

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

Issue 21 December 2011



A warm welcome to you all to Issue #21.

A special 'Welcome' to all new subscribers to *DDN* which this month include Russian darts fan Aleksey who tells me that he is only just beginning to play darts but is, not surprisingly, enjoying it. Aleksey (pictured with one of my books) only bought a NODOR Supermatch dartboard and a set of 21 gram steel-tip NODOR tungstens during the summer and has already scored three 180s. (I think I'm still waiting to score my third after decades of playing!) Keep going like that Aleksey and we'll be seeing you at the Ally Pally very soon!

In this issue of *DDN* the key featured article is about Syd Hall, the one and only 'Pouff Darts Champion of the World'. Things were so much simpler in London in 1938. Then, from one extreme to the other, I look at darts at the North Pole (and other cold places) and find the solution to one fans' quest for a set of Embassy darts. Add to this some interesting follow-up to items and queries raised in previous issues and we have a packed *DDN* 21.



I know it's not Christmas everywhere in the world but I do want to take this opportunity to wish you all the very best for the festive/holiday season and for 2012. Thanks especially to all those who have contributed views and information to me over the past twelve months or have helped me in any way with the production of *DDN* and of course to those who merely write and tell me to 'carry on the good work'.

So this is the final *DDN* for 2011. As you probably know, there is no *DDN* published in January but - have no fear - it (and I) will be back in early February.

Here's Issue #21...

FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES

(a) Media attention

In Issue #19 I mentioned that I had been interviewed by Mark, the 'Oche Jockey' who has started an 'Oche on the Radio' show on my local community radio SAINT FM. We enjoyed it so much that Mark invited me back in November and then again earlier this month. I think the concept of a darts-related show is great and am more than happy to be

on it and to assist Mark spread the word of darts not just within my home county but, via the internet across the globe. Mark's show runs from 12 noon until 2 p.m. every Saturday and fans can listen to the show online at www.saintfm.org.uk.



Also, I have to apologise to the 'Oche Jockey' for calling him Mark Wright in Issue #19. Wright was wrong. Mark's actual surname is Powell. (Sorry mate.) The image shows Mark and me just before I was featured on his show on 3rd December. It doesn't look as though Mark's looking forward to it does it? But rest assured we had a great time.

(b) BDO website

In Issue #20 I mentioned that I'd been asked to contribute articles to the upgraded BDO website. Well, the first article, a brief history of our great sport, went online on 1st December and I'm already receiving some very positive feedback including Jan from India who told me "I follow BDO on Facebook and just now they published a news feed written by you. As always a fantastic one. Keep up the great work." (Thanks Jan.) So please take a look at www.bdodarts.com and let me know what you think.

The next article, which is to be posted in time for the 2012 Lakeside World Professional Darts Championship, will be all about the inaugural Embassy in 1978. An edited version of that article will feature in the official programme for the 2012 tournament. And, talking of the Embassy...

(c) Embassy (sets of) darts

In the November issue of *DDN* Lee H. asked if anyone could help him find a set of 'Embassy' tungstens like those that could be purchased years ago with vouchers from packs of Embassy cigarettes. He had tried contacting Imperial Tobacco and scouring the internet all to no avail. But *DDN* delivers!

A subscriber to *DDN*, who wishes to remain anonymous, has come up with the goods and Lee is a *very* happy man. When he heard the news Lee wrote, "Patrick. That's fantastic news. Thank you for spreading my query around the darting world. If it hadn't been for you and your passion for the game and the history of this great sport I'd have been looking to try a different dart altogether."

As if that wasn't enough, the very mention of the Embassy brought back particular memories for renowned darts journalist Wayne Baker. Wayne (pictured) wrote to say,

“Hi Patrick, I’ve just finished reading the latest *DDN* - very good and informative as usual. Incidentally the article on the Embassy tungsten darts.....



Guess what darts I used to win the Corals Pro Am with Scotland's Alan Soutar? They were Embassy World Professionals Nickel Tungsten 28g. I won them in a previous Pro Am championship when the event was sponsored by Embassy. The case is white leather with gold and red lettering featuring darts containing Embassy flights. Inside is the WINMAU logo.”

Those Pro-Am tournaments at Lakeside are fought for every year and Wayne has been an eager competitor for many years.

You can read Wayne's informative *Darts People* articles every month in *Darts World* magazine.

(d) Brian Netherton

Brian, who was the first Cornishman to win the *News of the World* Individual Darts Championship, and who died earlier this year, has been mentioned in the last two issues of *DDN* and his reputation has led one subscriber to search for footage of that legendary final in 1972 when Brian won the coveted title by beating Wales' (equally legendary) Alan Evans. Peter R. wrote, “Excellent Patrick. I love reading the historical stuff as it reminds me of a time when darts was played in every (?) pub every night. Sadly that is no longer the case. This month's newsletter was as interesting as usual. I have searched YouTube for some footage of the Evans/Netherton NOTW final without any luck.”

So, can any *DDN* subscriber help Peter? If you can then please contact me via my website www.patrickchaplin.com and I'll pass the details on to Peter and the rest of the planet. When he dropped me a line Peter told me that he was taking a break from playing league darts but was still practicing in the hope of launching a 'comeback' next season. (I know how you feel Peter!) He lists his passions in life as “real ale, darts and my wife.”

(e) Flight collecting

As mentioned in the last couple of *DDN*'s it looks as though Martyn Carlyle's idea of swapping flights over the 'net is taking off. Martyn has now established a swap page on his website <http://www.martsdarts.co.uk/martyn-carlyles-swaps.html>. Other collectors have joined in including Wazza from Australia and Kent from Denmark and I am sure that many more will follow.

Kent, who specialises in signature/personal flights, has set up his own swap site at www.kentbovin.com/darts/flights_swap/ and fans are invited to look in and see what swaps Kent has to offer.

Remember though that Martyn swaps full sets of flights whilst Kent deals in single flights. Kent told me, “My idea is to swap one-for-one which means I would like to receive other players’ signature/personal flights, preferably of the same age and time period if possible.”

Martyn Carlyle has gone further and has decided to add an additional page to his site as a ‘central swap site.’ Martyn told me, “This is a place where anyone interested in flight swapping can get in contact through my contact page and arrange to send me by email pictures or scans of their swaps. I will then place them on a page with a contact address of the flight owners and they can then arrange their own swaps from there. Obviously I cannot be held responsible for any flights that do not arrive as this will have to be done on trust.”

Martyn has therefore started the ball rolling and has promised to keep me informed.

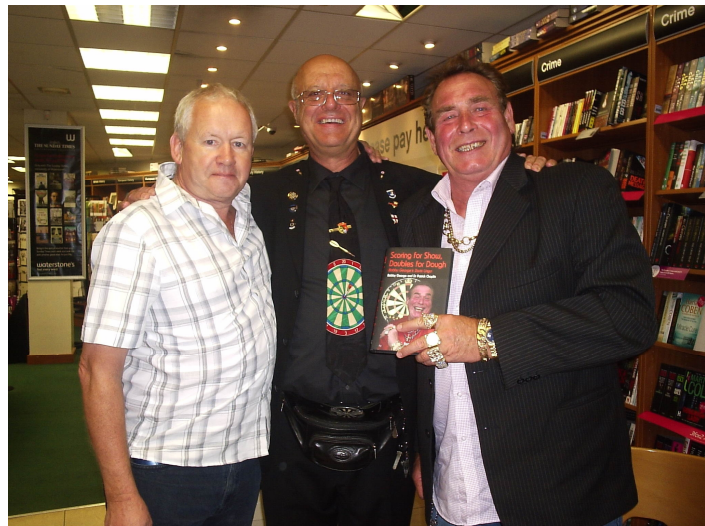
(f) Another book...

In Issue #20 I mentioned other darts-related books that I am currently working on. The good news is that a publisher has stressed an interest in my project *The Sport of Pints – The People’s History of Darts* and possibly *180! Fantastic Darts Facts*. The ‘publishers meeting’ is not until later this month so I’m hoping to be able to bring you some more (hopefully good) news in Issue #22.

(g) Scoring for Show...

There’s no way I could let the festive/end of year *DDN* be complete without suggesting that all darts fans should buy Bobby George’s and my book *Scoring for Show, Doubles for Dough – Bobby George’s Darts Lingo* as a gift for Christmas or any other occasion.

Only last month one reviewer’s comment was that the book was ‘Just perfect’ and recommended that you ‘buy this book at once.’ So who are Bobby or I to disagree? *Scoring for Show...* is published by Apex Publishing and can be ordered

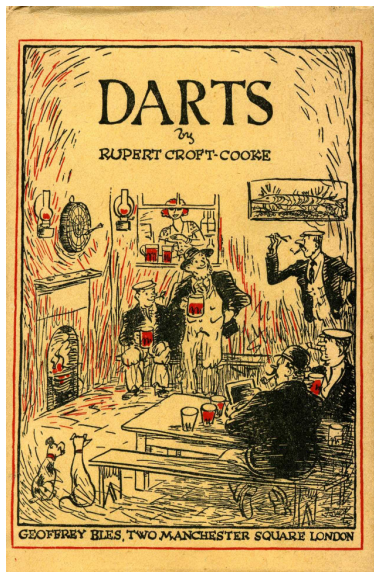


across the globe via Amazon.com. (The image here shows Bobby, Patrick Dee ('The Curator of Darts' and me at a book-signing in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk earlier this year.

THE PUESDOWN INN, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

On the final page of the last issue I was pictured outside *The Puesdown Inn* in Gloucestershire and promised to tell you the reason why I was standing outside.

Many, many years ago, in the early-to-late 1930s in fact, *The Puesdown Inn* was a regular haunt of Rupert Croft-Cooke, an itinerant, multi-talented author of over 150 books, the only one of which concerns us being *Darts*, the very first book solely devoted to the game (see image of book cover).



Croft-Cooke had moved into the area to seek solitude in the country; somewhere he could focus entirely on his writing craft. When he wasn't concentrating on authorship he would be practicing his second love, playing darts, a game he described as 'a public bar game, a game for good fellows, a spit and sawdust pastime. It is a game to play with the glow of beer in one's brain, to the sound of tinkling glasses.'

(And so says all of me.)

When I visited *The Puesdown Inn* about 12 years ago I was thrilled to see that, although a party wall had been knocked down to expand the bar area, both the fireplace and the dartboard had been retained.

The image of me shown here (taken long before working on completion of my PhD turned my hair grey and I lost a bit of weight) partly replicates the front cover of Croft-Cooke's book *Darts* (shown above) with the serving hatch now replaced by a window. I was standing on historic ground! The owners of the pub at the time were thrilled to hear of *The Puesdown Inn's* place in darts history and I vowed to return.



I went back to the area earlier this year in search of more information about the life of Croft-Cooke. I chose to stay at *The Puesdown Inn*.

The previous owners had sold up nine years ago and the place had been converted into a gastro pub. The small bar which had contained the dartboard in both Croft-Cooke's and my time had disappeared and become part of an enlarged restaurant. When I asked the present incumbents where the dartboard was one of them merely replied, "It was here when we arrived but we soon took it down."

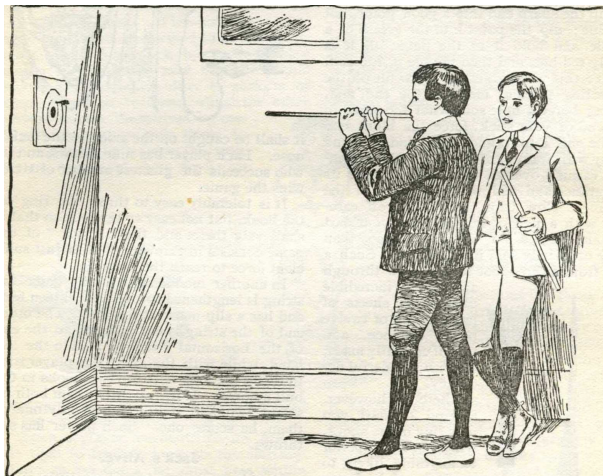
I should have listened to my friends who told me, "You should never go back."

Trust me. I won't.

SYD HALL – WORLD 'POUFF DART' CHAMPION

Puffing darts at a target through a wooden or metal tube was not an unknown pastime in English public houses of the mid-to-late Nineteenth Century.

Soon to be over-run by the new, emerging game of darts which involved throwing instead of blowing, 'puff and dart', as it was most popularly called, had all but disappeared from pubs by the turn of the twentieth century, confirming its place, albeit temporarily in the toy market, and then, presumably for safety reasons, being withdrawn altogether.



The image here shows two boys playing puff and dart during the late Victorian period (Image copyright holder unknown).

Certainly 'puff and dart' was extinct by the 1930s, or so it was thought, but then evidence was found which showed that there were still a few 'puff darters' around.

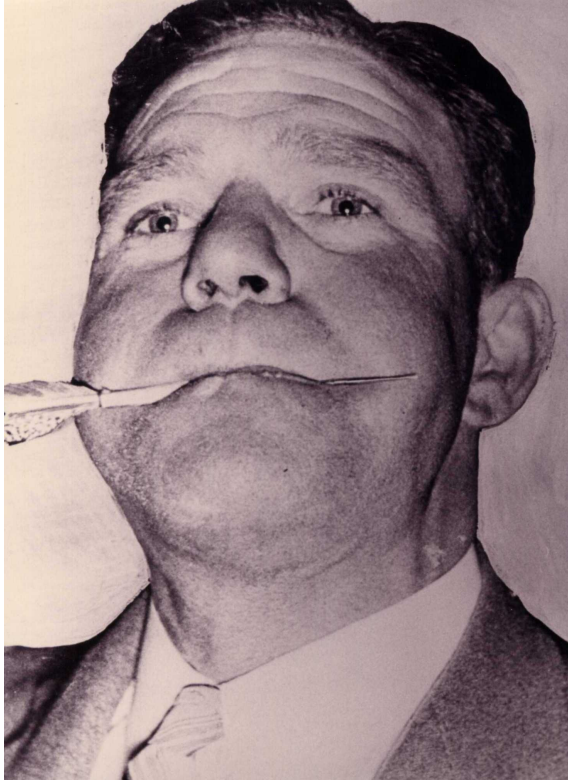
When Rupert Croft-Cooke (see above) was researching his innovative book

Darts published in 1936, he came upon a van driver in his travels who employed a strange blowing technique which did not involve a tube. Croft-Cooke wrote that 'He *blows* his darts. Believe it or not...he puts a dart between his lips and with a puff from some uncommonly powerful lungs he sends it straight in [*to the dartboard*]'.

The late 1930s was a time when darts was very much in vogue with the middle and upper classes, especially in London and the south-east of the country. In December 1937 the King and Queen had played darts, albeit briefly, at a community centre in Slough and the country had gone 'darts mad'. Everyone, or so it seemed, was playing darts.

On such a wave of darting hysteria the media were quick to pounce on anything to do with the game and in early 1938 the national newspaper, the *Daily Mirror*, achieved a coup by organising the first ever 'Pouff [Yes, that *is* the correct spelling] Darts Championship.'

The newspaper had heard of a Darlington (County Durham) man named Sid (real name Stephen) Hall who, it was alleged played all his dart games by 'puffing' each dart in exactly the same way as Croft-Cooke's anonymous van driver. At the time, Sid was in his early thirties and worked for the Cleveland Bridge Company; one of his claims to fame being that he had once puffed a dart 36 ½ feet from the circle of a Darlington cinema to a



dartboard on the stage. (The image of Syd shown here was loaned to me by Syd's daughter, the late Mrs. Barbara Knox.)

An article appeared in the *Daily Mirror*, written by sports writer Dennis O'Sullivan, appealing for other 'pouff dart' players to make themselves known with a view to holding the inaugural 'Pouff Darts Championship of Great Britain'. In addition to Syd, seven other 'pouffers' were found to take on the challenge, namely Mr. S.W. Band of Florence Park, Oxford, Mr. W. Bishop of Leytonstone in Essex, Mr. C. Brown of Southall, Middlesex, Mr. H. S. Clayton of Bethnal Green, east London, Mr. J. Perry of Notting Hill, West London, Mr. E. Thompson of Copenhagen Street in London and, perhaps surprisingly, Miss Edna Beattie of Darlington who was the only female contender and described by

the *Daily Mirror* as 'an attractive dark-haired woman.'

How would she fare against the men?

The contest took place on Friday 18th March 1938 as a featured item at a party Dennis O'Sullivan was holding for sporting celebrities at London's prestigious Dorchester Hotel. The hockey (as the 'oche' was known back then) was set at the standard nine feet, the competitors each in turn placed each dart crossways in his or her mouth and at the word 'BLOW!' the contest commenced. However, it was not darts as we know it today. No games of 301 but merely 'ten goes of three pouffs each...and the one scoring most points will be declared champion'.

Fittingly enough, it was the man who generated the initial interest, Syd Hall, who won the contest with an impressive total of 644 points from his ten 'pouffs', averaging 17.89

points per dart. Second place went to an apparent late-comer, Mr. T. Baldwin of Tunbridge Wells, Kent whilst third place went to Miss Edna Beattie.

For his victory Syd received a silver cup, which bore the legend 'Pouff Darts Tournament. March 1938. First prize S. Hall, World's Champion' plus three guineas (which is about £3.15 in today's sterling). The tournament was a one-off and was therefore never contested again.



One other 'puff-darter' who in fact made a living as a variety artist for many years blowing darts was 'Rondart' (seen here with his lovely assistant Cristina) (Image: Author's Collection). Star of both stage and screen, I'll have more to say about 'Rondart' (and Cristina) in a future issue of *DDN*.

As far as I am aware Syd never made any money from puff-darting but his name is now entered into the *DDN* Darts Hall of Fame as the one and only official 'Pouff Darts Champion of the World.'

Syd died of lung cancer in 1956.

More recently Syd's grandson Kevin Knox contacted me to ask if I knew anything about Syd's world title and so I sent some information and a photo to him. Kevin has now framed the story and the photo and hung them with pride on a wall in his pub, the *Rose & Crown* in Chellaston, Derbyshire. Kevin told me, "It's been the centre of conversation... in the pub."

DARTS AT THE NORTH POLE (AND OTHER VERY COLD PLACES)

In Issue #20 I posed the question "Has darts ever been played at the North Pole?" and presented the fragment of information I had discovered so far. In response Eddie N informed me that the Daily Mirror had recently published an article about exactly that, which can be found at www.mirror.co.uk/darts/northpole.

Eddie also recalled reading once about the Norwegian Antarctica Expedition by Roald Amundsen and how they played darts at the South Pole. He Googled 'Darts at the South Pole' and the results take you to a book of Amundsen's book and further delving reveals that he and his colleagues did indeed play darts in Antarctica.

This research reminded Eddie that in September 1973 he had chartered a 146-seater plane to fly the West of England darts team and supporters from Bristol to Ludvika in Sweden to participate in the Sweden Open (which was won by Kim Brown). "That was the nearest we ever got to the North Pole," said Eddie, and Ludvika was the coldest place that I have ever been to play darts."

It was Eddie who also mentioned that he had been informed on his travels that in 2006 there was 'a proper darts league' at New Zealand's station, Scotts Base in Antarctica. I contacted the New Zealand authorities and a member of the Administration Team there told me,

"There is a dart board at Scott Base and depending on who is down there each season depends on how much it is used. In previous seasons we have had dart players at Scott Base and they have run a bit of a competition during the season but there is nothing official set up."

Surely confirmation, if indeed confirmation was necessary, that darts can be played and *is* played anywhere and everywhere around the world.

SPONSORS NEWS

The WINMAU Dartboard Company announced last month that one of the rising young stars of the UK County circuit, Craig Barratt from Lincolnshire, has been signed up by them. Craig (pictured), who is the current Nottinghamshire Open Champion and had an impressive run in the 2011 WINMAU World Masters reaching the last 64, said "Joining the WINMAU team is like a dream come true" while Ian Flack, Sales and Marketing Director for WINMAU told me, "Since Craig has joined us he's hit two nine-darters in practice and had 18 x 180s in a 20-leg challenge match. That's some form!"

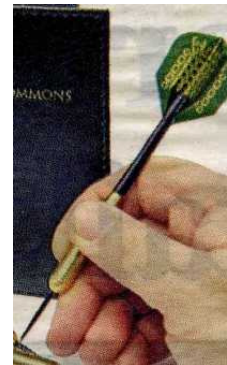


Some form indeed and good luck to Craig in the future.

There are some fine young darts players coming through the system at the moment, especially via the youth academy structure. I am hoping to be able to report on at least one of these academies in a special article in a future issue of *DDN*.

AND FINALLY...

The Speaker of the House of Commons came under fire recently when it was discovered that darts were being sold in Parliament souvenir shops. The darts (pictured) which retail at £26 were deemed, not surprisingly, to be a security risk and one kiosk immediately withdrew the 'potential weapons' from sale. MP Patrick Mercer told *The Mail on Sunday*, "The idea that missiles like this can be bought in the House of Commons souvenir shop makes no sense at all." A spokesman told the newspaper that, as soon as they realised the danger, the product had been withdrawn from sale.



It makes one wonder if those in charge of product selection ever thought selling darts at the seat of British Government was ever a good idea!

COMING UP IN THE FEBRUARY ISSUE:

Remembering of course that there is no *DDN* published in January, the next issue will be **February 2012** which will feature some, if not all, of the following:

- An interview with former England star Mike Gregory
- Book Review - Brian Belton's *The Little Book of Darts*
- Darts as an Olympic Sport (held over from this issue)
- The tale of the 'standard' flight

AND FINALLY, FINALLY...

I hope that you have all enjoyed *DDN* during 2011 and will continue to do so in 2012. I wish all of you every happiness and success for the New Year.

Best wishes,

Patrick

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