

Old Wilsonians win major trophy

“But isn’t that the deadline date for Brexit?” asked virtually everyone participating when they heard that the Alf Parish Memorial darts match was due to take place on March 29th

“We always thought that a back stop is another word for a goal-keeper” suggested the Old Wilsonians’ Football Club

“No; it’s a wicket keeper”, countered the Old Wilsonians’ Cricket Club

“And a hard boarder (sic) must be a reference to my lodger; he’s a bit of a bruiser”, chirped no-one in particular

“No skill, just lucky”, observed Ellie

“Are you referring to the way in the government have handled this matter?”, I replied

“No; that’s the name of my team”, she rejoined

“Wasn’t Brexit a hit for Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Titch in 1966 “, asked their agent, hoping for a revival

“No – that was ‘Bend it’ but the latter names were just a few of those who have held the post of Brexit secretary, whilst the five Constituency Labour Parties, and in unison, simply chanted

“Oh, Jeremy Corbyn; Oh Jeremy Corbyn”

“Any chance of reviving ‘Deal or no deal’, suggested Noel Edmunds, someone else hoping for a comeback

“I’ve achieved an extension”, announced the Prime Minister, now known as Lino – Leader in name only

(I’ve always found lino difficult to nail down but easy to walk over)

“We had a loft conversion,” informed the ever helpful Ellie

This is getting to be a bit like the ‘Pass Notes’ column in ‘The Guardian’

It’s also getting a bit silly, and we are forgetting the main purpose of the evening, namely to remember Alf Parish, a man who helped so many people in such a selfless way and whose grasp of detail would have enabled him to unravel the complexities of Brexit in an afternoon

The first person I saw upon arrival at Selhurst Park was Carolyn, our tried and trusted bar tender, as she got out of her car and prepared for another tough shift. She recognised me and, with her help, I managed to breeze through security – sometimes it is useful to know people with power and influence

I then met Carmen, the Palace representative for the evening, and Warren, who did a great job moving furniture around

The room was set up to accommodate 36 darts players, representing nine teams, and about 30 supporters and I had agreed with Charlotte, yet another excellent member of the Palace Events team, to cater for 65

Two members of the Old Wilsonians’ cricket team were the first to arrive but soon the room was full and we had to work out the best way to play 34 games of darts in a little over four hours

Earlier in the day I had informed Roger Hough that I had ‘a cunning plan’ to help achieve this – even came dressed as Baldrick in order to prove it – and he gave me some invaluable help as we made the draw

The players, too, were the epitome of assistance as they willingly agreed to shorten the second round ties to nearest the bull if nine darts had not achieved a double, whilst reducing the third round to one leg proved essential, as Jasper Gundry-White’s stentorian cries ensured that the right people got to the oche at the right time

“I’ll get a six dart finish” promised Alex Forbes, when he learnt that 301 was the starting point

As the evening progressed even more people arrived and Carol and Marie busily set about selling raffle tickets to such an extent that we ran out

“I’ll get some more,” proclaimed Carmen

The standard of the darts varied – some scores were as low as three and four, some darts hit the board without registering a score at all, and some hit the wall

“Is it safe to come out?”, inquired Carolyn – one of the boards was very adjacent to her Bar But it did not matter – providing no-one hit Carolyn, of course, which they didn’t. The only thing that really mattered was that everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves

And everyone was a winner, too, even those who went out in the first round, but special mentions must go to the two youngest competitors, Ruben and Coby, both 11 years old

Ruben threw his darts with enthusiasm and a great deal of skill but eventually fell to the guiles of Pat Curran, who must be at least four times his age; sorry for that, Pat!

But Coby did even better by winning his game against Roger Hough, a former winner of this competition

And so we came to the final, contested between Tony Nawrocki and Nick Bryan, both from the Old Wilsonians’ Football Club, which Nick won in a first rate game of darts “As we have now won the trophy three times in a row, do we keep it?”, inquired their skipper, Alex Forbes, still smarting from the fact that he had failed in his attempt at a six dart finish

Doreen Parish presented the trophies – No, Alex, you cannot keep it – and another successful evening came to an end

Thanks to everyone who played and supported the evening, which raised £1,000. This was distributed between the participating teams and thanks to Gary Stevens and the Bromley & Chislehurst team who were not able to make it but kindly agreed to donate their portion of the money to a local food bank

And to the GPM London Print Branch, who had already sponsored the event to the tune of £250, for agreeing to donate their portion of the winnings to Arts Network, a local charity which supports those with severe and enduring mental health issues

And, of course, to Crystal Palace Football Club for hosting the event, providing the raffle prizes, food, dart boards and darts, Carolyn, Carmen and Warren on the night, and Charlotte, Lyndora and Zee, whom I had worked with in the run-up to the evening

And what of next year?

It looks like we are going to have to find a bigger room and a couple more dart boards. Alf would have approved