

"The rich history of British boxing is not just about the glitz and glamour of box-office superstars like Lennox Lewis and Frank Bruno. There are many fascinating untold stories that predate the television age. *Fighting Men of London* is a captivating collection of seven very different tales set in a lost fistic era. Delving deep into their individual stories, Alex Daley gets up close and personal with some of British boxing's unsung heroes and forgotten stars. You can almost feel the blood, sweat and tears." – **Colin Hart, *The Sun***

"To read Daley's book is to be taken back, very deliberately, to a London – to an England – just the other side of the memory of most of us... Daley's London is very much a working-class city: a city of Irish, Jewish and, later, of Caribbean immigrants; a city of poverty and its constant companion, crime; a city of community and togetherness; a city blighted by war; a city of evacuated children... this is a fascinating book... East End boxing history at its best." – **Boxing Monthly**

"Daley and the fighting men shine a guiding light on a time when British boxing boomed, bringing to life the characters, the venues and the generation as they embark on a colourful journey through a golden era."  
– **Tris Dixon, *Boxing News***

"*Fighting Men of London* is a book about a throwback era in boxing, when brave men fought in smoke-filled halls for small purses... Daley is to be congratulated on his book, bringing to life the stories of proud fighters of the past with stories to tell – warts and all." – **Blackpool Gazette**

"I'm no expert on British boxing, and except for one or two of them the names and exploits of Sid Nathan, Jock Taylor, Teddy Lewis, Jack Streek, Albert Carroll, Ted Berry and Sammy McCarthy were unknown to me. Making their acquaintance through Daley's and their own captivating narratives was a pleasure and honor."  
– **Pete Ehrmann, [Boxing.com](http://Boxing.com)**

"Daley revives the days of cards in baths, small halls and open air arenas so the reader can vividly capture the gritty reality of trading leather in London over 50 years ago... Interwoven into the chapters are stories of love and loss, air raid sirens and evacuations and boxing in the booths that throw light on a distant yet golden era of British boxing... The journeys are exhilarating and candid."  
– **Will Hale, *BoxRec News***

"The author provides an insight into the lives of the fighting men of the past. Their memories provide many interesting stories. A good read!"

- **Len Whaley, *East London Advertiser***

"Daley's labour of love brilliantly transports you to a forgotten era. It brings to life a magical age in vivid colour through emotive memories with reflections on boxing booths, World War II, the Krays and many other personalities. The stories all provide superb insight, casting a much-needed light on an era that might have otherwise been forgotten." - ***Boxing News***

"Told through seven former fighters with an eye for detail that makes you think of Gerald Kersh... As a history of East End culture, it's illuminating."

- **Peter Watts, *The Great Wen, a London blog***

"Alex Daley has said his inspiration for the book was the thought that the stories of these men might soon be lost forever... The passion comes through in both Daley's words and those of his subjects. The book contains many intricate details of the various fights these seven pugilists can remember, in pretty healthy detail. For non-fight fans there's interest in the men's lives outside the ring, hearing first-hand accounts of Ted Berry's dealings with the Kray twins and Albert Carroll's stark honesty about his post-boxing career in armed robbery."

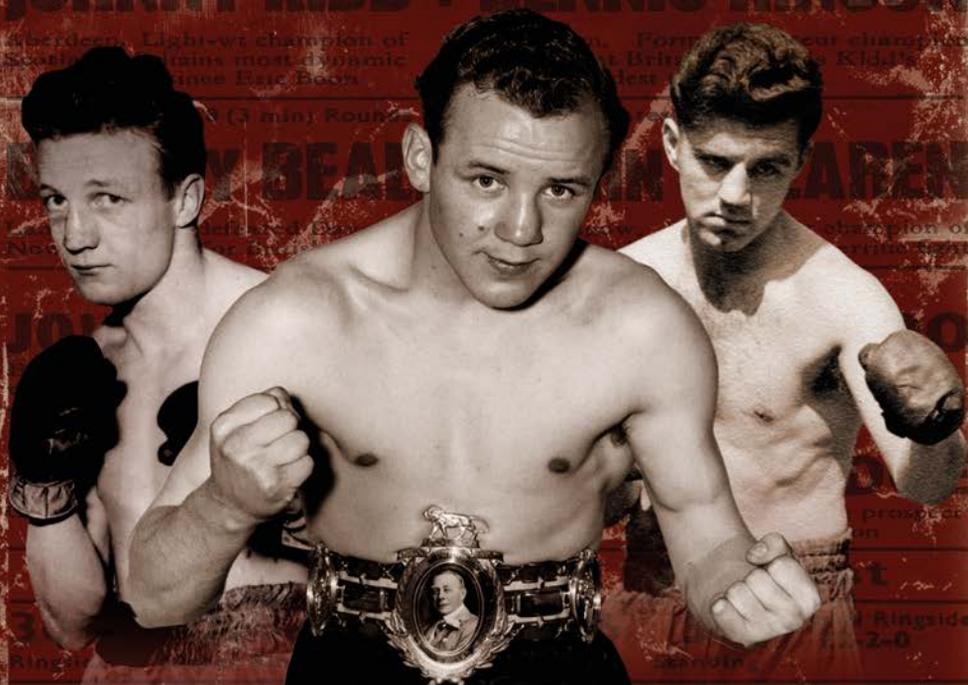
- **Matt Brown, *Londonist.com***

"A delightful book... Daley spent a lot of time interviewing the men and used the information in an innovative way." - **Ron Jackson, *SuperSport.com***

# FIGHTING MEN OF LONDON

VOICES FROM INSIDE THE ROPES

ALEX DALEY



"A CAPTIVATING COLLECTION OF SEVEN VERY DIFFERENT TALES SET IN A LOST FISTIC ERA. DELVING DEEP INTO THEIR INDIVIDUAL STORIES, ALEX DALEY GETS UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH SOME OF BRITISH BOXING'S UNSUNG HEROES AND FORGOTTEN STARS."

COLIN HART, THE SUN

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# SID NATHAN (ALDGATE) 1939–40

**I**T is 23 March 1939 and we are at the Prince of Wales Baths in London's Kentish Town. People file in through the arched doorways of this ornate redbrick and terracotta edifice and make their way into the main hall. At other times their visit would entail a wash, for these are the days when many London homes lack bathrooms. Tonight, though, is fight night.

Wooden boards have been laid across the water and the usually damp, steamy atmosphere has been replaced by the aroma of tobacco smoke, resin and embrocation. Fight fans sit on chairs around a temporary ring while others lean over balconies for a bird's-eye view. Dusk has fallen and chandeliers light up the room. People chatter loudly, bookmakers yell odds and pocket money, while journalists leaf through notebooks and discuss the imminent fights.

Madison Square Garden this is not, but in rings like this one champions are made.

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Out of sight and away from the hubbub, 16-year-old flyweight Sid Nathan sits tentatively in a shabby dressing room, waiting to be called out for his first professional contest. Around him are managers, peripheral characters and other boxers, including the man he is about to fight, Mike Constantino of Soho.

‘Are we on yet, Alf?’ Sid asks his manager.

‘Not long now, son,’ he replies.

Naturally, Sid is a little nervous but this tension serves to sharpen his senses and makes him more eager to show the crowd how well he can box.

He would not be sitting here, contemplating the task before him, if his stablemate Billy Nolan of Stepney had not withdrawn from this very contest with injured ribs. Nor would he be travelling the scheduled distance of eight rounds for the first time in his life.

Suddenly the door swings open and a whip (ring usher) marches in and points at Sid and his opponent. ‘You’re up next, boys,’ he says. ‘Give us a good scrap!’



Fast-forward 73 years to 2012 and I have the privilege of reliving this moment with Sid, who is now one of Britain’s last surviving pre-war pro boxers. He has also been an internationally renowned referee and is still an avid follower of boxing. I interview him on three occasions at his home in Boreham Wood where sadly, due to the death of his wife a few years ago, he now lives alone.

Arriving at his flat, I discover that boxing is still a big part of his life. He has stacks of DVDs of fights that he refereed and around his sitting room are mementos of his time as a third man, as well as photos of himself with famous fighters such as Herol Graham and David Haye. On my second visit, just after the Haye–Chisora press

conference fiasco in Germany, I notice the photo of Haye has been moved behind some others. ‘I’ve moved it there until he redeems himself,’ Sid says half-seriously. ‘But I don’t know how he’s gonna redeem himself after that disgraceful shemozzle!’

Sid keenly follows current boxing but is saddened by the lack of press coverage the sport receives today. Our third interview is the day after Tyson Fury’s clash with Martin Rogan, and although Sid doesn’t feel Fury has what it takes to reach the top, he is still eager to know the result, which to his annoyance is missing from his morning paper. He is probably the only follower of Haye and Fury who saw such old-time stars as Ted Kid Lewis, Nel Tarleton, Dick Corbett, Dave Crowley, Harry Mizler and Eric Boon box, and once shared a fight bill with Jack Kid Berg.

Today former fighters approach Sid and proudly remind him that he refereed one of their fights. He is recognised regularly as ‘That boxing ref who used to be on the telly’ and is delighted when people tell him he looks the same as he did 30 years ago – and they’re right. There is a timeless quality to Sid. Admittedly, while he was refereeing, his horn-rimmed glasses and thinning hair made him look slightly older than his years. But now, in his 90s, the reverse is certainly true. His mental and physical vitality are nothing short of amazing.

Though short and slim in stature, Sid oozes confidence and personality. He is charming, quick-witted, enthusiastic and ever eager to ensure a guest of his is made to feel welcome. The phrase old-fashioned gentleman was coined for men like Sid.

His voice is strong and clear and his speech is precise and carefully modulated – you have to listen closely to detect his East End roots. But he is an East End man without question, and his boyhood there along with his boxing experiences have made him the astute and resilient person he is today.

### A Jewish Tradition

To understand Sid's early life and his entry into professional boxing, we must first understand the milieu in which he lived and how he got there. Today there are few Jewish boxers in the world, let alone in England. But in the first half of the 20th century England (and London particularly) had an abundance of Jewish fighters, promoters, managers and trainers. Boxing was as important to Jewish people as Jewish people were to boxing.

There were 26 Jewish world champions between 1910 and 1940, and many of them – such as Benny Leonard, Barney Ross and Max Baer – were global stars. London had two Jewish world champions of its own in Ted Kid Lewis and Jack Kid Berg, plus a host of British champions of Jewish identity. Men such as Young Joseph, Mike Honeyman and Matt Wells before the Great War, were succeeded by 20s and 30s champions such as Jack Bloomfield, Harry Mason, Johnny Brown, Al Foreman and Harry Mizler. Some wore the Star of David on their shorts or dressing gowns, which as well as presenting a statement of faith, secured the loyalties of thousands of Jewish fight fans.

The main reason for such a strong Jewish presence in boxing is clear. For young men with few means of elevating themselves it was a possible route to wealth, fame and a better life; a way to escape the poverty that was endemic to the East End at that time and the hardship that had befallen their parents and grandparents.

Sid Nathan's grandparents, like the forebears of many other Anglo-Jewish boxers, were part of a late 19th-century and early 20th-century wave of immigration. Between 1880 and 1914 nearly three million Jews fled persecution and the threat of violence from the pogroms (anti-Jewish riots) in Eastern Europe. Most went to America, but 150,000 sailed to Britain. Upon arrival many headed for London's East End, which already had established Jewish communities and was a place they could worship in the accustomed manner,

buy kosher food and converse in languages they understood. But living conditions were crowded and squalid and job opportunities limited, and what's more the existing Jewish fraternity was not wholly welcoming to the new arrivals.

Early on in my first interview with Sid, I ask him about his forebears, but I discover that the details of his ancestors' arrival in London have been lost with the passage of time. He tells me that both his parents were born in England and that his grandparents emigrated there from either Russia or Poland, but that is all he knows of the subject. With this information, I trawl through some archival records and find, to my delight, that I am able to fill in some of the blanks.

The original family name was Natalski (later spelt Natalsky) and Sid's paternal grandfather, Nathan Natalski, a boot-maker by trade, arrived in London from Russia with his wife, Leah (also known as Rachel), and their young daughter Esther some time between 1879 and 1882. By 1891 Sid's grandparents were living at 4 New Church Street in Bethnal Green and had four further children to look after. The youngest was Sid's father, Jacob (soon to be changed to the more English-sounding Jack), who was born on 2 May that year.

Within a decade, two more children had been born but sadly Nathan Natalski died in 1900, aged 42, leaving his widow, Leah, and their eldest daughters as breadwinners. By 1901 the family had moved to 184 Old Montague Street in Whitechapel and Leah's son-in-law Joe Cohen – a boot-maker like Leah's late husband – was living with the family, most probably to augment the household income and save them the hardship and indignity of the workhouse.

But Sid's father, Jack, was soon old enough to help financially and found work as a machinist in one of the East End's many clothing factories. Aptly dubbed 'sweatshops', these were cramped, dingy places where the workers toiled for long hours at appallingly low pay. At the time of the 1911

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census, 20-year-old Jack was working in such a place while living with his family at 12 Lily House in Brick Lane. His gruelling day job, however, would probably have prepared him well for another tough vocation that, by then, was helping him earn a few extra ‘bob’.

Alongside his factory work, Jack was boxing professionally under the nom de plume of Jack Arbour. ‘He used the name Arbour so that his mother didn’t know that he was boxing as a professional. He chose Arbour because around that time he lived in Arbour Square, in the East End, which was very well known,’ Sid tells me.

The details of Jack’s ring career are difficult to piece together all these years later, especially given he may have used multiple pseudonyms. Jack Arbour (Bethnal Green) can be credited with numerous bouts between 1908 and 1911, while a certain Jack Nathan (Aldgate), who was fighting at the same time, seems highly likely to be the same man.

One certainty is that Jack had his most memorable fight at the Judean Club in Princes Square (off Cable Street) on 27 August 1911. Part boxing hall, part gymnasium, part social club, the Judean was a nursery for Jewish boxing talent until it was destroyed by Zeppelin bombs during the First World War. Jack’s opponent that day was a lad named Gershon Mendeloff, who was boxing under the pseudonym Kid Lewis. Ted Kid Lewis, as he was later widely known, was destined to win the world welterweight crown and make history as one of Britain’s greatest ever fighters. But in 1911 he was just an up-and-coming preliminary boy.

The official verdict shows he beat Jack Arbour on a third-round disqualification, but Sid heard a different story of the fight from his father. ‘My father told me that he put Lewis down with a perfect body punch,’ Sid recalls. ‘He said, “That punch was a perfect punch to the solar plexus, put him down, and they disqualified me.” Kid Lewis pleaded for a foul and got away with it, and my father was disqualified.’

There were no hard feelings between Lewis and Sid's father, however, whatever the merit of the decision, as the pair were pals.

'I can't tell you how many fights my father had because he never divulged how many,' says Sid, 'but he always said to me, "You were a better boxer than I ever was", which I felt was a great compliment for a father to pay his son.'

### **An Aldgate Upbringing**

In 1915 Jack Natalski (or Jack Nathan as he was now widely known) married Golda Silver in the City of London. Their first child, Louis, was born in 1919, and Sid (whose birth name was Samuel) followed on 1 September 1922.

The family lived in Buckle Street, off Leman Street, in Aldgate, a stone's throw from the well-known Gardiner's Corner, a junction dubbed 'the gateway of the East End' for it connects the five main thoroughfares of east London. In Sid's day it was a bustling working-class area and a hub of East End life, packed with pubs, coffee stands, all-night cafes and, of course, jellied eel stalls.

'Tubby Isaacs ran the jellied eel stall at the corner of Goldstone Street,' remembers Sid, referring to one of the East End's best-known characters of those days. 'Everybody knew of Tubby Isaacs.' Sid explains to me that jellied eels are not kosher and therefore should not be eaten by those who observe Jewish dietary laws. But ironically Tubby Isaacs's stall was pitched in front of the Beth Din, the office that handles the affairs of kosher foods, and directly beneath a large sign bearing its name. 'Tubby Isaac's stall is under the Beth Din' thus became a local Jewish joke uttered tongue in cheek.

Initially Sid attended Buckle Street Infant School and then, when he reached the requisite age, the Jewish Free School on Bell Lane. 'There were a couple of masters there who were very tough guys as far as I was concerned. They were a little bit brutal in their work. I

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won't explain any more,' says Sid, ominously. 'They were hard taskmasters.'

But apart from some tough schooling, Sid has fond memories of his childhood. 'From what I remember of it, before that dirty dog Mosely came along – and he started making speeches on different street corners to try to turn people's minds to race hatred – before that time, I thought the East End was a lovely place to live,' he says poignantly, referring of course to the fascist Oswald Mosely. 'Everybody in my street knew each other – they were a mixed people, Jewish and non-Jewish – and when a funeral took place *everybody* came out for the funeral.'

'I was called in regularly to a friend's house, who was council no doubt, but he was non-Jewish, he was a gentile – Johnny Herring. I was taken in regularly by the Herring family and supplied with a slice of bread with drippings spread on it, which was of course not kosher and therefore I wasn't supposed to have it. But I knew no different and I appreciated what I was given.'

'It was a wonderful place to be,' he adds, 'because we knew no different. We only knew of poverty. We didn't know anything about having money given to you free, *ad lib*, like the government is giving now.'

### Boxing Barmy

It is difficult to convey to the modern reader just how popular boxing was in Britain in the 1920s and 30s, for today it is a fringe sport by comparison. Back then regular fight shows were held all over the country and the boxers often fought several times a month, some even several times a week. London was the hub of this boxing industry and a place to where aspiring boxers flocked in their droves. Fight shows could be seen across the city, with some venues putting on two or three bills a week.

Pro boxing had a following akin to professional football today and the fighters, in terms of status though not salary,

were the Premier League footballers of their day. Every London district had its own ring idols, their successes and reverses fervently cheered and bewailed by their devotees. Their exploits provided reams of newspaper fodder and every national paper had its own dedicated boxing columnist.

As chance would have it, just two streets away from Sid's Buckle Street home stood Premierland (pronounced 'Premier-land'), one of Britain's leading fight halls of the 1920s. I ask Sid whether he went to boxing shows with his father during this exciting period. 'I was taken to the odd one or two,' he says, 'but I wasn't taken much. Maybe he thought it wasn't the atmosphere for a young boy to be in.

'The only one I *can* remember,' he adds, 'is when he took me to see Kid Lewis at the Premierland, and I saw him box Joe Rolfe, who was quite a well-known boxer in those days. I remember seeing Lewis defeat Joe Rolfe and, at ringside where we were, Kid Lewis leaned over the ropes, took me under the armpits – I was only a little toddler – and picked me up to show me off. I don't know *why*, but I suppose it was because my father was a friend of his. As I got older I realised how important that was, that he did that for me.'

As a boy Sid's father showed him some of the rudiments of boxing, particularly how to deliver a decent left lead. But his fistic education really began at age nine or ten, when he joined the Jewish Lads' Brigade, a youth organisation similar in purpose to the Boys' Brigade, with an emphasis on morality and physical fitness.

'I had a uniform, a haversack, a belt and a hat to wear, like one of those hats that they wore in the air force on the side of the head,' Sid recalls. 'And I belonged to Underwood Street Company. We all had different branches, but everybody assembled at Camperdown House.'

Camperdown House, in Aldgate's quaintly named Half Moon Passage, was the organisation's headquarters. There the lads had the use of a large assembly hall, two smaller

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halls, two gyms, a common room, games and sitting rooms and several bathrooms. The last of these were especially welcomed by East End youngsters, most of whom did not have bathrooms at home. Activities on offer included gymnastics, physical training, handball, badminton, a social union, dances, occasional amateur concerts and, of course, boxing.

The boxing instructor was a Sergeant-Major Butterwasser. 'Quite a peculiar name,' says Sid with a smile, 'and later on he changed his name to Butterworth. But he used to take us in the boxing class and he made it that interesting that I wanted to learn more.'

The Camperdown House boxing classes produced several future professionals – men such as European lightweight champion Al Phillips, Harry Lazar and the brothers Johnny and Alec Lyons. With its regimented structure and emphasis on clean living, the Jewish Lads' Brigade was an ideal environment for a budding boxer. Between the ages of ten and 15, Sid did plenty of sparring there, mainly against older boys, but he was not rushed in to actual bouts.

'I never had an amateur career as such,' he explains. 'I was only asked to box on one show, and that took place in the main hall at Camperdown House, and they said that I would be boxing Harry Lazar. Well I knew of Harry Lazar and didn't like him very much, because he was, I suppose, that popular but he was a bit cocky with it. And they put me in against him, untrained as I was, even though I had been doing a bit of sparring in the main hall.'

'But there was an audience and there were three judges appointed. It went the full three rounds and I got the verdict. I believe I got it because – apart from our boxing ability, because we both had boxing ability – I had him in trouble at one time, he leaned over the ropes and I refused to punch at that point. I stepped back and waited for him to stand up and box again.'

Harry Lazar (pronounced Lazer), a future star professional, was already causing a stir as an amateur, so his loss to the unknown Sid Nathan was quite an upset. Some time later, after Lazar had turned professional, he invited Sid to spar with him at the gymnasium where he trained.

‘I think the idea was to get me to go in that ring and box my head off,’ Sid chuckles. ‘And he taught me what good boxing was all about! We had three rounds of boxing but I feel that, if there’d been anybody to judge it, he would have got the verdict. So he more or less gained revenge for his defeat in the amateurs. But his manager liked the fact that I was able to take a punch, give a punch, make a few moves that made Harry miss, and with that he asked me if I would like to box as a pro.’

The manager was Alf Jacobs, a bookmaker who had turned to boxing management and possessed an impressive stable of fighters. ‘Although I felt that I hadn’t had the experience,’ Sid says, ‘he nevertheless went to see my dad and said to my dad that I’d be good as a professional. Initially my parents disagreed totally with me boxing as a professional, but eventually they succumbed and I signed a contract for five years.’

Sid began to train at Jacobs’s gym, a ramshackle place above a disused stable in Mile End, which adjoined the La Boheme dance hall. The trainer and masseur was a man named Fred Ordway. ‘A good old boy was Fred. A very nice man, but he was a nervous type of man,’ says Sid. ‘Always had a cigarette sticking out the corner of his mouth. When I had my training sessions he’d massage me from head to foot. He’d even massage my toes!’

After leaving school at the standard age of 14, Sid had initially worked as a messenger boy at the BBC, a job he had acquired through a cousin who worked for the broadcaster as a typist. ‘It was amazing that I was able to work there,’ he declares, ‘because it wasn’t known for Jewish people to work at the BBC. “*You worked at the BBC!*” It was unusual.

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I sometimes wish I'd stayed there. It would have been a job for life.'

But he left the BBC for a position at the law firm H.H. Wells & Sons, whose offices were at 17 Paternoster Row, hard by St Paul's Cathedral, in the heart of the City. 'I was doing County Court work,' he says. 'I was taking cases that they gave me, which were for people who owed money for goods received, and I used to have to go to court and issue a summons against them. It was quite an important role.'

As incongruous as a role in a solicitors' office may seem next to a prize-fighting career, Sid managed to combine them. After finishing work at 5.30pm each day he boarded a bus bound for Mile End, sweated and swapped blows for a couple of hours at Alf Jacobs's gym, then headed home for supper and bed in readiness for another day's legal work.

'I trained every day,' says Sid, 'I don't remember ever leaving a day out. I spent a lot of time keeping fit. That's how I got my six-pack in that photograph,' he laughs, nodding towards a photo resting on his mantelpiece of his younger self in a fighting stance, taken in 1939. 'For an eight-stone-three boy, I had a good six-pack.'

### **Stablemates**

Despite Sid's inexperience, training and sparring with Alf Jacobs's other fighters soon sharpened his boxing skills and helped prepare him for his first professional fight. He has fond and lucid memories of his stable mates, some of whom were among the best men in the country at their respective weights. His eyes twinkle and he smiles warmly as he turns his mind back 73 years and tells me about them.

#### ***\*Les Johnson (Finsbury Park)***

'I learnt a lot from Les Johnson,' he says. 'I used to spar with him regularly, and we had some real tussles between us. He once hit me with a punch and I thought the world had come to an end! I could feel myself sway forward and I could feel

him put his hands up against me to stop me from falling. He said to me, "You all right, Sid?" I said, "I'm all right now. Now you've stopped me falling!"

Les Johnson was a cousin of British champions Dick and Harry Corbett, but paradoxically as a child he hated fighting and at all costs avoided physical confrontation. After leaving school he boxed as an amateur at the Mildmay Club in Newington Green but only did so half-heartedly and with no ambitions of turning pro.

That all changed quite by chance when his sister went to a dance and met the Southern Area flyweight champion Dave Keller, pride of Billingsgate, who invited Les to spar with him. Les took up the offer and despite taking a pasting from Keller, he did sufficiently well to prompt Alf Jacobs (who managed Keller at the time) to sign him as a professional.

Les decided his birth name, Leslie John Spence, did not befit a prize fighter, so after a period of training he turned pro under the nom de plume of Les Johnson. Born in Hoxton on Boxing Day 1911, he made his pro debut at 26, an age by which, in those days, many fighters were finished.

Boxing out of Finsbury Park, he stopped the talented Pat Warburton twice, drew with the world-class Joe Curran and on 27 November 1938 KO'd his sister's old dancing partner Dave Keller, who was still Southern Area flyweight champion, in a non-title affair. Les later challenged unsuccessfully for the Southern Area bantamweight title and in 1949, at the age of 37, caused a sensation by beating the number three flyweight contender Dickie O'Sullivan (a great uncle of the snooker player Ronnie O'Sullivan).

'He was a nice bloke,' says Sid of Les Johnson. 'He was about 28 at the time; a bit of a late starter. He was only a little fella; he was even shorter than me – and I'm not tall. But sparring with him did me a lot of good and he was very good to me.'

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### *\*Al Marson (Canning Town)*

'I went in the ring with Al Marson just to speed around him,' recalls Sid, 'make him move more quickly. It was at the manager's request. Make like I'm boxing but making sure that we didn't exchange punches. Otherwise I wouldn't have lasted more than half a minute because he could have knocked me out with one punch. But he was a good boxer – had a very good left hand. Nice tall guy – nice fella. Marson rarely ever lost a fight.'

Al Marson, like Les Johnson, was a latecomer to professional boxing. He had taken up amateur boxing after struggling against a smaller boy in a schoolyard fight and joined the Benjamin Franklin Club where the coach was the experienced Harry Brooks. Al won a London Federation of Boys' Clubs' 10st title and as a senior was a member of Limehouse and Poplar ABC. Then he lost interest in boxing and instead started weightlifting to develop his physique. But the allure of the ring proved irresistible.

He would watch brothers Bill and Tommy Partridge sparring in the gym, observing that Tommy always struggled against Bill, who was a decent pro heavyweight. So Al offered to spar with Bill instead and as their workouts became a regular fixture, Al's gym-mates urged him to turn professional. He signed a contract with Alf Jacobs and had his first paid fight in 1938. His progress was steady and in the 1940s he battled his way up the rankings to become number one light-heavyweight contender to champion Freddie Mills (more on Al Marson in the section of this book on Jock Taylor of Sidcup).

### *\*Harry Lazar (Aldgate)*

'I kept away from him,' Sid says of Harry Lazar. 'I never really, honestly, liked him at all, because he was a bit of a flash guy and I wasn't like that. But he was brilliant. He *was brilliant*. I used to admire him. I used to watch him and say, "I wish I could box like him."

‘He was brilliant at what he did – that I will always remember. And whenever I talk to anybody about boxing, I talk about Harry Lazar as being a good, good fighter and a brilliant boxer.

‘He was improving so much that he was beating everybody that came his way, and he was getting heavier as well, so there was never any chance of us boxing each other again. But I knew Lazar was gonna lose sometime because he just wouldn’t train. I saw him lose contests that normally, if he’d have been trained and fit, he’d have made a mess of whoever it was.’

Harry Lazar (real name Lazarus) was born five days after Sid on 6 September 1922, into a poor and crowded Aldgate household that eventually comprised eight boys and five girls. His grandfather Harry Solomons was a bare-knuckle champion of England and his father was a bookmaker, so entry into the fight game was a natural move for Harry.

Boxing almost exclusively at the Devonshire Club and the Mile End Arena, Lazar won his first 26 pro fights. In his prime a lightweight, then later, when slightly over the hill, a welterweight, he won 84, lost 25 and drew six of 115 fights. In a 12-year career he beat champions and leading men such as Johnny McGrory, Dave Crowley (twice), Harry Mizler, Tommy Hyams, Dave Finn and Henry Hall but never fought for a title.

His kid brother Lew Lazar, though less gifted than Harry, was perhaps more committed, winning the Southern Area middleweight title and challenging for British and European crowns. Another Lazar brother, Joe, earned a formidable reputation as an unlicensed bare-knuckle fighter, but was unable to get a licence to box legitimately due to his prison record. While yet another brother, Mark Lazarus, found fame as a professional footballer.

‘I remember him fighting Harry Kid Silver,’ says Sid enthusiastically as he recalls one of his keenest memories of Harry Lazar in the ring. ‘Lazar beat him on points: