

**A SYNOPSIS OF THE HISTORY OF BOXING
AT COALVILLE - FEATURING
FEATHERWEIGHT BOXER ERIC JONES OF
COALVILLE**



Coalville's "Palais de Danse" fronting Owen Street with the Cascelloid factory buildings to the rear where numerous professional boxing tournaments were held in the 1930s before it became a Billiard Hall for a short period in September 1936 after which it was purchased in 1937 by Cascelloid the owners of Palitoy to make soft dolls. A further three and half acres of land was purchased to the rear of the Palais de Danse by Cascelloid to build a new factory.

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - SEPTEMBER 2024
Updated November 2024 / February 2025



There was a good crowd at an open air boxing tournament at [Coalville Grehound Stadium](#) on Monday evening 3rd August 1931, when in the chief event, Les Wickwar (Leicester) retained the featherweight championship of Leicestershire by defeating Jack Stone (Leicester) on points over 10 /2 minute rounds (Leicester Evening Mail)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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PREFACE

The following is an attempt to provide a record of the local sport of boxing which was so well supported in Coalville over a period of three decades from the late 1920s. Local boxing tournaments were recorded in Leicestershire newspapers of the day and some of the information contained in the publication is taken from these newspapers, supported and cross-checked with records contained in various boxing history websites.

The publication relates to professionally organised boxing tournaments held in venues under British Boxing Board of Control (BBB - C) rules **and not** the "Travelling Boxing Booth". Many of the fighters who became famous like Freddie Mills, Benny Lynch, Tommy Farr, Joe Beckett, Jim Driscoll and Jimmy Wilde, were products of boxing booths. They continued until 1947 when the BBB-C introduced new rules. These pop up boxing booths (tents with a boxing ring and seating) generally toured the country with fairs and circuses etc. It is recalled by the older generation that Ashby Statutes had a boxing booth



SAM McKEOWEN'S BOXING BOOTH WITH FREDDIE MILLS FAR LEFT AND SAM McKEOWEN WITH THE MICROPHONE
Photographic copyright owned by the originator

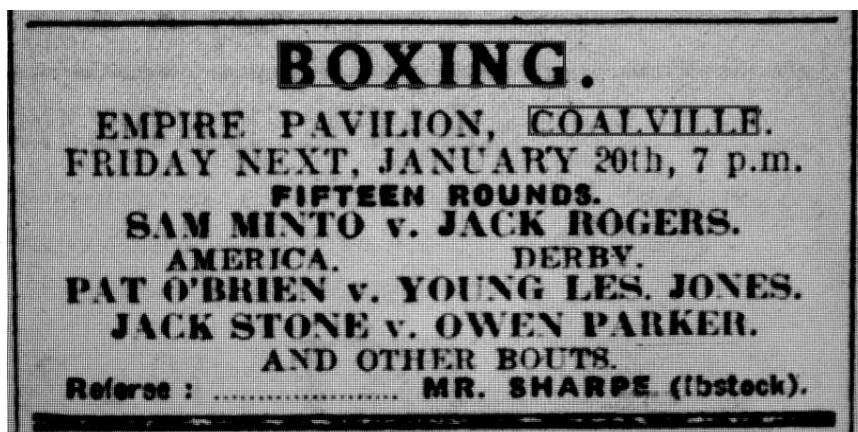
Fairground booths were an important part of boxing in Britain and enabled many aspiring professionals to hone their skills against a wide assortment of challengers.

The booth fighters typically signed up for several months and travelled with the booth from town to town. They were given food and lodgings and paid a small wage for their services. The bulk of their income (small though it was) was earned through 'nobbings', coins thrown into the ring by spectators as a show of appreciation after they had fought.

When the booth arrived at a new location it was the boxers' job to erect the ring, tent and platform, to be dismantled later and loaded onto a lorry when

the booth departed. They were also called upon to second other boxers or time-keep when not in action themselves.

There are early references to the "Empire Pavillion" and "Stewart's Boxing Pavillion" where tournaments took place in Coalville. It is thought that these would have been in the form of fixed tents incorporating a boxing ring and seating on open land, and not actual buildings.



In the late 1920's / 1930's, boxing tournaments were recorded as being held at various venues in Coalville - The Empire Pavillion, Stewart's Boxing Pavillion, The Olympics Sports Club, Coalville Greyhound Stadium, Stableford's Recreation Rooms, The Territorial Drill Hall, The Baths Hall, the Palais De Danse (see front page), West End fields, and the West End Club, Ashby Road. Some fights as shown in the photograph on page 2 were held in the open air.

During the 1930s, regular professional boxing matches were held at a venue with the rather grandiose name of the "Palais de Danse" in Owen Street, Coalville (see front page) and attendances up to 2,000 were recorded. Sam Betteridge of Coalville promoted the fights.

SUNDAY BOXING BANNED IN COALVILLE

On Sunday 19th August 1934, notwithstanding a storm of protest from some of the civic and religious leaders of the town, the first Sunday boxing tournament was held at the Palais de Danse in Coalville in front of 1,500 supporters. The principal fight was a twelve rounder being between Eric Jones (Coalville) and Jock Atkin of Glasgow. This went the distance with Jones winning on points. **Sunday boxing at Coalville only lasted for two tournaments, as "The Lord's Day Observance Society" stepped in with a threat to sue under the "Lord's Day Observance Act".**

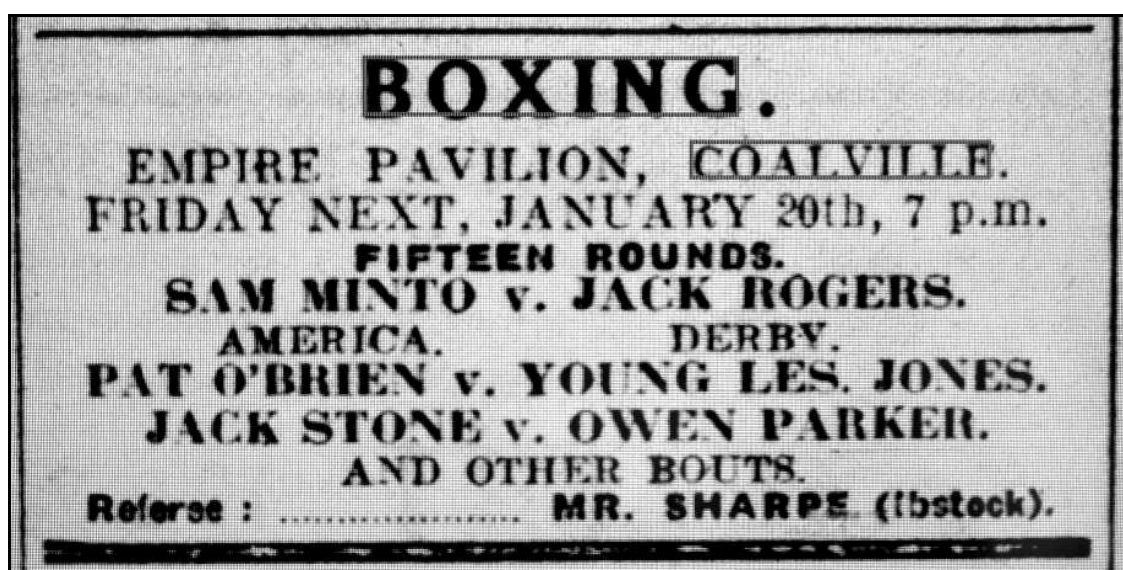
In Sept 1936, it was decided by the owner of the venue at that time, Mr. J. Eaton of Burton on Trent, to turn it into a billiard saloon, but shortly afterwards in 1937 the building was purchased by Cascelloid for the purpose of making soft toys there..

Other local boxing venues developed as time went on - the West End Club on Ashby Rd, Coalville, The Territorial Drill Hall, Coalville, Alexander Park Rink at Swadlincote, the Town Hall, Swadlincote, the Kings Hall, Derby and Loughborough Town Hall for example The short intervals between fights in which boxers engaged at that time was quite amazing compared to today. A good purse for a fight could be around £10.

The first official record found, relating to organised boxing in Coalville was in November 1927. The tournament took place under the auspices of Coalville Olympic Sports Club and was held in the Territorial Drill Hall on a Saturday night. Here was the first mention found of Coalville's Eric Jones fighting, who went on to become a professional champion. It is thought that this was an amateur tournament as Eric Jones first professional fight did not take place till the 1st July 1928.

Another tournament recorded in December 1928, was promoted by Coalville Olympic Sports Club at Stableford's Recreation Rooms. Eric Jones was top of the bill and fought a draw with Young Mobbs of Leicester. Again it is thought that this was an amateur tournament for the reasons given above.

In January 1928 the following boxing tournament was held in Coalville at the "Empire Pavillion."

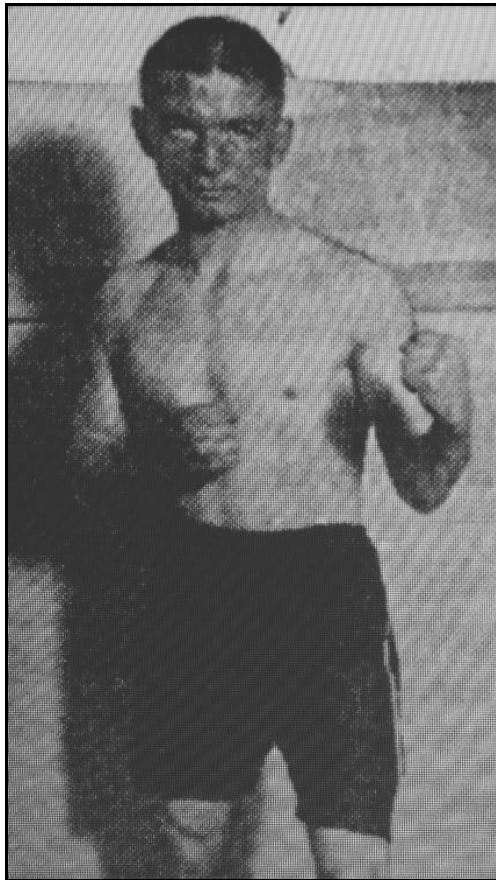


BOXING.
EMPIRE PAVILION, COALVILLE.
FRIDAY NEXT, JANUARY 20th, 7 p.m.
FIFTEEN ROUNDS.
SAM MINTO v. JACK ROGERS.
AMERICA. DERBY.
PAT O'BRIEN v. YOUNG LES. JONES.
JACK STONE v. OWEN PARKER.
AND OTHER BOUTS.
Referee : MR. SHARPE (1bstock).

Another tournament was held at Coalville on 4th February 1928 at "Stewart's Boxing Pavillion", when the chief event was a return 15 round bout between Jack Creighton (Plymouth), welter weight champion of the Fleet and Sam Minto (America) in which the latter was victorious after Creighton was disqualified for a low blow. Minto had only fought 3 weeks earlier on January 20th.

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ERIC JONES OF COALVILLE



Coalville Town's favourite boxer was Eric Jones who lived in Melbourne Street, which was one street away from the "Palais De Danse."

Eric was a prolific boxer, and fought all over the UK, including at least two bouts at the "Tower Circus, Blackpool" in Dec 35 & Nov 34 loosing both to Len Hampson (Jones suffered a damaged hand) & Fred Bilsborough respectively. He also fought in Amsterdam on one occasion. His career spanned 16 years between 1928 and 1944, in which he took part in 163 professional fights in total - Of these, he won 108 (32 by KO's), Lost 43 (24 by KO's) and drew 12. He boxed 1239 rounds and won 29.6 % of his bouts by KO's. During his career, he fought three world champions - Jackie Brown, Benny Lynch and Jackie Peterson.

Records are available for all of Eric Jones 163 fights for anyone who wishes to carry out further research, and a synopsis of a few of his fights follows.

Eric Jones made his professional debut on the 1st July 1928 at the age of 15 at Bantamweight. The fight took place at "Stewart's Pavillion", Coalville when he defeated Young Sears also of Coalville on points over 6/2 minute rounds. From then on he boxed in the flyweight division (up to 112 lbs). His last, and 163rd fight was on the 11th December 1944 at the age of 34 against Ron Kingston at the Kings Hall, Derby, when he retired in the 5th round of an 8/2 minute round fight.

His second fight was on the 17th August 1928 when he beat Jim Young Shepherdson of Leicester at Stableford's Recreation Club, Coalville by a Technical Knock Out (TKO), in round 4 of a 6/2 minute round bout.

His third fight took place on the 15th January 1929, when he defeated Harry Siddons of Leicester by a knock out in round 2 of a 6/2 minute round bout at Spinney Hill Club, Leicester.

On the 21st of January 1929, in his fourth fight, he beat Tiger Bert Ison of Leicester, who retired in round 2 of a 6/2 minute round bout at the "Olympia Sports Club", Coalville. On the 24th of January 1930, he beat Arthur Hodson on points over 10 rounds at the Bath's Hall, Coalville, and on January 29th he drew with Len Wickwar over 6/6 2 minute rounds at the Spinney Hill Club, Leicester. **So, in 14 days he took part in four fights, quite remarkable by today's standards**

Eric Jones won all of his first 17 fights (except for 2 draws) before being defeated in his 18th fight against Jackie Kirk of London, by a KO at the Belgrave Club, Leicester on April 30th 1930.

In his 39th fight he beat Les Wickwar on the 20th of January 1930 at the Baths Hall, Coalville for the **Leicester Flyweight title** by a KO in the first round of a 10 round bout, having previously fought a draw with him at Spinney Hill Club, Leicester on January 29th 1929. They fought for £5 side deposits, against a purse of £10 !! **At this time, Eric was only aged 15 and Wickwar was 17.**

In December 1931, the principle event at a boxing tournament in Coalville was a ten - 2 minute round contest between Eric Jones the Leicestershire flyweight champion and George (Tishy) Marsden the Nottinghamshire champion. In the early stages, the men appeared to be well matched, but as the fight progressed Jones was seen to have the advantage, but he fell through the ropes in the ninth round, although luckily he did not injure himself. In the last round Jones severely punished Marsden, who had sustained a cut eye, and was down for counts of nine and four. Because of Marsden's injury, the referee stopped the contest and gave the decision to Jones on a TKO. In June 1932 Eric defeated George Marsden again at Loughborough Town Hall. He actually fought him on five occasions, winning four and drawing one.

In August, 1934, Eric defeated Bert Kirby at the "Baths Hall," Coalville.

In 1936, he made three appearances at the Coalville Palais de Danse venue:-

- In January he defeated Kid McNally
- In June, he defeated Dixie Kid, the coloured fighter from Wales, over 12 bloody rounds.
- In August he defeated Frankie Kid Bonsor. The month before it became a Billiard Hall.

Eric made a further appearance at the **Baths Hall, Coalville** in June 1936 when he defeated Tut Walley of Hanley. Following a low punch, Walley was disqualified.

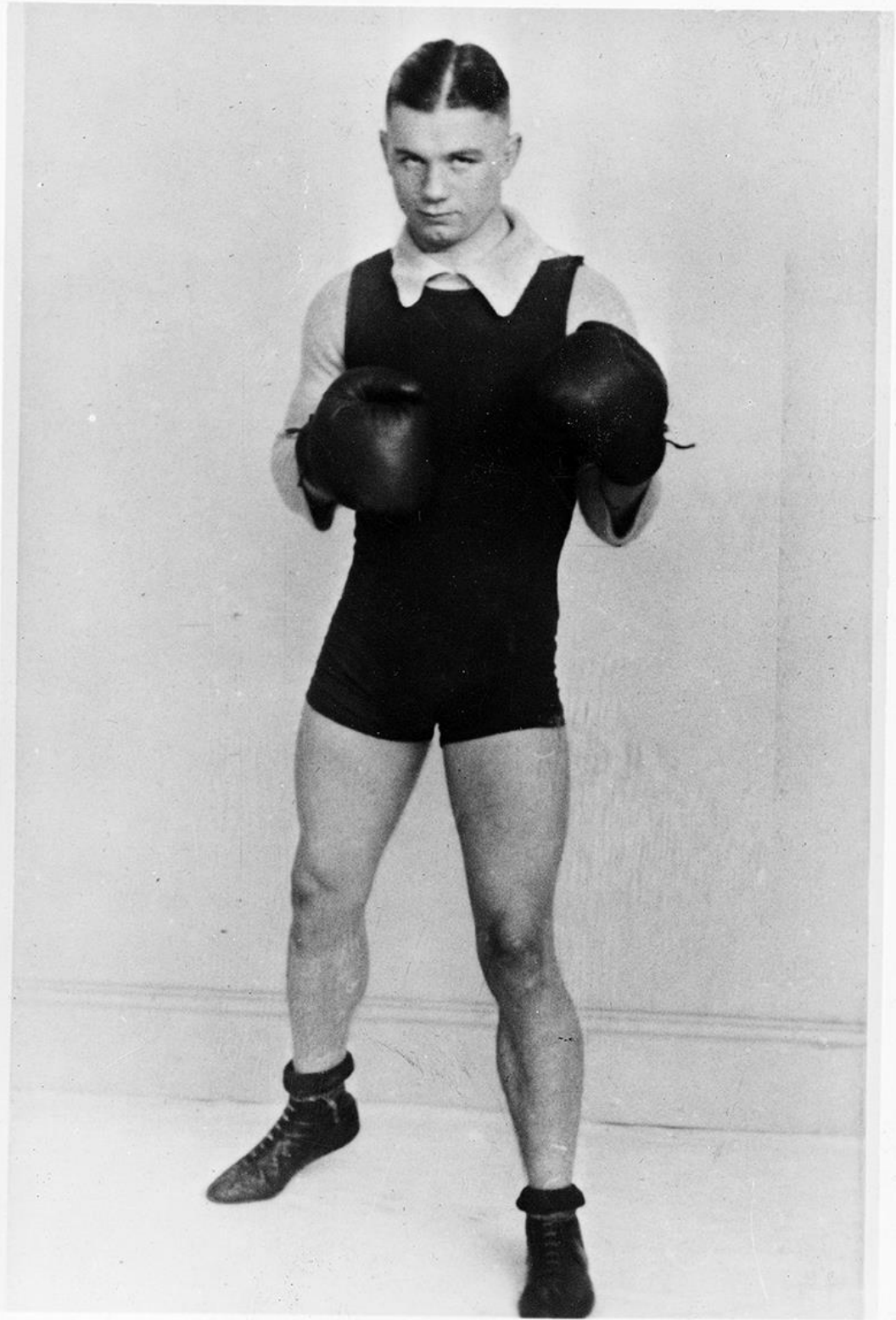
Eric Jones went on to become the Southern Area flyweight champion by defeating Johnny Griffiths at the Kings Hall, Derby in February 1939.

Unfortunately, Eric lost his Southern area title to Jackie Peterson (Glasgow) in an **eliminator for the British flyweight title on August 1939 when he was knocked out after 1 minute 55 seconds, in front of a crowd of 25,000 Glaswegian vociferous fans at the Cartyne Greyhound Track, Glasgow.**

Eric retired in 1944, and at some point before 1947, he went to work at Grieve's Needle Factory, Coalville, as in 1947, the Minister of Supply, made a visit to the Factory, where he was introduced to Eric Jones, the infamous Coalville boxer who was in charge of a machine there, and learned of his fights with three world champions - Jackie Brown, Benny Lynch and Jackie Peterson, the current champion. Jones explained to the minister that he was taking three Coalville boxers to fight in Ireland next month, so presumably he had moved into boxing management by this time.



Leicester referee Arthur Morton counts out Charlie Hazell of Wales, after he was knocked down by the Coalville boxer Eric Jones at the Granby Halls, Leicester in 1933.



ERIC JONES (COALVILLE)
SOUTHERN AREA FLYWEIGHT CHAMPION
Sole Manager: GEORGE BIDDLES, "Star and Garter" Hotel, Derby.
'Phone: DERBY 3521

THE WEST END CLUB, ASHBY ROAD, COALVILLE

Some good boxing tournaments were held at the West End Club on Ashby Rd, Coalville and one in January 1934 held in front of a packed house was staged by Charlie Branson. The top liner fight was reported as being a bruising affair over 10 rounds between Bill Hardy (Barlestone) and George Thornton (Loughborough) which was won by the former, although not in his usual knock out manner, as it went the distance.

Professional boxing matches were recorded as still taking place in Coalville in 1947 but they went on at the West End Club much later than that.

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AMATEUR BOXING AT COALVILLE

Amateur boxing was still recorded as taking place at Coalville Baths Hall in 1948. Below is a copy of a poster advertising a 'Grand Amateur Boxing Tournament' at the Baths Hall, Coalville in 1944. This was organised by 'Ashby Amateur Boxing Club'. Note: Ringside seats were 5 shillings, normal seats 3 shillings, and standing 2 shillings.

GRAND AMATEUR

BOXING

TOURNAMENT

At BATHS HALL, Coalville
(By **ASHBY AMATEUR BOXING CLUB**).

— **PROCEEDS for RED CROSS FUND**
on

FRIDAY, 1st DECEMBER, 1944

At 7-30 p.m.

G-ROUND RETURN CHALLENGE CONTEST

AL. ADAMS (ASHBY)	v.	NOEL WILKINSON (HARTHORPE)
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HEAVY-WEIGHT CONTEST

J. HUBBARD (COLEORTON)	v.	C. HOLLIS (COALVILLE)
KEN GRICE (MOIRA)	v.	C. BRYAN (COVENTRY)
KID REDFERN (OAKTHORPE)	v.	J. HALL (COALVILLE)
FRED POXON (MOIRA)	v.	J. OSBORNE (COALVILLE)

AND OTHER SUPPORTING BOUTS

Prices of Admission : Ringside (by ticket) 5/- Seating 3/- Standing 2/-
Ticket Holders to be in their Seats by 7.15 p.m.

GRIFFYDAM VILLAGE BOXERS

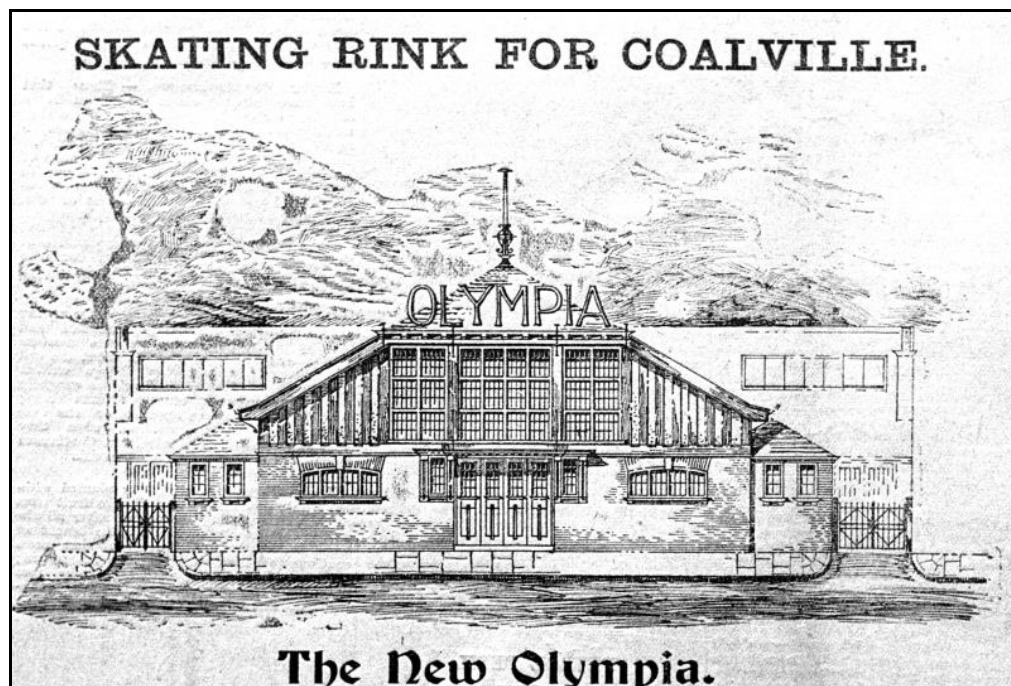
When I decided to research local boxing, whilst a member of the Griffydam History Group, I did not expect to discover that **Griffydam** had its own pugilists. Those with an interest in the history of **Griffydam** will know of course about the considerable amount of local fighting which took place in this small village and the local area due to the excessive imbibing which often took place, particularly amongst the coal mining fraternity.

At Coalville's West end Club on the 20th February 1934, in front of a good crowd, on the programme was the 9 stone novices' competition for the cup given by Sir William Edge, M.P. **Joseph Kilby (Griffydam)** secured the verdict in his fight with **George Townsend (Griffydam)**, the referee accepting the towel thrown in from Townsend's corner in the second round. **George Dimmock (Griffydam)** beat Tim Moore of Loughborough on points. There was some wild swinging reported in a fight between **George Dimmock (Griffydam)** and George Kilby, the latter retiring in the second round. In the final, Jack Hannah (Groby) beat **George Dimmock (Griffydam)** on points.

At the Palais de Danse, Owen Street, Coalville on the 30th May 1936, when Eric Jones topped the bill again, there was an eight round contest between **George Holland (Griffydam)** and Ike Hicklin (Breedon). Winner not known

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

The 'New Olympia' in Coalville was originally built as a roller skating rink in 1910 but was later converted into a cinema and venue, and boxing tournaments were one of the events held there. It was demolished in the early 1930s to make way for the Regal Cinema on Jackson Street (now the bingo hall). The Olympic Sports Club which is mentioned earlier in relation to boxing tournaments was thought to have been based at the New Olympia.



1910 saw the opening of a great attraction for the young and middle aged inhabitants of Coalville and district. Constructed by a consortium of Coalville business people called the Coalville Olympia Company it rapidly became a prime centre of amusement for the town following the announcement of its opening in the Coalville Times.



Please visit the Coalville Heritage website where a fascinating history of this venue is available together with further photographs.