

Britain at Work

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Muhammad Ali's visit to North Kensington in 1966

On May 15 1966 the World Heavyweight Boxing Champion Muhammad Ali visited the London Free School children's group at 34 Tavistock Crescent, by Westbourne Park station and the site of the Westway, at the time of his second Henry Cooper fight at Highbury. The Neighbourhood Service children's group was run by Rhaune Laslett, who went on to organise the Free School Fayre procession, which evolved into the Notting Hill Carnival. The London Free School group also offered adult education lectures about housing, families and mental health, labour relations and unions, maths and statistics, comparative religion, photography, science, economics, law, English, immigration, current affairs, music and painting.

From the boxing ring to the shop floor: In this issue, we want to show how Muhammed Ali's personal history was embedded in the history of social and political struggles in the USA, Britain and the wider world. Segregation, the Vietnam war, the fight for equal rights and justice, these were all part of Ali's life, both inside and outside the boxing ring. When he came to London in 1966, he brought with him this strong anti-racist, anti-imperialist politics that was shared by many working class and trade union militants in the capital. What Ali did in the ring was to be found in countless workplaces: the fight for dignity, rights, and alternatives to the coercion of the market. If, as EP Thompson argued, 'historical consciousness ought to assist one to understand the possibilities of transformation and the possibilities within people', then the urgency and power of Ali's own history should give us the opportunity to review that recent past on both sides of the Atlantic.

Muhammad Ali training at White City TA gym in 1966



In 1966 Muhammad Ali trained for the Henry Cooper fight at the Territorial Army gym in White City. In the second photo, as Angelo Dundee wraps his hand he jokes with Jack Achilles, head chef of Isow's, where Ali would eat in the run-up to his fights. Photograph R McPhedran/Getty Images. Rosanna Achilleos-Sarli wrote the following Ali tribute letter to The Guardian 12/6/16—A photographic reminder of Muhammad Ali's kindness to my father:

My father, Jack Achilles, was the head chef at Isow's restaurant in Brewer Street, Soho, when Jack Solomons a regular customer, promoted the fight in 1963 between Henry Cooper and Muhammad Ali, then known as Cassius Clay. Ali stayed in Piccadilly and frequently went to eat at Isow's. Knowing as much about food as Ali knew about boxing, my father got on well with his most appreciative diner. Ali trusted that he would feed him whenever he was in London, and especially before his fights. From then on a telegram from Ali would arrive to let my father know when to get the Aberdeen Angus steaks ready. He would go to choose the meat and supervise the butchering, to make sure it was fit for a king. In turn, he was singled out by Ali in the press

conferences and generously included in many of the photo calls that were routinely held at Isow's. One afternoon, in 1963, our entire family went, at Ali's invitation, to the East End to watch him sparring before the fight with Cooper. My father was also given tickets to the fights. In simply acknowledging the important part my father played in feeding him so well, Ali was a giant among men.

Earlier this year I attended a lecture in North Kensington library, west London, given by the local historian Tom Vague. The subject was a visit by Ali to the London Free school playgroup in Tavistock Crescent in 1966. In the middle of the lecture, a slide came up of Ali training at the Territorial Army gym at White City and standing next to him was my father. I had never seen the photograph and it caused quite a stir when I called out: "That's my dad." It is a tremendous photograph. Both men are laughing while Angelo Dundee wraps Ali's hands. To my eye, my father and Ali look equally matched in the image, and that was Ali's greatest gift—to relate to everyone, to look down on no one, to be generous to all, to enjoy the moment.

IWCE day schools and Britain at Work London website

The Britain at Work London Project has supported the IWCE (Independent Working Class Education Network) for some years. We attended two recent IWCE day-schools London and Norwich, the first of which included Sally Groves who talked about the Trico strike and Martin Eady who drew on his new book 'Hold on Tight,' both West London speakers we have interviewed. Chris Coates (ex-TUC Librarian), Richard Temple (Senate House Library archivist) and Ann Field (News International Project) also spoke. A week later, the new East Anglian IWCE held a day school in Norwich which explored the history of agricultural workers (Dave Berry), Chartism and Labourism (Colin Waugh), and workplace violence against women (Jenny Webber and

Ann Skipper). We hope that the IWCE will help to build a national network for labour and oral history and look forward to working closely with it in the future.

Please visit the new Britain at Work London website www.britainatworklondon.com It has an interview with John McDonnell MP, information about our book 'All in a Day's Work', all of our newsletters, and information about the London project. It will include special features and short extracts from our interviews. Please get in touch with Rima: rima@britainatworklondon.com if you would like to be interviewed. The 'All in a Day's Work' book with foreword by John McDonnell is available for £12.85 with p&p contact Rima or phone 0207 2727649

Brian McNeil-Lynam



Brian McNeil-Lynam (centre, seated) at an NUR North London Council District meeting circa 1981

An extract from the eulogy for Brian McNeil-Lynam, by Marie Lynam, 2.12.2015. Brian died on Monday 16 November 2015 at the age of 82. At the age of 16, he joined the navy; was sent to Singapore and Malaysia in search and rescue missions. There, he learnt about the Chinese Revolution and became a Maoist. He was court-martialed for insubordination and dismissed from the army. On his return to London, he married a gypsy lady and started work at Cable and Wireless. In 1956, Brian joined the Paddington Labour Party, then became associated with the Internationalist Group and then joined the Trotskyist Posadist IV International in 1961-62.

As Brian's wife objected to his views, they eventually separated and Brian went to work as a miner at the Gelgiving-Cotgrave pit in Nottinghamshire. There, he joined the NUM. He stayed there 2 years. Around 1966, Brian moved to Birmingham and started work at the Longbridge-Austin car plant. He joined the AEUW, and with others, demanded that the profits of automation should go to the workers. This kind of thing won him the sack and, in 1968-69, he moved to Bedfordshire, to work for the Luton-Vauxhall car plant. In Luton, he joined the NUVB and started editing *The United Car Worker*, a small publication that won him the enmity of the trade union bureaucracy. His aim was to have the skilled and unskilled fighting together for their rights, and eventually the end of all grades through automatic skilling for everyone. Sacked again, and blacklisted, Brian changed his name to become Brian A McNeil, but he went on being sacked all the same. He married Marie Moreau in 1969, found employment on the railways and they both moved to London.

In London, Brian joined the NUR. After several years, he became chairman of the North London NUR district

Council. Brian was a contemporary of Jimmy Knapp, leader of the NUR before Bob Crow. With the rest of his Union comrades, which included Pete Firmin, he fought for the railways to become part of a more fully integrated national transport service. Brian had no children from his first marriage, and none with Marie either. So he adopted Isabel, his friend's child, as his god-daughter. I

In 1990, Brian got a 2-1 degree in English at the University of Westminster. As his year abroad was in Argentina, he wrote his dissertation in Spanish on the question of the Argentinian Trade Unions and Nemenism. He travelled to Bolivia, and then went to Chile to visit friends who he had met in London when they were refugees from Pinochet. He tried an MA after that, but was stopped by growing symptoms of manic-depression.

Sturdy in his health throughout his mature life, Brian was diagnosed with manic depression at the age of 68. This illness became fairly well controlled by cocktails of medications, but Brian then developed Parkinson symptoms. At the age of 71, Brian could no longer eat by himself. He was less and less able to walk but he fought bravely to continue to be involved in the struggle of the working class and contribute ideas to it. Brian insisted in keeping himself informed to the last. He read the headlines of the *Morning Star* until almost the end. He died after several weeks in hospital from the last stages of Parkinson.

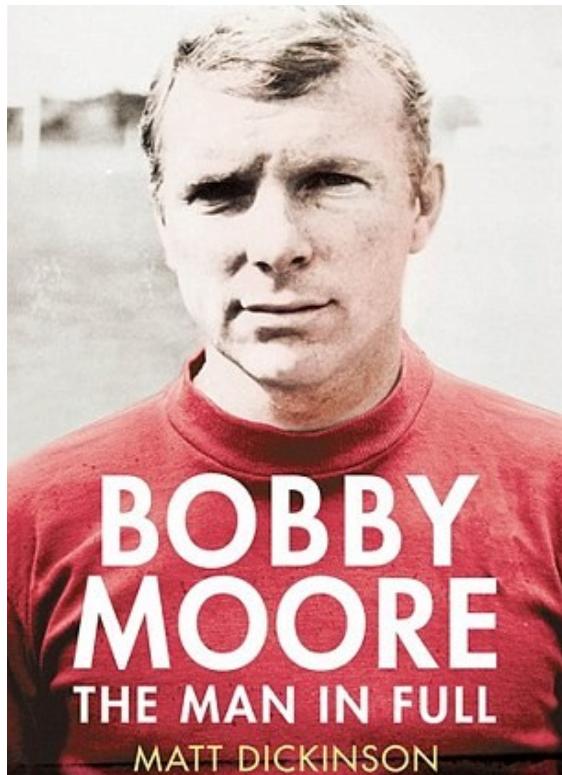
Brian taught Marie that life has meaning through the use one makes of it on behalf of human progress. His life goes on in the struggle of all the others who continue the fight for social justice and equality. In that sense, no comrade is ever really dead. Forward! Marie

'Bobby Moore: The Man In Full' by Matt Dickinson

For those of us of a certain age there is an image of Bobby Moore that is forever imprinted in our minds: the handsome, blonde England captain being held aloft by his jubilant team mates as he brandishes the Jules Rimet trophy against a backdrop of a clear blue sky; truly the golden boy of English football. Yet, more than 20 years after Moore's premature death, how much did we really know about the person beyond that impassive façade? Matt Dickinson delved exhaustively into Moore's background, interviewing family, former colleagues and friends and, consequently, has written the most incisive and thorough portrait yet of the former West Ham and England hero. It was no easy task for Dickinson. Even Geoff Hurst, who shared in all of Moore's triumphs for club and country, concedes that he didn't know the real Moore, beyond the image that his illustrious colleague presented to the world.

Bobby Moore was born in Barking, in April 1941, during the blitz. An only child, his upbringing by his proud parents imbued him with those wartime characteristics that served Londoners so well in helping them carry on and get through it—the stoicism and the ability to keep a stiff upper lip. That would never change. Even in extremis, there were no displays of emotion from Bobby. He always sought to keep control of himself. Moore was not initially regarded as an exceptional young player when he joined West Ham. It was Malcolm Allison, a senior professional at the club, who identified certain qualities in young Bobby, and became his mentor. "Look big, think big", Allison exhorted his young charge. The extrovert Allison also introduced the reserved Moore to the drinking culture that was so pervasive in the game. Bobby would embrace it whole-heartedly: 'Win or lose, on the booze' was his motto. Moore, essentially a shy and introverted man, would befriend lively, outgoing characters such as Jimmy Greaves, and show business personality Kenny Lynch, who would become his great pals and drinking companions. Moore's managers at international and club level, respectively Sir Alf Ramsey and Ron Greenwood, were reserved and uncommunicative characters. However, whereas Moore forged a great manager/captain relationship with Ramsey, his relationship with West Ham manager Greenwood would become increasingly strained and problematical.

The Colombian city of Bogota will always be associated with Moore, due to the notorious 'stolen bracelet' incident that at one time looked like it might scupper his involvement in the imminent Mexico World Cup of 1970. Moore's post-playing career saw him embark on a succession of failed business ventures, and an unsuccessful attempt to forge a career in club football management. His marriage to Tina (they were the 'Posh and Becks' of their day) painfully broke down, and he



would explore new horizons with his second wife, Stephanie. When Moore received the news that he had terminal cancer he set about contacting and meeting up with former colleagues, effectively saying his goodbyes, without telling them of his plight. Moore managed his impending death as he had his life—in a controlled fashion. An announcement of his illness in the newspapers, a visit to Wembley to commentate on an England international, and then Bobby was gone, within a week of his desperately sad fate being made public.

Amidst the outpouring of grief at Moore's early demise, an English public disenchanted with the modern game held Moore up as a beacon for the values that had been lost. Dickinson, though, in reflecting this response, does not offer Bobby up as a candidate for sainthood. Whilst not in any way besmirching Moore's elevated status, he reveals him as a person with flaws, just like the average human being. Dickinson concludes the book with righteous and justifiable anger towards the highest echelons of the English game which Moore had served in such distinguished fashion, yet which disgracefully failed to find a role for its greatest figure. Dickinson's elegantly-written book provides an essential account of English football's favourite son. **John O'Mahony**

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