

# DARTS HISTORY

(formerly *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*)

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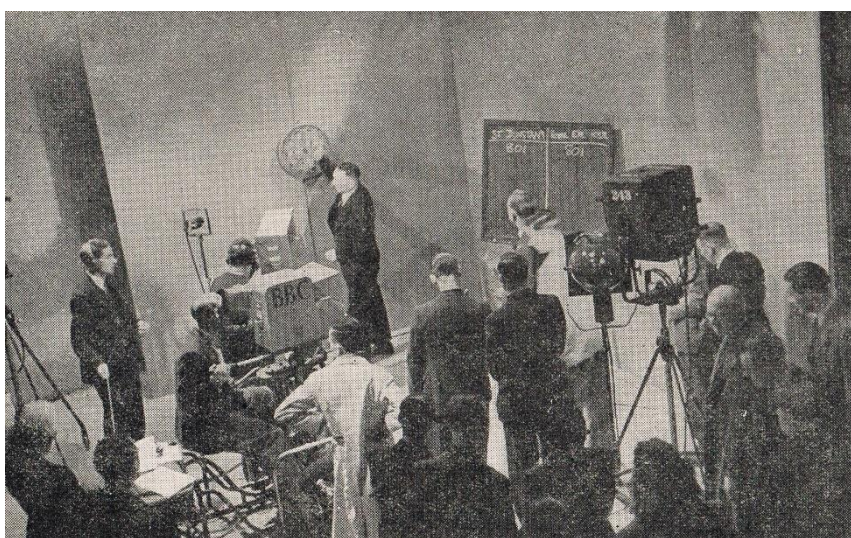


## ‘B.B.C. HAS “NO PLANS” FOR TELEVISING DARTS’

I have to admit that the above title, the label of ‘EXCLUSIVE’ and the teaser line ‘A Special Report’ on the final page of the June edition were a little misleading. I am sure that all of you would have wondered about the subject as the BBC (Britain’s national broadcaster) has had little or no involvement with our sport for some time, so why should it be any news to us that the company had “No Plans”?

It was a ruse on my part.

Regular readers will know that I have recently written about darts on television and those who know of the contents of my book



*Darts in England 1900-39 – A social history* (still available in paperback) will recall that darts was first broadcast by the BBC from the Alexandra Palace, on ‘London Television’ at 9.25 p.m. on Saturday 29 May 1937; a programme title ‘Darts and Shove Ha’penny.’

[Sadly, I have no photos from that historic day but reproduce here an image (above) which shows the filming of a darts match by the BBC at the Alexandra Palace in 1949. © Patrick Chaplin/*The Dart*.]

Here is that earlier BBC report in full:

‘Since the Boon v Danahar\* contest was televised with such tremendous success two weeks ago we have been reading in the public Press just how new scientific is going to revolutionise all sporting broadcasts. So perturbed was the British Boxing Board of Control in the matter that you will have noticed that it determined to keep boxing from a possible box-office evil by banning all television broadcasts without the express permission of the Board of Control.

[\* *Eric Boon and Arthur Danaher were involved in the first-ever televised boxing match, broadcast by the BBC in 1939. Boon, a British lightweight boxer, defeated Danaher in this historic fight, which was also shown live in cinemas. The match was a significant event, marking the first time a boxing match was televised and simultaneously shown to a paying audience in theatres. This was two years after darts first appeared on TV.*]

## Somewhat Perturbed

Apart from the fact that John Harding defied this ban at the N.S.C. show at Earl's Court on Monday night, and that all sports promoters must necessarily feel somewhat perturbed about television as a possible box-office enemy, the prospect of television affecting all sporting events must seriously be considered.

With this idea in my mind I was naturally interested in the plans of the B.B.C. regarding television broadcasts of darts matches. I thought that the B.B.C. would naturally have some plans in regard to such a popular game as darts, and so I got in touch with the Press Department at Alexandra Palace.

## Nothing Fixed!

And what do you think I found? Only that until April there is *nothing fixed for darts at all*, and, apparently, the programme from April on are not fixed!

When I enquired about television broadcasts of darts at the beginning of the season I was told that the game would be on air once a month according to the plans at that time, and so I can only say what a pity it is that darts, the most popular game in the country today, is, apparently not being considered by the television powers that be!

It may interest readers to know that some eighteen months ago I put up the suggestion that a television demonstration might be featured of the various styles of dart-playing now in practice throughout the country. The suggestion was duly acknowledged and something, it was hoped, would be done about it.

Here we are, nearly two years later, and the suggestion has been tactfully ignored. I thought in my naïve manner, that this would have been of interest to "viewers." Of course, with all the blah which has appeared in the dailies about television the number of people actually possessing sets cannot have been very large.

## Popular Levels

But I saw a television set made by a reputable firm the other day priced at 30 guineas, which seems to suggest that the manufacture of such sets is now reaching popular levels.

When the price of these sets has reached reasonable levels then a large increase in "viewers" can confidently be expected, and then darts will become an essential part of the programmes.

That is, unless the attraction of chamber music and the highbrow items is considered by Mr. Gerald Cock and his assistants to be of infinitely more entertainment value!

The author of above report, extracted from *Darts & Sports Review* dated 11<sup>th</sup> March 1939, was not only concerned about the apparent proposed lack of televising of darts but also the fear that television would effectively remove the public from being spectators to events such as boxing, and presumably, horse racing and football, encouraging people to become viewers of sport on TV at home rather than spectators at the events. But the reporter was projecting his fears into the future. The number of people, and therefore 'viewers', were few at that time and restricted to only those who could afford a 'set.'

But, of course, nobody could honestly predict at that time just how much the ‘miracle’ of television would eventually devour so much of people’s time yet fail to dent the people’s love of genuine ‘live’ sport. By September 1939 though, all thoughts turned to something else

## **PETER ‘POP’ BROOKS**

In May I receive an enquiry from Harlie Hutton:

*“Hello, I hope you are well. I am writing to ask where you got your copy of the Darts Year Book 1978 published by Unicorn. My grandfather [Peter ‘Pop’ Brooks, pictured in this photograph, second from the left, back row, above the player looking down] is unfortunately deceased and was mentioned in that book. I can’t seem to find any copies. Thank you.”*



I had to tell Harlie that the book she mentioned was rare indeed but, although I could not find her a copy, I could send her the details about her father-in-law. Here’s what the *Unicorn Darts Yearbook 1978*. (Edited by Roger St. Pierre (Ipswich: Studio Publications (Ipswich) Ltd, 1978) (pages 74-75) had to say:

## **‘PETER (POP) BROOKS**

**Born December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1937, Staveley, Derbyshire.**

‘Now in his second spell having retired in 1968 after playing competitively for twelve years. Re-started in 1970 and is now playing better than ever. Selected for the BDO [*British Darts Organisation*] Squad in the 1977 England-Wales International. Has played for Poolsbrook, Victoria, Royal British Legion (Staveley), Alma and North Wingfield and in Staveley Super League lost only one match in two seasons.

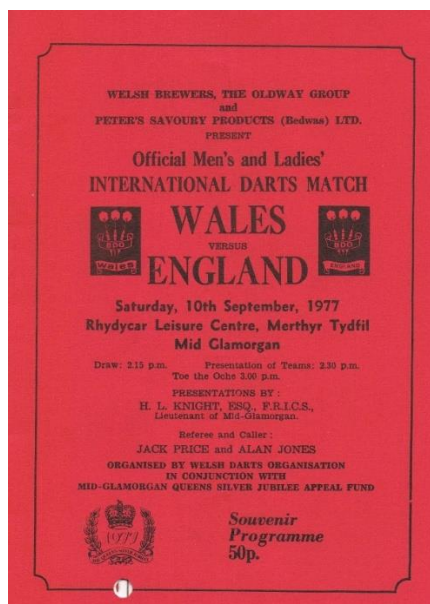
Winner of the 1974 NDA [*National Darts Association of Great Britain*] Men’s Pairs Championship with W. Snell and reached the last eight in 1977. In 1974 was also a Quarter Finalist in the Watneys Inter City Pairs. Member of the Midland County team which beat Wales.

Sponsored by J. Brooks, Bridlington, Fishing Cobbles, Yorkshire Lass, Sun Flower.  
*Exhibition availability: Fee £50 (week-ends). Contact: 33 Franklyn Drive, Staveley, Chesterfield, Derbyshire. Throws right-handed.’*

A further search, this time, in Derek Brown’s *The Guinness Book of Darts* (Enfield: Guinness Superlatives, 1981) revealed the following:

## **‘NDAGB Men’s Pairs Results**

1974 Bill Snell and Peter Brooks, Royal British Legion, Staveley, near Chesterfield, beat Martin Carter and Doug Trundle, Woodmans Cottage, Gorefield, Wisbech.'



In addition, the programme for the International Darts Match Wales versus England held on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September 1977 (see left) informed us it was held at the Rhydycar Leisure Centre, Merthyr Tydfil, Mid-Glamorgan. The list of England team members revealed:

'Reserves: ...

'2. **Peter Brooks** plays for the Royal British Legion, Staveley, near Chesterfield, thus completing a Derbyshire treble with [*John*] Lowe and [*Jim*] Beardmore.'

*Darts World* – October 1977 (#59) carried a brief article on the event but it looked as though Peter Brooks was not called to replace any of the original main team. Clearly, if any *Darts History* readers can provide any further information about 'Pop' please contact me at

[patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com](mailto:patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com).

## A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS?

From the USA, Jerry Lucky recently wrote:

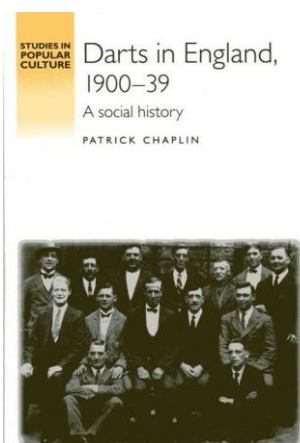
*'Hi Patrick. As I sit here watching the highlights of Night 16 of the Darts Premier League [23<sup>rd</sup> May] I thought I'd dash off a little note to say I'm currently re-reading your wonderful book Darts in England, 1900-39 – A social history. [Image below, right. Still available.]*

*I'm always stunned at the amount of research you put into this book and in my opinion every serious darts player should avail themselves of a copy. I'm sure they would find it fascinating. The only thing missing for me (and understandably so) is that there are so few photos. Which brings me to my question; What book(s) would you recommend for someone like me looking to see a nice assemblage of historical photos from darts' early period?*

*Oh, and one more thing...if you are ever stuck wondering what to put into the monthly newsletter, I'd sure appreciate a historical retrospective of the various darts periodicals that covered the sport over the years, what was available in different countries, when did these magazines start and stop, and perhaps what led to their demise? Has the internet essentially supplanted these publications?*

*Anyway, keep up the great work. I look forward to your monthly newsletter hitting my inbox. All the best, Jerry.'*

I replied



'Hi Jerry,

*Thanks for your email and your thoughts. Thanks too for recommending Darts in England... to everyone. [Copies are still available in paperback from Manchester University Press.]*

*As for the lack of photos/images in Darts in England..., the number of images was something specified by my publisher, Manchester University Press. As an academic work, I guess the focus was on the words rather than the pictures. Another point was the cost of publishing copyright images. Although I was able to negotiate cost-free images for more or less all of them (which took a long time) there was at least one image I desperately needed for the book that cost me over £100 for one use.*

*As you may know, I have been working on the follow-up book The Sport of Pints for years (and it's still in progress – sort of). I am unsure if that will ever see the light of day. If it does then that would include a lot more early photos/images (again, subject to copyright searches and legal clearance).*

*As for other books that feature more photos of darts in the early days (by which I mean pre-1960s), I can't think of one except The Guinness Book of Darts by Derek Brown but even then, there are few. Dr. Darts' Newsletter/Darts History (1-184) has featured more 'old' images over the years than any other publication. Apart from Derek (actually Deryk) and me, no one has ever been that close to darts history.*

*As for your suggestion, if I am ever stuck wondering what to put into my monthly newsletter, to write an historical retrospective about darts periodicals, I think you will be very, very,*

*surprised of the number of such newsletters/magazines appeared (and many that disappeared) between the late 1930s to date and the number of countries in which they appeared. Just think about the USA. How many periodicals over and above BEN, Double Eagle, International Spider and The Darthead could you bring to mind? (Let me know.)*

*But you have inspired me to write something about darts periodicals in a future Darts History. But to write a full, detailed history of them all would take my lifetime over again, I guess.*

*Thanks again for writing Jerry. It's always great to hear from you.'*



Just taking a brief glance through my archive and, for the moment, ignoring the large number of darts magazines and newspapers produced over the years by the UK, the USA and, surprisingly, published in Germany, other countries that have produced such periodicals include Australia, (*Points and Tips*), Bulgaria (*Dapmc*), Canada (*Darts Digest* and *Darts Action*), Czech Republic (*Sipkory Sport*), Denmark (*Dartsport*), Finland (*Darts and Darts News*), Holland (*Darts*), Hungary (*Darts Magazin*), Norway (*daRts*) (above see front cover of *daRts* dated Issue 1, 2001), Poland (*Interdart*), South Africa (*S.A. Darts and Snooker*) and Switzerland (*Darts Switzerland* and *SDA Darts Magazine*).

This is only the tip of the 'dartmagazineberg.'

## DO YOU REMEMBER ROBERT MACKENZIE? – A TOP SCOTTISH PLAYER

In June I received an envelope from the offices of the Professional Darts Corporation. It contained letters addressed to me that had found their way to the PDC and which they were forwarding to me to deal with. It was from Kevin Dakers of Edinburgh who told me that Robert Mackenzie was one of his favourite Scotland players; that he was ‘often on the TV’ and was ‘very talented.’ He also remembers Robert’s reaction ‘when he beat Ceri Morgan in the 1986 Home Internationals and it was the Scotland men’s teams first victory in the tournament since 1982.’



My archive revealed little about Robert but, the photo, right, shows that he was runner-up in the British Gold Cup Singles in 1986. (Image, right, © Steve Dasko) (More research to follow next time.) However, regular contributor, James Hope, told me recently:

*‘I met Robert myself a few times during the mid to late 80s and he was tipped to be the next best thing in Scottish darts but unfortunately he had a loss of form and he drifted away from the big time darts scene I don't know if he still plays or not as I haven't heard much recently about him could some of your regular contributors to the newsletter maybe know what Robert is up to nowadays.’*



And, of course, I would like to hear from *Darts History* readers if they have any memories of Robert. In fact, Neil Campbell Adams (featured in #184) copied me an article from the *Inverness Courier* as recent as 11<sup>th</sup> May this year which reported that

*‘ROBERT Mackenzie [pictured, left © Inverness Courier] put on a vintage performance to be crowned Inverness singles darts champion for what is believed to be the seventh time in his career.*

*The transport manager from Inverness, who plays for Still Game in the Inverness Darts League, claimed the title against a field of 78 entries which culminated in him beating Jack McNeilly from Nairn club Seaforth Club 2-1 in the final at Raigmore Motel.*

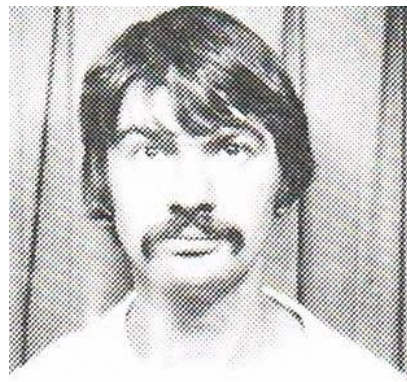
*The 62-year-old added another Inverness Singles title to his collection, having won the competition for the first time in his career back in 1983.*

*Mackenzie says he went into the tournament with little expectation of being in contention to win the trophy.’*

## TV COULDN’T GET ENOUGH OF DARTS – IN 1978

Darts was on a peak of a popularity wave by the end of the 1970s and in the WINMAU World Masters programme for 1978, one of the key men in televised darts since the early part of the decade, John B. Meade of Yorkshire Television, (pictured on next page, right) wrote:

*Tyne Tees, Yorkshire Television, Thames, A.T.V [Associated Television] and Anglia all have one thing in common .... they produce darts programmes. World of Sport transmit darts live and incredibly even B.B.C. 2 have jumped on the darting bandwagon. The result is that darts now gets more television coverage than any sport outside the big three of football, cricket, and athletics.*



*Of course, to a television producer darts has everything. It's got colour, drama, tension, infinite skills, and most of all larger-than-life personalities. Even those people who aren't particularly darts aficionados recognise immediately Eric Bristow's cocked finger; Evan's knack of finishing on bull .... wasn't it marvellous by the way that the cameras managed to capture forever Alan's recent 161 shot out? – Lowe's almost monotonous accuracy; Leighton Rees' snake like action.*

*But there is no doubt that familiarity can breed contempt so it's up to the British Darts Organisation and television people to keep coming up with new ideas... When my latest darts series come out in the New Year, you'll notice a couple of new gimics [sic] .... each time a player hits one hundred and eighty they receive a hundred and eighty pounds .... And each of the participating players also help Dave Lanning with the commentary. (Alan Evens [sic], by the way, will have no trouble finding a job if and when he packs in playing darts.) Both innovations worked well. We recorded two competitions, the first a straight knock-out between the world's top eight and then a pro/celebrity competition but still with big money prizes... the players provided the skills, the celebrities the fun and glamour... another innovation, apart from one-off competition London Weekend used to do in conjunction with TV Times.*

*There's no doubt darts is well and truly here to stay as a T.V. sport, and the climax must be next November when hopefully we'll be able to tune in and watch teams from throughout the world battling it out for the World Cup in Las Vegas.*

As the 70s merged into the 1980s, darts enjoyed its popularity like never before and the sport became the darling of TV as Olly Croft built the British Darts Organisation (BDO) to the powerhouse of darts it became. But by the mid-1980s television began to turn its attention away from darts. Remember that, at that time, Britain only had four major TV programme providers, BBC 1., BBC 2, ITV, and Channel 4 and all shied away from our sport. There seemed to be anything the BDO could do. But then satellite TV emerged in the early 1990s...

The rest, as they say, is [darts] history.

## **AND FROM THE INTERNATIONAL DARTS FEDERATION...**

Tom Lucason, a member of the International Darts Federation (IDF covers soft Darts, e-darts, and Para Soft Darts) and subscriber to *Darts History* writes:

*'Dear Dr Darts. Thank you so much for the May issue of Darts History; another fascinating read. It was interesting to read about the Nodor British Open that Dave Whitcombe mentioned. Where was this played? Was it in Wales and who organised the event? I*

