

DOLCHSTOSS

No. XXVIII

'What's Britain got to beat that ???
Young's Special, the N.G.C. and the new
Dolchstoss, that's what !'



CONTENTS

EDITORIAL - a brief glance forward ... and backward and sideways 3-5

LETTERS from John Piggott, Craig Nye, Pete Swanson, Barry Ellis and Andy Davidson 6-7

TREASURER'S NOTES, which reveal that Piggott has also written to Tony Ball 8

SCRABBLE, with final diagrams of S53 and S71 (I hope), by Peter Dean 9-11

ONE GOOD REASON for abolishing variants - we could abolish Richard Scott too 12

POSTAL RATINGS still show Gareth Lodge on top, compiled by Andrew Waldie 13

FTF REPORTS from Hillingdon, Walsall and Bushey, by Richard Sharp & Chris Harvey. 14

BDC 14 - victory statements from Edwin Godfrey, Steve Doubleday, Adrien Waird.... 15-17

BDC 22, 24 and 21D crammed into a corner together just like old times 18

BDC 12 (hurray), BDC 17 (Hill's enter betting!) and bits of BDC 19 19

BDC 19 (continued) and the beginning of BDC 18 20

BDC 18 (continued with Buckell gripe) and the beginning of BDC 59R 21

BDC 86V, the Youngstown joke, and a geography lesson for pete birks 22-3

BDC 54V - latest developments in the War of the Ring from your local Nazgul 23-4

BDC 77C still held up by committee bickerings, what a bloody disgrace 24

NGC 100A - who are the mystery men ? Why can't the French fleet float ? 25-6

NGC 100A COMPETITION - watch this space and you might win £2 in 5 years' time ... 26-7

FORMULA I - they're off ! Intrepid trackside report from Mike Wassall 27

CLUB NEWS with 75 (!) new members, 7 COAs and a plug for DesConTenT 28-9

ALL BRAN, hidden where I hoped you wouldn't notice it, from Richard Walkerdine .. 31

CHESS by Brian Clark - what do you mean, it ought to come before p.31 ? 30

USEFUL ADDRESSES, if you happen to live at them 32

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Having cunningly saved about 10 lines on the contents, I can put in yet another plug for DesConTenT. If you haven't registered DO IT NOW or you may find yourself paying extra when the time comes. There's a form on p. 31 if I've remembered to put it there - if I haven't write to resident NGC crook Doug Wakefield.

*

STOP PRESS Just heard that Richard Scott, your friendly animated variant bank, will be away for a fortnight or so from 23 February. During this period you won't be able to get any variants (well, you could try the independent bank, but it'll probably be quicker and cheaper to wait a fortnight anyway). Message is clear: if you're going to want any variant rules before mid-March, order 'em now.

Also a call from Norman Nathan - there is now no question of changing the date of DesConTenT. Apologies to those who did want it changed, but the majority will be as relieved as I am.

* * * * *

Credits

This is Dolchstoss XXVIII. Edited by Richard Sharp (address back page). Printed photo-litho by Instant Print West One, Heddon St, London W.1. Published by the National Games Club as an expensive disservice to its members. Editor lubricated by Young's of Wandsworth. Cover drawing and title by Pete Swanson and Craig Nye respectively, if they come out.

*

DEADLINE — for all games except 77C, Friday 28 February to Richard Sharp. 77C only, Tuesday 25 February to Gus Ferguson. I wanna run my train

EDITORIAL by Richard Sharp

Things look pretty good at the moment. A huge new intake of members this month - nearly double the previous record - and a generally warm reception for the new-look Dolchstoss (see letters page). Perhaps a good time to look at two closely associated criticisms of Dolchstoss that have been appearing recently. The first, less common though perhaps more important, is that I am using the zine as my own 'personal' medium when it should be the impersonal 'voice of the NGC'. The second, raised by a cross-section so large and varied that one cannot ignore it, is that I should run no games in Dolchstoss.

Part of the problem, I think, lies in the origins of the zine. It started as a simple NGC gamezine like any other; and I, although already running the club, was just another GM and so entitled to my opinions. The trouble arose when I amalgamated Dolchstoss and the short-lived NGC Bulletin.

The Bulletin, for the benefit of newer members, contained in embryo the sort of general club news now found in Dolchstoss, with reports on chess, Scrabble, etcetera. It was sent free to all members, and was theoretically a monthly thing. However, it was all my own work, in a way that Dolchstoss no longer is with its many outside contributors, and the effort of running the two was far too much - the Bulletin alone was as much trouble as the old duplicated Dolchstoss. Since the games had to appear on time it was the Bulletin, and thus the majority, that suffered from the double workload. I therefore merged the two under the name of the gamezine and began to sell it to non-players. The 'free handout' idea, though nice, was ludicrously bad economically, and contributed very handsomely to the collapse of the London meetings through lack of funds.

So what you have now is a hybrid, and there is considerable support for breaking it down again into its original component parts - or simply getting rid of the games altogether, either by allowing them to run down or, more drastically, by farming them out here and now.

What it comes down to is this. Should there be a club zine, sent to every member, and carrying no games? Is it the General Secretary's job to run such a zine? And if so, should the General Secretary's job not be open to Diplomacy gamesmasters?

It may well be that the answer to these questions is Yes. If that is what members want, they should have it - and I'm afraid they won't get it from me! Not because I think the ideas are bad - I don't - but because I know damn well I couldn't carry the load efficiently. Under the present system the games impose a valuable discipline, forcing me to drop everything else and get the zine out. Dolchstoss has been very punctual, considering its size and complexity, over a long period. Without the games this wouldn't happen. One obvious proof of this is the fact that I cannot get any part of the zine ready in advance of the deadline. Not once, ever. There's always something more urgent to do.

I might add that I enjoy running games, don't like gameless zines, and don't want to run one. Also, perhaps, that I can find good use for the few humble pennies the GM rakes off, some small consolation for the thought that occasionally arises (and is more frequently voiced by others): 'Why the hell are you spending hours on that rubbish when we're totally broke and you could be earning £5 an hour translating?' Because I like doing it, that's why, but it's a good point for all that.

So here is a suggestion. If anyone thinks he could produce a zine of the type in question, let him step forward and run for General Secretary at the elections (not far off now). I expect I shall stand too - but those who want the new system will be able to put me at the bottom of their lists. This is not in any sense a demand for a vote of confidence, or anything silly like that. I think it's true to say that if I was sufficiently determined to be re-elected I should be! But I can honestly say that if the General Secretary's job is that of producing a no-game zine, I don't want that job.

Meanwhile, I can assure players that Dolchstoss will continue as a gamezine no matter what, until I am forcibly restrained! Obviously if the club sections went elsewhere the subsidy would go with them, and either standards would come down or prices would go up. But I want to run a 'personal' gamezine without being bound by other people's ideas, even the Committee's. That the Committee's opinions and its decisions should be reported in Dolchstoss goes without saying; but so long as I am the editor I feel I should be able to say what I like without deferring to anyone else's veto. If you disagree, vote me out (and at least we'll silence the morons who think the NGC is my personal empire and the Committee my loyal hatchet-men).

Zine News

It's been Monster Month. The loud thump announcing the last issue of Albion was nothing compared to the mighty crash of the 106-page Europa. Both were really fine achievements, never mind the size - it's a sad thought that we shall never see the famous Albion again. Though much of its content was wasted on the likes of me, I always found plenty of interest there, and in terms of production quality I have long been accustomed to measure other zines by how far they fell short of Albion. Meanwhile Courier goes on, and one day I really must have a game in it.... Europa was really impressive, again with a lot of wargame stuff I didn't read but with plenty of good Diplomacy and general meat as well. Highly recommended - but can Walter-Luc keep it up? It would kill me, but of course the Swiss are tougher than we are (better food, probably).... Bellicus came with staggering promptitude, and I am delighted to give credit in this unaccustomed quarter. Even the content was less stupefying than usual, Will in his tearing hurry having to leave the choicest ennuis out for once - many will rejoice with me at the 'suspension' of the dreadful Elsinore. Still some classic Haven idiocies for connoisseurs, though - references to 'Sharp's praetorians', 'the politburo', and so on. Really the man is a gem - if he didn't exist Andrew Herd would have had to invent him.... I also received a copy of Hyperion, Geoff Challenger's zine for running Hypereconomic Diplomacy, sent ot me free of charge because he had been rude about me in it. Nothing very original, just some neo-Haven rantings, though I'm bound to admit the zine itself was quite impressive.... There were also, of course, all the reliable regulars, NGC and otherwise, but they only make news when they don't arrive.

*

OJ

This didn't come, and now it seems it never will. Before this issue goes to press I hope to have some more details, and new homes for the games. Meanwhile I'll just say to other NGC gamesmasters: when you want to fold, for Christ's sake fold and don't bugger about for six months saying you're not going to. Please ?

*

MP Zine Poll

Wahoopee, it's ego-boosting time again ! Many readers will remember the other two MP zine polls; the first was won by the now-defunct Ethil the Frog and the second by Dolchstoss. Entering is easy - write down all the British zines you get (must be two or more) and mark each one out of 10 (10 being superb, like Dolchstoss for example, and 1 being seaweed like ... well, never mind). Send your entry to Richard Walkerdine, Cheriton, 15 Crouch Oak Lane, Addlestone, Surrey, KT15 2AN not later than 28 Feb. What's the point ? Well, to find out what we all think is the best zine in Britain, I suppose, but you may think a better reason is that RJW has foolishly offered to send a free copy of Mad Policy to all non-traders who enter (the issue showing the result, obviously). Great opportunity to see this little known minor work by the nonentity husband of the famous Claire Walkerdine.

*

NGC List

I've had the first sheets of this from Gordon Bell - up to about No.270, but missing those who didn't return the form. I may send it out with this issue, provided I can do so without delaying publication; otherwise next time. The list will be free to all who returned the form, and I don't see why others should get it, frankly.

The questionnaire on the back will produce hours of happy statistical analysis when I've had all the forms back. Of the 50-odd answers received so far, for instance, only 5 think the NGC costs them too much - more reckon it costs too little, and the majority said 'about right'. I'll have a full report on this when all the forms have found their way back to me.

*

New zines

With this month's huge growth, we're going to need 'em. Latest volunteers are Dave Ross and Philip Murphy, both starting soon, as I believe is Phil Stutt, who

gave his name in some time ago. In addition I've had inquiries from two other members. So it looks as if we shall be OK for some time yet.

*

Dolchstoss Contributors

Popular opinion seems to be that it isn't worth getting outside contributors' copy retyped. By asking people to type it themselves in reproducible form, we save time (and thus money) but sacrifice uniformity of appearance. I'm grateful to the several contributors who've made the effort, and we'll see what it looks like. Main trouble is that the PO insist on cramming the most unsuitable packages through my small letter-box - virtually everything that was packed flat finished up creased or torn, despite cardboard splints, 'FRAGILE' notices and other precautions. Anyway, I'll go ahead with what I've got. On the whole, it may be best to fold paper after all, though without flattening the creases. Contributors are asked to use heavy-quality typing paper, not the thin 'copy' paper, and especially not duplicating paper.

Thanks to those who sent artwork of various kinds as well. Wink sent some horrific colour slides of ScotDipCon, one of which will inevitably be published, as it proves beyond doubt that Walkerdine is a liar. Pete Swanson sent a cartoon, which will grace the front cover if (and it's a big if) it comes out - rather faint pencil, alas. The cover lettering, I need hardly say, comes from the Retief stable - the work of Craig Nye. (Typeface Arnold Bocklin, if memory serves.) Thanks, one and all.

*

Book Review !

And why not ? Ethil used to include incomprehensible notices of SF ravings, and Greatest Hits has revived the habit. Dolchstoss never hesitates to lead where others have followed, but at least I'll stick to more or less relevant works.

The book I'd like to draw to your attention is for bridge players, and I don't mean beginners. Called Precision Bidding in Acol it's by Eric Crowhurst, an England international and member of the same county association as myself. So I admit I'm biased. But it really is the best book on advanced Acol bidding ever published; it ventures into those obscure sequences that keep occurring at the table but never in books until now. Only uncontested auctions are covered (contested bidding will be the subject of a second volume), and every reasonably frequent sequence is analysed and explained. Speaking as one whose Acol is somewhat rusty (I only play it when facing strange partners) I have found it enormously helpful, and I thoroughly recommend it to anyone who plays reasonably regularly and reasonably badly.

*

DesConTenT

Doug reports around 50 registrations so far. Knowing Diplomacy inertia to be a potent force and deadline-conditioning a chronic evil, I think this should mean we reach our target of 75 by 15 February, as many will register on the last possible day through sheer force of habit. Why risk it ? You'll look bloody silly if you wanted to come and we cancel it, won't you ? Pay now, live later.

There's been some dismay about the date, which apparently clashes with some (though not all) school exams. This is very much regretted, and there's even been talk of postponing for a week, but in my view this could be disastrous at this late stage. It's not my decision, but I've felt bound to give my vote against switching.

On a brighter note, GAMES & PUZZLES and Philmar have put up some prizes for the Diplomacy Championship (which will bear their joint names) - £25 cash plus 7 6-month subs to G&P. The form the Championship will take is still being argued over, and at present everyone is utterly appalled by everyone else's suggestions, as usual. You can be sure we'll have something suitably testing lined up on the day though.

*

Diplomacy is a Subtle Game

Two letters crossed in the post after Germany stabbed Japan in an NGC Youngstown game. Japan to Germany: 'You rotten s*i*!' Germany to Japan: 'Get knotted, you slant-eyed git!' Persuasive, devious, honey-tongued stuff - that's what it's all about. No prizes for identifying the players involved.

LETTERS

Most of this time's letters, predictably, are comments on the new-style Dolchstoss, mainly favourable though not entirely. Here are a few extracts:

'A milestone on the NGC road of progress' (ROBIN BROWN); 'Without doubt the best thing to happen since Dolchstoss started' (NORMAN O'GRADY); 'Looks very good' (GRAEME LEVIN); 'Dig the new format' (TONY HICKIE); 'I (we) liked the new format' (DENNIS LOVE); 'Looks very nice indeed' (NICKY PALMER); 'Words fail me' (GLYN PALMER); 'Superb - all that's needed is some illustrations and then Diplomacy World will have to look to its laurels' (ANDY DAVIDSON); 'Congratulations - or something' (DAVE BROWN); 'A great improvement' (PETE SWANSON); 'Lost its atmosphere' (RICHARD WALKERDINE); 'What a time to find I need glasses' (RON RAYNER); 'I like the layout, I've always liked the content and I love the size, as the actress said to the Bishop (CHRIS HARVEY); 'Very good' (GRAHAM REYNOLDS); 'Absolutely magnificent' (DAVID WHEELER); 'Any spare foolscap?' (LES PIMLEY); 'I wasn't particularly impressed' (JOHN PIGGOTT); and so on. Many thanks to all who wrote, both for and against - I'm very glad most of you liked it, though congratulations properly belong to the printers, and to Norman Nathan for setting the idea up. I liked it too, by the way, though I can certainly see room for future improvements. Meanwhile, I'll quote John Piggott's letter more fully, as it is the only detailed anti opinion sent.

JOHN PIGGOTT 'You express hurt surprise that I haven't been falling over myself in fulsome praise for the new-look Dolchstoss. Perhaps you've gathered (correctly, I may add) that I wasn't particularly impressed. Of course, offset printing gives you a splendid opportunity to get some fancy layouts and illustrations; but what you actually gave were a few cramped and very wiggly Letraset headings: anyone with a golfball typewriter with a high sans-serif face could produce better-looking stuff on mimeo. You must enlist someone with an eye for layout and an artistic touch if Dolchstoss is to succeed in its new format - Steve Doubleday springs to mind, but I'm sure there are plenty of suitable people in the NGC if they can be persuaded to come forward.

'Of course, preparing careful typing and paste-ups for decent layouts takes time; one of my SF fan friends who switched from mimeo to offset affirmed that typing stencils is far less arduous and time-consuming than pasting up, indeed !

'The second disadvantage of the new Dolchstoss is the same fault that Ethil suffered from: a middleman printer. Each new person inserted into the production process of any fanzine inevitably increases the risk of delay, and the risk is much greater when said middleman is a mere entrepreneur with no fannish pride and tradition. Of course he gets paid for doing your stuff, but I don't suppose he'll go to the wall if you withdraw your custom: what does he care if players get the zine a week late?... It may be that you've struck lucky with a reliable man, of course, so in justice judgement will be reserved for a few months yet. But I have my doubts about it, and will be following the outcome with keen interest.'

RS: Fair enough, John, and your interest is appreciated. I should point out that I did not expect fulsome or any other praise from you - I was fishing, successfully, for some acid to dilute the enthusiastic consensus, so that Will couldn't accuse me of printing only favourable comment. I plead guilty to all charges about design - I have neither interest in nor feeling for visual arts, and I did apply for help in this department. There are excellent practical reasons for changing to litho unconnected with design, and these have been adequately justified by the result and the response, I think. You would argue, rightly, that someone else could make more profitable use of the facilities. No doubt many could; but who will ? Now, if your criticism about turn-round speed were to turn out correct, that would be serious. But this printer reckons to turn copy round in 48 hours, 24 if absolutely necessary. This is miles in advance of anything I could achieve with a duplicator. I hope and believe you're wrong about this - printing is a highly competitive field, and while the NGC's custom may be only a drop in the ocean, any responsible firm (as this one clearly is) will be reluctant to disappoint any customer. Well, we'll see, as you say.

CRAIG NYE . You realize of course that D has gone up in price ? Cos it used to be say 28 pages foolscap and is now 28 pages of A5 reduced from A4. I calculate that is equivalent to an 11% price rise - say 1 p. Actually of course it's a lot more as the 11 p. includes postage. But why should I care - I don't pay for it....

Letters (ctd)

RS: I missed Craig's letter earlier, as it's on about 4 feet of blue loo paper. It contained much helpful comment (for which thanks, Craig) and the bombshell that 'Els thinks slanted artwork like that is infantile!! Well, she's just spiteful because I was rude about her snooker. On the subject of price, it's not fair to call it A5 - for content purposes it's A4, only a few lines less per page than foolscap. In fact several regular features were missing, and we may well finish up at 32 pages more often than not; also the old Dolchstoss rarely reached 28 pages. As for the postage costs, who are you kidding? The idea was to give readers as much for no more cost to them - if saving postal charges is one way, who cares?

PETE SWANSON When are you going to stop being a bloody bigot and give us ((IDA/UK)) some support? Apart from the fact that you are 'anti-American', what other excuse have you to ignore us when we are trying to do a lot more than you? Apart from supplying a regular supply of games to newcomers to the hobby I can't see what else the NGC does, unless you call inflicting us with an endless supply of mediocre and worse magazines a benefit. Also, when are you going to learn that, apart from a financial and moral support from the North American part of the organization, the IDA/UK are concerned with Britain and British Diplomacy? If you are waiting for something to come from our labours, wait no longer. IDA/UK has put out the 1974 Diplomacy Handbook in this country, sponsors the Boardman Number Custodian in this country, subsidizes Game Openings, supports orphan games under Les Pimley, and is working on things like Novice Packages, Variant Bank and the promotion of Diplomacy on the Continent. If you can see the benefit from some of the above schemes then stop ignoring us, and either support us or give us something to argue about!

RS: I'm not anti-American - I put up with you, don't I? Right. The NGC not only supplies games to newcomers, but in most cases it supplies the newcomers as well. It also offers various other games: people like you always forget that the NGC is not entirely a Diplomacy organization. I leave it to those who have seen your own efforts in the zine field to decide what constitutes mediocrity in a zine.

As to your 'benefits' I'm not interested in the Handbook, can't see why Walkerdine needs 'sponsoring' like some sort of dog biscuit, have mixed feelings about Game Openings, expect the NGC to house its own orphans without Marshall Aid, abominate the dreadful novice package idea, cannot congratulate you on the Variant Bank and have no idea what you are doing messing about with the Continent (where Walter-Luc Haas seems to be organizing things pretty well).

The only reason for joining the IDA (in the words of Pete Birks, who did) is to con the Yanks out of some dollars. 'Financial and moral support' - ugh! I think you do bugger all, mate, so argue about that.

BARRY ELLIS A brief note regarding the variant bank. About 9 months ago I ordered 15 or so variants from Andrew Herd and received one batch of 5 fairly quickly with credit for the remainder. I then sat back and waited, and waited ... meanwhile following the fortunes of the variant bank in Dolchstoss and elsewhere. Three months ago I sent a reminder to Dave Pink and, lo and behold, yesterday the second batch arrived with profuse apologies from Dave, explanations of mislaid records, and other problems. I was even undercharged for the postage, and promised the final set of 5 or so variants in 4-6 weeks when the bank received new stocks. So perhaps all is not lost after all. I may be a particularly lucky victim of bad administration; but if Dave is conducting his variant deals with others in anything like the way he was managing mine, I don't see how he can possibly be 'coining it'.

RS: Rumour has it that the bank has improved slightly of late, perhaps because of intensive press criticism in many zines. The NGC will go on providing the basic variants as announced last issue, at any rate for the time being.

ANDY DAVIDSON I'm not too happy at the thought of holding the NGC Con out of doors. I greatly fear that the weather will be cold, windy and wet. No doubt the Committee will see to its own comfort (in Desscot proper?) while the rest of us suffer. Anyway, I trust that this all night bar will serve milk ...

RS: A small hurricane has been arranged. Meanwhile NGC scientists are labouring day and night to produce a waterproof nocturnal cow for your own use.

TREASURER'S NOTES by Tony Ball

29.1.75

The date at the head of this column (daring innovation!) is the date that I sit down to write these notes, and is there at the suggestion of Chris Harvey. It seems that some of you wait until the last possible second to send me money to boost your credit, and are then surprised to see their names appearing in print again in the following Dolchstoss. Please remember that I have to prepare this column several days before each deadline so that I can get everything sent to Richard by the deadline. It would help me enormously if everyone could send their money at least a week before the deadline and remember, by sending money late you risk getting cut off the mailing list and missing an issue of Dolchstoss.

John Piggott has kindly responded to my plea for suggestions for spending the club profit. He suggests that we put up the GM's share of the game fee even higher, perhaps to 100% (now 80%) and I personally have a lot of sympathy for this. After all the GMs have helped to make the club what it is today and put in a lot of effort for little financial return; in a lot of cases they make a small loss. However, I would prefer to wait a while longer before making any further increases to see the effects of the last increase. A lot of the financial strength of the NGC comes from the flood of new members, and I have a feeling this may slacken off when the higher postal charges come into effect in March. Let's see what happens then. Incidentally, the price of Dolchstoss will have to rise then to take into account the increase in postal rates. Richard will you start sending Dolchstoss by second-class mail then? If you will, the increase will be restricted to 1 p. 1st-class mail will probably mean a 2½ p. or even 3 p. rise.

John also suggests a monthly prize competition in the form of puzzles or a quiz, with cash prizes provided out of profits. Would members welcome this? The problem of course is to find someone with time (and talent!) to set the questions and adjudicate the answers. Is anyone interested?

Finally, John says he does not agree that the National Con should be subsidized. Well, John, I very much doubt if it will be. Norman Nathan is doing the organization and he is very meticulous about these things and insists on a self-supporting con. I think I'm right in saying that if 100 people turn up then the Con will break even. Any larger numbers will mean a small profit. The NGC may have to guarantee the caterers a certain 'take', but this should be met easily from members present. Thanks for the letters, John. Could I have other members' comments please?

The following members have insufficient credit to receive the next Dolchstoss. Can they please send me some more money (after first reading the first paragraph above!)
 A.C.ALLARS, B.CLARK, T.COX (Walsall), P.R.FELDMAN, J.J.GROSE, B.HAND, A.HOLT,
 B.C.KENNEDY, B.LAVINGTON, I.MACDONALD (479), A.SIERLA, P.WARD, J.WESTLAKE!

The 60 p. annual fee is due from the following, who have insufficient credit to pay:
 M.SHERRAD, E.ELLERY, A.C.MILLS, R.PREVOT, R.E.HEUER, W.CUNNINGTON, J.SCRIVEN,
 D.YULE.

I have deducted it from credit in the cases of R.Sargent, N.Furse, P.Charlton, J.McGugan, C.Hawes, B.Little, N.Burton, M.Sanders, J.Patterson, C.Nye, R.T.Correll, Capt. R.Morton, D.Wakefield, S.Bowran, E.Morgan.

From: NGC Treasurer Tony Ball, 10 Arbroath Road, Sundon Park, Luton, Beds, LU3 3LA.
 Telephone: 0582-596950.

* * * * *

Most people already get Dolchstoss 2nd class - only players get it 1st class, plus a few overseas subbers who elect to pay extra. How about an increase of 1 p. all round and 2 p. to players? ... Competition idea isn't bad if anyone will do it.... Tony, some people on your defaulters' list won't see it as they don't get this - Ellery is the important one. Forget Mills (address not known) and Heuer (blacklisted). On the list you sent me - Sherrad never was a trade, so he and Yare get chopped, as do all others on the list except Turnbull (free), Roth (player), Thomas (promised!!).