

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

Issue 44 December 2013

'T'IS THE SEASON...



As another year draws to a close, I send my heartiest Christmas wishes to all *DDN* subscribers and to those who do not celebrate the season my heartiest good wishes to you all. Special thanks too to the WINMAU Dartboard Co., for supporting my research for another year.



It's been a busy year for me both darts-wise and with regards to my other interests, pubs and local history. I write regularly for the Pub History Society's *Newsletter*. As regards local history I have just completed *Langford – An Obscure Essex Village Transformed*, a book about the village where I spent my formative years. That book will at last see the light of day in 2014. (I even manage to mention darts in the chapter on village clubs and sports!)

On the darts front, I hope some of you were able to catch my appearance on ITV4 in *The Power of Darts*. Also you may already know, I have been contracted to write yet another darts book (my *eighth*) which will be published in 2015.

Plenty of darts coming up for both satellite and terrestrial darts fans over the period December to mid-January, and you don't really need me to tell you that the highlights will of course be the PDC and BDO World Championships. I usually attend Lakeside but for the first time for some years am unable to be there.

Finally, to give this issue of *DDN* a festive flavour, I've included here an image of the former No. 1. Ladies darts player as seen on the cover of the December 1978 Christmas issue of *Darts World*. Now onward #44...

DARTITIS (1)

Richard Phillipson from Skipton, North Yorkshire was very quick off the mark to respond to Bob Johnson's excellent article about dartitis, 'the dart players' curse', which appeared in the November issue. Richard wrote:

'Just responding to Bob Johnson's excellent article re: dartitis in November's *DDN*. As a sufferer of the dreaded disease since March 2009 (Yes, I can recall the exact moment it became a conscious part of my game!) I, like many others, have trawled the net for possible causes/solutions. None however, have rung as true as when reading Bob's story.

There are many arguments as to whether dartitis is a mental or physical problem - to be honest I couldn't care less as long as I find a way out the other side - and thankfully I was able to draw many parallels between Bob's experiences and my own.

As a reasonably proficient and naturally quick-throwing local pub league player I suddenly began to think/question my action in pursuit of constant improvement. This quickly led to developing an uncontrollable hitch in my pullback resulting in erratic accuracy, loss of confidence, form and, most importantly, enjoyment. I analysed every aspect of my throw from feet to head. Everything tightened, balance became a huge issue and frustration and embarrassment were common emotions. I was now scared of a game I was previously passionate about and competent at playing.

I hated darts.

No longer could I face playing (and regularly losing) in the local league. Opponents' comments about my 'different' throw and lack of form had a massively negative impact. Trusted and respected darting friends' advice was well meant but had no effect whatsoever. 'Just keep still,' is a great piece of advice, but in the throes of darditis, is an impossibility.

Until you've been there, it is pointless trying to explain. This is where Bob Johnson's article differs from most. Forget anyone else. You alone are the only person who is going to solve this problem. I had to learn to love the game again and want to practice. I lowered my expectations and began to throw with a 'caveman' action. Targets were not important, merely the act of developing a fluid if somewhat ungainly action. With consistent repetition and isolated practice, accuracy improved. I'd shifted focus back to the board rather than how I got the dart to the board. This was a massive breakthrough - not worrying what my action may look like to someone else!

After a few months I managed to find the infamous 'zone' where my throw felt natural and fluid and scores were much more consistent. I actually look forward to practicing more than playing matches now. I am not 'cured' by any means, but have learnt to enjoy playing darts once again. Most importantly, I have learnt to accept I'm now a different player than my previous incarnation, one that enjoys the sport more than ever before.

There are thousands of sufferers out there and I'm glad the subject has received long overdue exposure courtesy of *DDN*. Personally, I wish high profile sufferers such as Eric Bristow and, in particular, Mark Walsh, would share their recovery stories more publicly, as although I believe it is down to individual resilience to overcome darditis, any light at the end of the tunnel is most welcome.

From personal experience we're willing to try anything (maybe not the bucket of water however!). Bob's similar and shared experiences have given me another confidence boost on the road to recovery.

Thank you.'

ASSORTED BOARDS

Richard also made reference in his e-mail to my article about the Portsmouth dartboard. Although he had no information about that particular board it spurred Richard into informing me that he believes his league, the Embsay, Eastby Garage Darts League, Skipton, is the only league that plays on a London Fives board, a

Harrows Quadro 240 board, a Manchester log-end board, a Yorkshire board *and* a standard treble board in the course of the same season! How unique is that?

Or is it?

If you participate in a league where regional dartboards are played on along with the standard dartboard during the same league season why not write to me about it? Send your information to info@patrickchaplin.com.

Richard has agreed to write an article about his league and this will appear in a future issue of *DDN*.

LADIES DARTS ORGANISATION (LDO)

After I circulated news of the TV programme *The Power of Darts*, in which I appeared, Julie Lambie, Chief Executive Officer of the Ladies Darts Organisation (LDO), who has been featured in previous issues of *DDN*, wrote to inform me that she had been interviewed on 11th November by her local regional station, Estuary TV. Julie's interview, in which she outlines the purpose of the LDO and encourages other lady darters to join, can be found on YouTube at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dz6WzJLPfXo&feature=c4-overview&list=UUWenkgH8-RpLwIJ5fkqgAhttp://>

That's great news Julie. You did very well and promoted your sponsors too!

If any other *DDN* readers have appeared on darts-related TV, just let me know, provide the link and I'll include it in a future issue.

BRIAN 'THE KING OF THE MIDLANDS' VAUX

It is always sad to hear of the death of a popular darts player. During the second week of November Joyce McK wrote:

'My husband's uncle, Brian Vaux, sadly passed away on 8th November. We are trying to do a write up in our local paper and looking for some history. Brian was known as 'The King of The Midlands' in the 1970s, played for England (1976) and The Sports Argus charity team. He had many pubs including the *Bee Hive* in West Bromwich and the *Hen & Chickens* in Mosely Street, Birmingham. I was wondering if you could give me any hints as to where I will find archive information on him. The funeral is next Monday (25th November) so we do not have much time. I would be grateful if you could help me in my search.'



Sadly darts archives are few and far between and I believe that I hold more information than most but even I felt challenged by this request. I had heard of Brian but was unsure whether or not I could help Joyce. In the end, with the help of Derek

Brown's research and the PC/*Darts World* photographic archive I was able to provide sufficient information to meet Joyce's request.

Before I became seriously interested in darts history in the early 1980s, the one person who cared about the heritage of the sport was Derek (later Deryk) Brown. In his book *Darts 78* (London: Mirror Books, 1977) Derek wrote the following about Brian:

Brian VAUX (born August 10, 1939) from Newtown, Birmingham, threw as well as he has ever done in '77, which is saying something. Began at 16, was a member of the Sports Argus team at 17, their youngest ever performer. Had a marvellous start to his England career, winning all three in the Home Internationals (v Scotland, Ireland, Wales) at Bristol in '73. Was dropped for the Scotland match in '77, despite winning his previous international against Ireland, and there was much Brummy muttering about that. One of Warwickshire's success men in '77. Says there was no team like the Argus: enjoys his exhibitions for M & B [Brewers Mitchell and Butler] and others. His best moment in a national tournament came when he was runner-up to Jack North in the '76 British Open.

[I wonder if any DDN readers recall the 'Brummy muttering' and know why Brian was dropped for that 1977 match against Scotland.]

In April 1973 at a sports shop in Chelmsley Wood, Birmingham, Brian and two fellow darters, Paul Tunley and John Lynock, became world record holders by scoring 1,000,001 *under match conditions* in a time of 41 hours 6 minutes thrashing the previous record by over twenty hours! The three players' record bid was carefully scrutinised with Bill Perry (Secretary of the Worcestershire Darts Association (WDA)), Graham Duffield (also of the WDA) and Ron Norton (representing the Kidney Machine Fund Committee) all checking all the scores 'by calculator'. *Darts World* (July 1973) proclaimed the new record and reported that, 'Despite the tiring conditions the three players averaged scores of over 400 for every minute they played. In the total were 59 scores of 180.'

Derek Brown referred to Brian's 'best moment' being runner-up in the 1976 British Open. I researched back issues of *Darts World* magazine and found the report of that match. Unfortunately, but as to be expected, much of the report is about the winner, Burnley's Jack North. The report reads:

'In a fine exhibition of controlled throwing, he [Jack North] beat Birmingham's much fancied Brian Vaux in the final with two straight wins in 21 and 25 darts respectively.'

Brian was a naturally gifted darts player who could beat the best but he never, as far as I am aware, sought fame and fortune. However, having said that, you don't earn a nickname in darts like 'The King of the Midlands' without continually taking on and beating quality darts players and earning their respect.

R.I.P. Brian

(Image of Brian Vaux on page 3, reproduced courtesy of the PC/DW Archive)

COMPANY HISTORY - DURRO

Donald W. has written to me, 'Patrick, I've read your really interesting article [on your website] about the history of NODOR/WINMAU. I was wondering if you have any information concerning the history on the Durro darts company.' He later added, 'I love watching darts footage from the late 1970s and 1980s. For me we had real characters in the game back then; something I feel is lacking today. My interest in Durro comes from watching old footage of Eric Bristow and seeing some old *Darts World* adverts of Durro darts featuring Bobby George.'



Clearly I was very pleased that Donald found the NODOR/WINMAU story of interest. Researching the darts industry is mightily difficult as few records remain. I have very little information about Durro although I did interview one of the founders, Paul Durrant, in 1998 in which he gave little away (few companies ever do) except that he claimed his company was the first to manufacture tungsten darts; something that a number of other firms and individuals have claimed to have done in the past.

I do know that the original Durro company, according to *Darts World* advertisements, was based in Romford Road, London E.7 and later moved to Leyton, London E.10 in the mid-1970s and then to Feering, Essex which was where I spoke to Paul Durrant fifteen years ago. (The early Durro advert (shown left) was featured in *Darts World* magazine, Issue 9, August 1973.)

I also referred Donald to *DDN* Issue 41 (September 2013) which, as readers may recall, featured Jon A. whose grandfather was responsible for designing some of the Durro dart flight designs which included Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, comedian Tommy Cooper and actor James Cagney.

In a bid to help Donald further I agreed to raise his query with all readers of *DDN* and to ask if anyone can help piece together the history of DURRO. If you can then please contact me at the usual e-mail address, info@patrickchaplin.com.

And whilst on the subject of darts companies, Eric K. from Holland has asked if I know anything about the GLYDA Darts which had bases in both London and Wolverhampton. Again my knowledge of this company is very limited so if anyone can provide any information please contact me and I'll pass it on to Eric.

From my personal point of view I would like to know more about the history of the TRABRO company (manufacturers of, amongst other things, bristle dartboards, elm match dartboards and galvanised steel soaking tanks) which was based in the East End of London from the 1920s until the 1980s. Again if you have any information, I would love to hear from you.

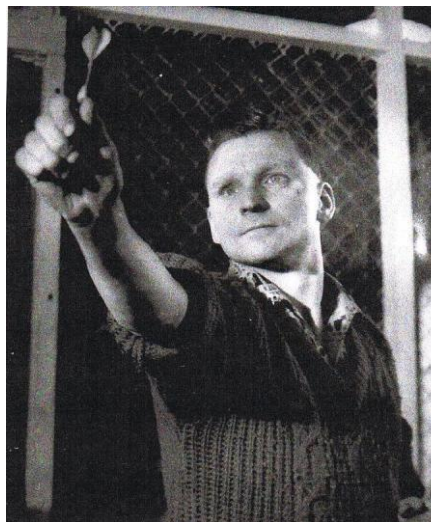
Thanks in advance for any help you can give.

FRANK SYKES

Since the first issue of *DDN* I have occasionally featured exclusive interviews with famous darts players of the past. However, in this issue I turn my attention to an 'ordinary' darts player. My subject this month is a man from Yorkshire, now 86, who was, in his time, a local legend.

Frank Syke's story is made all the more remarkable by the fact that he lost the sight in his right eye when he was only 15 years old yet, even before he started playing serious darts. His left eye was removed and replaced with a glass one.

Throughout his entire career Frank (pictured right in the 1960s) threw darts with his right-hand. When I mentioned his cross-laterality (a right-handed throw, lining up the dart with the left eye) he said, "If I didn't hit my right eyebrow when I played darts, I was not throwing properly. Sometimes the blood used to trickle down my cheek. I used to play then with Schofield 'lights' and when I put in new paper flights, that is what happened."



By the mid-1950s Frank was earning quite a reputation playing for his local pub, the *Rising Sun* at Golcar, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. While Frank earned not one, not two but *three* nicknames, 'Glass Eye Frankie', 'Syky' and 'Syko, the Mad Darter', his team became known as 'The Pot Hunters' due to their consistent success on the oche (or 'hockey' as it was back then).

By the late 1950s/early 1960s Frank's ambition, like so many good pub darts players of that era, was to make it to the Grand Finals of the *News of the World* Individual Darts Championship. Between 1964 and 1969 he achieved the fine record of reaching the finals of the Yorkshire Area three times.

In 1964 Frank won the Huddersfield and Dewsbury Area Final and represented the David Brown Social & Sports Club, Meltham at the Divisional finals held at the Capitol Ballroom, Leeds on Tuesday 3rd March 1964. Frank beat Albert Hodgkiss (Sheffield Area champion) 2-1 in the initial round, then Ray Reynolds (Hull Area champion) 2-0 in the semi-finals and then played Mick Smith (York Area champion) in the final.

Frank recalled, "I went to Leeds on the train and was followed by three coach loads of supporters that cheered me on all the way. When I arrived at Leeds I went into a pub across the road to practice. As I was practicing, another darts player came in and said, "Do you mind pal, if I play?" and of course I said, "Not at all." The man beat Frank 2-1 in the pub and little did he know it was that the man was the player he was destined to meet in the Area final later that day: Mick Smith.

Of the venue, Frank told me that the staging for the darts finals at the Capitol Ballroom, Leeds was 'makeshift' with 'wooden steps up to a platform.' Frank said

that he felt no nerves, was 'cool' and 'never felt any tension' saying, "I just rolled my sleeves up..."

With the match level at 1-1 Frank needed double 20 for the match. His fans began chanting, "Syky! We're off to London!" but unfortunately Frank 'wired' the double top. Mick Smith needed 32 for the match but his first dart for double 16 'nearly hit the treble' but his second dart hit the corner of the double 8 ('just about hanging in the corner'). Mick turned and shouted, "I'm the Champion!" Frank told me, "If I'd jumped up and down that winning dart might well have fallen out!" But he and it didn't.

Frank was back again for the 1965 Divisional Final as winner of the Huddersfield and Dewsbury Area finals. To reach that stage Frank beat his good friend Frank Radforth 2-1 in the Dewsbury, Huddersfield, Batley and West Riding Area Final. Frank Radforth from Dewsbury was always a threat; the programme notes of that Area final stating that whoever met him would 'certainly have to go a bit.' Syko did just that. The victorious Frank told me, "I scored a lovely 180 near the end of the last leg which put me in a good position to finish the game off. I needed that 180 as Frank was really cracking away on his [*favourite*] treble nineteens."

The Divisional finals were held on Wednesday 10th March 1965 at the Madeley Street Baths, Hull. On this occasion Frank represented the *Rose and Crown* Hotel, Longwood and met the York Area champion Mick Smith again but this time in the first round. The result was the same as the 1964 final with Smith winning the match 2-1.

In 1966 Frank fought through to the *News of the World* Yorkshire Divisional final but this time as the Huddersfield & Dewsbury Area winner in the *Player's No. 6 Competition*. This was contested on the same evening as the actual individual Divisional Finals held at the Corn Exchange, Doncaster on Thursday 24th March 1966. Frank represented the Longwood Conservative Club, Huddersfield. At the time, *Player's No. 6* was a popular brand of cigarettes and the format of the competition, as described by Frank, was "You had six darts with which to score as many sixes as you could." Frank added, "On the day I hit treble six, double six and two single sixes, a total of forty-two points but, sadly, that was not enough to win."

Frank made it to the *News of the World* Yorkshire Divisional Finals again in 1969 as winner of the Huddersfield and Dewsbury Area. The Divisional finals were held on Wednesday 12th March 1969 at the St. George's Hall, York. Frank represented the *Prospect Inn*, Longwood and met the Leeds Area champion, Brian Holder in the first round. Frank lost the match 2-1.

Despite his Herculean efforts to make it through to London and the Grand Finals of the *News of the World* tournament, and unlike his friend Frank Radforth who had reached those Finals in 1956, Frank Sykes never made it to the bright lights of the capital. But what a record! 'Syko' was always there or thereabouts...

Another indication of Frank's skills at darts is that he played the legendary Joe Hitchcock on a number of occasions. Frank also acted occasionally as Joe's stooge at exhibitions when Joe entertained the crowds with both his darting and nail-throwing

skills. Frank recalled, “Joe’s nail tricks included knocking a cigarette out of my mouth, head back with a florin [*an old English coin worth two shillings (ten pence in today’s money)*] balanced on my nose which he would knock off with a nail, remove a matchstick held between Frank’s teeth and knock off a plastic ‘Red Barrel’ [*a giveaway from Watney’s brewery which made that brand of keg beer*] placed on each ear with two separate nails one after the other.”

Whenever Joe travelled the country a representative of his sponsor, Watney’s, always accompanied him. Frank said, “On one occasion the rep said to me, “Joe might be retiring. Do you fancy taking his place?” I said, “Not likely. I could never come up to Joe’s talents.”” (Praise indeed for ‘Syko’.)

Frank Sykes retired from darts in 1985 but a year or so ago he took up the game again. Now 86 years young, Frank told me that he is back on the oche and practicing ‘like a mad ‘un nearly every day.’ Although he only has sight in one eye, Frank has also had to contend with the progress of age. Frank admits that his right thumb and two fingers are ‘a bit numb’, so he wears a vinyl glove on that hand to promote a better grip. He has also cut away the right side of his spectacles because, as he told me, “I was always knocking them off.”



Frank now lives in sheltered housing in Halifax where he continues to practice the game he loves whilst occasionally writing to me with more stories of his life in and love of darts. Who knows what the future might bring for ‘Syko, the Mad Darter’?

Bearing in mind that one of the joiners who works for the housing association where Frank lives, and who he sometimes chats with about darts with, is none other than the 2013 Lakeside World Champion Scott Waites, (see above Image © Frank Sykes) so could we see a new darts double act on the oche soon?

DARTITIS (2)

During our exchange of notes over a period of weeks, Frank Sykes told me that, back in the 1950s, when playing for the *Rising Sun*, Golcan, he was struck by an affliction known back then as ‘darters’ elbow’. Frank said that, during a friendly game in which the winner received three pence (in old money), “I got darters elbow, or whatever they called it. I could not believe it because there was no pressure on these games and I really never felt much pressure. It was awful.” For over three weeks Frank was unable to release a dart - so for ‘darters’ elbow’ read ‘dartitis’.

The cure came courtesy of Joe Sykes (no relation) who was in his seventies; a local man who threw Schofield ‘Medium’ darts, a man they called ‘Joe Crack’ because he was able to group his darts in an area no bigger than a sixpenny piece (approximately one half-inch diameter). Frank told me, “It was Joe I had to thank for getting rid of my darters’ elbow. He used to stand behind me in the pub and had me throwing darts

quick. He used to say, “Don’t sight your darts, just throw them anywhere on the board. Get them out of your hand *quick*.”

Frank was back in business, throwing quality darts again within three weeks.

DARTS SALOONS

A few months ago, Kevin M. wrote to me saying, ‘Patrick, I was talking to an old guy last night who told me that he used to go to darts with his dad way back in the day and his job was as follows:

A player threw his darts and then stood back. The Ref counted up the score and then the Ref removed the darts from the board and handed them to the old boy (then 14) and he then returned the darts to the player. He told me that he had to do this for every player during the game, until the match was over. I'm not saying that the guy isn't telling the truth because I would trust him but have you ever heard of anything like this before???’

Well, *this* ‘old boy’ was able to help Kevin. I replied:

‘Kevin, that's a very interesting story. I've not heard of anyone having the job of referee in which they also pull out and return darts to punters in a pub. However, back in the 1930s when darts was proving very popular amongst the middle and upper classes, premises called 'Darts Saloons' appeared in major cities, most popularly in London; the purpose being that those ‘posh’ classes could learn to play the game without having to engage with the working classes in pubs.

These premises employed men to teach the upper classes; the players receiving instructions on how to play. They would then throw their three darts, the referee/teacher would announce the score and write it down and then take the darts out and return them to the player.’

AND FINALLY...

Earlier in this issue, I featured responses from Richard Phillipson concerning dartsitis and the Portsmouth dartboard. Richard has also asked for *DDN* readers help. He wrote, ‘I'm trying to acquire a Vogelpiks dartboard.’



Vogelpik is an old rural Flemish café target game which some believe is where the game of darts actually began. You may also be aware of my belief that the modern game of darts, far from being an ancient English pub game, is a hybrid of the English ‘puff and dart’ and the French ‘flechettes’.

(See my book *Darts in England 1900-1939 – A social history* for details.) The small darts used in the game of vogelpik are not dissimilar to those utilised in ‘flechettes’.

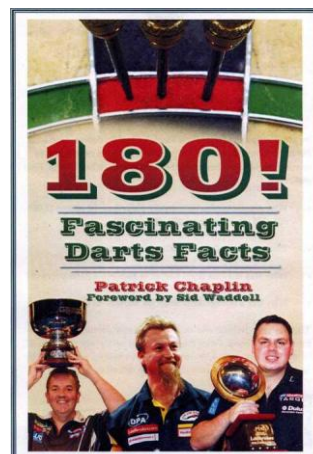
If you can help Richard in his quest contact him at phillipson119@btinternet.com..

BUT BEFORE I GO...

How could I possibly sign off without suggesting that the following darts publications make *fabulous* gifts?

180! Fascinating Darts Facts

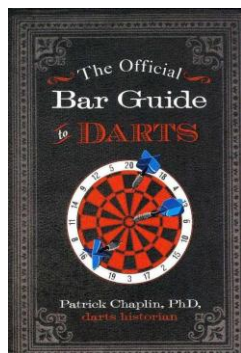
The late Sid Waddell praised *180! Fascinating Darts Facts* saying, “I know of no other book that opens the door on the wild and wonderful world of darts as this.” *Darts World* said, ‘Darts fans and those who are not fans but who have friends and family who love the game don’t have to look any further than *180!* for that special and unique darts-related gift.’ International Darts Consultant Dr. Eddie Norman wrote, ‘Once one starts to read the first page it is impossible to put the book down until the final page is reached.



Published by The History Press *180! Fascinating Darts Facts* is available in both paperback (£7.99) and as an eBook. Copies can be purchased direct from Amazon.com or www.thehistorypress.co.uk.

The Official Bar Guide to Darts

My comprehensive work on darts published globally in 2010 by Puzzlewright Press (an imprint of Sterling Publishing, New York) of which US darts expert and author George Silberzahn wrote, ‘For anyone interested in learning about Darts, this is a must read.’



Dan Peek, author of *To the Point – The Story of Darts in America* said, ‘In my opinion, *The Official Bar Guide to Darts* is the only book on the theory and practice of the sport of Darts that anyone will ever need. Forget about the Rest – Seriously.’

Signed copies of *The Official Bar Guide to Darts* (and *180!*) are available from A180.co.uk and dartscorner.co.uk.

Darts in England 1900-1939 – A social history

When I started out in 1996 on my journey to attain a PhD in darts history I never knew that it would lead to my research being published by the prestigious Manchester University Press (MUP) but that is exactly what happened. I was awarded my PhD by the Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge in 2006 and the hardback edition of *Darts in England 1900-1939 – A social history* was published by MUP in 2009.

Having received excellent reviews from globally recognised sports academics, this book was shortlisted for British Society of Sports History’s prestigious Lord Aberdare Sports Literary Prize.

STUDIES IN POPULAR CULTURE
Darts in England,
1900–39
A social history
PATRICK CHAPLIN



In 2012, to enable *all* darts fans to access my work, Manchester University Press published *Darts in England...* in paperback at a most reasonable price of £15.99 (plus p & p). (It had originally cost £55 in hardback.) This can be ordered from Amazon.com.

OK...

...so that's it for another month.

All that remains for me to wish you all a very HAPPY NEW YEAR!

I hope you have enjoyed this issue and, as usual, all feedback is welcomed. As regular readers will know, I tend to rest up over the festive season so the next time *DDN* will appear will be **February 2014** unless...

'Til then...enjoy your darts!

Best wishes,

Patrick

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Check out even more fascinating darts facts by visiting my website www.patrickchaplin.com

...and if you would like to learn more about the Pub History Society (PHS), the Society promoting the heritage of British pubs and the people associated with them, please visit www.pubhistorysociety.co.uk.