

Sid Cato



*Sid Cato at Franklins Gardens,
Northampton – the first home of
NAC*

Florence Chambers, the widow of Sid Cato provided the following information on how Sidney started Northampton Archery Club.

Sidney was born in Leicestershire in 1921 and was brought up in Coalville as part of a mining family with four brothers. During World war II he was in the RAF, but was medically discharged and was moved to Northampton to work for British Timken at Duston in the town. He left there and opened a small watch-making shop in Sheep Street.

Florence Wren was born in 1931 and grew up in Birmingham. During the war a bomb hit the kitchen of the family home. This naturally frightened her mother and the family moved to Northampton, never to return to Birmingham. As a young woman, Florence applied for a job in a shop in the town, owned by Sid. In 1947 the couple married, and in 1950 their son Sidney Stewart was born. He is known mostly as Stewart.

Cato's watchmakers' shop was a familiar business in town and the shop moved premises several times, firstly to Regent Square, then Bridge Street, to Wood Hill and finally to St. Giles Terrace.



Sid Cato's shop (behind the bus) on Wood Hill around 1963

Going back to the late 1940's (probably 1949), Sid all of a sudden said he wanted to take up archery and placed an advert in the Chronicle and Echo inviting like-minded people to meet at Franklin's Gardens on a given day. About 25 people turned up and NAC was born. As far as Florence remembers, none of the would-be archers had ever shot bows before, and all were self-taught. There were no coaches. In the early days members were generally not on first name terms.

Quite why Sid became interested in the sport is a mystery. Perhaps he was inspired by Errol Flynn who was the lead actor in the first major Robin Hood film released in 1938 – who knows? We do know that Sid actually met Flynn twice, but this was after the club was formed. Once was in the Black Boy Inn on Wood Hill, and the other was in a restaurant in the basement of what is Oliver Adams shop on the same road – it was called The Aeroplane* or something similar. One cannot help but imagine a conversation about archery and the various techniques; and what Flynn had maybe done wrong in the film. Perhaps arms were being flung around in the pub, in an arrow shooting fashion! Flynn had acted at The Rep. Theatre in Northampton around 1933 before become a film star, and returned to the town around 1952.

Equipment for the club had to be purchased, and Florence recalls that targets were purchased at £8 each from Johnsons shop at the top of Abington Street near to the site of the New Theatre (now demolished). Bows were also procured from the same shop. The club's badge was designed by Sid.

The club's first shooting ground was at Franklins Gardens Rugby Ground in Weedon Road, followed then by Delapre Abbey. The move followed issues with arrows being found on the field by rugger players. Some time after the move to Delapre a fire gutted the storage building on that site.

There were several other key members to the club at the beginning – Major Hogg, Peter Isaac, Ben Hurd, Bill Day and Walter Spencer. Saundersons Outfitters also had two sons in the club.

Major Hogg lived in Overstone, and he and Sid did not always see eye-to-eye. Sid was a very down to earth country character who did things very differently from the Major, a teacher from a local school. They clashed a bit on occasions.

Ben Hurd lived originally in Kettering Road (on the right hand side as you are going out of town near to Churchill Avenue), but subsequently moved into a chalet at Overstone which he already owned.

It would seem most likely that Sid would not like the club entirely as it is today. He loved traditional bows and would not approve of the technical kit used these days. Any traditional bow shooter would be most welcomed by Sid. Sid shot for many years at the club, but in 1969 he suffered a heart attack and had to stop. He however continued to support the club as president.



Sid Cato in later life



The Rose Bowl presented to Florence

Sidney died in 1993 and NAC provided a guard of honour at his funeral. Florence was presented an inscribed rose bowl by Northampton Archery Club in recognition of his huge influence on the club. After Sid's death, Florence was Lady Paramount at several of NAC's tournaments. Without Sidney there would not have been an NAC and we owe him a lot.



Stewart Cato



Florence at an NAC Tournament

** Footnote – The restaurant called, The Clipper was located beneath Oliver Adams. A Clipper was a Transatlantic passenger aeroplane, and the restaurant was set out as if a passenger cabin on a plane. Portholes were set along the sides with pictures behind them to depict sights from the sky. The restaurant suffered a fire and closed down.*