

DR. DARTS' NEWSLETTER

Issue 99

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INTERNATIONAL PUB DARTS AND 'THE PIT'

Due to the untimely death of Eric Bristow MBE in April and the May issue being totally devoted to the memory of the great man, the following item had to be carried forward to this month. I trust it was worth the wait.



Usually, when I receive questions via my website www.patrickchaplin.com or by e-mail relating to darts history, I can provide an answer within a few days either from my own archive or by consulting one or more of my numerous contacts in the world of darts.

However, on one occasion last autumn, a question was raised relating to a pub here in the UK, to which I had no answer. The enquirer had written

I visited Looe, Cornwall in 1970, and there was a pub there, Smugglers I think, that had a low ceiling, so to play darts one had to stand in a hole in the floor, covered by a trapdoor when not in use. My memory tells me that this pub held a darts tournament with Boston, Massachusetts I believe, via Telstar, the first International televised match.

I went back there some years ago, but the pub had been redesigned, the trap door and darts board gone, and no one knew anything about a Telstar match. Was I dreaming? I can't seem to find out anything about it...

Having found nothing about this apparently unique darts match in my archive and there being no national or regional darts magazines in 1970, I wrote a letter to the editor of the *Cornish Times* hoping that readers of that newspaper would be able to help. Did they know anything about the *Smugglers* pub, the international darts match, or of playing darts from a hole in the floor?

They did not let me down.

More or less immediately, a good number of readers told me that my enquirer had the wrong pub. It was not the *Smugglers Inn* at all but the *Jolly Sailor* at West Looe (pictured above).

Reader John Pengelly told me:

I remember the dart pit very well. As a young man I played darts for the Jolly Sailor...The dartboard was inside the pub door on the left with the pit by the coal fire at the end of the bar. It was because of the low-beamed ceilings. The pit was boarded over when in not in use.

During the 1930s darts experienced its first 'boom' and became extremely popular all across England. Dartboards went up in thousands of pubs as landlords embraced the 'craze'. They had to, otherwise customers who wanted to play the game would have gone elsewhere to experience this new fad.

In some cases the architecture of the pub proved problematical. In the case of the *Jolly Sailor* the ceiling was too low which meant that players' darts once thrown would either hit the ceiling or, more often, the beams and not the dartboard. So, the answer was to dig a small trench or pit into which the players could step. In his book *Darts* (1936) author Rupert Croft-Cooke recorded that, at *The Case is Altered* pub near Ruislip (now part of the London Borough of Hillingdon) 'owing to the low ceiling, the players have to stand in a little pit.' Thus the pit guaranteed that the official height of the board (5' 8" from the centre of the bull to the floor) could be attained as well as the player being afforded a full view of the board.

One respondent from the *Cornish Times* letter, who wished to remain anonymous, recalled an occasion in the 1970s when he went to step out of the darts pit with darts in one hand and a full pint in his other hand, slipped, fell out of the pit and did not spill a drop!

Reader Derek Powell told me

I started playing darts when I was 19 years old back in 1959...The hole in the floor has long gone. Where the dartboard used to be they had cut a doorway through to the Lounge Bar, filled the floor in. There you go. That's history.



However, 'ex-Looer' Charlie Davies wrote

The floor did have a hole in it that did have a cover. I haven't been to the pub for years and as far as I know the hole is still there.

Charlie also remembers the pit flooding at high tide! (The colour photograph (above) of the pub provided by Charlie shows the original positions of the dartboard and the pit.)

Derek Powell also told me that darts is no longer played in any pubs in Looe, replaced by food. So is Looe now dart-less?

John Pengelly also remembered several matches being played against an American darts team. He did not participate but remembers

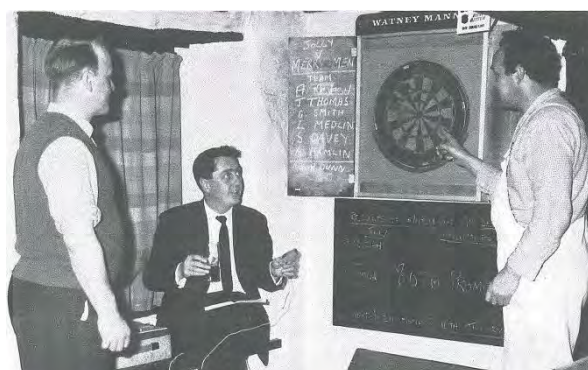
The main man on the mike [microphone] was Mr. Ted Thomas, others included Mr. Reg Bassett and Mr. Eddie Walke...The pub landlord at the time [circa 1964/65] was Mr. Alec and Mrs. Olive McVee.



(‘Saki’), Les Medlen, Ted Thomas, Bing Ridley and Sid Davey. The second photo (below, right) shows Gordon Smith with ‘the recording device’ preparing for the match against the ‘Merry Men’.

So how were these ‘international’ matches actually played?

A phone call from Lester Pengelly explained all, or practically all. Lester told me that each game was 301-up, double in and they were recorded on a reel-to-reel tape machine (hi-tech in those days) and then the tape was posted off to their opponents in America. In return the American team would play and record their game and post a tape of their match to the lads at the *Jolly Sailor*. On receipt they would find out who had won in the least number of darts and record victory or defeat.



Marion Pengelly told me that it was probably Ted Thomas who made the arrangements.

Thanks to *Cornish Times* readers the story of the ‘pit’ has been clarified and so has part of the story of the international darts matches played via an exchange of tape recordings. Thus the latter had nothing to do with Telstar or an early satellite broadcast but all to do with the landlord and customers at the *Jolly Sailor* somehow making a connection with darts players in the USA.

What hasn’t been clarified is the actual US pub the *Jolly Sailor* team played against; the ‘Merry Men’. Was it in Boston, Massachusetts as my enquirer suggested? How and when was the initial link made with the American pub? Responses from *Cornish Times* readers indicate that these international ‘by-tape’ matches were definitely being played in the mid-1960s and *probably* into the 1970s but can anyone provide actual start and finishing dates?

I would love to fill the gaps and complete the story.

On receipt of this information, Michael B., who made the original enquiry, wrote:

Patrick. Wonderful to hear from you and thanks for digging up the story of the pub, the pit and the international matches.

I don't know how I got Telstar and Boston in my memory but, as you might know, one remembers long gone things quite well but not what one had for breakfast!

I did have the pub name wrong too, but in general it seems that I did not dream the general story. Thanks for doing your investigations and I hope that you might uncover more information in future!

RECORD-BREAKING CROWD AT THE GERMAN MASTERS

Fans of the *News of the World* tournament will doubtless recall that the record attendance ever recorded witnessing a darts match was 14,534 at the Royal Horticultural Hall, London in May 1939; the match being the London and the South Divisional final between Marmaduke 'Dukey' Brecon, representing the *Jolly Sailor*, Hanworth, Middlesex, and the legendary Jim Pike playing out of the *Windmill Club*, Southwark.

Pike was later to 'up' the attendance figure a little when he wrote an article on darts for the 1946 publication *The Sports Book* writing that his match against Brecon 'drew an audience of nearly 17,000 people.' But that matters not anymore.

On Friday 25th May at the Veltins Arena in Gelsenkirchen, Germany a record-breaking 20,000 fans watched Austrian darts star Mensur Suljovic overcome Belgium's Dimitri Van den Bergh 8-2 to take the German Darts Masters title and the first prize of £20,000, only Mensur's second televised title of his career and his first victory on the PDC World Series of Darts circuit.

Congratulations to both men for making it to the final. I don't usually make predictions but that young Dimitri will surely become World Champion in the future.

So, the record for attendance at a darts match has gone, at last, nearly *eight decades* since that Pike v Brecon final. Congratulations to all those involved at the PDC for making this happen. Thanks too to commentator Stuart Pyke for giving me a mention as the supplier of the information about that first record-breaking match.

FEEDBACK

DDN (now nearly 100 editions old) still stimulates fans into writing about how much they enjoy my research and ramblings every month. Recently Kev, from Bristol here in the UK, contacted me about the note that accompanied #97 about giving readers the opportunity to unsubscribe. He wrote

Patrick Sir. I could never even think about unsubscribing from DDN. You do amazing things. You write and say to us about the Sport we love. I know you have a lot of messages, I do hope you may see mine to read. You are Amazing Patrick. Thank you for teaching me even more about our Sport...

Thanks Kev.

But, of course, much of the feedback I received from last month's issue which was dedicated to Eric Bristow MBE was about The Crafty Cockney.

Indeed when I mentioned my meeting Eric at the launch of the League of Legends, Bob Anderson was good enough to send me this photo taken at Old Trafford on the day where Eric is being interviewed in the background.



Subscriber Mark Williams wrote

Can I say I have never enjoyed reading an article in a long, long time. I love the way that you structure your newsletter and made into such a touching tribute to a great dart player and man.

The word 'legend' is bandied around too much. Eric was a Legend and a gentleman. I met him on a couple of occasions and he loved chatting and being himself. The last time I met Eric was at the Midland par Three golf Championship in the summer. He was playing with Keith Deller and their banter was hysterical. I asked him and Keith for their autographs and they spent ages with myself and my daughter Amy. My daughter who is 12 knows of him and has seen him on TV but he made such a fuss of her and she said after they left what lovely people both Eric and Keith were.

Professional TV Sports MC Paul Booth wrote

Hi Patrick. Great issue dedicated to Eric, I wished you'd have contacted me, I've shared the road with him for the last ten years and was with him on the hospitality event in Liverpool on the night. I'd have loved to have paid tribute to my dear friend.

I think you just did Paul. Thanks.

Wayne Baker, pictured right, who many darts fans will recall being a long-time contributor to *Darts World* magazine said

A wonderful tribute to Eric - who was a legend... Many happy memories of The Crafty Cockney including seeing him lift his first Embassy. Managed to beat him at the world champs Pro Am tournament at Lakeside (with help from Dennis Priestley!!!).



Three-time World Champion John Lowe wrote, “*Patrick. A wonderful account, well done.*” John also told me of a recent event relating to one of Eric’s best friends, Ritchie Wainwright. John said

Richie lived close to Eric. They both supported Chelsea. He was Eric’s leisure time friend. They would go out on Eric’s day off, practise together, drink a few Guinness...and the inevitable Indian to finish. Richie would come to Tenerife when Eric holidayed there with me. Needless to say he was heartbroken when Eric died.



Eric was due to appear at the annual Armageddon darts tournament in Leicester in April. John told me

Matt Ward runs the event each year, very successfully I can say, a full house every time. Eric should have been playing me on the night so, after his passing, Matt decided it would not be right to put another professional in his place, so instead put the place up to the highest bid, all proceeds to the British Heart Foundation. The opening bid was £600. Richie wanted to play so desperately that together we decided to raise the bid. Richie opened a just giving page on Facebook and I put my darts up for auction. The result: we raised £650, enough to win the bid and make his dream come true.

Richie can be seen on the poster [above]. He is the one between Barney and MVG, top right, and in the photograph with Eric, me and Dennis Priestley, and the one throwing wearing the Crafty Cockney shirt.

Ritchie represented Eric well in his game against me. Eric's son James was also in the line-up on the night and the event eventually raised £1200 for the British Heart Foundation.

As John said,

It's a great story, that Eric's closest friend had the chance to take his place and at the same time make a contribution on Eric's behalf to a great charity.

Returning to the tribute *DDN*, fellow darts researcher and author Justin Irwin wrote

Hi Patrick - a very fitting tribute issue, well done. We all have our 'Eric Bristow' stories, good and bad, and you've captured a good mixture perfectly. Thanks.

Subscriber Chris Kelly wrote

Thanks for the latest DDN, Patrick. A fitting tribute to the great man that was Eric Bristow. My earliest memory of darts was seeing my dad watching him on TV. A true great.

DDN stalwart Mick Simpson e-mailed me

Morning Patrick. Just read the Eric Bristow DDN and I must say you have done him PROUD. 'Fantastic' is all I can say. A massive 'Thank you' to you. He was as you so rightly say a LEGEND in his own life time. All the best Patrick and thanks for the memories.

From India, darts champion Ashfaque Sayed wrote

Dear Pat, What tribute to the legend! How can I forget the meetings with him in London as well as Germany ...all because of your facilitation and help. These are memories I will cherish.

From the USA, subscriber Gilbert Valenzuela said of Eric, "He was top shelf."

And finally to subscriber Edward H. who thanked me 'for the wonderful Eric Bristow memorial edition of *DDN*' adding "He will be missed." Edward then respectfully pointed out that, referring to page 2 of *DDN* #98, Keith Deller's famous outshot against Eric "was 138, not 137 ☺". (Of course, I knew that but clearly my keyboard didn't!)

A number of readers of *DDN* have pointed out that I made no mention in either the March or April *DDN* of the death of the former Professional Darts Corporation Master of Ceremonies, PDC Hall of Fame member and one-time contributor to *Darts World* magazine Phil Jones who passed away on 23rd March.

That was very remiss of me and I apologise for that omission. Phil's contribution to the sport of darts was immense and it is sad to record yet another major contributor to the evolution of modern darts.

I am grateful to the PDC for allowing me to utilise their obituary below which originally appeared on the Corporation's website.

Phil joined the PDC in 1993 and was both Master of ceremonies at TV events and an official working on non-televised tournaments through to his retirement in 2007.

A former journalist with Darts World, Phil also worked alongside many of the sport's top names on the exhibition circuit. He was inducted into the PDC Hall of Fame upon his retirement in 2007, when he moved to Las Vegas to live with his wife Michelle.



“Phil made a huge contribution to the PDC in over a decade of service,” said PDC Chairman Barry Hearn. He was a deserved member of the PDC Hall of Fame and will be fondly remembered by all involved with the sport for his unique style. We send our condolences to Phil's wife Michelle and his family.”

Former PDC Tournament Director Tommy Cox paid tribute to a “great friend” as he said: “It's been a shock and Phil will be sadly missed. He was a terrific guy and was instrumental in the early years of the PDC's growth. It was fitting that he was inducted into the PDC Hall of Fame because he was a major part of the PDC and the face of the organisation until his retirement.

He was a really good fella who enjoyed life, loved his darts and always had a smile on his face, and a great friend of mine. We were still close and I spoke to him regularly, and I've got so many happy memories of our time together.”

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DUE to pressure on space a number of items planned for this issue (including memories of being stooge to JOE HITCHCOCK and darts in Bhutan) have been held over 'til next time. PLUS look out for a very special 100th edition competition next time!

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