

The History of the Merseyside Quiz Leagues

1959-2009

**with additional
material on the local
quiz scene**

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Origins and Early Days of the Merseyside Quiz Leagues

Merseyside has long claimed to be the birthplace of the that type of competitive quizzing that might best be called, in the words of Don Yule of Merseyside and London quizzing, ‘team quizzing’, organised into a league format.

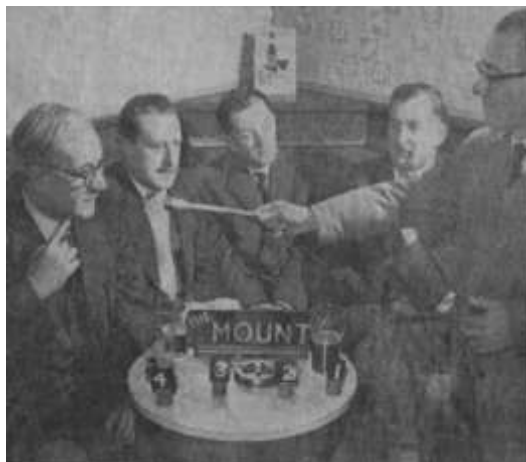
Just why the idea of a league competition for quiz teams should have originated on Merseyside is difficult to answer. Of course there are claims from other places, but all the evidence we can find favours our claim to be the oldest. Possibly the competitive, argumentative, and talkative characteristics of the ‘Average Scouser’ had something to do with it, helped by his love of sport. Then, the popularity of quiz shows on television, particularly in the early days of ITV, may well have been a factor, and there is no doubt that having seen something on television, people were often keen to try it out themselves, particularly in the 1950s. Or it may have been a reverse effect – something you could do in your local pub or club and thereby escape from that television set so recently installed in the living room.

It has been suggested that the founders were somewhat ‘long in the tooth’ for physical sports, but found their age no barrier to enjoying a competitive quiz game. Quizzing also began to attract the ‘brains’ who had, perhaps, not found success or enjoyment at darts or snooker, but who now found that here was something at which they could do well. Then the natural processes of meeting people, making friends (and enemies, or at least rivals!) must have contributed.

However, much of this is merely speculation. What can be said is that the idea sprang up in Bootle in 1959. Friendly quizzes were often being held in the area. One evening, at the Mount Hotel, following a chance remark by Eric Powell suggesting that quizzing could “be operated on a wider scale [which] everyone seemed to think ... was a good idea” it was decided to establish a league (*Jack Robinson, Liverpool Echo, 30th October, 1963*). On Tuesday, July 28th 1959 a meeting to start a Quiz League was held at the Mount Hotel in Bootle. Brady (*right*), licensee of the Mount secretary. Officers were elected, and fixtures, rules, and the provision of a first Merseyside Quiz League(s) that year. The teams taking part were Grapes, British Railways, Scott’s, and Brooke Bond, while Chadburns had no game that first week. Later in the season Taverners joined, and St Robert Bellarmine’s took over from Brooke Bond. This gave a ten-team league. The rest is history.



The meeting was chaired by Bill Hotel, with Jim Howard as such items as question setting, trophy were discussed. The very matches took place on October 5th were Mount, Mount Ladies, Derby Arms, Captain’s Green, and Brooke Bond, while Chadburns had no game that first week. Later in the season Taverners joined, and St Robert Bellarmine’s took over from Brooke Bond. This gave a ten-team league. The rest is history.



Quizzing at the Mount Hotel

Central Organisation of the MQL

In the very early days, the committee (forerunner of the present council) was headed by interested parties from Threlfalls the Brewers, who as our first patrons gave the league tremendous encouragement (early question papers were sometimes headed 'Threlfalls' Brewery Quiz League'). Thus the President, Chairman and Deputy Chairman were not actually quiz players, although Messrs. Wills and Willman did come along and chair committee meetings (and always bought a round of drinks for all those attending). During this period, which lasted until 1970, three members bore the brunt of the organisational problems: Jim Traynor (General Secretary until 1968), Jack Robinson (as PRO, and then Secretary), and Jim Howard (Treasurer and Question Controller). Jim Howard's work with the questions did much to ensure the successful launch of the venture and its unity as the different areas developed.



Jack Robinson

The original single league of 10 teams (other sources suggest 11 or 12 teams) grew rapidly. There were two leagues in the second year, Bootle and Liverpool, and within eight years there were five leagues, the area having spread to include Crosby and Southport. Not long after, teams from Wirral started playing in the Liverpool League, and teams from Ormskirk in the Southport League, and each eventually formed their own leagues. Finally, in the mid-seventies, under the inspirational guidance and energy of Charles Williams, the Warrington League emerged onto the scene.

As the MQL expanded, much of the work originally done by the central committee was devolved to the local areas. This process seemed to happen quite naturally, and it was only codified afterwards; it all progressed with remarkably little dissension, apart from the occasional good argument at the Annual General Meeting. One of the most important changes occurred in season 1970-71, when the Bootle, Crosby and North Liverpool Leagues merged to form the Northern League, arranged in divisions, and thus started the now universal practice of promotion and relegation.

After Threlfalls left us, due to a take-over, Jim Howard took over as Chairman, with Jack Robinson staying on as General Secretary and PRO. During this period, Jack saw the Radio Merseyside quizzes off to a good start, becoming question master for a time, with his wife as scorer. In the early days, recording was done at various quiz venues, which sometimes caused problems, as when we discovered 'on the night' that there was a Radio Cab firm close to St Mary's Old Boys Club. We also survived a postal strike, when various people spent a lot of time delivering sets by hand, especially Jim Howard. In 1973, Bert Dutton (right) took over as Treasurer, a post he filled with distinction for many years. That year saw Jim Howard stepping down as Chairman, but stepping up to the Presidency. Jack Robinson had to retire as secretary in 1973, with Jack Lovatt taking his place.



Allan Urion (pictured left), also from the Northern Leagues, became the new Chairman, bringing a dynamic (but sometimes abrasive!) approach to the next decade of development. With his vision, enthusiasm and good humour Allan oversaw a doubling in the size of the MQL. In 1973-74 there were 132 teams registered in the MQL; when his chairmanship ended in Season 1983-84, 266 teams had registered. He was keen to enhance the corporate image of the MQL, and the Mimir logo was introduced. During his chairmanship the 'passing-over' of questions came in, as did his own pet project, the Mimir Individual competition (for which he wrote most of the questions in the early years).

Jim Prendergast replaced Jack Lovatt as General Secretary in 1975, serving for seven years before heading out to work in Saudi Arabia. At this point in 1982, Peter Deakin (right) from the Warrington League switched from Deputy Chairman to General Secretary and, stepping into the breach, occupied the post for twelve years. Jim and Peter both represented the MQL in regard to Radio Merseyside's broadcast quizzes, organising the questions and refereeing the matches. Jim worked for several years with presenter and question master Bob Azurdia on Heads You Win (Janet Barker and Neville Cohen taking over from Jim on his departure for Saudi); in 1986-87, after a break, the programme returned with a new title, Merseyquiz, a slightly different format that included a buzzer round, a new QM, Jenni Collins, and with Peter as the question-controller. Sadly, Merseyquiz disappeared from the airwaves after 1992-93, largely as a result of regional BBC broadcasting taking time away from local programming.



The MQL held its Silver Jubilee Dinner at the Everton 500 Club on 27th October 1984, with Vince Kelly of the Liverpool Echo (an ex-quizzer with the Kirkdale Royals) as guest speaker. A brochure was produced outlining the Leagues' early history.

The period from 1984 through until 1994 saw Peter as General Secretary joined by Don Bissett of Wirral (pictured below), who became Chairman in 1984; together they



oversaw what was undoubtedly the high point of Merseyside team-quizzing. Peter retired as General Secretary in 1994, but Don continued as Chairman until his untimely death in 1996. During this time the MQL metamorphosed into the English Estates MQL. English Estates North West brought substantial financial support to the MQL between 1985 and 1994. The handbook was redesigned, stationery was produced in English Estates colours, the Merseyside Challenge Cup became the English Estates Trophy and the presentation evening each May took place at the English

Estates 'own' pub, the George Stubbs in central Liverpool. The MQL was indebted to Aidan Manley of English Estates for his selection of the MQL as a suitable outlet for English Estates sponsorship. It was in 1986-87 that the MQL reached its greatest number of registered teams, 310. When English Estates sponsorship ended, the MQL found a new sponsor in Burtonwood Brewery, an association that lasted from 1994 through until 2005.

English Estates Sponsorship



In recent times the MQL has been served by many officers of quality. The chairmanship passed successively to John Wilson, Cliff Houghton, Ray Oakes, Joy Platt, Bill Thomas and Frank McFarlane. Three of the gentlemen in that list have also given distinguished service as General Secretary, viz. Cliff Houghton, John Wilson and Ray Oakes. Cliff is back now for a second spell in the role. The MQL has had only two Treasurers since Bert Dutton, Neville Cohen (1992-95) and Dag Griffiths (1995 onwards). Since 1978 the presidency has involved a three-year term of office, and many distinguished servants of the MQL have occupied the post. (A full list of MQL office holders since 1959 is to be found on the MQL website.)



Much hard work is done, season after season, by those concerned with question production and distribution. Very often it has fallen to the lot of the Assistant General Secretary to organise set production, a job Charles Williams (pictured left) and Peter Richardson, among others, competently handled over the years. Peter Richardson also took over an initiative introduced by Peter Deakin to monitor question-set quality, developing it into an impressive statistical and feedback exercise. To this day we remain uncertain as to whether question-setters were prepared to heed the wise words and guidance that flowed from this initiative! Certainly many quiz players enjoyed the opportunity to adorn the score sheet comment boxes with vented spleen. Since the mid-1970s, question distribution has been principally done, year in and year out by just five men. Bob Wilkie has been a question controller since the 1970s, while his counterparts from the other 'half' of the MQL have been Bill Hawkins, Harry Owen, George Lucy and Brian Cunningham. Without the essential, time-consuming work of these five there would be no quiz league as we know it. Too often their contribution has been taken for granted by our members.

On 3rd April 2009, a Golden Jubilee Dinner took place at the Village Hotel in Whiston, with Barry Simmons (the new recruit to BBC 2's 'Eggheads') being the guest speaker. This was an opportunity for MQL Chairman, Frank McFarlane, and MQL President, Ken Smith, to make short speeches regarding the anniversary. The dinner was held in the 'Motivation Suite', and we wait to see to what heights we are all now inspired. A further celebration took place at Rainhill on 2nd May when MQL quizzers met up with quiz buffs from across the nation at one of the regular Grand Prix events organised by quizzing.co.uk. At the MQL Presentation for Season 2008-09 at St Charles' Club on 21st May, some final thoughts on MQL history were given by Peter Richardson, Janet Barker, Neville Cohen, Peter Deakin, John Wilson and Cliff Houghton.

From the high point of 310 registered teams in 1986-87, MQL registration is now back at 148 teams. While it has not been this low since 1974-75, it is still the case that the MQL is a formidable and sizeable organisation. Since the heady days of the 1980s much has changed in the world of leisure pursuits, and this has impacted on many activities, including those based on local league and licensed premises formats. Darts, dominoes and bowls are among those pursuits facing membership challenges. Legislative changes to drink-driving and smoking have impacted (for good or ill) on pubs and clubs. Team quizzing has to compete with table quizzes at many venues; it is still disappointing that more quizzers cannot be tempted away from the comfort of the table quiz to the more isolated discomfiture of the team quiz. Some of our constituent leagues are re-examining our current quiz format, in the search for innovations that might draw in new membership. However, when we look at the size and strength of team quizzing leagues in other towns and cities in the country, we remain proud of what we have achieved on Merseyside and what we still have today.

Raven Image



Over the years the MQL Council discussed the desirability of the organisation having its own motif or logo that could be used on ties, trophy centres and stationery. The problem was that all the logos put to Council by various members failed to generate full support. Eventually, at a council meeting held on October 21st 1979 at Southport and Birkdale Cricket Club the MQL 'ravens' logo was adopted. It had been put forward by Allan Urion, MQL Chairman.

The logo, which features two black ravens, edged in silver, above the silver initials 'MQL', all on a maroon background, is based on an idea from Scandinavian mythology. The ravens are those of Odin and are called Huggim and Mummin, one representing Thought and the other Memory.

The logo has survived now for thirty years, even coping with the challenge presented by the rival St George's flag of later sponsors English Estates. In recent times it has had one small design facelift, with the ravens detaching themselves from each other for what might be termed reasons of delicacy!

During the 1980s the maroon MQL tie bearing the new logo was a short-term fashion item, and then a celebrated AGM perennial. The Treasurer, Bert Dutton, would solemnly intone that the MQL financial balance stood at "£550.43 and 33 MQL ties", or a year or two later "£477.98 and 31 ties". In the end, the remaining few ties were written off into accounting oblivion. There are still many older members of the MQL who possess an MQL tie; any hope that one might be able to sell the same, at great profit, on e-Bay has been sabotaged by ties ceasing to be a gentlemen's fashion item (if nothing else).

Merseyside Challenge Cup and the English Estates Trophy



Question Distribution

The MQL relies heavily on an assortment of behind-the-scenes volunteers. Among them are its question distributors. We thought we'd give our distributors a chance to give us an indication as to what their job has entailed over the years.

First, we asked **Bob Wilkie**:

What got you into distribution? I started playing in the early 1970s at St Cuthbert's in the Liverpool Central League when Fr Hickey asked for members to start a second team. Towards the end of 1973-74, Bert Dutton said the MQL was looking for a Questions Controller. Bert gave me an outline of what was involved and I thought it sounded a good idea. I then decided that I would act as Distributor, not Controller.

And you've stuck with it ever since? In the early 1980s I nearly gave up as I was so busy at work. Also my room was becoming a complete mess, with quiz sets everywhere. However, Bert's quiet words to me were: "Bob, you're doing a great job, keep it going."

Have things ever gone wrong? I have made a few mistakes, but most are now conveniently forgotten! One mistake that does come to mind was when I did not have enough postage stamps; I put elastic bands around both stacks and then posted the unstamped stack of envelopes! I had to leave work and camp out by the Monument Place post office, waiting for the 3.30p.m. pick-up. The postman was late, of course.

What about security incidents? I've come across a few over the years. I was once asked to hand-deliver a set to a venue by the League Secretary. The club's chairman had been scoring in excess of twenty points a game, but had declined to play for the President's Trophy team. On this particular night he scored just seven points. On another occasion a similarly high-scoring player would only play home games: I'm not sure I should reveal his method for unsealing and re-sealing the envelope! Rest assured that the MQL has its ways of exposing the tiny handful of cheats.

How long does it take to organise a mailing? In the early days it used to take me about 4½ hours; now I've got it down to 2 hours.

We asked **Brian Cunningham** how he organised a set for distribution:

When do you get started? A fortnight prior to the distribution week, I check that envelopes and question sets have been supplied by the respective Leagues. I need to check that there are sufficient copies of the sets being used. If there are problems then I've time to rectify the situation. I despatch questions on a Tuesday, and so ahead of that I prepare the stationery. I date stamp the questions and envelopes for the Monday night games, and place them into the envelopes. I re-check that the envelopes do contain the questions before sealing and taping them. The same procedure is repeated for the Tuesday matches.

How do you deal with amendments? When I receive details of a change of venue, match night, re-arranged fixture or whatever I make the necessary alterations to the relevant envelopes immediately, rather than just making a note. Of course, there are also last minute changes but that is not a frequent occurrence.

So how many sets get sent out in a mailing? I have to count the number of envelopes so that the cost of postage can be recorded: depending on the fixtures for that week the number can vary between 25 and 70.

A quiz is more than the players and the question-set. We must not forget the contribution of the match officials. Here, perhaps just a little tongue-in-cheek, a regular QM gives an official's view of quizzing.

Kewemming

[or, thoughts from the top end of the table]

Evening, Jack. Pint of the usual.... Is the question set here?.... No? What do you mean? They always arrive on time. New assistant thought it was junk mail and binned it!!! [*!#!*!#!*].... Right Team, don't panic.... whose playing at home close by.... that far away: are you sure there's no one nearer? Pass me your mobile.... Hello. Is that the Frog and Dumpling? Has the quiz started? Damn. Can you pass a message on? Tell them we need their question set as soon as they have finished, and I'm coming over to pick it up.... Ah! The visitors have arrived.... Good evening, folks.... bit of a cock up over questions.... have to go and pick them up. Our Team will organise a friendly whilst I'm gone, sort of reversing the evening.

[So this is the Frog and Dumpling where they've moved to.... thought I'd never find it.... Ah, here's the Quiz.... only on Round 5.... My God, it will be midnight by the time I get back.... Still, beggars can't be choosers.] Thanks everyone.... will send these back asap.

[Back at last.... everyone seems happy.... all the extra drinks I expect!] Right folks: now we can get on with the real Quiz.... Hello! Where are the sandwiches? I know I've been a long time but that's no reason to scoff the lot!.... Well don't expect any leniency from me this evening.

[At least with this opened set I don't have to go through the boring ritual of showing the sellotape seal and listening to the usual fatuous standard 'joke'.] Welcome again to the Cockles.... *[why, oh why, does the QM always have the worst light in the room?]* Tonight's quiz is set by Angels and Demons of the Mersey River Quiz League and were set this week, so as usual are unchecked but claim nonetheless to be correct! All rounds are general *[that's another claim I've heard before!]*

OK Cockles, are you going first or second?.... second, right. *[That's going to be a nightmare for our Scorer, and me for that matter, after half time.]* Well good luck to everyone *[and our lot will need it....]*

Round 1. Question 1.... *[well that's an easy one to start with.... hells bells, 9 seconds gone already; I wish I had someone to help me out with the timing.]* Team? One point to No. 3 (No, on the other side, Scorer.) Right Cockles, your first question.... Correct. *[Blimey, that was fast; hardly had time to check the watch.]* That's 2 points. (That's right Scorer in the little box. Well done.) *[My god I'm patronising.]* What's that Number 4, you can't hear me? *[What do you expect with the Jukebox going and that fellow on his fifth pint in the corner saying the answers out loud? If I can hear him, I'm damn sure you can.... still it's a good ploy to get extra time to think of the answer.]* IS THAT BETTER? Good. *[I hope my voice lasts out to the end].* End of Round 1 and the scores are.... (I think that should be a 6, Scorer.)

Round 2. No.1 your question.... *[Another one with only two possible answers; it's a gift for Cockles if he blows it.]* Cockles No.1: Who plays the part of.... Correct.... *[My God, does she watch every episode of Corrie, Eastenders and Emmerdale? Must do, with the ease she got that.... probably watches the omnibus edition as well.]* No.2:

What is the chemical formula for.... *[Not that gift again.... is that all they can think of for science questions? It's either Sodium or something that requires a master's degree in nuclear physics.]* Cockles No.2: Which Pope.... No. Over.... Correct.... I'm sorry Cockles No.2; you may have seen your answer in a book you were reading last week but it is not what's down here. *[Probably been reading Dan Brown!]*.... Captain, do you want to protest? ... *[And fill in all your reasons, with cross references, and be prepared to attend a Protest Committee meeting, the first in six years!]*.... No?.... Fine. On with the quiz then.... End of Round 4 and halfway.... (thank you Scorer).... Anyone want to top up drinks or shall we go straight on? *[particularly in view of the time, if we are to get to bed before breakfast]*.... Right, OK then.... *[surely he's not going for another two pints... he is!!....where does he put it?]*

Round 5. Change over time. Your question first this time, Cockles.... Incorrect. Over: Correct. 1 point for number 2.... (The other side, Scorer. No, just cross the first one out and initial it... to show you've done it and not some one later altering the score sheet... you'd be surprised.).... Oops! Sorry number 3, that should have gone to Cockles No.3, so I will have to give it to them.... yes, I know you knew it... it was my fault; sorry.... *[here I am in the semi-dark, trying to read font size 2 questions, check my watch that has what little bit of light there is reflecting off the part where the second hand is, and all you can do is belly ache. Anyway, you shouldn't have eaten all the sandwiches.]* No.4. Your question. What do the letters RSPCQM stand for? *[Here we go again. Does any question setter know the rules: only one letter for goodness sake?]*

Cockles, No.1. *ÆXZJRSENTI* *[why do they put in such unpronounceable names? It's their revenge on QMs.]*.... was the Greek god of what?.... *[if that was supposed to balance with the Roman God in 3a in Round 2, the setters want their heads examining!]*.... Yes, your team has had both Mythology questions. The setters have forgotten to swap over the balance for the second half.... No I can't change them over; I can only read them as written. *[Unfortunately.]*

Yes No.2, I am aware that that was the ninth football question. Aren't you glad there wasn't a specialist round on it?.... Cockles No.3: What is the collective noun for.... *[Another end of set cop out. I wonder which list they've taken this answer from?]*.... Well, no one got that. Perhaps it's from the Sanskrit list? What's that, No.3? Why are you getting all the questions nobody can answer, yet you know everyone else's? Search me. *[Oh dear, same every week; it wouldn't change if he moved position.]*

Last question, No.4.... Scores? What's the score, Scorer?.... Cockles are one ahead.... OK No.4, you need to answer this yourself to win, or one point for the team to get a draw.

[No pressure!].... Your question is.... *[Dear God, only a sadist could put that in as a last question!]*....Team? Correct. One point.... That makes it a draw. Well done everyone.... (That's right Scorer, tot up the individual scores along the bottom and they should add up to the same as the final scores. Simple.).... What's that?.... They aren't the same?.... *[Bother! Now we'll have to check through all the answers!]*.... What do you mean Scorer, it was a 5 not a 6 in the first round?.... So, a win for Cockles, well done *[you smarmy devils.]*.... Hard luck team, that's another place or two down the League Table. Relegation???....

See you in the second half of the season, Cockles.... *[when I for one intend to finish their sandwiches before they get back from the bar!]*.... What's that? As you're short of a QM, could I ask the questions on the return match?.... *[after my performance tonight, they must be desperate!]*.... Certainly, I'll be delighted. Drive carefully. [BB]

The Broken Finger

Marquis of Granby versus The Chapel House: the thought of it takes the breath away and sends an adrenaline surge through the bodies of quiz aficionados the world over [*well, at least in parts of Warrington! – Ed.*]. And so it was this time.

Played at The Chapel House to a packed audience, the match got under way. We got on well with the Chapel House lads, but the only thing we found difficult when playing them was the fact that all four were inveterate chain smokers. In those days, of course, smoking inside pubs was fully legal and in the case of The Chapel House lads it was compulsory. None of us Marquis chaps smoked and so it was usually an uncomfortable couple of hours whenever we met.

Ten minutes into the quiz, and after the inhalation of the equivalent of a couple of acres of tobacco plants, we could stand it no longer. We called a Time Out and I tried to open a window to give us a chance of survival to the end of the quiz. The Chapel House has rather ancient sash windows, and these are not the easiest things to open. After a seemingly futile struggle on my part I eventually managed to raise it to its full extent. I turned to my team mates to accept the usual adulation and plaudits. And then pride came before my fall! The bottom part of the window, now at the top half of the unit, was obviously missing its relationship with the bottom sill and decided to rekindle the friendship without warning. Down it came with a crash. Unfortunately (for me) the second finger of my left hand was still *in situ* when this happened. The window fully returned to its old position despite the fact that its downward progress was hindered by a rather thick and knobby digit. This digit immediately began to throb and send out extremely strong messages of pain to the rest of my body.

Everyone sat in shock except my dear friend Keith Butler, a great guy but sadly with no concept of what constitutes humour. He doubled up with laughter. In the meantime I said something which loosely translates as “Oh dear! The window has crashed down and trapped my finger. It really hurts you know.” Keith continued to laugh. “I don’t think this is a laughing matter, Keith,” I added. “Could lift the window and release my finger?” I requested (although again I paraphrase).

One of our more cerebral members, Dr. David Simmers, grabbed the window and without any thought to the implications for my still-trapped finger wrenched the bottom window and lifted it, a shade too violently I feel. As the window rose and the pain increased exponentially with every centimetre of lift (Newton’s Law?) I said words to the effect of: “Oh, David. Thank you so much. I do wish you could have been a bit gentler though. The pain is rather severe.”

At least now I could survey the damage. Fortunately the window had not been harmed or impaired in any way. Sadly the same could not be said of my finger. It was a rather different shape and colour compared with a few minutes earlier. Keith had by this time just about stopped laughing and had begun to show signs of sympathy. I had turned “a whiter shade of pale” and the room started to sway a little. I sat down, and eventually it was suggested that I needed some fresh air. The Chapel House lads lit up again and graciously allowed me to be substituted by our spare player as I took up my position on a cold, concrete bollard outside the pub.

And what was the result of the match? We lost, not surprisingly. However, most of those there that night remember the occasion as the only time in the Warrington Quiz League’s history when a substitute was used.

Martin Gould

The Great British Blunder

Back in what must have been the mid to late nineties, two colleagues and I from work appeared on the BBC TV daytime programme *The Great British Quiz*. The QM was newsreader Philip Hayton. The format, which I think was a reworking of the Angela Rippon *Masterteam*, involved buzzer, consultation and individual spotlight rounds, also had a sort of “Twenty Questions” type interlude in the middle of the quiz where the teams had to elucidate a subject that was typically British.

PH announced “... and for those at home here is today’s subject.” Across the studio on a small monitor appeared the words *Eddie ‘the Eagle’ Edwards*. PH invited our opposition to have the first go. In the meantime I turned to Les on my left and asked if he had seen the monitor too. He said that he had and we quietly wondered what we should do. In the meantime, Mike on my right who had not seen the monitor, fed me a sensible question to ask, which in a sense of confusion I repeated to PH. This resulted in a polite ripple of applause from the audience. Les and I continued our whispered discussion and decided that we would have to own up and say that we had seen the answer. Our opposition had received warm applause for their next question which had revealed that the subject was a living person.

I then asked if it was *Eddie ‘the Eagle’ Edwards*. Gasps and rapturous applause followed by an amazed PH asking how we had got it. When we declared we’d seen it on the monitor a loud “CUT” came over the PA.

We narrowly lost the competition but enjoyed the experience. Neither team got the replacement “Twenty Questions” subject of Bread and Butter Pudding!!

Brian Thompson

An Ode to Quizzing

by

Phil

(The Poet Laureate's 'Brother')

It's Monday night at nine p.m.,
The envelope is shown.
The tension mounts as silence falls,
Our memory skills are hewn.

The setter's name is read out loud,
This followed by a whine:
Oh No! Not jazz and breweries!
That's a hang'em, flog'em crime.

Literature and history,
No sport or films I'm betting.
Discrepancies are everywhere:
This set's not had much vetting.

You try a guess or take a chance
E'en though the fives are showing,
But when you make that silly blurt
Your opponents sit there glowing.

A colleague offers "No-one died;
It's something we've all done."
But still it's burning deep inside,
You know you should have won.

This is why we love our quiz;
Others wonder why the fuss.
But we'll turn up each Monday
For our next adrenaline rush.

Fifty years have come and gone
A million questions asked
Let's hope and pray for Fifty more
So our sons and heirs can bask

THE NAME'S (NOT) THE SAME!

Some teams manage to keep the same name and the same venue through decades. Others chart a different route through quiz life. Here Dennis Collins shows how you can have both the appearance of being a mutli-team man, while in reality being a one-team loyalist.

In the beginning, were two teams: one was a relatively new team, Pensby Hotel, that had risen rapidly through the divisions to the dizzy heights of Wirral 1 under the inspirational captaincy of 'Stormin' Norman Lovely, whilst the other was a team of perennial Division 1 mid-tablers, the Admiral. Admiral's only claim to fame at that time was an appearance on Radio Merseyside's Merseyquiz competition, where they were denied glory by the strict refereeing of Peter Deakin, MQL right-hand man to QM Jenni Collins. *[Editor's Note: wrong decision, fairly applied!]*

That year saw an influx of new blood into the Admiral team, including both me and my son, David (the 2008 MQL Mimir champion, but then only 17 years-old and not legally old enough to indulge in post-match libations!). We took the Division 1 title.

A portent of what was to come was when the team introduced itself and its members on Radio Merseyside, in rhyme. I cannot remember all of the stanzas but I know the last one was "But their resolve began to weaken, When they heard the buzzer of Peter Deakin!" followed by frantic (exasperated) buzzing by Peter himself to signal the end to that bit of nonsense!

In season 1988-89, the Admiral team changed its venue from the Admiral in Rock Ferry to the Royal Castle in Birkenhead. The then team captain was the redoubtable Marcus Keppel-Palmer. Marcus, incidentally, is alive and well and living and working in Bristol (at the University) and, in his spare time, annually attends and presents reports on the Eurovision Song Contest for the BBC local radio network! Not for Marcus a boring name like Royal Castle (helped by the fact that another team had that name anyway). Being a huge (in every respect!) fan of Mervyn Peake, he renamed the team 'Gormenghast', in which trilogy there features a Royal Castle. Gormenghast subsequently merged with the Pensby Hotel team with its first home at Heswall British Legion. A move to Thingwall Recreation Centre spawned another new name, the Tuigvellians ('Tuigvelle' being the Viking name for Thingwall). This was closely followed by a further change to the rather unimaginative 'Thingwall'.

The Welsh connections within the team influenced the first use of an anagram for our name when we converted Thingwall into 'Llangwith'. Over the succeeding years, Captain Norman took the bit between his teeth and came up with some highly imaginative anagrams, most of which were based on the names of the venues at which we played.

At this point, I feel I should pay homage to our League secretary, Jim Eccleson. Over the years, Jim has had the often onerous task of having to vet (and often reject) our submissions for new names, many of which may have overstepped the mark as being in thoroughly bad taste and possibly an outrage to public decency! We thank him for his patience and forbearance. We did touch on this in season 2002/03 when our name in the Handbook eventually appeared as 'Name Not Accepted' and in 2005/06 when we were truly and reverently 'Lord Jim's Observance Society'! One very good friend of ours from Ormskirk has very good reason (though he doesn't know it) to be grateful for Jim's diligence in weeding out offensive material! *[Editor's Note: Jim managed his own subtle fight back. The Gormenghast of 1988-89 appears in the*

end-of-season league table as 'Admiral', while the 1990-91 fixture book he contrives to spell Tuigvellians as Tuisvellians throughout!]

Many of our names have been straightforward anagrams of our venues. Thingwall Recreation Centre inspired not only 'Llangwith', but 'Allan Wight', 'Alice Warrington', plus our favourite 'Cartwright, the Lone Alien', and the Pensby Hotel gave birth to the 'The Nobel Spy'.

Other names are, perhaps, deserving of further explanation to put them into some sort of context. In 1997/98, the Wirral Quiz League had acquired an (arguably unfair) bad reputation for question sets that were not, apparently, popular with the other MQL Leagues. (I honestly believe that although some Wirral sets may have been less than perfect, this was mainly due to different areas' perceptions of what constitutes a good quiz – "One man's meat etc".) Consequently, we submitted an unattributed set of questions which passed muster with the question assessors and attracted no derogatory comments at all! Thus, we became 'The Disguised Wirral Set'.

After winning the 1st Division in 2000/01, we then came fourth in each successive year thereafter so that in 2006/07, we called ourselves 'Come Forth!' and, inevitably, we then proceeded to do so! It was not a difficult decision to rename ourselves the following season '...and t'was ever thus'.

For this current season, Norman managed to secure sponsorship from a local taxi firm (being incapable of driving at the time due to his advanced state of inebriation!). We believe this makes us the first sponsored Quiz Team in the MQL. Doesn't the name just roll off the tongue – 'Sevens & Roadrunners Taxis 677 7777'?

In recent times we have been following the running career of Andrew Baddeley, who ran brilliantly in the Beijing Olympics in the 1500 metres for Team GB and is strongly fancied to do well in this year's World Championships in August. Andrew is the son of one of our long-standing Team members, Neil, so next year's name might well feature an anagram which reflects Andrew's achievements (as long as he doesn't follow our example and 'Comes Forth!').

In the middle of last season, we acquired the services of former Mimir winner, Carl Whelan, on a free transfer in the January transfer window (because of the Bosman ruling). Our Team now operates on a strict rotation policy (Senor Benitez please note!) and, under the expert guidance of our QM and coach, Alan Steedman (no mean quiz player himself) then, touch wood, we may avoid yet another season of 'Coming Forth!'.

DENNIS COLLINS (or, as per our name in 2004/05, 'ENID NILSSON CLIMBERS!'). Work THAT one out for yourself!!!

A Sociological Perspective on Quizzing

In the twilight of my teaching career I found myself teaching Sociology; it was then that my thoughts turned to the sociological profile of quizzing as we know it in the MQL, and on the wider stage. I wondered if there was a Master's thesis in the topic, but couldn't see why I should want to write another dissertation or thesis: no-one had ever read my earlier efforts (bar the examiners). I did think that the subject could evolve into an interesting lecture topic for Warrington's esteemed Literary and Philosophical Society (now approaching its 134th year) but, until now, this endeavour has been mere wishful thinking (particularly as they've never asked me to give any sort of lecture!).

As I can't hope to condense a degree thesis into a thousand words, I will dispense with the wider world and concentrate on the MQL. Rigorous research will also be another victim of time and space; however, I hope you will see some validity in my snapshot of our quizzing society.



When I joined my first quiz team, Wallaseyans B of the Liverpool & Wirral League East, in Season 1971-72, the average age of our team was about 27, and I was but 24 years old. The Wallaseyans A team was rather more venerable, but still had a mean age below 35. Today's Wallaseyans continue to exercise their minds in the Wirral League, but the ages of the current team members average out at close on 60. The Wallaseyans are, however, mere spring chickens.

Wallaseyans 1975

At the age of 29 I moved on to the Warrington League in 1976-77, joining the Warrington Sports Club Woodworms team. In that season our team's average mean age was 32. Today's Woodworms team has an average age of 71. Where once upon a time our age could be said to have been in line with our team score in a match, these days we equal a typical match aggregate score. What's more, age might have brought us greater wisdom, but that's not the same thing as greater factual knowledge, retention and retrieval.



WSC Woodworms 2004

As I look around the leagues, there does seem to have been this ageing process taking place. A major challenge for us all is how, if at all, we can bring younger people into quizzing. Some leagues are looking at altering the format, to make it friendlier for those next generations who have been brought up on the relative individual anonymity of table quizzes. Perhaps we should just accept that most of us are from the Top of the Form generation, and just as that old favourite has long disappeared from the airwaves, perhaps our day is reaching its evening, if not yet night?

One of the founder member teams of the MQL back in 1959 was the Mount Ladies, runners-up in that inaugural season. Nevertheless, men have always heavily outnumbered women among the ranks of MQL quizzers (perhaps in the ratio 2:1). There have been, and are, very good women players in the MQL: Evelyn Peachey and Janet Barker (the only women to have won the Mimir Individual competition) were

among the best players in my early years in quizzing, while Pat Arthur, Madeline Evans and Olive Behan are among those who continue to make great contributions. However, there is a question to be asked as to whether quizzing, or at least our style of it, is more likely to attract males? In October 2008 there was a correspondence in the Guardian regarding the lack of female contestants on University Challenge. ‘Gillian’ suggested that “while the boys are engaged in this harmless parlour game the girls are actually doing some work”, while ‘Danny’ said “it’s not just the level of education that counts; to enter such a contest also requires a large ego.” It could be we’d get closer to the answer if we asked why some people are interested in quizzing and others not. However, we would still be left wondering if our quizzing, its format and the surroundings in which it takes place might just be more male-friendly (whatever that means).

The final factor I’ll draw attention to is social class: to what extent is MQL quizzing a phenomenon rooted in the middle class? Was it always so, or back in the 1960s was it much more of a working class interest? Speaking at the Golden Jubilee dinner, MQL President Ken Smith recalled the origins of the MQL in the lunchtime conversations of dockers in the Bedford public house. Jim Robinson, in an *Echo* article in 1963 was quoted as saying: “So many types of people are involved. There are housewives, railway workers, accountants and dockers.” (How outdated that “housewives” reference seems now!) In a 1972 *Liverpool Echo* article, Colin Maddock wrote that “Bricklayers sit alongside dental surgeons, history teachers take on storemen – just about every conceivable occupation is represented.”

While I acknowledge the truth of this, my own experience suggests a disproportionate number of participants over the years have been drawn from the middle class. Both at the Wallaseyans and Warrington Sports Club our teams very largely comprised middle class folk, but that probably reflected the socio-economic milieu of the two venues. Wherever I look I see teachers, accountants, librarians, teachers, managers, scientists and engineers (many, of course, long-retired). Of the many quizzers who might well identify themselves as working class, I suspect many were people from families where going straight into work was the norm or necessity, living in the age of the 11+ examination, restricted grammar school opportunities, and a school-leaving age of 15 (or 14 for some in that first generation of quizzers). Had they enjoyed the greater equality in educational opportunity and expectation available post-1970, the vast majority of such people would have proved themselves the educational equals of today’s middle-class quizzers.

That’s enough of this cod-sociology, snapshots and speculation. There are factors such as race and disability that I’ve not addressed. Even if you consider my thoughts misguided, should you feel that there’s a thesis to be developed on this theme then you have my permission to write it. All I seek is an acknowledgment, and the right to plagiarise your ideas and research for that lecture I might yet give to the Lit & Phil.

Peter Deakin

[Editor’s Note: further contributions to this History of the MQL are welcome and should be sent, in the first instance, to the General Secretary.]