

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Cues *by* Andy Hunter

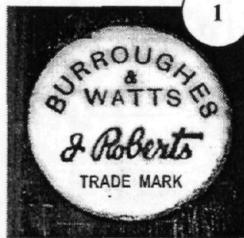


Many people are unaware of the market which exists for old cues. There is in fact, a thriving collector's market at the present time, and in a series of articles it is intended to help identify the range of old and valuable cues which may still be found hidden away in some dusty corner of your local club, together with their current market value. Although the details given here are not intended to be fully comprehensive, they will hopefully provide a much needed guide to this neglected area of collecting. The value of cues featured in these articles is taken from actual prices being paid today by collectors, which also reflects the comparative scarcity of each model. It additionally assumes that the cue is in generally good condition (not shortened or re-weighted) and the badge is fully legible. The types of cues described are those which were commercially available at the time of manufacture. However, it was possible to have any model of cue made to customer specification, using a variety of different woods. The value of such examples would usually be at the higher end of the estimates given.

John Roberts Senior

The series starts with perhaps the most famous name in Victorian billiards, that of John Roberts. Father and son bore the same name and between them dominated the game for the latter part of the 19th century. John Roberts senior was professional champion from 1849 to 1870 and four different cues are known to carry his name. These were produced from about 1860 to 1890 and in chronological order are identified as follows,

- 1) Square badge with Roberts' signature and inscribed "sole makers Thurston's". (£200-£300)
- 2) A round badge similar to diagram 1. (£200-£300)
- 3) A square badge as diagram 2, with "Burroughes & Watts" is stamped into the wood on the flat just above the badge. (£200-£300)
- 4) The later edition is the same as above, and is only identified by a much shorter flat (½" rather than 1½") above the badge. (£150-£250)



John Roberts Junior

John Roberts Junior first became professional champion in 1870 at the age of twenty two. Early cues of the younger Roberts were also produced by Burroughes & Watts to the same square badge design described in 4) above. The essential difference was the addition of "Jr." to the signature. (Diagram 3) This cue was produced in two styles differentiated by the words "Champion Cue" being printed in either red or black. (*both versions* £150-£250)

Three varieties of Picture Badge cues are also known to exist. These were produced by lithograph, usually applied to a square badge made from "composition" rather than ivory, and depict John Roberts Jnr in the following poses :

- 1) Standing full length, holding a cue
- 2) Showing upper body and holding a cue.
- 3) Just head and shoulders.

The latter image is also used on a triangular badge. (*all versions* £250-£350)

A "Champion Cue" also exists which bears the date "1899" and the writing on the badge runs across rather than along the cue. Produced after the death of his father in 1893, Roberts now dispenses with the "Jr.". (£200-£300)

All of these cues were normally hand-spliced and manufactured with a plain ebony butt and Ash shaft. Special order cues are known to exist which have ivory ferrules or extensions.

Shortage of space dictates the end of this brief introduction to the Roberts cue. If anyone would like specific information on these or other cues, I will try to reply or feature them in future articles. Until then, good hunting.

Cue Tips

Early cues did not have ferrules and were usually tipped straight onto the wood. Constant impact caused the wood to split and flake at the end and a frequently used cue would gradually be cut down to remove this damage. Sometimes, to prevent this, an extension made from a solid length of horn or ivory was applied, but this solution never became universally popular. Perhaps to compensate for natural shortening, all cues produced before the 1930's would have a length of at least 55¾" up to a maximum of 58" with perhaps just the odd one which is even slightly longer than this. An old cue which is shorter than 55¾" has almost certainly been cut down, and depending upon the extent to which this has happened, its value is dramatically affected, reducing to about one third of the values shown. Sometimes cues which had become too short were repaired by the manufacturer who spliced a new length to the shaft from about the centre point of the cue. Unless the cue is particularly rare, this remedial work will have the same effect on value. A long cue is an indication of original condition and age.

