

DARTS HISTORY

(formerly *Dr. Darts' Newsletter*)

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THE EARLIEST BREWERY LEAGUE?

Throughout my research I have always believed that organised darts leagues weren't promoted by brewers until after the Great War/First World War. But subscriber, Martin Hopkins, has produced evidence that such leagues were around before then. Martin wrote:

"Good morning, Patrick. You may recall, I collect silver dart medals before September 1945.



I have amassed over 130 now, mainly from the 1930s, with a smattering from the 1920s and 1940s. However, I have just acquired a medal with the date 1914 inscribed on the cartouche.

This will certainly become the pride of my collection if authentic! I've attached some pictures.

The hallmark is for Marples & Beasley of Birmingham with the year date of 1913. The front displays the legend: 'Wilson's Brewery

Dart League,' the reverse: 'Rowsley Arms, 2nd Team Champions, Ardwick & Ancoats Division, W. Johnson'



My cursory research indicates that Wilson's Brewery were in Manchester, with the Rowsley Arms a few streets away..."

This does seem to indicate that there was a flourishing darts league, at least in Manchester at a very early date. Of course, anyone could scribe any date on a medal, but this has an air of authenticity...

I replied:

"Martin, the great thing about history (any aspect of history) is that a single discovery can change everything.

As you probably know I suggested in my book *Darts in England 1900-39* that formal organisation of darts by brewers began in earnest in the early 1920s, your purchase of the Wilsons League medal dated 1914 has made me think about things a bit differently.

I was sure that one or two breweries saw the benefits of darts pre-1914 but have never found any evidence except for local pub-based, non-sponsored, matches and, of course, the 'famous'

Grimsby Board (28 segments) dating from the 1890s, the photo of which (right) shows the board, the darts, and some medals.

I have no doubt about the providence of your medal as the hallmark shows 1913 and the engraving 1914.

As Wilson's brewery was based in Manchester, I am wondering if the league played on a Yorkshire Board or the smaller Manchester Board. Unfortunately, the medal does not show the type of board in its design. I suggest that it was one of those two, as the 'treble' or 'London' board was resisted by players in Yorkshire right up until the 1970s.



You might recall that in the *News of the World* Individual championship, the organisers allowed competitors to play early rounds on their 'local' boards and under 'local rules' until the latter stages of the tournament.

So, I need to rethink page 84 of my book where I wrote back in 2009, 'the formal organisation of inter-brewery sport began in 1921.' I'm not saying I'm wrong but clearly your medal could mean that I need to put the 'began' back a bit, but *for which board?*

Back in 1985, I sent a questionnaire to every brewery in the UK asking if they ever supported darts and only Greene King mentioned support in the early days but, sadly, Wilsons did not reply! (That would have saved us both a lot of problems today!)

I'll publish your email and my reply to you in a future issue of *Darts History* to see if any other medal collectors can help."

So here it is.

There must be other darts league medal collectors within the *Darts History* family, so I am throwing open the question, "Do you hold any pre-Great War, pre-1914 brewery dart league medals?" If so, please let me know at patrick.chaplin@btinternet.com and help me to re-write darts history.

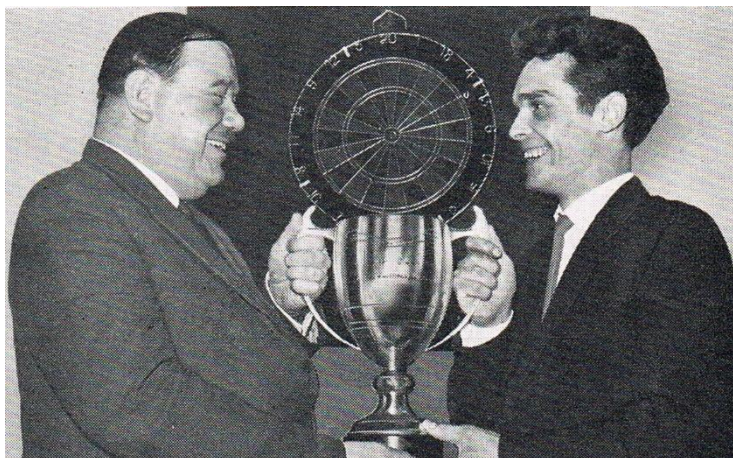
GRAHAM FRITH – THE PHANTOM ARROW

Although, over the years, I have had trouble with understanding 'coincidence.' I have always thought that no such thing exists. But explain this.

While completing #191, I was, during the same period, continuing to research some of the Divisional Finals of the *News of the World* for 1967. At that time, I reached the North of England Division which had taken place at the Plaza Ballroom, Tynemouth, North Shields.

I discovered that the Carlisle Area Champion was none other than **Graham Frith**. The programme for that event only provided the information that 'G. Frith' played out of the *Cumberland Inn*, Carlisle. No other information was provided of any of the participants. But

fortunately, my copy of the programme had been *filled in*: to such an extent that details of all of the matches from quarter-finals (the first round) up to the Final.



From the inked entries I learned that Graham beat Brian Howe, The Hartlepoons Area champion (playing out of the Welsh Harp, Trimdon Grange) 2-0 in the quarter-finals. In the semi-finals Frith met Jim Graham (Area Champion for Workington) and beat him 2-0.

In the Final, Frith came up against the Sunderland Area champion, Bob Hunter, who played out of the

Corporation Social Club, Gateshead, who he also beat 2-0. Frith had not lost a leg in the Divisional Final and earned his ticket to attend the *News of the World* Individual Darts Championship of England and Wales which would be held at the Alexandra Palace on Saturday 22nd April that year.

The programme for the Grand Finals in London stated:

‘Carlisle’s Graham Frith has been in bad health for the past nine months. It took a lot of courage even to enter these championships, and it took courage plus ability to get to these finals.

With this kind of determination – and with the ability he showed in his Divisional win at Tynemouth – who’s to say that Graham won’t complete a remarkable recovery by taking the title back to the North of England?’

(The photograph, above, shows Graham being awarded the North of England Divisional Cup on 14th March by E. Davis, Esq., Sales Manager of the Scottish-Newcastle Breweries Ltd. Image © *News of the World*. Used with permission.)

Sadly, whether because of continued bad health or his meeting a better player on the day, Graham Frith fell at the first hurdle, the quarter-finals, when he lost to Terry Pickard, the Lancashire and Cheshire Divisional champion 1-2.

FEEDBACK - #191 – ‘NEWS OF THE WORLD CHAMPIONS’

In response to an article in last month’s issue James Clark wrote:

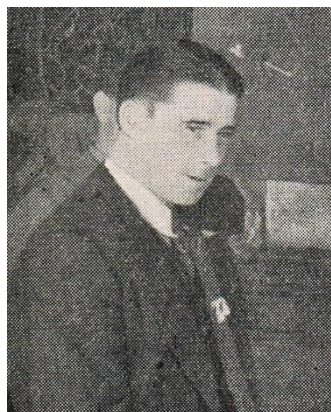
“Hi Patrick. Regarding the News of the World champions v the Twickenham Four article, I would just like to provide a little more information on one of the Twickenham Four team. I believe that ‘B. Talbot’ is Bill Talbot. [Pictured, right.]

He was a friend of my father, Jim Clark, a member of the St Dunstan’s Four. Bill was known to me as ‘Uncle Bill’ as his sister was married to one of my uncles. Bill was from

Twickenham and he and my father often played leisure darts together. Bill did not play for the Feltham Ex-servicemen's club team as my father did.

I believe my memories would be from the mid-fifties to the early sixties. Uncle Bill loved a day at the races as did my family. He was a big man with a jovial personality and I have enjoyed having memories of him rekindled.

Sorry, that not much of this is darts-related but I thought he deserved a mention. Regards, James Clark."



James' email resulted in my looking through back issues of *The Dart*, a marvellous little darts newspaper/magazine which was first published in 1945 and throughout the remainder of that decade.



I immediately found mention of Bill Talbot (and indeed James Clark) in the issue dated 15th December 1945; an article titled 'Anticipated Good Marathon Match,' in which *The Dart* announced that 'THE match of the year' was to be played at the *White Hart*, Southall, on Tuesday next, 18th December. This was to be between Joe Hitchcock (Captain of the St. Dunstan's Four, pictured, left) 'the North London marathon champion' and Bill of Hanworth.

(See advertisement (below, right) that appeared in *The Dart* on Saturday 15th December 1945.)

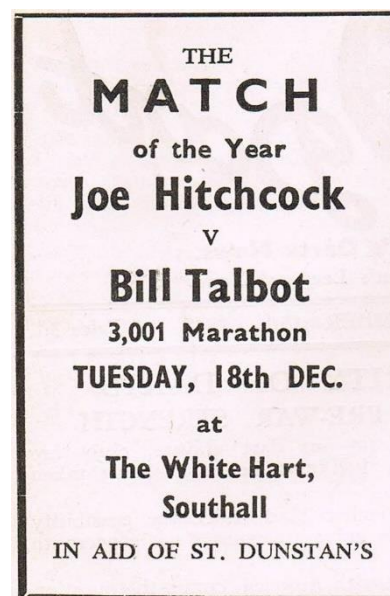
At that time, Joe was unbeaten in marathon games of 3,001 up and was described by Frank Wolfe the founder, owner and editor of *The Dart* as 'probably the most consistent scorer in the world today.'

Bill Talbot was

'...renowned for his speed in throwing. He will score 1,001, start and finish on a double, withdrawing the darts himself, in under three minutes. He has done it in two minutes, three seconds. Another favourite feat is to go round the board on doubles and this he has done in two and a half minutes.

Quite recently Talbot scored 180 three times in one day, playing in ordinary pairs games. Snappy finishes on anything between 160 and 80 are regular features of his of his usual play.

Talbot is well known for his ability in good match play and exhibition shots. He won through to the last eight of the "News of the World" individual competition as long ago as 1935. He holds among other trophies, the Feltham, Hanworth and Bedfont Darts Association pairs championship won with his partner J. Clark.'



Given these qualities the editor of *The Dart* anticipated 'a match worth watching' (the best two of three games of 1,001) when Bill and Joe met at the *White Hart*, Southall on 18th December. All the proceeds were in aid of St. Dunstan's Fund for Blinded Ex-servicemen and women.

On 22nd December 1945, *The Dart* reported that Joe Hitchcock remained unbeaten having been victorious over Bill Talbot, the match being played in front of an audience of 600 'or listened to by means of loud speakers in an atmosphere of quiet excitement.'

'Everybody gave the strictest of order, and although applauding to the full when necessary, silence returned immediately a player toed the hockey.'

Compare 'quiet excitement' at the *White Hart*, Southall in 1945 with the manic atmosphere of modern matches played in front of thousands at the Ally Pally!

It was generally expected that Bill would extend Hitchcock and *The Dart* reported that there were 'bad luck' incidents in the match, 'both players keeping neck and neck through real good dart throwing.'

It is rare to find detailed records of marathon matches so I make no excuses for publishing the Joe v Bill match in full:

Talbot won the toss and he had 19 throws before registering a score less than 41. His third and fifth throws were tons and his tenth 140. Hitchcock put up three tons in this period and the check was Talbot 1750, Hitchcock 2327.

The check after 20 throws was Talbot 1750, Hitchcock 1749. Then the North London champion started a run of good scores and led by 170 on the third check. Talbot's next ten throws produced three tons, two 95s and left win 522. Hitchcock, with two tons and 140, left 315.

The match seemed to be all over when Joe required 88 and Bill 291, but Talbot put up a splendid 140, followed by 60 to leave 91. Hitchcock then threw for 88, his last dart, going well up to avoid the 60, dropped into the 40 to leave 12, and with his first dart of the next throw he won the match. The spectators would have been delighted to have seen Talbot have a throw at 91, but they applauded the winner in the way he deserved.



Hitchcock scored one 140 and eight 100's. Talbot two 140's and five 100's. The match was finished in 46 throws.'

In an accompanying match where the St. Dunstan's Four took on a team from *The Dart*: Bill Talbot, Sid Welleton of Hanworth (a player not known to me), Marmaduke 'Dukey' Brecon (who had won the London & The South division in the 1938/39 season when he played out of the *Jolly Sailor*, Hanworth. He beat Jim Pike 2-1)) and a player named Jim Clark (James Clark's father, pictured right)).

The competition included 'a splendid finish of 90' by Clark, comprising of single 18 and two double 18's, something that

you might not have thought of expecting back in 1945 but nowadays commonplace in the professional game. *The Dart* team won the game on double one. The whole evening raised £100.10s.6d for St. Dunstan's a value of £6060.00 today.

[All images used in this article © *The Dart/PC Archive*.]

BULLSEYE FEEDBACK

John Plews whose company produced the video *Toe the Oche* back in 1987, and whose story was featured in #174 (October 2024), contacted me relating to the *Bullseye* article in #191. John wrote:

"Hi Patrick. Thanks for your latest Darts History.

Thanks too for your excellent tribute to Andrew Wood. By inventing Bullseye, he certainly kept darts on television in the lean times before SKY brought the game to our screens with such an impact.

Unfortunately, the only contact I had with Andrew and his daughter Laura was through our respective lawyers when I was negotiating the royalty fee to stage a 'live' version of Bullseye. My company Ovation took the show on the road for several years dealing with both Chatsworth and Andrew Wood's company.

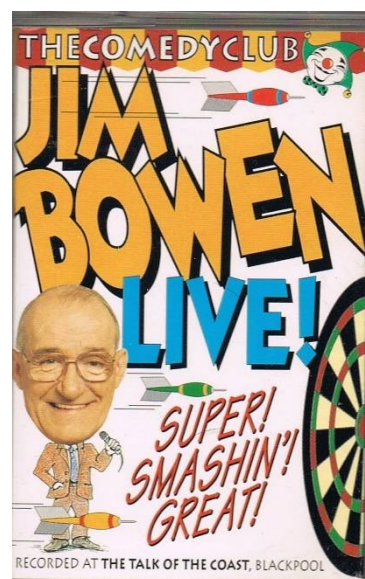
[**Note:** Jim Bowen, of course, mentioned *Bullseye* in his 'live' shows across the country. The cassette (Remember them?), shown right, which records his appearance at The Talk of the Coast, Blackpool, in 1993. It promised that you would 'Find out what he's really thinking when the contestants on "Bullseye" gamble and lose...'] John Plew continues...

However, I can add an anecdote to your feature. As much as Jim Bowen was so right for Bullseye and he found fame and a place in the public's hearts through a game-show, he was never the first choice as host.

The story that Jim always told in later years concerned Peter Harris, the first Bullseye Director. When Peter was looking for the right person to front the show, he tried two very well-known British gameshow hosts. Apparently both these fine showbiz folk had answer machines on their land-lines (no mobiles back then), and the rather impatient Mr Harris got fed up leaving messages on those devices. In the end he called Jim who, of course, answered the telephone in person.

"Are you free next week for a TV test," asked Peter. "Just a minute I'll look in the diary," said Mr. Bowen. What Jim really meant (putting his hand over the receiver) was he needed to ask the 'Keeper of the Diary' - his very organised wife, Phyllis. "You're free any day next week," whispered Phyllis and Jim said to Peter, "where do you want me".

The rest, of course, is history.



When Jim retold that story in his show “An Evening with Jim Bowen,” he always said to the audience, “Really, I was third choice to host a show that changed my life.” However, he never ever revealed the names of the two entertainers who lost a prime-time TV job because they left their careers in the hands of an answering machine.

Personally, I had nothing to do with the TV series but, looking on the Challenge Channel, I can often see myself sitting in the audience waiting for Jim to finish the recording so we could discuss an upcoming ‘live’ show. And, as the repeats are now on daily, often back-to-back, it’s very interesting to watch all the changes, improving the Bullseye format as the series progressed from 1981 to 1995.

For me it was an absolute pleasure to work with the lovely Jim Bowen over many years, and I’m sure your readers will be pleased to know that Phyllis is still a very active member of her community in Lancashire.”

BULLSEYE WASN'T THE FIRST

Ever since the producers of *Bullseye* decided that one of the top prizes “hiding behind Bully” would be a motor boat (an ideal prize for the winning couple who didn’t live together or perhaps, lived in a tower block), I always believed that it was an original, yet quirky, idea.

But recently whilst researching the *News of the World* Grand Final for 1967, I discovered that in the Player’s No. 6 Competition, which was played at the same time at the Ally Pally, the third prize was a tape recorder, the second prize was a set of luggage and the first prize was – Wait for it! – A FIBRE GLASS DINGHY COMPLETE WITH OUTBOARD MOTOR!



Congratulations were due to O. J. Taylor, the Eastern Counties No. 6. winner, playing out of the *Three Horse Shoes*, Nassington, a village of 850+ souls on the River Nene, north Northamptonshire. How many opportunities Mr. Taylor would have had to try out his prize in the river is not known.

Regrettably, I am unable to trace a photograph! However, I found this photo online of a 1967 Savage Javelin dinghy

which may or may not have been the prize.

Sense ruled the following year when the winner, J. R. Corden (Midland Counties No. 6. Champion playing out of the *Bridge Inn*, Sandiacre, Nottinghamshire) was awarded with a Rayleigh Wisp bicycle.

AN AI WARNING

As part of the above research, I decided to enter “Player’s No. 6 Darts Competition” into Google. The first thing it produced was its AI interpretation:

‘Based on the search results for early 2026, the Players Championship 6 (2025/2026) is a professional darts competition within the PDC ProTour circuit.’

Nothing before. Most helpful.

REGIONAL DARTBOARDS

Over recent months, I have been approached by subscribers and others asking if the rumour is true that WINMAU (my sponsors) are ceasing to produce the small range of regional dartboards they have supplied for many years.

Warren Ackary from Australia has asked “Is it true that Winmau/Nodor are stopping production of the Lincon board?” whilst Danny Pendergast who runs and plays in a London 5s dart league on a Wednesday night, the Canning Town & District Darts League (CTDDL) told me:



‘We are a league made up of 10 teams (who still have 1 or 2 teams you listed back in 2009) we have 121 registered players. (I hope you can understand in 2025/26 this is a big deal for us). We have survived teams folding, pub and clubs closing and Covid but the final nail in our coffin will be Winmau’s decision not to produce the 5s dartboards we need because, to quote Winmau, they are “obsolete”. We are not the only London 5s league to

still exist and require the boards.’

I promised to do what I can to help and have for a while been in touch with my colleagues at WINMAU and I *hope* to have positive news soon, so watch this space.

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