

DARTS HISTORY

(formerly *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*)

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FALCON AND PINNERTON – A BRIEF HISTORY

Of the number of darts, dartboard, dart accessories companies, that have existed over the years, many have fallen by the wayside over the years and information about them lost to history, whilst others have flourished. Thus, it is only on occasions, when prompted by an enquiry, about a company I am unfamiliar with, that I follow it up and delve into my archive to find out what I can. Falcon Darts is a case in point.

In January I was approached, via my website, www.patrickchaplin.com, by Andy Smith who wrote:

'Dear Dr Patrick.

First off, I love your website.

My Father was Gordon Smith. He was partners in Falcon Darts back in the early 80's before it went bust. Later my dad and Trevor Griffiths formed Pinnerton Ltd and made quite a successful few years' business with more downs than ups.*

I remember as a kid spending my holidays and weekends in the factory in Woking. They used to do business with Retriever, Winmau, Terry Fullerton [Canada], Tom Pope, Ben Drake. My father passed away about 2 years ago...

He worked like a dog all his life. He would often be working 60-70-hour weeks to keep up with orders as he'd made himself indispensable as the chief engineer. He was often the only one who could get the machines up and running after a tool break or machine breakdown, in any of the mills and lathes.

It would be nice one day to have a chat and pick your brains if I may. Thankyou in advance. Keep up the good work. Best Andy Smith

[*Falcon advertisement (above) taken from *Darts World* November 1976 is one of the earliest of the company's adverts I can find in the magazine. This advert shows winner Ray Rawlings (on the left) with his father Bernie. More about Ray later.]

I have discovered recently that while those machines were 'up and running' Falcon was making a large range of tungsten darts. The following were listed in a feature called 'Tungsten '78' which appeared in *Darts World* in June 1976 (issue #43):

'FALCON – A range of copper-tungsten at all weights.

Whisper, 16 gms; Slimline, 20 gms; Knurled Slimline, 21 gms; Falcon Special, 22 gms; Popular, 24 gms; Plain Jane, 22 gms; Fenland, 25 gms; Mendip, 27 gms; Grampian, 28 gms; Cleveland, 30 gms; Knurled Cleveland, 31 gms; Penine [sic], 30 gms; Nova, 35 gms; Super Nova, 42 gms.'

Unfortunately, I do not have any image of the darts (Can anyone help with one?) but what a range, from a 'Whisper' to a 'Super Nova'!

When looking for information about former darts companies, after I have exhausted my archive, my first port of call is Dr. Eddie Norman, former owner of the famous Bristol-based House of Darts. Eddie told me:

'I remember Trevor and Gordon very well. They were good friends of mine. I think Gordon ran a boy's football team. They were the nice guys in early darts. They started Falcon Darts in Wych Hill, Woking.

What Falcon was first famous for were 'bubble canes' which were the first easy-loading bubble canes. Other firms made similar canes but they tended to snap easily. Trevor and Gordon perfected the 'easy-loading,' bubble canes. They charged 3p per set of three in about six colours and sold millions, but, unfortunately, they were eventually copied. They advertised these bubble canes in early Darts World.'

(Image, left, is a selection of 'bubble stems' from the collection of Patrick Dee, 'The Curator of Darts.' Image courtesy Chippix. Used with permission.)



'Trevor was the salesman and Gordon the darts 'perfectionist' machine man. Falcon Darts were made to perfection. Gordon even made a range up to 50 grms for us which we called the PEN Board Busters range. They are collectors' items today. If you can get your hands on a set, not many were made and are very rare. They made a full range of PEN darts for us (Pete and Eddie Norman range)

We ordered thousands of sets of darts off Falcon over the years and Trevor delivered them himself although Gordon regularly popped to Bristol to visit us.

The problem that arose was they started making replacement darts points for spring-loaded darts very similar to the USA Hammerhead points and Walt Bottelson had a US and UK patent on his Hammerhead Points. The US version were five times the price of the Falcon version. Apparently Bottelson threatened to sue Falcon for infringement of his patent and wanted a lot of money off of Falcon.'



As a result, Trevor and Gordon immediately put Falcon into receivership.

They already had the name Pinnerton as a non-active shelf company and reopened as Pinnerton the same day. However, the name, and thus the products never caught on. Andy Smith told me

'In the early 2000's Pinnerton went into liquidation and my dad started his own company with his cousin, supplying and fitting security fencing. They had a good 10 years of this but he retired due to Mums ill health and his body wearing out. He died in 2022 after an 18-month struggle with Alzheimer's.'

[The advertisement for Pinnerton darts (left) is one of the earliest I can find in *Darts World* (October 1988).

Eddie told me

'The late Tom Pope at Retriever did some sort of deal with Trevor and Gordon and finished up owning the name Falcon Darts which I believe Retriever Sports still own.'

Thanks Eddie. If anyone else recalls Falcon and/or Pinnerton please drop me a line at www.patrickchaplin.com.

Ray Rawlings

Readers will have noted from the advertisement on Page 1 that, by 1976, the company was sponsoring Ray Rawlings, a darts player who, I must admit I had not heard of. Who is/was he?

According to *The Guinness Book of Darts* (Revised 1982)

'Ray Rawlings (born 2nd May 1957) ... became the first player to win both the 501 and 1001 knockout cups in the Greater London Super League. Lives in Maidenhead, Berkshire, and won the Nodor British Open of 1976 as a teenager.' [19]

Ray with his darts partner John Mason qualified for the prestigious Unicorn World Pairs championship but didn't make the final. Possibly the first time Ray appeared in the record

books is 1976 when he won the NODOR British Open. Ray, listed as from Maidenhead, beat Mike Butt (Somerset).

[Note: The NODOR British Open was held in Bristol for four years beginning in 1974 when the winner was Charlie Ellix, who retained his title in 1975, then Rawlings (1976) and finally Cliff Lazarenko 1977.]

Subsequent research shows that in the 1978-79 season 'Ray Rawlings (Slough)' won the London Super League Singles (501) by beating Mick Nelson (Chingford) and also winning, in the same year (1979), the London 1001 Championship (the De Oliver Trophy) beating Ken Russell (Tower Hamlets).

FEEDBACK FROM #180

Thanks to everyone who sent me messages about #180 and the memories some of the articles prompted. Brian H. wrote

'Congratulations on 180 issues of DDN! Great picture of you with your dart team! Rob G's comments really struck a chord with me: Since I picked up my darts again after a long layoff I've found it's hard to find a local pub to drop in and have a casual game. Once upon a time there'd always be someone to give you a game but now you're lucky to find a dartboard. I end up playing on my board at home, competing against a computer on an app! Thanks for another great read & look forward to the next offering.'

From Germany, Martin G. emailed me

'Hallo Patrick. Thank you again for your most interesting Dart Histories that I appreciate very much. And congratulations 🎯 to your 180th issue.'

From The Honest Oche, Mick Browne wrote

'Hi Patrick.

Thought I'd drop a line on this momentous occasion. Thank you, in short, for the chance to read back. It allows me the chance to go back to days playing against my Dad.

Started out with a board down the side of my bed to then converting the back room into a sports bar!! Played every day after school, then later work with Dad, beating him more and more as the years rolled on. Never played much in his later years but we watched on the TV.

Anyway, I'm rambling. But thanks again for providing the 'door,' so I can be 11 again, (see right) going to Gerrys of Wimbledon for my first bristle board, a Nodor, and first set of Tungsten (still have them).

Your friend at the Oche.



My mention in that issue of pubs closing and the disappearance of many dartboards from still existing licensed premises, prompted Mick S. (a regular contributor to *Darts History*) to write

'Hi Patrick. Thanks, as ever, for another great read. When you asked about pubs local to me in Mitcham where I come from, I can name 27 pubs and to the best of my knowledge only 5 remain. Very sad.

I now live in New Malden and the main road to Kingston had 7 pubs just in that road. Now none. All gone. But one new pub was opened a few years ago. To me it's no surprise that Dart Leagues are disappearing at an alarming rate.

180! How great that is. Well done my friend. That's fantastic. Here's to the next 180!'

From Australia, Warren A. emailed to say

'Hi Patrick! Congratulations on the newsletter reaching issue 180! Quite a milestone and I must say "all the best to everyone who enters for the prize." Looking at feedback and such in the 180th newsletter, I started to think about my 40 years of playing darts. Doesn't seem like I've been playing darts since March 1985 but records tell me I have!

Travel, travel was the issue in the 70/80/90s here in Australia to go and play tournaments and even league! I remember in the 90s I played every night of the week and sometimes every weekend but the love of darts and camaraderie made me travel and I had to rely on public transport.

One Tuesday to Wednesday night each week was tough, train, tram, and bus to the venue (home and away venues) and catching the last train and bus home meant I had to stop off half way home and sleep at a friend's house and jump on the train to get home the next day! I'm glad my work was my own and I was my own boss!

That's what we do. We travel but what about the players there in the UK in the 80s? When they travelled to the States they knew to break even or make money they had to either make the final or win a tournament such was the cost!

I guess in a way we ALL travelled and often didn't make a profit but now the younger generation benefit from the trail blazing days which brought on countless tournaments, associations and more venues.

The juniors today are something else. The JDC is a hotbed and quite rightly so. They are our future and the need to be nurtured.

Sorry Patrick, ramblings of a silly old man! Warm regards Warren...'

I replied

'Not silly, and not so old my friend. Keep playing and reading Darts History. Your feedback is always welcomed.'

THE PIONEERS (#180) – A CORRECTION



I always know I've done OK when my good friend Chris Lovell sends me an email saying something like "Another great read," which he did after receiving #180.

Chris also wrote

"Can I point out that Linda Duffy would have been known as Linda Batten in those days."

Of course you can Chris. It also gives me an opportunity to include a photo of one of England's very best ladies' darts player. (Image © Darts World/PC Archive. Used with permission.)

COMPETITION CLOSES VERY SOON

Thanks to everyone who have entered for my competition in #180 so far for that very special dartboard. Entries close at midnight on Wednesday 16th April, after which time any further entries will be considered null and void. The lucky winner will be notified shortly after.

'A FISH OUT OF WATER' – AN ANIMATED FILM – DARTS QUERY

Now here's something a bit different. It shows the range of questions/enquiries I receive about darts. Andrew Weltch, of Weltch Media contacted me earlier this month:

'Dear Patrick,

I just came across your fascinating site and wondered if you could help me with some advice, please?

I'm producing a short independent animated film, set in the 1890s (or a slightly alternative reality version of it!). The main scene takes place in a pub/beer house in a Devon seaside town, where some people are (anachronistically, I believe) playing darts.

As it's an alternative reality (even with some hints of steampunk), we are taking dramatic licence with this (and a couple of other things), but I'd still like to make it as close to accuracy as possible.

With this in mind, I'd like to get the board and darts looking roughly contemporaneous (so, I suppose 1910s?). I think the board would be wooden? No treble ring, but maybe the double? Would the numbers be in our familiar sequence? Would players throw three darts? And what would the darts look like?

Any advice would be gratefully received, and I could offer a 'thank you' on screen!

The film is called 'A Fish Out of Water' and can be found on IMDb here: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt36131951/?ref=hm_rvi_i_4.

Many thanks in anticipation. Best wishes.

I replied

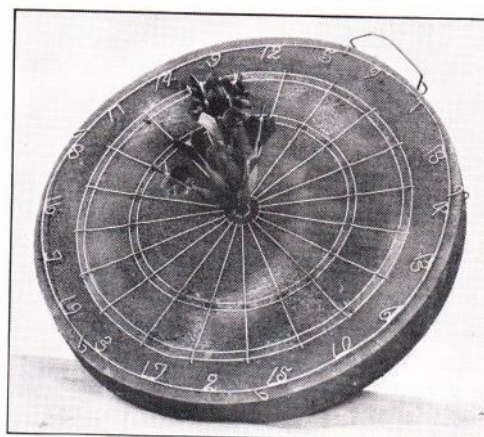
'Hi Andrew,

Thanks for your email letting me know about A Fish Out of Water (and the link that I have checked out) and your questions about darts.

You mentioned the playing of darts being anachronistic so I assume you know that it is highly unlikely that darts would have been played in Devon in the 1890s and perhaps not even in the 1910s. Skittles ruled back then! (And still does in some areas even today.)

Darts didn't reach Devon, or any part of the West Country, until after the Great War but if you are taking dramatic licence with your pub games scenario(s) and place a dartboard on the wall it would have been hung with the centre of the bullseye at 5 feet 8 inches (the estimated average height of a man back then) and thrown from the hockey or throw-line (not 'oche' - that's 1970s lingo) of, usually, 9 feet.

If a dartboard was used, you are correct, it would have been made of wood (usually elm, but sometimes poplar), would have measured 18 inches diameter, no treble ring, some with a double ring and no outer bullseye ring. The numbers were what we regard as standard today but a smaller board with different numbers existed in Manchester and occasionally dartboards were made to local requirements - one-offs - (such as the Grimsby Board - huge, with double 28 at the top!) which I have found to have existed in the past during my research.



I do not have an image of a 1890s wooden dartboard but attach a photo of one from the 1920s/1930s. It has a treble and outer bull but gives you an idea. (Image, above right, My Collection.) (Wooden boards tended to rot or fall to pieces with use and over time, thus the rarity.)



Darts was usually found (as it is everywhere today) with three darts for each player but yet, I know of one game where four darts was standard in the 1930s. Until the 1920s when brass darts were introduced, the standard dart was known as the 'French dart,' [see left] simply because they were made there: never in England and imported in thousands, mostly by fairgrounds. French darts were made of wood, very light, and

had turkey feathers for flights (see attached for what they looked like). Later they were produced with lead weights either pressed around the wooden barrel or drilled into it.

I think that answers your questions, Andrew.

That's very kind of you to offer a 'thank you' on screen. That's always appreciated. (Let me know when it's available.)'

Andrew's questions arrive at the same time of an enquiry from a French/German TV company to interview me about darts history. It's early days but I will keep you all informed if the approach comes to anything.

STOP PRESS

Whilst rummaging through some old newspaper cuttings recently, I came across the following report from the *Darts and Skittles Chronicle* (incorporating the *Dominoes Mercury*) dated 1st April 1903:

'Sisters Gladys and Vivienne Goodchumps of Hastings, Sussex, England, (right) claim to have invented a brand new fortune-telling gadget based on their love of the new public house entertainment known as 'darts' or sometimes 'dartes.'

Gladys told the Chronicle, "We have always been looking for something else to replace the tarot cards and palm reading and tea leaves and this is it. Based on the segmented dartboard, it is spun by the customer and whatever colour it ends up in we make something up about them."



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