

DARTS HISTORY

(aka Dr. Darts' Newsletter)

Issue 155

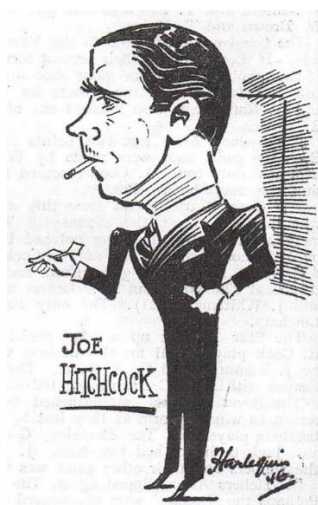
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JOE HITCHCOCK – A WELSH SIGHTING

As many readers will know, it is always good to hear from folks who have met, played against or simply witnessed an exhibition given by Joe Hitchcock.



Thus, I was very pleased to hear from William B. Greenhaf who after reading one of my articles about the legendary darts player on my website www.patrickchaplin.com, wrote to me from Wales telling me of the occasion in 'about 1963' he watched the great man in action. William told me:

Patrick. I was lucky enough to see Joe Hitchcock give an exhibition at the Green Fly Club in Bedwas, Wales.

His first half comprised challenging anyone in the club to a match of 1,001 and when the score came low, he would win with the catch phrase "and one for the loser." He would turn away, not looking at the dart going in the double, and he would then buy a pint of Watney's for challenging him.

His last match before the break was pre-marked on the board by his pretty assistant. It was 1001, 901, 801, 701, etc. His second half was incredible: all played with 6-inch nails, again challenge matches first then he asked for volunteers and his assistant put Watney bottle tops on their ears and he removed them with the nails.

I noted that the nails' flight was angled and it was the shank of the nail which removed the bottle tops. The last game the volunteer was facing the board with tops on his ears. Joe took his stance and his assistant put a blind fold on him!

The Green Fly was famed for having Tom Jones before he became famous. Thanks for giving me the memories.

I was sorry to discover that the Green Fly club was demolished in 2014 (see right) so not even memories of Tom Jones appearing there in his early career could prevent it! Presumably houses are there now.



[Joe was sponsored by Watney's for many years. The image of Joe shown here appears courtesy of *The Dart/PC Darts Archive*.]

Thanking about William's email made me wonder if any *Darts History* readers ever saw Joe play and what the format of his exhibition matches took on the night. If so, please contact me at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.

EDDIE NORMAN – A REPORT FROM THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Globe-trotter Eddie Norman reported at the end of January:

I first went to the South Pacific with a set of darts and a dartboard way back in 1968, then again in 1974 and 1977 (with Leighton Rees) visiting different islands each time.

Things have changed since the early days and darts is now becoming quite a big sport in the South Pacific and is very well organised.

As I headed down to Australia this week [late January 2023], the 3rd South Pacific Darts Championships are being held this week in Tonga with teams from Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Solomon Islands and Niue taking part.



Darts is certainly growing around the South Pacific from when I first went to the South Pacific with a dartboard and a set of darts.

THE CONTINUING INTEREST IN 'RONDART'

Journalist and *Darts History* subscriber, Thomas Bartley, of *Darts World*, contacted me towards the end of last year concerning an exhibition being set up in Darlington over the pantomime season, celebrating the life and career 'Rondart'. [Image (left) © Elaine Vizor.] Thomas promised me that, if he could, he would visit the Darlington Hippodrome and check out the exhibition for himself. Last month he updated me writing:



Dear Patrick,

Thanks again for another fascinating newsletter. It is much appreciated.

*I realised I forgot to get in touch with you over Christmas time about the Rondart exhibition. I managed to go and see it in Darlington and was very impressed. Elaine [Vizor], yourself and the team have done a great job. I wrote an article up about it for *Darts World* online and hope your readers will find it interesting at: <https://dartsworld50.com/2022/12/24/the-return-of-rondart/>*

My thanks to Thomas to keeping his promise to visit the exhibition and for writing his

excellent article for *Darts World* thus helping to spread the word of ‘Rondart’ to a new generation of darts fans.

DR. DARTS ON THE RADIO (AGAIN) - 23rd January 2023

Annabelle Martin, from BBC Radio Bristol, contacted me on 19th January to ask if I would take part in the Question and Answer (Q & A) segment of the Mid-Morning Show on Monday 23rd January.

The programme features John Darvell (pictured) and the Q & A segment is generated by queries received from listeners. On 23rd January the questions were, not surprisingly about darts.



I was interviewed by John at 12.40 p.m. which I enjoyed very much. Here are the questions I was set and my responses (as far as I can remember them), which I have added a little to, or expanded for greater clarification for readers.

Where does the word ‘oche’ come from?

Everyone thinks that ‘oche’ has been around for ever but that is untrue. The word ‘oche’ has only been used in darts since the early/mid 1970s. Before that, where a darts player stands behind in a game was called the ‘hockey’, the throw-line or ‘the mark.’

The word ‘hockey’ was first used officially in 1926 when the National Darts Association (NDA) issued their Rules. The word was then in 1927/28 when the *News of the World* Individual Competition was started. ‘Hockey’ was then used by all future darts associations until in the early 1970s, Olly Croft, the then General Manager, the top man, at the British Darts Organisation (BDO) discovered the word ‘oche’ (in old French meaning a ‘nick’ or ‘notch’) and from henceforth the word became the one in vogue and ‘hockey’ was confined to history.

When did darts become a game?

Although darts has been found to have been played as far back as the 16th century, it was a version called ‘puff and dart’. This version faded out during the 19th century and was replaced by the darts we know today (imported from France by fairground people, where darts and the game were called ‘flechettes’). The first properly organised darts in pubs developed after the Great War.

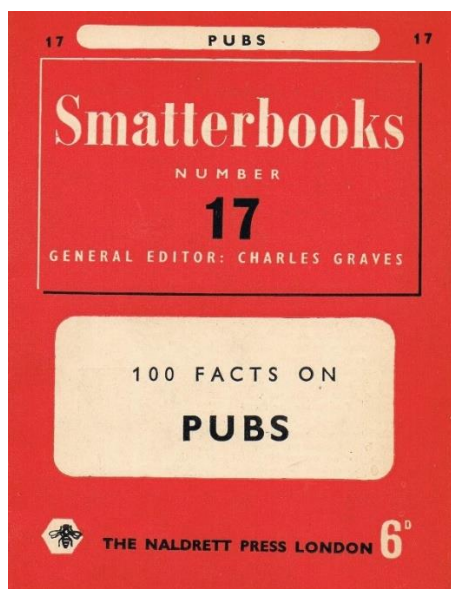
Where did the word ‘bull’ come from?

The original dartboard was modelled on the existing archery target in which the centre has always been called the ‘bullseye’ and this name transferred to the new game of darts. Over time the word ‘bullseye’ has been abbreviated (especially in TV commentaries) to the ‘bull’. I think I did OK.

(Image of John Darvell © BBC. Used with permission.)

SMATTERBOOKS – 100 FACTS ON PUBS (THE DARTS BIT)

I have lost count of the number of pub books that mention darts and indeed I used information from many of them to support my work. As it is now seventeen years since I was awarded my PhD and fourteen years since the Manchester University Press published my dissertation in book form that you all know as *Darts in England 1900-39 – A social history*. (Still available.)



The latest booklet I came across online late last year was Smatterbooks Number 17, simply titled *100 Facts on Pubs*, published by The Naldrett Press of London, one of a series, the object being ‘to present in a convenient form a collection of essential facts about a variety of subjects’. As far as I am aware there was no Smatterbook specifically about pub games but in Number 17, the game of darts was well covered within the 100 Facts.

The original price of *100 Facts on Pubs* was sixpence (about 3p today). I paid £9.00 for it in November and, in my view, it is still a bargain.

There was no publication date shown but the text reveals that the most recent books cited in the bibliography were dated 1948, so I suggest the printing date was circa 1949/1950.

Here’s how darts was viewed by Smatterbooks (General Editor: Charles Graves) at that time.

Fact 19 Why people *do not* go to the pub.

People do not go to public-houses in search of solitude. They look for bustle, gaiety, laughter and a buzz of talk, cheers and chaff round the dart-board; where they find these, they are good-humoured, tolerant and well-mannered...

‘Chaff’ was a word I had ever come across in a pub sense before so I had to look it up and found that in the UK it is slang and relates/related to ‘light-hearted teasing or joking’.

Fact 35 *The greatest of pub games is darts.*

That ‘fact’ is written a little like a Commandment and, like a Commandment, it is true.

Fact 36 reveals the point that darts had reached by the late 1940s/turn of the 1950s:

Twenty years ago darts was a game of the public-bar. Many saloon-bar customers now demand of the publican ‘a darts-board for us, too’. But it is still to the public-bar that you must go to for the ‘rigour of the game.’

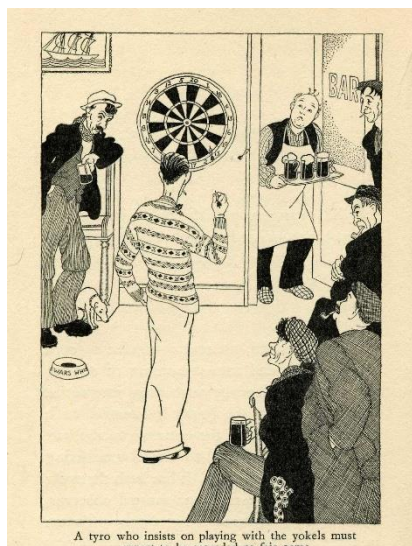
The demand for a dartboard being installed in Saloon Bars really kicked off on 17th December 1937 when the King and Queen played a brief (three darts each) game when visiting the then new community centre at Slough in Buckinghamshire. A ‘community

centre' was a new concept back then and the Royals were keen to be seen encouraging and taking an interest such a scheme.

Brewers seized upon the potential of the 'Royal darts match' and a number issued an instruction to their houses to install dartboards in Saloon Bars to cope with increased demand for the game from the middle classes. For example, John G. Showers, landlord of the "Stanhope Hotel," Rodley, Yorkshire, came under pressure from his brewer to extend the game into his Cocktail Bar by providing a 'super dart-board.' [Possibly the 'super' board was a bristle dartboard rather than a standard wooden elm board.]

Reluctantly Showers, who already provided a dartboard in the public bar, hung a dartboard in his Cocktail Bar - describing the new attraction as 'a nightmare'.

However, it took him only a short while 'to close the doors on the board and use the tray, meant only to catch darts, for flowers.'



About the time of the publication of the Smallerbook on *Pubs* the autobiography of John Showers titled *The Welcome Inn* (Derby: Pilgrim Press, 1952) was published which looked back at the licensee's life in which he mentioned darts 'invading' his cocktail bar in the late 1930s.

Showers, in his opinion, instinctively knew where darts belonged and continued to actively encourage the game in the public bar of the "Stanhope", where darts matches between locals and chance visitors had already become very popular.

In the Public Bar, John Showers, had also witnessed first-hand, visitors 'attracted to the dartboard where 'clever local dartsmen would inveigle the unsuspecting young innocents' by playing a 'playful first match' and then, when stakes were agreed, they would proceed to 'trounce their hapless victims'.

The image (above left) shows a 'tyro' (a posh visitor) thinking he can play darts. The caption of this cartoon reads 'A tyro who insists on playing with the yokels must expect to be regarded as fair game.' (© Alison Fuller (circa 1937))

Fact 37 provides limited knowledge of the dartboard:

The darts-board with 20 sectors, number 20 at the top, is now the standard board; yet there are pockets of local die-hards who defend peculiar boards of their own; the Fives' board for instance survives in parts of London.

No picture is provided for the reader to see what the 'darts-board with 20 sectors' actually looks like or the order of the numbers, the segments, doubles and trebles, etc. but we can confidently guess that it was what we recognise today as the Standard or Treble Board.

The Fives Board preceded the 'Standard' or 'Trebles' board therefore should *not* be regarded as 'peculiar'. There remain today a good number of 'die-hards' in London that still play on or 'defend' their Fives Board.

We must also remember that the Yorkshire Board, the 20-segmented board with no treble ring or outer bull was the immediate predecessor of the Standard or Treble Board is still played on in a number of areas in that county.

Fact 38 focussed on darts leagues and darts' governing body.

Before 1939 Darts Leagues flourished everywhere. The pubs belonging to one brewer in a given district organized a team apiece, and played home and away matches with the others; the championship of that league went to the team which collected most points. The brewer provided challenge cups, and gave medals to the members of the winning team and the runners-up.

'Before 1939 Darts Leagues flourished everywhere', but the truth is that properly organised darts leagues only started in December 1924; the first in London belonging to the Barclay brewery. (See advert, right, which appeared in *The Anchor Magazine* dated December 1924.)

For a sport to 'flourish everywhere' in only fifteen years was a great achievement.

Barclay's Darts League.

The formation of a Barclay's Darts League is under consideration, and provided a sufficient number of teams are entered from our houses by the 15th inst., the Company will provide a Perpetual Trophy in the form of a Cup, with Gold Medals for the winning team and Silver Medals for the runners-up. Further particulars may be obtained from the Licensees of all houses supplied by the Company.

A governing body, the National Darts Association, regulated the registration of players and the competition rules and barred professionalism. The governing body has been reorganized since the war, and new leagues are now formed.

At the time this booklet was published there was actually no 'national' darts association. The National Darts Association (NDA) formed in 1924 failed to survive the war and its successor, the National Darts Association of Great Britain (NDAGB), was not created until 1954.



The mention of barring professionalism was not mentioned in the NDA's original rules. In 1990, the 1930s darts star, Harold Barker from Bradford, was described in *Darts World* magazine as 'the first professional darts player in England'; the first of a new breed of professional-cum-exhibition dart players.

Because of the nature of darts, and the small number of players making a living from the game, it developed free from the hypocrisy of amateurism common in other sports.

Amateurism was never an issue in darts as there were so few being paid for their services and thus for all intents and purposes darts players were more or less to a man, amateur with only one or two being occasionally paid for their services.

In my view the banning of professional players was probably founded by the *News of the World* who is known to have excluded professional players from its competition before the Second World War until the 1970s. In the 1940s, Joe Hitchcock is known to have been banned because of his sponsorship by a brewery and Jim Pike was excluded after the Second World War as he played exhibitions for money and had set up his own darts company.

It was only towards the end of the interwar period when J. T. Gerrard wrote in the *Darts and Sports Weekly News* (22nd January 1938) that

The sooner "Darts Professionalism" is recognised the better it will be for the game. If a man, or woman, is sufficiently skilful to attract the public to watch them do their "stuff", why should they not reap some financial reward for their efforts?'

Gerrard was 'all out for it' provided that it did not develop along the same lines as county cricket, i.e. "Amateurs" v "Professionals" – "Gentlemen" using the saloon entrance while "Players" enter via the "public bar".'

No subsequent record has been found of the amateur/professional debate. To date no evidence has been found of any woman darts player being paid to play during this period. Indeed, the first full-time professional dart players would not emerge until the 1970s.

Gerrard's reference to 'or woman' was way ahead of its time in terms of gender language in sport. This may have been a genuine wish to embrace women in darts but might equally have been in recognition of Mrs. Morgan's success in making the *News of the World* Divisional Finals the previous year when she won the Winchester Area competition.



[The image, above, right, (© *News of the World* used with permission) shows Mrs. Morgan being presented with her trophy at the Guildhall, Winchester by Major J. R. Pinsent D.S.O. Mayor of Winchester.]

Fact 39 raises the matter of the 'Carlisle Experiment' where in that city the Government owned all the pubs.

Apart from organized competitions, you can now play darts almost everywhere, except in Carlisle's Government pubs, where the game has not been allowed. The introduction of the 1948 Licensing Bill brought this restriction into the limelight, and the Home Secretary has now given some hope to would-be darts-players in Carlisle. Elsewhere, the simplest way of getting a darts-board into your local is to ask the landlord to provide one.

COMPETITION ANSWER



Thanks to all of you who entered the competition set by Monarch Water offering a set of original promotional WINMAU Monarch Water darts, plus a Mark Webster signature card and five Monarch Water pens to one lucky subscriber. The question was

In Mark's quote (published in #154) Monarch Water push sustainability but don't mention the company. So, what company have Monarch Water partnered with to plant a tree for every invoice raised?

The answer, found on the company's website, was **ECOLOGI**.

The lucky winner on this occasion is subscriber Carol C. of Ontario, Canada.

DIFFERENT NAME

As you all know, back in June 2022, I changed the name of *Dr. Darts' Newsletter (DDN)* to *Darts History* but that I have never given you any reason for the change.

I had been thinking about the title for some months and, after much thought, decided to call it *Darts History (DH)* because, in my view, that better reflects what my publication is all about today. Whilst *DH* will continue to report on everything to do with darts, but, as you will have seen of late, the demand has been focussed on the past with an occasional, important report on darts in the 21st Century.

I have found that my readers enjoy when I bring 'new' facts and stories of the past of darts rather than reports on the modern game. That's not to knock what is happening in darts today. It's fantastic! There is so much great stuff happening out there, so much online, but you can access that, in various forms whilst I believe my purpose is to bring 'new' history to darts fans: often material that cannot be found on the 'net. I hope you approve.

MY RESEARCH IS SPONSORED BY

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