

THE CUE COLLECTOR

by Andy Hunter

Tom Reece Cues

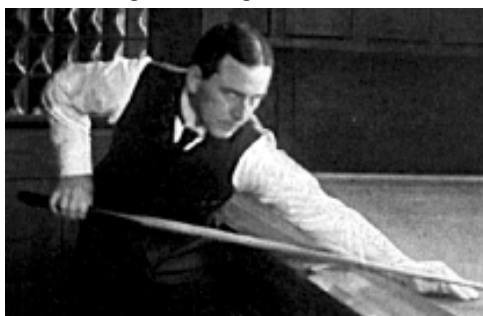
Tom Reece is perhaps best known for this career-long rivalry with Mel Inman, with the flamboyant style of Reece contrasting sharply with the dour safety tactics of Inman. Reece invariably came off second best in these contests which over the years produced verbal exchanges between the players which were followed almost as eagerly as the play itself.

However, Reece is also known for making the highest break ever recorded in a billiards match. This was a fantastic 499,135 which he completed at Burroughes & Watts Hall, London on Saturday 6th July 1907. The massive break took Reece five weeks to compile by means of the "cradle" cannon—a technique which was banned almost immediately after his great achievement. [This story was covered in depth in *ABP No.14—Ed*] All of his cues are inscribed with this famous "record" break and additionally carry reference to a second, lesser break. It is this which provides the most recognisable distinction between the available versions, with the shape and style of the badge remaining consistent. All of the early cues have either an ash or greenheart shaft and an ebony butt with a front dark elm burr splice.

The cue would have been first manufactured by Burroughes & Watts, probably shortly after his great break, in late 1907. The badge on this first version also makes reference to a break of 627 together with the date "6th January 1907". This cue is the most sought after and is valued at between £250-350.

In the second version the minor break changes to one of 692 and carries the date "1st February 1911". This would be worth only slightly less at £220-320. Both of these early cues have more of a "billiard" shape than the others and can be very whippy, tending to be a bit too springy for snooker and more suited to billiards.

Subsequent cues in the range are usually shaped a lot more like a snooker cue. The first of this new design has a secondary break reference of 773 (March 1913). Finally the break moves to 901 which Reece made 13th-14th June 1916. Both of these breaks were made against his arch-rival Mel Inman and the latter was Reece's highest with ivory balls—excluding his cradle cannon contributions. Examples of either cue would be worth between £150-200



Tom Reece in action in 1915



Typical style of badge for the Tom Reece cue. The earlier ivory badges had a wavy line under the text and the later plastic version had a straight line.



Chas. Parker cues kept the same badge design for about 80 years

Early badges were made from ivory or bone, and then later, also from plastic. There is an additional minor variation to the badge design which appears to be linked to the material used, with ivory badges having the text underlined by a wavy line and the plastic ones having a straight line.

Some time around the mid-1920s another version of the cue appears. This is identified by a plain ebony butt without the decorative front-splices. It would have been made well into the 1930s and is valued at £150-200. This particular edition is usually a good snooker-playing cue. The majority of these have an ash shaft although maple examples are known to exist and being rarer will have a slightly increased value.

Parker & Sons

I have recently been asked about cues by Parker and Son. These are not particularly common, but neither are they the rarest of cues; all examples in the range being worth between £80-150.

Charles Parker established his company in Barnsley in 1879 and operated from various addresses in that town until they were taken over by E. A. Clare (now Thurston's) in the 1950's, continuing to trade under the Parker name for several years after this.

All of the badges are of a common circular design with "C. Parker" around the top "Barnsley" at the bottom and "Maker" across the middle. The later badges are smaller but otherwise retain the same design throughout the production period. The earliest were made from bone/ivory with plastic used for the later editions. The company may have made their own cues or had subcontractors supplying them. They all have ash or maple shafts with various types of butts, the later editions with the plastic badges often have fancy splicing into the butt.

Claude Falkiner

Today, Claude Falkiner has become one of the lesser-known English professionals although his skill with the nursery cannon was at one time much admired in the English game. In 1924 he played a series of matches against a young Walter Lindrum in Australia during which they established a lasting friendship. Lindrum has placed it on record that it was through watching Falkiner playing cannons that he received the inspiration to change his method of relying principally on the red ball game. The result is part of billiards history.

Falkiner, who was born in South Kirby in 1885, was capable of playing at an incredible pace, once having a break of 367 unfinished timed at 1 minute 58 seconds! His biggest break of 1,130 was made against Walter Lindrum in September 1930. Falkiner retained an involvement with the game until his death in 1979, when at the age of 95 he was still actively running a Billiard Hall in Bournemouth.

The Falkiner cue can be either machine or hand-spliced. Both carry the same badge which would have been made from bone on the early versions and inscribed "Facsimile of the cue used by Claude Falkiner" also carrying his signature. Those I have seen have an ash shaft with a plain ebony butt.

A later edition was produced which was machine spliced having a rosewood butt and a front-splice veneer with a maple front-splice on top of that.

Hand-spliced examples are valued at around £140-160 and machine spliced cues would be worth around £80. These are nice cues and very collectable.

Tom Reece (left) with his great rival Mel Inman, pictured in 1931



"Inman had three flukes in successive strokes—all losers into the same pocket. On the third, Inman looked round with a half comical expression, uncertain whether to smile or not. The witty Reece convulsed the already tittering house by remarking 'Go on Inman, I'll count them for you—that is three, now for the fourth'. Inman laughed"—*Billiard Times, January 1912.*