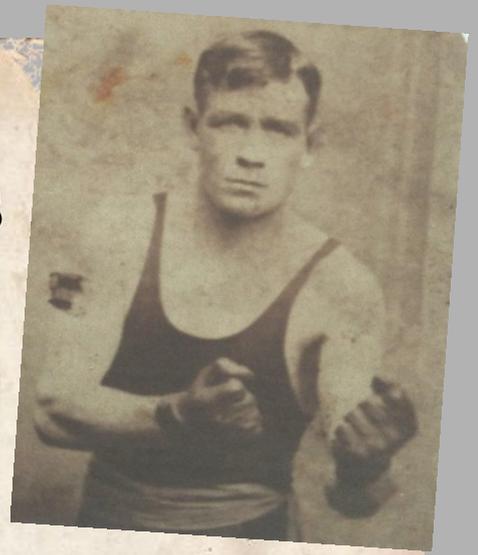


James William Travis



Jim Travis not only fought the Great War in the trenches, he was also fighting as a boxer.

Jim was born in 1892 and it wasn't long before his fighting skills came to the fore in the Arthur Street School playground.

He lived at 54 George Street, Grays with his parents James and Sarah, and nine siblings. Sarah gave birth to 13 children but sadly lost three of them. Jim went onto become a cement labourer, the same as his father James.

He joined the RASC Territorial Army unit as an ambulance driver before transferring to the regular army in 1911. By then he had already topped the bill at the Grays Drill Hall and was known at professional boxing venues.

It was not unusual, at that time, for Jim to have to assist in putting the boxing ring together and then selling tickets at the door before entering the ring to box. In his first year in the Territorial Army Jim reached the semi-finals of the Imperial Service Championships (known then as the Army and Navy Championships).

When war was declared Jim took his ambulance to France; but that didn't stop his boxing. Boxing was very popular behind the lines during rest periods when soldiers had to make their own entertainment. Jim fought 15 rounds on the Arras race course within the sound of gunfire. His purse for one 10 round fight was a packet of biscuits. Because there was a limited number of boxers available at Jim's weight, on occasions, his commanding officer would arrange bouts with soldiers of heavier weights.

During the war Jim corresponded with his friend Harry Standfield of York Road, Grays and several of his letters were partially reproduced in the Grays and Tilbury Gazette, which recorded the following:

- He boxed a 10 round contest for 400 francs (about £16 at the time), and won easily.
- On Christmas night 1914 Jim was boxing with Dr Bargraves - Jim wished all his friends at home a happy Christmas and said he was all right.
- Harry Standfield sent Woodbines to Jim, and Jim promised to bring home a German helmet for Harry - he already had one himself!
- Jim was getting plenty of clothes, but had written to his father asking for sweets.
- The Grays and Tilbury Gazette was received at the Front each week.

In 1915 Jim married Catherine Hogben in Orsett, and they went on to have 3 children - James (Jim) Ernest, Ronald (Ron) and Catherine Queenie, known as Queenie.

After the war Jim returned to Grays where the family lived at 2 York Road and in Hathaway Road. He worked in the docks, with his two sons, until he retired. The family home was adorned with trophies, including:

- Featherweight Champion,
- British Expeditionary Force 1917
- Featherweight Champion, Army of Occupation 1919
- Runner Up, Army Championships 1921.

Jim had a whole host of medals testifying to brigade, divisional and corps success.

Contemporaries confirmed that Jim was made of stern stuff; he was hard to hurt, moved with unusual agility and was a veritable fighting machine when the bell clanged.

Jim continued boxing after the war, seldom being put down and never once having the 'ten count'. He was the terror of the fairground boxing booths, where a proprietor exclaimed "Oh dear, here comes that little bloke again".

He told his grandson that he had fought against Max Bygraves's father, known then as 'Battling Tom Smith', (as confirmed in a letter from the Front), and against the man who famously struck the gong at the start of the J Arthur Rank films.

Jim estimated that he fought in around 200 contests, with not more than 20 defeats, and only stopped boxing when he was about 40.

Jim was also a keen cyclist and boasted that he had the first bicycle in Thurrock with blow up tyres!

Jim died in 1985 after a very full and interesting life.

Story provided by Jim's grandson, Keith Schooling.