

Mickey Oates: Local boxer

by Barry Ryder, June 2015 [email]

In his posting of 29 April entitled 'Last Stall Holders', Keith Nichols invited readers to submit the names of any 'booth/prize/stall fighters' that they could recall. Unfortunately, I don't know of any. However - in the hope that Keith won't mind me slightly moving the goal-posts - I would like to offer some personal memories of a Walthamstow lad who was a professional boxer.

His name was **Mickey Oates** and he lived in Higham Hill. He was born in 1947 and his parents owned and ran the fish-and-chip shop which once stood at 315, Higham Hill Road. This is the shop (below) today.



Mickey enjoyed a brilliant junior and amateur career and in 1969 he made his professional debut at the age of twenty-two. He fought Sangster Dart in a lightweight contest at the Hilton Hotel in Mayfair. He won with a third-round knock-out.

I had known of - and followed - Mickey's fledgling career because his Mum and Dad's shop was only a few doors along the road from my Dad's butchers at number 307. This is how the old place looks today (below).



I often helped out in the shop after school and on Saturdays. One of my tasks was to pop along to the chippy and get grub for my Dad, myself and Billy Qaiffe who also worked in Dad's shop.

Over time, we got to know Mickey's Dad and we were soon getting fight-tickets from him. We were big fans of the young local hero.

After his debut, Mickey featured regularly on the bill at York Hall, Bethnal Green and at Shoreditch Town Hall. Fight fans will know of these venues and their place in London's rich boxing history. These were the fiery furnaces in which champions were forged. Our lad from Higham Hill was entirely at home there. My Dad, my uncle Percy (from Carr Road) and I, were usually there in the smoke-filled darkness urging him on.

The local Guardian avidly followed Mickey's progress and he was often on its sports pages. Better still, his burgeoning talent was attracting attention in much more exalted circles. This clipping from 'Boxing News' attests to the fact that Higham Hill had produced a sportsman of real prowess.

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9

southpaw six-rounds curtain-raiser,

LEE STOPS VISITOR RILEY

SHOREDITCH—January 13

ANOTHER crowded house saw another great night's fights when Jackie Lee, Hoxton (9.7½) beat Tony Riley, Coventry (9.10½) in the 7th round of the chief bout at Shoreditch Town Hall.

A bad cut near Riley's left eye was the cause of the stoppage but by then Lee had got well on top.

For the first half of the fight the Londoner made the pace in the early part of each round, but Riley was always coming back finding a flaw in Lee's defence and landing frequently with short sharp straight lefts to the head.

But Riley appeared to slow up at the end of the 4th. Lee, always going forward, throwing southpaw jabs and following lefts, had good rounds in the 5th and 6th and was chasing the Midlander all around the ring with combination punches to the head when the bout was stopped.

A perfect right hook by Tommy Glencross, Glasgow (9.5) to the chin of Pat Pain, Barking (9.6) ended their fight in the second round.

The punch had a delayed action effect. Pain slumping to the floor two or three seconds after being hit.

The Londoner gallantly just managed to beat the count but

Glencross followed up fiercely and dumped Pain for three more counts of eight before what had become an unequal contest was halted by referee Sid Nathan.

Micky Oates, Walthamstow (9.9¼) had to work hard to outpoint Tei Dovey, Ghana (9.9¾) by a score of 29¾-29¼ over six hard rounds.

With Dovey always ready to have a fight, Oates seemed to forget his superior boxing and went punch for punch with the Ghanaian. Referee Don Chandler contributed to the fight by letting the pair punch away at close range.

Micky Laud, St Ives (10.6½) beat slippery Mohammed Ellah, Ghana (10.9) by 29½-29¼ points after six hard rounds.

Laud was usually the governor but the Ghanaian was always ready to fight back.

John Waddingham, Islington (9.7½) had a rare old punch up before beating Pat Walsh, Ilford (10.1½) by 29¾-29 points in another six round bout.

Although Waddingham was the more versatile puncher Walsh was always going back at him throwing punches and trying to turn the tide.

Lex Wilson, Battersea (10.10) outpointed Les Ferdinand, Muswell Hill (10.9) by 29¾-29¼ points in the final hard hitting six round fight.

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Oates continued to grind out results until March, 1970. He then lost five out of his next six fights between that month and October of '71. He was climbing the ladder and the competition was becoming increasingly fierce.

The defeats had all been technical-knock-outs and Mickey's cuts weren't healing well enough. It's the curse of all boxers; No matter how hard you train, if you bleed anywhere around the eyes, referees will stop you even if your opponent can't.

Our lad from Higham Hill retired from the ring after two more losses in February and March of 1972. On both occasions he sustained cut eyes and was stopped.

At the close of his career he'd won nine and drawn two of his 18 professional bouts. It was no mean achievement. Boxing is, far-and-away, the most demanding of all sports. Nothing else comes close. Determination, strength, skill and courage are essential and Mickey had them all in abundance. What he didn't have was the good fortune to be blessed with skin as thick as a rhinoceros. Henry Cooper was similarly disadvantaged, of course.

Mickey's heroics will forever remain as one of my enduring Walthamstow memories.

Barry Ryder