

THE CUE COLLECTOR

by Andy Hunter

Sidney Smith was born on 26th March 1908 at Killamarsh, Derbyshire. He began to make a name for himself as a professional player in his late teens, by which time he was now based in Doncaster.

Having taken the Yorkshire Professional titles at both billiards and snooker, he came to national prominence by winning the inaugural Junior Professional Championship in 1929. This was open to all professionals under the age of twenty-five years who had not competed in the existing Professional Championship. Shortly after this he began to play with a cue given to him by Clark McConachy.

He was widely regarded as a player likely to rise to the very top of the game, but never quite managed to fulfil this potential. In 1931, Harry Young writing in *The Evening News*, rated Sidney Smith the fifth best English player, behind Joe Davis, Tom Newman, Willie Smith and Claude Falkiner.

During the early 1930's he toured extensively with his namesake Willie Smith, both players being under contract to Burroughes & Watts. Amongst his performances was a break of 939 in 52 minutes, and playing against Willie Smith in February 1932 at Newcastle, he had a two-hour sessional average of 296. He made three "thousand" breaks during his career:- 1,023, 1,090 and 1,292 which was his personal record.

Sidney Smith made a World Record snooker break of 133 on 11th December 1936 during the course of the Thurston's Snooker Handicap. This was played alongside the Daily Mail Gold Cup, the main professional billiards tournament of the season which would later pass exclusively to Snooker. Despite his record break and a handicap of +14, Smith finished in fifth place. This record was eclipsed by Joe Davis just four months later, although it remained a record for the Gold Cup competition, the last of which was played in 1940. Smith's snooker career also included being runner-up to Joe Davis in the Professional Snooker Championships of 1938 and 1939.

The War years interrupted his progress in the game as he joined the armed forces at the end of 1940 and did not play a serious billiards match again until 1948. In this year he crowned his long career by winning UK Professional Billiards Championship, defeating John Barrie 7,000-6,428. This match also marked his retirement from serious billiards although still appearing in exhibition matches into the 1960's.

There are four known hand spliced cues in the Sidney Smith range. There are also three machine spliced cues.

- 1) The "Sidney Smith champion" cue made by Burroughes & Watts, Soho Square, London is a hand spliced cue. This cue had Sidney Smith's signature written diagonally across the badge. It would have been made out of ash or maple with an ebony butt and a green veneer with a maple, beech, or a bur front splice. Price £150 - £220
- 2) The cue which honours his "Gold Cup Snooker Record" is also hand spliced. It would have been made out of ash or maple with a plain ebony butt. The rarity of this cue is reflected in a valuation of £200 - £300
- 3) There is also a signed picture badge cue in the range which was made both as hand and machine spliced. Both have the same rosewood butt with an ebony front splice with two maple lines down the front of the ebony splice. (Reverse of that shown in the picture) Price for hand spliced £200-£250; machine spliced £70-£100
- 4) The Sidney Smith "champion" cue commemorates his United Kingdom Professional Billiards Championship win in 1948 (see photo). This would have been made out of ash or maple with a rosewood butt



Sidney Smith (top right) and details from his "Champion Cue" which was produced shortly after his victory in the UK Professional Billiards Championship in May 1948

and a maple front splice with three ebony lines down the front of the maple splice. This particular cue comes in two versions, the difference between them is that one makes reference to just 1947-1948 on the badge and the other has "1947-48-49".

The "1947-1948" cue, would probably have been manufactured for just one year and is consequently quite scarce. This has only been seen as a machine splice version but even so would be worth £80-£120. The "1947-48-49" cue which was made in both hand-splice and machine-splice would be worth £120-£180 and £60-£90, respectively.

Tom Carpenter

Tom Carpenter was born of English parents at Newport, Monmouthshire on August 31st, 1887, and from his base in Cardiff, held the title of Welsh professional champion over a long period. Although he did not secure a place amongst the absolute top-notchers, he was little removed from it as his performances reveal. In the 1928 world championship, for instance, he beat (level) such a great opponent as Tom Reece by over a 1,000 points after being a long way behind. Another highlight in his career was a famous match with Joe Davis at Cardiff. In 1922, playing 7,000-up on level terms, Davis won by just 1 point! This was narrowest margin ever recorded in professional billiards. When at the top of his form, he occasionally made a 3-figure session average, his best being one of 222 against Arthur Peall.

His record break of 1,214 was made by the "pendulum cannon" on 18th May 1927. Under the rules of Billiards at this time there was no limit for ball-to-ball cannons provided an indirect cannon intervened after every 25 scores. The "pendulum", was unveiled by Tom Reece in the 1927 Professional Championship, and exploited the rule by jamming the balls in a corner pocket and occasionally playing cushion-first to make an "indirect" cannon. This loophole was closed in August 1927, by which time Carpenter was one of only three players to have made a thousand break by this means (the others being Joe Davis and Tom Newman).

Carpenter gave up playing professional billiards in the mid-1930s to concentrate on business interests, running two temperance clubs in Cardiff. However, he continued his involvement at an amateur level and at the age of 73 played regularly in the Minehead & District League. He was regarded in this League as an excellent sportsman in the very best sense of the word, being affectionately known as the 'maestro'.

The Tom Carpenter Ally Cue Record Break 1,214 (see photo) is not only a rare cue but is made to a high level of craftsmanship. It is a double hand spliced cue with four ebony and then four snake wood splices. The badge is ivory and it has an ash shaft. Scarcity and quality would push this cue to a valuation of £250-£350.



Tom Carpenter pictured in 1926 and detail from the badge of his "Ally" cue "Record break 1,214"

