

A HISTORY OF
REDHILL & DISTRICT
BAR BILLIARDS LEAGUE
1948 - 1998

REDHILL & DISTRICT BAR BILLIARDS LEAGUE – A HISTORY

INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACCORDING to old letters and other material the Redhill & District Bar Billiards League started in the summer of 1948, although a national knock-out competition was launched in the 1930s in which teams from the East Surrey area played. A letter of May 1967 from the table suppliers, Bar Billiards Ltd, to League Secretary, Fred Vane, refers to the Plumbers Arms in Limpsfield who won a Surrey area competition three times in pre-war years.

Fifty years on from our first League season it is appropriate to look back as well as forwards and this history of the League, which has been written to mark our Golden Jubilee in 1998, contains a great deal of information much of which has not seen the light of day during the lifetimes of many of the people who read it.

My own memory of the Redhill League goes back to September 1971 when, still just old enough to drink under age, I first played as a spotty, callow youth for the Blue Anchor in Blindley Heath. At the time it never occurred to me that the Redhill League in particular and Bar Billiards in general would give me so many life-long personal friends and my decision to write this story has been motivated by those people. Many of you have been similarly lucky and will know how I feel.

Bar Billiards Ltd have supported the Redhill League from the outset and I am indebted to our good friend Ken Hussey who has provided many items of correspondence between his company and the League since 1948 as well as a lot of other material. In writing this account I have drawn heavily on these documents.

Inevitably, the history of our early years is rather sketchy. For example, there are no final League tables in existence, but we do have mid-season tables for some of the early years.

DC's A-Z. ALF HUNNISETT – 'Sir' Alf would be more appropriate because he was a true gentleman of Bar Billiards, one of the first to make it look like a game of skill and touch. I'd never realised the significance of side-spin in Bar Billiards until I saw Alf play. He was always willing to share his vast talent (but never his schooners of sweet sherry) – if you were willing to listen. Top Man!

Nor is there much evidence to show when knock-out competitions were introduced, although Frank Taylor recalls playing in the Singles semi-finals in the early 1950s and there is a press cutting, presumably from a local newspaper, reporting the semi-finals and final of 1955.

Some of the facts about our more recent history are engraved on the cups and shields, but the 1950s and 1960s are not nearly as accurately recorded. I have therefore drawn upon the remarkable memories of Frank Taylor, George Stevens and others who will figure in this account, who have illuminated my dull text with their anecdotes and who gave up their time to fill in numerous gaps that would otherwise certainly have remained empty. They have provided me with a treasure-house of reminiscences about the leading players and personalities in the Redhill League in the 1950s and 1960s. Even so, gaps will unavoidably remain and I apologise for any omissions.

Some of my contemporaries, for example Geoff Jukes and Terry Oakley, have contributed a lot of detail on the 1970s and 1980s and, above all, two of the life-long personal friends I referred to earlier have given this story a dash of colour with their amusing tales. Karl Tidy has recorded some special memories of Jersey and Dave Constable has put pen to paper and written his own fun-filled A-Z of memories which he has kindly allowed me to reproduce. I owe Karl, Dave and all the other contributors an unpayable debt of thanks and this brief history of the Redhill & District Bar Billiards League is theirs as much as anybody's.

Finally, I apologise in advance for mentioning myself in this history. Reporting the news when you also happen to be making a certain amount of it presents unavoidable editorial problems and I hope I may be forgiven if immodesty has from time to time intruded.

Simon Tinto
May 1998

THE EARLY YEARS – 1948-1960

THERE was a time when thousands of licensed premises had a Bar Billiards table nosing into a quiet corner. That was in the days of real pubs and clubs, of which all too few remain, and before the undiluted greed of large breweries changed the nature of the license trade forever. Bar Billiards tables are now the exception rather than the rule and while no statistics exist, it seems there are now fewer players than in the immediate post-war period.

The nature of the game has also changed. How, for example, would the best players today have coped with imparting spin on the heavy ivory balls of the past as compared to the lighter cellulites of the present? And judging from the scores that were common in the early days, it seems that Bar Billiards, even for the best players, was a game of gentle potting rather than the aggressive, modern in-off style.

This is borne out by the way the game was promoted when it was first adapted from a version played in Belgium and northern France and imported to England in the early 1930s. Area representatives from the table suppliers would visit pubs and clubs demonstrating the new game. The idea was to give new players technical help, but before long many League players were outclassing the reps!

Soon after the war, Leagues appeared in many parts of England, although the oldest, Oxford, had existed since 1934. Along with Medway, Portsmouth and others, the Redhill League was launched at a time when local services such as transport and the wider availability of petrol had improved enough to allow the unrestricted movement of people.

Presumably an Inaugural General Meeting was held, possibly at the Crown in Nutfield which seems to have been an unofficial HQ in early years. Registration fees were set at two-and-sixpence (twelve and a half pence) per team and a shilling (five pence) per player.

DC'S A-Z. BRIGHTON V REDHILL Charity Challenge. Those of us lucky enough to play in this annual event, usually at the Stadium in Hove, would not have escaped the great rivalry between the two Leagues. It was always intense, but superbly friendly and if you got out of the pub with any change in your pocket you must have been hiding in the loo. At the end of the day it was all about charity – Bill Burwood would have loved it.

The elected Officers for 1948-49 were;

Chairman	B. Eggett (Prince Albert)
Secretary	J. W. Wakeman (Greyhound)
Asst. Secretary	Stan Haybittle (Marquis)
Treasurer	Mrs Martin (Crown)
Committee	A. White (Crown)
	L. C. Vane (William IV)
	J. Gunn (Prince Albert)
	L. Holland (Station)
	J. S. Pearse (Diamond)
	G. Mitchell (Plumber's Arms)
	A. Jones (Marquis)

Two of those names will be familiar to many members over 40 years of age. The first League Secretary, J. W. Wakeman, was related to Peter Wakeman, an accomplished player now retired and living on the south coast. Peter won the Open Pairs title with a young man called Geoff Jukes in 1976. L. C. Vane was a relative of the late Fred Vane. A family butcher who played many seasons of Bar Billiards for the William IV in Bletchingley, Fred was a delightful and gentlemanly character who served the League for many years and was President from the mid-1970s until 1985. The 14 original teams (1948-49 season) were;

Crown A (Nutfield)
Crown B
Diamond A (Hurst Green)
Diamond B
Greyhound (Redhill)
Harrow (Chaldon)
Marquis A (Redhill)
Marquis B
Noah's Ark (Redhill)
Plumber's Arms A (Limpsfield)
Plumber's Arms B
Prince Albert (Bletchingley)
Prince Of Wales (Reigate)
William IV (Bletchingley)

Of the original 14 founders, none remain in the League, although there was a Greyhound team until 1995-96. The first Holland Club team moved from the Diamond after the publicans, Joe and Molly Mullen of fond memory, retired in 1988. The William IV was a Bar Billiards stronghold and had a team until 1986-87, while the Marquis, which once had a table in each bar and four teams, dropped out in the mid-1970s. The Plumber's Arms was demolished in 1970 at which point the teams moved to Limpsfield British Legion and boasted one of the fastest tables anyone had played.

The Noah's Ark deserves a special mention. The table was awful, with a paraffin heater underneath giving off such foul fumes that any break of over a couple of hundred resulted in a blinding headache. It was also the filthiest pub imaginable; 40 years of nicotine adorned the walls and scraps of carpet were nailed over holes in the lino where a thousand pairs of shoes had worn through to the floor-boards below. Even so, the Noah's Ark did have a repulsive kind of charm, but was closed in the late 1970s by public health inspectors who found a spring onion growing from a crack in the kitchen table!

League matches began on 30th October 1948 with the following results.

Marquis A 4 – Harrow 1
 Crown A 3 – William IV 2
 Greyhound 4 – Plumber's Arms B 1
 Prince Of Wales 2 – Diamond 3
 Noah's Ark 3 – Prince Albert 2
 Plumber's Arms A 3 – Marquis B 2
 Diamond B 3 – Crown B 2

The first whitewash was on 13th November when the Marquis A beat the Prince Albert. Meanwhile the Diamond A were winning all their 13 matches in the first half of the season, with a remarkable total of 50 points from a possible 65, opening up a 10-point gap over their nearest rivals, the Harrow. The half-way league table looked like this;

Diamond A	13	50
Prince Albert	13	31
Harrow	13	40
William IV	13	31
Greyhound	13	36
Crown A	13	30
Marquis A	13	36
Marquis B	13	29
Plumber's Arms A	13	35
Crown B	12	26
Noah's Ark	13	31
Prince Of Wales	12	23
Plumber's Arms B	13	31
Diamond B	13	21

By the end of March the Harrow had drawn closer to the Diamond A, trailing by 69 points to 63. There the records stop, but the title may not have been decided until the last match of the season when the Harrow were away to the Diamond A. However, as the Diamond had already won 3-2 at the Harrow earlier in the season, it's fair to assume that the Diamond A became our first ever League Champions.

DC's A-Z. COUNTY BAR BILLIARDS. I'll never forget the buzz when I was first picked for Surrey. The selectors were three great players – Alf Hunnisett, Alan Hall and John Peters. In those days we played County Trials on various tables around the League. Simon Tinto will recall this as he was also selected at the same time.*

**Alan Hall of Whyteleafe British Legion, not to be confused with our friend from the Royal Mail, the Greyhound and Merstham Village Club.*

In 1949-50 the Diamond B, Noah's Ark, Plumbers Arms B and Prince of Wales all dropped out of the League and were replaced by Caterham Country Club, the Red Lion and two teams from the Station (South Nutfield). The Diamond were still the class team and led the Marquis A by 4 points half way through the season, but the Harrow, runners-up in 1948-49, were miles off the pace. The half-way table was as follows.

Diamond	13	45
Marquis A	13	41
Crown A	13	37
Station A	13	36
Greyhound	13	35
Marquis B	13	33
William IV	13	33
Prince Albert	13	32
Red Lion	13	32
Plumber's Arms	13	31
Harrow	13	29
Station B	13	27
Caterham Country Club	13	22
Crown B	13	18

Again, no final table exists, but the Diamond and Marquis A probably fought it out, with the Diamond favourites to retain the title.

In 1950-51 the League expanded to 16 teams. The Harrow and the Plumber's Arms withdrew, but B teams from Caterham Country Club, the Red Lion, Diamond and Greyhound meant that the Prince Albert and William IV were the only two venues with just one team. It would be nice to believe these days that we could have two teams in each pub and club.

This time the Diamond A had a fight on their hands, trailing the Red Lion A by a point, with the Greyhound A, Station A, and Crown A all close behind. There is no record of the second half, but the title would have gone to one of the top five teams in the following half-way table.

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Plumber's Arms	13	31
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Station B	13	27
Caterham Country Club	13	22
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1951-52 MID-SEASON TABLE

Red Lion A	15	53
Diamond A	15	52
Station Hotel A	15	49
Crown A	15	47
Greyhound A	15	47
Marquis A	15	41
Prince Albert	15	39
William IV	15	39
Marquis B	15	38
Red Lion B	15	33
Caterham Country Club A	15	30
Station Hotel B	15	29
Crown B	15	27
Greyhound B	15	27
Diamond B	15	25
Caterham Country Club B	15	24

By the beginning of the 1951-52 season the League had grown to 20 teams with two divisions of 10. By mid-season the Station A were just ahead, while the Marquis B and Diamond B looked a good bet for promotion. The half-way League tables were as follows.

A LEAGUE

Station A	9	30
Greyhound A	9	28
Marquis A	9	27
Red Lion A	9	27
Diamond A	9	24
Prince Albert	9	24
Caterham Country Club A	9	20.5
Crown A	9	20
Marquis C	9	19.5
William IV	9	9

B LEAGUE

Marquis B	9	31
Diamond B	9	29
Crown B	9	25
Plough A	9	25
Greyhound B	9	22
Station B	9	21
Red Lion B	9	20
Plough B	9	18
Caterham Country Club B	9	17
Locomotive	9	16

DC'S A-Z. DANK & DREARY. The Noah's Ark is no longer with us, but unlike the wall-paper there, my memories haven't faded. It had the lowest possible wattage bulb in the Bar Billiards light and local mice that used to feed off the home-made brawn sandwiches. All in all it was still an enjoyable evening.

1952-53 MID-SEASON TABLES

A LEAGUE		
Station	13	49
Greyhound	13	47
Marquis A	13	39
Caterham Country Club A	13	39
William IV B	13	39
Marquis Saloon Bar	13	36
Railway	13	35
Marquis B	13	30
Plumber's Arms	13	30
Crown A	13	28
Locomotive	13	24
Plough	13	22
Red Lion	13	19
William IV A	13	18

B LEAGUE

Diamond	12	47
Wheatsheaf	12	38
Prince Albert	12	38
Noah's Ark	12	33
Warwick	12	31
Blue Anchor	12	29
Crown B	12	28
Greyhound B	12	28
Caterham Country Club B	11	27
Brickmaker's Arms	12	25
White Swan	11	22
Tower	12	20
Old Oak	12	19

By 1954-55 there were 14 A League teams and 16 in the B League. The officers were;

Chairman	Stan Haybittle
Vice-Chairman	Alma Riseley
Secretary	Bill Cameron
Assistant Secretary	Fred Vane
Treasurer	Mr F. Godfrey

1954-55 A LEAGUE

Caterham CC A	Noah's Ark
Crown A	Plough A (Bletchingley)
Diamond	Plumber's Arms
Greyhound A	Prince Albert
Locomotive	Railway (S. Godstone)
Marquis A	Wheatsheaf
Marquis B	William IV B

1954-55 B LEAGUE

Blue Anchor	Red Lion A
Brickmaker's Arms	Red Lion B
Caterham CC B	Station (Nutfield)
Crown B	Southeastern
Greyhound B	Tower
Old Oak A	Warwick Hotel
Old Oak B	White Swan (Godstone)
Plough B	William IV A

1954-55 LEAGUE CHAMPIONS	RUNNERS-UP
Station Hotel, Nutfield	Greyhound
1954-55 B LEAGUE WINNERS	RUNNERS-UP
Diamond	Prince Albert

In April 1955, according to letters between certain administrators and Bar Billiards Ltd, an attempt was made to form a new League in the area. The correspondence suggests that some people wanted a restriction covering Redhill and Reigate only which might have been due to a reluctance to travel to outlying areas for matches. However, Bar Billiards Ltd decided they could not sponsor two Leagues in the same area and preferred to remain loyal to the original organisation.

It is clear that in the first 10 years existence the League continued to grow rapidly. In 1955-56 there were 30 teams – an increase of 115% against the 1948-49 season. This was probably because League Secretary Bill Cameron and Fred Vane, Bill's Assistant Secretary, were extremely active administrators who did a huge amount of work to encourage new teams. The 1955-56 League looked like this;

A LEAGUE	
Caterham CC A	Noah's Ark
Crown A	Plough A
Diamond	Plumber's Arms
Greyhound A	Prince Albert
Locomotive	Railway (S. Godstone)
Marquis A	Wheatsheaf
Marquis Saloon	William IV A

B LEAGUE	
Blue Anchor	Red Lion A
Brickmaker's Arms	Red Lion B
Caterham CC B	Southeastern
Crown B	Station (Nutfield)
Greyhound B	Tower (Redhill)
Old Oak A	Warwick Hotel
Old Oak B	White Swan
Plough B	William IV B

ALF HUNNISETT

THE 1955-56 SEASON may have been the most significant so far in the League's brief history with the appearance of the Commonwealth (now the Fountain) in Caterham valley. It was from this pub that the legendary Alf Hunnisett emerged, although he had previously played in Tunbridge Wells. Alf was the our first truly great player and he dominated Bar Billiards in this area for 20 years until the mid-1970s when poor eyesight caused his retirement, but he continued to support the League for some years afterwards. He died in 1990.

Those who saw Alf at his best will recall his astonishing knowledge of angles and spin as well as the priceless abilities of being able to imagine shots in his mind and produce his best form in match-play. An excellent snooker and billiards player, he revolutionised the theory and practice of Bar Billiards, showed that you don't have to hit the ball at a thousand miles an hour to impart heavy spin and, above all, worked tirelessly and selflessly to inspire the next generation of young players.

Alf was the first of only two players to win a hat-trick of Singles titles (Andy Finn, from the Ship, repeated this feat in 1989-90-91) and eventually won five in all – still a record. He was so far ahead of the rest that he would often decline to enter the competition in order to ensure a different winner (an act of typical generosity). He also formed a highly successful partnership with Alan Hall in the Pairs, which they won on half a dozen occasions, and later with Terry Allen. Alf was a cornerstone of the glittering Whyteleafe British Legion team that would dominate during the early and mid-1970s, winning six consecutive League titles.

Prior to his last triumphs in the 1970s he won the League title a dozen times and in 1973 he became the first Redhill player to score 20,000 in match-play. Cliff Wayland, Simon Tinto, Sue Mariner, Geoff Jukes, Tony Cross, Terry Oakley and Andy Relf have since joined the exclusive 20,000 club, but it is a measure of how far Alf was ahead of his time that 25 years later only seven players have followed the trail he blazed.

Alf Hunnisett was indisputably the greatest player of his generation, challenged in his day only by John Peters and Alan Hall (two teammates at Whyteleafe British Legion) Arthur Jeffrey and a very few others. The fact that those who remember him still talk about Alf over 20 years after he retired from competitive Bar Billiards is a lasting testimony to his greatness and there are perhaps only a handful of Redhill players today who could have given him a game.

DC'S A-Z. E IS FOR EATS. While playing for the Queen's Head in Nutfield with Rod Smith, Shaun Potter, Laurie Roberts, Alva Gaskin, Simon Bell, Derek Holman and Ross Kenrick we were spoiled rotten. The food was absolutely brilliant and most of us had trouble eating it all. Well, nearly all of us anyway – Eh Derek! E also stands for the truly irreplaceable enjoyment that Bar Billiards people have given me over many years.