

Ron Historyo's
Time Travel
to the

Wrestlers of the
Golden Age

Bob Berry



Bob Berry with the Joe
Smith/William Kay Belt

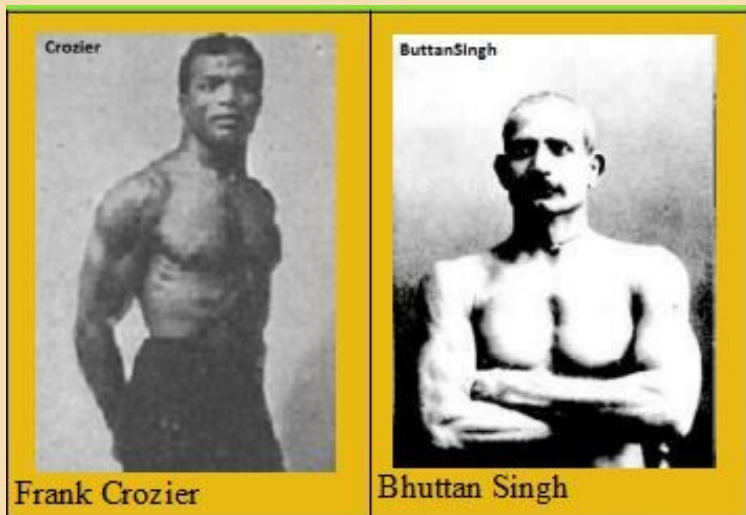
If you thought that the 1930's were hard times you would not be wrong, but rest assured life in a Lancashire Coal mining town in the 1800's was in a different league. Long before Billy Riley there was already a conveyor belt of wrestlers coming out of Wigan and surrounding towns, but it was Edwardian times before the Lancashire style of wrestling really hit the Capital. The 1904 Alhambra show had been more of a festival of wrestling under Antonio Pierre, but the 1908/09/10 shows were run by Bankier and Bettinson for world championship. With Londsedale style trophies it was the place to showcase the great Northern wrestlers of this age. Such was the peak of Bob Berry's career. He appeared in all three Alhambra tournaments.

But back to hard times, how did all this start?

Robert Berry was born in the summer of 1879 and through his childhood lived on Platt Lane, Wigan. This was a great man and if you want to tap into his genealogy his father was Henry Berry, originally of St Helens and mother Mary Gibson of Wigan. Bob had a big family and there must be relatives out there who would like to remember him, maybe family of his brothers Alexander, Henry, Samuel, Edward, William, John and Oswald. Or sisters Catherine, Annie, Mary, Margaret.

Naturally Henry Berry was a Coal Miner or Hewer and all of the boys followed his trail. The girls worked in the Throstle room at the local mill. By spring 1911 the family had moved a to Chapel Street in Ince, Bob Berry was still living at home and still a Coal Hewan.

But back to those Alhambra moments. In the 1908 tournament Bob Berry had gone out of the middleweights after a loss to Joe Carroll, one of the great Wiganer's. This was after three stages of competition and on points after 30 minutes. Carroll went on and won the title.



In 1909 Bob Berry made the final and fought Frank Crozier for one and three quarter hours without a fall before losing 2-0. It had been a controversial semi final where Bob fought Henri Irslinger, who was disqualified on the half hour for an illegal hold..

According to some newspapers by 1910 Bob had improved tremendously. Rounds one and two he accounted for opponents in half a minute. Round three he defeated Italian Colombi Feruccio in seven

minutes. Round four and he beat Jim Foster of Pemberton on points. In the semi finals Berry fought Peter Bannan of Burnley and the previous year's winner Crozier was matched with Buttan Singh, a man who Bannan had met as far away as Australia. Bob Berry Sailed through with Bannan retiring injured. Buttan Singh took an incredible three hours of wrestling to beat Frank Crozier.

A fast and attacking Berry never gave Singh, the veteran, a chance and won 2-0. Thirty years of age and world champion and yet another native of Wigan to hold a championship at Middleweight that other men from Wigan would one day own. Going back to the 1909 loss to Crozier, there is no need to think that had Crozier beaten Singh in the 1910 semi final that he would have been Bob Berry's Nemesis. At the beginning of 1909 Bob Berry had already beaten Crozier in the semi final of an international contest at Bury Co-Operative hall run by Mr W Kay of London who put up a belt and Bob Berry had gone on to win that final against Jack Winrow of Heywood.

Bob Berry had many big fights at Lancashire grounds, for example he fought Job Shambley in October 1909 at Pendlebury with the match carried forward till next week due to being abandoned for rain. The following week they met at the Westwood Grounds Wigan and Berry defeated Shambley of Westhoughton to take £50. The match was before 500 spectators and for the middle weight championship of England. Also at the Westwood grounds in August 1908 Berry met Joe Carroll for £50, seventy three minutes, no score and a draw agreed.

As well as the outdoor venues, Bob Berry would grace such venues as the Palace Theatre Manchester and the Hengler's Circus Tournaments run by William Bankier. In 1908 Berry did lose to Crozier at Palace Theatre. Of course the news papers tell the tales of a man's best years, but the way it worked was that in the early years you would prove yourself against pit mates and be best in your village, moving up to beating champs from other towns. Matches as such there would be no record of, but when you got to championship standard there was work in Music Halls, exhibitions and a period began of spectators coming in through turnstiles because wrestling moved to Football grounds.

After Alhambra in 1910 Bob had a big match at Wigan with Henri Irslinger, possibly a warm up for a return match with Buttan Singh who he had vanquished in the final at the Alhambra. The match was to be for a Gold Cup on the ground of Manchester United. By my reckoning this was the first year at Old Trafford after United left Newton Heath. The attendance was 8000 and during the match Berry's arm was heard to crack and with a hammer lock on he conceded to Singh and could not continue. From then on I could not find Bob Berry wrestling again. I did find him training others in the next few years for bouts at Atherton FC which was a popular Lancashire venue. In 1913 f1,400 fans paid to see Teddy Whittaker of Bolton fight Willie Charnock of Newton. Tom Rose trained Whittaker and Bob trained Charnock.

Probably in 1911 Bob Berry's life was to change a bit. Manchester was a place of great opportunity and a much better place to work than down a mine for a good weeks wages. Before 1911 was out he had met Bertha Tate in Salford, she came from Swinton. They married that year. Two children followed, Robert Jr in 1912 and Thelma in 1916, but by now they were all living on the other side of Manchester. The Bradford/Miles Platting/Clayton area. The move to Manchester was hard to prove but I did eventually find Bob referred to as originally of Wigan but late of Manchester.

In August 1917 it was reported that Robert Berry wrestling champion had been wounded in the first world war. Supposedly of the Kings Liverpool Regiment and a home address of the Brickmakers Arms in Bradford. I believe that this should have been Bricklayers Arms. After a wild Goose chase of finding another Bob Berry in that regiment dying on the Somme, I had a great difficulty working out if Bob had survived.

Eventually I found an iconic moment at the birth of the newer wrestling. In February 1931 at Belle Vue Manchester there was a Billy Riley v Bill Garnon fight and the referee that night was Bob Berry. Finally I had the proof that he had survived the war. Not only that but he was still involved in Wrestling.

In 1939 he was living on Hulme Hall Lane still in the area where today you would be near Manchester City's Stadium. At sixty years old Bob was a labourer and Bertha an office cleaner. It was not possible to decide when Bob died, he seems to have moved district, but I don't think far. I believe he probably lived into the 1950's, some of those outlying east Manchester suburbs were classed as Ashton-under-Lyne registration district and I fancy a tentative 1957 until we can prove otherwise.

There had been nothing at the beginning to give Bob Berry's age, but the vital clue was in the 1917 newspaper report. Six Berry brothers had all joined up for world war one, so the task was to find a Berry family in Wigan that fitted the bill.

Until you get into all this it is hard to appreciate exactly how many great champion wrestlers Lancashire had. Make no mistake Bob Berry should be very high on that list. The Alhambra has been used as a sort of benchmark on all my pioneer stories and over the years I have often stated how much William Bankier did for wrestling in Britain. His contribution to the Music hall era is an eye opener.

Some early Catch Wrestlers have had bio's done before, in the case of Bob Berry I don't

think so and I am proud to have written this tribute to him. It is all original detective work not copied from anywhere else.

I have had the help of a co researcher and enthusiast of Lancashire Catch Wrestling in Ruslan Pashayev of the USA. He has provided background knowledge of tournaments, results and different belts of the Edwardian age. Many Thanks to Ruslan. I also had help from fellow genealogist Peter Booth of Australia. We both admitted going to bed shattered in trying to figure out the fine detail of the genealogy.

Historyo

I finish with some of Ruslan's Tournament results.

12st (Heavy-Weight) International Championship Tournament

December 28th 1908 - January 1st 1909

Co-operative Hall, Bury

Promoter/Organizer: William Kay

[1st Round](#)

Bob Berry of Wigan beat Joseph Topping of Bolton .

Jack Winrow of Heywood beat Gino of Italy

[2nd Round](#)

Bob Berry bye

Jack Winrow beat Alfred Jones of Manchester

[Semifinals](#)

Bob Berry beat Frank Crozier of Jamaica

Jack Winrow beat Lauritz Neilsen of Denmark

[Final](#)

Bob Berry beat Jack Winrow

Bob Berry is presented with Gold & Silver Belt emblematic of the championship.

1910 NSC Alhambra Middle-Weight Championship

[1st Round](#)

Bob Berry of Wigan beat Charles Relf of Catford

Buttan Singh of India beat M. Spero of Battersea

[2nd Round](#)

Bob Berry bye

Buttan Singh beat Professor Poland of Southampton

[3rd Round](#)

Bob Berry beat Colombi Feruccio of Italy

Buttan Singh beat Jim Evans of Manchester

[4th Round](#)

Bob Berry beat Jim Foster of Pemberton

Buttan Singh beat Jack Carroll of Hindley

[Semifinals](#)

Bob Berry beat Peter Bannon of Burnley

Buttan Singh beat Frank Crozier of Jamaica

[Final](#)

Bob Berry beat Buttan Singh