General editor's foreword

It has long been recognised that the public house was and is one of the principal centres of working-class leisure. But until now the study of pub games and pub sports has been comparatively neglected. Patrick Chaplin's book is the first serious study of the sport of darts and the first systematic assessment of its social and cultural role in English society in the first half of the twentieth century.

The history of darts is a subject that has been mired in myth and misconception and reported on in largely anecdotal terms. With his extensive primary research in the national, local, sports and trade press and in the archives of the brewery companies, and with the judicious use of oral interviews, Chaplin establishes an accurate and authoritative account of the origins, growth and development of the sport. He convincingly argues that darts was deliberately encouraged by the brewers and publicans as a way of increasing the attraction of the pub as it came under threat from the competition of music halls, cinemas and dance halls. The development of darts was encouraged by sponsorship from newspapers with a large working-class readership, particularly the *News of the World*. The sport was also organised, codified and standardised, as Chaplin demonstrates, by the National Darts Association, established in 1925.

Chaplin rightly stresses, however, that darts was not something imposed on pubs from above; it was enthusiastically embraced by pub patrons, who valued it for the skill it entailed, the competition it engendered, the gambling it facilitated and the camaraderie it promoted. By the 1930s it had even become a 'craze', with the trade journal *The Brewer and Wine Merchant* reporting in 1939 that darts had become 'the most popular game in Great Britain'.

This book has undoubtedly been a labour of love, assiduously researched and evocatively written. It fills a major gap in the scholarly literature and will remain definitive for the foreseeable future.

Jeffrey Richards

Patrick Chaplin - 9781526129765

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