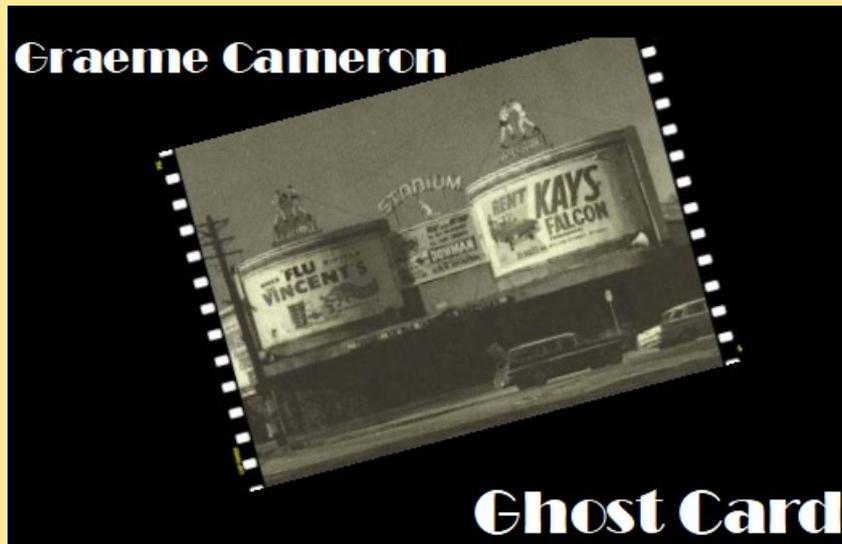


Graeme Cameron

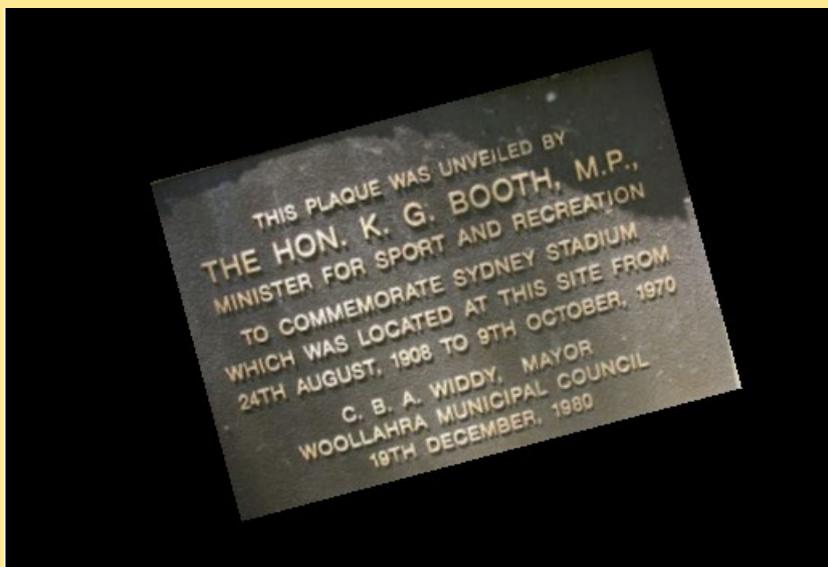


Ghost Card

In 1968, I attended my very first live pro wrestling card. It was at Sydney Stadium. I was just 11 years old but I remember every detail of it as though it was yesterday (bar the name of one ... very annoying), not just because it was my first time but because there were some unusual things about that day, most notably, the fact that there is no record that this event ever took place. But let's start at the beginning.

Many Heritage readers had their first experience of wrestling through a father wishing to share his love of the sport by taking them to their first card. Not so with me. Neither of my parents were wrestling fans. I was to find a kindred spirit in my grandmother but that's a story for another time. I came to it as the result of wrestling being the only thing on TV at Midday on Saturday that wasn't an old movie. I loved super hero comic books and sci-fi and, as comic book author Peter David once noted, professional wrestling was a "live comic book". Heroes, villains, costumes, I was hooked

As I mentioned, my parents were not fans but when I won two tickets to the wrestling in a competition they had to give in. Still, it came as a surprise when my mother said my father would be taking me. Wrestling was usually on Friday nights when my father went out with his workmates. He would never give that up to take me to the wrestling but I wasn't about to ask questions. The day came and off we went. I could barely contain my excitement.



Back then I lived in the suburb of North Sydney, which meant a trip across the Harbour Bridge. I noticed there wasn't much traffic for that time of day. I knew it normally started at 8 pm but it was daylight when we arrived, I thought we were way too early. My father found a parking spot relatively easily in a very busy part of town. I put that down to the fact that he lived in the area before marrying



my mother and knew where to look but it was another odd thing. We entered the Stadium.

Now, Sydney Stadium was not known as "the Old Tin Shed" for nothing. The building was clad entirely in corrugated iron. Originally an outdoor venue, this had been put up as a temporary measure, to be replaced later. Forty years on, this "temporary measure" was still there. It was cold in the winter

and a saunabath in the summer. In a video for an exhibiton honouring the Stadium 6 years ago, wrestler Alan Pinfold declared it the coldest place he had ever worked. Conversely, there was no wrestling between December and April for many years because it was simply too hot. The seats were tiered long wooden benches like you find in a circus Big Top.

As we made our way to our seats, I saw the white spots on the wood, looked up and noted the pigeons in the rafters and realised those spots were not paint. After checking to see there were no fresh deposits, my father and I took our seats.

The advertised card had three feature matches, popular Italian Mario Milano against French-Canadian villain Pat Patterson, Canadian villains Skull Murphy and Brute Bernard defending the tag team title against the cowboy/Indian combination of Tex McKenzie and Billy White Wolf and Spiros Arion (who was always a blue-eye in Australia) defending the heavyweight title against Texan arch-villain Killer Karl Kox. I was looking forward to these matches but was to be disappointed. The dreaded "card subject to change" reared it's ugly head.

Announcer Sam Menacher, (an American who toured Australia in 1952 as a wrestler) informed us that Skull Murphy would not be appearing due to a heart issue identified in Melbourne six days earlier (Murphy would die of heart failure just two years later). Pat Patterson would take his place in what was now a non-title match with a new unnamed opponent for Milano. Then the action began

It was a very British opening match with Salford's Spike Robson opposing Scotland's Billy Dundee in the battle of the immigrants. Robson arrived as a seasoned professional while Dundee had emigrated as a young teenager and was a product of the Hal Morgan's club wrestling circuit, trained by another Scot, Jim Deakin.

Both men debuted in Australia in 1966 and were on the cusp of the heavyweight division, usually billed as being 15 stone but probably lighter. Both often featured in the opening preliminary, sometimes in catchweight bouts against lighter wrestlers, proving a fast-paced, lively opening match and so it proved here. These two met many times over the next eight years. After a very even struggle Robson was the winner on this occasion.



In 1975, Dundee went to Tennessee in the United States where he dropped the "Y" from his first name, and, as Bill Dundee, won numerous titles (most notably the AWA world tag team title), later becoming matchmaker. He became very influential and is now a legend of the business in Tennessee.

The next match featured, the villainous "Pretty Boy" Johnny Boyd defeating another local

wrestler whose name I don't recall. I do remember that Boyd dominated the match with rough tactics. Another Hal Morgan product, Boyd's name was the result of his obsession with American gangster movies. He went on to have a successful career in America as one half of the Royal Kangaroos tag team with another Morgan graduate, Norman Fredrick Charles, known in the UK as Maurice LaRue. Boyd was also successful as replacement for New Zealand's Butch Miller in the Shepherders tag team and in singles in the Pacific Northwest and San Antonio promotions, becoming matchmaker in the latter.

Next up was Mario Milano against a new opponent. Milano had debuted in May, 1967 and with the support of Sydney and Melbourne's huge Italian populations, quickly established himself as the top blue-eye. By year's end he was holder of both the heavyweight title and one half of the tag team titles but lost both early in the new year. One of his opponents the previous year was Pat Patterson and I was looking forward to seeing them renew hostilities but thanks to Skull Murphy's illness that didn't happen. Milano's new opponent was New Zealand's Brian Ashby. Ashby was a more than capable wrestler and villain but like other New Zealanders and Aussies, was treated with little respect by promoter Jim Barnett. He was usually there to do his duty to the big names and that was the case here. After providing some opposition, Ashby did as expected as Milano's hand was raised. Ashby later had some success in Florida and Puerto Rico under the name Bruno Bekkar

Now it was time for the feature tag team match, now non-title, French-Canadians Pat Patterson and Brute Bernard against Tex McKenzie and Billy White Wolf (who were actually from Ohio and Iraq respectively). All four had faced each other in singles contests previously and the familiarity showed. Both teams worked well with each other, providing an entertaining back-forth match which either team could have won. In the end McKenzie and White Wolf overcame the Canadians' foul tactics and came out the winners.

Now came time for the main event in which Sprios Arion, who was even more popular with the large Greek communities of Melbourne and Sydney than Milano was with the Italians, would defend his heavyweight title against Texan villain Killer Karl Kox, from whom he took the title. It would be a Texas Death match, which would seemingly give the challenger the advantage. For those who don't know a Texas Death match was a no disqualification match (which also favours the villain). The wrestlers are tied together at the wrist by a rope with the winner being the wrestler who touches all four corner post first.

Arion v Kox became one of the greatest rivalries in the of Australian wrestling, equaling, if not exceeding McManus-Pallo in the UK. This was one of their early encounters. They



met many times over the next few years and every match was an epic struggle where the rules went out the window. Similar to the McManus-Pallo, Arion somehow always came out the winner (except for one match) and that was the case here. Arion overcame the odds and successfully defended his title. I went home a very happy 11-year old. But that's not the end of the story

The match results were always published in the newspaper next day and I had started collecting them in a scrap book. I looked for them but they weren't there. Sometimes they were held over to the next day so I looked again. Still, they weren't there. As I had actually been there I wrote them in myself by hand and moved on. It wasn't until many years later when I became interested in wrestling history that I revisited this. When exactly was this card? Why weren't the results published?

There were clues. Spiros Arion was heavyweight champion 9 times and Skull Murphy and Brute Bernard tag team champions 7 times but they were only champions simultaneously once for about 20 days in April, 1968. My father wasn't at work and I wasn't at school. Was it a public holiday? That left only one possibility, Good Friday but to that point, the promotion had never run a card on Good Friday for obvious reasons. The other possibility is that it was a special Saturday card with an earlier start time but Saturday night they were usually in Melbourne. I guess I'll never know for sure

Though myself and five of the wrestlers survive to attest to the fact that this card did take place no documentary records exist for either Friday 12 or Saturday 13, April 1968, the only possible dates. It's as though it never really happened

A ghost card.

Sraeme Cameron

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