

“His Heart Was Too Big for His Pocket”

The Life of ‘Peerless’ Jim Driscoll

As originally told by Charles Barnett

Compiled and edited by Phil Burns

Latter end of boxer whose heart was too big for his pocket

(28 June 1925)

In conclusion of his series, Barnett shares some insights into the affection with which Driscoll was regarded. He offers a number of stories which show the camaraderie among the boxing community, and also between other sporting communities.

It is hard to imagine the sense of loss which was shared so widely on the event of Driscoll's death. News reports and Pathe news reels tell us of the thousands who lined the streets or joined the procession from the pub where Driscoll and his wife lived on Ellen Street, to St Paul's church around the corner and then afterwards from the docks all the way to the then new cemetery in the north of the city. That so many felt moved to pay tribute is a testimony to the love and respect people had for Driscoll, which was always reciprocated.

Phil Burns

Now comes the end of the story of Jim Driscoll, splendid sportsman and a man beloved of his fellows. In writing the concluding chapters of this very human life story, Mr Charles Barnett pays high tribute to the fine Comradeship among boxes of his acquaintance-the spirit that teaches a man to "play the game".

Finally he draws aside the curtain that is covered the closing days of Driscoll's career and his last grim fight, revealing the touching scene that attended the passing of "a boxer of humble parentage, whose heart was too big for his pocket, a real man, admired for skill and principle".

Driscoll always set an example to young boxers in being friendly with all rivals. To him a boxing contest was a business arrangement, and he would not allow his pupils to betray temper outside the ring.

This “cricket” spirit spread in South Wales to such an extent that people found it hard to believe that lads could meet in actual combat and give of their best. There are two amusing examples of this.

On one occasion I suggested a match to Mr. “Peggy” Bettinson, the manager of the National Sporting Club, and he at once exclaimed, “Why, they are both from Wales!”

To this I retorted, “Yes, and in the same gymnasium, but it makes no difference. Besides, you frequently paired two Londoners so why not two Welsh boys?”

Mr. Bettinson agreed with my argument, and the lads concerned put up a thrilling battle, with the result that Welsh boxers were in great demand at the club after that.

The other example of boxing camaraderie concerns trips to Pembroke Dock during the war. I had consented to arrange the programmes for Colonel Leslie’s military tournaments there, and both Driscoll and Jimmy Wilde helped me.

One day I took quite a large party from Cardiff and the Rhondda, and we filled a couple of compartments.

We whiled away the monotony of the 100-miles train journey by playing ha’penny nap, and there was good natured banter from start to finish.

Our train, instead of going direct to Pembroke Dock, ended the journey at Neyland, which is the other side of the water, and we crossed in a ferry boat, still “chipping” one another.

In our party was Lewis Williams (Penygraig), an old rival of Wilde, and as we landed he made a remark which evoked a burst of laughter. We were turning into the road in the military zone at that moment, and who should be standing there but Colonel Leslie. He did not seem very enthusiastic over our arrival.

After a brief and rather cold introduction, I was asked by the officer to send the boxers to the Duke of Edinburgh hotel. “Your room is booked at the Bush Hotel,” added the Colonel, “but I would like to have a word with you before you go.”

Accordingly I directed the young fellows on their way, and then followed Col. Leslie into his private quarters.

“Sit down,” he said, whilst he seemed to be fumbling among some papers, and I dropped into the chair wondering what on earth it all meant, because our association hitherto had been most happy. Then he spoke.

“Mr. Barnett,” he began gravely, “do you think these lads will put up a genuine fight to-night?”

That was the explanation of his cold reception. We had arrived bubbling over with laughter and it was naturally hard to believe that pals (including the referee) could appear in the same ring.

I laughed heartily at the question, and assured him that he need not worry.

“The fact that we all came down together will not make any difference,” I said. “Those boys see the ‘cricket’ of boxing and you will have good sport.”

That evening everything panned out as I had prophesied. The boxers fought to the last gasp, and the great crowd cheered enthusiastically.

Near the finish, when it came my turn for a speech, I told the crowd briefly of the fears of Col. Leslie. I pointed out that the boxers had travelled down together, had tea at the hotel together, had fought together, “and are now going to sleep together.”

HARMLESS LITTLE JIMMY

When Wilde appeared at Pembroke Dock I secured an invitation for him to join us at supper in the officers’ mess, and I particularly noticed one captain silently listening to the stories Wilde related.

After supper we adjourned to another room, and as the party filed out the “silent” officer hung back to have a word with me.

“And that is Jimmy Wilde,” he said. “Well, well! Do you know, he looks just the kind of fellow one would not mind meeting on a dark night!”

A boxer to whom Driscoll took a great liking, Will Brooks, of Aberavon, subsequently appeared at Pembroke Dock, and I mention him because of a quaint remark he once made when I was refereeing his contest with Kid Doyle.

Brooks was not in the best of condition, and he persistently held on the “blind” side. At last I called a halt and said “Brooks, if you hold again I shall disqualify you.” His reply was “Darro, he’ll hit me if I let go!”

The remark was so frank and unexpected that I laughed in spite of my effort to be stern, but, happily, Brooks improved and I had no occasion to exert my authority,

AMONG THE JOCKEYS

To jockeys especially, Jim was his natural self, for he was something more than a punter - he was a lover of horses.

In earlier chapters I have related how jockeys often gave him quiet hints, and one tip at Ascott a few years ago did him a good turn.

We were chatting with a jockey in the paddock when a man came up and claimed the attention of the jockey.

“Do you think Re-echo has a chance for this race?” he asked. “Well, yes, he certainly has a chance,” was the reply, and the inquirer hurried away, probably to speed the news.

“Don’t take notice of what I told him,” said the jockey after he had gone, “I believe Pondoland will win.” The result of the race was Pondoland 1st, Re-echo 2nd. The jockey who tipped the winner did not have a mount in the race.

Driscoll and Steve Donoghue were also on terms of friendship, and when Steve won the Derby on Humorist, Captain Cuttle and Papyrus, one of the happiest cheers came from Driscoll, the boxer had not backed the horses himself.

“He’s a jockey-and-a-half,” Jim would shout with enthusiasm.

A similar opinion was expressed about F. Rees, the steeplechase artist, and Driscoll also greatly admired the riding of J.Hogan, “Brownie” Carslake, and Will Griggs.

One reverse for Griggs cost Driscoll a lot of money. It was the day when the rider of Ceylonese objected to the first and second in a race. Griggs rode Werwolf first past the winning post but Ceylonese was awarded the race. We were celebrating the victory of Werwolf when we heard the bad luck.

It is no secret that many titled personages endeavoured to secure Driscoll’s services as an instructor for their sons who were competing in ‘Varsity boxing, but only once did he fall in with such a desire, and that was for the benefit of one who is well known in the newspaper world. Driscoll visited the mansion, and took great pains to give the son all the advice he could.

Had he wished, Driscoll could have made thousands of pounds that way, but he never made a penny.

I have yet to learn that he took money for helping any of the boxers who from time to time became famous, such as Llew Edwards, Percy Jones, Eddie Morgan, or Jimmy Wilde. These and scores of others profited by his advice, and he was pleased to see them successful.

YOUNG BOXERS GRATITUDE

In after years Driscoll took Brooks' young brother to Scotland to act as sparring partner to Tancey Lee, and the gratitude of the young fellow was shown when volunteers were recently called for to box at the Driscoll Memorial tournament. Brooks fought a contest free of charge.

Another example of the 'cricket' shown by boxers was seen shortly after Driscoll and Fred Welsh met in their "needle" match. Driscoll was chairman of the Nazareth House tournament committee one year, and he secured the attendance of Welsh at the annual show.

The hall was crowded out, because the majority of people wanted to see what would happen. All they saw was a happy gathering of boxers, every one boxing in sporting spirit for the good of the cause.

It was the same after Driscoll had twice beaten Spike Robson of the Lonsdale Belt. Robson came to Cardiff and sparred with Driscoll at the tournament, after which they dressed in the same room, chatting in the most friendly way.

Everyone knew the ring rivalry that existed between Owen Moran and Driscoll, but it did not prevent them from being on good terms with one another. Moran showed his regard right to the end.

WEARING O 'THE GREEN

Moran, by the way, has given me a fuller version of the incident in the United States, which ended with a challenge by Moran to an American-Irish crowd.

It had been arranged that Moran should meet Tommy Murphy on March 16, but it was in the early hours of the 17th (St Patrick's Day) that the Birmingham boxer was called from the top floor of the club to get ready for the fight.

When Moran came down stairs everything was green. There was a green cloth on the floor of the ring, green flags in the corner, and the ropes were green. About 4,000 spectators were present, and Irish songs were being sung.

Moran, who wore the Union Jack round his waist, eventually knocked out Murphy, and having done so he strode to the centre of the ring and shouted "Any more Irish wanting to be licked?"

It gives one a true idea of Moran's dare-devil spirit in those days, but he was a rattling good fighter, as he later on proved by knocking out Battling Nelson.

At that time, Driscoll, Fred Welsh, and Moran were equally ready to meet Nelson, who was the world's lightweight champion, but the retort of the

title-holder was hardly complimentary. When challenges were issued he retorted contemptuously: "I can beat those three in one ring."

This was uttered in the hearing of Moran, and the Birmingham boxer replied: "Why not see what you can do to me first?"

Nelson received the shock of his career when they met, and it is small wonder that he avoided a contest with the other two. Unfortunately for Moran, the title had passed to Ad Wolgast ere he defeated the booster.

I now come to another milestone in poor Driscoll's story. This was the time he entered the Middlesex Hospital for a serious internal operation.

Jim had reached London one day when he was taken ill suddenly. Luckily an old friend in Mangle Hyams came across him, and Driscoll was persuaded to go with him to the hospital.

Directly he was examined at the institution by a specialist he was advised to remain there, as unless nearly operation was performed he would not survive.

In writing to tell me the news Driscoll showed stoical courage. His chief concern was that he was due to contribute an article to a Sunday newspaper and did not want to disappoint the sporting editor!

THE LAST PHASE

For days he hovered 'twixt life and death but his recovery was more rapid than I had hoped for, and when he returned home he was loud in praise of the nursing staff and the surgeon.

From that time up until his last fatal illness Driscoll enjoyed what was for him quite good health. He put on weight, and was cheery in manner.

It was influenza, followed by pneumonia that brought the end of the man I regard as the world's finest boxer.

Cardiff, his native city, is seeing to it that his name will live long.

The Shilling Memorial Fund, started for the purpose of endowing a "Jim Driscoll bed" at the local hospital, has been subscribed to by thousands of admirers, lords, knights, dock labourers, colliers, police - all are in the list - and never was there a more deserving cause.

Donations have come from England, Scotland, and Ireland, as well as Wales.

I began this Life Story with a brief reference to his funeral. I close with it. In the history of Cardiff, and indeed in the history of Wales, no greater tribute has been paid to the dead, no more solemn occasion has been experienced, no funeral so largely attended.

Merely a boxer of humble parentage, but one with a heart too big for his pocket, a real man, admired for skill and principle.

Included in the long funeral procession were probably one hundred orphans from Nazareth House, and each one carried a wreath. They had lost one of their kindest and noblest friends.

In the procession also were several schoolboys. They were the last to be taught boxing by the great master of the art, and they could not restrain their grief.

Jim Driscoll is dead, but his memory will surely live long.

§
**BURIAL OF JIM
 DRISCOLL**

§
**REMARKABLE SCENES AT
 CARDIFF**

§
NATION'S SYMPATHY

§
**IMMENSE CROWDS SEE THE
 CORTEGE**

Scores of thousands of people lined the principal streets of Cardiff to watch the procession at the funeral of the late Mr. Jim Driscoll on Tuesday.

No greater tribute could be paid to Driscoll's popularity and memory than the fact that all classes of the community were represented in the huge concourse of people. Minister were there as well as priests, and miners, Docksmen, trimmers, seamen, business men, boxers, footballers, and athletes of all kinds mingled freely with one another.

Requiem Mass at St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church, Tyndall-street, in the morning was attended by people from all parts of the city, and the church, large though it is, was crowded to the doors.

Children from Nazareth House were there in charge of the Sisters of Nazareth, and Roman Catholics from all over the city were present. Several of the Roman Catholic priests of Cardiff participated in the Mass, including the Rector of St. Paul's the Rev. Father Greishaber, Mgr. Irvine, and the Rev. Father Tobin.

FLORAL TRIBUTES.

Perhaps the greatest tribute to Driscoll's memory was paid in the

masses of floral tributes which were sent by friends and admirers everywhere. Early on Tuesday morning wagonloads arrived at a time, and the capacity of the home was taxed to the uttermost.

Wreaths and oilier floral tributes were received from the members and the committee of the National Sporting Club, London: Mr. A. F. Bettinson, manager, National Sporting Club; Mr. Charlie Harvey, New York, Driscoll's old manager; the members of the Welsh National Sporting League; "News of the World" staff and proprietors; Editor of Evening Express, Cardiff; Evening Express publishing and machine rooms; Nazareth House Assault-at-Arms Committee, Cardiff, and the Welsh Amateur Boxing Association.

From almost every quarter of Great Britain and Ireland telegrams were received during the morning.

The funeral was of military character - a tribute to Driscoll's service with the Army in the Aldershot Command. The coffin was draped with the Union Jack, and some of the Roman Catholic friends of Driscoll acted as bearers. A gun carriage was used later after the principal thoroughfares of the city had been passed.

The service at the church was conducted by the Rev. Father Greishaber (rector), and among the Catholic clergy present were Canon Hannon (St. David's Cathedral), Father Crowley, Father Barnett (St. Mary's), Mgr. Irvine, and Father Tobin.

IMPRESSIVE SCENES.

The scene in Tyndall-street was one of the most impressive ever witnessed in Cardiff. It was gone three o'clock when the huge procession started on its way

to the Cardiff Cemetery. The Cardiff Post-office Band was in front, and it was followed by a gun-carriage of the Royal Field Artillery.

In many ways the funeral procession was one of the most representative ever seen in the city. Men and women of all nationalities were in it; soldiers and ambulance men walked together; members of the Red Cross and St. John were there, also nurses and nuns.

Peculiarly impressive were the little inmates of Nazareth House, while a sombre military touch was added by a guard of honour from the Welch Regiment.

All the traffic in Bute Road, St. Mary Street, and Custom House Street was brought to a standstill, and all the neighbouring streets were impassable long before the procession passed through.

It seemed as if the whole of Cardiff had ceased to work in order that all in the city should be able to join in the last tribute.

CHILDREN'S TRIBUTE

Going through the principal streets of city the procession was led by an empty hearse, covered entirely with magnificent wreaths of all descriptions. Behind the mourners' carriages followed a long train of men friends from all parts of the country. Behind the long procession of men came the little children of Nazareth House, each little girl carrying a wreath. Then came the guard of honour, followed by the Post Office Band playing the "Dead March." The empty gun carriage followed, and immediately behind it was the draped coffin, borne by Driscoll's old friends. Another long procession of men friends followed, and these included many

uniformed soldiers, including a Welsh Guardsman in full regalia. Relatives and close friends followed on in coaches. Numbers of people joined the procession en route, and when it reached the City Hall it was estimated that it was fully a mile and three-quarters long.

All the approaches to the burial ground were thronged with people, and all the roads were absolutely unpassable.

CHIEF MOURNERS.

The chief mourners were:—

Mrs. J. Driscoll (widow), Mrs. Franklyn (mother), Mr. T. Franklyn, Cardiff (step-brother), Mr. and Mrs. Denis McCarthy (sister and brother-in-law), Mr. and Mrs. Stack, Cardiff (sister and brother-in-law), Mr. and Mrs. Kerrigan, Cardiff (sister and brother-in-law), Miss Elizabeth Franklyn, Cardiff (step-sister), Mr. and Mrs. Tom Burns, Cardiff (uncle and aunt), Mrs. Emily Donovan, Cardiff (aunt), Mr. and Mrs. C. McCarthy, Cardiff (first cousins), Mr. and Mrs. T. O'Shea, Cardiff (cousins), Mr. and Mrs. Jim Poole, Cardiff (cousins), Mr. and Mrs. John Donovan, Cardiff (cousins), Mr. and Mrs. Jim Burns, Cardiff (cousins), Mr. and Mrs. T. Poole, Cardiff (cousins), Mr. and Mrs. George Jakeway (cousins), Mr. P. Anzani, Caerphilly (cousin), Mr. and Mrs. Florence McCarthy, Cardiff (cousins), Mr. and Mrs. M. McCarthy, Cardiff (cousins), Mr. and Mrs. Keefe, Cardiff (cousins), Mr. and Mrs. Dickson, Cardiff (cousins), Cornelius and Florence Driscoll, Cardiff (nephews), Cornelius McCarthy (nephew), Miss M. A. McCarthy, Cardiff (niece), Mr. and Mrs. T. Anzani (cousins), Mr. and Mrs. Charles Anzani, Senghenydd

(cousins). Mr. and Mrs. Jim Burns (junior), Miss Lisa and Irene Fletcher, Cardiff (nieces), Miss Edna Wiltshire (niece), Messrs. F.J. and A.T. Moorecraft, and Mr. Albert Jones (Driscoll's old trainer and mentor).

REPRESENTATIVES PRESENT

Among the members of the general public present are Mr. Danny Davies (Cardiff), Mr. Nelson M. Price (representing the Wales branch of the British Legion), Mr. Joseph Hopcraft (Sports Editor, "News of the World"); Mr. Tom Jones (publisher, Evening Express), Mr. E. J. Petch circulation manager, Western Mail), Mr. R. J. Kennedy (representing the Western Mail); Capt. James Griffiths. Mr. George Jukes, and Mr. Jack Gronow (representing the Welsh National Sporting League); Messrs. J. H. Wood, G. Jakeway, W. Baird, D. O'Neil, H. Chichester. and W. Davies (representing the Nazareth House Assault-at-Arms Committee).

Mr. Peter Wright, J.P. (Newport), Sergeant-major O'Connor (representing the 1st Battalion of the Irish Guards), Mr. John A. Woods (deputy city treasurer), Mr. Many Leayham (representing the National Sporting Club). Mr. Charlie Blackburn (Liverpool), Capt. A. W. Brock, M.C., D.C.M.. and C.S.M. J. H. May (representing the Army Physical Training Staff); Mr. Mansell Hyams (London), Mr. Arthur Price, ex-Supt. Burke, Messrs. Dan Sullivan, Dan Crowley, and Richard Smith (representing the Cardiff Irish Fellowship), Sergt-Major Pride (Welsh Horse), Messrs. Fred and Charlie Yeates (Roath Athletic Club), Mr. A. M. Webber (South Cardiff Homing

Society). Mr. Ralph Lile, Mr. J. Hughes, Mr. F. Parker, and Mr. F. Davies (Cardiff), Messrs. E. Williams, Tom White, W. Neal, J. Davies and Jerry Welsh (Welsh A.B.A.). Messrs. Roy White, Norman White, Will Jones. J. Blackbarrow, Jack Elliott, Bob Carpenter, Llew Llewellyn, and Tom Berry (Newport). Mr. Morgan Crowther, Mr J. Daley (Cwmbran), Mr. Alf. Milsom, Capt. H. A. Pettigrew, of St. Fagan's (representing the Welsh Horse, of which the late Mr. Driscoll was at one time a member). Mr. Harry Sharman. Dr. W. J. Barry, Capt. McEnroy, Mr. Jack Smith (Sporting Fraternity of Manchester). Mr. Fred Goodwin. Commander J. R. Schofield, Messrs. R. J. Redford, T. Stewart, J. R. Johnson. and T. I. Dancer (representing the Cardiff Licensed Victuallers' Association). Mr. Charles Oram and others (representing the Cardiff Central Athletic Club). Major F. H. Shannons. M.C.. D.C.M. (representing the Cardiff and District branch of the British Legion), the Rev. W. A. Byrne (rector of St. Mary's. Canton), and the Rev. H. H. Barnett.

WELL-KNOWN BOXERS

The following well-known boxers: Messrs. Albert Jones (Driscoll's old trainer). C. McCarthy. W. H McCarthy. Rees Price (Mumbles), Dai Morgan (former Welsh champion), John Basham (former British welter-weight champion), Joe Johns (former light-weight champion of Wales), Fancy Perkins, Jack Scarrot, Young Barnes (ex-schoolboy champion), Owen Moran, Young Billy McCarthy (ex-feather and light-weight champion of Wales), Jim Courtenay, Tiger Smith, Johnny Owen, Aberdare (former Welsh

champion), Tommy Barnes, Frank Read (the blind boxer), Billy Davies, Jack Davies. Jerry Driscoll, Tom Richards, Frank Singer. Tommy Wilson, Mike Marney, Jack Imperato, Tom Evans, Billy McCarthy, Grouse Marney, Jerry Shea, Larry Cronin, William Fitzgerald, T. Savage, Pat Perkins, Joe Johns, Billy Morgan,

Edgar Smith, Salem Sullivan, George Williams, W. Price., Andy Dalrymple, M. J. Yewlett, and others.

The funeral arrangements were conducted by Augustine J. Stone, 5, Working-street. Cardiff.

Western Mail, Cardiff, Wednesday 4 February 1925