

Penistone?

That was a day. Ralph Finch remembers music...back in time.



Ira Paine Target ball poster.
Courtesy Paris Musées

Alan Blakeman's auction of his great collections ended in England on September 11, 1997, but...the memories linger. Of the many great (or simply unusual) items sold, one in particular caught my eye. It was described as:

Lot 13: A *PENISTONE STOCKSBRIDGE & HOYLAND NEWSPAPER ENAMEL SIGN. 19 by 4 inches. Blue background with yellow lettering and border. Small amount of edge rusting. Estimate £80-£120

I don't know how many people in England were interested in this, but I can assure you that at least one Yank liked it: Me! Let me time-travel back—and back again—and explain.

In the summer of 1997, this newspaperman was on vacation in England and sitting in a pub in a tiny village in rural Penistone, where my thoughts were then suddenly linked to a 1950s cultural icon of America and a moment of reverie in a cold barracks on a snow-covered military base near Ayer, Massachusetts, in 1959. (FYI, the base has been erased from the face of the earth, but my memories last.)

First, let me continue the story of my search for old glass. It was 10:45 in the evening of Wednesday, July 9, 1997, and I was in the rustic pub in Penistone, near Barnsley. Before that night I had never heard of the village, let alone the pub.

Penistone, which dates to before 1086, is now known (barely) for two things, said Alan Blakeman, the publisher of the *British Bottle Review* (BBR) magazine and one of my four companions that evening.

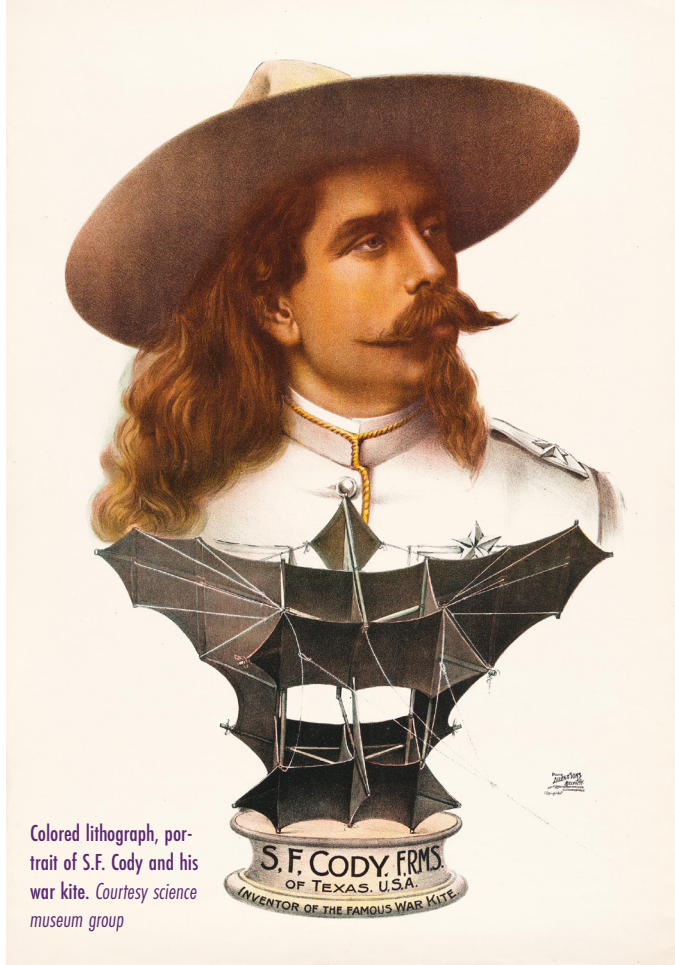
A: The local adolescent males refer to the town as “penis-stone” and ...

B: The village was once the center of the wooden crate industry, supplying the pop bottle companies of Barnsley. (“Around the 1870/80s, Penistone was THE place making wooden crates,” explained Blakeman.)

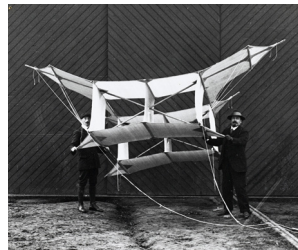
Now, let me continue...It was 10:45 in the evening, and with us in the pub was a small crowd of locals and ruddy-faced Brits laughing, smoking, and drinking and hardly listening to a bald-headed man in his late '60s playing a guitar and singing a slow version of Buddy Holly's 1957 hit, *That'll Be the Day*.

The hobby has given me many great memories. As I've often mentioned, the six degrees of separation in the world of glass collecting—and target balls—have constantly amazed me. In my always-expanding world, fueled by my experiences and travels, I often cross the path of someone—or something—I have read about in my research for Target Ball and Bottle magazine articles.

Buddy Holly ca. 1957. Born Charles Hardin Holley September 7, 1936 Lubbock, Texas. Died February 3, 1959 (aged 22) Cerro Gordo County, Iowa. Cause of death Blunt trauma as a result of a plane accident



Colored lithograph, portrait of S.F. Cody and his war kite. Courtesy science museum group



S. F. Cody War Kite pictures.

Holly song, I wrote in my journal later that night, would I think back to the evening in the pub, sitting with good English friends Alan and Gill Blakeman (the lovely Gill was to die several years later) and Alan and Ann Key? I hoped so, I concluded in my 1997 journal.

Years after that entry, I came across the name Franklin Samuel Cowdery. In America, in the late 1800s, Cowdery passed himself off as Col. S. W. Cody, an imitation of Col. W. F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody. Then—after Buffalo Bill’s lawyers got on him—he went to England and demoted himself to Capt. Cody, “Buffalo Bill’s son.”

Cowdery/Cody, in his Wild West act, shot target balls hanging around his wife’s body. (She was said to have worn red tights so that if there were a little bleeding from broken glass, it would not be noted by the audience.) Later, around 1900, Cody—who now had officially taken the name, Cowdery—became interested in big kites, large enough to take a man aloft; from that, his interest drifted to gliders. After Wilber and Orville achieved their initial success, Cowdery attached an engine to his glider and, in 1908, became the first (semi) Englishman to fly. For a whole 27 seconds!

After that, to raise money, he would drag his plane around the country to show it off. And no, he didn’t fly the plane since there were no places to land; he had it towed from village to village!

On a later visit to England in the fall of 2002, I found a magazine showing the history of Penistone. In it was a photo of Cowdery with one of his planes, the “*Flying Cathedral*,” being pulled by horses. And I know Mr. Cowdery, I thought, and Buddy Holly, Cody ne Cowdery, and Penistone. And target balls. It’s a small world.

Oh, yeah: Holly died in a plane crash in Iowa. Cowdery was born in Iowa. Will I ever cease to be amazed at the stuff I experience? That’ll be the day.

And, back to Blakeman’s auction, I didn’t get the Penistone sign. It sold for £140.



Once in Paris, for example, I visited the hotel where target ball shooter Ira Paine died after a September 1889 shooting display at the nearby *Folies Bergère* (which I also visited).

So, back to the summer of 1997, in a village pub, then...much later, while researching for my target ball journal, I also thought of a man who, 100 years earlier, had already visited that tiny English village. A minor figure in America, but one who became a major cultural icon in England and perhaps even visited the village of Penistone; maybe he’d even been to that very pub!

The man was aviator, kite man, and target ball shooter F. S. Cody/Cowdery, who later died in a plane crash.

First, let me continue time traveling...I was in the village of Penistone...and in a pub hearing, *That’ll Be the Day*. Amid the smoky haze, the raucous laughter, and the Brit-accented conversations, I remembered that cold, wintry night in Massachusetts. It was February 3, 1959. It, too, was a Wednesday. I had been sitting on my bunk in the austere wooden barracks of Fort Devens, near the town of Ayer, when word finally reached us that Texas-born Buddy Holly had died in a plane crash. Perishing with him were Ritchie Valens and “the Big Bopper” (J. P. Richardson).

I remembered two of my fellow ASA (Army Security Agency) GI recruits—a small Hispanic named Accardo and a really big man I recall only by his nickname, “Bear.” On *The Day The Music Died*, these two GIs sat on their adjacent bunks and quietly cried.

Fast forward and return to Penistone: The next time I heard that January – February 2025