

## **Mickey McGuire**

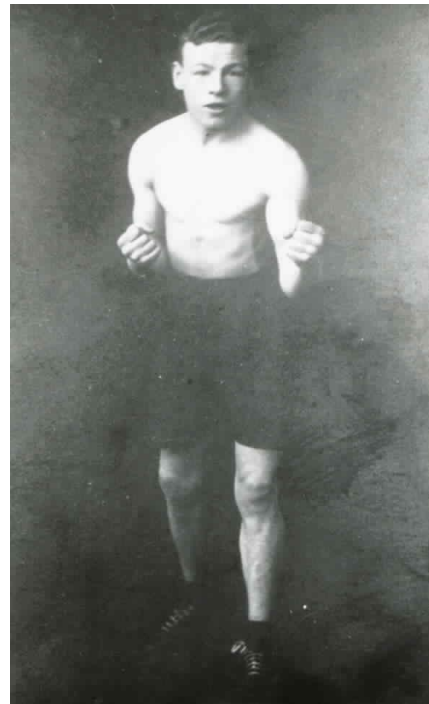
### ***By Miles Templeton***

The city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the North-East of England was a hotbed of professional boxing for the first forty years of the twentieth century. There were thousands of professional fighters active in the area during the 1930s and Mickey McGuire was one of the best of them.

In 1932 McGuire, then aged only 19, fought against the reigning World Flyweight champion, the Tunisian, Victor 'Young' Perez. The bout was sensational and McGuire became a household name throughout the North of England. Today, however, the name Mickey McGuire is barely known even amongst the most ardent fight fans and in the city of his birth he is forgotten.

Mickey McGuire was born into a fighting family, on January 14th 1913. His real name was Robert W Drane. His elder brother Paul became a middleweight of the second rank in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Paul had around 70 contests including fights against three British champions, Jock McAvoy (twice), Harry Mason and Jack London. London was the British Heavyweight Champion later in his career. McGuire's father, Teddy Drane, had boxed from 1911 to 1919 and I can find 19 contests for him. Another member of the family, Jack Drane boxed from 1902 to 1912, taking part in 77 contests. Teddy and Jack fought primarily at Ginnetts Circus and the original St James Hall which prior to the opening on the New St James Hall were the most important boxing venues in the city.

Between 1886 and 1933 I have found 38 different venues in the city of Newcastle where boxing was held. At this time Newcastle, along with Liverpool and Birmingham, ranked as the most important fight centre in England, outside London. Amongst the many famous fighters who appeared in the city were Philadelphia Jack O'Brien, Sam Minto, the Dixie Kid, Digger Stanley, Spike Robson, Pedlar Palmer, Andrew Tokell, Bobby Dobbs, Frank Craig and Bombardier Billy Wells. During the 1920s the fistic importance of the city declined. What it lacked in quality was more than compensated for by quantity, as the St James Hall was one of the few venues in Britain to host professional boxing twice a week, a situation which remained pretty constant throughout the decade. In the 1930s a new



purpose built boxing stadium, the New St James Hall was built on the site of the old St James Hall and during 1933/4 this venue hosted six professional boxing promotions every week. I doubt if there was any other hall in the world where one could find boxing shows held so frequently. This was the place in which Mickey McGuire became famous.

McGuire came from Byker, a place teeming with narrow streets of back-to-back housing less than one mile from the centre of the city. The list of boxers from Byker is endless. Many of them fought regularly, and lost more than they won. Most of these men fought because of economic and social circumstance, they needed to put food onto the family table. The lucky few went on to become top-class fighting men and these included Seaman Tommy Watson and Benny Sharkey, both of whom were featherweights of high renown at the time that McGuire was also at his peak. Watson fought a close contest with Kid Chocolate for the World Featherweight Championship at Madison Square Garden, New York City in 1933 and Sharkey defeated the reigning World Bantamweight Champion, Balthazar Sangchili in Newcastle in 1936.

At the height of his fistic fame McGuire lived at George Street, a short distance from the Bridge End gymnasium, where he, and many others, learnt how to box. This gymnasium was run by Jimmy Britt, another ex-fighter from the period before the First World War. In the

gymnasium were many budding fighters and a few notable ex-pugs from the Byker area, amongst them Jim Falcus, a middleweight who campaigned between 1910 and 1934 and who had well over 100 contests. Britt and Falcus spotted the potential of the young McGuire and along with brother Paul they guided him carefully through the early stages of his career.

He had turned professional in 1928, aged 15, and his first bouts were at the Bridge End gymnasium. Early in his career he fought two Sunderland boxers, Joe Baldersara and Roy Mills, both of whom went on to become very successful fighters throughout the early to mid 1930s, who both had around 100 contests. By 1931 McGuire was becoming recognised as one of the North's most promising flyweights, beating amongst others, Joe Cowley, Jim Ireland, Joe Croft and Arthur Tomlinson, all of whom were on the 'up'. He had defeated Ginger Rennie of Sunderland in September 1931 in a contest billed as for the Flyweight Championship of the North. This bout should be considered as being for the North-Eastern Championship as there were other claimants to the Northern Flyweight Title at this time. By the end of 1931 McGuire had fought 34 times and had only lost once.

In January and February 1932 McGuire won three contests against real top-notchers, including Jackie Brown of Manchester, whom McGuire beat on points over 15 rounds at Manchester. At this time Brown was the reigning British and European Flyweight champion and his defeat was a major surprise. The contest was fought over two minute rounds. A reigning champion would normally take part in bouts of three minute rounds and the shorter rounds would have particularly suited McGuire's style. This contest put McGuire right at the forefront of those boxers seeking to contest the British title and largely on the strength of this victory McGuire was invited to Paris in March to take on Valentin Angelmann, an ex French Flyweight Champion who had fought Frankie Genaro for the NBA/IBU World Flyweight Title in 1931. This bout was a formidable proposition for the young McGuire and he was stopped in 8 rounds.

Over the course of the rest of 1932 McGuire won a number of important contests losing only one, a 7 round loss to Teddy Rollins, in an open air contest at Whitley Bay. In this contest McGuire sustained a temporary dislocation of the muscle in the right arm when well ahead on points. This injury did not heal quickly and was still problematic when he was matched against the World Flyweight Champion, Victor 'Young' Perez of Tunisia.

Perez was Jewish and a carefree young man of 21 when he arrived in Britain in 1932.

He was described by George Kaplan, an American fight observer of the period as 'a difficult kid, hard to handle. On reflection I think he was more interested in having a good time. He was a good-looking kid, plenty of girlfriends'. In keeping with the habits of many world champions at that time, Perez was undergoing a tour, cashing in on his fame, and fighting around Europe against supposed second-raters in non-title bouts. He was probably earning around \$1000 per contest and he had lost only one of these fights, against Emile Pladner, prior to his contest with McGuire.

The match with McGuire was set for 15 rounds and it was made at 8st 2lbs, just above the Flyweight limit. It took place on September 12th 1932. At the weigh-in McGuire came in below 8st and Perez' weight was not announced. This led to considerable speculation that Perez was also below 8 stone and that consequently both were under the Flyweight limit.

The hall was not full, possibly due to the price of admission. In order to bring a world champion to Tyneside the promoter, Mr J J Paget had taken a considerable gamble. Those who saw the fight, however, would never forget it. In a quiet first round McGuire measured the champion with a few light lefts and Perez' first punch was very low, earning a rebuke from referee Joe Tolley. The second round also started quietly and then after 33 seconds of the round, McGuire whipped across a left hook which caught Perez flush on the jaw. Perez reeled backwards, his head coming into contact with the middle rope as he fell. Perez moved his hands frantically in his endeavour to rise, but he could not get his body more than a few inches from the floor before Tolley counted him out.

Referee Tolley stated that the winning punch was one of the best left hooks that he had ever seen and he confirmed that Perez was 'out; before his head made contact with the rope.

Nick Cavalli, Perez' European manager stated after the fight that 'Perez is too upset to say anything to the reporters, all I can say is that the sooner they meet again the better it will be for both. This accidental punch will not happen again'. The matchmaker, Mr John paget immediately set out to secure a return contest, this time for the title, but he was realistic in stating that 'I am afraid the terms offered to the man who holds the world title, in spite of Monday's sensational battle, may not be acceptable'.

These words were well stated for it was Jackie Brown who got the title match with Perez seven weeks later in Manchester, despite the fact that McGuire had beaten them both during

the year. Perez was outgunned by Brown and stopped in the thirteenth round. Perez and McGuire never did meet in a rematch.

The victory over Perez really put McGuire on the fistic map but he was never to fulfil his promise. He lost crucial contests against Chris 'Ginger' Foran, Benny Lynch and Pat Palmer and retired from the game aged twenty-five after 76 contests.

For Perez the future was far bleaker. Interned in Auschwitz by the Nazis during the second world war he was executed around 1943.

I would rate McGuire as being in the top ten North-Eastern boxers between 1920 and 1940. A strong case could be made for him as the best ever flyweight produced in the area.

For more information on North-Eastern boxing please visit website, [www.northeastboxing.co.uk](http://www.northeastboxing.co.uk).

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## PHOTOS

Mickey McGuire and Jim Hall at Endinburgh  
Mickey McGuire and Jim Hall Facing Off

MICKEY MC GUIRE'S RECORD APPEARED  
ON PAGE 82 OF IBRO JOURNAL NO 77

### RING MAGAZINE MONTHLY RATINGS

WEIGHT CLASS:	112
FIRST RATED:	MAY 1932
LAST RATED:	NOVEMBER 1934
MONTHS RATED:	30
BEST RATING:	3

