

CLARK McCONACHY

DO WE NEGLECT THE CANNON IN BILLIARDS?

Copy of Article by Richard Holt

The Billiard Player

Sept 52

*Would it be an exaggeration to say the cannon is the **orphan** stroke of billiards? You have only to think of continental and American games to realize that cannon-play, as such, scarcely exists in our English game. This forcibly struck me when watching **Clark McConachy** in his match for the World Professional championship against **John Barrie** last year, for the New Zealander's attachment to cannon-play (i do not mean "nurseries" alone) could fittingly be described as affectionate!*

*Top-of-the-table, which, when he did pursue it, seemed **child's play** to him, did not appear to interest him much, and as for the loser game, it was merely incidental to cannons, instead of the other way about, as in English billiards generally, particularly amateur.*

Indeed, so much was McConachy intent on cajoling the balls into close harmony, as it were, one might have imagined the table to be pocketless.

*Naturally, he did his full share of **nurseries**, but his 3-ball manipulation and manoeuvres extended far beyond that, and he executed many fascinating bouts of cannons **in the open**. As i once said, one could fancy his infancy to have been spent in a cannons mouth instead of a cradle. Diagram 1 (shots 1,2,3 &5) shows a few of the large variety of "caroms" he so lovingly performed.*

*Turning to amateur-play, can it be said that the cannon is regarded, even by our best players (i exclude one or two) as other than a **connecting link** between losers and pots? One of the essential in top-of-the-table play is, of course, mastery of the cannon, but even there the amateur's handling of the cannon is anything but confident, and failure in contact is more often the reason for breaking down at the top than is missing the pot.*

***H W Stevenson**, the famous professional of 40 years back, used to indulge in quite a number of cannon sequences at the top ("**for a time the real top-of-the-table game is superseded by a purely cannon effect**" is how he put it himself). Though i saw Stevenson perform, it was as a mere boy, so that the memory is not detailed but just composed of impressions, but i have seen reproductions of his breaks, and also during the late war, when i "performed" in the Censorship, i had a few games with a colleague who had played with Stevenson in India. Consequently, i have a good idea of Stevenson's tactics, and as i say, he would often perform a series of "independent" cannons, **reversing position** as he got near the side by a subtle little gathering stroke, in the course of a spot-end break.*

How often do you see anything of the kind nowadays, except from McConachy?

***Reece**, too, of course, was a master of the close-cannon. The cannon has appealed powerfully to the players of delicate touch and subtle artistry. But these cannon sequences are practicable in **any part of the table**, and just as, while performing them, the "fixed idea" must be the shot or shots comprising a resumption of top-of-the-table technique, so at the other end, the pot-red and white-loser position must be the ultimate target, after such a bout. **Gathering cannons**, when position is lost (that is, when an object ball strays a little) bring the ball back into the particular corner and the "series" can be continued.*

All this, the amateur may declare, is easier said than done! I agree, but why? Simply because the English billiard player does not **cultivate** the cannon technique, and that applies to its main principles; ball contact and cushion angles, as well as to its refinements, such as those i have referred to, **i sometimes think the scoring values in billiards are unequitable and ought to be as follows: loser 1; pot 2, and cannon 3.**

The cannon is obviously the hardest stroke as it involves two-ball contacts instead of one. I wonder whether proficiency at cannon play would be much superior to what it is if, in the past, the cannon had been rewarded by **3 points**. By the way, lest somebody remind me that the continental table has no pockets, let me state i am aware of it! But there is ample cushion-space on the English table for expert cannon-work.

There are two vital principles of cannon-play: keeping the balls in front, and making accurate contact on the second object-ball. Yet, paradoxically enough, these figure only to a minute degree in the billiards tactic of the average amateur for loser-play does not urgently demand them.

There is only one object-ball in a loser or a pot, and there is no second object ball either, if i may emphasize redundantly. **How often, however, does a break end buy a tentative cannon stroke?** Far more often than by a missed loser or pot. Diagram 2 (shot 2) illustrates the kind of stroke (cushion cannon) which the amateur never essays with out doubts, and D'm 3 (shots 3 7 5) the kind of stroke he often bungles, and rarely tries. "Try to imagine where all 3 balls will be when they have stopped rolling on the next shot" was one important item of advice given by **Willie Hoppe**, the American champion, and it is one the amateur rarely troubles about.

Look at D'm 2 (shot 3) which shows a **3-cushion cannon**, bringing the balls together. This type of shot is often on, but in executing cannons with the balls far apart, the amateur rarely thinks of the after position, which can often be achieved as desired, by correct contact. "Landing on the second ball" is, perhaps, the most important, albeit the most difficult to effect, perhaps, of billiard axioms.

Cannon-play is, i think, almost the most fascinating part of the game, both in its primary (ie as an art in itself, and a scoring factor) and secondary (as shown) a co-ordinating factor in the other phases of the game) aspect. It is, therefore richly rewarding.

It is also rich in variety. The gathering cannons, D'm 1 (shots 1, 2, 5); D'm 2 (shots 1, 3 & 4); D'm 3 (shots 4, 5 & 6, off the "bump") are intriguing examples of how the balls can be assembled. Shot 4 (D'm 2) depends on spotting at the right end of the "D", and by accuracy of contact the red can be made to return to the corner area (nearly all amateurs spot in the middle of the "D" and send the red up and down, a policy which faulty strength can ruin).

D'm 3 (shot 2) shows a fascinating little stroke based on keeping in front of the two ball; it needs skill to make the right contacts, of course, but this sort of thing should be the aim of the true artist to achieve. Turn to p. 12, D'm 4, and there we see: shot 1; the invaluable **"squeeze" cannon**, and 2, a cannon which **"gathers"** by using the cushion-rebound. The **"run-through"** cannon, particularly that off the cushion (rarely seen in amateur play) is, again, a precious aid in ensuring scoring sequence.

D'm 2 (shot 1) is a good example of the run-through, in the open but using the cushion, while shot 1, D'm 3, is a good specimen of the true **"cushion run-through"**, sending the white out of baulk and getting on the red, and far more precise than the direct screw cannon, which may achieve the wrong side of, or too close, to the red, for a loser or pot. D'm 1 (shot 6) shows a very

interesting **"kiss" cannon**, the possibilities of which type are rather scantily visualised by the amateur.

It is not without significance that throughout the history of billiards literature and journalism, treatment of the cannon, as an integral and independent branch of the game and, as a scoring force in itself, is almost non-existent.

J P Mannock and Riso Levi both treat the separate varieties of cannon exhaustively but chiefly -- i might almost truthfully say, only -- as an auxiliary to the other phases of the game. I do not refer to "nurseries" as this is a specialised form of cannon-play, and an end in itself, and also one, which the amateur, and even some professionals fail to master. I am dealing with cannon-play as an art in itself.

The amateur may ask, why bother with the difficulties and subtleties of cannon-play when big breaks are already made without it, and when the cannon performs its mission so adequately, as an adjunct to the loser and top-of-the-table games. Well, few amateurs are accomplished top-of-the-table players and i know of only a handful who of set purpose pursue this game. But is it not possible, and indeed very probable, that amateur breaks might be much bigger if the amateur took the trouble to master (or tried to master) the niceties of the art.

The true artist will not reject something difficult merely for "materialist" (ie scoring) reasons. Why limit the potential fascination of the game and remain content with the practical and utilitarian?

A good way to initiate oneself into cannon-play, in its more advanced sphere, is to play a game of 25 (cannons "up"). I myself had such a game the other day with a 300-break amateur. He won by 25-16, but i had the satisfaction of making the biggest break, 5 ! And it gave me a lot of satisfaction! It is intriguing to endeavour to bring the balls together, and, exciting, when you have done so (!), to see how you can keep them there. Try it!!

I hope to deal further with cannon-play in a future article and trust the interest of many of my readers in its greater possibilities in English billiards may have been aroused.

THE BILLIARD PLAYER OCTOBER 1969.

Sixty-year-old Norman Squire (Australia) won the Australasian professional billiards championship by beating 74-year-old Clark McConachy (New Zealand) by 5,005 points to 4,825 in a six-day, 24-hour match at Heiron & Smith's matchroom in Sydney.

HOW I WON – JUST by Rex Williams, Billiards & Snooker, September 1968.

What a match! Without a doubt the hardest i've ever played. There were a few people before i left England who said: "McConachy's seventy-three. You'll have no trouble." I wish they could have been there to see how wrong they were. Clark may be seventy-three but he has kept himself so fit that he looks barely sixty.

He may not be the player he was when he was making his thousand breaks regularly in the company of players like Walter Lindrum and Joe Davis but before the match he was churning out his 400's and 500's every day in practice so he is still, by any standards, a great player.

My biggest regret about the match was that the player's seat was at the baulk end because i would have loved to have been near enough to see exactly what he was doing in some of his runs of nursery cannons.

I've no hesitation in saying that Clark is the most fantastic cannon player i've ever seen in my life. He gets the most delicate thin cannons; he judges his all-round cannons so perfectly that i gave up playing safe; and in all his runs of nurseries he only once got a cover.

When this happened (see diagram 1), he played the most delicate little masse' to leave the balls in perfect nursery cannon position. The most amazing thing about Clark's masse's is that he doesn't rest his bridge hand on the table at all!

..... The scoring, the breaks and the averages were all lower than i expected

.....The speed of the table was only three lengths, about half what is usual in Britain. When Walter Lindrum was in his hey-day, he was widely quoted in Australia as saying that the best speed for a table was about four lengths. While this may be true for a nursery cannon specialist i doubt whether this applies to the all round game. Nevertheless, Lindrum's opinion carried so much weight that Australian tables still tend to be rather slow. Of course, the "right" speed for a table is really a matter of pure opinion, an opinion influenced by what one is used to and what suits one's game best.

In the early stages of the match, i missed quite a few long in-offs through trying to force the object ball round to a position from which i could play in-offs into the middle-pockets. After a while, i realised that this shot -- which i played as a matter of course in England -- was impossible. So i had to begin to play these in-offs to leave the object ball in the vicinity of the pink spot. It isn't easy to go against Billiards habits which have been ingrained over one's entire career. Nor is it easy, even when you know that you've got to hit a middle-pocket in-off pretty hard to bring the ball back for another in-off, to actually do it. Over the years, one's cue action becomes so grooved and so used to playing certain standard shots at a certain strength, with only comparatively small variations from table to table, that one can't just adjust to it in a few minutes. This was a big problem to me.

I was also surprised to find that we were not playing on a West of England cloth but on one of much coarser texture. This also slowed the speed of the table and posed one or two other little problems.

..... I went into the match not intending to use the spot strokes unless it looked as if my straightforward "old rules" type of game was not going to be good enough to win. After a few hours play, i decided that i'd better try to exploit the spot stroke -- only to find that this was far more difficult than it would have been on a faster table. If the cue ball was at a slight angle to the red so that i had to come off top an side cushions to get in position for another pot, i found that a very powerful shot was needed. If the cue ball was at an angle just off straight so that a stun through was needed, i found a tendency for the cue ball not to travel far enough from the spot and leave one of those pots which can easily be misjudged because the two balls are too close to each other.

While i was trying to work all these problems out, Clark was pressing on in his imperturbable way. The longer the match went on, the more i realised that what Clark doesn't know about Billiards isn't worth knowing.

..... Diagram 2 shows a wonderful four-cushion cannon he played, hitting the first object ball with strong left-hand-side.

..... Diagram 3 shows the sort of shot he never seemed to miss. His sense of the geography of the table and his knowledge of just how much side to use made these shots look like certainties when he played them. It's the sort of shot i would expect to get six times out of ten, but

having seen Clark play it I'm going to practise until i feel i can get it nine times out of ten. I never realised before how vital it is to be able to start a break from this 50-50 sort of leave.

..... Apart from his play, Clark showed tremendous mental toughness in pulling back to within seventeen points after i'd been nearly six hundred in front. Clark has generously offered to teach me the finer points of nursery cannons, a gesture which illustrates what a wonderful sportsman he is.I do play nurseries to some extent but i am the first to admit that i don't yet play them to his standard. At the height of his career, Clark once played 466 consecutive nurseries, taking the three balls along the top-cushion and back thirteen and a half times.

..... I think that the present limit of thirty-five consecutive cannons should be raised to fifty to give players an inducement to master nurseries. If the present limit is kept, there is a danger that this wonderful art will die out completely.

One of the amazing things about Clark is that he makes his own cues. He must be the only player ever to have made a cue then made a thousand break with it. Unlike very other professional i know, he has changed his cue many times in his career -- over twenty he thinks. He uses 20 oz cue, much heavier than is normal in Britain but a great many New Zealand players have followed his example.

WILLIAMS WINS WORLD TITLE by C Everton, Billiards & Snooker, Sep 68.

..... William's win should now ensure that the Championship is more regularly contested for McConachy had not defended the Championship since he defeated England's John Barrie for the vacant title at Leicester Square Hall in 1951. This has been due to no reluctance on McConachy's part but to the considerable financial and geographical deterrents implicit in the distance which separates England from New Zealand.

..... To Clark McConachy, MBE, we offer our condolences on his narrow defeat & our congratulations on a most courageous comeback to get within seventeen points after being nearly six hundred behind. To show such mental & physical resilience at the age of seventy-three speaks volumes for the value of the fine physical condition McConachy has always kept himself in through rigorous training & for the enormous skill he acquired in the golden age of professional Billiards with his great contemporaries, Walter Lindrum, Joe Davis, Willie Smith & Tom Newman.

Session 2 McConachy, who had been troubled by the lighting in the afternoon, reappeared for the evening session wearing his famous stiff, wide eye-shade & immediately began to play with better control.

Sessions 5 & 6 On the resumption, McConachy immediately recaptured the lead with a break of 150, mostly nursery cannons.

Session 10 In the evening session, McConachy again attacked from the outset. A 79 at his first visit was followed by a superb 236 which reduced William's lead to 129. Williams replied with 64 but McConachy, with a series of magnetic close cannons, followed with 66.

THREE OR FIVE LENGTHS? Clark McConachy MBE Billiards & Snooker April 69

I was very surprised to read in your December issue that Rex Williams was quoted as saying that the Table used in the World Billiard Championship in New Zealand was only three lengths.

For the last fifty years, i have played all over the world, & i have never been asked to play on a Billiard Table of three lengths. The Table we played on for the Championship in New Zealand, was definitely Five Lengths.....

REX WILLIAMS WRITES

.....I think that the ideal speed for a table is five lengths. This is the speed of my own table at Blackheath & i can assure everyone that the table i played on in New Zealand was much slower than that. I remember Clark remarking to me before one session that he thought the table was an ideal speed & i remember thinking that the speed was far from ideal if i could not get long losers round to leave an in-off in the middle-pocket.

HARKING BACK THE YEAR 1958

Billiards and Snooker, August 1966

Clark McConachy, playing Leslie Driffield at the latter's residence, made a break of 1191 ; Driffield made one of 671.

CLARK MCCONACHY ON SNOOKER

IN A TALK WITH RICHARD HOLT

The Billiard Player Feb 1952

I see that Sydney Smith, in a considered opinion on Clark McConachy's snooker, formed by watching him closely in our 37 frame match, holds that the New Zealander is unhappy at the game & unable to cope with its constant & never-ending problems & complexities.

Having seen McConachy play snooker this season, i believe this verdict to be as wide of the mark as a penalty-kick which hits the corner post. A man who can make a break of 132 in the World Snooker Championship, which McConachy did in 1947 (v Fred Davis), & one of 165 (129 break to win a frame, & 36 from the opening shot, in the next, v J Davis) is surely not unhappy at the game. Mac, by the way, claims this to be a 165 break, &, stretching a point, it is!!

I had a talk with McConachy recently on his snooker form this season, & those 8 defeats in the Tournament are not troubling him seriously, though it stands to reason he'd rather they had been 8 wins!! The main cause of his failure to produce his best form is, of course, that he had not been playing top-grade snooker (that is, against the best players in the world) for over 3 years, & during that time & before, he has been after Walter Lindrum's blood, &, therefore, practising hard at close cannons all the time.

That is not the best training for a game so different as snooker. Snooker here has been brought to a pitch of excellence it has never reached before, & i mean that not only are the big players playing great snooker, but the professionals, hitherto considered second class, are now challenging them. Players like Albert Brown who i think is the future star, John Barrie, who is outstanding in both games, not yet tough enough, but of the right metal, Alec Brown & John Pulman play top-class snooker, & i was very impressed with their play against me.

As to Joe Davis, to give me 21 point & a licking shows him to be as great as ever. His speed & accuracy all over the table are marvellous, & he spells aggression in all he does. He never snookers in the D if a middle-pocket pot is at all on, & a chance of getting to the top again. Aggression is protection, as in boxing & this spirit of going all out is one of the secrets of Joe's success. He doesn't, as a policy, play a shot intending to miss, so as to play safe.

I asked McConachy what he thought of a remark i had heard Davis make, namely that billiards after snooker is as easy as falling off a horse. Mac didn't agree.

How is it, if that is so, that there are so many fine amateur snooker players & so few really good amateur billiard players. In the clubs, an amateur can often make the professional look silly at snooker, but that is definitely not the case at billiards!! Where is the billiards professional to take Joe's place?? No English professional stands a ghost of a chance with him at the game, but any of the leading snooker professionals can give him a hard game, & sometimes beat him. Who of them could beat him at billiards??"

In support of Mac's view i proffered the fact that a good amateur billiards player could even beat a good snooker, if he had never played the game before, merely by his billiards technique, whereas the reverse would be impossible. Mac agreed emphatically.

My defeats in the tournament have made me determine to eliminate from my game the technical faults which revealed themselves & i am getting down very seriously to practice on these lines. It is a matter of the eye, sighting, & when the eye has lost the snooker angles, its no easy job to get it back. Snooker may appear the art of pin-pointing, but you can't pin-point long shots, & it is notably with long shots that you get in & unless you get in, you can't win. Walter Lindrum, when in tip form at billiards, found it hard to concentrate on the long-range stuff. Some people tell me i ought to wear glasses like the others, &, of course, there comes a time for every professional when the eyesight changes & a bad spell comes. Sydney Smith had one & took to contact lens,

Incidentally, speaking of Sydney, he's been playing the safety technique with a subtlety few can equal & that comes from his billiards obviously. Glasses won't tell you the angles, nor bring the snooker angles back after you've been concentrating on the 3 ball game. You need practice to bring the eye back to focussing the typical snooker angles, & , in my opinion, it is much easier to get them back than it is at billiards. I'm convinced that if i had put in at snooker, i'd have been a super snooker player!! Naturally, it will take a bit of time to get back the feeling of ease at snooker, but, as i said, i am working hard & it'll come. I believe in graduated practice. If, for example, you're out of form at long shots, it is no good putting them up & practising long shots, its time wasted. You must start at close positions & work up gradually from the miniature to the long range, & that not quickly but slowly!!

Practising long shots for an hour, without that preliminary, is time wasted. Incidentally, you can train your eye out of form as well as into it. Sighting is everything & once you've mastered it, that is, got back to quick focusing, it's the same in both games. You have to train the eyes. I've been straining them!! I've had to be overcareful, & to concentrate too hard, to avoid a mistake. It's no use sighting the ball & letting fly blindly in snooker, make one bad error, & you've lost the frame. In my matches, i have often been going along nicely, with the scores more or less level, & then one slip, & the frame is lost. Billiards is chiefly delicate shots, in snooker, you are dealing with what i'll call heavy balls. Snooker needs delicacy, of course, but most of the shots are screw & stun, & when you've been slogging away at nurseries for years, well, it speaks for itself. If you're playing billiards all the time you can't suddenly turn to snooker, & beat professionals who have been doing the opposite season after season. Players in top form don't have to worry about the angles, as i've had to do. Match winning snooker needs extra care, of course, but i have had to be over-careful & that taxes the eyes too much & in over concentrating i've taken my eyes off the ball just too soon.

All of the big professional players have had their bad spells, mostly due to changing eye-sight, even Joe Davis, & didn't that great player Walter Donaldson lose 6 of his 7 games in the tournament last season. Anyway, i gave Fred Davis, who was playing very well, a good game

(McConachy lost 17-20) & i played pretty well, but it was a strain of excessive concentration all through the tournament.

I saw some of the game mentioned by McConachy, & can confirm that he played really well, winning one long frame, by superb potting & positional play, after being 16-61 down.

I have been criticised for slow play. How could i do otherwise under the circumstances?? The professionals here put in countless hours practising, some have their own tables, & one i know practises on Sundays. They all have access to the best tables, which is more than i have!! Also my 22 oz cue & small tip have been the target of criticism (on my own account of course), but they are the same that i have used i my best achievements at the game. Anyhow, i'm figuring on making a good advance towards my best against Horace Lindrum in the Championship, & whether i succeed or not in getting back to real form, i'll be all out, depend on it!! Also, i hope to give Sydney Smith a good fight at snooker when we meet for Billiards and Snooker at Newcastle on the 4th. By the way, i'd like to compliment the English professionals on their good sportsmanship, you rarely hear growls & grizzles from them after a bad session or a lost game.

Every admirer of McConachy will, i feel, endorse my good wishes to him for his championship duel & in his efforts to get back to tip-top form in snooker. He leaves for a South African tour in April next, & will return next season, when i trust we shall see him at his very best, & also in some billiards, for it is farcical that lovers of the game should have no opportunities to see one of history's greatest billiards artists & exponents of the game exhibit his magical mastery of it.

HARKING BACK THE YEAR 1951

Billiards and Snooker Jan 1966

*Clark McConachy won the World professional Billiards Championship by beating John Barrie, by 9294--6691. McConachy was 55 & had played no serious billiards for years. Barrie had played in two championships since the war but had not been too well earlier in the season. A splendid game, however, resulted. McConachy showing delightful mastery of **cannon play** of all kinds & Barrie shining at the top where he had **perfected his own formula**. Highest break, McConachy 481. Fine attendances.*

MC CONACHY ACHIEVES HIS HEART'S DESIRE

The Billiard Player

Oct 1951

When Clark McConachy & John Barrie went to the table for the opening of the World Professional Billiards Championship Final on September 3rd, expectation was rife as to what might happen. Some slight analogy existed with the big fight!!

Would solid, youthful John Barrie cement the spot-end formula he has evolved into a machine-like scoring technique &, maybe, reel off continuous high breaks, to wear the veteran New Zealand master down, or would the latter, ranked as one of the greatest half-dozen in the history of the game, swamp Barrie with endless runs of nurseries, thereby restoring the formidable scoring-fluency of the 1000 break era.??

It looked to be a case of close cannons versus top-of-the-table play.....

..... Those who expected nurseries from the word go were surprised, but the initiated knew that these would be a matter of time. Nevertheless, the cannon was the star feature of McConachy's billiards, in this break & indeed throughout the match. As it turned out, the nursery was not to appear, as a regular feature, till the third day. What McConachy gave us, however, was a recurring series of interludes or tableaux, in which the balls underwent every imaginable kind of canonic evolution, not only near, but away from the cushions. When one ball strayed a bit or got a

trifle out of pattern, a beautifully gauged cushion cannon returned it to the other two, & every type of cannon conceivable, served to keep the balls as close & interrelated, as in a pas de trois, to borrow a term from ballet.

..... *Barrie's play was, despite its skill & accuracy (at its best) a black & white reproduction against the sumptuous colour of McConachy's. He did in fact assay two or three bouts of nurseries when the opportunity arose but he was not their master. Half way through the game McConachy was able to exploit them at will & he made many delightful runs from the top-cushion to the middle, to pot the red & leave a white loser & so accomplish the baulk line shot. His speed at them was not striking but a month's regular play would alter matters.*

..... *To sum up, McConachy gave an exhibition of magical billiards, excelling in all phases of the game -- he elected once to play the red ball for an extended period & every stroke was a pleasure to see, particularly the way he brought the red nearly to the baulk line in order to make spectacular run-throughs. His slow screws were masterpieces of delicate execution & when he did choose, capriciously, to dally at the top & to resist the lure of his beloved cannons, he proved he could have played the spot-end game ad infinitum. This too was achieved with exquisite touch & variety of stroke. Independently of the result, the lover of the art will treasure McConachy's display as an unforgettable display of the art and poetry of the game.*

McConachy 9294 (59.96) -- 481, 438, 423, 397, 376, 248, 222, 206, 231.

John Barrie 6691 (44.81) -- 367, 336, 213, 225.

PEN PICTURE OF THE CHAMPION

Richard Holt

The Billiard Player

Oct 1951

..... *At the table, McConachy is a character, a camouflaged showman, & a great artist, who has probed the secrets of the 3 ball game to their Eleusinian origin. As showman, the little hip round the table corner, the suddenly quickened pace along the side-walk, the quaint, enigmatic glare, with true poker-face fixity, at the spectators, as though challenging anyone to catch him out in what he is doing, the try-out, for balance & feel of his cue, before some critical shot, the dramatic attitude of expectancy, as the drop cannon proceeds to its culmination, lime an anxious signalman watching the express take the points, all this entertain the observant spectator, apart from the play.*

He can make even the long loser exciting. Not a quick player, he Column No, when he wants to, be quick. His very deliberation, however, is arresting, seeing him construct a break is like watching an artist over his shoulder. Speed seems alien to such a don of the game, & to billiards of such introspection & genius.

Cannons to McConachy are like gold to a miser, or the sun to the flowers. He is their Cinquevalli. They are his lodestar. He watches over them like a shepherd, his sheep, & of one member strays, he shepherds, coaxingly, it back to the fold. He must have played at cannons in his nursery. When he screws, it is with a thaumaturgic wand, not a cue. As in other phases of the game, he loves the empirical & eschews the obvious. He is the arch aesthete of the game.....

..... *After 30 years of trying, he is World's Championship, at last. And a worthy on, truly, one of billiards' immortals.*

NEWS OF INTEREST

The Billiard Player

February 1951

Clark McConachy made 17 breaks of over 1000 in 1950. He is a non-smoker & teetotaller & takes a lot of exercise. He first won the New Zealand Professional Billiards Championship in 1915-16 &

made a break of **1083** (red) at **17½**. In 1922 he made a break of **915 with ivories**. He considers his greatest honour, that of being presented to HM King George V, at the Marlborough Club in 1922. He was the first player to make a **1000** break in **two** successive visits, & the first to make a **1000**, under baulk line rules. His record break is **1943**, v Joe Davis, at Manchester in 1932, & in the same match he made **464** nurseries, taking the balls backwards & forwards along the top-cushion. In 1934, he made a break of **1934** v Walter Lindrum at Brisbane.

PEEPS INTO THE PAST

The Billiard Player Sept 1950

Playing Joe Davis in 1932 at Thurston's, Clark McConachy played with **Thelma Carpenter's cue**, which he had brought away from Bournemouth in mistake for his own. He made 97, 194, 167 & 160(unfinished) with it in the session, &, later on, in the same match, & the same cue, compiled a magnificent break of **1,321!!** A month later McConachy introduced a new cue. It weighed **20¾ oz!!** A record weight for a first-class professional.

FRAGMENTS FROM FORMER DAYS

The Billiard Player Aug 1957

Charles Dawson **I ache all over -- arms, back & neck**, said Dawson, at the conclusion of this week's cannon bout with Vasquez at Soho Square. **I kept punching away at those big balls until i could hardly lift the cue up. The game isn't half such a good one as ours, not in touch or variety of strokes. There is only one game of Billiards.** (From an interview).

PUBLICITY BILL

The Billiard Player Sept 1957

BILLIARDS

Clark McConachy

World's Professional Billiards Champion

BILLIARDS RECORDS

World Professional Champion

New Zealand Professional
Champion, 1915--1952

Highest Break --1943 v Joe
Davis, Thurston's, 1932

Baulk Line record -- 1927 v
Walter Lindrum, Australia, 1934

466 consecutive cannons at
Manchester, 1932 (All made on
Top Cushion, travelling 13 times
between the two Top Pockets).

4 Breaks of 1000 in 1000up,
England, Scotland, Australia &
New Zealand.

BILLIARDS

1 hour, 400 start

SNOOKER

4 frames

6 Blacks start each frame

Trick Shots & Lessons in Ball Control

SNOOKER RECORDS

World Snooker Finalist, 1932 &
1952

Certificated for Max. Break of
147, 1952

Break of 165 in two frames, v
Joe Davis, Leicester Square
Hall in 1947. First frame 129,
followed by 36 in opening
second frame.

241 snooker centuries.

*An editorial reminiscence I recall some years ago being asked by Clark McConachy if i would come along & help him with a **book on billiards** he was writing -- he meant me, i took it, to take notes as he did the shots. **Red ball play** was the theme. We, therefore, hied ourselves to a well-known club in the West. It was freezing cold & there was no heating, as the only table we could get was one away from the main scene of the action. We each wore our overcoats!! But what took place was the direct opposite of what i had anticipated, **for i did the strokes & Mac made the notes!!***

*He put the red up for **middle-pocket work** & asked me to make the particular shots & so on till we had done the repertory of centre pocket in-offs. Alas, this book never materialised!! As he was touring the country, time was insufficient.*

*As a matter of fact, we packed up eventually, billiards under arctic conditions was, to put it mildly, unenjoyable. I still have the **book** in which he wrote, but have never looked at it as i did not want to imbibe his knowledge as my own. He has never written for it, so i hope that if he reads this he'll tell me what to do with it!! A great pity -- for a **book on billiards** by the maker of a **1943 break** would be a treasure. I hope he'll get busy on it yet.*

LOOKING BACK ON THE TOURNAMENT The Billiard Player Aug 1931

..... Davis is a master of nursery cannons, & when in opposition to Lindrum, it was interesting to see how he compared with the Australian champion at this branch of the game. He does not excel Lindrum at nurseries -- Lindrum seems to rock the balls rather than cannon with them -- but he compares well enough to make over 70 cannons between the top & middle-pockets!!

..... Lindrum does not seem to be in earnest, unless it is that his free & easy mode of playing causes a false impression -- an impression that however many thousands he is behind, he will always catch up.

..... McConachy ... was in ... deadly earnest..... with jaws set an muscles taut, fighting for every point. Running in & out of difficulties.... I saw him run up over 900 points in an unfinished break, & yet so uncertain was his play that not once should i have been surprised had he broken down at any particular shot. McConachy was just lacking the final accuracy of touch necessary to manoeuvre the balls always into the desired position.

CLAUDE FALKINER

NURSERY CANNONS

By Claude Falkiner (Holder of close Cannon World's Record)

This is a copy of Chapter XIV from **BILLIARDS FOR AMATEURS**
by Sidney H Fry, 1922?. This is possibly the only written work by Falkiner.

Close cannons make a greater demand on "touch" and delicate cueing than any other phase of billiards. By the same token they make a greater call on one's descriptive powers than any other stroke or movement. indeed the 'nursery cannon' is as difficult to describe on paper as it is to play, and that is saying a good deal. Some of my brother professionals may disagree, but i should certainly "ticket" close-cannon play as the very highest form of the art and science of billiard playing. Therefore the stroke or movement, call it as you will, is only for the very advanced player and can have little interest, in an educative sense, for the average player.

A gossamer-like "touch" is the greatest essential to the successful "nursery-cannon" expert. Can this be acquired? It can, but it will probably take you years of assiduous practice and study before the extreme delicacy of touch demanded of the close-cannon player comes to you. And even then you may have done very well indeed to score from ten to a dozen consecutive close cannons. But the practice will have been of immense advantage to you. It will, generally speaking, have led to an improvement in touch and control of the ball at close quarters. Indeed, the player who makes a dozen or so consecutive cannons, may rest assured that his touch and judgement of close-ball contacts is quite good enough to help him defeat a great many more players than will beat him.

But i should be misleading you if i failed to express the conviction that the real artist at close-cannon manipulation is born and not made. Take the late John Roberts, Harry Stevenson, and Tom Reece, for instance. Their great talent in close-cannon work was always beyond question, but how many attributed their ability in this direction to the fact that all three came into billiards with the sense of touch very highly developed? If i may not be considered immodest in saying so, the same is true in my own case. I had "touch" before i had knowledge, and in specialising more or less in the beautiful and difficult close-cannon movement, i was merely following the bent of the gift Nature had bestowed upon me.

I am often asked whether it is more difficult to secure position than to maintain it. It is not easy to define a satisfactory answer. Although on a few odd occasions one obtains the position by some fortunate circumstance or another, a lucky kiss, for instance, working up for ideal position on the rail is beset with more difficulties than the keeping of it when once you have obtained it. For one thing your range of operations is a little more extended, and the minutest fraction of an inch out in either strength or direction is nearly always fatal. You have to sheer off from your scheme of things for the moment and begin all over again on the extremely difficult task of getting balls into the "just so" position. And when the "just so" has been engineered, the "ticking" of cannons is fairly easy--if you are in good touch, that is--until you approach the period when you have to break the sequence by playing one off a cushion. Then perhaps you have the most trying ordeal of the whole movement. you are up against an essential to close-cannon play. How to work the cue ball into position for continuation of the sequence. It is comparatively easy to keep the cue ball on one side

or the other of the two objects when "on the run," but a different proposition when you have to play on to a cushion after striking the first object ball and before making contact with the second. One of two things may happen to end the run. You may get the cue ball between the two objects, or else get it directly in line with them and be called upon to play a difficult masse" (and which, if made, may leave the position more difficult than ever) or open up a pocket shot.

There are many variations of the close-cannon sequence, but all except the straight "rail nurse" are quite beyond the capabilities of say 999 out of every 1000 players. The endless variety of kiss shots, and masse' effects to maintain position, are more often than not even too difficult for the super-expert. Hence, in my opinion, it would be a sheer waste of time to dwell on these phases from an instructional point of view. Unless a player is born with the extreme delicacy of touch required for successful close-cannon play, it will take him many years to acquire it to a degree which makes a run the thing of beauty which Stevenson, Reece and (sometimes) myself make of it. But there is no reason why the good average amateur should not practise the "rail nurse". It will certainly improve his touch and give him a close insight into the extreme value of cue-ball control and object-ball contacts.

In all close-range strokes, the best results can only be obtained by "shortening" the cue. By this is meant taking hold of the butt somewhere near the splicing portion of the cue, and making your bridge much closer to the ball than for ordinary play. For close-cannon play, your bridge must be close up to the ball ; it gives you greater command over it and reduces to a minimum the tendency to "pinch" the cue and "dig" the ball when the latter has only an inch or two to travel.

If u happen to be a fairly good player and can make your sixties, seventies and eighties, and have an overwhelming ambition to become proficient at the "rail-nurse" type of cannons, be very careful that you do not grasp the shadow and let go of the substance. Don't make a fetish of the close cannon. In learning to make it well, you may be losing your power of cue in other direction. In a word, don't make any particular phase of the game an obsession, whether it be close cannons or anything else. It use to be said of a certain professional who had an exquisite touch and beautiful style that he sacrificed hundreds of points because of his decided partiality for the nursery cannon. The same may have been said of the remaining few really great close-cannon experts, though personally i cannot go so far as to admit that my own all-round game really suffers because i tick off a few close cannons now and again. But there is much wisdom in what Stevenson (a beautiful cannon player) used to say, "Never leave the top cushion when on nursery cannons ; if you do make a mistake there, you have a couple of pockets open to you." And it is really significant that in the best and highest breaks compiled by Stevenson, Reece and myself, the nursery cannon has figured to a comparatively small extent. Nurseries are beautiful and bewildering to look at, and flatter one's sense of vanity a little, maybe, but to the average amateur, who is the real backbone of the billiards world, the more difficult of the phases of the close cannons are best left alone. The effect, apart from the spectacular, is nearly always to lose more than you gain in a match.

TOM NEWMAN

11 FEB 30

It pleases me to note that **Claude Falkiner** has shown great form against Davis, returning high averages, with several breaks of 700 or thereabouts. In one of these he scored **203 nursery cannons in ten feet of cushion space** -- a remarkable feat even for such a master of close cannon play.

WILLIE SMITH

A CASE OF NOSTALGIA

Richard Holt

Billiards and Snooker Oct 1966

In early January of 1949 billiards enthusiasts including, of course, habitués of Thurston's before it was bombed in 1941 -- it was born again in October, 1947, & opened under a new name, Leicester Square Hall -- were delighted to read that two of the "giants" of the past era, Willie Smith & Claude Falkiner, 63 & 64, respectively, would play a week's exhibition at this classic venue of the game.

Professional billiards, at the time, was more or less, to quote from my report of the event, "in a state like that of the garden of a long empty house". Hence the thrill of anticipation on the part of connoisseurs & enthusiasts. Readers may care for a few retrospective remarks on the match.

When the players "entered the ring", they got quite an emotional ovation. Smith, looked a shade older but only a shade & still, as we quickly saw, the same brisk navigator round the table, who had made a break of 2,743 without a single run of nurseries, & one of 2030: Claude Falkiner, avuncular & now quite Pickwickian in appearance, stouter than in the palmy days of the game, a master craftsman. Breaks of 1,130 (his record), 1001, 985, & with ivories, 870, were highlights in his career, not to mention a run of 230 close cannons.

Both found the occasion a bit unsettling, doubtless apprehensive of having lost their old skill, & also, the table a bit awkward. Hence the missing of easy shots at the outset. A modest 15 by Falkiner & neat 31 by Smith, followed in each case by a 21, obviously caused many who had doubtless imagined the players would start off from where they left off years before to wonder. Gradually, however, accuracy improved & 57 by Smith (a glimpse of true Smithian craft), following 38 by Falkiner, clearly showed the customers would have their reward.

Smith led by a few; Falkiner took it into his head to screw into the top pocket off the Spot; probably just to show he could do it. Then he complained about the balls, "they kick badly like brick meeting brick, instead of responding sweetly & kindly", he said. "Never mind" added Smith, "I'll really be off in a moment".

And he was! With a gargantuan fluke. "Thank God for the pockets," (he had tried a connn!), he commented, "I think I'm going strong, & then something happens!" He led 260 -- 159.

He essayed a screw-back cannon, missed & the object-ball careered round the table & knocked the red in. "A good job you're not playing Mr Inman", chaffed Falkiner. "Well", retorted Smith, "I've not had a fluke for 15 years, i think i ought to be allowed that one". Falkiner made a dainty 31 & then Smith launched out on a break which ended at 99. At that figure the cueball came to rest at the pocket edge. "Hope springs eternal" consoled Falkiner, who himself had missed quite a number of hots by a hairsbreadth. No runs of nursery cannons yet, which caused Smith to proclaim, "Falkiner's forgotten his nurseries, it's up to me to make a few".

As Smith had always dubbed runs of these to be

cushion--crawling

this was a hot one! Interval score ; Smith 506 ; Falkiner 278.

"I'm just trying too hard to play as i used to" remarked Smith at the start of session 2, "but it won't come". The drought now came to an end for Falkiner, for an ideally harmonious 91 in his old style delighted everyone & elicited loud applause. Despite the absence of bit breaks, the exalted quality of the play enraptured spectators & full atoned for statistical shortcomings.

At last came the first century break, a fluent & symmetrical 123 by Smith, which called forth applause both long & loud. "I never got that for a thousand in the old days", commented Smith, genuinely surprised. Eighty & 74 by Smith & 77 by Falkiner showed the old facility was returning. Then came a gem of 185 by Falkiner, a model of exquisite craftsmanship which brought down the house. "I'm trying too hard" he said, disappointed at the breakdown. "We'ree missing the blindfold strokes", added Smith. "You'ree doing fine!" cried a spectator. "Hear, hear" shouted others.

A glaring fluke came from Smith. "I'm not ashamed of it", he announced in mock defiance. "Rather difficult, i think", jollied Falkiner, "to find a billiard player ashamed of a fluke".

Well, in the end, Smith won the match by 6278 to 4566, but who cared. The onlookers had come to see the true art of the game revealed & they saw it. That was enough & when they streamed out at the end i heard nothing but praise & remarks indicative of a desire for more.

Smith's breaks were : 123, 143, 108, 123, 109, 105, 266, 222, 109, 182, 157, 121, 170, 212 & to crown it all, a superb effort of 323 a feast of co-ordinated stroke play that took us back to pre-war glories. Smith's subtle technique which adorned everything he did, gilded even the "blindfold" shots.

Falkiner's breaks were : 185, 121, 188, 122, 150, 101 & 140. He displayed in full measure his glittering talent of past days & dozens of touches resembled, in their sensitivity & purity of execution, the exquisite touch of a master. Smith's use of drag was also a thing to wonder at.

In his speech at the end, Falkiner declared, "Playing billiards & snooker is the secret of perpetual youth". His very appearance was a proof of it. After Smith's 323 break, Falkiner summed it up : "A wonderful break!" he said ; " i suggest he plays Joe Davis !" "I hit them & hoped" said Smith. "Your faith brought you home" replied Falkiner. He declared finally, "What was most pleasing was the number of old friends who came to look on. You know there's a great deal of nostalgia in all this" & he was right, for everything in the match made live again the memories of the past.

If i recall rightly, they played once again in London & the Provinces & Smith & Joe Davis began a series which became an "annual", latterly at Burroughes Hall & which one remembers nostalgically, to quote Falkiner's graphic expression. If only we could see them today !

WILLIE SMITH & THURSTONS

The Billiard Player Feb 1955

It is a very sad happening that **Leicester Square Hall** is closing down, the last game being between Joe & Fred Davis commencing January 24th, & when i roll up to play Joe the previous week my mid will be going back very many years. In fact, i first played there in September, 1910. The Hall was then called **Thurston's Hall**, the premises being the headquarters of this old firm of billiard table makers.

However, i must turn the pages just a little further back, this being to the May previously, when i played in London for the first time against the late **Tom Newman**, this battle was at **Burroughes Hall**, Soho Square, & **John Roberts** was Tom's backer for 100 pounds aside.

We had a terrific set-to, Tom leading the first three days by over 1000, & i ended the first week's play leading by over this margin. Tom came again, caught me, & led until the last session, when i made a **736 break**, & won by 811. By the way, this was the largest break ever at the Hall, in spite of the fact that the London Tournament was played there, & all the leading professionals of the day participated.

It may read strangely that i mention the game at Burroughes Hall, but i do so for the reason that, it being my first game in London, i was under the eyes of the critics, & in those days the Press gave the game of Billiards plenty of space. Long reports were given, & weekly articles of a column were the rule, not merely the scores, if u can find them, as now.

Whether it is that because a newspaper runs a competition, the others will not report the games, i know not, but the public & all others connected with the game suffer. It is useless to argue that there is no public interest in Billiards & Snooker, &, as a matter of fact, these two games are the most played of any by the British people, & in this statement i do not exclude Golf. A few years ago there was a referendum in Leeds, & it pointed to the fact that there were over 1000 Billiards tables in the City. This means that there are about 10,000 people playing Billiards and Snooker each day in Leeds alone. It would be very interesting to have the rest of the figures for the country. Again, when the sports news is being announced by the BBC, it is "Finally, Snooker". That is if it is not missed out. If anything is missed, it is Billiards and Snooker.

After getting this off my chest, i come back to my reminiscences, & the reports of the critics on my first game in London. Some said that i **played with a cue like a pit prop**, & that my stance was wrong & also that **my cue bridge was far too long**, & my backer said that i must read all this nonsense & forget all about it. I wisely did so, & the fact remains that when i won the Championship at the first attempt in 1920, ALL the professionals then **copied my heavy cue**. I play with a **cue of 18 oz** in weight.

Coming back to my memories, i mad my first appearance there in September, 1910, as i have already mentioned, & my opponent was **HW Stevenson**, he conceding me a start of 3000 in a game of 9000 up, which game i won by more than my start. Harry was not at all pleased, & the fact that a Scotsman was playing the bagpipes outside did not make matters any better for him. This was the Scots usual custom each Saturday afternoon. Stevenson told the doorman to go & tell the Scot that Stevenson was playing there, not **Aiken**, who was the Scottish Champion in those days.

A most memorable event occurred during the course of this game that has never had any mention anywhere, this being that the late **Charlie Chambers** started his refereeing career during the course of this game. Charlie, was the **spot boy**, this meaning that he wore nice white gloves & picked the balls out of the pockets, **the referee sitting on a high stool near the marking board**. On the third evening of the game the referee failed to turn up, & Chambers did both the marking & spotting, even though he was only about 16 years old, & he took the job on ever afterward, & a grand referee he was.

How on earth the referee could properly do his job in a competent manner so far away from the balls was a mystery to me, & i go so far as to say that no one could cover nursery cannons in this position.

Another important change was made at the same time, this being that **the breaks were added after the break ended**.

It was the custom in those days to call the total score as the player went on, & at the close of the break the number was announced. If a spectator came in late he was totally unaware of what the player had made, & even those in the hall were ignorant.

I suggested to the Press & to Chambers that the breaks be counted aloud, & added after the player had broken down, so that the spectators could be aware of the size of the break, & this custom was adopted everywhere afterwards.

How much more enjoyable for the spectators to know when a player is approaching the 500 or the 1000 than to sit wondering what the break was. I claim the credit for this change in the marking, which benefited everyone.

*After this game with Stevenson i played very little at Thurston's Hall, there being a boycott against Willie, one reason being that i went all out to win my games by as big a margin as i could, & then the 1914 war came. However, in the autumn of 1919 i made another appearance there, playing **Fred Lawrence**, & then the great match with **Melbourne Inman** was played there. I had won the World's Championship, & Mel did not participate, but he came along to Burroughes Hall at the final session to challenge me.*

It was a case of the new champion against the old. We played at Thurston's Hall, & i won by thousands. Again there was an amusing incident after the end of the game. When we attempted to leave the hall we were really & truly "Snookered", Leicester Square being packed with people, & all traffic was stopped. They were calling for Willie. I was amazed, never dreaming that there was such interest in the game, but i ought to have known better, because all the seats were booked for the two weeks prior to the start of the match.

Eventually, the police did manage to get two taxicabs into the Square, & linked hands so as to enable us to dash into the cabs. I made my dash, Mel following, but to his dismay he was bundled into my cab, & off we went together to the Piccadilly Hotel, where i celebrated, & Mel took it all in good part, & had a drink or two with us. This match was a real winner, & any price could be had for tickets.

I came along one afternoon, arriving just in front of Mel, &, much to my amusement a tout offered him a 5/9 ticket for 2 pounds. Mel wanted a policeman to arrest him for fraud. I roared with laughter, & suggested that Inman be arrested, so as to let me win.

These are some of my memories of Leicester Square Hall, & there are very many others of the late & present day professionals, & it is safe to say that there will never be another hall in London like it. Thurston's name was hallowed in the Billiards world, & even to this day i find it hard to say Leicester Square Hall. It has always been Thurston's to me, & it is not an easy matter to alter one's tongue after 45 years.

I looked forward to my yearly game with my great pal, Joe Davis, it being a social affair as well as an entertainment for the public, & when i do so this time it will be a sad occasion, knowing full well that i will never play there again, & i did so much want to do so only once more, just once, so as i could be there on my 70th birthday, that is if i am spared, to be able to play.

WILLIE SMITH ON MEL

The Billiard Player Oct 1951

*The passing of Melbourne Inman has left a great gap in the personalities of the Billiards World..... It would have done one good to hear Mel laugh when he used to enter my office. I did a quick jump up from my chair, & laughingly said -- **Lock the safe. Mel is here.** Bang went the*

safe door. I always did this, & after a few times Mel used to announce himself -- **Lock the safe, Mel is here.**

..... I take my mind back to when we were playing at Grimsby in 1922. One morning we went down to Cleethorpes for a blow of sea air, & along the front there was a row of stalls showing all kinds of games, etc. Then we came to a stall with a miniature Billiards table on it, & on the table rested two packets of cigarettes. If you were successful in knocking them both down, one was the prize.

We both knew that it was not possible because of the distance the packets were apart, but Mel said -- **We cannot leave this burglar out.** We tried, lost, & paid our 2d each, Mel saying it was impossible. The stall-holder retorted -- **What is impossible!! You watch me. Any decent Billiards player can do it.** He put the packets up again, & i may say closer together, & down the packets went. I asked him to show me how he did it, & he set the packets up again, but Willie snatched up the cue, & knocked down the cigs. Being a non-smoker, i handed the cigs to Mel, & he said -- **Just my luck, Capstan, & i smoke Gold Flake.**

A Grimsby newspaper actually gave a full column that night on our visit to the stalls, it being a great joke. **Any decent Billiards player can do it.**

Why was Inman such a draw with the public.?? There can only be one answer, & this is that he was a great all-rounder, & the audience were never bored with his play. Mel once laughingly told me that people did not come to see him win, but came hoping that he would lose, & he said that he did not care about this as long as they came to the play & paid. Also, he was a master at forcing strokes, getting out of difficulties time & time again by sheer cue power.

Billiards would never have slipped back as a public entertainment had there been a few more Inmans, instead of

cushion-crawlers

WILLIE SMITH

31 JAN 30

I had my revenge **over Clark McConachy** Following a 1208 break on the second day came several indifferent displays, but then i rolled out successive breaks of 1046 & 919 on the Friday night. With these huge runs i turned a four-figure deficit into a four-figure lead, &, with only one day left for play, everything was in my favour. McConachy made his effort on Saturday night, but he could not catch me, being 700 behind with only half an hour to play, & this period was put aside by each of us to give exhibition shots. Both of us made some great strokes, in fact, every shot on the table was executed, & the audience laughed most heartily at the display. The crowning point came when my opponent having potted me twice in succession. I made a great cannon the second time & potted him the next shot, promptly giving him a double baulk to face. "Mac" let drive across the table, connected up with my ball, fluked a loser, & double baulked me again, & this time i failed to score. The exhibition caused the most laughter i have ever heard at a professional match, &, much to the surprize of the spectators, **i made two runs of nursery cannons**, the laughter breaking out afresh when i said : "If the Council knew i could play these they would be limited."

RISO LEVI

AN APPRECIATION OF RISO LEVI

Sydney Smith

The Billiard Player

June 1952

No matter how long the games of Billiards and Snooker survive the vicissitudes of sporting fortune the name of Riso Levi will forever be associated with all that is profound in these two great games. His knowledge of the intricacies of Billiards, & his deep understanding of the meaning of words & the beauty of language, combined to make him the outstanding Billiards writer of all-time. I have heard it said that Riso picked the brains of those who had great knowledge of the game & making full use of his ability as a writer, earned a reputation not wholly deserved. How utterly stupid, & how far from the truth.

I have been very close to Riso Levi for 25 years -- closer perhaps than anyone outside his own family -- & i have on hesitation in saying that his amazing perception, his extraordinary breadth of mind, & his clear & logical brain, enabled him to see clearly the thousands of problems which make up the game of Billiards, & to make definite contributions unknown even to professional cuemen. His influence on the game, especially in the field of writing, was enormous, & will be felt for generations to come. The fact that he never reached great heights as a practical cueman had no bearing on his capacity to understand the game, & to impart that understanding to countless readers & pupils.

His monumental works -- Billiards for the Million, Volumes 1 to 3, & Billiards, The Strokes Of The Game, Volumes 1 to 3, are the greatest one-man literary effort in the sporting world, & will stand for all time as a fitting memorial to his deep & lasting influence on the whole game of Billiards.

His writing was not confined strictly to the theory of Billiards. His beautifully written humorous books -- Billiards In A Lighter Vein, Charlie Brown & I, & My Wife & I, reveal a first-class raconteur with an abiding sense of humour & a deep knowledge of life in general. The many readers of his learned articles on astronomy will bear witness of his erudition in other fields.

And he had great courage. He was fearless in his views & never shy of propounding his well considered opinions even when they ran counter to long accepted theories. The proof of his clear & powerful brain can be seen in the fact that never once in his long & wordy battles on the theories of the game -- even against leading professionals -- was he proved wrong.

Picking brains forsooth!! He had enough & some left over for half a dozen lesser mortals. He was a kind & gentle man, happiest when he was giving from his bottomless well of wisdom. I am proud & humble to have been privileged to be close to this great man, & eternally grateful that circumstances ordained that, at an early age in my career, our paths should cross & so enable me to drink deeply from the ever-flowing fountain of knowledge that was Riso Levi.

He had an immense influence on my life & taught me many things. I was fortunate to know him in the full flower of his greatness, & doubly fortunate to have been one of his closest friends.

He lived a full & splendid life & gave freely of his many talents. Now, at the grand age of 86, he has passed to Elysian Fields where perhaps he is listening to the click of ghostly billiard balls & expounding on even deeper theories of his beloved game of billiards.

It came as a great shock when i read of the death of Mr Riso Levi in The Billiard Player. Between 1946-51 i spent a week of my holiday each year with him, & as i wrote to your paper in 1946, his wonderful patience & knowledge, imparted in such generous measure, gave me an enthusiasm i shall never lose.

We used to go to the billiards room at about 10am, staying till about 11pm, & always it was me that sagged at the knees & begged to go to bed. Yes!! Those hours i spent in the quiet of the billiards room at Wilmslow with that great character & gentleman, Riso Levi, will always be remembered by me. Wherever Billiards is played in the years to come, his influence will be felt.

While reminiscing at the meal table, he would enliven the discussion with anecdotes about the giants of the past, & how amusing he could be when in the mood!! However one might disagree with him, one had to admire his forthrightness, especially his demonstrations at the table to emphasize his points. We can best remember him by doing all we can to further the interests of Billiards with the same enthusiasm.

TOMMY REECE

The death of Tom Reece severs the last link with the second of the three great epochs of professional billiards. First, we had the Roberts - Mitchell - Cook - Bennett - Peall era. Secondly, that in which Stevenson, Dawson, Inman, Reece, Diggle, Harveson & Aiken were the shining lights, & lastly, what may be called the twilight of the gods, the reign of Lindrum - Davis - Newman - Falkiner - Smith & McConachy.

The connoisseur will remember Tom Reece as a magician in the game's most delicate sphere, cannon play, rather than as the hero of two sensational episodes, those in which he exploited the anchor & pendulum formulae so prolifically, though these feats, red-hot news at the time, formed the burden of the tributes paid him in the obituary notices. He must be given credit for his manipulation of these two strokes which were rather a freakish offshoot of the game than an essential feature, but others managed to follow in his footsteps in this respect. Only one or two, however, equalled him, & none excelled him, in style, artistry & delicacy of touch & execution. His play was full of grace & charm, & a break by him, at his best, was always fascinating to watch. His was the poetry of the game, & he, a stylist par excellence.

On the walls of London clubs figure cartoons of the rich & vivid characters of Edwardian days, days when bohemians were abroad & individuality was at its zenith. Tom Reece belonged in spirit to those congenial times, & as such opulent personalities take their leave one by one, a keen sense of loss affects us, for when all have gone, our national life will be the poorer.

PASSING OF A GREAT BILLIARDS ARTIST

Tom Reece Dies at 80..... Tom Reece was born at Oldham on August 12th 1873. He passed away at his home at Lancing, Sussex, on Friday, 16th October. His great rival, Melbourne Inman, departed this life on August 11th, 1951, aged 73. So their lives & careers were practically coterminous. Each had a chequered career, & each was a colourful character apart from his

vocation. Unfortunately, billiards has had no Wisden's to tabulate a complete statistical survey of their countless meetings -- billiard enthusiasts do not, like cricketers, revel in literary treatment of their game -- &, after all, bearing in mind the big difference in the two games, in the case of such personalities as these, it is the general rather than the particular that counts.

Nevertheless, one would like to know how many times these ideal antagonists bested each other, Inman had the advantage in wins by a big margin, to be sure, but wins are not everything, & most connoisseurs would surely plump for the Oldham player when it came to the subtler phases & style of the three-ball game.

Reece did not see a billiard table till he was 17, a cotton-mill (he was a knotter, earning 15s a week) was the scene of his early life, & his hobby was swimming, at which he could do the 100 yards in 65 secs. When he did eventually sight a table - at a club - he was in ecstasy at the sight, & with the game. He soon started to play, & the club of the Cotton Spinners Association gave him facilities for practising. "From that moment my fate was sealed" he related later. It was his one chance of rising in the world!! Afterwards it was all billiards for him, & later on he got a chance of seeing John Roberts play. Many years afterwards, in his heyday, he would tell people Roberts was the greatest player he had ever known.

Reece did not make his first 100 break till he was 22, but five years later, in 1902, he made his first 500. For the next 30 years or so Reece was a top-liner in billiards, & he won a name for artistry that places him among the great exponents of the game. In 1911 he visited Australia, where, incidentally, he beat Inman in a game in which his highest break was 513, & Inman's 584, & here is what the then Secretary of the NSW Association wrote about him. "A billiardist all over, his pose is perfection, his movements at the table are rapid & graceful, his delivery free & his billiards -- well, superior." All who saw him at his best were charmed by the refinement & delicacy of his play, & his conception of the game was one which confined the playing area to segments of the table to the exclusion of all the rest. His variations of delivery & nuances of touch were many, & only distinguishable to the keen-eyed. He was one of the first, if not the first, to use the masse' & semi-masse' for positional purposes, at the spot-end. Naturally, when he missed, he left them on, which explains why Inman invariably bettered bettered his aggregate. Stevenson also was one of the game's cleverest players, & like Reece he crossed swords continually with a player whose methods were the antithesis of his own, Charles Dawson. The names of Reece & Stevenson, however, loom larger on the walls of the Pantheon of billiards art than those of their two great rivals, splendid players though these were, but of course, there are those, perhaps the majority, who will maintain that the greatest players are those who win. But that is starting something!!

Reece's great ambition was to win the championship. Six times he reached the final, only to fail on each occasion, three times to Inman & three to Tom Newman. Against the former (in 1913) he got to within 1373 (18,000--16,627), & against the latter (in 1924), to within 1155 (16,000--14,845). In the 1913 championship, Reece was actually in front as it came to the straight, & by delightful play at the top & in close cannons & masse' effects, he had closely contested the issue all the way, bit in the final spurt Inman drew away, to win. In the 1914 event, Reece beat both George Gray, the red-ball champion, & Stevenson (two of his best feats), only to fail against Inman.

Reece will always be remembered for his exquisite cannon play, & here we come to two highlights in his career which have attracted more attention perhaps (notoriety is doubtless the proper word) than his rare artistry, namely, the break of 499,135 (unfinished) with the anchor stroke, in 1907, & his exploitation of the pendulum cannon, in 1927, the stroke with which he

suddenly confronted Inman, to the latter's surprise, but not consternation, despite Reece's growing score, for Inman, when up against it, was made merely more determined.

A lot of misconception has marked references to the mammoth break, which Reece made at Burroughes and Watts Salon (London) during June 3rd to July 6th, in 1907, against J Chapman. The balls were not jammed in the pocket jaw, as has been so widely stated, but in the position shown by our photo (taken by Burroughes and Watts at the time), Reece made the cannon by contacting, kiss-wise, the further ball (red), & skimming the whit on the rebound. Chapman scored 926 before Reece got the position, with his score 825. For the rest of the game, Chapman occupied his seat, perhaps the most agonizing experience that has ever fallen to the lot of a billiard player, which is saying something.!!

Reece's marathon occupied in all 85 hours, 49 minutes, sessions were often played during the am period & theatrical friends would look in to see the score. He made 249,552 cannons, & on an average scored 10,000 at a session. Orthodox sessions were at 3 & 8. Harry Tate did a sketch with a curtain fall in it, after which Reece was seen with a hoary white beard, the table area, apart from the cannon space, was covered in cobwebs, & Chapman, also bearded, lay snoring. The hero of the occasion received an extra cheque of 135 pounds for his pains. The refusal of an official Certificate by the Billiards Association was simply due to the fact that the public were not present at many session (though George Reid, of *The Sporting Life* was stated to have seen the whole break, & he lived to tell the tale) but it was expressly stated by the governing body that not the slightest imputation was cast on Reece's integrity.

The 1927 pendulum cannon was the old jam stroke, with a difference (Taylor made 1467--729 cannons, no limit--in 1891, but with the position arising by chance). Reece maintained that the balls were not jammed as the slightest inaccuracy would have dislodged them -- see Diagram No 4 -- & in this jam stroke we believe there was sometimes a slight space between the balls. Reece manoeuvred the balls into the jam of pendulum position after three strokes, on this occasion (v Inman, 1927 Championship, at Thurston's). The stroke differed from Taylor's in that Reece had to make a cushion-first cannon after each sequence -- he did this when each 20 was called -- & it was this stroke which needed special delicacy of touch. He compiled 1151 (568 cannons) in this break, & later made other big breaks with it, including one over 3000. The Billiards Association, however, felt compelled to restrict the pendulum cannon, as big breaks by it threatened to upset the game (Joe Davis made 2501 with it, against Newman, in the 1927 Championship), & by defining specifically the indirect cannon, & imposing a 35 limit, put paid to the stroke.

Henceforth, an indirect cannon was to be, ball--cushion--ball, which obviously excluded the pendulum cushion--ball--ball formula, whereby Reec, after each sequence, cleverly played on to the cushion without disturbing the balls in making the cannon, after which he would, as stated, resume the direct cannons. The real pendulum cannon is shown (No 2) in diagram, but Reece had once made a sequence of 42 cannons with it, with the two object-balls about 1/16th of an inch away from the cushion, & about 3 to 4 inches from each other -- one of the most skilful sequences of all his cannonic feats.!! We also show the rocker cannon (No 1), the Frank Ives' cannon, with which that player made 1267 cannons (with bigger balls) against John Roberts in 1893, & lastly, Reece's practice stroke for the anchor (1907) stroke.

..... One Easter, about 30 years ago, i went to the afternoon session of an Inman v Reece match, at the Orme Hall, Manchester. During the play, a fly plagued both players considerably by alighting on the balls or the cloth, near them. The efforts of all concerned to capture or kill it were of no avail. Session ended.

I went home to tea & returned for the evening session. Play recommenced, & the fly did likewise. But its antics this time lasted only about twenty minutes, because it alighted too near Inman, who thereupon killed it at a blow, at which point Tom Reece loudly called out to the marker, "Put him one on for that.!!"

Reece was a very nice looking man, with magnificent shoulders, &, like others of his time & sphere, was a striking character. He & they (Stevenson etc), were always beautifully dressed, not quite so casual as present-day pro's. it seemed to me they would dress in boiled, stiff shirts, even to play in a doss-house. It also seemed to me, when i & other members of the public paid to see them play at Orme's, that we were not paying them, oh no, they were condescending to display their art.

A WORD ON TOM REECE Joyce Gardner The Billiard Player Nov 53

I am grieved to hear of the passing of Tom Reece, for Billiards has lost a great Cue-man, & i, my first friend in the game. It was entirely due to his advice & encouragement that i became a Professional Billiards Player, & to help my progress he generously agreed to play an exhibition with me in London.

How well i remember that day!! He arrived at the crowded hall, immaculate in evening dress, & i must have appeared, as i felt, very young, & very frightened. However, Tom was wonderfully kind -- indeed, i could have been his daughter -- for not only did he allow me to win the match by over 200 points, but he took us to the Ritz afterwards to celebrate.

Following this, i played a number of Exhibition Matches with him, also making a film, & these experiences gave me every opportunity to fully appreciate his lively companionship. One train journey to Cheltenham in particular comes to my mind, when in an empty compartment he entertained my mother & i for some three hours with stories & impersonations of his great friend Eugene Stratton.

You have asked me, Mr Editor, to write these lines, & i am sure that elsewhere in this paper there will be tributes to the artistry of this wonderful player. Many stories have been written of him, but the one i like best was told me by the manager of a well-known firm of table makers, present at an exhibition given by Clark McConachy, the New Zealand Championship, & Tom, at a famous West End Club.

They appeared before his late Majesty, King George V, at a private party, & at the end of play, McConachy, the visiting professional, on being presented, bowed & withdrew, with Reece, however, the King began an animated conversation, & Tom was soon regaling His Majesty with jokes at which he laughed most heartily.

The only sign given by Tom that such an event was quite unusual, was the fact that during the whole of the conversation he chalked his cue tip continuously.

What a rich, full life he has had, travelling around the world more than half-a-dozen times, & numbering among his closest friends the leaders of sport & the arts -- it is good to know

that even at eighty he had just returned from a successful visit at Australia, & the picture i received at Tom showed him looking a debonair sixty.

We who love the game are sad that the last link with the golden age of billiards has been broken -- i remember him with gratitude.

PASSING OF A GREAT BILLIARDS ARTIST TOM REECE -- MEMORIAL ARTICLE : CONCLUSION

The Billiard Player Nov 1953

Tom Reece's personal record was 901 (v Inman 1916), that is, by orthodox billiards, & that was made with Ivory Balls. Inman's record was 950 (ivories). Reece got past the 900 milestone on several occasions.

Two of his finest feats were, 678 & 617, separated by one stroke (against Falkiner), & 559 & 549 on the same day, against Inman himself, in 1910. These breaks, with Ivory Balls, would obviously have amounted to more, with Bonzoline or Crystalate. Reece thought that the long-loser, with ivories, made precise leaving of the object-ball more difficult.

A quick scoring feat was his 886 in 48 minutes in the match against Falkiner referred to. In his last match with Inman, in 1913, Reece made a break of 708, & Inman, breaks of 698 & 653.

In the 1913 Championship Final, against Inman, which the latter won by 18,000--16,627, Reece played delightful billiards, executing masse' strokes & nurseries in exquisitely deft fashion, & scoring home-table bulk of his points at the top. After a grand break of 535, a close finish appeared likely, but Inman forged ahead, to win.

Reece's comparative weakness at forcing strokes was a handicap & it is obvious that, in his eyes, nursing the balls constituted the essential art of the game, for being able to calculate the after-position is manifestly a prerequisite to yoking strokes together, whereas the leave in a forcing stroke can scarcely come within the process of accurate control which marks the subtlest aspects of technique. It is of interest that shots (then called moving pictures) were taken of some of Reece's play in this Final & shown in cinemas.

When George Gray came to England in 1910, he compiled no fewer than 22 (1000) breaks, with non-ivory balls (including 2196 unfinished with Crystalates, & 1199 with Bonzoline balls). In 1914, he paid a second visit & started playing with ivories.

He had entered for the championship, & in practice soon made two 800 odd breaks with ivories. Against Tom Newman (then 20) he made 634, 520 & 517 with non-ivory balls. It appeared probable, therefore, that he would swamp Reece, whom he was to meet in the Championship, but it proved otherwise, & Reece gained a meritorious victory by 9000 to 7211. At the end of the second day's play, he was 1000 ahead, on the fourth day, nearly 2000, & although Gray made some good breaks, he was unable to overhaul the Oldham player.

One comment read, I shall always think that Gray was taken to play with ivory balls in match play before he was fitted to do so. Early he found that he could not produce his practice form in a strenuous game, & his nerves failed him. The writer was Inman.

Gray was stated to have caught a chill while in Scotland. Anyhow, Tom Reece beat him, & that was that. Gray did eventually make a 1000 break (1134, in 1915) with ivory balls.

In the 1924 Championship, Reece then in his 50th year, put up a great fight against Tom Newman, in his 30th. He lost by 1155 (14,845--16,000), Newman making a break of 1021 on the 8th day (12 day game). On the Friday afternoon (11th day) Reece made a desperate rally, scoring 997

points & averaging 99, to Newman's 668 (60). Reece led at the half-way stage (8000--7446), having averaged 40.4 to Newman's 37.6. Match averages were, Reece, 40.26, Newman, 50.31. Each player made 48 century breaks.

A month earlier, Reece, receiving 1500, had defeated Newman by 16,000--14,880 (Reece, 476, Newman 652). The performance in this Final of Reece's was a remarkable accomplishment for a player of nearly 50.

Reece received handsome tributes after the 1925 Final against Tom Newman, one verdict being that of all the numerous professionals eligible to challenge Newman (title-holder), Reece along revealed the sporting spirit desirable in a public performer.

As we said last month, Reece & Inman stories, authentic & mythical, are numerous. Perhaps one of the funniest concerned Stevenson & John Roberts. Reece used to tell it. Roberts was a veteran at the time, with an impressive white beard, while Stevenson was approaching billiards middle age. A scene at the particular match between them was caused by the referee's mistake, & spectators were shouting & almost coming to blows. The referee thereupon jumped on a chair, &, shouting at the top of his voice, called out, *Gentlemen!! I appeal for order!! You aren't doing these lads any good!!* This brought down the house & everyone roared with laughter, even Roberts, despite his habitual aristocratic coolness, joining in. For the lads had long since left their youth behind.

Reece thought Roberts was the greatest player he had seen, & Willie Smith the greatest scoring force (this was in 1928). It would be easy to continue this article, with Tom Reece as theme, but we have said enough, we hope, to have signaled fittingly the passing of this great billiards personality, & what finer & more eloquent epitaph of his earthly achievement could there be than the fact that in the history of a game, of which there has been but a handful of great masters, Tom Reece will figure amongst that handful as one of the game's supreme artists.

ABOUT TOM REECE

by Willie Smith The Billiard Player Nov 1953

With the passing of Tom Reece, yet another link has broken in the chain of the good old day when Billiards was the game. Tom never accomplished his life's ambition of winning the World's Championship, his villain of the piece being Melbourne Inman, but how he tried.

Reece was a delightful player to watch, his delicate cue action being lovely, but his screw & forcing shots were on the weak side, this being accounted for by the fact that he held the cue just with the thumb & the forefinger. Because of his splendid work at the head of the table many people were of the opinion that he was a better player than Inman, & it was just a matter of temperament between them.

In my opinion, nothing of the sort, Mel was master of the all-round game, & this was for too much for Tom. Many were the stories of what transpired between Inman & Reece, & some were true, others being imagined & told retold until some people were quite sure that these happenings had occurred. However, one could always look out for some fun when these two rivals met in the Billiards Hall, & it was just as good when they met casually.

The greatest joke of all was when Crippen was hanged, & the same evening the Judge who sentenced Crippen to death was to present the Championship Cup at Thurston's Hall, Inman & Stevenson were the players, & Mel won. Naturally, the gentleman had to say a few nice things about Inman, in addition to sympathising with Harry Stevenson, & this was too much for Tom

Reece, who retorted, **if you knew as much about Inman as i do, you would have given Crippen the Cup, & sentenced Inman to death.**

In the match hall they were enemies in the real sense of the word, but if you ever happened to meet these two men outside the Billiards Hall, you would see that it was only Billiards that was the cause of their rivalry, because, socially, they were great friends, & i hav had some happy times in their company. All the same, Tome could not help now & again sending forth a quip at Mel, & all he did was to extend to Reece that bland smile of his, the smile that used to rile Tom no end when it was seen in the match hall. I gave an instance of Reece's quips at Inman, & what about the following.??

I was playing Mel in the Daily Mail Snooker Tournament a few years ago, & Tom came in to see the play. Just before Mel & i went in to start, we were chatting to Tom Webster, in came Reece, & right away he said to Mel, **What, you still here. Why aren't you in Dartmoor with your pals.??** Naturally, Tom Webster & i had a grand laugh, but Mel just held out his hand to Reece, & at the same time that bland smile was on his face when Tom Reece shook it heartily.

I must mention that Mel said to Tom that he was smoking a nice cigar, & unlike Willie, enjoyed one. The sequel was that Reece pulled out a well-filled cigar case, held it out to Inman, & he took one. By the way, Tom was a great cigar smoker, & large ones at that. I used to call them half-butts.

After dealing with a small fraction of the Inman-Reece items, i now come to the part i had in the Billiards life of Tom Reece. We played many matches, first meeting in the 1000 pound Billiards Tournament, which was promoted by Burroughes and Watts. This was only my second game in London, having only played Tom Newman the May previous. I very soon found out that Tom Reece simply hated the red-ball stroke, & i caned it for all i was worth, & in those days i had made many breaks over the 1000 off the red-ball, & there was then no limit on the stroke in the rules. As a matter of fact, directly i managed to get the red-ball into position, Tom walked out of the match hall, & to those who are acquainted with Burroughes Hall will know that there are swing doors, & Tom sent them both swinging hard & proper. I won the heat, & in the games afterwards Tom never had the pleasure of defeating me.

As i have stated, he could not stand the red-ball stroke, although i once had a very narrow escape from defeat at Glasgow. I was conceding Reece 3000 (9000), & Tom was in play, leading by 1213, & he only needed 375 to win. He missed an easy shot, & i landed in front of him before he scored again. I had four breaks over the 300 mark in succession. I am not going to write what Tom said to me, except to say that he called me Tiger Smith. A great sportsman has passed along, & the world is poorer today, & his wide circle of friends will mourn his death.

I have just concluded a grand fortnight's play with that famous old-timer, Claude Falkiner, & i am giving some diagrams of strokes that were played by us during the visits to the clubs. Claude made no large breaks, but his play was as artistic & as dainty as ever. I always regarded Claude as one of the real artist of the game, & one of the greatest cue-men that ever handled a cue.

Claude Falkiner never shone in match play, & the first world war had something to do with this, his health having been affected with war service, but as an exhibition player he was without rival.

*An Inman--Reece session was always good for a wisecrack or two. On one occasion Inman, after turning the 100 & getting into a hopeless position, with Reece rising from his seat to go to the table, got an outrageous fluke which gave him perfect position. Reece, highly indignant, remarked, **you might let me know some time how to do that shot, Mr Inman**, whereupon Inman rejoined, **you know my terms for tuition, Mr Reece**.*

*Equally amusing was the result of a spectacular fluke by Joe Davis, when playing Fred Davis in the New of the World Tournament. He made a break off it which won the frame, & brought the comment from his brother, **this fellow ought to win the pools every week**.*

THE BILLIARD PLAYER

AUG 1955

*Inman (to Reece) -- **That's enough of the back chat, I've come here to play billiards!!***

*Reece -- **I hadn't noticed it!!***

HERE & THERE

The Billiard Player

July 1931

*In the recent Inman -- Reece match, Reece set up a double-baulk, leaving the red-ball just inside the D. Inman approached the table to take his shot, & remarked -- **It's out. What do you mean??** -- said Reece. **I mean it's out of play** -- said Inman.*

TOM REECE

Alcock's Sporting Review

Oct 14 1911

A pressman in one of the dailies told Reece that the journalistic conscience would force him to give the visitor (who was his very good friend) a slight raking over in the report of the next day.

That's alright, old man, said Tommy, say any mortal thing you like about me. There's only one thing i wouldn't forgive, & that is if you were to say nothing.

TOMMY'S FINE SHOTS

NEWSPAPER SNIPPET

Fine shots are the bete noir of the amateur, as a general thing, and no strokes are more appreciated by the big crowds that view each session of the Reece -- Lindrum game. Some of the skinning strokes made by the visitor are Carl Hertzian in their cleverness, and his admirers claim that the redoubtable Tarmy can hit a ball so fine or "thin", that the ordinary observer would imagine the object had been missed. It is asserted "that if the balls were placed across the table in line, with only a sheet of paper separating each, that Reece could take the centre ball a foot away and fire through the opening without disturbing the stationary spheres, so accurate is his sight and so firm his cue arm." He certainly can skin a ball finer than any player we have seen in Sydney, but whether he is equal to the above claim is open to question.

"A fine player." "More delicate touch than Stevenson." "I like his style very much indeed." "The best billiard showman that has visited us." These were some of the remarks that filled the air in eulogy of Reece on the completion of the opening session on Monday afternoon, even when neither cueist could do himself justice owing to the new balls being a trifle "greasy". These views were repeated in superlatives when the brawny young Lancashire lad, with some of the sweetest, delicate, close cannon play seen in this city, sent the critics home enraptured.

*Inman, having a lean spell & irritated by the repeated click of close cannons performed by **Reece**, whispered to the latter : " I use all five slates" (a reference to his all-round game); Reece pausing a moment : "I can make more on one slate than you can on five !"*

HARKING BACK THE YEAR 1953

Billiards and Snooker March 1966

Tom Reece died on October 16th, aged 73. Melbourne Inman, his lifelong rival &, one might add, "partner", for the temperamental contrast between them, not to mention their mock antagonism, gave an added appeal & tang to their meetings, had passed away, aged 80, in 1951. Besides being a great billiards artist, with an exquisite touch, Reece was a fine swimmer, who could do the 100 yards in 65 seconds.

A DIP INTO THE MEMORY BAG Arthur Goundrel The Billiard Player Sept 1955

*..... At the conclusion of a Luncheon-time game between **Stevenson & Reece**, i was invited to give some Trick Shots. Performing the **Basket Trick**, i miscued & **tore a hole in the cloth** right in the middle of the table. The deathly silence was broken by **Reece** exclaiming -- **Its all right, gentlemen, the Sergeant played the cannon through the table!!***

*The sequel was not too funny either. Tom advised me to go round to the local billiards firm ... & get an order for a new cloth, as the Club must have one, & there would be a nice bit of **comission** for me. So i hurried round, but, on mentioning my name, i was promptly told to **Get Out!** On telling this to Reece at the evening session he said, **Oh, i forgot, they are under contract & must put one on free!** As though he didn't know.!*

*Early in 1916 i joined up with ... Inman & Reece, refereeing their games, & oft times their rows, up & down the country..... I remember one day walking with Tom in Northampton when we came across a press poster with big headlines -- **Great Jewel Robbery**. Tom stopped in his tracks, & said -- **Arthur, I'll bet a pound Inman is IN IT!!***

*Another time just as Inman was playing a stroke, there was a loud crash outside. Mel looked at me & said -- I suppose that was the **Side** i put on.?? Like a flash i replied -- No Sir, that was **Outside**. To which Tom added -- That's where **He** ought to be.*

*During the War, Tom Reece & i were playing at a Camp occupied by New Zealand Troops. The Camp had its own Electric lighting system, but... there was a breakdown.... one bright boy produced a **dozen candles** & stuck them on the cushions all round the table. This was not so bad for me as i played by resting my cue on the cushion, but for Tom it was a different matter. After playing a few strokes & **burning his shirt sleeves**, he completely lost his temper, & with two swipes of his cue, he swept the candles right & left -- & that concluded the Entertainment.*

*.... It was the final night of a Professional Championship which Inman had just won from HW Stevenson. Tom had got it into his head that **Stevenson had laid down** The Cup was being presented by the Lord Chief Justice of England, the late Lord Alverston, who, prior to coming along had just sentenced the notorious Crippen to death. After passing some nice remarks about both players & the game, his Lordship was about to hand the Cup to Inman when Reece jumped up & said -- **My Lord, if you knew as much about these two players as i know, you'd give Crippen the Cup & sentence these two blighters to Death.***