

# THE CUE COLLECTOR

by *Andy Hunter*

John Patrick "Jack" Mannock was born in London on 24th September 1859 making his debut as a player at the age of 19 in the London professional tournament of 1878. At one stage in his career he could play well enough to hold his own against any of the professional players, perhaps with a sporting start from just a few at the top of the tree. But he stood out in a class by himself as an instructor, having a great knowledge of billiards and the requisite gift of being able to impart his knowledge. His highest breaks as a player were 282 (with spot and push strokes barred) and 394 (all-in).

Mannock was a prodigious inventor of "gadgets" associated with billiards, which were generally used for the instruction of his pupils. Typical of these was the "finger stall" which was an apparatus clenched in the bridge hand which was designed to help form the correct bridging position. W. S. Gilbert, who was one of his pupils, made reference to this device in "The Mikado" when he wrote of an immortal who "on a spot that's always barred was doomed to play, with fitless finger stalls on a cloth untrue"



Jack Mannock demonstrates the use of his special cue for playing massé strokes

Jack Mannock lived for three years in France and could speak the language fluently. During his time there he obviously studied the Continental game and the expert use by their exponents of the massé stroke. On 21st January 1891 he registered a patent on a cue which was designed to "prevent making miscues especially in the massé stroke". A feature of the shaft was that it was parallel for 18" from the tip. The cue was also slightly shorter than usual being 55½" in length. Mannock later designed an even more specialist massé cue which he describes in his book, first published in 1904, as being "two thirds the length of an ordinary cue" with it's 17 oz. weight "well inclined towards the tip".

His original 1891 cue, on which all later models were based, was produced in two versions. Both had badges which were made from mother-of-pearl, but the earliest had the lettering embossed and in later editions it was cut in. They both said "Anti-Grip Cue, J. P. Mannock" but one version adds "Patented" and the other "Registered". These cues also had an horn ferrule approximately ¾" in length. Both the "registered" and "patented" first edition Mannock cues can be distinguished by a slightly shorter badge than later versions, and the "J" in his signature had a small loop. These earlier cues would also be a typical billiard shape. Being the rarest and most collectable Mannock cues these examples are valued at anything between £300 - £500+. The two authenticated cues of this type which I have seen, were also stamped on the base. The "patented" had an "O" and the "registered" had a mark which was difficult to distinguish, but may have been an "M". Care should be taken in making too much of stamp marks when deciding authenticity—a better test is the type and position of the badge.

All of these early cues had an ebony or rosewood machine splice with a steamed pear shaft, the steaming giving the shaft a pinkish colour. Four tulip hand-splices were added at the bottom of the machine splices and the structure was completed with a snakewood front splice

From my experience as a maker of cues using Ash, Maple, Greenheart and Pear, the latter wood is one of the smoothest and nicest to play with. A good piece of Pear-wood will consistently play a true shot and does not stick to your hand, hence Mannock's claim to have produced an "anti-grip" cue. He designed the unusual splicing arrangement in the way that he did because of the nature of the wood used. To make the Pear stiff enough to use, the hand splices on the base supplemented the machine splices, extending the length of the butt from 18" to approximately 23", thereby reducing the length of the shaft. The first

Mannock cues also had an Indian Rubber tube fitted tightly around the butt to prevent slipping whilst making a stroke. I have never seen a surviving example of this.

Around 1900, Burroughes & Watts bought the patent design from Mannock and took over the production of the cues. These cues were also manufactured with "patented" and "registered" badges which were positioned half an inch higher on the butt so that a Burroughes & Watts stamp could be placed on the flat below. The patented version was only produced for a few



A Mannock "Registered" cue showing the Burroughes & Watts stamp, circa 1930.

years after which all their cues were marked "registered". At this time Ash and Maple also began to be used for the shafts. Pear and Maple shafted cues would fetch £200-£300, Ash shafts, being less common, would bring £250-£350. Burroughes & Watts cues with a snakewood front splice are also valued at £250-£350.

The early Burroughes & Watts cues would also have letters stamped into the square base of the cue. These were probably individual maker's identification marks and from the late 1920's these letters began to be replaced with a number. At this time the cue was streamlined into the snooker-cue shape of today. By this date the original snakewood splice had also been replaced with Burr or Yew.

Other companies have made cues with a Mannock badge, but they are not based on the same design and are not sought after by collectors. In this respect I have seen a "Mannock Victoria" a plain ebony butted cue with a front splice which definitely carried an early badge, although the authenticity of the rest of the cue was questionable.

*Amongst Mannock's many distinguished pupils was Sir Thomas Lipton. One day Mannock called at his house at Southgate to give a lesson, and it being his first appearance there he informed Sir Thomas' "man" who he was. "Oh," said the valet, "you are the Mr. Mannock who wrote the book on Billiards I suppose." Jack admitted that he had been to an extent responsible for the production and was flattered by the remark "it's the finest thing that ever happened for the gov'nor." continued the manservant "He keeps it in his bedroom and reads it every night for a few minutes when he drops off to sleep. Before he had this book he suffered dreadfully from insomnia and now he seems to be quite cured."*



## CHARITY CHALLENGE

Pinewood Park, Upper Sherringham

Sponsored by Sands Agricultural Services, this year's event was won by World No.1 Mike Russell, who has now recorded three successive victories in this event.

Russell defeated David Causier in the 90 minute final, which drew a packed house to Pinewood Park, Upper Sherringham.

Earlier, Chris Shutt had been eliminated when he lost to both Russell and Causier in the round-robin section of 75 minute games, while Mike Russell put together the highest break of the event with his 345 against Causier.

### Round-Robin

|                          |     |                          |     |
|--------------------------|-----|--------------------------|-----|
| David Causier (273, 253) | 732 | Chris Shutt (183)        | 380 |
| Mike Russell (196, 141)  | 549 | Chris Shutt (280)        | 452 |
| Mike Russell (345)       | 546 | David Causier (163, 156) | 575 |

### Final

|                         |     |                          |     |
|-------------------------|-----|--------------------------|-----|
| Mike Russell (252, 235) | 734 | David Causier (240, 156) | 574 |
|-------------------------|-----|--------------------------|-----|

Over 100 spectators witnessed the competition, with memento's being presented to the players by David Nud of S.A.S.