



POLICE BOXING Team Police - Boxing

MEMORABLE ATHLETES

The Police Boxing Association had been in existence and continually active since 1906. However, indirectly the Police Force had a link with boxing that went back to the early bare-knuckle days, for it was they who played a game of cat and mouse with the 'Fancy' (as the followers of the sport were then known), as they tried to arrange their illegal matches on commons and fields without the interference of the 'Peelers'. Therefore, it was a trifle ironic that when boxing acquired a certain respectability with the formation of the Amateur Boxing Association and the National Sporting Club, the Police embraced the sport wholeheartedly and became one of its staunchest supporters.

Since those early days, boxers from Great Britain's Police Forces have performed at all levels, from Novice Competitions, National Championships to the Olympics. In other words, from the grass roots of the sport to elite level with many of the boxers concerned not only representing their respective forces but also their country.

This short history is therefore an opportunity to recall some of the more prominent police boxers who fought at the highest levels of competition and shared rings with the best.

No history on Police service boxing could be proffered without reference to the great Harry **MALLIN** of the Metropolitan Police. Harry's pedigree at a glance shows that he won two Olympic Gold Medals in 1920 and 1924 plus five ABA Titles at middleweight. He was also undefeated in over 300 bouts. A phenomenal record.

Following his retirement from the ring after his second Olympic success Harry continued as a much-respected administrator in Amateur Boxing circles, being the British Team Manager at the 1952 Olympics. He was a great ambassador for Amateur Boxing generally and Police Boxing in particular up until his death in 1969. For many observers of the sport Harry **MALLIN** would certainly have a claim to the mantle of the best amateur boxer this country has ever produced.

Harry had not been the first policeman to claim an Olympic Gold for boxing, that honour went to City of London Policeman A.L. **OLDMAN**. At the 1908 Olympic Games in London he had dominated the weight class wiping the floor with the rest of the heavyweight opposition. **OLDMAN** was an all round sportsman and something of an adventurer. He served in the army before joining the police and later transferred to the Ceylon Police before eventually emigrating to Canada just prior to the First World War.

Although a number of policemen who showed an aptitude for boxing took the step to curtail their police careers and become professional boxers, without a doubt the most successful to make the transition to the professional ranks was Dick **SMITH**. Whilst in the Metropolitan Police he won two ABA Heavyweight Titles in 1912 and 1913, and shortly afterwards he took the plunge into professionalism annexing the British Light Heavyweight Title and was victorious in three defences, making the Lonsdale Belt his own property.

Dick also boxed in good company meeting Bombardier Billy **WELLS** (three times), George **CARPENTIER**, Joe **BECKET**, Frank **GODDARD** and Harry **REEVE** (twice), all fellow Champions. Later he became a respected trainer who counted the boxing peer the Marquis of Clydesdale amongst his pupils.

The period between the 1st and 2nd World Wars could well be described as a golden era in police boxing. Even after **MALLIN**'s retirement the Metropolitan Police still had a formidable string of boxers to represent them. P.C. Fred **JACKSON** was a double ABA Champion at Light Heavyweight in 1927 and 1928 and Heavyweight Jim **TITMUS** the genial former soldier was one of the toughest of his day winning against some of the best men around.

Jim was one of the nicest fellows ever to don a pair of gloves and was known within the sport as the 'smiling policeman'. He later went on to become one of amateur boxings most respected administrators and after retiring from the police enjoyed a second career as a London Cab Driver.

A number of forces boasted very strong teams that could hold their own with all comers. In the 1920's the Port of London Authority Police had Arthur **CLIFTON** the 1924 ABA Heavyweight Champion, Johnny **ELLIOTT** ABA Middleweight Champion for 1924 and 1925 and also a silver medalist at the 1924 Olympics, plus Fred **WHITBREAD** who had won the 1920 Welterweight Title on its inception. Although most of the police boxers were in the heavier weights they still threw up men in the lighter categories. One of this rarer breed was Harry **BONE** of the Metropolitan Police who in 1928 won the ABA Title at Welterweight. Harry became one of those stalwarts of the amateur game and when he retired from the ring he devoted his time to the Enfield Boxing Club for many years.

Came the 1930's and Nottingham Police produced a formidable team with ABA Champions 'Ossie' **DAVIES** and Jim **ROLLAND**, also **G.HOLTON** at the 1934 Empire Games came away with a silver medal.

Undoubtedly though their high achiever was Light Heavyweight George **BRENNAN** who won ABA Titles in 1933 and 1934 as well as picking up a gold medal at the London Empire Games in 1934. **BRENNAN** was a former soldier who turned professional shortly after his gold medal exploits and went on to box the likes of World Title challenger Tommy **FARR** on two occasions.

Derby Police was another Constabulary who had a strong line up during the 1930's, which included several good men who were recruited from Wales. In 1939 P.C. Dick **THOMAS** won an ABA Title and at the same championships Light Heavyweight Alf **FORD** gave hot prospect and future British professional champ Bruce **WOODCOCK** a good run for his money before losing a close decision. Another addition from the 'valleys' was W.H. **WALTERS** who during this era won five Welsh Championships as well as being runner up in the ABA Finals in 1934.

Joe **GOYDER** would have a good claim to the highest rank achieved in the police by a former top boxer, when he became Assistant Commissioner of the City of London Police after 30 years service. Not bad for a working class lad from the tough New Cross area of London. He was one of three boxing brothers in the City Police but without doubt Joe was the best. He won the ABA Light Heavyweight Title in 1929 and 1932, was in our Olympic Team in 1928 and won the Empire Games Gold in Canada in 1930. Although perhaps the bout he was best remembered for was a losing one, on a split vote, in the 1931 ABA Final to Welsh icon Jack **PETERSON**. Like so many of his ilk Joe carried on putting much back into amateur boxing long after he ceased being an active boxer. He and his brothers becoming the mainstays of boxing in the City Police.

Another City of London policeman who made a big impression was Charles **O'GRADY** a good boxer and all-round sportsman who joined the police from the Grenadier Guards. He then came under the guidance of boxing trainer retired PC Bill **HAZELL** who had himself been the ABA Heavyweight Champion back in 1911. With **HAZELL's** help **O'GRADY** won the ABA Heavyweight crown in 1933, but more importantly on route he k.o'd the incomparable Pat **FLOYD**. The only time multi title holder **FLOYD** was ever knocked out in his boxing career. Later after leaving the police and a brief flirtation with the professional ranks **O'GRADY** owned a successful florist shop in Kilburn, North West London.

Other police forces to throw up good men during this period were the Royal Ulster Constabulary's P.C. J. **MAGILL** who between 1934 and 1936 won three ABA Titles and a bronze medal at the Empire Games. Also, Heavyweight Arthur 'Jock' **PORTER** of Colchester Police boxed for England in the 1939 European Championships. When formally serving as a soldier he had been a runner up in the

1937 ABA Finals, but two years later returned as PC **PORTER** to claim the ABA Title.

Although many of the police boxers of this era were often six feet or more, none could compare in size to the man dubbed the 'Police Carnera' (after the Italian giant ex Heavyweight Champion of the World). Metropolitan Policeman Roger **HUNTER** was 6'8" tall and weighed almost 19 stone. He boxed all the best men of the 1930's and was a losing finalist in the 1935 ABA Final.

The following year proved to be a high point when he was one of those selected to represent Great Britain against the USA Golden Gloves Team at Madison Square Gardens in America. He knocked out his American opponent in two rounds as the British Team won the event 7-4. Shortly before the outbreak of war **HUNTER** changed careers when he joined the RAF, becoming a pilot. However, he kept up his boxing and went on to claim the Inter Services Championship. During the early days of the war he was reported 'shot down missing' and his mother received two telegrams. One stated that her son had been found safe and well, the other announcing that his wife had just given birth to a daughter. Roger later went on to win the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Post war with many men still overseas and awaiting release from the services there was not too much new talent emerging in the police ranks. Although still in the Army George **SCOTT** carried on the Nottinghamshire Police tradition by winning the ABA Heavyweight Title in 1945, whilst veteran Bill **BEDDOW** of the Derby Police, a former Midlands Area Champion, a reliable if not outstanding heavyweight performer during the war years got his reward by selection for the Great Britain Team that took on the USA at Wembley in 1946.

Denis **ROWE** a Glamorgan Constable put down a marker for the Welsh in 1955 when he defeated Peter **JAMES** of the Royal Navy to win the ABA Heavyweight Title. Another Glamorgan Constable Dia **CURTIS** also won several Welsh vests, whilst in 1969 PC Graham **MILES** from Merthyr won the Welsh ABA Heavyweight Championship.

The Metropolitan Police's foremost boxer for the next few years was Denis **POLLARD** who from the late 1950's to the early sixties was a major force amongst the countries amateur light heavyweights. Although due to a combination of injuries at crucial times and the odd debatable decision, an ABA Title somehow managed to elude him. Nevertheless, he was a London Champion and boxed a number of times for both London and England including captaining Britain's European Championship Team in Moscow in 1963 and was a member of the outstanding British Team that made history in 1961 by beating the USA at Wembley 10-0. He retired from the sport after his regular trainer, Bill **CHEVALLY** moved on from amateur boxing and consequently Denis decided to concentrate on his police career.

POLLARD's position as arguably the countries best police boxer was succeeded by another Light Heavyweight in the form of Johnny **BANHAM**, who when he wasn't boxing rode a horse as a member of the Metropolitan Police's Mounted Branch. He was an all-round athlete who also excelled at swimming, water polo and fencing although it was boxing's good fortune that he decided to make it his prime interest.

BANHAM enjoyed a very successful career, although like his predecessor an ABA Title never came his way, even so he represented London and England on many occasions and was captain of the England Commonwealth Games Boxing Team in 1970. On his retirement from competition Johnny went on to coach the Metropolitan Police and National Police teams for some years before tragically succumbing to cancer while still a relatively young man of forty-nine.

Others prominent in the early seventies were Maurice **GOODWIN** of the Staffordshire Police, an experienced police boxer for a number of years who reached his peak when getting to the ABA Final in 1970. Two other very talented boxers appeared for the Metropolitan Police during 1970 and 1971. The stylish Freddie **KNOWLES** (who sadly died in 2008) was an England International at middleweight, likewise was Steve **CROSBY** a hard punching light heavy who later in his boxing career reached an ABA Final.

In 1976 the Met's popular light middleweight Billy **GRAY**, a former Royal Marine, caused a stir when his punching power took him to an ABA Final and gained him an England vest against Bulgaria. Billy was approaching the end of his ring career and his success was a fitting way for him to sign off.

In 1982 a new weight category was announced by the ABA when the Super Heavyweight division at over 91 kilos was introduced for some of the very big men then inhabiting the sport. The following year a British Transport policeman Guy **WILLIAMSON** got to the ABA Final only to lose on points to the Royal Navy's Keith **FERDINAND**. Two years later, in 1985, the big policeman was back and this time won the title and also gained England representative honours into the bargain.

Also in the early 1980's a young light heavyweight from Humberside Police came to the fore with some stirring performances on the International stage. David **CROSS** won a bronze medal at the under nineteen European Championships and a silver at the under twenty World Championships.

Another more experienced campaigner from the Strathclyde Police, Eddie **MILES**, took the Scottish Championships in 1984 and also went on to win a deserved Scottish international vest. The same year saw the British Police send a six man team to the "Police Olympics" which were held in Arizona, USA. Under the guidance of Head Coach Johnny **BANHAM** all six came away with Gold Medals.

It was an outstanding achievement and included in the team were the aforementioned Guy **WILLIAMSON** and Eddie **MILES**.

The Welsh Constabularies boxing pedigree continued to throw up useful big men with PC Richard 'Thumper' **FENTON** of Pentwyn who won two Welsh ABA Heavyweight Titles in 1992 and 1993 and progressed to an ABA Final in 1992 losing to future British Professional Champion Scott **WELCH**.

It would certainly be remiss me to approach the conclusion of this potted history without reference to a competition that was once regarded as the highlight of the police boxing year, I refer of course to the Police European Open. Although from the early 1920's there were prestigious championships within the ABA calendar exclusively for the benefit of police officers who wished to compete, it was not until 1927 that this competition emerged as the pinnacle of boxing success a serving police officer could attain to within his own occupation.

Prior to that some of the larger forces such as London's Metropolitan and Liverpool had their own championships and during the same decade there was the British Police Championships. However, in 1927 this latter competition transformed into a truly 'Open' affair with entries invited from any police force in Europe and thus raised the status of European Police Boxing to a new level.

The first year in its new form saw an invasion by a formidable team from the Dublin Civic Guard which went on to win three of the five titles on offer. From then on, despite an enforced break for the Second World War, followers of the event saw boxers from Italy, Germany, France, Finland, Ireland, Switzerland and of course many from numerous British Police Forces.

They even on occasions managed to include boxers from Uganda and New York into the event. Although space prevents me from going into more detail, many of the police boxers previously mentioned in this history were also proud winners of the European Police Title.

Although the European Open Police Championships was promoted by the Metropolitan Police during its lifetime, in this form it made its final appearance in 1989.

During the forthcoming years the fabric of Police Boxing underwent major changes and in 1991 'The Open' as it was referred to, was adopted by the ABA of England and retitled the British Police International Open Championship. The first official new championships being staged in 1993. That year saw boxing police officers from Great Britain, Spain, Russia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland, Italy and three USA police regions Denver, Houston and Boston taking part.

Two British contestants made the finals against highly rated boxers, the Metropolitan Police's Daniel [Dan] **O'SULLIVAN** and Thames Valley Police Officer Dan **HOPKINS** took the titles at Light welterweight and Super

heavyweight respectively, **O’SULLIVAN** winning on points and **HOPKINS** by way of stoppage. Both of their opponents were Italians, who were not only members of the National Police Team but had also represented Italy at the Olympics.

From this tournament the staging of the event was to be shared across the world in order that all countries had the opportunity to stage the event. After two further bi-annual tournaments held in the USA, sadly up to the present time it has never reappeared hopefully, this piece of Amateur Boxing history will not be consigned to a distant memory.

From the end of the twentieth century, in contrast to previous era’s, it has become extremely difficult in the police service and other essential public services to attain recognition at the very highest level of amateur boxing. With financial cuts and budget restraints it is highly unlikely that a serving operational police officer could set his or her sights on being a member of the Great Britain Elite Boxer System, which has proved so successful in recent times.

The exception to the rule has been the emergence of two British Police Service female boxing stars both of which have since left the service to pursue remarkable international successes in the sport. These are ex Cleveland Police Support Staff member Amanda **COULSON** and Lancashire Police Constable Lisa **WHITESIDE**.

COULSON’s record shows she has been four times National ABA Champion; G.B. Champion; a three times European Union Championship – Silver medallist and a four times Gold medallist at international Box Cups.

WHITESIDE’s outstanding international amateur record is as follows, both Bronze and Silver medals at European Championships; both Bronze and Silver medals at World Championships; a Gold medal at the European Union Championships and a Gold at the Commonwealth Championships in 2018 in Australia. Lisa turned professional in January 2019. Mid-way through achieving all this, she suffered and overcame a fractured skull in a tragic accident. Some achievement!

In 2021 Detective Constable Seul Bee **LEE** [Julia] of the Metropolitan Police won both the London area Female Development Championship [previously known as the Novice Championships] and then progressed to win the National [England Boxing] title. The following year 2022, **LEE** won the Senior Elite [previously known as the National ABA’s] title.

Compiled by Barry Jones MBE together with boxing historian Larry BRAYSHER [ex Metropolitan Police Service]