

A SYNOPSIS OF THE HISTORY OF BOXING AT COALVILLE

(Featuring boxers from Griffydam)



There was a good crowd at an open air boxing tournament in Coalville on Monday evening 4th August 1931, when in the chief event, Les Wickwar (Leicester) retained the featherweight championship of Leicestershire by defeating Jack Stone (Leicester) on points.

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - SEPTEMBER 2024

PREFACE

The following publication is an attempt to provide those interested, with a basic knowledge of the local sport of boxing which was so well supported in Coalville over a period of three decades from the late 1920s. It was well recorded in the Leicestershire newspapers for anyone who wants to carry out further detailed research.



Coalville's Palais de Danse frontage facing Owen Street with the Cascelloid (Palitoy) factory to the rear where numerous boxing tournaments were held before it became a Billiard Hall for a short period in 1936

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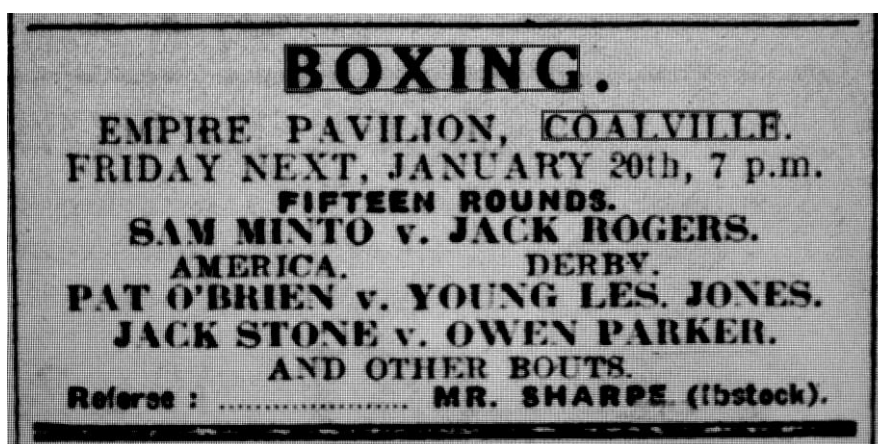
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During the 1930s, regular professional boxing matches were held at a venue with the rather grandiose name of "Palais de Danse in Owen Street, Coalville. National and local bouts were held there and attendances up to 2,000 were recorded. Sam Betteridge of Coalville promoted the fights. In Sept 1936 it was decided by the owner Mr. J. Eaton of Burton on Trent, to turn it into a billiard saloon. Prior to this, fights were recorded as being held at other venues in Coalville - Coalville Baths, The Empire Pavillion, Stewart's Boxing Pavillion & Stableford's Recreation Rooms and the Waggon & Horses grounds, Ashby Road. Some fights as shown on the front cover were held in the open air.

Other local boxing venues were, the West End Club on Ashby Rd, Coalville, Coalville dog racing track, The Territorial Drill Hall, Coalville, Alexander Park Rink at Swadlincote and Loughborough Town Hall. The short intervals between fights in which boxers engaged at that time was quite amazing compared to today. A good purse for a fight could be around £10.

The first official record found, relating to organised boxing in Coalville was in November 1927, which took place under the auspices of Coalville Olympic Sports Club and was held in the Territorial Drill Hall on a Saturday night. This is the first mention found of Coalville's Eric Jones fighting, who went on to become a champion in this sport as the reader will observe later.

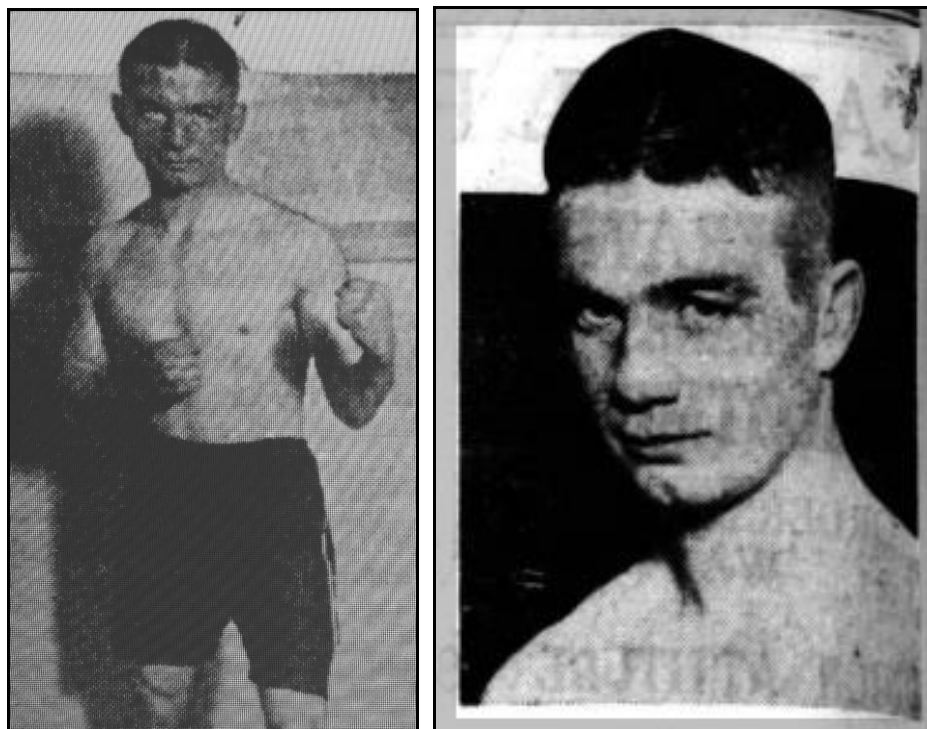
In January 1928 the following boxing tournament was held in Coalville at the Empire Pavillion.



Another tournament was held at Coalville on 4th February 1928 at Stewart's Boxing Pavillion, when the chief event was a return 15 round bout between Jack Creighton (Plymouth), welter weight champion of the Fleet and Sam Minto (America) in which the latter was victorious after Creighton was disqualified for a low blow. Note that Minto had only fought 3 weeks earlier on January 20th.

Another tournament recorded was in December 1928, and was promoted by Coalville Olympic Sports Club at Stableford's Recreation Rooms. Eric Jones was top of the bill and fought a draw with Young Mobbs of Leicester.

Coalville Town's local favourite was Eric Jones who lived in the adjacent Melbourne Street to the Palais de Danse. He boxed at flyweight and won the Leicestershire championship in December 1929 when he knocked out Les Wickwar of Leicester, at Coalville Baths, in a scheduled 15 round - 2 minute per round contest, weighing in at 8 stones. They fought for £5 side deposits, against a purse of £10 !!



ERIC JONES FROM COALVILLE

In December 1931, the principle event at a boxing tournament in Coalville was a ten - 2 minute round contest between Eric Jones the Leicestershire flyweight champion and George Marsden the Nottinghamshire champion. In the early stages, the men appeared to be well matched, but as the fight progressed Jones was seen to have the advantage, but he fell through the ropes in the ninth round, but luckily did not injure himself. In the last round Jones severely punished Marsden, who had sustained a cut eye, and was down for counts of nine and four. Because of Marsden's injury, the referee stopped the contest and gave the decision to Jones.

Eric Jones went on to become the Southern Area flyweight champion by beating Johnny Griffiths. In 1936, he made one of his then rare later appearances at Coalville Palais de Danse, when he defeated Dixie Kid, the coloured fighter from Wales, over 12 bloody rounds. Unfortunately, he lost his Southern area title to Jackie Peterson (Glasgow) in August 1939 when he was knocked out after 1 minute 55 seconds, in front of a crowd of 25,000 Glaswegian vociferous fans. He made a second appearance at the Palais de Danse in June 1936 when he fought Tut Walley of Hanley.

In 1947, the Minister of Supply, made a visit to Grieve's Needle Factory in Coalville, where he was introduced to Eric Jones, the infamous Coalville boxer who was in charge of a machine there, and learned of his fights with three world champions - Jackie Brown, Benny Lynch and Jackie Peterson, the current champion. Jones explained to the minister that he was taking three Coalville boxers to fight in Ireland next month, so presumably he had moved into boxing management by this time.

Some good boxing tournaments were held at the West End Club on Ashby Rd, Coalville and one in January 1934 held in front of a packed house was staged by Charlie Branson. The top liner fight was a bruising affair over 10 rounds between Bill Hardy (Barlestone) and George Thornton (Loughborough) which was won by the former, although not in his usual knock out manner, as it went the distance.

A memorable boxing occasion at Coalville occurred when Reggie Meen, the former heavyweight champion of Great Britain made an appearance at the Palais de Danse, Owen Street, when he met 16 stone Chic Knight of Bermondsey over 15 rounds in July 1936, which was promoted by Sam Betteridge. Result not known.

When I decided to research local boxing I did not expect to discover that **Griffydam** had its own pugilists. Those with an interest in the history of **Griffydam** will know of course about the considerable amount of local fighting which took place in this small village due to the excessive imbibing which often took place, particularly amongst the coal mining fraternity.

At Coalville's West end Club on the 20th February 1934, in front of a good crowd, on the programme was the 9 stone novices' competition for the cup given by Sir William Edge, M.P. **Joseph Kilby (Griffydam)** secured the verdict in his fight with **George Townsend (Griffydam)**, the referee accepting the towel thrown in from Townsend's corner in the second round. **George Dimmock (Griffydam)** beat Tim Moore of Loughborough on points. There was some wild swinging reported in a fight between **George Dimmock (Griffydam)** and George Kilby, the latter retiring in the second round. In the final, Jack Hannah (Groby) beat **George Dimmock (Griffydam)** on points.

On Sunday 19th August 1934, notwithstanding a storm of protest from some of the civic and religious leaders of the town, the first Sunday boxing exhibition was held at the Palais de Danse in Coalville in front of 1,500 supporters. The principal fight was a twelve rounder being between Eric Jones (Coalville) and Jock Atkin of Glasgow. This went the distance with Jones winning on points. **Sunday boxing at Coalville only lasted for two tournaments, as "The Lord's Day Observance Society" stepped in with a threat to sue under the "Lord's Day Observance Act".**

At the Palais de Danse, Owen Street, Coalville on the 30th May 1936, when Eric Jones topped the bill again, there was an eight round contest between **George Holland (Griffydam)** and Ike Hicklin (Breedon). Winner not known

Boxing matches were recorded as still taking place in Coalville in 1947 but they went on at the West End Club much later than that as the author can remember this as a young man. Amateur boxing was still recorded as taking place at Coalville Baths Hall in 1948.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION ON THE PALAIS DE DANCE, OWEN STREET

The Palais de Dance was probably the best known boxing and dance venue at Coalville in the mid 1930s and there is an earlier report of an attendance of 1,500 when Eric Jones fought Jock Atkin of Glasgow there in August 1934. It ceased to be a boxing venue when the owner of the building Mr. J. Eaton decided to turn it into a billiard hall in September 1936. This didn't last long as in 1937 the building was purchased by Cascelloid, the owners of Palitoy to make soft body dolls. A further three and half acres of land was purchased to the rear of the Palais de Danse where Cascelloid built a new factory. The Owen Street factory had a chequered and fascinating history, which is available to read on the Coalville Heritage website for those interested.