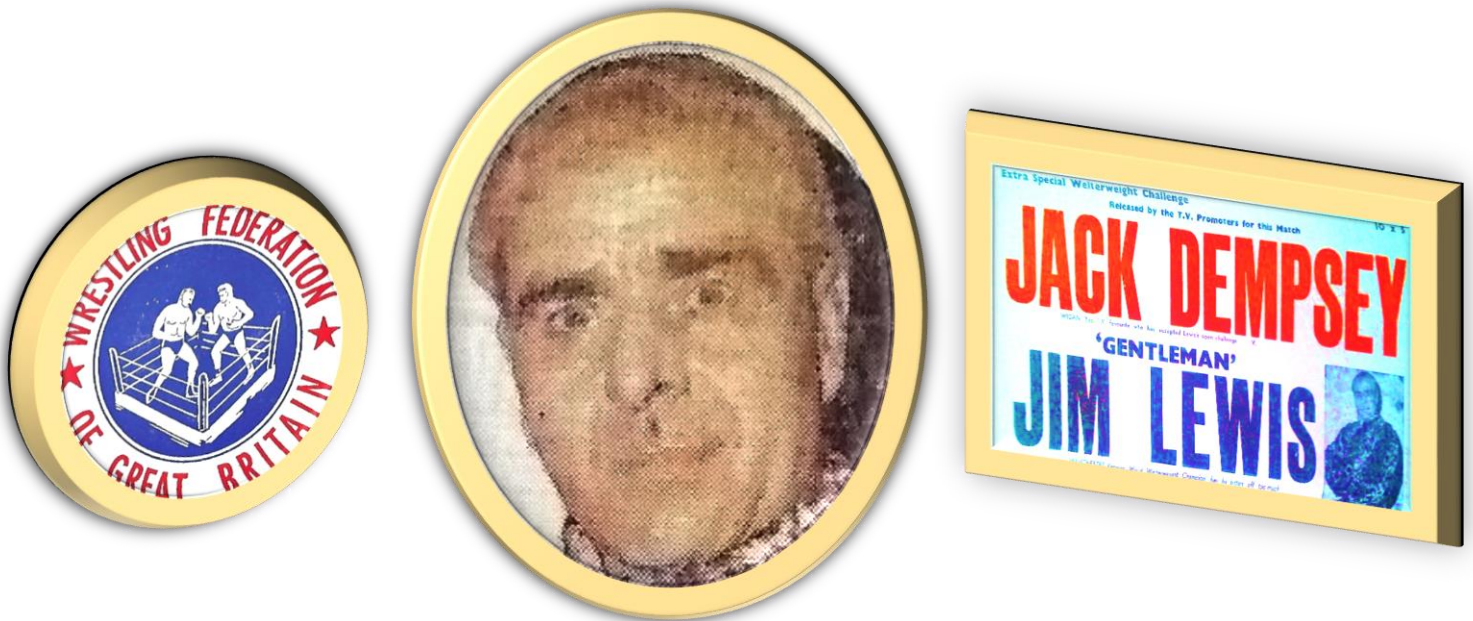


The Continuing Story of Gentleman Jim Lewis



The Story So Far :

Gentleman Jim Lewis did more than most to push the case of the indies in the sixties and seventies after the Joint Promotions doors were slammed shut in his face. But the amount of material available on this flamboyant champion belies his place in grappling history.

Wrestling Heritage recently published a tribute to Lewis on the anniversary of his birth, January 31 1917 with lovely quotes from colleague and friend Eddie Rose, memories from Bernard Hughes, together with a newspaper cutting from Jim's son and research from your fine Heritage team.

I've borrowed their shovels to try and dig even further into his history because along with Doctor Death this is the man who, for me anyway, epitomised the thrills and over-the-top, edgy presentation of the independents.

When Jim Lewis was on a bill you knew whatever happened that evening you'd get value for money from his appearance. Few could equal his ability to control a crowd. He knew exactly when and how to press the button to set the fans off ... and he did it night after night ... year after year.

The 'Facts' :

Not even Sherlock Holmes would have been able to fathom the truth or otherwise of information that came out of the glory days of UK wrestling. Some is fact. Some is clearly “wrestle-fact”. Some is the result of a memory playing tricks. And a great big dollop lies somewhere in the middle of that lot.



I've tried my best to dispense with the colourful material that is clearly business build-up stuff. But some of this will have undoubtedly seeped through. If that is the case, there's no harm done, I'm sure.

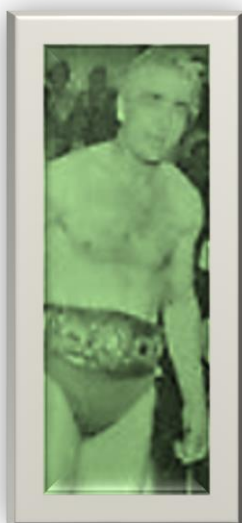
The Memories :

As a go-fer for Indy promoter Jack Taylor I got to see Gentleman Jim Lewis many times in the sixties.

He and Jack went back many years and were good pals. In the sixties and early seventies a vast amount of Jim's work was for Jack's International Promotions across the Midlands and East Anglia.

Jim was always billed as from Manchester, even when he moved down to Leicestershire, where Jack was also living. No-one would have expected his ring persona to be reflected in his out-of-ring character. And it wasn't. He helped many a young wrestler on their way.

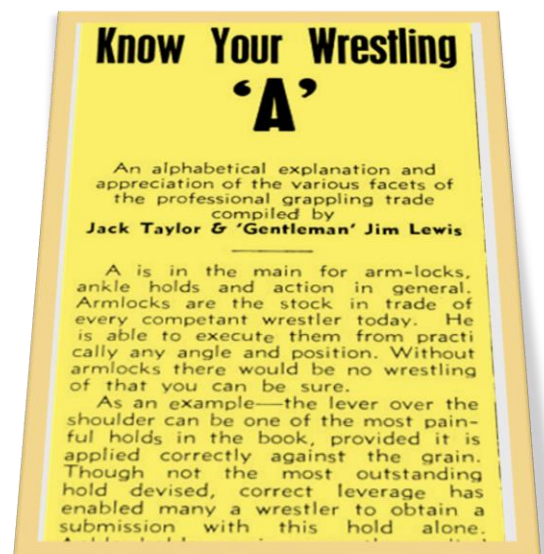
Like Jack he was always eager to promote the game. Not just through his own promotional activities, but over and above ring activities. For instance, he and Jack used to write a regular A-to-Z of wrestling for Ringsport (R) to keep all aspects of the business in the public eye.



I never saw Jim in action live until the sixties but I have to say that conventional wisdom among the guys working with Jack at that time was that his age in the mid-sixties indicated an even earlier birth date than 1917!

But either way, Jim was unmistakable until the time he 'retired'. Maybe a little slower ... but certainly he delivered the goods every time, whatever his age.

The fact of the matter is that throughout his career he remained the ultimate showman. Top of the bill or not, he was always a star. And he always looked the part.



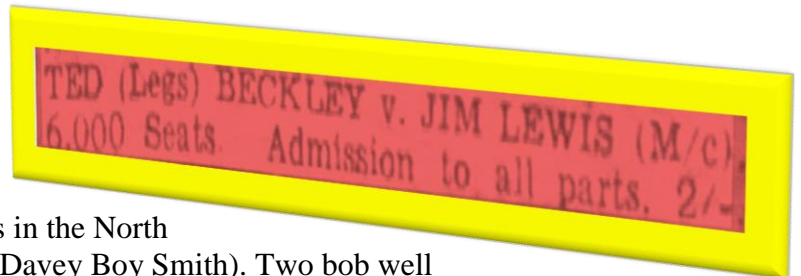
Career Highlights (... and some not so high) :

The Jim Lewis Heritage tribute traced his ring career back to 1940 when he was knocked out by Bill Ogden in Cheshire. I can't beat that, but I do agree he probably started out before his 23rd birthday. Anyone with evidence of a 30s appearance?

What is clear, though, is that he made a big name for himself in the forties and was very well established by the time the fifties rolled round.

Ron Historyo posted a fabulous 1942 Belle Vue line-up (R) that has Jim in against Ted Beckley.

(Beckley, of course, was also Ted Betley who later did Dr Death jobs in the North before training Dynamite Kid and Davey Boy Smith). Two bob well spent if you ask me, Ron!



Certainly as we enter the 50s Jim had cast more than an eagle eye on one Gorgeous George in the States (L). Jim was in good company to be influenced by George Wagner because, of course, one young Cassius Marcellus Clay was quite open about stealing Gorgeous George's 'act' and shouting about how great he was and what he was going to do to his opponent. It worked for him.

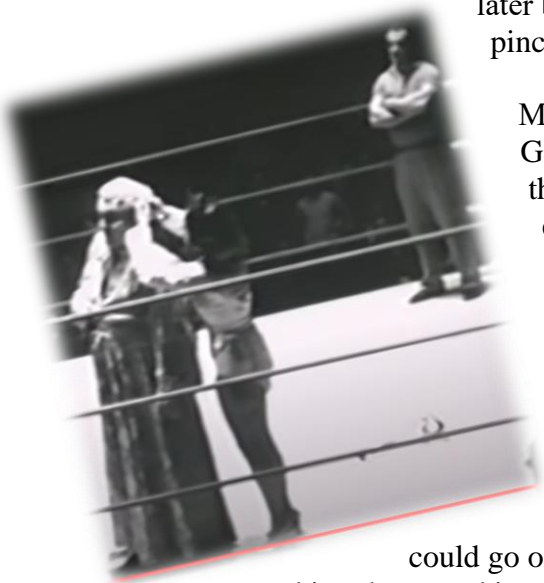
Jim was more interested in the 'camp' side of George (although 'camp' wasn't a word you heard much outside the Boy Scout world). Few who met Jim would have thought there was anything effeminate about him outside the ring. His training regime would have stumped many a younger man. (By the way, that remained the case for many years ...).

It was clearly quite a gamble to create a flamboyant camp character for the early 50s wrestling world. Remember, the likes of Adrian Street and Bobby Barnes would still be in primary school at this stage!

On this September 1952 flyer from Portadown (R) we read that our Jim is the owner of 100 dressing gowns. He is the "peroxide, manicured dandy of the mat." What's more ... it's the "most stupendous contest ever presented in Ireland."



George Wagner became Gorgeous George for the first time in 1941 in Oregon. Word travelled slower in those days, and it was a whole decade later before Jim Lewis took the 'Gentleman' handle and pinched bits of the act.



Mind you, he didn't go the whole hog. Gorgeous George had valets, one female and male, to spray the ring canvas with disinfectant before his entrance. When George did deign to climb through the ropes the female valet would remove his hairpins slowly (L) and he would rebuff the attempts by the referee, who'd been waiting patiently in a neutral corner, to search his hands and boot soles.

The pre-bout shenanigans could go on longer than most of his bouts, working the crowd into a frenzy even before the first bell sounded. But make no mistake about it; George Wagner was a talented wrestler. He had to be with an act like his. And Jim Lewis was one of the most skilled welterweights around in this country, too. Anyone who believed he was just a gimmick grappler would soon have second thoughts when seeing him in action.

So Jim, resplendent in this picture (R), brought a comb, mirror and sometimes even a powder-puff into the ring, often with his own valet leading him to the ring. This was quite something for the UK at the time. The gowns had to be folded carefully. He wouldn't be rushed. He would stop to 'do' his hair in the middle of rounds and was never lost for retorts when the crowd turned on him verbally ... and, often, physically.

It's the early fifties and he's in demand. The Jim Smith Championship Belt bounced around between Gentleman Jim, Jack Dempsey, Alan Colbeck and Fred Woolly (R) taking part in numerous title attempts. Jim's turn was in September '53, beating Colbeck in Portsmouth.

Jack Dempsey would play a big part in Jim's wrestling life. They faced each other many, many times over the years not only through the fifties but into the sixties, too. Jim always claimed a televised knockout victory over Dempsey but I've not had much luck establishing the veracity of that one. (There was a televised victory over Jeff Kaye, though, much later in 1965).

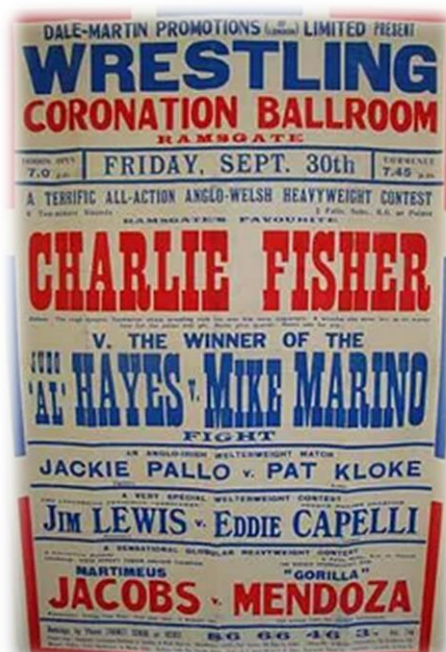
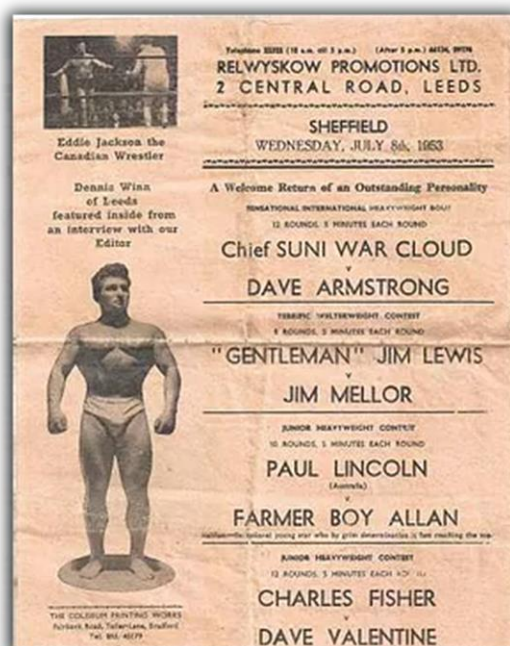


QUESTION FOR FORUM FANS : Was Alan Colbeck the busiest wrestler of the glory days in the UK? Every wrestler I research from this era seems to have been in the ring with him! Big and small. Was there anyone he didn't face? And has he really ever been given the proper recognition?

British titles were a world away from Jim's early days. He had trained as a boxer but switched sports after appearing on a mixed boxing and wrestling bill on the advice of his cousin, Harry Howarth, who was British Lightweight Champion. After losing to Alf Jenkins he decided to hang up his boots, until a chance meeting with Tommy Welsh, who was coach at the local YMCA in Manchester.

After weeks of proper training Jim was back in the ring ... this time for years to come. He used to say the money was pretty poor, but being a wrestler back then was really something.

The Charlie Fisher collection in Wrestling Heritage includes a couple of 50s posters that show Lewis on the same bill. The Relwykow show was 1953 and the Dale Martin line-up in Ramsgate is from 1955 ... (note the humble position of Mr Pallo ...)

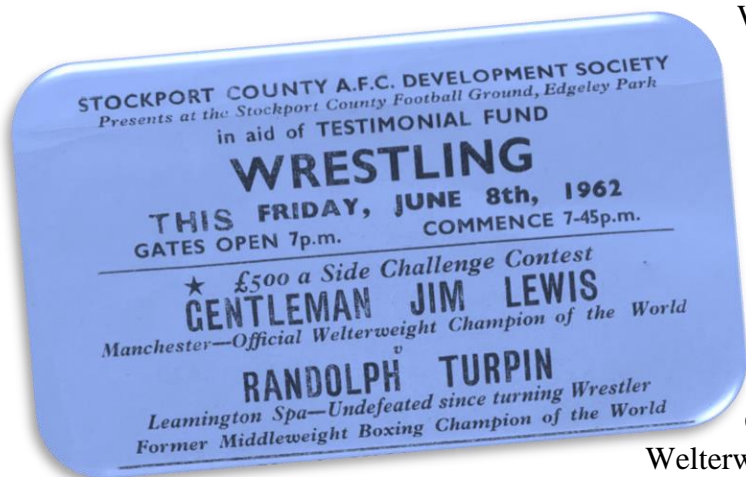


Jim wanted to go north of the border, and when he did get to Scotland he was on the same bill as Johnny Kwango's big brother, Black Butcher Johnson. They got on like a house on fire and Butcher took Jimmy out with him to France and Spain to widen his ring education even further.

French and Spanish wrestlers did a lot of to-ing and fro-ing with their English counterparts at that time.

Wrestlers like Paul Debusse from Paris, and the stand-out villain Black Shirt (Blouson Noir) tagger, Marcel Manneveau, facing Gentleman Jim on this Norman Morrell bill from King George's Hall in Blackburn in 1957.





With Jim on the bill the promoters knew the punters would go home happy. Time after time Lewis would get his marching orders ... and the scrap against former boxing champ Randolph Turpin (L) was no exception. Lewis helped train Turpin, among many others. Messrs McManus, and Pallo joined Dempsey and Colbeck on the list of vanquished.

According to 'wrestling-titles' Gentleman Jim Lewis held the World

Welterweight Championship three times in all, the first time was in 1954 in Hull when he beat champion

Fernando Bawin.

Lewis always maintained he made such a fuss when it was announced that Bawin (R) was coming over to defend the title against Colbeck ... because Lewis had just beaten Colbeck ... that promoters allowed him to step in and take on the champion. It went fifteen rounds and Lewis was carried back to the dressing room shoulder high.

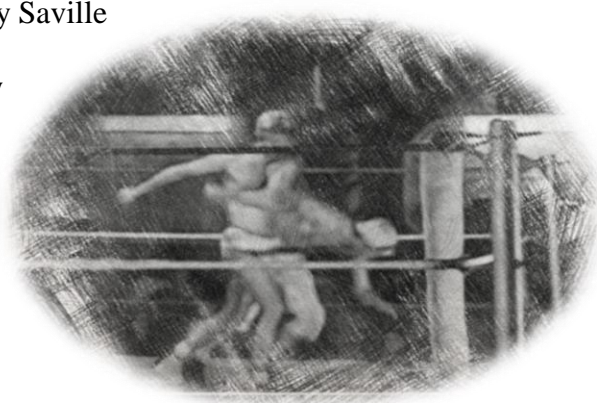


When Bolton-born Ivan Penzecoff (L) was ready to make his debut the promoters needed a top-notch who could make the youngster look good (but not too good!). "Send for Lewis" was often the call when a good tutor was needed.

Ivan's first bout was a loser against Gentleman Jim. The two would later tag together for Joint, forming a pretty formidable team.

One career swerve that I'm sure he would rather regret was that he helped train disgraced DJ Jimmy Saville to wrestle. Saville never won a bout and bemoaned the fact that the grappling fraternity gave him a proper hiding at every opportunity.

Read Adrian Street on the topic and you'll know that was most certainly the case. Jim Lewis didn't hold back either when he agreed to be Saville's first professional opponent (R). He really put the gold boot in. Saville said afterwards : "The man has a temper fuse as long as his thumb nail!"





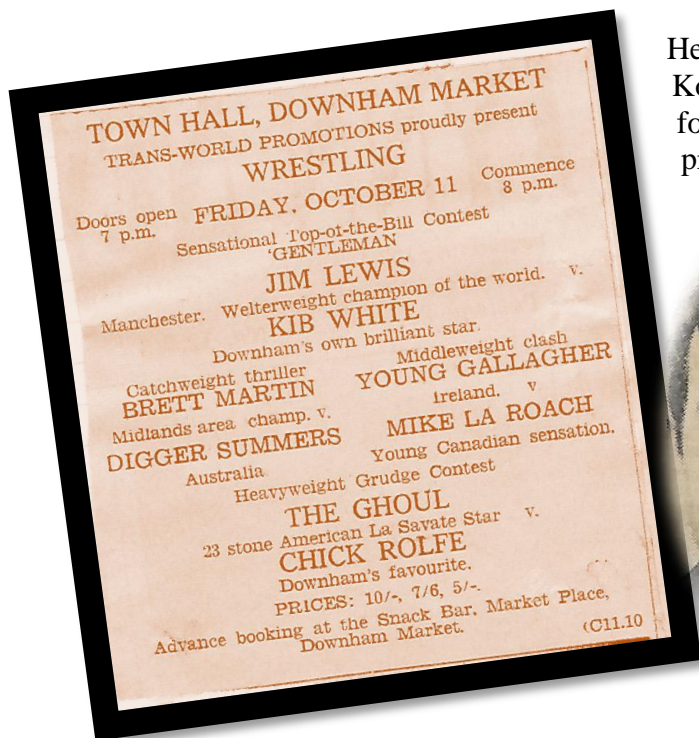
Jim's taste of televised wrestling for Joint Promotions left him furious. He didn't realise how little people were paid for providing what was high rating TV.

So he formed the short-lived Wrestlers' Union and from that point relations with Joint became so strained that Jim finished his career with the indies ... mostly with his mate Jack Taylor.

Many of his appearances were around the Midlands and East Anglia region, where Jack operated. In February 1966, just 16 months on from his televised win against Jeff Kaye, Jim was part of team to take indy wrestling to Wisbech Corn Exchange for the first time (R).

The promoter was 20th Century Promotions, headed by Max Crabtree with a helping hand from Jack Taylor. Dale Martin had failed to fill the Corn Exchange so they had pulled out.

Lewis must have allowed himself a wry smile when he saw how the independent bill had packed the hall to bursting point. His own bout, with Lance Morgan, ended in a seventh round knock-out win for the Gentleman.



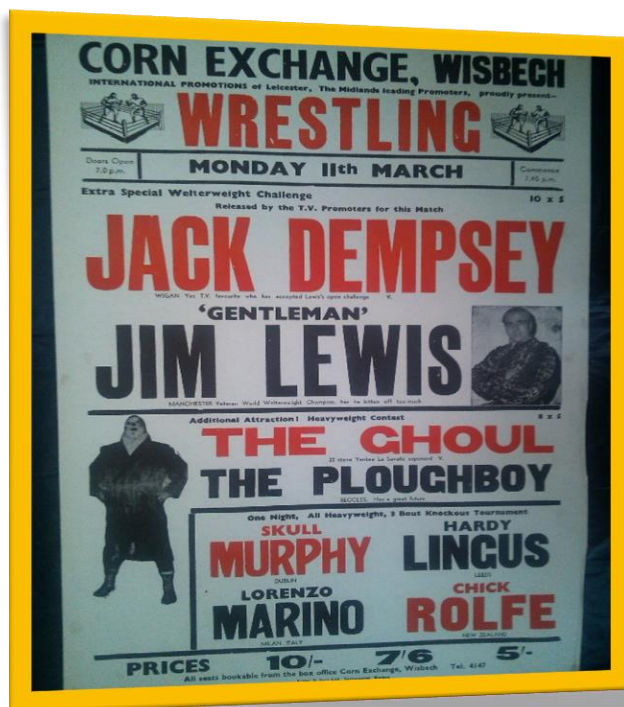
He turned out for the notorious Sandor Kovacs Mk II, the late Terry Goodrum (L) for his Trans World Presentations presentations, too, across the Fens.



Here in Downham Market he's facing Goodrum himself (L) billed as local boy Kib White.

This was the name he used for a few years before dressing up Bill Clark in a King Kendo outfit and getting into all sorts of legal bother.

The feud with Jack Dempsey continued through the 60s. These two put on one hell of a show. Hardly surprising given the number of times they faced each other, of course. But these were two pros who knew the lot. There wasn't much you could teach either of them about crowd-pleasing and sheer ring skill.



Jack Taylor's

shrine was the Granby Halls in Leicester. Granby's not there any more. It was the scene of fantastic pop concerts, including the Beatles a couple of times, and some of the best indy wrestling you could wish for.

Jack used Jim Lewis at Granby as often as was wise. Not always as a bill-topper, but Jim was always there for the big event. Take a look at these two line-ups and you get a feel for the way the best indy promotions went up against their TV rivals ...



Two more Lewis bills next. Jack's never far away. And we've got one of Jack's best protégés going in against Jim .. Loughborough's only Dane, the great Cliffe Milla ..



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DOWNHAM, BROMLEY, DOWNHAM TAVERN, DOWNHAM WAY
BIG-TIME * ALL-STAR * INTERNATIONAL

WRESTLING

No Connection with Previous Promotions Here

THURSDAY 11th JULY

Two Fantastic Tags 12 Wrestler Spectacular Four Bouts In All

'GENTLEMAN' JIM LEWIS v **TONY CORTEZ**
MANCHESTER, Greater Area, England v SOUTH LONDON, West End, Tag Team

LORD JOHN BELLINGHAM v **JACK TAYLOR**
MANCHESTER, Greater Area, England v SOUTH LONDON, West End, Tag Team

THE SHEIK v **HYMIE ISRAEL**
DASHING SUMMERIA v KURT VON HIMMLER

THE UNDERTAKERS MYTHIAS & HICKORY vs **THE IRISH SHAMROCKS** MICK COLLINS & MAHONEY

Dashing MICK COLLINS & MAHONEY

12/6 : 10/- : 7/6 : 5/-

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FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, at 8 p.m.
Wet or Fine 1,500 excellent covered seats.
Tremendous Scoop!!

15 x 5 WORLD WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP
GENTLEMAN JIM LEWIS v **CHALLENGER CLIFFE MILLA**
The Champion. Victories over Fallo, McManus, Dempsey. Denmark. Top-line continental challenger.

Italy versus Gt Britain — **Tag-Team Sizzler**
VINCENT AURALIO from Caserta, and **TAFFY JENKINS** v **CHRIS McMANUS** from London's tough starlet.

Boxer v Wrestler
MICK DALBY (Loughboro') v **SHEIK ABDUL SINGH** Anglo/Arab Yogist, v **GERNHART BOND** S. Africa. **ADOLPH DABROWSKI** The Polish Strongman

POPULAR PRICES: 10/-, 8/6, 6/6, 4/-
Advance Reservations at the King's Lynn F.C. Offices, The Walks, King's Lynn; 41 St. James' Street; 20 London Road.

A quick look now at some of the bills from Wisbech, where Jim almost set the Corn Exchange alight with his rule-bending and arrogance. His feud with Jack Taylor really

gripped the imagination of the fans. And we've got a shot of Jack pulling off the winning fall in one of their encounters.

CORN EXCHANGE WISBECH
INTERNATIONAL PROMOTIONS of Leicester proudly present—

WRESTLING

MONDAY 18th DECEMBER

Sensational Tag-Team Knock-Out Tournament

Team No. 1 THE UNTOUCHABLES **Team No. 2 MEXICAN STARS**

RIOT SQUAD JIM LEWIS v **GONZALES BROTHERS** PANCHO MANUEL

BROTHER DEATH v **MISTER X**

VINCENZO AURALIO v **TAB WHITE**
CASERTA, v KING'S LYNN

LORENZO MARINO v **GERNHART BOND**

THREE TAG MATCHES ALL ON THE SAME NIGHT

PRICES 10/- 7/6 5/-

All seats bookable from the box office Corn Exchange, Wisbech Tel. 4147

CORN EXCHANGE, WISBECH
INTERNATIONAL PROMOTIONS of Leicester, The Midlands leading Promoters, proudly present—

WRESTLING

MONDAY 12th FEBRUARY

Secured at Last... weight Championship

KEVIN CONNEALLY v **JACK TAYLOR**

SHEIK ABDUL SINGH v **'GENTLEMAN' JIM LEWIS**

KAMIKAZE & CHANG v **BRITT VARTZ**

LORD 'SNOOTY' MONK

CORN EXCHANGE WISBECH
INTERNATIONAL PROMOTIONS of Leicester proudly present—

WRESTLING

MONDAY 20th NOVEMBER

WORLD NO. 1 TAG TEAM IN INDIVIDUAL CONTESTS

UNDER-TAKERS MATHIAS v HICKORY

LORENZO MARINO v **TAFFY JENKINS**

PANCHO GONZALES v **GENTLEMAN JIM LEWIS**

SKULL MURPHY v **PLOUGH-BOY**

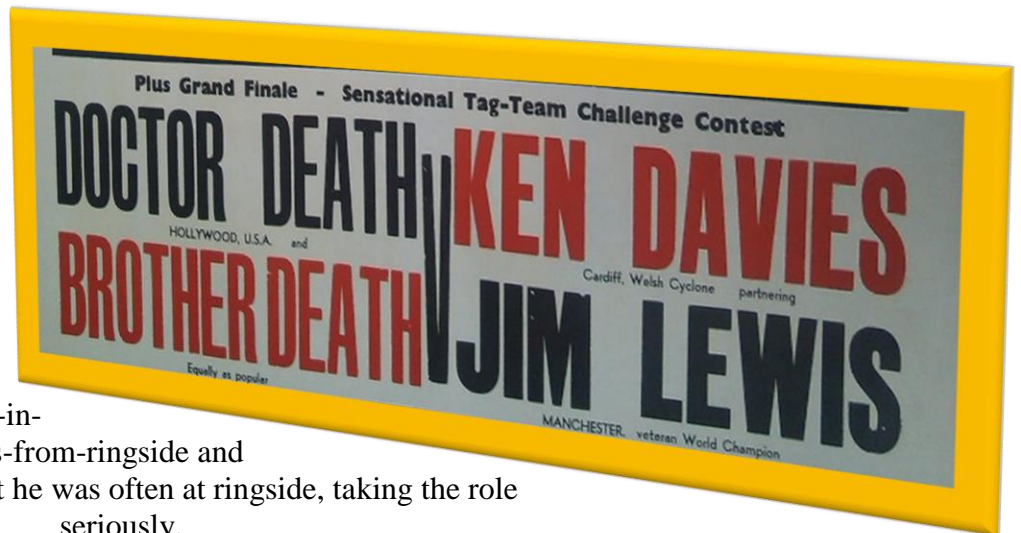
PRICES 10/- 7/6 5/-

All seats bookable from the box office Corn Exchange, Wisbech Tel. 4147

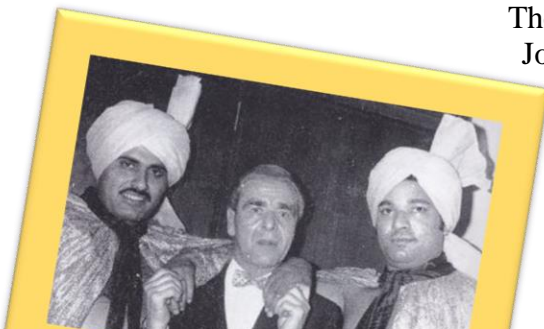
Right – Jack Taylor takes a winning fall over Jim Lewis, with Lord Snooty Monk the referee



Jim always swore he'd never hang up his gold boots, but as he wound down he took on the role of manager. He looked the part although, surprisingly, he never turned the role into an American-style, jump-in-the-ring, grab-the-legs-from-ringside and shouting the odds. But he was often at ringside, taking the role seriously.



The first wrestlers he took under his belt were Armjit and Joginda (known as Joga) Singh. They were both light-heavyweights. Armjit was heavier and, at 28, four years older than Joga. They were cousins. Training base was the Victoria Hotel in Leciester, where Jim taught them his speciality rolling arm lever submission. A little later the duo were joined by two more distant relatives, Jajit and Jagir Singh, both middleweights. The Bengal Tigers were born.



Although Jim shunned managerial ringside antics he did often appear on the same bill as his protégés, and here's a flyer from Jack Taylor's Granby Halls where Jim appeared with whole tribe. Quite a bill, with Cowboy Jack Cassidy and Killer Ken Davies, Lord Bertie Topham (apparently without valet Ponsomby!), Jack Dempsey and Jack's younger brother, Young Raymond. (And I see I could have presented the flyer to get a shilling off the seat price ... for the teenagers, that's five new pence!)



GRANBY HALLS LEICESTER

THIS SATURDAY 20th APRIL at 8.p.m.

BIG TIME ★ ALL STAR ★ INTERNATIONAL
WRESTLING
★ THE SPECTACULAR of SPECTACULARS ★

Gentleman
JIM LEWIS and his INDIAN TEAM
versus
REST OF THE WORLD

Jim Lewis	v	Jack Dempsey
Jajit Singh	v	Young Raymond
Joga Singh	v	LORD Bertie Topham
Armjit Singh	v	Cowboy Cassidy
Jagir Singh	v	Ken Davies

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Saturday night offer. ONE SLIP PER PERSON

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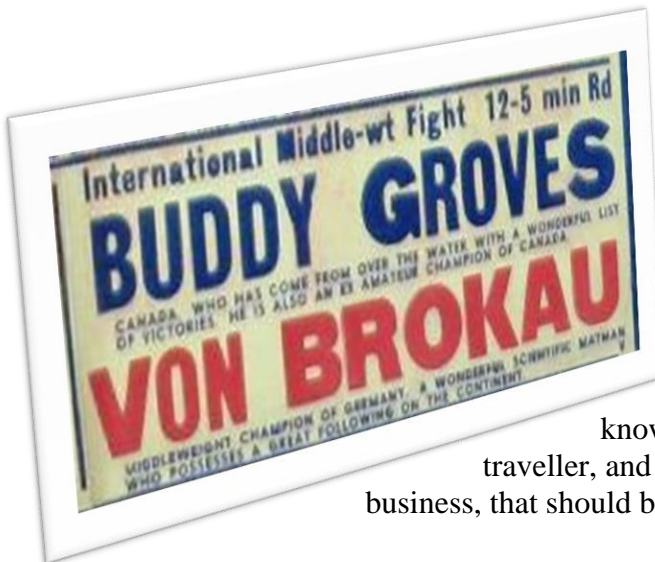




The Refereeing Rector, the Rev Reginald Thompson (L), interviewed Jim Lewis for the Wrestling Review in the sixties. Obviously many of the answers and observations were purely to promote names and venues, but I think we can find one or two interesting tit-bits within.

What about his heroes? An interesting list of icons. They included :

- American **Frank Sexton**, world heavyweight champion from 1945 to 1950 ;
- London's pride, **Bert Asserati**, multiple British Champ and the scourge of Shirley Crabtree ;
- **Carl Van Wurden**, the Canadian who headlined in the 30s and 40s, who eventually moved to Lewis's home city of Manchester and who became one of the first masked wrestlers as the Green Asp ;
- The original **Flash Barker**, Canadian speedway star and glamour-boy wrestler who crossed the pond and wowed UK audiences.
- **Harry Rabin**, a hero in the 30s who had a spectacular fall-out with Jack Dale. That would endear him to Jim!
- **Wild Tarzan**, another prolific 30s/40s performer, and **The Farmer** (I guess that's George Broadfield) also get honourable mentions.



Asked which wrestler gave him the hardest time, the answer was an interesting one. You'd have to be really tough if Jim Lewis said you were tough ... and who is the man who gave him most trouble? The answer is a big name from the 40s. **Red (Von) Brokau**. Billed as from Germany but he eventually settled in Jim's city of Manchester. He was

known for being a hard worker and quite a traveller, and if Jim Lewis says he was the business, that should be good enough for anyone.

As far as up-and-comers were concerned he mentioned **Al Miquet**, **John Monk** (R), who wrestled for Jack as Lord Snooty Monk, and **Jager Singh** from the Punjab, a nod to his future career as a manager. And who did he have respect for among the wrestlers of the day? Not many. Just one. **Dangerous Danny Lynch**. "They hate him, but he never fails to give value for money," said Jim. **He could have been talking about himself. RIP.**

