

Tom Aiken, Billiard Player

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The Greatest Cushman Scotland has Produced

Great at Spot Stroke

By Riso Levi (Aberdeen Journal, date uncertain)

This is an extract from the current number of "*The Billiard Player*":

Tom Aiken, the doyen of Scottish billiards, and an undefeated Scottish professional was on April 12th entertained at a dinner in Edinburgh... The function was to mark the completion of 50 years in billiards by the popular player.

Scotland has given us many good players in the past, as for example the late **Hugh McNeil** and the late **J.G. Sala**, but **Tom Aiken** is undoubtedly the finest cushman which she has yet produced.

Aiken was born in Aberdeen in 1872. Like most other professionals he began his billiards at a very early age; indeed at the age of 10 he was already a marker at Peterhead.

His wages to begin with were only 3s 6d a week. If, however, his earnings in those early days were scant, he had plenty of time on his hands, and he never lost an opportunity of practising strokes or playing games.

As a result of this constant practice **Aiken** had made his first century break by the time he was 12, and his first 200 at the early age of 14.

About this time he began to practise the spot stroke, which was then in vogue, and which was not abolished until a good many years later. So good did he become at it that he frequently made breaks of 300 and 400, and occasionally even a 500 by its means, whilst he was still in his teens.

When he was 25 he made his record break of 1018 by means of it, and thereby joined the very select band of players who have made a four-figure break without the aid of any freak stroke.

Today, many players are inclined to think that the spot stroke could not have been so very difficult, because **Peall** and **Dawson**, to mention only two spot-stroke artists, made such gigantic breaks by its means, frequently putting the red down 300 and 400 times consecutively, and on two or three occasions even 500 or 600 times.

Let good players who think thus try to pot the red twelve times, or even six times consecutively off the spot, and they will soon think very differently.

How good **Aiken** used to be at this stroke will perhaps be best realised when it is mentioned that the great **John Roberts**, who also played the spot stroke a great deal, and made many big breaks by its means, never succeeded in making a four-figure break by this method of play.

It is a well known fact that when two professionals desire to play an exhibition match, and one has to concede, let us say, 6,000 in 16,000, his opponent would not hear of his receiving anything like so many points, and considered that 3,000 was an ample start. And so a good deal of wrangling frequently took place before the terms were finally arranged.

In this respect **Aiken** was quite different from our English professionals. When our crack players desired to give him a bigger start than they were able to, he never made any fuss, but took all the points offered, and then went all out to show them that they had "bitten off more than they could chew".

Thus, when **Aiken** first played regularly in England, he was proved conclusively how much better he was than his opponents would admit by going through two long consecutive seasons *without losing a single stroke*.

Aiken played matches with **John Roberts** on numerous occasions, but the old champion was always defeated by the Scot, firstly because he conceded him too many points, and secondly because **Tom Aiken** would never play to order, but always played to win.

Aiken's best performance against **John Roberts** was when, after being in receipt of 4,000 in 16,000, he won by no fewer than 2,557.

Another great performance of his was against **Diggie** in London in 1908. The game was 9,000 up. The Scotsman was in receipt of 1,000 but he showed in this game that he did not need any points, as he won by 1,800.

Tom Aiken in his prime was, therefore, very little behind the best English players of his time.

Aberdeen Press and Journal, December 1943

Champion of 22 Years

Many of the older generation of billiards players will remember **Tom Aiken**, Scottish champion for twenty-two years, who has died in Edinburgh. He was 71 years of age.

An Aberdeen man, **Tom** was undoubtedly the greatest exponent of the game Scotland has produced.

At the age of ten he went to Peterhead as a marker, and two years later he was making breaks of 100 and over. Gradually he built up a name for himself, and in 1896, when he was twenty-four years of age, he won the North of Scotland championship.

In 1902, he became Scottish champion for the first time, beating **Tom Rae**, Edinburgh, by 8135 in a game of 18,000.

Beat Top-notchers

It was after this that he set out on what was a successful career. He met all the top-notchers in the billiards world of the time, including **Roberts, Inman, Newman, Lindrum, Reece, Weiss** and **Gray**. He had victories over them all to his credit.

In 1908 he made his record anchor stroke break of 7172 in Edinburgh, which was only twelve short of the then world record held by **Dawson**.

One of his most notable achievements was against **F. Lindrum**. In three level games he beat **Lindrum** twice and drew once.

In 1911-1912 he won the £1000 tournament in London, and in 1913 he toured Australia with **George Gray**.

Widely-read Book

The outbreak of the last war interrupted his brilliant career, and after the war he established successful saloons in Edinburgh, where many of the most noted players of recent years appeared.

His book, "*Plain Talks to Billiard Players*" was widely read, and proved helpful to young players.

He is survived by his wife and three sons, who are accountants. A brother is **Mr. Robert Aiken**, 86 Stanley Street, Aberdeen, who is a retired Post Office Official.