

History behind the group boxing charity

Approximately 36 years ago The National Dairymen's Association (Furness branch) Committee started a boxing tournament evening held in October at the Cumbria Grand Hotel in Grange-over-Sands, to raise money for the Gamma Scanner appeal fund at Furness General hospital. This was to be an annual event to raise money for various local charities. The first and second year were both successes but due to business commitments the committee unable to devote the quality time required for successful tournaments, gave consideration to cancel all future events. Gary Neal, the then Chairman of The National Dairymen's Association (Furness Branch) committee, approached Jim Whitton, then Chairman of the Northern Group of Freemasons (now the Furness and South Lakeland Group) and asked if they would be interested in taking over the annual boxing event. After lengthy discussions it was agreed to 'give it ago'.

A boxing committee was set up comprising of a Chairman Wilf Hackett, Vice-Chairman Ralph Walker, Treasurer Harold Saunders ('Rowly'), Secretary Peter Turner, one member from each of the then thirteen masonic Lodges within the Northern Group of freemasons, and as a co-opted member Gary Neal, for experience and advice, along with Alan Willoughby, coach of the Kendal Boys Amateur Boxing Club. The first masonic tournament was arranged to take place in January 1986, instead of the October, as the committee felt that it clashed with many other masonic events. It was as a very nervous occasion for all involved; however it proved to be a huge success making over £3,000 split between masonic and local charities. 36 years later it is still going strong and still making money for masonic and local charities, up to date it has made over £200,000 from which 101 local charities have benefited. We hope that this will continue for the next 36 years.

Approximately 17 years ago Vice-Chairman Ralph Walker took the chairmanship, and carried on the successful events until 2007 when he then relinquished the chairmanship to Gary Rogerson. Ralph remained on the committee as Vice-Chairman until 2012 when Tony Cassells took over allowing Ralph to 'take it easy' but is available for his valuable advice. Gary Neal is still co-opted for his experience and valuable advice and we are delighted to inform you that in our January's meeting a vote took place for David Grainger to be made an honorary member which he has accepted. The Shire Horse and Gypsy Caravan which is also known as the 'Horse and Cart' by those who follow boxing, started when 34 years ago, during the planning for the first ever Northern Group, as it was then, boxing tournament, the need to acquire raffle prizes was discussed. The Chairman at that time, Wilf Hackett happened to mention this to his wife who said she had just the thing they needed. She was tired of dusting and moving a certain ornament in their house and he could take it as a prize.

After much discussion the committee decided they would auction the ornament, the first boxing event took place in January 1987 and the horse and cart was duly auctioned. On this first auction the horse and cart raised £100, but the buyer was adamant that he did not, or dare not, want to take the item home and would be glad for it to be auctioned next time for charity, and the legend of 'The Horse and Cart' was born. In recognition of the buyers generous act it was decided a plate with the donors name should be fixed to the plinth.

After this arrangement had run for five years the chairman and committee thought it had run its course and they decided to offer the horse and cart to Gary Neal to use at the local dairymen's charity event that he was helping to organise. The event was held at the Newby Bridge Hotel and the auction saw the horse and cart make £60 for the Furness Gamma Scanner Appeal Fund. It was bought by a dairyman from Liverpool with the proviso that he did not have to 'cart it' back to Liverpool and that it should again be used for charitable funds. Gary returned it to the boxing committee and it has been used very successfully every year since. Whoever wins it in auction, by custom, always donates it back for use the following year and they have their name placed on the plinth. It is estimated that this arrangement has brought in around £ 10,000 over the last 34 years and the committee are very grateful to the generous benefactors who have bought the 'Horse and Cart' in the past, and long may this tradition continue.