

Dan Donnelly (boxer)

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Dan Donnelly (March 1788 – February 18, 1820) was a professional boxing pioneer and the first Irish-born heavyweight champion. He was posthumously inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame, *Pioneers* Category in 2008.

Contents

- 1 Life and times
- 2 Donnelly's Arm
- 3 See also
- 4 References
- 5 External links

Life and times

Donnelly was born in the docks of Dublin, Ireland in March, 1788, the ninth of his mother's 17 children. He had worked as a carpenter earlier in his adult life.

He fought at a time when boxing was of the bare-knuckles variety and bouts had no time limits. He took part in only three major fights, winning each of them. His first triumph was over Tom Hall at the Curragh of Kildare on September 14, 1814 in front of 20,000 spectators.

His second victory on December 13, 1815, at the same location and with a similarly-sized crowd, was his most celebrated and a source of Irish pride because his opponent, George Cooper, was from England, which still ruled Ireland at the time. Donnelly broke Cooper's jaw in the eleventh round of the 22-minute match, and collected the prize of sixty pounds. A squat, weather-beaten, gray obelisk surrounded by a short iron fence marks the exact site, which has been called Donnelly's Hollow since the bout. The inscription on the monument: DAN DONNELLY BEAT COOPER ON THIS SPOT 13TH DEC. 1815.

In his third and final fight on July 21, 1819, he defeated Tom Oliver in 34 rounds on English turf, at Crawley Down in Sussex.

He had a reputation for being a gambler, a womanizer and a drunkard. After his victory over Cooper, Donnelly was the proprietor of a succession of four Dublin pubs, all of them unprofitable. Fallon's Capstan Bar is the only one still in existence.

He died at Donnelly's Public House, the last tavern he owned, on February 18, 1820 at the age of 32. An oval wall plaque commemorates the site of his death. He was buried in an unmarked vault at Dublin's Bully's Acre cemetery, near the Royal Hospital Kilmainham.

Almost two centuries after his death, Donnelly remains the subject of urban legend. One contends that he had the longest arms in boxing history, with the ability to touch his knees without bending down. Another claims that he was knighted by the Prince Regent. His arms were actually of normal length for a man of his size (six feet tall). No known documentation exists to support the latter.

Donnelly's Arm

Not all of Donnelly's remains are interred at Bully's Acre. His body was reportedly stolen by professional grave robbers and sold to a Dublin surgeon who, before demanding that the corpse be returned to its proper resting place, removed Donnelly's right arm, along with the attached shoulder blade, to study the muscle structure. The arm subsequently found itself in Scotland at the University of Edinburgh's medical college, where it was disinfected, lacquered and used in anatomy lessons. It was next exhibited at an English traveling circus. It returned to Ireland in 1904 when "Texas" McAlevey, a Belfast bookmaker/bartender acquired it to first put on display at his bar before relegating it to the attic of his betting parlor. James Byrne, the proprietor of the Hideout Olde World Pub in Kilcullen, County Kildare received it in 1953 from a wine merchant who had purchased it just for fun. This was where the mummified arm would be showcased for the next 43 years. The trophy limb was the subject of a February 20, 1995 *Sports Illustrated* article.^[1] Desmond Byrne, son of the late James and current owner of Donnelly's arm, removed it from public viewing in 1996 when he sold the Hideout.

See also

- List of bare-knuckle boxers

References

- ↑ Abel, Allen. "Donnelly's Arm," *Sports Illustrated*, February 20, 1995. (http://vault.sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1006267/index.htm)

External links

- Dan Donnelly biography - International Boxing Hall of Fame. (http://www.ibhof.com/donnelly.html)
- Myler, Patrick. "Irish Dan Donnelly: Still On Tour 178 Years After His Death," *The Ring* (magazine). (http://www.irishartscenter.org/Fighting%20Irishmen/Patrick%20Myler-re%20Dan%20Donnelly.pdf)

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