

Apart from our Association's internationally-recognised table tennis player, Aubrey Simons, the one person that stands out in our history is the legend that is Doug Shipton. This is the name that seems to resurrect more memories with our senior players and re-ignite more "stories of interest" than any other member of our league to date but, more often than not, with a wry smile on their faces in so doing!



Though the family lived in Bristol, the youngest son of Bertie Shipton and Mabel Jenkins, Douglas Bertram Shipton, was born in Cardiff on 23 June 1919 and had two elder brothers and one sister. His father died at the age of just 45 in 1935 when Doug was only 15 years old, so this would have had a profound effect on him at that time. However, it was soon after that Doug appears to have found his niche in table tennis. The first written account of him playing in our league was in the nationwide Table Tennis Activity magazine at the age of 17.....and he was a "winner" from the start. So much so, that he quickly found himself representing Bristol in an inter-city home league match against Cardiff on 21 November 1936. He then came to further prominence when he defeated Fred Hipkins, who was the Bristol Individual Championships Division 1 winner the year before, in a Bristol league match in November 1937. In April 1938 Doug then reached the final of the Evening World's own local event, beating Charlie Dawes (the 1933, 1936 and 1938 Bristol champion) in the semi-final, where it was reported in their newspaper that he revealed himself to be a "fine stroke player of high promise", and with "what a top-spin". As a result of his meteoric progress, he was selected for an England trial in Exeter on 14 January 1939 with Aubrey Simons.



On 21 January 1939, Doug again defeated Fred Hipkins in the "match of the evening" semi-final of the Bristol Individual Championships, whilst Aubrey Simons dispensed Don Parsons at the same stage, having in an earlier fourth round match also beaten Charlie Dawes. The 1938/1939 season's Men's Singles final scheduled for March would therefore be the first time either of these young players had reached that pinnacle, but it would be Aubrey who would prevail, as Doug would be unable to participate! An announcement was made in the local press in early March 1939 following a B&DTTA Executive decision which headlined as "One of the biggest shocks of the season; the suspension of the 19 year old Bristol star, recently described as one of the ETTA's best finds for some years". The reason is unknown, but in the end it only lasted a week or so after a quickly convened two-hour meeting reversed that decision. However, a few weeks prior in late January 1939 Doug had entered the English National championships at the Royal Albert Hall in London, where he defeated Hassan of Paris in the first round, before just missing out to Tommy Sears who was ranked 7th in the country at that time (see report left from the Evening Post 27 January 1939). He also partnered our 1938 and 1939 champion, Mary Scott, in the Mixed Doubles in those Championships. In February 1939, though, it was reported by the Sunday Express sports writer no less, that Doug "had a tendency to play more to the gallery than to the game in progress", and this was his Achilles heel.

On 26 February 1939 Doug was to at last face his nemesis, Aubrey Simons, in their first ever "final" together in the Western Counties Closed championships at the Spa Pavilion, Bath. In that match, Doug's aggressive attack was countered again and again by the impregnable defence of Aubrey plus his deadly smashing "chop" shot, and so it was that Doug eventually succumbed in a bruising battle 18-21, 21-20, 18-21, 19-21. It was highly likely that this match was to shape Doug's tactics in "trying to avoid" playing Aubrey in the future! However, he had no hesitation in participating in "exhibition" matches against Aubrey, eg on 15 April 1939 at the Bath Closed Championships finals night. It was in these "matches" that Doug excelled.....and enjoyed! Twenty one days earlier in a Western Counties' league match against the Metropolitan Association, it was reported that Doug won by his "electrifying activity and the vim he puts into every stroke", and it was this "entertaining" that endeared him to the spectators and enabled him to pit his skills against World champion players at that time too, eg on 22 April 1939 in Bath, he was participating in exhibition matches against Victor Barna (WC 5 times) and partnering



Richard Bergmann (WC 4 times) in a doubles match. The crowds would flock to watch Doug's playing style, which was very often many, many feet away from the table at times. He was at the top of his game and "living" for table tennis! (*The exact date of the photo on the previous page is not known, but it was clearly taken around Christmas-time, probably soon after the War at the Fry's club in Keynsham, and features Doug (far end) "teasing" Charlie Dawes in a typical exhibition match. A grinning Aubrey can also be seen far left!*).



Doug represented his home team of Central YMCA in the Bristol league at this time, and on 17 May 1939, he beat Henry Hodge by three games to one to win the R A Norman Memorial Cup in the Central YMCA's own finals (*see left*). This now 78 year old cup still exists to this day (*photographed right, albeit a little worn*), and is currently held by his family. Having finished third the previous season, Doug's Central YMCA league team also won the B&DTTA division one title in the 1938/1939 season, finishing just ahead of Aubrey Simons' St Paul's, Bedminster team. Unfortunately, the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 was to halt Doug's table tennis progress. Despite that, a heavily-reduced Bristol league did continue during the 1939/1940 season with just three divisions, as many of our players were away on duty, although Doug did participate.



It was understood that Doug had some health and illness issues, which prevented him from undertaking any military war service at that time. Since leaving school, he also had at least seventy different jobs interspersed with some unemployment and financial difficulties, most likely because it was table tennis that always took precedence over any job that he did hold. Anyway, his Central YMCA team were only runners-up that season, as they were pipped by a "newly-created" consortium called the "39" Club, made up of the few remaining players from other depleted clubs that were not large enough to enter full teams themselves. Thankfully for Doug, the league was re-formed for the 1944/1945 season, even before war had ended, and Doug hastily joined the Transport & General Workers' team, and during that short season his team carried off the "6 team" top Division 1 title being undefeated (*see right*).

They were also undefeated the following season, again in a 6-team division playing each other three times, and yet again in 1946/1947 in a 12-team division, by which time normality was slowly returning. His club also claimed the Belsten Cup in three years out of four during this period. Please also see the remarks left of Mr Edward Frank Christopher, our President from 1930 to 1943, who wrote this piece in the Evening Post towards the end of the War.



Douglas Shipton, Transport and General, England trials. But for the war would probably have gained international honours. Particularly strong in defence. Renowned for returns from seemingly impossible positions. Delights spectators by his attractive play.

Meanwhile, Doug had married Ena Brown in 1943 and they had three daughters named Charmionne, Averil and Marie and they lived in Greystoke Avenue, Southmead (*his house is shown right*).



Whether or not he was able to continue playing table tennis at all around those four years or so when there was no league activity is unknown, but he nevertheless became our Individual Championships Men's Singles winner in that brief 1944/1945 season beating Fred Hipkins yet again in the final. However, this was in the absence of Aubrey Simons who was away in Burma, as too were many others. He did not make it to the final again in our re-named Bristol Closed Championships until 1952/53 when he was to then miss out to Basil Bucknell - apparently mainly due to show-boating again. The year before he was also runner-up in the Men's doubles in the 1951 Welsh Open in Cardiff, partnering our league's Ray Chinnick. However, Doug then spotted an "opportunity" to win another title in our championships. As has been related on many occasions, if he found himself in the same event as his arch-rival, Aubrey Simons, he would "inauspiciously" crash out in the first round and "surprisingly" find himself the clear favourite in the Consolation Singles. He won that event three years in a row from 1956 beating Colin Feltham, Norman Thompson and John Miles in each respective final. Dennis Rowe, of 1950/60s Page club fame, once quoted tongue-in-cheek that "*the Consolation Singles event was eventually abandoned in 1958/59 because Doug was winning all the time. He turned losing in the first round of the "main" event into an art form!*"



In the early 1950s Doug played for Totterdown YMCA, but later in that decade he was representing the Weston club in a team with Ray Philpott, and on 21 May 1958 he reached another Bristol Closed Championships final in the Coronation Cup event. On this occasion, it was a team mixed doubles event, and Doug partnered Miss Barbara Couch. Although they won their two matches, his team lost out to Page A. He did win the Veterans' Singles in both the 1962/63 and 1963/1964 seasons though, beating Harry White in both finals, but Harry eventually had his revenge in the 1965/66 event. Doug's winning trophy in the 1963 event is shown left. At around this time he was playing for the J.O.P. club and still really enjoying his game, for example, beating the 1962 Men's Singles champion, Pete Brooks, in three games

in a league match in December 1966 and seemingly still being able "to turn it on" whenever he wanted. In that 1966/1967 season, together with team-mates Ray Sewell and John Osborne, they claimed the division one title. The next season their club was re-named Allies JOP and they finished fifth in the Premier division, which was also Doug's last season in our league. His mother had passed away aged 74 in early 1966, and it was a year or so later that Doug decided to move away from Bristol and live in the Bournemouth area.

There have been many accounts of Doug's "exploits" at the Central YMCA in Colston Street and at Totterdown YMCA (see right). Not only was he a great table tennis player, but he was also a super snooker player too, and it is often recounted that he would apparently sit quietly in the shadows and cast an eye over unsuspecting and gullible targets whilst they were playing either table tennis or snooker, and then he would "pretend" that he had never even played either game before and offer to "play them for a tanner". Of course, each time Doug would start off ostensibly awkward, but then "somehow" just manage to edge the last few points! He



also relished a small flutter now and then, and loved his football too. Anyway, sometime in the early 1950s, though unfortunately it is not known at exactly which event or date this happened, he was due to play a doubles match with Basil Bucknell against none other than the 1949 and 1951 World Champion, Johnny Leach, who was, as always for a match, dressed immaculately for the occasion and was partnering Victor Barna. Knowing it would rile Mr Leach, and no doubt in order to gain any advantage he possibly could, Doug arrived late for the match in his "everyday" clothes, wearing his trade-mark trouser braces as well as sporting a pair of old leather boots. The match duly started, but at each change of end Doug would break off in order to listen to the broadcast on his transistor radio announcing the football scores which, of course, infuriated his opponents even more! The outcome of the match unfortunately remains a mystery!

Doug was also slightly claustrophobic and even feared the confined space of a train carriage. On one occasion, Doug was in the February 1949 Bristol team that was due to play the famous St Bride's club in London in a Last 16 Wilmott Cup match, and his compatriots Charlie Dawes and Roy Smart were "quite fearful" throughout the whole train journey. However, as regards Doug's style of play, Roy's brother, Dennis, recalls that "Doug would retrieve balls from yards behind the table, and because of his desire to be somewhat flamboyant and a showman, he allowed himself to get into trouble but, more often than not, had the ability to win through. He had such a tremendous touch with the old Barna rubber bat too!" (You can see his bat in front of him in the pre-War group photo above right). Dennis goes on to say that "Doug was a charming, somewhat debonair personality; you might even say a little unconventional, and he certainly had an eye for, and appealed to, the young ladies!" By all accounts, and there have been many more than those mentioned here, he was most definitely one of our Association's very best players of all time, and it's as if there's a film just waiting to be made on the colourful life of one of our league's most intriguing and loveable characters.....perhaps there might well be one day!



He passed away on 9 April 1991 with cancer at the age of 72. If anyone has any other stories on Doug, or indeed, anyone else in our Association's history, please do let us know. Thank you.