



Fanpower

Without the fans there would be no stars, no wrestling, there would be no Heritage.

Grizzled Veteran

A valued member and friend of Heritage for many years before his death in November, 2014.

It was Tuesday 27 August 1957; I was just 12 years old and frankly had no idea what I was going to see.

Bear in mind that at that time it was very much an adult's world, at 12 you were still considered a child and I don't think teenagers had been invented.

We didn't have a television at home, and whilst I followed boxing it was only through the papers. What boxing I had seen was short pieces on title changes in the Pathe News at the cinema. Wrestling wasn't reported, neither were there any magazines that I was aware of.

My Granddad had become interested in Wrestling whilst in Hong Kong and the Far East before the First World War, and had regularly attended the famous Blackfriars Ring in London, before it's destruction. He and my Uncle used to talk glibly about good old Charlie, Tony, and that Mick's a bit of a lad. As though they were friends or workmates. Only later did it become apparent this was Fisher, Mancelli, and McManus.

Anyway I can only presume that some sort of family decision had been made that my cousin and I who were exactly the same age were now old enough to be exposed the sport.

We travelled to Barnhurst Residents Club in the back of Uncle Ray's delivery van, got our programs and went in. The Club, a glorified village hall, was set out in the traditional way

with rows of folding chairs around the ring, there was a general hubbub, a thick smoky atmosphere, and I didn't see any other children. We settled in our seats about four rows back, on the end by an aisle. (Little knowing that was the wrestlers route to the ring!)

There was a lot of noise and movement, then the light went on over the ring, but no one took any notice. Then two men, one small and dressed in black, the other short and rotund dressed in a dinner suit, strolled down the aisle and climbed into the ring where they just milled about and chatted to one another. The incomparable Lou Marco and Sammy King our M.C. for the night.

Then suddenly the hall lights went out, all noise stopped, and the atmosphere was electric. Especially for those of us who didn't know what was going on yet!

Sammy King welcomed us on behalf of Dale Martin and announced one substitution, Eddie Saxon for Dennis Warnes, and immediately walking down the aisle were two burly men. It was starting!

I have to say, that of course there was no music, the wrestlers all wore M & S dressing gowns like your dad, occasionally with a small towel wrapped round their neck, black trunks and shoes, they walked to the ring and stood in their corner until they were introduced.

That first contest was Paul Lincoln (yes that Paul Lincoln) V's Eddie Saxon, which ended with a k.o.win for Lincoln in the second round.

Before we could get our breath back, this low roar rose from the crowd behind us and gradually rose into a volley of abuse. I turned to see the biggest meanest man I had ever been near scowling and snarling his way down the aisle, followed by a blond, boyish man who seemed considerable smaller. Once in the ring they were introduced as Johnny Yearsley and Judo Al Hayes respectively. Once the bell rang it was mayhem until Hayes eventually subdued Yearsley with some sort of rabbit punch and knee lift combination to win by k.o.

By then it was the interval and I was transfixed, I wanted to go to the loo, but didn't want to leave the safety of my seat in case I bumped into a disgruntled Yearsley en-route. Nevertheless we went and were back into our seats for the main event.

This was the extremely popular and local Charlie Fisher vs. Norman Walsh. Charlie was one of my granddads favourites and I suspect his appearance in the main event may have influenced the choice of that night for our first taste of wrestling. The bout ran the full six rounds and ended a one fall apiece draw, by which time I was as vocal and involved as anyone in the hall.

Our evening was brought to an end by another four round contest where the evergreen Jack Cunningham beat Chic Purvey by two falls by one.

We tumbled out into the night, back into the van and away home. I knew then I was hooked, as couldn't wait to go again. I had to wait until November when strangely Norman Walsh was once again top of the bill, however that's another story.