

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

Issue 68 January 2016

WELCOME TO 2016



I hope you all enjoyed the festivities over recent weeks and saw the New Year in in the appropriate fashion. I trust you will all have a very happy and productive 2016.



Thanks to all who sent me their good wishes for the season and the New Year and, as always, for all the feedback received. As regards the latter, special thanks to those who responded to me regarding the Yorkshire Board (pictured left). (See more, later in this issue.)

I am very pleased to start the New Year by welcoming all who have subscribed over the past couple of months which include Steve Waller from Florida, USA, and Robert and Dana Cooke who are currently living in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Robert told me,

I am originally, many years ago, an exile from New Zealand but now have my business here with my wife Dana. A few months ago I met up with Eddie Norman in Taipei and he mentioned that you wrote an incredible darts magazine that you sent out by e-mail to darts fans around the world. He spoke very highly of what you do for darts and has sent me your book 180 Fascinating Darts Facts which was incredible.

Eddie (pictured, right) was one of the most interesting people that my wife and I had ever met. We only play darts locally for fun but he came along to our small local club and introduced friends of mine to the world of darts. Since Eddie talked on the world of darts they are all hooked and I wondered if I might receive a copy of your darts magazine he mentioned that I could print off as a read in our club each month.



We are very small in darts here but since Eddie's visit interest is growing in the sport.

No sooner said than done. I *think* that Robert and Dana are my first subscribers from Taiwan. Mind you, I could be wrong...

Welcome too to Paola Martyn who wrote:

I have a tiny pub/restaurant here in Toa Alta near our capital San Juan in sunny Puerto Rico. We are proudly an unincorporated territory of the great USA. We only have about ninety-five players who play darts here but they are very keen and I am trying to start a darts league. A British man (Yes. Dr. Eddie Norman again] gave me all the rules to do this. Before he came to see us nobody played darts. Now we have nearly 100...

We had the World Baseball Classics here but we are keen to get darts going and playing. We had the British dartsman visit us on his Caribbean tour. He gave us four dartboards to play on and now people are keen to play and [interest in darts is] growing since his visit. The British man said we need to learn about more darts and you may please send me a darts booklet flyer each time each month or each two months by e-mail. Is this possible please? We are keen to learn more from where darts started in Great Britain.

Surely Paola *must* be my first subscriber from Puerto Rico...

Welcome Steve, Robert, Dana and Paola! Welcome all!

FANTASTIC!

Thanks to *DDN* stalwart Mick Simpson who wrote

Morning Patrick. I know I am like a broken record when I keep saying what a fantastic job you keep doing. But the fact is it's true you never cease to amaze me with your fantastic knowledge of this great game of ours... I am sure you have many more fantastic topics to tell us about...If I had a hat I'd take it off to you.

Rest assured Mick there are lots more facts (fantastic or otherwise) to come in 2016.

Mick then asked me...

“WHERE ARE THE NEWS OF THE WORLD TROPHIES?”

He wrote: *It's brilliant to read such facts about the greatest tournament ever to be played (in my opinion) the NEWS OF THE WORLD. I have had a few beers in Jim Pike's pub that he represented back then The Hope. I used to work up the road from there. Do you by any chance know if the N.O.W. ever gave out solid gold medals? Also do you know what happened to the trophies that Phil Taylor and Linda Jones won?*



On the first count the answer is most definitely 'Yes.' As regards the whereabouts of the major *News of the World* trophies awarded to the winner of the Men's and Ladies' tournaments I can confirm that they are safe in the News UK vault.

The image of me (left) holding the men's trophy was taken a while back. (Image © Chippix. Used with permission.) There is no other way that I would ever have held that trophy! The Archivist at the News UK archive recently told me:

We hold both the men's and women's National Individual Darts Championship trophies, together with the men's regional trophies for London & Home Counties, Lancashire & Cheshire, Wales, Yorkshire, North of England, Eastern Counties,

Midland Counties, West of England and the Republic of Ireland and the women's regional trophies for London & Home Counties, Yorkshire, North of England, Eastern Counties, Midlands Counties, Western Counties and the Republic of Ireland. All are held in our archive vault in north London.

When asked if the trophies will ever go on display he replied, “*We have no present plans to display them but may well do so in the future.*”

It's good to know that they're all safe and sound. I also know for a fact that a number of *News of the World*-related trophies (including Jim Pike's runners-up for 1939 and Eddie Brown's 1962 *News of the World* winners' trophy) have found their way into private collections whilst others, regrettably, have been sold for scrap!

JIM PIKE – THE NEWS OF THE WORLD YEARS – PART TWO 1939 AND BEYOND

In the December *DDN* I wrote about the legendary English darts player Jim Pike and his first appearance in a *News of the World* darts tournament final in London in 1935 where he was defeated 2-1 by 27-year-old unemployed bricklayer's labourer, William Forecast. In this second part I continue the story of Jim Pike's involvement with the *News of the World*. (Pike is pictured below, left, circa 1940s, throwing darts with his *NoW* teammate Leo Newstead watching over Pike's left shoulder.)

As far as I can tell, although it can be safely assumed that Pike entered the *News of the World* tournament every year from at least 1935, I can find no trace of him making the last eight in 1936, 1937 or 1938, his next appearance being in 1939.



Things had changed more than a little since Pike's first appearance in a *News of the World* final in 1935. In the 1935/36 season the competition had been extended to include the Home Counties but at the start of the 1938/39 campaign it had been extended still further to embrace the whole of the south of England. The *News of the World* now comprised of six divisions, London & the South, Wales, Lancashire & Cheshire, Yorkshire, the North of England and the Midland Counties and had attracted, in total, more than 257,000 entrants.

Given the growing popularity of the tournament the venue for the final had been moved from *The Horns*, Kennington to a much larger venue the Royal Agricultural Hall in north London. This was just as well as the finals attracted a crowd of **14,534**; a record then and one that still stands today.

Another change was that the field now comprised of sixteen players from London and the South of England including Jim Pike, the County of London divisional champion (representing the *Windmill*, Southwark, Fred Wallis, the Sussex divisional champion (*Alexandra Arms*, Eastbourne) and the Essex county champion, P. Askew. The latter I mention only for the reason that he was from my own home town of Maldon, playing

out of the *Warwick Arms*. Wallis had won the London and Home Counties title in 1938 so effectively was the defending champion. How would he fare?

The final games took place in London on Thursday 11th May 1939, commencing, or as the programme stated 'Men on the Mark' at 7 p.m.

Pike, Wallis and Askew all made it through the first round. Askew was defeated in the next round but Pike and Wallis, along with A. C. Birchmore (Cambridge) and Marmaduke Breckon (the Middlesex champion) made up the four semi-finalists.

In the first semi-final Birchmore played Breckon. In the first leg of the best of three game Breckon left himself 64 with Birchmore back on 110. 'The Champ', who reported on the match, later wrote 'I was not alone in considering that Breckon was already "past the post"'. However, what happened next stunned the crowd. 'The Champ' continued:

A wild shout disillusioned me. The record crowd of more than 14,500 saw Birchmore start with treble 18 (which made 54), a 20, and then his last dart went plonk into double 18. He had achieved – what looked impossible – 110 which was just what he wanted to make game.

Many would have thought after such a tremendous finish to the first game that Breckon would never have recovered and that he was dead in the water but no. In the second game Birchmore had a chance to win the game and the match on double top but missed 'by the proverbial coat of paint' with all three darts. Breckon, also waiting on 40, stepped up to the mark and hit double top with his first dart to level the match.

The start of the deciding leg showed both players being nervous as Breckon, who threw first, 'opened with a paltry 24' whilst Birchmore scored only 30. However, Breckon soon showed his class and won the leg and the match on double 10 with Birchmore not far away on 56.

In the second semi-final Jim Pike found himself up against Fred Wallis the current holder of the London & Home Counties title. 'The Champ' commented

Make no error. Wallis is a grand player and since taking the honours last year he has many times given exhibition games, descriptions of which have been broadcast. Here in the second game, for example, he had a run of 100, 100, 85 and 83, yet with it all - he lost! – Pike won two straight games.

The Champ's report of the final is recorded here in full.

Pike won the toss and he kept ahead to win the first leg in spite of the fact that Breckon made a century in a struggle of surprisingly low averages. Each man seemed to be aiming for pet numbers, and Pike made the game shot.

Breckon restarted and his figures speak for themselves – 60, 97, 100, 43, 126. Against that Pike opened with the lowest score of the night, five, which evoked a wave of disappointment but he quickly made up leeway with scores of 71, 85, 26, 126, 64 and

80, which left him 44 only to get. Ah yes but Breckon as winner of the toss, was on his toes, and he at once made it game all.

Now for the decider, and please note that Pike this time had the luck in the toss.

Before he could start Breckon dashed forward and surprised him by embracing him. The sporting gesture was not lost sight of by the vast crowd. Dead silence followed and Pike flashed 60 on the electric scorer.

Breckon toed the hockey, and, amid cheers, recorded a century. Then a 45 by Pike brought 83 from Breckon, and a loud "Oh!" from the pent-up spectators signalled a 26 by Pike. He was yielding his advantage.

Breckon replied with 97 and again Pike comparatively failed. His visit produced only 25. Breckon stood up – and 99 went to his credit. Pike, a seasoned campaigner, tried calmly and well to retrieve the situation, but three subsequent efforts could produce only 57, 67 and 33. By this time Breckon was left to get 40 and he beat the favourite without turning a hair.

So, Marmaduke Alfred Breckon became the 1939 *News of the World* London and the South of England darts champion whilst Jim Pike was, once again, the runner-up. Breckon, a hod-carrier by trade and a Yorkshireman by birth, (pictured below with his wife and his *News of the World* trophies) (Image: PC Archive) was awarded the huge *News of the World* trophy by Henry 'Homicide' Armstrong, the triple world boxing champion. Leaving the stage about midnight the champion rushed away and filled the huge cup with – Yes, you've guessed it – **Coffee!**

By 6 a.m. the following morning the champion who had only just reached the pinnacle of darts success was, after a few hours' sleep, back shouldering his hod and 'ascending his daily ladder.'

Just a few months later war broke out and the *News of the World* darts championship was suspended for the duration. Pike was asked by the *News of the World* organisers to put together and captain a team of darts champions to help raise money for charity, primarily for the Red Cross, during the war years.



The *News of the World* individual darts championship restarted at the beginning of the 1947/48 season but Pike was not among the entrants. Ironically he was deemed by the organisers to be a professional and, as Derek Brown (author of *The Guinness Book of Darts*) opined, 'Whether [Pike] was discouraged from entering or whether he was barred, is not clear.' However, by then Pike had set up his own darts business and was in great demand as an exhibition player. Jim Pike died in February 1960, aged 56.

THE YORKSHIRE DARTBOARD

In the last issue I asked if anyone could help me with the details of the height and oche length relating to the Yorkshire Board.

My thanks to two subscribers from the USA no less (Glen from Seattle, Washington and Scott from Austin, Texas) who both brought my attention to information contained in David King's excellent website Darts501.com. I publish below (with permission) the results of David's research into the matter.

Yorkshire Dartboard set-up and rules

The height and throwing distances for the Yorkshire dartboard differ than that of a standard dartboard.

The Yorkshire dartboard (pictured below, right) is hung so that the centre is 5ft 6ins (1.676m) from ground level, the throwing line or 'oche' is 7ft 2ins (2.184m) from the dartboard face at ground level. The diagonal distance from the centre of the bull to the throwing line at floor level is 9ft (2.743m).



Some may disagree with the set-up I have listed above and this may be due to changes seemingly adopted in parts of Yorkshire but not necessarily all. The information I have gathered from Yorkshire and professional dart players confirms this set-up. However I am aware that some set the Yorkshire board up as per a standard clock board.

Subscriber David Wales e-mailed me to say

Many years ago I used to live in Beverley, East Yorkshire. I recall playing on the Yorkshire dartboard back then and the board height, as I recall, was lower than the normal dartboard at 5'6" the throwing distance was 9' was measured from the bullseye to the ground as this allowed for and any floor imperfections. I don't know of any variations to this. I guess if there are any Yorkshire boards played on now they may have adopted 5'8" height, 7'9¼" throw distance alone the floor as per the normal board.

In fact David King was quick too to point me in the direction of his newly updated (and splendid) website. He told me:

John Lowe got in contact with some old friends that played on the board using his social media. I can also confirm the 9' bull to oche does give 7' 2" throwing distance from the board. The info comes from Brian Bird Yorkshire County darts.

You can find the information at <http://darts501.com/Yorkshire.html> and while you are there why not have a tour of the site. There's so much of interest there. (Thanks David.)

DR. DARTS AND FLIGHT CLUB

For the two or three months up to late November last year I was assisting with the provision of darts memorabilia for an exciting new club that has now opened up in London called Flight Club.

This is darts seen as never before. Hardened darts fans might not like it as there are no leagues or organised tournaments just 'Social Darts'. Unicorn has assisted with dartboards and darts and Flight Club have installed a self-scoring steel tip system.

I visited the Club when it was just a shell and negotiated the sale of some items of darts memorabilia with SEO and Founder Steve Moore who was insistent that, however modern the approach to darts was, he would make an assured nod in the direction of darts' heritage. Steve also purchased copies of old images from me and from top darts photographer Steve Daszko.

At the time of writing Flight Club was fully booked for the next two months but you can find out all you need know by visiting <http://flightclubdarts.com/>

I think you'll be surprised. *Very* surprised.

DDN MAILING

Over the past year I have experienced a few problems (all hopefully now resolved) with regards to mailing out *DDN*. However, I thought I would just remind you all that *DDN* is always sent out to subscribers before the tenth day of each month. So, if there is no sign of it in your in-box by that day please drop me a line (quoting the subject line from a previous e-mail from me (for example 'DDN G') as the gremlins might have struck again! I will then rush your *DDN* to you.

AND FINALLY...

A PAIR OF DARTS?

A good friend of mine within the darts industry writing under the pseudonym 'Baffled & Frustrated' contacted me last month. He wrote:

Yet again a correspondent has today contacted us about "a pair of darts". It has always intrigued me how this has come into common parlance when - as far as I know - the game has always been played with a set of three darts. Any ideas? Was it at some point played with only two?

An excellent question I hope you will agree. Here's my reply:

I still hear that expression 'a pair of darts' even today in local pubs and have often thought about its origins as, as you said, modern darts has never been played with just two darts. However, it is likely that its popular predecessor was.

Contrary to most people's perception of darts history, darts as we know it today is comparatively recent. There is little or no evidence that it was played on the

dartboard and with the darts we know today before the last quarter of the nineteenth century and, even then, sporadically and mainly in the south east.

What was very popular before that was the game of 'puff and darts' or 'puff darts' where small miniature darts were blown through a long tube at a random numbered target: best score with TWO DARTS being the winner. I assume that this was the derivation of the phrase 'a pair of darts.'

Towards the end of the nineteenth century 'puff and darts' was featured in THE LANCET, no less; the cause for concern being that players, instead of breathing in BEFORE they put their mouths to the tube and blew, actually put the dart in the tube and then their mouths to the tube and then BREATHED IN. This often resulted in the small dart being drawn down into the gullet and in a number of cases proved fatal. (Even Edgar Allan Poe mentions death by 'puff and darts' in one of his short stories.) Safety versions of puff and darts were introduced but its fate as a pub game had been sealed and slowly but surely, round the turn of the twentieth century, darts as we know it today began to become popular, initially via fairgrounds and a short time later via the brewers.



So 'Dr. Darts' reckons 'a pair of darts' is a throw-back to those days.

Interestingly the photograph above right shows a modern take on puff and dart. The image (© *Herald Express*) taken in July 1993 shows the ladies' team from the *Green Mantle* club, Paignton (where the photo was taken) having taken on 'Torbay's blowpipe experts' the *Railway Inn*. The ladies beat the visitors five legs to two in what was billed as 'Devon's first blowpipe darts match.'

At the time the *Railway Inn* team were checking with darts organisers if blowpipes could be used in league play!

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