

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

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HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL MY READERS

Thanks to everyone who sent me their good wishes for Christmas and the New Year. Sadly, two weeks before Christmas, my father passed away suddenly which naturally cast a shadow over our proposed festive and New Year celebrations. He was 97. With so much work to be done, darts research will have to take a back seat until all issues have been resolved. Thus this *DDN* will be the last to be published until March. I trust you all understand.

NEW WEBSITE FOCUSSES ON PLYMOUTH (DEVON) DARTERS

Over recent months I have been in contact with Steve Chapman, renowned in Plymouth, Devon over the years as a key reporter on all things darts in that town and beyond.

Steve, who for many years wrote darts reports for the local press, especially the *Plymouth Evening Herald*, has been of great help to me in the past in relation to facts about key darts players in that area. Now retired Steve (pictured) told me recently



One of my earliest reports came in April 1973 and the encounter in Plymouth when Devon entertained Sweden who included a young Stefan Lord and a mid-interval exhibition match over a leg of 3001 involved the great Tommy O'Regan.

I was also present on March 28, 1976, when a Plymouth darts player, Timmy Green, defeated Eric Bristow in the final of the Golden Games which was also held in Plymouth and televised by Westward TV. Memories! ! !

Indeed *Darts World* (May 1976) recorded that Timmy Green recorded three 180s and 'held the edge' over Bristow and 'stormed on to win' 2-0 and won £500 cash and a trophy, the runner-up receiving £100 and a trophy. Green's performance so impressed the Golden Games' sponsor, the bookmaker John Owen that Owen told a reporter, "The quality of darts was the finest I have ever seen. I am prepared to back Tim in a series of 21 games, starting at 1,001 against anyone in the world." Interestingly an invitation match that followed Timmy's success was won by Devon's Paul Gosling who beat another Plymouth player the world-renowned Cliff 'Ticker' Inglis in the final.

Now retired, Steve Chapman he has set up his own website www.threeinthebed.co.uk. He told me back in October

My website is basically darts-related for all things in Plymouth and Devon County matches. It's only been up and running since 18.00 on Tuesday, October 10 and within a few days I had 2,281 site visits and encouraging comments. I have had to do this as I think after almost

40 years my darts page in the Plymouth Herald is about to be no more. This has not been set up for any monetary gain, just so the Plymouth darts players have a platform for all their achievements.

I am revisiting some of my earlier interviews to put up on to my new website. I started with my interview nearly 15 years ago with Ralph Lancaster who has just completed 50 years playing in Plymouth. At the beginning of January 2018 I will probably post my interview with Timmy Green (mentioned above), John Goves (the winner of the Whitbread Flowers Dartsathlon in 1988), Fred Pritchard (a South West Area winner of the News of the World no fewer than 15 times) and last but not least, the first man to win the WINMAU World Masters in 1974, Cliff "Ticker" Inglis...all Plymouth darts players.

In response to a plea for help from Steve I was able, via Jay Tomlinson former proprietor of *Bull's-Eye News*, to track down American darts player Len Heard (pictured, right.) (Image courtesy PC/DW archive. Used with permission. Heard, a plumber by trade emigrated from Plymouth to the USA in 1973. He represented his adopted country in the Embassy World Championships 1980 and 1981 and at the *News of the World* Individual Darts Championship finals in 1990.



Steve has now completed an article about Len Heard which he will post on his website on 18th January to coincide with Len's 76th birthday. Check out Steve's website. It's a great read.

And there will be more from Steve later in this issue.

NODOR – 'SCHWEPPE'S BITTER LEMON' DARTBOARD

website visitor David H. recently contacted me. He wrote:



I have recently inherited a very old unused Nodor Dartboard in its box. It has Schweppes printed twice round the board. It also has a 1958 blue NODOR stamp on the reverse. Is this of any value?

I don't give valuations but thought this dartboard was a of interest so I e-mailed my key contact at NODOR sending a number of photos that David had forwarded to me, including the one on the left here. My contact replied:

The e-mail and photos of the Schweppes Bitter Lemon board are really interesting – it's always nice to hear stories of old products etc. Pat, I have to say that this one had us scratching our heads, but I think we've figured it out...

Firstly, the carton clearly states that the board was made in Bedwas. On the basis that the company didn't relocate to Wales until 1970...it suggests that the board was made post-1970. One possibility is that the carton may not be the one that the board was originally packed in. Could the board have been made in London in 1957, stored in a warehouse somewhere for 13 + years and then have been repacked in a new carton featuring the Welsh address?

A possibility, but a long shot.

Looking at the markings on the rear of the board, one can then see the initials 'TKH'. These are the initials of one of the machine operators - Terry - who worked for the company between 1974 and 1996. Interestingly, Terry was one of around 20 people who originally worked at the Bedwas factory and then commuted daily to Bridgend after we bought the company in 1983.

There are also some numbers printed on the rear of the board. At first glance, they appear as 31.4.14. We know that the board certainly predates 2014 and, unless Pat "The Master of April Fool Gags" Chaplin has managed to shoehorn an extra day into the calendar, 31st of April is also a non-starter...

More likely is that the numbers are actually 81.4.14, suggesting that the date of manufacture is 14th April 1981... Certainly...interesting... but all the above indicates that this board is some 36 years old... As your [enquirer] suggests, it still looks absolutely pristine. It's certainly not approaching retirement age and should offer several more years of happy darting.

FIFTY NOT OUT FOR HIGH-FLYER LANCASTER

The history of darts is not just about those who become household names, it is mainly about millions of ordinary, casual players who simply enjoy the game on a recreational basis with friends and, of course, the hundreds of thousands of players who make a name for themselves at their own local level, never making the dizzy heights of championship or televised darts. These latter players become local heroes.

In this article darts journalist Steve Chapman records one such local hero who recently achieved fifty year of darts-playing in Plymouth, Devon and who is still going strong.

A SPORTSMAN'S life is usually relatively short, but one Plymouth darts player who defies the rule is Ralph Lancaster who has just completed 50 years on the oche of Plymouth hostelrys. He started playing in 1967 at *The Trafalgar* in Ebrington Street and at the time, did not even have his own set of darts!

Lancaster (pictured) first got serious in 1969 and moved to the *Fishermans Arms*, where the side was very successful in the Tivvy League, which was later to become the Men's Whitbread League.

He remained there for three seasons picking up his first trophies when the team won the league title, Knockout Cup and Attwood Cup and Lancaster partnered Ron Penaluna to the pairs title in 1971-72.

Lancaster moved to the *Longroom* in September 1972, but his stay only lasted two seasons as the team, one of the best pub sides that ever played in Plymouth, were disbanded.



In the season of 1974-75 Lancaster began a successful flirtation with the Ind Coope [*Brewery*] League, later to be taken over by Halls, Oxford and West, which lasted right through to the end of the 1985-86 season. During this time, representing the Seymour Arms, the team won the league championship no fewer than *seven* times, emerging with the league and cup double on four occasions.

Personal success for Lancaster during these years saw him take the doubles title with Martin Smith in 1982-83, again in 1984-85 and he was the captain's winner the season in between. He was crowned individual champion in 1982-83 and emerged as supreme individual champion on two occasions in 1983-84 and 1985-86.

The following season Lancaster was back in the Courage League, albeit for only one season, turning out for the *Lord Beresford*. The Devonport side took the league title and the Johnstone Trophy and Lancaster claimed yet another individual title.

Season 1987-88 saw Lancaster move to the *Fellowship Inn* and success followed when he won the Courage captain's cup. The following season Lancaster was on the move once again and displayed his talents in the Bass Open League for the *Victory Inn*. As well as taking yet another singles title, Lancaster helped to win the doubles, trebles and fours and the team, not surprisingly, were league champions.

Brewery leagues were now being phased out around this time and the Courage League (formerly Plymouth Breweries League and PB Courage) then had three new names in a relatively short space of time.

It went from the Courage League to the John Smiths League before being sponsored by Booker Cash & Carry and finally Trophydart.

Throughout these years the team that displayed their talents at *The Trelawney* and *Victory Inn* reigned supreme and Lancaster was the captain of this great side throughout the nineties. Three of the main titles within these leagues were the championship crown, Knockout Cup and Johnstone Trophy and the team did the treble no fewer than *six* times. As well as steering a successful side, Lancaster also remained a good individual player and claimed more success when taking the captain's title in 1994-95 and 1998-99.

The last Plymouth men's league to uphold the traditional fixed double start was the Devonport and District Social Clubs League. Lancaster first came to prominence in this league in 1990-91 when the newly formed Kings Tamerton Social Club won the division three crown.

Promotion the following year saw them emerge as division two champions with their final accolade coming in 1993-94 when they took the division one championship – three divisional titles in as many years. During those three seasons the side also won the Knockout Cup and Lancaster himself clinched another doubles and individual title.

After winning the division one title, Lancaster moved to the St Johnston Social Club and had been the recipient of one trophy or another in every other season up to 2004. Up to that year, St Johnston had been division one champions on no fewer than eight occasions and had clinched the knockout cup five times.

Lancaster was crowned individual champion in 1997-98 and runner-up twice.

Ralph Lancaster was also a big player on the British Inter County Championship scene, making no fewer than 149 appearances. He has turned out for Devon on 94 occasions and represented Cornwall 55 times, being part of the Duchy squad that won the British Inter County Championship title in 1991-92

He made his debut for Cornwall in 1989 and last wore the black and gold in 1988 against Somerset. Ironically, one of his best performances came whilst playing for Cornwall against Devon in 1994 and was even featured on Westward Television. Lancaster came from 2-1 down to edge out Devon's John Syvrett 3-2, aided by legs in 15 and 16 and a checkout of 121. The Plymothian came out of this encounter with a very respectable average of 28.98.

In the year of his Cornish debut, Lancaster partnered another Duchy stalwart John Goves in the John Bull Bitter pairs championship, but represented a Devon hostelry, namely *The Lugger*, a public house in Devonport. They won the South West area play-offs and qualified for the national finals at Eltham, London, where the top prize carried a winner's purse of £1,500. The duo did not win, but did exceptionally well to reach the semi-finals. This being a national competition, it was no mean feat.

Lancaster had started to participate in national competitions as early as 1974 and it was in this year that he won through to the last eight of the British Open before bowing out to England international Alan Glazier, despite winning a leg in just 10 darts.

Lancaster has been an ever present in Plymouth's most prestigious tournament, namely the Champion of Champions from its inauguration in 1985 and his persistence finally paid off when he was crowned Champion of Champions in 1996.

In the thirty-one years that this competition has been in operation, only three players have successfully defended their title. John Goves in 1986, Flynn Jones in 1995 and Adrian Lamerton in 2006, three different decades.

Ralph Lancaster came very close to having his name added to that illustrious trio when, in 1997, he won through to the grand final once again, only to be beaten in the odd leg of seven by Tony Turner.

The new millennium brought a different insight to local darts and the money leagues replaced what was traditionally the "grass roots" leagues.

Success remained with the Victory Inn though and they emerged champions of the Monday Premier League in 2001-02 and 2002-2003. Arguably the highest standard of darts at this time was being portrayed in the Plymouth City Super League and Lancaster was privileged to captain the Victory team for six seasons, winning the league title on every occasion. Lancaster told me:

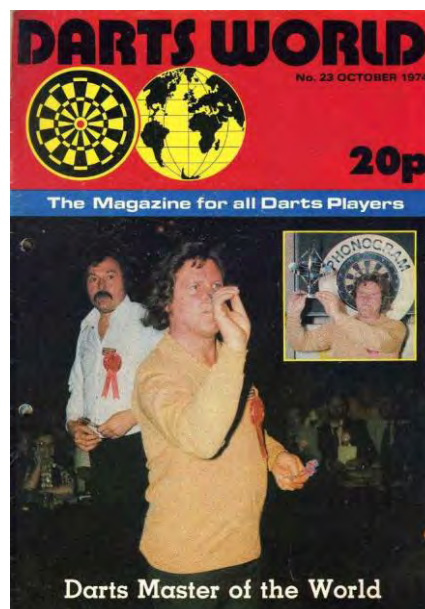
“I have had the privilege to play alongside some of the great Plymouth players over the years.

Two of them being the late, great, Cliff “Ticker” Inglis, who was the first player to win the Winmau World Masters in 1974 and Tim Green who, at the height of his successful career, was ranked number eight in Great Britain”.

[The image, right, of the front page of *Darts World* magazine, issue number 22, October 1974, shows ‘Ticker’ during the first World Masters that year. Image PC/DW archive.]

Other notable players that Lancaster rolled off were Fred Pritchard, Joe and George Bishop, Kevin O’Connor, Tim McCoy and Des Stabb to name just a few and more recently, John Goves and Glyn Wells.

“I have had the honour to captain most of the teams that I have played for, but the best captain I played under was Geoff Gunning” he added.



Fifty years on from that Monday evening in September 1967, Ralph Lancaster is still strutting his stuff on the Plymouth darts scene and only in June of this year he was still good enough to make the final of the Secretaries’ Cup in the Plymouth Open League.

Still a valued member of his various teams, Lancaster competes in the Monday Open League (Ker St Social Club), Porters Function Room 501 Top 20 League (Octagon Social Club) and Plymouth and District Friday League (Kings Tamerton Community Centre).

Thanks Steve.

DARTS LINGO - A THING OF THE PAST?

Subscriber Mick Simpson was intrigued by my article on darts terminology featured in *DDN* #90 (September) and wrote

That's a great postcard about 'bed and breakfast'. [Here Mick is referring to 'bed and breakfast' being slang for a score of 26 with three darts] I don't hear that from younger players. Perhaps they are ashamed to score so low?

All darts players, famous and infamous, professional or amateur, good or not-so-good, hit low scores now and again (or in my case, over and over and over again. However, I believe there has been a cultural



change in the game where the slang or 'lingo' on the oche is being naturally phased out as less and less people use it.

Mick has made a good point though. I've been throwing darts of doubtful quality for many years and I rarely use the special language of darts anymore. When I was a member of the *Blue Boar* darts team back in the 1980s we used it seemingly all the time. (We used to curse a lot too.) I told Mick

As regards darts 'lingo' in general I don't think the younger players are interested in using it. It's possible that the introduction of new darts terminology ceased with the death of Sid Waddell. None of the commentators of today seem to use it.

What do other *DDN* readers think? Do you still use darts lingo when on the oche?

If so, please write to me and prove me wrong. Contact me at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com.

THE RAVEN DARTBOARD

Steve Doyle, one of my US subscribers writes:

I'm hoping you can provide me with some information!! Looking for some history on Raven dartboards!! [Pictured below] I always loved the distinctive black and white bull and was thrilled to find one in unused condition!! At one time I even had a rubber floor mat with the toe line on it made by Raven.

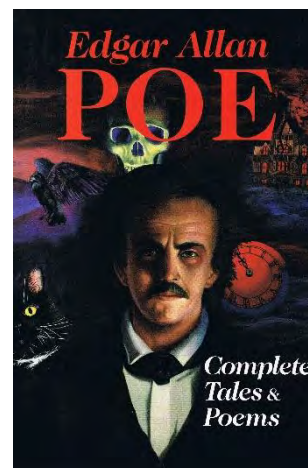


To my knowledge they no longer exist. Were they simply a sub-company to one of the bigger board makers? I'm curious as it was always my favorite board! Not sure whatever happened to my original... It's a welcome addition to my small collection.

I had a RAVEN dartboard up to a short while ago which bears the legend 'Made in the UK' on the reverse and 'Official Dartboard of the US Darting Association' on the box and initially wrote to globe-trotting darts ambassador Eddie Norman to see what he knew. He replied:

You ask about The Raven board, yes this was Bob McCloud's board and it was made by NODOR as a private label board. We [The House of Darts, Bristol, UK] used to sell a few for Bob and I had a couple on the wall in my office, which Bob loved to see when he visited us. But he pushed it through the United States Darting Association and his company, Darts Unlimited Limited, 516 Fifth Avenue in New York...

I have always imagined that the dartboard (pictured above) was named after Edgar Allan Poe's famous poem 'The Raven'. The Americans have always been fascinated (as indeed have I) by Poe who was one of the first US literary giants and remains so today. **BUT**. I think I *may* be wrong on this.



However, in the half of a century I have been reading Poe's works I have only ever discovered one reference to darts. This appears in Poe's short story *The Angel of the Odd* (1844). Poe relates

The avenues of death are numerous and strange. A London paper mentions the decease of a person from a singular cause. He was playing at 'puff and dart,' which is played with a long needle inserted in some worsted, and blown at a target through a tin tube. He placed the needle at the wrong end of the tube, and drawing his breath strongly to puff the dart forward with force, drew the needle into his throat. It entered the lungs, and in a few days killed him.

The moral of this story must surely be "Blow. Don't suck!"

'Puff and darts' was the most popular form of darts played in the UK up until the mid-to-late nineteenth century when the modern game began to evolve. Cases like that quoted by Poe were commonplace and even featured in the medical journal *The Lancet*.

See you in March.

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