

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

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IS COVID-19 THE GREATEST-EVER THREAT TO TRADITIONAL DARTS (AND OTHER PUB GAMES)?

While all around us (at least here in the UK) the plague that is Covid-19 *appears* to be easing the UK Government allowed pubs and clubs to reopen from early July provided they can



implement advice published in a 48-page document; instructions that are designed to protect the public and staff from each other and ensure social distancing.

(The photograph shows one of my local pubs, the *Carpenters Arms*, a small, backstreet pub with darts and dominoes and great real ale. (Photo © Stephen P. Nunn. Used with permission.))

For the majority of pubs in the UK, providing food is vital to ensure their profitability. It has been so for decades. In many cases the provision of a darts area has also been important especially on those quieter evenings (say, Monday-Wednesday) where a public bar packed with players and supporters can ensure good trading particularly during the winter.

Covid-19 has been a hammer blow to our pubs here in the UK which were all closed in March by order of the Government and only (but cautiously) reopened last month. Sadly some have remained closed and may never open their doors again.

Licensees have had to plan both their indoor and outdoor spaces to accommodate strict rules, the most important of which relates to social distancing. Tables need to be placed to ensure at least a one metre distance between them and thus many fewer tables are available for meals unless more space can be found. Thus it may well be that the space otherwise occupied by darts is turned into room for another table. I am sure this has happened on numerous occasions in the past but sadly I expect these incidents to increase over the weeks to come as dining and seating space is at a premium.

Even if the dartboard and existing darts space survives such measures, how the hell can you play darts *and* guarantee social distancing? The person chalking (traditionally taking chalks means you play the winner of the game in progress) will always be less than one metre away as the thrower collects his or her darts *unless* each player chalks their own. Each using a separate piece of chalk of course and discarding said pieces after each game. Darts is one of the few sports that usually begin and end with a handshake. Not anymore.

Darts is such a sociable game and thrives on friendship and lively banter. Darts generates its own unique atmosphere. Not even having a separate Games Room will necessarily save darts. That Games Room is a valuable space: even more valuable now but not for darts; for more tables. Worst case scenario they've removed the dartboard and detachable oche and filled it with tables. The pool table is outside under a canopy. Why isn't darts out there under cover? One reason is that you have to *pay* to play pool. Leaving the dartboard where it is might seem to indicate a potential return at a later date.

Possibly.

A couple of years ago, as part of a tongue-in-cheek April Fool piece in *DDN* I suggested that an European Union regulation was to be introduced making it compulsory for Perspex ® screens to be constructed between the player on the oche and those watching him/her. This was not for any specific health reasons but to protect spectators, the chalker and the other players from any chance of damage by rebounding darts. Now it appears that was not such a ludicrous idea given the impact of Covid-19.

I sincerely hope that solutions like the Perspex ® screen are found and darts continues to thrive in public houses and clubs across the planet but things will have to change. Something as simple as the 'house darts': that mixture of old sets of darts that are kept behind the bar for all and sundry to use; sometimes for free and sometimes for a small deposit to ensure their return. If someone wanted to play darts and the house darts were unavailable who, in this plague-conscious time, will want to lend their darts to them?

Paranoid?

Possibly.

Here in the UK there are substantial pockets of other pub games played up and down the country. I am thinking specifically of dominoes (see below being played in the *Carpenters Arms*) (Photo © 2019 Chipsnapz. Used with permission) and shove ha'penny where the games are kept behind the bar and loaned out to customers.



Both games require contact with ‘pieces’; the dominoes themselves, the ‘pegs’ on the cribbage board used for scoring and, in the case of shove ha’penny, contact with the board and the coins.

Will the ‘bones’ and the coins and board have to be treated/disinfected between each round? And with dominoes how will shuffling the bones before the commencement of each game ever be right under Covid-19 rules? There are two choices in my view. Either the games stay behind the bar counter and are not allowed out for play or the players agree to flout the law and play on. The latter of course puts the landlord/landlady at the risk of being reported and, thus, the very real chance of losing his/her licence. The same would apply to playing cards.

Clearly Covid-19 has not been a threat to televised darts: the Professional Darts Corporation has worked splendidly to provide ongoing darts tournaments and entertaining clashes between current darts stars and, with a bit of luck, the crowds will be allowed to return to venues at some stage: hopefully sooner rather than later. Various darts Apps have allowed the keenest of general players to compete virtually.

But there is nothing, *nothing* like the real thing.

Will I ever play darts in the *Carpenters Arms* again?

I sincerely hope so.

DARTBOARD NUMBERING – FEEDBACK

In last month’s issue I reported on Alan Snow’s recalculation of the numbering of a 20-segment dartboard which generated the following response from subscriber Chris Kelly:

Great to receive the latest DDN and I enjoyed reading it on my first bus journey to work since lockdown. I was particularly interested in the dartboard layout article and I have often wondered about the arrangement of numbers on a dart board and why they are in the order that they are.

I think that the revised one is much better and makes much more sense. The fact that 8 and 16 are together on the traditional board seems to offer the player an easier route, as does the cluster of odd numbers at the bottom. But I guess it is knowing these things that adds to the intrigue of the game.

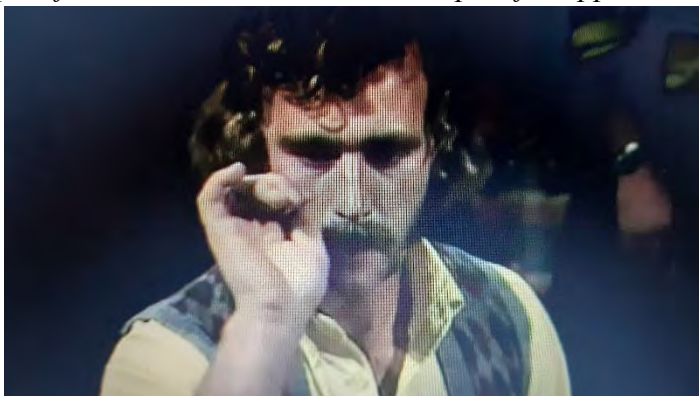
One that an ex-teammate of mine used to use when he left 15 for example would be to go for low 11. Meaning aim at the lower part of the Single 11 bed so if he missed he hit an 8, leaving 7, and so getting another chance with two darts in hand. The normal route would be 7 then double 4 but 7 is next door to 16 and 19 so a miss would cause him to bust and waste two darts.

DES STABB – OBITUARY – FEEDBACK

The death of Plymouth darts ace Des Stabb was reported in the July issue (courtesy of Steve Chapman) and in response Essex darter Gerald Corrigan wrote to me as follows:

Your article featuring the sad passing of Des Stabb (pictured below) triggered memories for me of him playing at The Longroom and Lord Beresford in the Courage PB [Plymouth Breweries] league, I was playing at the Cherry Tree and naturally we were always on opposite sides. He gave loud vocal support for team mates, but showed respect for opponents.

In those years I only played against him twice. Oddly it was in the Whitbread Tuesday League. He was at the Olive Branch and I was playing for the Black Horse. We were drawn against each other and honours were even. On the very few games he lost he was graceful, which made him special.



Des Stabb to me was an outsized character, as I have mentioned, he had a loud gruff voice, but always seemed to have a happy disposition. I first became aware of Des when I was playing for the Cherry Tree Tops in the second or third division of the Courage PB league, with the Cherry Tree 'A' team playing in the top division, with a history going back to 1947 in the old PB league. We were well pleased to have made it through to the cup semi-final being held in the Plymouth Guildhall. We won our match and I had the top score of 177, only to be pipped by Des who hit 180 in his semi playing for the Longroom. They were the top team and beat us in the final.

Thanks Gerald. Now here are some memories of Des from retired global darts ambassador Dr. Eddie Norman:

Hi Patrick, Thank you for another great DDN really enjoyed it and as always appreciate all the work that has gone into it.

I was sad to see Des Stabb had died. I go back to the early seventies knowing Des. He took part representing Devon in the first World Masters, in the South West play offs. He had a 'cousin' (?) called Roger Stabb who played for me in the West of England. Roger died a few years ago. They were both wonderful characters; noisiest two in the house when they got together - wonderful memories.

Des played in the United Kingdom Darts Federation for George Ashley at the Hyde Park Hotel in Plymouth. George Ashley became chairman of the United Kingdom Darts Federation and did the speeches at the Wales versus Rest of Great Britain UKDF match in 1976 at the Webbington Country Club.

STEVE CHAPMAN – FEEDBACK

Following my publishing the article relating to darts journalist Steve Chapman's retirement in #123, subscriber Brian H. wrote

I would also like to echo the comments about Steve Chapman's darts reporting: I came across Steve's Web site when looking for information about a Devon player & was amazed at the amount of information Steve had gathered & compiled. Like Bill Bell rightly said, you'll struggle to find a better reported local dart scene. I wish Steve well in his retirement.

CLEANING TUNGSTEN DART BARRELS

Mark S. recently wrote to me asking “Could you please tell me the best thing to clean tungsten Darts is?”

OK. I know that there are a number of solutions (pun not intended) if you Google the question but if cleaning them with warm soapy water is good enough for Michael Van Gerwen, then it should be good enough for anyone.

And key advice from WINMAU: Definitely **DO NOT** use any solvent-based cleaners.

LOCKDOWN MUSINGS (2) - DARTS LINGO – A THEORY ABOUT ‘SHANGHAI’

Every so often new theories arise for the meanings of darts lingo, language specific to the sport of darts. Recently Martin from Surrey, a visitor to my website, had been musing about the origins of ‘shanghai’. He wrote

Dear Dr Darts, I have read your explanation of the origin of the word/game Shanghai, and have looked elsewhere on-line, but nowhere I have looked mentions the fact that the city/port of Shanghai lies on the globe at a longitude of 120 East.

To me, and I must say I have absolutely NO evidence, written or otherwise, to back this up, that way back, some chalker when faced with a score of 120 on the 20s, blurted out 'Shanghai' in a bingo-caller fashion, and it kind of stuck. Then perhaps later it morphed into meaning any triple-double-single on the board.

Also, I must say that Shanghai, when seen on a wall-atlas or large globe, looks like it's at 120 East, but with the world-wide-web at my fingertips, it's more like 121 East. Perhaps the chalker had a map on the wall near him?

Writing this, my idea seems to be getting flimsier. Oh well. I'm still going to send it!

And I’m still going to publish it! Thanks Martin.

TYRE SURROUNDS – FEEDBACK

The article in last month’s *DDN* relating to tyres being used as dartboard surrounds prompted subscriber Chris Murray to send me this photo. Chris said

Not the world's greatest picture, but the attached is of me in the Horse and Well in Woodford Green, Essex (as was). 1970s/80s? The board is surrounded by a tyre. The Orson Welles as we so wittily (ahem) nicknamed it is still trading (well it should be soon) but you'd be lucky to find a dart board.



NEW SUBSCRIBERS

A warm welcome to all new subscribers. Newcomer Dave Packwood wrote:

Re. darts newsletter. Thank you for adding me to your list of subscribers. I am a keen follower of the amateur game at local pub league level although my interest in the elite level has diminished somewhat over the years because, as with so many other sports, the ever increasing amount of money at elite level has fractured the link between the game's spiritual home in the bars and clubs of working people and the glitz and glamour of the world championship oche. However, [subscriber] Chris Kelly tells me that you also have a deep affection for traditions and history of the game so I am sure that I will gain many hours of pleasure from following your newsletter.

I sincerely hope so Dave.

GILL PENMAN – TOP NEW ZEALAND DARTER



While researching the 1940s darts scene for my latest book I have, of course, delved into the career of Joe Hitchcock and his post-war captaincy of the St. Dunstan Four.

In 1948 'The Marathon Marvel' resigned to pursue his professional contractual obligations for Watney's brewery and handed the captain's responsibility to fellow Londoner, Jackie Boyce. (Boyce was to win the *News of the World* Individual title in 1949.)

A photo in my archive shows the 'new' St. Dunstan Four comprising, in addition to Boyce, Stan Outten (1937 *News of the World* London and Home Counties champion), Leo Newstead (a former member of the *News of the World*

Team of Darts Champions) and Gill Penman. Penman (pictured) was a New Zealand darter and is a player I know nothing about.

Clearly he must have been a top darter to qualify as a member of the legendary St. Dunstan Four so why is there no record of him?

I know it's a long shot but can any *DDN* reader help? If so, please contact me by email at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.

JOE HITCHCOCK – A MEMORY

During the writing of the 1940s/1950s chapter of my new book I have recorded the lives of both Joe Hitchcock and Jim Pike.

This reminded me that, a while back, subscriber Mick Simpson had told me a tale of Joe taking on one of his friends. Mick wrote

Many years ago, I think late 1950s, a good friend of mine long-since passed away related a story to me. He played in Battersea a lot and was a good player.

One night went into his local and a friend of his said to some guy "He will play you." This man said to my friend "Do you fancy a game for a pint?" My friend said, "Give me a chance to have a beer then yes, no problem."



*They started playing and my friend won. The guy said "Well done. Play again?" My friend replied "Yes. No problem." Well he won again." This happened **three** times. Then his friend who had said when he walked in the pub "He will play you" turned to my friend and said "Do you know who that is?" "No" replied my friend. "That's Joe Hitchcock" he said.*

My friend never won another game that night. It's amazing what a name can do.

The photo above shows Joe in action sometime during the 1940s. The gentleman on the left with shirt and tie is none other than Jimmy Clow, an oft-time member of the St. Dunstan Four and sometimes known as Jimmy Clark.



And talking of Mick S., readers may recall in DDN #121 I ran a piece about the discovery of a St. Dunstan's darts medal by a metal detectorist. The item, see left, was in a poor state and I said that I would find the one in my collection and publish a photo of it. But I failed miserably. Fortunately, Mick came to my rescue and produced the image (right) of his top notch, highly polished, St. Dunstan medal.



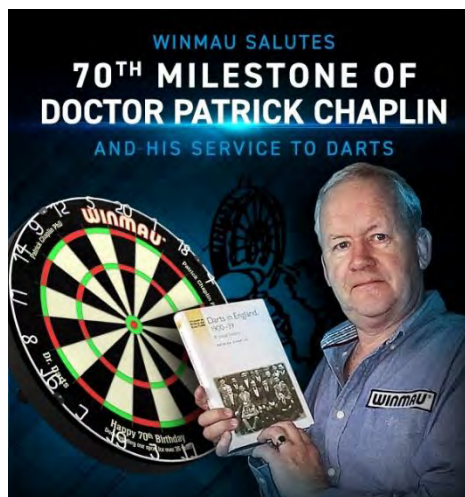
These medals were awarded by the St. Dunstan Four (usually by their captain Joe Hitchcock) for anyone who beat his team in one of their marathon challenges.

I hope to have more relating to darts medals discovered by detectorists in a future issue of *DDN*.

DR. DARTS' 70th BIRTHDAY

I'd like to say a huge "THANKYOU" to all those who sent me cards and messages, through the post, via email and Facebook wishing me a Happy Birthday, my having achieved the completion of seventy years on this planet, half of which has been spent researching darts.

I am particularly grateful to my sponsor for presenting me with a unique 'DR. DARTS' dartboard. See https://winmau.com/news/post/winmau-salutes-70th-milestone-of-doctor-patrick-chaplin-and-his-service-to-darts?mc_cid=d2b94419c3&mc_eid=51f220b997.



It was also good of *Darts World* to feature my life's work in their online magazine. Thanks guys. See <https://www.dartsworld.com/the-darts-world-years-patrick-chaplin-hits-70/>. Thanks too to my great friend David King (Darts501.com) for his article about my work. David and I have shared a passion for darts and darts history for many years. (See <https://darts501.com/Patrick-Chaplin-Darts.html>).

In addition David wrote:

Just thought I would ask the question. I assume you are going to continue with DDN? You mentioned that you were looking for a stopping point for DDN and suggested the age of 70 might be the milestone that triggers the end of DDN (I hope not!), or is this something you have put on the back burner?

Rest assured David, there are a few more *DDNs* left in this old septuagenarian!

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