

DARTS HISTORY

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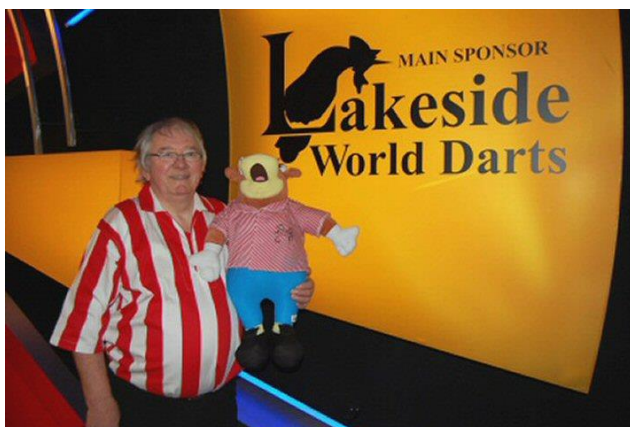
February 2026



ANDREW WOOD (1934-2025) - CREATOR OF *BULLSEYE*

Any obituary I publish in *Darts History* tends to relate to either darts players, referees, or commentators but, in this case, I report the passing on 16th November 2025 of Andrew Wood, the creator of the *Bullseye* TV game show.

I have known Andrew for a long time. We never met but exchanged emails and telephone conversations more or less since I began researching the sport of darts. I always found him an obliging gentleman and someone who was proud of his creation. Any conversations were lively and interesting and he always punctuated our chats or his emails to me with "Please give Bullseye a good plug."



(Image of Andrew, above, right, courtesy of Darts 501)

Rather than a formal obituary about the man who gave the world *Bullseye*, I have decided to present, as my personal tribute to Andrew, this article in which I recall the programme he gave us, how it started, and the pleasure *Bullseye* gave us as viewers, dart players and fans, and the opportunities he gave those in darts over the years trying to make a living, when 'proper darts' on TV was beginning to fade. *Bullseye* kept the game (and its stars) in the spotlight up until and beyond the arrival of satellite TV BSkyB and before the World Darts Council (WDC – later to become the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC)) came to rescue the sport.

Bullseye ran on Central TV for 13 series from 1981 to 1996 but since its return to 'repeat TV' (Challenge) some years ago it was discovered that *Bullseye* was still loved, so much so that it was rebooted for a TV special in Christmas 2024 and, in 2025, 'the much-loved show' was revived and revised slightly for a new series featuring ex-cricketer "Freddie" Flintoff.

In March 1986, at the very beginning of my darts research, I wrote to Chatsworth Television Limited, its Director and Producer of Bullseye, Peter Holmans, and asked two questions (i) "How did the television series "Bullseye" come about?" and (ii) "Why do the people enjoy "Bullseye" so much?"

Peter replied,

“How did the television series “Bullseye” come about? It all began in late 1980 when Andy Wood came to see me with the idea of three players competing by throwing darts to choose the questions they wanted to answer. The first date in my diary about the series in January 29, 1981, a not to be forgotten day. In a rehearsal room at the former ATV studios at Elstree, Jon Scoffield sat in a dilapidated sofa and Norman Vaughan [*a very popular comedian of the period*] presented him with a very rudimentary demonstration of the game that was to be. Jon saw the potential, and made two crucial decisions.

The first was to choose Jim Bowen [*below left*] to be our host, and the second was to appoint Peter Harris, who had been directing the Muppets, to be our Director. Weeks of work, thinking, developing, and rehearsing in a Birmingham hotel with Jim followed.



Eventually we felt we had a shape, but no ending, and it was Peter who suggested that if the winners didn't gamble for the big prize we would let the losers have a go. That ensured our finale, and on 13 April we recorded a pilot in Birmingham. I saw it again last summer [1985] and it looks terrible, but it pointed the way for our first series which was recorded in July.

The first episode went out on [Monday] 28 September at 7pm in front of Coronation Street. To everyone's delight the show was a great success and it has grown in popularity ever since. Now [1986] in its fifth series on Sunday afternoons it regularly attracts over 13 million viewers taking it to number two in the

charts last Christmas [1985].

So much for the facts. Your second question calls for speculation. [My question was “Why is Bullseye so popular?”] I think there is one underlying reason why the audience loves Bullseye. It is so obviously fair to the players. Everything that happens, you see. If a dart falls out, even at the most crucial moment, there are no second tries. And the final gamble is not only exciting; it reveals a great deal about the players mentality and attitudes.”



[The image, left, shows the 1981 original Bullseye/Bully logo, whilst on the right, the image shows that by 2011 Bully had lost some weight.]



(Note: ‘Bully’ logos © Andrew Wood. Used with permission.)

Later, in *TV Times* (10th October 1981), Peter Holmans told journalist Linda Hawkins that after ATV had accepted the idea:

“That was when the real work began. ATV appealed for contestants who could play darts and answer general knowledge questions taken from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. We had 4000 applicants which we sifted down to a short list of 600. Then we auditioned them at 30 a day. Eventually we narrowed the applicants down to the 39 contestants you will see battling it out over the next few weeks.”

As Peter said *Bullseye* first went out at 7.p.m. on a Monday just ahead of *Coronation Street*. The first professional darts player guest was Bobby George, who was ranked No. 4. darts player in the world at that time followed in the next week by Maureen Flowers, England’s top lady player. The following year it was moved to Sunday tea-time, regularly attracting audiences of 14 million and peaking at 19.8 million. The professional players who participated were, or became, household names (or most of them). *Bullseye* showed that darts was not just a sport but family entertainment.



Andrew Wood’s creation helped maintain interest in darts and kept many of the professional players in the public eye whilst TV companies were beginning to fall out of love with the sport, drastically reducing or cutting out darts tournaments altogether until, by the end of the 1980s, only three televised tournaments remained. Plus, *Bullseye*.

[The image, left, shows ‘Bowen’s Bullets’ the *Bullseye*-related darts products introduced by WINMAU much later.]

Back in the early noughties, Andrew told me

“I recall having a long conversation with Phil ‘The Power’ Taylor in the studio in Leeds about Bullseye. I said darts on TV in the UK can say “Thank you”

to Bullseye for help making darts a sport that is now much more friendly to TV broadcasters and that Bullseye has helped darts have a much wider audience than ever before.

Phil at that time agreed with me. He said that Bullseye was such a big and important show that any Pro Dart Player should want to be on it. It gave lesser-known Pro Dart Players the chance of being seen with the show being in over 11 million homes each week and help make a name for themselves.”

Bullseye continued to entertain and showcase darts up until its final series in 1996 bridging the gap between when TV showed next to nothing of the game and the creation of the World Darts Council (WDC/PDC). And we all know what has happened since...

With the advent of Challenge (Sky) TV, *Bullseye* returned to our TV screens with Series 1 & 2 but it was not long before Andrew told me

Just in case you don't know Challenge Sky have bought Bullseye Series 3, 4 5, 7 and 8. As I'm sure you are aware Bullseye has been on TV in an unbroken run for the past 35 years. It will be on till May 2017 and beyond. [‘And beyond’ indeed. As I write this today, I know that Bullseye remains scheduled on Challenge for most evenings.] It is a record that I am very

proud to have on my CV. I thought that Bullseye would be a hit when I first wrote it but I never dreamed it would last so long. A big thank you to all the loyal Bullseye Fans. Bullseye has 58,800 Facebook fans so please come and join us on Facebook. My daughter Laura spends hours working on the Bullseye social media.

Back then, Laura told me “We have had up to 250,000 viewers as that has been our highest viewing figure to date since being on Challenge TV.”

Doubtless, those numbers have increased substantially since that time, and the original *Bullseye* will remain on our screens for a long, long time to come. It has become an important part of darts history.

As we know, *Bullseye* recently received a revamp and I am pleased that the revisited version has brought the best ever darts quiz show to the attention of a new generation of darts fans.

More recently Laura wrote:

“[My dad] ... was never anything but driven, passionate, and relentless in his vision. He knew with Bullseye that he had a hit on his hands, and my goodness, he was right.

He taught me that you have to believe in yourself, your goals, and your dreams, because if you don't, no one else will. He leaves behind the most wonderful legacy with Bullseye, and I can only hope I can continue to make him proud by carrying his creation forward.”

Laura recently confirmed that ‘Bully’ is joining the *Darts World* magazine team:

From February, Bully will be writing an official column for the print edition of Darts World, giving readers a regular insight into his activities, appearances, show news and more. This collaboration marks an important new chapter for Bullseye and an exciting move for the brand.

All power to Bully and, of course, to Laura, the continuing driving force behind *Bullseye*.

RIP Andrew.

FEEDBACK FROM #190

Mick S. writes:

Thanks Patrick. Very informative and very good. I don't believe anyone will beat Taylor's record. The fact is he is not only the world champion 16 times, he made the final another 5 times: 21 years at the top of the tree. I don't know any other sport where a champion has lasted that long. I'm sure if I'm wrong someone will know.

Also, the difference between boards now and then is staple free, much narrower wires making doubles and trebles a lot easier to hit. (Not in my case I hasten to add) (Nor mine Mick!) Lukes' darts are also a lot narrower than any I can remember Taylor using, so for Taylor will always be the best. As ever thanks again yours in Darts. Mick.

Cheers Mick.

And Andy F. writes:

Brilliant. Thanks Patrick - still reading your newsletter and enjoying Darts as much as ever. I also enjoyed Paul's article - another long-term stalwart who has always provided a unique perspective. Thanks for the latest issue.

Chris K. writes:

"Hi Patrick. Thank you for the latest Darts History. A thoroughly enjoyable read, as always.

As you said, it's great to see Deta Hedman as World Champion. I have also met her and she really is a lovely lady and more than deserves the title of World Champion.

As for the article on Phil Taylor, I'm not sure I agree with that but I guess time will tell. I think the sport has changed in a way that means no single person will ever dominate like Taylor did. But what do I know... Thank you, once again."

Cheers Chris. I think you are right, that no one will be able to dominate the sport like Taylor did. There are so many young players coming up through the system now that it shouldn't be too long before one or more able to equal 'The Nuke' and thus making multi-titles more difficult.

FEEDBACK FROM INDIA - #190

'Hello Pat,

[writes Ashfaque Sayed, (pictured right in 2010) following my publishing his article 'A Dream is taking place' in last month's issue.]

Just wanted to let you know your article went to the entire darts fraternity in India. Thanks to our President Devesh Srivastava who posted in our group as well as wrote a strong thank you message for me saying I am doing good for Indian darts.

Thank you, Pat. It is possible only due to you wishing my country and its Darters well.'

As readers may know, Ashfaque was the first darts player from India to appear at the PDC World Darts Championship at the Ally Pally in the 2007/08 year. A great achievement but I can't believe that that was nearly two decades ago. Ashfaque, my friend, keep leading the way.



DR. DARTS INTEREST FROM FRANCE (AGAIN)

You may recall that I was interviewed early last year by a French production company about the history of darts and what links, if any, the game has with France. And as you probably remember there *is* a strong link with France and this was one of the issues I discussed towards the end of 2025 with another journalist from across the Channel.

In November I was contacted by Antoine Breard, journalist for L'Equipe, the No.1 sport newspaper in France, who is producing a short, animated film which should include darts. This led to me being interviewed by Antoine on 28th November about darts history. Questions included the origins of darts, darts in France, flechettes (the real link between France and *our* darts).

After everything I have written about the numbering of the dartboard (including my explanation featuring in at least three of my books and in numerous newspaper articles over many years) Antoine asked me about 'Mr. Gamlin, the inventor of the numbering.' I spent a little time explaining that Gamlin never existed and that the real inventor, I believe, was Thomas William Buckle, a Yorkshire wire-worker.

It's also good to hear from any members of the media. I always try to debunk myths, like Gamblin, but, sad to say, he and others always turn up, even more often since the advent of the world wide web.

MEMORIES OF DARTS IN CYPRUS

Having read #189, the mention of the *News of the World* Team of Dart Champions, brought back memories for Cyprus subscriber Vic Hemmings. I first met Vic and other members of the Pafos Darts Association on the island in the early 2000s. Vic writes:



"I used to play with Jim Pike darts and remember folding the brown flights then splitting the canes and soaking them before putting them in the barrels."

(I remember that too Vic. My Jim Pike darts were Pike's company's Leo Newstead darts although I tended to buy off the shelf flights.)

"Many times, I threw one dart into another but, on one match night, I hit treble 18 with one dart into another then a third which was amazing as I thought

they would all fall out. Annoying, I only scored 54. Loved the Jim Pike darts and could not get on with the tungsten. No problems. I got them from Ajax sports shop in Ilford [Essex]. A true sports shop. Not the ones that sell clothes."

The photo above shows (left to right), Vic, Mick Saggs (landlord of the *First and Last*), fellow darter, Terry McGovern and me (© Chiphotos 2009).

In 2019, I uploaded an article about my earlier visits to Cyprus and the history of darts on the island. Reading it again today has brought back some brilliant memories for me of Cyprus, the sun, the drinking and the darts. Please check out:

<https://patrickchaplin.com/2019/05/21/cyprus-the-island-of-aphrodite-and-darts/>

THE 'NEWS OF THE WORLD' CHAMPIONS

Purely by coincidence, if you believe in such a thing, very shortly after publishing #189 which included the lead article about another *News of the World* team hinted at by way of a trophy obtained by reader Neil Oldham and featured in the December issue, another 'team' has been revealed via an item collected by another reader and regular contributor, Chris Lovell.

Chris found this programme, see below, right, for a 'Grand Attraction,' a fund-raising event held at the *Railway Tavern*, Twickenham (then part of the county of Middlesex but now part of the London Borough of Richmond) on 17th July 1951, a time by which I *thought* both the *News of the World* Team of Champions and the St. Dunstan Four had finished and their individual component players moved on to other things.

How wrong could I be?

What is of particular interest here is the composition of the visiting team of darts stars named as 'News of the World' Champions.' See what you think...

Each member of the team of four is described as a 'News of the World' Champ.' The team comprised, Gill Penman (recently introduced as the captain of the St. Dunstan Four), Jim Pike (captain of the *News of the World* Team of Dart Champions), Joe Hitchcock (the recently retired captain of the St. Dunstan Four) and Leo Newstead one of the original members of *News of the World* Team of Darts Champions but also, later, an occasional member of the St. Dunstan Four.



So, what we have here is, in rock music parlance, a 'super group.' Penman and Hitchcock from the St. Dunstan Four merge (perhaps for only one evening) with former *News of the World* team members and united under a 'Four banner.'

The Four were challenged that evening by the Twickenham Four that comprised: A. Harding from 'Sussex' which I *think* would have been the *Sussex Arms* pub, B. Talbot (*Mulberry Tree*), L. Blight ('Exiles'), and D. Chapman of the British Legion club. The challenge comprised three games, 801-up, straight start, finish on a double. Sadly, I am unaware of the result but given the strength of the *News of the World* Four, I would confidently state that the Twickenham Four put up a good fight but lost. (Of course, I would be very happy to be proved wrong on this point.)

The other challenge detailed on the programme pitched another Twickenham Four (possibly their 'B' side?), S. Mitchell (the *Lord Napier* pub), S. Diggins (*Dukes Head*), W. Saville (*Railway Tavern (Priv.) (?)*), and V. Gilbey (*Anchor*), against a Teddington Four comprising R. Strudwick (*Horse & Groom*), H. Want (*Duke of York*), C. Wiggins (*Star* (Hampton)) and W. Horne (*Duke of Clarence*). Their games were of slightly shorter duration: three games of 601-up, but also straight start and finish on a double.

I never stop learning!

FROM MY WEBSITE – THE PHANTOM ARROW

Over thirty years ago, in *Darts World* (issue 217. December 1990) an article I featured titled *The Phantom Arrow* appeared about a masked darter who would take on all-comers as part of the latest entertainments at Kirklington Hall. It was well-received and in 2021, when rebuilding my website, I posted it for all to see. Then another five years on, I received the following message from Ed. Cain, for whom my article rolled back the years for him and his family. Ed wrote:



“Hello Patrick. Thanks for this article which has stimulated great memories and conversation in our family. My late father was Ted Cain and we have many memories of listening to his Kirklington Hall “folklore” including the episode involving the Phantom Arrow.

My sisters have memories of getting in the back of my dad’s old green Cresta van and going to fetch Mr. Frith from the station in Carlisle ahead of his appearances at the Hall.

My sisters were sworn to keep his identity a secret.

Your article mentions the number of times that the Phantom was defeated. According to my father a defeat was allowed on occasions so that the challengers did not lose hope and kept on coming. Once again, thanks for the article. Sincerely. Edward Cain.”

Thanks to Edward for revealing his father’s part in this fascinating story. To read my original article about ‘The Phantom Arrow’ see <https://patrickchaplin.com/2021/11/17/graham-frith-the-phantom-arrow/>

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