

THE GOLDEN YEARS OF WISBECH CORN EXCHANGE (Seventh and Final Round)



25) The Story So Far

We've taken the rollercoaster ride of wrestling promotion at Wisbech Corn Exchange from the early sixties when Dale Martin tried, but failed, to fill the hall. The major

criticism was the failure to bring their biggest TV names to the Fens after an initial burst of stars. Max Crabtree then gave it a go and did reasonably well, but moved out after three shows to hand things over to Jack Taylor's International Promotions (right). These proved to be the golden years. Short but sweet. JT moved on while he was still ahead, and then Bill Clark (left, as King Kendo) took over and struggled to put

bums on seats. He provided excellent entertainment but fading former TV stars did not float the boat of the average Wisbech fan.

Bill moved on across smaller halls in East Anglia. Given the last lot of takings, would anyone take up the reins and erect a wrestling ring in Wisbech ever again?



Now read on

26) A Gamble Too Far?

A month before the seventies were ushered in, a company called Continental Promotions (not to be confused, I think, with Dropkick Johnny Peters' business) prepared to put on a show in Wisbech. A long string of warning bells were set off in my mind

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THE WARNING BELLS:

- 1) They were not proposing to use the Corn Exchange, which was a fabulous wrestling venue.
- 2) They intended to use the Wisbech Tower Hall, totally unsuitable for wrestling. It was a room, not a sports venue. But presumably much cheaper.
- 3) Their top-of-the-bill match was a return match from a couple of years earlier between John Romeiro and Sheik Mike Taylor. I could not think of a return match that would be less expected or wanted ... let alone welcomed. But presumably not expensive.
- 4) They did not advertise in either of the local papers, which at that stage were the main ... and only serious ... source of whats-ons. Well, that saved some cash!
- 5) Only a few posters went up ... late in the day. I'm surprised they went that far throwing cash around.
- 6) They wouldn't take any notice of me although I tried to help with a wee bit of free publicity and as much enthusiasm as I could muster. The article is re-printed here (above). It was free publicity for sure, but it only gave fans a couple of days' notice.

So what could possibly go wrong? The Wisbech Standard report (below) set out the tale of woe very well. Seventy people turned up. The wrestling was awful (difficult to think it could be otherwise with no atmosphere).

ONLY 70 SPECTATORS

NEW promoters, a new venue ... and about 70 spectators. In short this was the sum total of events when wrestling returned to Wisbech on Monday after nearly a year's absence. And judging by the fans' reactions it will be many moons before another promoter dares to serve up this type of entertainment in Wisbech again. To say the wrestling was poor would be a compliment. The entertainment value was almost nil, and long before the end many of the fans were demanding their money back. The wrestling was held in the confined spaces of the upstairs room at Tower Hall.

WRESTLING

A spokesman for Continental Promotions, who staged the wrestling, thought there was a possibility of trying again in Wisbech — but not in the near future. She commented that many fans were under the impression that the wrestling was taking place at the Corn Exchange, and as a result thought wrongly that the promotion had been cancelled. They had not advertised in the local Press.

'Grudge' fight at Wisbech

A RETURN grudge fight to stir the memories of Wisbech wrestling fans high-lights the programme when grappling returns on Monday.

The new venue is Tower Hall, Wisbech, and topping the bill is a bout between Lynn wrestler Sheik Abdul Singh, also known as Sheik Mike Taylor, and Doctor Death's former tag partner Johnny Romeiro.

These two last met at Wisbech on September 25, 1987, when Romeiro clambered out of the ring and refused to continue his fight with the Sheik.

Romeiro was giving his opponent a very rough time until the Arab yogi produced his infamous "Death Chop".

Safety

It was at this point that Latin American point that Romeiro jumped out of the ring and headed for the safety of the dressing room.

The Sheik figured in quite a few programmes that season, at one stage being pitted

Romeiro is no stranger to Wisbech fans either, and the fight that he is best remembered for occurred on May 8, 1987, when he dared to cross swords with his former partner masked Doctor Death. After a fierce tussle Romeiro failed to beat the count in the sixth round.

Many actually demanded their money back. However bad things had got in the past, no-one EVER felt they should demand their money back. So this was indeed an historic day in the Wisbech wrestling calendar.

And that put the lid on Wisbech grappling for many years But, my friends, this is not quite the end of the story.

27) Give Us A Break!

Hopefully you now have a fair idea of what the average Wisbech wrestling fans wanted. They wanted excitement, dedication, controversy, thrills something to shout about ... and something to look forward to in the next show.

It appears Dale Martin learned little from their experiences in the sixties ... because in the eighties they tried again ... with a few shows ... but just one main selling point. And the big sell Who else? Big Daddy.



Wisbech had been held at four different venues. That must be some sort of a record.

By the mid to late eighties it was clear that the antics many of the TV wrestlers who appeared week after week were pushing the sport in one direction only. Trying to sell Big Daddy to the fans at Wisbech was almost a microcosm of what was happening nationally.

These shows were not runaway successes.

DMP tried two different new venues, and that meant the last four wrestling promotions at

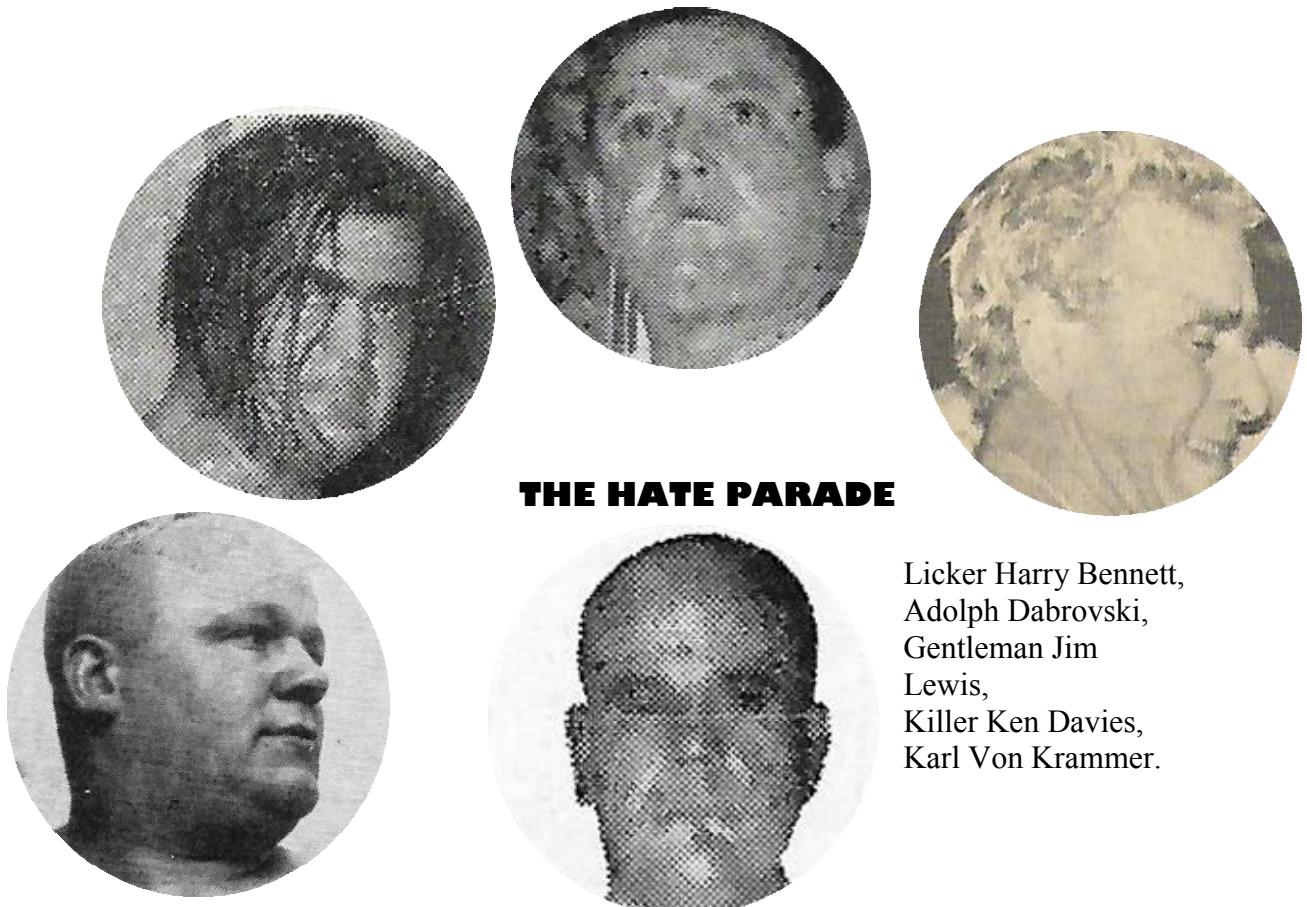
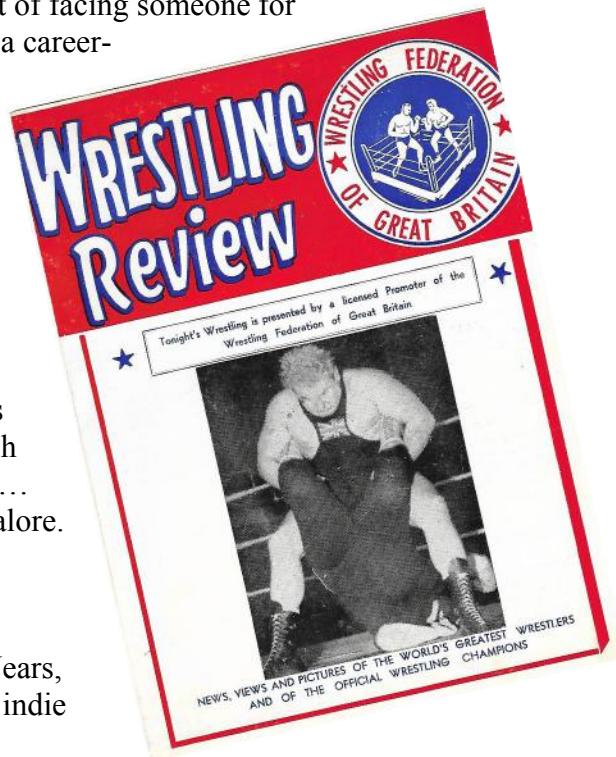
Wisbech fans remembered when Shirley Crabtree COULD wrestle. They SAW him. (*See the Wrestling Review below*). Why would they want to see this shadow of that wrestler calling himself Big Daddy? Would they really turn up to see big guys becoming inexplicably terrified at the prospect of facing someone for whom climbing through the ropes looked like a career-ending effort?

Not for Wisbech the slick Dale Martin approach. They wanted the edginess of the indies, when you got a feeling that anything really could happen. INDIES 1 JOINT 0.

So that was that for the Golden Years. There would be future shows featuring the UK's answer to Hulk Hogan or Kane and Co. But as far as the Golden Years are concerned Wisbech Corn Exchange wrestling fans had been there ... done that ... in full voice ... with memories galore.

28) Memories Are Made Of This

Looking back at the Corn Exchange Golden Years, the Heroes and Villains were the cream of the indie circuit in the in the south and east.



Licker Harry Bennett,
Adolph Dabrovski,
Gentleman Jim
Lewis,
Killer Ken Davies,
Karl Von Krammer.

THE HERO ROLLOF HONOUR



Dwight J Ingleburgh, Jack Taylor, Mick Collins, Taffy Jenkins
and the 1967 Doctor Death

Perhaps the way to round off these memories of Wisbech Corn Exchange is to hand things over to the man who ran its Golden Years. Jack Taylor. One of the hardest working, dedicated, helpful and talented men on the wrestling scene post-war. So many wrestlers owe their careers to him.

I lost track of Jack after the 70s, but caught up again with him in 2001. The Daily Mail had done an article about him, which he regarded as a bit of a hatchet-job. But it meant I could get his address from their newsdesk and catch up with him again. He wrote the following letter to me And I think his views are worth sharing. It's a reflection on the state of the game at that time. There's no ranting. Just a measured look at what was good in the game ... and what brought it down.

I'm sure he would not have minded me sharing this with Heritage fans, so I am reproducing it here. (Remember that this is way before spell-correct and computers ..)

So, over to you, Jack Thank you for the memories

Jack Taylor. Gentleman and Wrestling Scholar RIP

Martin Campbell 2020

24th Jan 2001

Dear Martin,

Many thanks for your letter and it is always nice to hear from people who were involved in the wrestling in the old days, like yourself. That article in the Daily Mail incidentally resulted in me receiving 47 letters and at least 100 phone calls from all parts of the UK. However, Martin, the reply to that question which I did was decimated by someone at the mail to only skirt around what I had written. I suppose it served their purpose, but I started off with the fact that after 33 years of ITV coverage (with in the main, inferior wrestlers!!!) once the tele had ceased, so the wrestling itself declined, due of course to the fact that the old style promoters who really had a grip on the wrestlers, were retiring or dead, and thus the people managing the business now had no control whatsoever, the lads did as they liked, converted with the punters, drank openly at the bar giving a bad image.....within ten years the business was done for. I got out incidentally just before it came off television, we still had very good houses, promoted mainly throughout the Midlands, and in Wales and Scotland and down in Cornwall. Our best venue of course was the Granby Halls here in Leicester, 2000 fans congregated there every saturday night and that Hall ran for fifteen long years. Sadly the Halls have now been demolished. Wisbech, I don't recall ever having a bad house there. Though the wrestling continued throughout the year, in summer mainly at the Holiday resorts, the season commenced in September. In those days September and October were difficult months as in the Fen district the fog was impossible. I recall going to March on one occasion, we set off two hours early, arrived there at 8pm, should have started at 7.45pm, our car load of four wrestlers the only ones there. The ring was there, we were still awaiting a car load from Yorkshire with Harry Bennett (remember him) etc and as I pulled up at the Hall, I thought crikey, there's going to be no one in tonight, it was a real pea souper, couldn't see a hand in front of you. However, after gaining entry by the stage door, peering through the stage curtain, I was astonished to see the Hall packed to capacity and one kind gent had organised a 'sing song' to keep the fans spirits up. Those were the days Martin. Bennett and the other four lads did arrive by 8.30 and the show went on as usual, the crowd really appreciated the lads efforts to get there.

My answer to that question in the Daily Mail. I covered how the new professional wrestling started off, with the likes of Bert Assirati, Athol Oakley, Langevin, Dave Armstrong, Bert Mansfield, Jack Pye etc etc, then the war intervened, followed by a new breed of promoter....Norman Morrell, Dale Martin, Relwyskow, Ted Berresford, the Wright Brothers. Within a few years they made the business a closed shop, stopping others from promoting.....I had just come out of the forces, had initially worked for Morrell and Berresford, was previously an Olympic Style amateur wrestler....NO good for the professionals, I was too stiff and not entertainment orientated. I came from Lancashire, after the Forces went to live in the Midlands, I married a Nottingham girl and finally settled at Loughborough where I became Sports & Social Officer to the Engineering company, Herbert Morris Cranes. It was then I met Margery Assirati Bert's wife. The big Promoters had stopped using Bert, he would not do as he was told, and was too expensive, that's when I came into the picture as a promoter. It was Bert who turned me from a rank real wrestler to a professional entertainer.

The first lot of promoters became Joint Promotions, we started an alternative organisation, the Independants, and through this so I met Shirley Crabtree and his business partner Norman Berry, they were going bust with their half a dozen shows in Yorkshire. They used my men and that started the boom for them too. The likes of Spike O'Reilly, Roy La Rue, Cliffe Milla, Undertakers, Jim Lewis...Lewis incidentally had (then) been wrestling for thirty odd years. Unlike Boxing, wrestlers who worked every night, thus naturally kept themselves in condition. I never liked to see the beer bellied wrestlers, they brought I thought discredit to the game.

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Once the rot had set in, and television no longer propped up the business, the decline came rapidly as you can imagine.

My point about the old promoters. As a wrestler, you arrived at the Hall, went in inconspicuously, preferably by the back door.....and then you STAYED in the dressing room, until it was your turn to perform in the ring. I always got the constant gripe, the wrestling is bent!!! The general public don't know the half of it.

Rest assured, there were very competent wrestlers who could crip the normal man, and were proud to be trained at Wigan. And there were prime guys who really were super wrestlers....the more one trained the more competent he became. Back to this question about it being a fix. I, probably like you are a theatre buff, both amateurs and the pros. You go to see a production.....the ACTORS do not mix with the public, sit with them, have drinks with them. It is the difference between professionalism or otherwise. To become a STAR, means you become unobtainable. Thus when wrestlers started coveting with the public. The business was done for. That is my opinion. ✕

I have a column in a monthly Fanzine, published in Middlesborough and air my views and have many agree and disagree with me. Through the years I have also contributed to many Magazines both British and American on wrestling topics.

Several years ago I wrote a BOOK, Training to be a Wrestler. I completed it in book form and several so-called publishers had it for consideration. Turned out they were vanity publishers, wanting three grand to start the thing off with no guarantee to produce more than 500. Then I followed that up with another one on what goes on in the background of the wrestling. That too was not taken upif my name had been McManus, perhaps it would. I still write all sorts of articles and am always on the BBC Radio Leicester from time to time.

Well Martin, must stop now, my wife has been waiting for half an hour to get out to the shops and this letter will be mailed at the same time.

Been nice hearing from you.

Kind Regards,

Jack Taylor
Jack Taylor

Britain's Own JACK TAYLOR

ON THE RIGHT hailing Britain's own triple champion after spending a very successful Summer Season touring the coastal resorts.

Jack is ready and willing to defend his British Title against all challengers and for any sidestake.

Taylor, Lancastrian by birth—coming from Accrington, in his late thirties is fitter and faster than ever and will be a very hard man to beat. He has travelled extensively and has graduated the hard way like the first class paid wrestler has to do.

He never shirks any challengers, indeed welcomes the opportunity to test his increasing prowess on the mat, as one or two 'upstarts' have discovered to their dismay.

It will be interesting to see who the next lot of challengers will be for the Official title tries this winter season. Not only in the Lightwelterweight division, Taylor's own province—but in all other weight classifications too.

