

THE CUE COLLECTOR

by *Andy Hunter*

Joe Mack

Joe Mack was described by a leading billiards journal in 1933 as "A greater player than the records show" which may well be a fair summary of a player whose exploits are little known today.

He was born in Liverpool on 25th November 1870, but it was in Manchester that he learned his billiards, starting his career as a Marker at the Conservative Club in that city. He was one of the tallest professionals of his day, standing at just under 6ft. and was regarded as player who might have graduated into the top half-dozen exponents of the game had he chosen to dedicate himself to the task. He played against all the best players of the day, succeeding in defeating Tom Reece in level games on two occasions in 1900 and 1901.

However, his appearances in the billiard room were to be sporadic as he took lengthy periods of "retirement" from the game—horse racing always having a stronger attraction for him than billiards. The *New World of Billiards* in 1907 said this of our subject: "A most deliberate player is Joe Mack, but he is not easily put off his game. Although having been practically out of first class billiards for several seasons, Joe Mack lacks confidence in himself when playing in public. I should like to see him more before the public, but I fear this will not happen this season. His losing hazards at all paces and angles are worth going a long way to see." He was described as having "a curious trick of following up a stroke with his cue, as if to persuade the ball to travel in the desired direction". Nevertheless, playing an all-round game, his style was considered to be of great educational value to the amateur player, and he was always capable of breaks in the three or four hundreds.

Perhaps Mack's greatest achievement on the billiard table came during a match against Joe Sala at the latter's rooms in Edinburgh. During this match he made a "spot-barred" break of 773 which included a run of 200 nursery cannons, which was a record at that time.

The cue which commemorates this feat has an ash shaft with an ebony butt. The inscription is roughly carved into an ivory badge. This is a rare cue and would be valued between £150-250. Contemporary accounts state that this break was made on 11th January 1898, although strangely, the inscription on the cue is "1896" which may well have been a simple transcription error by the engraver. This type of problem is not uncommon, with several cues known to suffer from similar errors.

William Cook (Update)

In a previous article I wrote about William Cook cues, since that time I have learnt about another model which was produced by Thurston's.

This has a round bone badge with red writing. The badge is a typical of the one Thurston's commonly produced at that time (*illustrated*) except for the Cook cue it is slightly smaller than the standard. The writing on the circumference is the same but at the bottom it only says London, not "W.C." and in the centre it would have "W. Cook's Model Cue, Sole Makers" as well as carrying a facsimile signature.



A standard Thurston's badge used for many of their early cues

The shaft is made from ash and it has a mahogany butt. Judging by the design of the cue it must have been produced shortly after Cook first won the title of "Champion of English Billiards" in 1870. This is a very rare cue and is could be expected to be valued accordingly by the right collector.



Joe Mack made a record run of 200 nursery cannons in 1896



The Murton round-badge cue with a cork inlaid butt and an example of the "Murton Meteor"

Murton's of Newcastle

The first records of Henry A. Murton Ltd come from the early 1900's when they were advertising the supply of sporting equipment for football, cricket, golf, running, boxing and quoits, as well as "billiard tables and billiard requisites". They operated in the north-east of England having branches at Grainger Street, Newcastle and Fawcett Street, Sunderland and traded until at least the start of the 2nd World War in 1939.

They retailed several different cues all of which were manufactured by Peradon & Co; with a Murton badge attached. The following is a brief account of some of their cues. They are not particularly rare, but those I have seen have been good players.

The Murton Meteor

The top of the range cue was the "Murton Meteor" which came in several different styles:

- 1) The first had an ash shaft, a plain ebony butt, and a square badge.
- 2) The second is the same as the first, other than it has green veneer with ebony on top. This is a hand spliced cue.
- 3) Another version of Murton Meteor is exactly the same as a Mannock cue, with an ebony machine spliced butt and four burr splices, which are full length butts, and a front splice. I have only seen these with an ash shaft and a round badge.
- 4) There is also a round badge version with a pear shaft which is machine spliced with an ebony butt and a burr front splice.
- 5) Another of these cues with a round badge has a black ebony butt, the front of which has a thick maple veneer, then another piece of ebony, a second thick maple veneer, and then a front splice of ebony. The example I have seen was hand-spliced.
- 6) There is one Meteor which is simply identified as "Meteor" on the badge. This is otherwise identical to the versions 1 & 2 above. This would have been made by Peradon.

The Murton Master

The "Master" would be either hand or machine spliced with an ebony butt that has a green veneer and an ebony front splice. I have seen the shaft in ash, maple and greenheart.

The Murton Sportsman

This is a machine spliced cue with an identical butt to that of the Murton Master.

The round-badge Murton

The cues carrying a round badge simply inscribed "Murton Newcastle" can be found as both hand and machine-spliced with an ebony butt. There was also a machine-spliced with a rosewood butt.

A cork handled version has the same badge and a hand-spliced ebony butt. From the bottom point of the four splices the butt was lathed or cut-in and a layer of cork laid down and filed to match the level of the butt. Manufactured by Peradon, identical cues were also made for other suppliers and I have seen these with the Stoweby, Burroughes and Watts and Orme and Son badges. These cues are valued around £100-200 for the hand spliced and £50-80 for the machine spliced.

Miscellaneous models

I have seen several Murton cues with ornate butts, having three or four different butts on the one cue. I think these would have been made as specials. I also know of a Murton machine spliced cue with six butts, one on top of the other, the last of them being full length and the others shorter. These cues would be valued up to £250 in very good condition.