

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

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DARTS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

A DDN SPECIAL ISSUE

This article has been prepared in response to an e-mail enquiry dated 9th May from Lisa Kingscott of Angle Vale, South Australia. Lisa wrote:

Dear Sir, (Dr. Darts),

I was given your e- mail address at a recent darts event in Melbourne by the great Gordon Sumner and was told by him and his darts friends that you are the most knowledgeable person on the history of darts and your darts knowledge is second to none and further you are probably the only person who would know the answer to a query that I have. Gordon said "Dr. Darts will know" and, if he doesn't know, no one will.



Well, after a build up like that how could I not do *something!*

Lisa, who is clearly a darts fan and plays once a week, continued:



My grandfather Walter Matteson [pictured above, right] played darts in 1960 for the Salisbury Hotel, Salisbury, South Australia and also for the Old Spot near Gawler, South Australia. Darts at the time was not huge in Australia. I am told Grandad was a really good player and was captain of both teams. At

the time pub hours in South Australia was six in the morning until six in the evening, and did not open on Sundays. The Old Spot, Main North Road, Gawler, South Australia.

[The photo of Walter on page 1 was taken circa 1951 and is the only photograph Lisa has of her granddad; all other images being lost.]

My query is that I am told in or around 1960 a young British Royal Air Force Officer stationed at RAAF Edinburgh, near Salisbury, South Australia, founded an Adelaide darts league that quickly went from one to three divisions. I am told it was sponsored by West End Breweries.

My grandfather played in the league and the Royal Air Force Officer in November 1961 arranged the first international darts match between Australia and New Zealand.

The match took place at the Royal Air Force Club, in Hindmarsh Square, Adelaide, where English pub hours were in operation, and the bar closed at 10.30 pm. My grandfather was selected to represent Australia and still had his medal from the match.

I wonder if you could possibly please give any information on the result of the match. I understand a return match was also arranged in New Zealand.

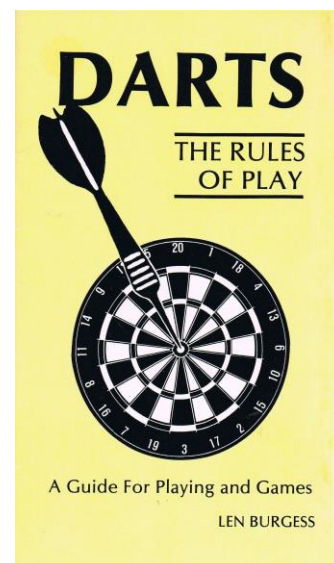
My grandfather told us before he died in 2004 that the organiser helped to create and promote darts in Australia. I wonder if you might have any information on the organiser at all, or sadly like my grandfather has he passed away?

Today darts is big in Australia and Grandad and his darts friends said it was all down to that young RAF Officer sowing the seeds for what the sport has become here today. Any help or information on the result of the match or my grandad would please be appreciated. With Many Thanks. Lisa Kingscott.

Before moving on to answer Lisa's e-mail, let's take a look at what, up to the early 2000s I knew about the development of darts in Australia.

There was a section of a sport encyclopedia that the Darts Council of Australia had been formed in 1927 but that clearly was erroneous. It wasn't until 1924 that a national darts association was set up in the UK. Back in the 1920s darts in Australia was still a child's game and although interest increased after the Second World War; servicemen and women bringing the game back with them from various theatres of war where the Brits were involved.

The first mention I can find of a commercial supply of darts to Australia is a reference to Cyril Arthur Viner who came to the country in 1946 with darts produced by Magnatex UK. According to author Len Burgess in his *Darts – The Rules of Play – A Guide for Playing and Games* published in Australia circa 1980s, Viner discovered that 'Aussies had



never seen a game of darts' and that 'he had to explain the concept of the game'. Viner then produced his own dartboards and, Burgess tells us shortly afterwards, 'Cyril had his first customer in Hartley's Sports Store in Melbourne'.

There was no mention of organised darts by Burgess and it would be at least another decade before the seeds would be sown. It will come as no surprise to learn that the RAF officer mentioned by Lisa was none other than Eddie Norman; a man who has helped me so much over the years with my darts research.

Back in 2006 he and I exchanged e-mails about darts in Australia. Up until then I knew very little about the development of the game in that country. I was aware that my key Aussie contact Warren Ackary had been undertaking research into his country's darts history and later provided me with information about darts in Queensland in the early days.

I discussed Australian darts with Eddie who as a young man in the Royal Air Force (RAF) and someone who had been involved with darts since the mid-1950s. In the late 50s he was posted by the RAF to Australia. Eddie told me

In early 1959, I was serving in the Royal Air Force (RAF) as a National Service (Volunteer!!) and after a couple of months was posted to the Joint Liaison Staff Unit in Canberra ACT, stationed at Salisbury in South Australia, where I met my future wife, got married in South Australia and signed on for another year in the RAF. I served the rest of my RAF career in Australia returning back to UK on board the P&O liner the Oriana.

I had always been interested in darts as a sport albeit as an organiser not a player.

Whilst in South Australia, I organised an Inter Town Darts Super League with teams from the local regions Glenelg, Elizabeth, Gepps Cross, North Adelaide and Salisbury amongst others.

Darts was not the most popular of sports in South Australia; cricket and Aussie Rules Football taking precedence over everything else. However, the league grew and was eventually played in two divisions of eight teams in each.

Problem was that the beer drinking hours in Australian pubs was six in the morning until six at night, and so the teams had to play in clubs usually with no drink.

The RAF had a magnificent club in Adelaide 'The RAFA Club' with English drinking hours and this was where all the finals were played much to the enjoyment of Aussie players who could get a late drink.

In 1960 I ventured further afield and arranged a championship in Adelaide at the RAFA club...between teams representing New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, with Victoria taking the title.

In September 1961, I arranged the First International match between Australia and New Zealand sponsored by a leading South Australia winery at the RAFA club, in Adelaide.

Unfortunately just as things were growing in darts in South Australia I was posted back to the UK and I lost contact with the darts scene over there. Two years later on a revisit as a civilian to Australia it was disappointing to see that things had gone flat and the local darts league I had created had disbanded with no one to run it.

On my return to UK, in 1962, along with my brother Peter, I founded The House of Darts International based in Bristol.

That was before I forwarded Lisa's e-mail to Eddie. On 10th May he replied

Hi Patrick, You never cease to amaze me. Where do you dig so much history from? What a wonderful letter! What wonderful memories that you have dug up for me of my service time in Australia.

When I was posted to Australia, I had never been out of the UK...

I remember the first Australia versus New Zealand match very well, the club was so packed; at least 1000 tickets were sold. There was not enough dustbins for the empty 'tinnies' (beer cans). (I think a few supporters came for the beer as well!) All profits were shared between three local charities. It was pounds, shillings and pence back then, not Australian dollars.

We never cleared the club until almost two in the morning, as the club was given an extension until 12.30 a.m. for the event. I had to be in Canberra on the Monday morning and was shattered, but really enjoyed the whole event.

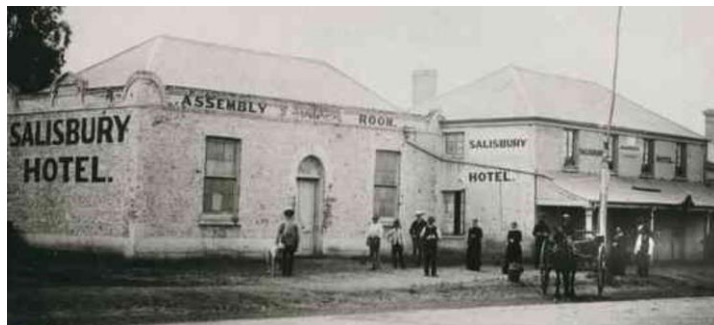
The match result was 8-4 to the Aussies.

I remember Walt Matteson well, I used the Salisbury Hotel as my local, when out and about on a Saturday but it closed at 6 p.m. and workers (men - no ladies) going home from work in the week always called in for what was called 'the six o'clock swill'.

[The photograph here, provided by Lisa, shows the Salisbury Hotel at the turn of the twentieth century.]

Australia was a man's world at the time, and there was a ladies bar the size of a bathroom and a men's bar the size of a ballroom.

Walt was captain of the Salisbury Hotel team, and he



worked at Holden's the car manufacturers in Elizabeth, the town next to Salisbury.

Walt was called 'The Undertaker' as he used to bury his opponents. I remember his brother Alec, who played Aussie Rules footie as well as darts. Walt lived, I believe, at Gepps Cross a few miles from Gawler; Gawler being situated on the way to the famous Barossa Valley.

Walt was a great player and played with feather flights. He won his match against New Zealand.

The return match at Invercargill, New Zealand won 7-5. I am not sure if Walt played in that match but he probably did. His big friend was Bob Ellingham and the two were inseparable, Bob also worked at Holden's.

Bob, I believe was English originally and lived in Elizabeth with his wife and two children. Walt and Bob were often my guests with their wives at RAAF Edinburgh Field, about 25 miles north of Adelaide, where I was based, for dance and dinner functions. Since then the name seems to have been changed to RAAF Base Edinburgh.



When I left Australia, I had a farewell dinner at the Old Spot and Walt praised my starting the ball rolling of darts in Australia. I was presented with a large Koala Bear [pictured] as a keepsake which I still have at home in Bristol.

It was wonderful to read Lisa's letter and jog my memory a little. Please tell her I am still alive, and I know Angle Vale very well as we have a relative of my wife Anne's who actually lives there.

Patrick, thanks for the memories. Please send Lisa, my kindest regards.

As regards the first Australian darts association, Eddie had never heard of any such organisation being set up in 1927. I don't think it ever was either so let's file that under 'myth'.

However, in his introduction in the programme for the First Australian Darts Championships held at the Newcastle Workers Club Co-operative Club Ltd., in Newcastle, hosted by the New South Wales Darts Council (NSWDC), the late Peter McMenemy, President of the Darts Federation of Australia (DFA), covered a little of the development of darts in his country.



Peter stated that '1963 saw the formation of the ADC' (the Australasian Darts Council) and added

I feel it is appropriate that New South Wales has the honour of hosting Australian Championships 1 as members of this State were extremely instrumental in forming our sport into a national sport back in 1963 and, in fact, hosted the first two Australasian Championships.

This seemed to contradict what Eddie had told me about the early organisation of darts in Australia. Eddie (pictured below in South Australia in 2014) told me



The Australasian Darts Council was something I had the idea for and was involved in and tried to get off the ground in 1960 although, after a lot of time spent on it, it was about 1963/ 64 when it finally took off and I had returned to the UK but still advised on a few ideas.

I was based temporarily at RAAF Wagga in 1960, an Australian base in New South Wales and got, as always, involved in organising darts. I planted the idea with local darts enthusiasts of an Australasian Darts Council involving Australia States and New Zealand and then returned to RAAF Edinburgh. I worked tirelessly on it for a year or so but my return to the UK... was looming so I had to leave it.

However, enthusiasts I had met took the idea forward and the first Championships were held I believe in 1964 or thereabouts in a Returned Servicemen's Club (alled an RSL) in New South Wales.

I visited Australia several times in the 1960's and the Australasian Darts Council was going strong but I think New Zealand became independent in or around 1977/ 78 when the World Darts Federation [WDF] was formed.

In 1976 the Darts Federation of Australia was formed. As mentioned above, the First Australian Championships were held in 1980. That same year Australia hosted Pacific Cup 1.

For two decades Eddie's House of Darts International won many awards for darts exports to Australia from several Australian departments and the Australian government. Eddie and his brother created 'House of Darts Australia' shops in Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide and Sydney and we were a major darts exporter to Australia.

So, that's the history of darts *in part* of Australia so far. If anyone can help with further information about the development of darts in Australasia please contact me on patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com so that we can gauge the whole picture.

As always it is great to receive positive feedback on any *DDN* and I hope that Lisa will forgive me for reproducing here her e-mail to me dated 1st June 2019. Lisa wrote:

Dear Patrick,

Thank you so, so very much for your e-mail on Darts in South Australia. I honestly could not believe how hard you must have worked. I just imagined an article of ten lines or so.

I have read it and reread it several times and will reread it and take it all in in the coming days. It is absolutely unbelievable that you have managed to piece together what our family has tried to do for so many years. As a family we cannot thank you enough.

Our family is scattered around Australia, but I shall make sure that every one of the family gets a hard copy of the article, they will be so thrilled.

I have no words to describe it.

Holden's was the biggest employer in Elizabeth, South Australia. There was a House of Darts (Australia) at Pooraka, South Australia. My cousin remembers which closed about twenty years ago.

After reading your wonderful article if you ever contact Eddie Norman, please give him the best wishes of the whole Kingscott family and a big thank you. And Patrick once again please may I say thank you and a really bigger thank you for all your work. We never expected the reply we received. Please feel free to use my original e-mail letter in anything you write.

Our grateful thanks.

*Lisa and family
South Australia*

Lisa, it was my pleasure.

[My thanks to Dr. Eddie Norman and also to Warren Ackary. (Originally transcribed 23rd June 2006 from an e-mail received from Eddie Norman. Thanks too to Lisa Kingscott for her original e-mail which has ensured that this important part of Australia's darts history has been recorded.)]

BOOK REVIEW – BULLSEYE BELLA by James T. Guthrie

Continuing with the Australasian theme, long-time subscriber Bill Bell was good enough to bring to my attention a book that had been sent to his daughter Emily (aged 10) from a friend in New Zealand. Although it is written for children (according to the 'blurb' for 'ages 9 to 99') you will all know that I am interested in all things darts, especially books. As far as I am aware this is the first darts-themed book ever published with young people in mind.

Emily was good enough to send me the book and to write a review of it. However, before we read Emily's words let's see the information the publisher issued with the book.

How many 12-year-olds are champion darts players? Not many, if any. But Bella Kerr is a darts prodigy. And when she finds out that her little brother Max's special schooling is at risk because of the lack of money, Bella secretly enters a darts competition at the local pub.

The 'old boys' network of darts players are not happy – none more so than the gold-suited charmer, Frankie 'Goldfinger' Phillips – a five-time national champion, who will do anything to stop Bella qualifying for the nationals.

Emily is pictured here reading *Bullseye Bella* with her sister Lily looking on. (Image: Eel Images International) Here's Emily's review:

Bullseye Bella is the best book I've ever read!

Some books I either don't get the story or it's so boring but BULLSEYE BELLA pulled me into the book! My favourite character is Bella because she reminds me a lot of myself because I also love darts!



Alice is very kind for looking after her brother Max - 'Blackbeard' – and for sticking up for Bella when Carver was saying she couldn't compete. I like that James [the author] hasn't drawn any pictures because I prefer to imagine the pictures in my mind.

I love that every time at the end of a chapter it would leave me guessing about what's going to happen next. My favourite part was when Bella played against Frankie 'Goldfinger' Phillips!

Thanks Emily. As I fit within the age range '9 to 99' (just) I've actually read the book and found it a fascinating read. Let's hear it for Bella!

[The award-winning *Bullseye Bella* is published by Scholastic of New Zealand.]

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