant that during this licence none other licence shall be granted to any other for these games within these cities...