

# THE CUE COLLECTOR

## by Andy Hunter

Melbourne Inman was born in London on 15th July 1878, receiving his unusual Christian name in honour of his uncle, Melbourne Tripp, rather than any connection with the Australian city of the same name. Born into a billiards family—his father, two uncles, and three brothers all having made a century break at the game—he always seemed destined to become a player himself. His father managed The Twickenham Club in London and it was here at the age of 14, that he began his career as a Marker. His rise in the game was rapid. He won his first Professional Championship in 1908 and from then until 1920 was at the height of his powers. During this time he won the Championship five times, only Harry Stevenson managing to deprive him of the title for three of these 12 years at the top of his profession.



Mel Inman: World record red-ball break for ivory balls

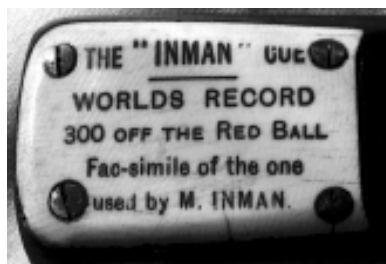
However, he is perhaps best remembered for his intense rivalry with the brilliant but inconsistent Tom Reece. Inman was a tactical, defensive player. With his deliberate movements, slow play and liberal double-baulks, he was the perfect foil for Reece, who rarely defeated him for money.

In October 1906 Mel Inman made what was then a record for ivory balls scoring 300 points exclusively from the red losers. It was certainly a record for ivory balls, but it was still some way behind John Roberts' run of 819 from the red ball (in a break of 821) which he had made with composition balls the previous year. That particular achievement was not recognised by the Billiard Association as the table had not been tested before the match. Roberts had also made a red-ball break of 372 with composition balls, back in 1898. However, all this did not deter Inman from advertising himself as the "champion losing-hazard player of the world" and endorsing a cue which proclaimed his achievement.

This is described as a "facsimile", which was intended to be an exact copy of the cue used by Inman himself and would have been manufactured for about two years from the date of his achievement until 1909, when Harry Stevenson extended the ivory ball record to 354. This cue has a black ebony butt with a dark red ash shaft, indicating that the wood has been either steamed or it is old timber which has been reclaimed and reused.

The only other known Melbourne Inman cue was produced around the same time and has a picture badge which was superimposed with Inman's signature. It usually has a plain or stripy ebony or Indian rosewood butt, and an ash shaft. The cue would have been a typical billiard shape with a parallel end to the shaft and a wide butt.

Both of these cues are very rare, the "facsimile" brings between £200-300, the picture badge between £250-350.



Details of the Mel Inman "Worlds Record" facsimile cue (above) and the Inman "Picture Badge" cue (right)



As mentioned in the Auction Reports on the opposite page, another rare cue recently surfaced, virtually unnoticed, at a provincial auction room. This was a "Nelson" Champion Cue and I have only ever seen one example of this cue before.

George Nelson is one of the more interesting characters in the game. Born in Driffield, Yorkshire, in 1877, he gave up a career as an hotel manager to become a professional player, winning the Championship



George Nelson: Yorkshire professional champion

of Yorkshire between 1906-11. He also arranged the first UK tour of the Australian wonder-boy, George Gray, in 1910-11, providing the opposition in many of his matches as Gray astounded the Nation by compiling thousand after thousand with red-ball play. Nelson later became a proprietor of a chain of billiard halls, and with his son—also George—established the firm which eventually evolved into the famous billiard table manufacturer Smith & Nelson. Outside the billiard world he became equally famous for his card playing, being regarded as an expert in contract bridge. Amongst all this he also managed to produce ten children before he died at the age of 79 in 1956.

His "Yorkshire Champion Cue" would have been made during the five-year period when he held that title and was manufactured by William Sykes who were an established firm operating from Hornbury, near Leeds. It has a plain ebony hand-spliced butt with an ash shaft. The example I have seen also has a star shaped mark on the bottom of the butt which may be a maker's identification. As far as I am aware, Sykes did not make any other "named player" cues. An unusual feature of the ivory badge is that it is secured with three brass pins. This feature is not totally exclusive to the "Nelson", but I have only seen it before on one other cue. The value of this cue would be about £300-350 possibly a little more because of its rarity.

The only other cues that carry George Nelson's name were produced some time after the Champion Cue and made by the family firm, Nelson of Leeds. These are round badged cues, produced as both machine and hand spliced versions, having a plain rosewood or ebony butt. They would be valued at about £150.

When the Nelson's company became Smith and Nelson they produced a lot of different, plain, run-of-the-mill cues (e.g. the Standfast cue). These have a negligible value in the collector's market.

## INTERNATIONAL BILLIARDS

We have now received the full results of the International match between England and Northern Ireland which was held at the Reading Rooms, Bangor on 22nd-23rd January. These are reproduced below.

Friendly Cup (Senior Competition): English names first,

Day 1

150-up games:- G. Rogers 146 (40), 98 (49), 108, T. Buttimer 150 (54), 150 (51), 150; P. Welham 150, 150, 41, D. Pogue 110, 40, 150; D. Kell 8, 60, 150 (57), P. Donnelly 150 (41, 68unf), 150 (100, 50unf), 113; S. Crosland 41, 110 (81), 150, D. Elliott 150 (46), 150, n/r. 500-up games:- P. Shelley (81, 81) 500, T. Shields (76) 368; W. Andress 494, J. McIntyre (56) 500; D. Nichols (52) 500, F. Cahoon (59) 485; P. Dunning (97) 500, E. Rogan 395.

Day 2

150-up games:- P. Dunning 150, 137, 150, J. McIntyre 148, 150, 139; J. McCann 150, 116, 126, E. Rogan 68, 150, 150; D. Nichols 150 (81), 150 (64), 97, T. Shields 120, 44, 150; P. Shelley 150 (74), 150 (48), 150 (69, 46unf), J. V. McLauchlan 105, 85, 81 (48). 500-up games:- P. Welham (94, 94) 500 T. Buttimer 173; D. Kell 500 D. Elliott 338; S. Crosland (78, 73, 53) 500 P. Donnelly (79, 61) 457; R. Lodge (78, 50) 500 D. Pogue 302.

Result: England 33, Northern Ireland 15

Kingsman Cup (Junior Competition): English names first,

100-up games:- M. Sutton 100, 37, 12, R. Latimer 80 (63), 100 (47), 100; M. Shutt 100 (47), 59, 100, M. Tully 77, 100, 44; D. Bavister 100, 40, 10, K. McCready 99, 100, 100, 1 hour games:- M. Shutt 326, K. McCready 210; D. Bavister 179, M. Tully 152; J. Chambers 239, R. Latimer 222; M. Sutton (85, 47) 281, J. Buttimer 109.

Result: England 19, Northern Ireland 5

## Fifty Years Ago ...

In November of next season the North-East England Association team will visit Belfast to play a selected team of the Belfast & District Amateur Billiards League. Jackie Bates, dual title-holder at Amateur Billiards and Snooker this year, and winner of the All-Ireland Snooker title, will meet Alfred Nolan, English Amateur Snooker Champion. There will be a luncheon on the day of arrival, and Civic and Government heads will welcome the guests. The Montpelier Y.M.C.A., holding 500, will be the venue—*The Billiard Player, August 1950.*