

# The Southern Ex-Boxer, quarterly issue of the Croydon (London) ex-boxers journal, Autumn (Fall) 1998

## HARRINGAY ARENA:

### The Night They Rang the Final Bell

by Patrick Myler

YOU HAD TO hand it to **Jack Solomons**. He knew how to put on a show. No fireworks, white smoke, cascading water, or 15-minute entrances, which are considered essential to work up today's big fight audiences.

All you got with a Solomons promotion was a recorded fanfare of trumpets, the introduction of a few notables who happened to be sitting ringside, a concise, to-the-point announcement of his principals - and it was on with the action.

Harringay Arena was Jack's favourite arena and he was a mighty sad man the night it closed its doors for the last time, on 28 October, 1958. He wasn't the only one with a lump in his throat when those comic clouters, **Fred "Nosh" Powell** and **Basil Kew**, brought the curtain down just before midnight.

It's hard to believe it's exactly 40 years ago since I sat among that sell-out 11,000 crowd and watched the parade of great ring performers who had graced the historic arena down the years.

Solomons went one better for the occasion by hiring *live* trumpeters to herald the champions as they ducked between the ropes to take their bows.

**Harry Mizler** and **Dave Crowley**, who fought each other on the first Harringay bill 'way back in 1936, got a tremendous ovation as they shook hands in the great tradition of mutual respect shown by former rivals.

They were followed by a stream of ring legends whose exploits had thrilled this great arena on unforgettable nights: **Jack Petersen**, **Tommy Farr**, **Peter Kane**, **Len Harvey**, **Eddie Phillips**, **Eric Boon**, **Arthur Danahar**, **Ernie Roderick**, **Ronnie Clayton**, **Don Cockell**, **Johnny Williams**, **Joe Erskine**, **Peter Waterman**, **Rinty Monaghan**, **Sammy McCarthy**, and the last pair to contest a British championship at Harringay: **Terry Downes** and **Phil Edwards**.

Solomon's master-stroke was getting three American world champions, **Henry Armstrong**, **Max Baer**, and **Gus Lesnevich**, all of whom had boxed at Harringay, to make the trip. What a reception they each got, and Madcap Maxie brought the house down when he vaulted over the ropes and engaged in a playful spar with little Rinty Monaghan.

The promoter had one final trick up his sleeve. One of Britain's greatest fighting heroes, **Randolph Turpin**, who had made his professional debut as an 18-year-old sailor at Harringay in 1946, disposing of **Gordon Griffiths** inside two minutes, stepped up to the mike to announce his retirement from the ring. His intention had been kept secret up to that moment.

Tickets for Harringay's final night were sold out weeks in advance. Knowing there would be a big demand, I booked my £1 seat well in time. These were the days before I entered journalism and could enjoy a free ringside press seat!

That £1 represented a fair slice out of my £8 weekly wages with a West End jewellery firm - and then there was the 2s 6d I had to shell out for the special souvenir programme. Such extravagance!

Anyway, I still have the programme - and the memories.

It's hard to imagine a modern promotion without the main event having some sort of title tag, even if the belt up for grabs looks like something picked up at a Benidorm street market. Yet that Harringay show didn't need any such phoney adornments.

Top of the bill was a ten-rounder between Britain's **Dave Charnley** and **Carlos Ortiz**, a New York-based Puerto Rican. If Solomons had so desired, he could legitimately have called it a world title eliminator, for both Charnley and Ortiz were among the leading contenders for **Joe Brown's** lightweight crown. Ortiz, in fact, went on to beat "Old Bones" to become champion four years later.

I always kept a diary of the fights I attended, probably as practice for the career in journalism I craved, and it was a real trip down Memory Lane to dig it out for the purpose of this article.

I noted that Ortiz was a classy fighter, with a fast jab and a solid dig in both hands. He was the master at long range as well as up close. Charnley was by no means outclassed, but the visitor always came back strongly whenever Dave tried to step on the gas.

Charnley, always a great favourite with the Harringay crowd, suffered a badly-cut eye and a damaged hand, but I felt that Ortiz would have won anyway.

Carlos would later capture the world light-welterweight title, as well as twice winning the lightweight prize, before he finally hung up his gloves in 1972 after losing in six rounds to **Ken Buchanan** in New York. Charnley, one of the best British fighters of the last half-century, never became world champion, although he certainly would have picked up at least one of the myriad titles available today.

The chief supporting bout at the Harringay finale was a heavyweight bore between **Dick Richardson**, of Wales, and American **Garvin Sawyer**. Richardson who won on points, clubbed away at a poor opponent, but couldn't find the extra momentum to finish him off. The ten-rounder was greeted with outbursts of booing and slow handclapping, and provided the opportunity for the phantom tin-whistle player (a regular on big fight nights) to give us his customary tootle of the scales.

That brilliant Welshman, **Dai Dower**, was unlucky to see his Canadian opponent, **Pat Supple**, have his hand raised by referee **Jack Hart** (whom I remember handing out his fair share of controversial verdicts) after an entertaining ten-round bantamweight bout.

My fellow-countryman, **Jim "Spike" McCormack**, from Belfast, was his usual elusive self, and his snappy jab earned him the decision in a lightweight bout with **George Martin**, from Bermondsey, who came in as a late substitute for **Johnny Kidd**.

And, of course, "Nosher" and Basil lightened the sadness of the occasion by putting on a hilarious show-closer. The "Nosher" got on his "bicycle" at the start, and stayed on it for the six rounds, once telling off referee Hart for getting in his way. He landed enough jabs to earn the points verdict.

I have been to many famous boxing venues in the intervening years, but I can truly say that none, with the exception of Belfast's King's Hall, holds such a special place in my memory as dear old Harringay.

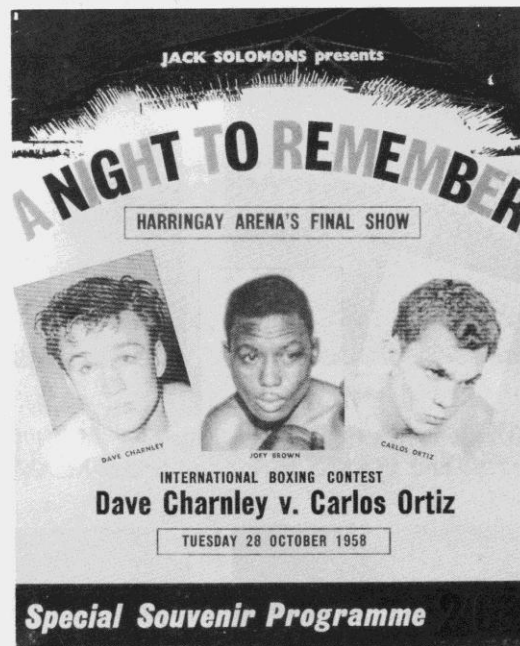
#### FIRST NIGHT

**Sydney Hulls**, father of the *Daily Express* boxing writer of the same name, was the promoter of the first boxing tournament at Harringay Arena on 18 November, 1936. There was no title tag to his 15-round bill-topper. Indeed, neither of the heavyweight stars was British.

Germany's **Walter Neusel**, a frequent visitor to these shores, outscored **Ben Foord**, a South African who was domiciled here for several years when he became British champion by halting **Jack Petersen** in

three rounds at the Tigers' Rugby Football Ground, Leicester.

Oddly enough, every one of the five contests on that Harringay first night went the full distance. **Dave Crowley** (Clerkenwell) outpointed **Harry Mizler** (St. George's), **Pat Palmer** (Battersea) won on points over **Jimmy Warnock** (Belfast), **Dave McCleave** (Smithfield) earned the decision over **Sten Suvio** (Finland), and **Norman Snow** (Northampton) outscored **Seaman Jim Lawlor** (Lowestoft).



(Top):

Programme cover for the closing night.

(Below left): **WALTER NEUSEL**, who topped the opening night bill by beating **BEN FOORD** of South Africa.

(Below right): **BASIL KEW**, who fought **NOSHER POWELL** in the last fight at Harringay.

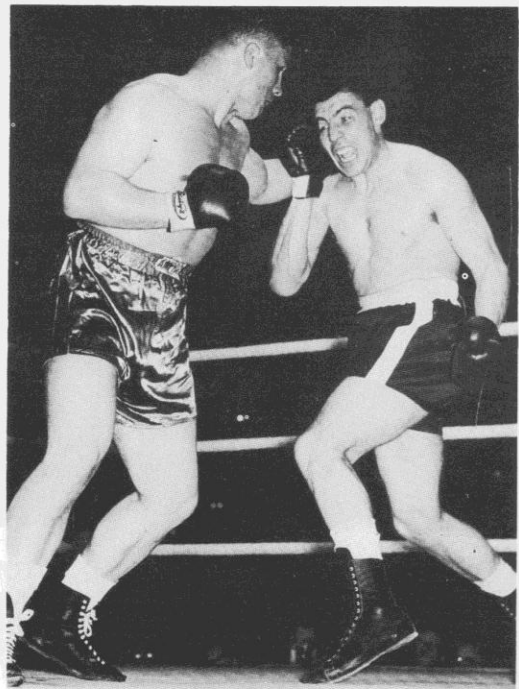
## FAREWELL TO HARRINGAY



The boxing personalities line up to say goodbye to a famous arena. Most of you will easily identify those shown here, but we'll make your job easier by saying that EDDIE PHILLIPS is partly obscured by LEN HARVEY and that TOMMY FARR is behind ERIC BOON to the right of the picture. Only five of the these boxers are still alive.



RANDOLPH TURPIN entered world rankings by beating TOMMY YAROSZ who never fought again



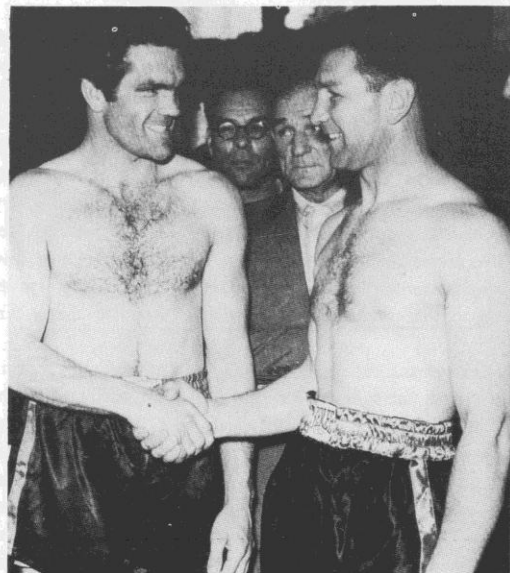
DON COCKELL surprised JOHNNY WILLIAMS by taking his heavyweight title. Cockell was en route to a world title tilt at ROCKY MARCIANO



LUIS ROMERO of Spain halted DANNY O'SULLIVAN'S march towards the world bantamweight championship when he stopped the Londoner after a thrilling fight. Good bantamweights were abundant in those days!



BRIAN LONDON fought WILLIE PASTRANO twice.



The 1946 MILLS-LESNEVICH fight was a classic.