

January 5th 2007

FOLLOW THAT!

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Much effort went into the Centenary Year of the Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling Association in 2006. Now, what happens for 2007?

Thankfully the main body of wrestling continues independently and unabated each year. All round the area, sports committees and agricultural show committees give a solid base for wrestling, providing prize-money, trophies, speaker systems, judges and the wrestling ring. If the CWWA did not exist there would still be wrestling events taking place. Year by year we lose events and gain events, but the vast majority continue as they have for decades and in some instances for centuries.

Similarly, in the winter season, each region has its academy to bring on the next generation of wrestlers, and the driving force behind these is always local people who see the need for coaching and training to keep wrestling alive in their area.

That is not to say that the CWWA is redundant. On the contrary it has many roles to provide guidance, structure and consistency to the sport and to respond to changing circumstances. C&W wrestling may be a traditional and regionally focused sport, but times change. Once upon a time wrestling was the natural sport for the school break-time or evenings on the village green. Now it has to compete with many other more fashionable activities and has to satisfy national and international standards.

The accreditation of coaches through a certification scheme may be desirable, but it is also essential. Without qualified coaches Kendal Academy would not be able to use the facilities at the South Lakes Leisure Centre. Schools require properly qualified coaches for in-school training sessions. Further development of coaching is necessary to sustain the recent advances.

In the meantime five academies are active, a crop of skilful youngsters promises well for the summer season and three international adventures are on offer in the next four months.

Carlisle Wrestling Club restarts its winter activities in the Gym at Currock House at 7.45pm on Wednesday 10th January with the second Points Night of the indoor season

January 13th 2007

TOWN AND COUNTRY.....

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.....converged on the Gym at Currock House for the first competitive wrestling of the year: Carlisle Wrestling Club's second Points Night. The night began with a big entry of 6 stone wrestlers who mainly lived within walking distance of the academy, and ended over two hours later with the men's heavyweights where the majority of the wrestlers were farmers' sons from all round North Cumbria.

In an action packed night Jack Brown put in one of his best performances to win three categories and the trophy for the best performance. He hiped and twisted his way to win the 6 stones, 7 stones and the Under 12 Years. In all probability he would also have won the 8½ stones, but big sister Katy flattened him in a show of girl power.

The other multiple winner, Joe Harrington, straddled the two parts of the night. His winning battle with the strapping Phil Housby concluded the first part when the gym was filled to overflowing with children and parents. A mass exodus of those with school-the-next-day, leaves the men to battle it out round-robin style in a quieter, more intense atmosphere. Just as he had to wait around in the first half before he wrestled, so Joe Harrington had to watch the lightweights and middleweights before he was in the thick of it once more; with his inside-hipe at its deadly best he fought his way unbeaten through to the end of the night.

Andrew Carlile, Richard Dixon, Richard Fox, and John Harrington were all on the best of form. In a feast of wrestling skill I remember two falls in particular: the decider for the lightweights came when Andrew Carlile struck with a venomous back-heel, only to be turned by Richard Dixon who arched himself round with millimetres to spare. The other startling fall ended the night for Richard Fox. He had been in imperious form in the middleweights, sailing through without losing a fall, and looked like carrying that on in the All Weights when Andrew Carlile brought him down. Most mortals would have been flat on their back from the overwhelming attack made by Fox, but Carlile while falling backwards, but still upright, countered with what my father used to call a twist off the breast. The resulting crash to the mat bloodied Fox's nose and left him a spectator for the rest of the night.

With such a high standard of wrestling all round it must be daunting for newcomers, so I applaud Oliver Burbury, a tiny lad from Raughtonhead who gave his all in the boys wrestling, and Matthew Fisher who had no chance against today's best men wrestlers, but wrestled manfully throughout.

Results:

Carlisle Wrestling Club Points Night

6st: 1, J Brown; 2, D Miller; 3, K Miller; 4, D Lawson.

7st: 1, J Brown; 2, D Lawson; 3, O Burbury; 4, D Miller.

8½st: 1, K Brown; 2, K Miller; 3, J Brown; 4, A Douglas,

10st: 1, W Noimai; 2, J Brown; 3, A Ridley; 4, C Ridley.

Girls: 1, D Thompson; 2, H Douglas; 3, K Brown; 4, C Gawthrop.

Under 12 Years: 1, J Brown; 2, B Wilde; 3, K Miller; 4, A Douglas.

Under 15 Years: 1, C Ridley; 2, M Atkinson; 3, P Murray; 4, K Brown.

Under 18 Years: 1, Joe Harrington; 2, P Housby; 3, A Ridley; 4, D Thompson.

11½st: 1, R Dixon; 2, A Carlile; 3, M Fisher.

13st: 1, R Fox; 2, John Harrington; 3, Andrew Carlile; 4, Richard Dixon.

January 19th 2007

ONCE A YEAR.....

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.....I receive a package of newspaper cuttings from Jeremy Godwin of Penrith, a retired archivist, who seems to read every local newspaper in the North of England and some in Scotland. Whenever he sees the word "wrestling" he must reach for the scissors, then label the scrap of paper with origin and date and file away to send to me when enough has accumulated. The resulting random collection gives an interesting sketch of the sport over the region and over the past century.

From the Penrith-based Herald we learn that two farm servants from Shap in 1906 were wrestling when "John Baty hanked John Newton but could not extract himself and broke his leg" A year later Warcop's new C&W Wrestling Club held its first competition.

The 50 years ago column in November tells of a "landlady of Penrith Pubs over a considerable number of years, Mrs Dinah Proud Heath who died age 67. Prior to her marriage she worked at the Two Lions and told of wrestling matches on the green at the back of the inn".

Much more up-to-date is a brief entry from last November under the heading "Wrestling Night" "Members of Skelton YFC enjoyed a brilliant Night of C&W Wrestling at Carlisle".

In the far South of Cumbria the Westmorland Gazette reported the reintroduction of wrestling to the Grasmere Rushbearing last year, and a week later a full page of the Leisure magazine was devoted to a review of the current situation in wrestling.

The nearby Keswick Reminder in August carried a letter asking for information about an old schoolfriend from the forties whose father, William Knowles, was a champion wrestler. In November a Sandwich Design Competition was won by "The Cumberland Wrestler", a powerful combination of Cumberland sausage, wholegrain mustard mayonnaise, tomato, rocket and red onion, which sounds strong enough to fell anyone.

To the east, the Hexham Courant's Bellingham column looks forward to the local show when "There's also a departure in the strange world of C&W Wrestling, where there will be an open class for lady grapplers." Earlier in the year, is a report of Kirkheaton Show with an excellent photograph of Jack Brown of Haydon Bridge felling Callum Bowman of Barrasford. The Courant, which is a sister paper of The Cumberland News, may only report wrestling occasionally, but on its website it carries a full compliment of my wrestling articles.

In the far west the Times and Star twice focuses on Douglas Clark of Maryport , international Rugby League player, Heavyweight wrestling Champion and war hero. The gist of it is that whilst Clark was one of only 17 players inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame in Manchester and was also honoured in the Imperial War Museum, there was no similar local recognition. That is to be corrected when he is included in Famous Folk trail booklet, and his memorabilia displayed in the Maritime Museum. In November that recognition had moved on, for work was starting on a bust which would be ready in the New Year for display in the new Visitor Centre.

Still in the west The Whitehaven News looks a long way back in their 125 Years Ago column with a report on wrestling at Talkin Tarn: "In the 12 stone wrestling, E Bowness of Frizington went down before I Frear of Distington in the second round and Frear and T Kennedy wrestled out the final falls which were very hollow affairs, Kennedy in the simplest style possible getting both falls". A letter asks for information about Thomas Curran of Cleator Moor, "who was apparently a champion Cumberland Wrestler in the late 19th or early 20th century".

Again in the 125 Years Ago column is an interesting piece of Victorian editorial comment "After a period of eclipse due to the exercising of bargaining rather than athletic power, wrestling is coming back to its own again thanks to the establishment of schools throughout the country. Long may this old county sport flourish; it will be an evil day for Cumberland when her young manhood no longer takes an interest in the fair and manly sport which won and held the devotion of their fathers."

And what about The Cumberland News? Its reports of C&W Wrestling are not an occasional matter. Fifty years ago, living in Alnwick, Northumberland, I used to read Clicker's column every week in the Cumberland News for comprehensive coverage of the sport. The situation has not changed

January 25th 2007

A CARLISLE LANDMARK

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.....has disappeared: the pub sign from the Cumberland Wrestlers has been taken down, for the building now has another use.

The two signs that have ornamented the front of the pub in the last thirty years both featured that wrestler of wrestlers, George Steadman, with a head and shoulders portrait of the great man. On the other side he was joined by Hexham Clark in a copy of one of the most famous wrestling images as the two men took hold for the camera at Grasmere Sports where both had illustrious careers.

Hugh Machin's "Some records of Grasmere Sports" published in 1911 has a photograph of Steadman, already balding taken centre stage in 1872. A photograph dated 1902 shows him still in his wrestling strip at Grasmere only two years before he died.

Hexham Clark of Broughton was the wrestler who vied with Steadman and then took over from him at the end of his career. Last year Hexham Clark and I became better acquainted, when Keith Barkhouse, his great great nephew brought some of Hexham's finest trophies and belts to show me. Months later Susan Baynes, Hexham Clark's great grand-daughter contacted me after googling his name and finding a Cumberland News article which mentioned him.

She came over from Wallsend to see the wrestling at the Cumberland Show, and subsequently she visited Keith Barkhouse to see the trophies. I receive many requests from people researching their wrestling forebears, but the Hexham Clark saga was one of the best.

A substantial group of young wrestlers from all over Cumbria and Northumberland look like travelling to Brittany to compete in the Breton Backhold Championships on Saturday, 24th February. There are four age categories for boys, each divided into at least six weight sections, starting at 33kgs. In addition there are six men's weights. The female wrestling is divided into two age sections, those born in the years 1992-1995, and the rest. Again there are many weight categories. We need more wrestlers and more adults to participate. Anyone who wishes to be added to the list should contact Roger Robson on 016974 73559 before Monday, 29th January

February 1st 2007

IF YOU WANT TO WATCH FILM

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.....of Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling as far back as 1919, then all you need to do is to press the right keys on a computer. An email from Roy Lomas, who runs the Grasmere Sports website, alerted me to a link on the Grasmere site to an ITN archive of news footage from 1897 onwards.

All you need to do is search for <http://grasmeresportsandshow.co.uk/Archives.htm> then find the link to the ITN site which has Pathe News items back through the years. In 1925, still in the silent film era, the title-piece of the film reads: Cumberland, The Grasmere Sports, Mighty men of the fells compete in Old English Sport..mist marred the glorious setting

The importance of Grasmere Sports is made evident by the national coverage which would be shown in cinemas throughout Britain in the week following the event. Huge crowds circle the running track which in turn circles the wrestling ring where three and four pairs of wrestlers compete at the same time. A huge grandstand takes up one entire side of the field.

Each year there is footage of pole vaulting, hound trailing, fell running and wrestling. My father used to tell me of how some pole vaulters used to climb the pole once it was vertical, before dropping over the other side of the bar. Such a feat seemed impossible to me, but now I have seen it on film.

The Guides Race was usually filmed with four cameras. The first would show the runners leaving the Sports field through a tree-arched gateway. The next shot is of a massive wall, taller than the runners, built to keep Herdwicks off the lower pastures. The runners clamber and leap before heading up through the bracken and past the camera. Then it is up to the rocky pinnacle with its flag where the runners pick up a tag to prove they have not taken a short-cut. Finally, the camera catches the winning runner crossing the line.

The hound trails concentrate on the beginning and end of trails, especially capturing the owners' mad shouting and cloth waving as the hounds approach.

The wrestling spends some time with wide-angle shots and several simultaneous bouts, but there are also finals and presentation shots. Particularly there are some good images of Big Bill Knowles, whose family is still associated with wrestling in west Cumbria. One amusing set of unused footage for 1926 shows a tall lean wrestler wearing a flat cap taking hold with a wrestler with an enormous centre-piece (both velvet and flesh!). Seven times they try to come to grips and fail. Eventually they must have managed, as the proper film shows the big man carrying flat-cap high in the air before throwing him to the ground and squashing him.

Presiding over all these events is flamboyant Lord Lonsdale always with a big buttonhole and a cigar only slightly smaller than a Cumberland sausage.

Ironically, I already have a Pathe News film of Grasmere in my study cupboard. When I first won Grasmere in 1964 and returned to university in Durham, a friend said that he had been astonished to see me on the big screen on his local cinema in Macclesfield. I found out how to order a clip of the film, but when I projected it found it was a case of mistaken identity, for the film showed the final of the Heavyweights when Ted Dunghinson felled Gordon Younger.

Even as I have been writing this article there has been a further development: another website where it is possible to view higher quality stills from the Pathe films. The website: <http://www.britishpathe.com> is also now available as a link on the Grasmere website.

Roy Lomas, amazingly lives in Madrid, but has served Wrestling and Grasmere well, firstly by writing and publishing the prize-winning hard-back book entitled Grasmere Sports, The First 150 Years which has a wealth of illustration and detail and secondly by setting up and maintaining the Grasmere website which is well worth a visit by anyone interested in Lakeland Sport.

February 8th 2007

AT TIMES I FEEL LIKE A WRESTLING AGONY AUNT

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

This morning's mail, electronic and in an envelope, brought two requests for information. One person, prompted by my previous article about the old Pathe film of Grasmere Sports asked how to get a DVD of some footage. My answer to that is that I haven't a clue, except to go back to Roy Lomas on the Grasmere Sports website who is more likely to know. *(Only possible by paying commercial rates. Here's a quote from them - 'The license fee for the footage you have requested is as follows; £360 per minute UK Rights 5 Years. Transfer Fee: Approx £170' - RL)*

The other query, from Eddie Hughes, 48 year old judo and Freestyle Wrestling enthusiast, from Eastbourne, was more in my line:

"Dear Mr Robson, I am sorry to bother you again and promise not to make a habit of it. I bought your book on Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling and enjoyed it immensely. I have taken all the technical elements I could from it and have purchased a wrestling dummy and am practising drills for lifts and sweeps as best I can, using my judo and freestyle wrestling knowledge to fill the lack of C&W knowledge.

I took your advice and went to an internet café and tried to download information on backhold wrestling, but through either a lack of computer expertise or confusing web sites seemed unable to gain much insight. Any useful information seemed to be articles written by you. Therefore I am writing to you to try and improve my knowledge of the sport. Would you know the following":-

1. *The address of the C&W Wrestling Association.*

That one is easy. Alf Harrington, the Secretary of the Association, who keeps the wheels turning can be contacted at Rostholme, Kirkbampton, Carlisle.

2. *Are there any technical manuals/books/DVDs available for purchase?*

There should be but there aren't. I'm halfway through producing a training handbook, based on contributions from the likes of Tom Harrington, Mervyn Sewell, John Richardson and a selection of Blands, but it hasn't moved far recently. A plan to adapt Barry Frizell's archive of video into a DVD is hanging fire, too.

3. *When is this year's Grasmere Games and other C&W wrestling events?*

Grasmere Sports is on Sunday August 26th. The best way to find out the calendar of the year's events is to become a member and so receive the membership booklet with all the dates.

4. *How do you enter such events?*

Just turn up on the day and enter at the ringside table, for C&W wrestling is "Open to the world".

5. *In the Tekkin Hod procedure when the referee shouts "Wrestle" do you have to keep your head on the opponent's right shoulder i.e. can I move away or even change to the other shoulder?*

Once the bout begins you can move your head anywhere except that you cannot pull the head down to escape your opponents grip, known as "taking your head out". If you end up with the heads on the wrong side, the referee will give you time to sort yourselves before stepping in to correct it.

6. *When taking Butchers Grip I prefer left knuckle toward opponent, right knuckle away. Does this matter, either within the rules or the application of the technique?*

There is no mention of this in the rules; it's down to personal preference. Some wrestlers suppose that there is an advantage to have the right thumb up if you intend to buttock.

7. Is there any advice, hints you could give me to improve my drills. I intend to increase my training and wrestle live with some judo and rugby mates and want to make sure I am on the right track.

Probably you are doing the right things. At least you have some live opposition. I remember solitary training in the 1960s when I lived outside the wrestling area. Then I resorted to Russian dancing to keep my thighs strong and flexible, and spent time swinging a wheelbarrow from side to side. My main advice on wrestling with other novices is to learn to relax in the last inch before contact with the mat if you are losing, and to roll or dive over your opponent if you are winning. In that way the session and your wrestling career does not end after two bouts.

Date for your diary:

Wed 14th February, 7.45pm, Carlisle Wrestling Club Third Points Night.

February 18th 2007

IN A DYNAMIC NIGHT OF ACTION.....

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....at Carlisle Wrestling Club, Richard Dixon, John Harrington and Andrew Carlile all had good wins.

Richard Dixon blasted Andrew Carlile away with that explosive, long-legged buttock of his to win the 11½st round-robin competition.

Carlile had little success in the 13 stones either for John Harrington was the one who ploughed through the opposition without losing a fall, ending up with a leg-up buttock on Richard Dixon, which you would have said was impossible.

In the end an inch decided the overall winner when Richard Fox went to hank Harrington. He was winning all the way until the last milli-second when Harrington found enough purchase to stop the momentum and twist down.

John Harrington looked as if he was going to go through the night unbeaten, until a bizarre slip, literally when he lost his grip mid-wrestle with Andrew Carlile late on in the round-robin. Carlile had thoroughly woken up in the All Weights group, having only lost to Joe Harrington. When the points were tallied, both he and John Harrington were equal first, so there had to be a decider, sudden death.

In a night of good wrestling, that last fall was a magnificent finale. In the attacking manner, which is so much the fashion amongst our best wrestlers these days, Andrew Carlile swung Harrington off his feet, up high in the air before twisting him, mid-air so that he had no feet to land on. Most people would struggle to lift 12 stones off the ground, but to do it with such speed and grace to 12 stones of reluctant, sinewy, fast-reactioned, experienced wrestler requires a special talent.

The men's wrestling followed a full night of competition for the youngsters who flock from distance, Alston, Haydon Bridge, Arlecdon, Kirkbampton, to the Gym at Currock House each week.

That wonderfully battered little trophy for the best performance was returned from last time by Jack Brown, then taken home by big sister, Katy. She is a polite, gentle girl, and in the past her wrestling has been gentle and polite. This time we saw the ruthless, coiled spring Katy Brown, who cross-buttocked and twisted to win the 8½ stones, wrestle up in the 10 stones and take a first fall from Donna Thompson in the Girls' final. Watch out! She's dangerous.

Carlisle Wrestling Club Points Night

6st 1, D Miller; 2, K Miller; 3, D Lawson; 4, P Potts.

7st 1, J Brown; 2, K Miller; 3, A Wheadon; 3, D Miller.

8½st 1, K Brown; 2, A Douglas; 3, K Miller; 4, A Wheadon.

10st 1, W Noimai; 2, K Brown; 3, M Atkinson; 4, P Murray.

Girls 1, D Thompson; 2, K Brown; 3, B Ridley

Under 12 Years 1, J Brown; 2, A Douglas; 3, H Douglas; B Wilde.

Under 15 Years 1, M Atkinson; 2, K Miller; 3, K Brown; 4, D Lawson.

Under 18 Years 1, Joe Harrington; 2, D Thompson; 3, W Noimai; 4, M Atkinson.

Men's 11½st 1, R Dixon; 2, A Carlile; 3, M Fisher.

13st 1, John Harrington; 2, R Fox; 3, A Carlile; 4, R Dixon.

All Weights 1, A Carlile; 2, John Harrington; 3, Joe Harrington; 4, R Fox.

Best Performance: Katy Brown

February 23rd 2007

CUMBERLAND AND WESTMORLAND WRESTLING MOVES.....

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....overseas this weekend when twelve male wrestlers and six females from this area will compete in the Brittany Backhold Championships in the town of Carhaix.

Two years ago Russell Housby and I were the only participants from Cumbria when he won the overall competition and I supervised the judges. Last year Milnthorpe Academy took five wrestlers and their coach to represent the area. This year the Milnthorpe wrestlers will be there again having been enthused by their last visit, but they will be joined by the Hodgson sisters, Tracy, Hannah and Connie from Kendal Academy; Scott MacKenzie and Dan Crane, teenagers from the new Rothbury Academy; and a good range of wrestlers from Carlisle Wrestling Club.

The two most senior wrestlers taking part will be Richard Fox and John Harrington who won many senior trophies during last year's Grass Season. Centenary Under 18 Challenge winner, Joe Harrington will also travel, as well as some of the younger wrestlers, Jack Brown and Paul Murray, and two of the new generation of female wrestlers, Katy Brown and Donna Thompson.

Several officials will also travel to help with the judging, including Tom Harrington MBE, who is a famous figure in international traditional wrestling after he showed the youngsters how to do win in Spain in 1997.

In many ways C&W wrestling is a solitary sport, with man against man in the centre of the ring, so opportunities to travel in a group and have support from other wrestlers from all areas of the North of England is a new and welcome addition to the wrestling scene.

A recent meeting of the CWWA Governing Board explored ways that the momentum of last year's Centenary celebrations could be maintained. The slogan which came out of that meeting was Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling. The Next Hundred Years This trip to Brittany makes an excellent start.

March 8th 2007

EIGHTEEN YOUNG WRESTLERS DID OUR REGION PROUD.....

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....when they competed in Carhaix, Brittany in the Breton Backhold Championships. No fewer than seven wrestlers came away with winners' medals, and four more reached finals.

Pick of the youngest wrestlers was Jack Brown of Carlisle Wrestling Club who felt sick with nerves before he started but came alive to win the 46kg class which had the biggest entry of wrestlers. Wrestling best-of-five all the way, first in a pool, then in the cross-ties and finals, he showed the Bretons a full repertoire of chips as well as concentration and poise.

His sister Katie did much the same with the 56kg group, revelling in competing on equal terms with girls her own age and weight, for often she wrestles with lads and bigger girls.

One of our wrestlers might not have been allowed to wrestle at all. Connie Hodgson of Dent was younger than anyone else on the mats. In the week before we set out I discovered that she was too young for any of the categories, so I emailed a Breton official with a plea: Connie has been wrestling against older opposition for some years. In addition, at Kendal Academy she also trains and competes with boys who are older than she is. She is a tough, cheerful girl, a farmer's daughter, well used to hard physical activity. The plea was accepted and Connie went on to smile her way through bout after bout, winning most of them, to finish second in the 45kg class.

Joe Thompson of Alston is also a smiley character, but his wrestling made him more akin to Dr Death. He won his first bout with a neat twist, nothing spectacular, but enough to put his opponent in hospital. His second opponent went much the same way but without the ambulance. I think the rest gave in. The only real scare he had was when his medal disappeared when he was warming down in a neighbouring room, but it turned up at the organisers' table.

Milnthorpe Academy had some good results with Douglas Parsons and Jack Lashley winning their age group at 68kg and 68+. The enthusiasm of the Milnthorpe lads and their coach, David Parsons, after their participation last year was a factor in the decision to take a much larger group over to Brittany this year.

Two of the older wrestlers opted to compete in the Seniors rather than the age section for which they qualified. John Harrington could have had an easy time of it, but instead dropped himself into one of the two biggest and most competitive groups. He wrestled with all his usual flair and control, won his pool but then was felled in the semi-final cross tie in one of those bouts which could have gone either way. There were winning falls off the mat, a long break from action because of an injury to his opponent and some very close calls in the judging. He ended with his wrestling reputation intact, but no medal.

Joe Harrington was guaranteed a medal in his age-group, for he was the only entrant, but like his half-cousin, he too went into a strong class of seniors. He wrestled well but ended up fifth out of ten powerful 90kg men. In the end though he performed wonders in the All Weights class which finished off the event, wrestling through to the semi-finals.

Richard Fox, the only genuine senior wrestler by Breton definition, found himself in the same group as the Breton champion Matthieu Le Dour and John Taylor of Scotland who are well respected in our rings. He was involved in several excellent bouts, but in the end it was Taylor who felled Le Dour in the 81kg final.

Our only Senior winner was 16 year old Tracy Hodgson of Dent, for the older girls were mixed in with the women. She and Donna Thompson wrestled out the final of the 70kg+.

The 24 wrestlers, parents and officials which set out for Carhaix made up a disparate group of all ages and from all round the region. During the visit they transformed into a good-humoured, supportive group.

The town of Carhaix and its local wrestling club, and the Gouren Wrestling Federation, provided a marvellous event, with three rings constantly in action for nearly seven hours, an attractive venue, and excellent hospitality, and a welcome travel subsidy.

Date

Wed 14th March Carlisle Wrestling Club Final Points Night

March 13th 2007

"PAUL MURRAY - HE'S STRONG, HIM"

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

..... The unsolicited compliment from a young lad at the ringside at Ennerdale Show paid tribute to the young wrestler's fierce determination to win against bigger opponents.

Last year he was no longer in the safety of the Under 12 Years wrestling where he had been so competitive, instead he was mixed in with lads two years older than him and had to fight every inch of the way. Fortunately, his style of wrestling enables him to deal with bigger lads, for he is adept at slipping round anti-clockwise to gain a strong hold, and then using it to rush his man forward or twist him back over.

At least, when he wrestled in The Brittany Backhold Championships he was wrestling with opponents nearer in age and weight than is usual for him at the moment. Wrestling best of five throughout the competition he was one of those who set the early standard for our wrestlers, and he came away with a winner's medal and certificate for the Minime 56kg, felling the Northumbrian, Dan Crane along the way. After all that, I managed to miss him out of my article on the Breton adventure, for which I apologise.

His father, Robin, a fellow Belted Galloway breeder, also deserves a mention for his role as light monitor in the dormitory corridor and general support during the visit.

Paul Murray's determination is not just apparent in the ring but also in his keenness to train at his Wrestling Club which is forty miles from home. He attends regularly for coaching from Andrew Carlile, Alan Jones and Tom Harrington and responds well to their prompting. Another sign of his keenness is that he is always immaculately stripped out to wrestle.

Paul is a good gymnast, and a potential farmer as he takes great interest in his flock of Jacob Sheep and is a major help with the Belted Galloway herd. His father says, "He's grand outside."so much so that it is only fair to take him to wrestling events, wherever they may be.

One reason for my oversight was that I wrote my previous article at high speed before going to a family funeral for my cousin, George Robson, of Netherwitton. He was one of those Northumbrian wrestlers who never hit the heights but made sure that the stars had to work hard every inch of the way. His best wrestling years, potentially, were spent as a gunner in the back end of a Lancaster Bomber during the Second World War. And he was one of that generation which flocked to the wrestling rings to keep the old traditions alive that had been under threat from German invasion. I only met him once in the ring and I ended his career with a broken rib. Typically, he didn't make a fuss and I only found out about it several years later.

News of another death shocked me at a meeting in Brittany. The Icelander, Hjalmur Sigurdsson, who regularly brought wrestlers to compete at Grasmere took his own life a year ago. I knew that he had moved up into a remote area in the North of Iceland after his marriage failed. Apparently, he had made a living by coaching sport, mainly Glima, the Icelandic wrestling style.

I remember him as an urbane, good humoured man who did so much for wrestling. His dedication is illustrated by the Heavyweight Championship at Alwinton Show in 2000 to which he brought an Icelandic Champion called Simmi. They flew from Keflavik to Glasgow, rented a car, stayed overnight at Rothbury and then Simmi met the rampant Rab McNamara in the first round. The last time he brought a group over was in 2005, when another heavyweight, Josef Stefansson, felled a below par McNamara at Bellingham Show. The Icelanders have decided to present a trophy in his memory, but that has seemingly created a schism in their ranks, as there is more than one view of what it should be awarded for.

Date

Wed 14th March Carlisle Wrestling Club's final Points Night. 7.45pm in Currock House Gymnasium.

March 15th 2007

LAST OCTOBER.....

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....we hosted an excellent Youth International in the Carlisle area. Last month saw the biggest group of Cumberland and Westmorland wrestlers ever to go abroad to compete when we took a bus-load to the Brittany Backhold Championships. But this month we are struggling to find wrestlers for the European Championships in Spain and have no chance of fielding a full team.

The Championship, which is held every two years, is the main event of the International Federation of Celtic Wrestling. The city of Leon in Northern Spain is the host and has a good record both as a host venue, but also as one of the dominant teams in the international events.

The lack of English wrestlers able to compete is especially disappointing as the English team had made strides in their understanding and performance in the Gouren style since the Breton wrestler, Sylvain Begoc, overwintered in Carlisle to improve his English and in exchange coached the likes of Andrew Carlile and David Atkinson to new levels in Gouren. Not only were their own levels of performance boosted, but they also learnt how to coach others in the technical intricacies of Gouren

Age and employment are the main problems when choosing a team to represent this area. Last year was a vintage year for C&W Wrestling, but that success came from the enthusiasm of youth. Older wrestlers with international experience, like Jason Davidson and Darren Whitfield have work and family commitments, which make training and competition more difficult.

By far the biggest problem lies in the predominantly rural nature of wrestling. The rules of the IFCW say that the championships should be during the Easter period, usually in April, and that is when farming makes its biggest demands. Richard Dixon, John Harrington, Richard Fox and Robert Leiper are all tied by lambing and calving, and maybe first cut silaging. Add to this list David Atkinson and Robert Wharton who are recovering from injury and you see a decimated team.

The only wrestler who has said that he is keen and able to go is Andrew Carlile, a veteran of many international campaigns, who is on excellent form these days.

Decisions have to be made in the next day or two, as the final date for team registrations is March 18th. If any wrestler wishes to take part, he should contact me immediately on 016974 73559.

We were founder members of the IFCW in 1985, and have always striven to play our part, but this year we are struggling to do so.

March 22nd 2007

CARLISLE WRESTLING CLUB'S

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....last Points Night of the winter season produced two hours of intense wrestling which left the trophies well spread out amongst the protagonists.

The men's wrestling results seemed to make little sense: whilst Richard Dixon was well ahead in winning the 11½st Points Trophy, the wrestler in second place, Andrew Carlile, then went on to win the All Weights. In the 13 stones the battle for the trophy was between Richard Fox and John Harrington. Unfortunately for Fox he had missed the first Points Night in November, so was unable to overhaul Harrington despite winning twice.

Amongst the youngsters, the Brown family did particularly well, with Jack winning the 7 stones and the Under 12 Years, and big sister, Katie, winning the girls and the 8½ stones. Katie also impressed the judges on this last night of indoor competition when they awarded her the cup for the best performance of the night. Of late she has developed a cross-buttock to be feared, to add to her other armoury of wrestling chips.

The closest contest of all was in the Under 15 Years when Craig Ridley had to win on the night to have any chance of winning the Points Trophy. In the final he felled his nearest rival Mike Atkinson, ending with a neatly timed back-heel against the bigger lad. This result meant that the two lads were exactly level after four Points Nights. The sudden death wrestle-off was a tense affair, but Ridley kept up his clever style to win by a short head.

The two Miller brothers, David and Kieron, had set the pace in the very first section the 6 stones when they wrestled out the final. The younger brother Kieron showed real ability and class to rush big brother David for the first fall, but David responded in style with an outside and swinging hipes for the next two falls.

Watchai Noimai has had a year when he was the wrong age and the wrong weight, but there was no-one to match his vigorous twisting style in the 10 stones. He also figured well in the final of the Under 18 Years, making Phil Housby work hard for the win which gained him the Points Trophy for the indoor season.

Waberthwaite Academy's Open Night was mainly a local affair with only Joe Thompson, travelling to compete. His journey was well worth it for he won the Under 15 Years, and was second in the 12 stones.

Twenty-five wrestlers took part in the event to show that the Waberthwaite Academy is serving the region well. Unfortunately all the wrestling events in that area happen late in the season, so sometimes there is a problem with continuity between indoor and outdoor wrestling.

Date

The Annual General Meeting of the Wrestling association takes place at Penrith Rugby Club at 7.30 on Friday 30th March.

Results

Carlisle Wrestling Club Points Night

6st. 1, D Miller; 2, K Miller; 3, P Potts; 4, C Wheadon.

7st 1, J Brown; 2, S Bolton; 3, K Miller; 4, D Parker.

8½st 1, K Brown; 2, P Murray; 3, J Brown; 4, A.

10st 1, C Ridley; 2, M Atkinson; 3, W Noimai; 4, K Brown.

Girls 1, K Brown.

Under 12 Years 1, J Brown; 2, D Parker; 3, K Miller; 4, A Douglas.

Under 15 Years 1, C Ridley; 2, M Atkinson; 3, K Brown; 4, B Wilde.

Under 18 Years 1, P Housby; 2, W Noimai; 3, C Lowry; 4, C Ridley

Best performance: Katie Brown

Men's 11½st 1, R Dixon; 2, A Carlile; 3, M Fisher.

13st 1, R Fox; 2, John Harrington; 3, R Dixon; 4, A Carlile.

All Weights 1, A Carlile; 2, John Harrington; 3, R Fox; 4, M Fisher.

Carlisle Points Trophy Winners 2006-7

6st. David Miller; 7st. Jack Brown; 8½st. Katie Brown; 10st. Watchai Noimai; Girls: Katie Brown. Under 12 Years: Jack Brown; Under 15 Years: Craig Ridley; Under 18 Years: Phil Housby; Men's 11½st. Richard Dixon; 13st. John Harrington; All Weights: Andrew Carlile.

Waberthwaite Academy Open Night

Under 9 Years 1, J Woodhouse; 2, D Armstrong.

Under 11 Years 1, D Fleming; 2, T Johnston; 3, B Fox

Under 13 Years 1, A Fox; 2, J Woodhouse; 3, D Birkett

Under 15 Years 1, J Thompson; 2, S Killip; 3, A Woodend.

Under 18 Years 1, L Benn; 2, A Killip; 3, A Porter.

6st. 1, A Fox; 2, B Fox; 3, T Johnstone.

8st 1, A Woodend; 2, J Ploughman; 3, D Fleming.

10st 1, A Killip; 2, C Naylor; 3, A Woodend.

12st 1, M Knowles; 2, J Thompson; 3, C Naylor.

All Weights 1, J Lowery; 2, L Benn; 3, J Milburn.

April 1st 2007

WRESTLING GOVERNING BOARD MEETINGS

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....will never be the same again. Jimmy Pringle of Rothbury will not be standing for re-election at the Annual General Meeting of the CWWA after many years as a lively and innovative figure.

For years he has been the man who has kept Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling alive in Northumberland. The events he ran, and especially Alwinton Show, were models for others to follow. The interests of the wrestlers were paramount to him, so he always found good sponsors for prize money, put on good weights, including Under 21 Years which is unique to Alwinton, and talked to wrestlers to make sure they knew they were valued at his events. He always had good connections with the Scottish wrestlers, and they repaid his support for them with minibus loads of wrestlers for Northumbrian events.

One of the main features of last year's CWWA Centenary, the Centenary Challenges with £1000 prize money, was his idea. And typically, the Northumbrian version was different to the more orthodox events staged at Cumberland, Penrith and Westmorland Shows. He took over Rothbury Mart at night, covered the mart ring with wrestling mats, packed in the crowd into the tiered seating and raised the roof with noise and excitement.

He began his wrestling at Thropton Academy in its heyday, and rounded his career off in Scotland. Now acknowledged as one of the best referees, he sets the tone each year at Grasmere where he officiates all morning for the youth events, and gives them his own individual dash of humour and enthusiasm.

Fortunately, he had good allies for the Rothbury event in Darren Whitfield and Jason Davidson, and they seem bent on picking up his mantle as coaches at Rothbury Academy and in the general organisation needed to sustain wrestling in the area.

Unusually, there are six vacancies for the Governing Board because of retirements, so this year is not just a matter of re-electing those who have reached the end of their term.

Last year celebrated a century of the CWWA and its Governing Board. Now it is a matter of looking ahead to the next hundred years. The Association has made good headway with its Development Plan in the last three years, particularly with coaching certification, but much remains to be done.

One possibility is applying the same sort of regulation to referees for wrestling competitions. At the moment referees are invited by each event independently and this can mean that officials are out of touch with rule changes and interpretation. The topic is to be aired at the AGM and at the subsequent Governing Board Meeting.

Any organisation wishing to stage a Championship event has to apply for it in writing before the 4th April.

Date

On Wednesday, 4th April, Carlisle Wrestling Club ends its indoor season with a training night and the presentation of Points Trophies

April 5th 2007

THREE NEW MEMBERS

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

..... were elected to the Governing Board of the Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling Association at last week's AGM. Two of them are from South of Shap Summit and Dunmail Raise, and the other is a Northumbrian.

Malcolm Parsons is from a well known wrestling family and has recently been involved in re-introducing wrestling to the Grasmere Rush-Bearing and organising wrestling training at Grasmere School. John Dennison was World Champion at 11st and 12st in the sixties and seventies, and follows his father, Albert Dennison, as a Board Member.

The new Northumbrian Board Member is Darren Whitfield, who is still an active wrestler, and will be the first wrestlers' representative on the Board. He is elected for a year and will be able to take part in all the Governing Board's business except for disciplinary matters. As a coach and organiser at Rothbury Academy he is already working hard for wrestling, and his election to the Board will go some way to compensating for the absence of Jimmy Pringle who resigned after many years as a Board Member.

The only item of potential change at the meeting concerned referees. Now that there is a coaching certification scheme in operation, the Development Committee has turned its attention to referees and brought to the AGM some ideas that will be discussed by the Governing Board. The draft document suggests that for the wrestling season 2008 all referees must be qualified by the CWWA, but judges will not need to be on a CWWA approved list.

A code of conduct for referees will be drawn up and circulated and a meeting of interested individuals will meet as early as possible in 2007 to discuss the rules and their interpretation. During the 2007 season assessors appointed by the Governing Board will observe referees and give them feedback. They will then draw up a list of approved referees for submission to the Autumn Governing Board meeting. Referees will be required to attend one seminar before each wrestling season.

Most wrestling events have referees who are regulars on the circuit and are up-to-date with the latest rules and interpretation, but still there are a few events which invite the local wrestling hero from fifty years ago who thinks the rules are just the same as ever.

More pertinently, some of the rules, such as those about pulling the head out, are interpreted differently by regular referees, and this could be sorted out by this proposed scheme.

April 21st 2007

AT ITS SPRING MEETING,

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....the Governing Board of the Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling Association allocated the championships for 2007. Two Herdwick Sheep shows on the Western edge of the Lake District, Ennerdale and Eskdale have never hosted a championship before. This year Ennerdale stages the 13 stones Championship on the Wednesday after Grasmere Sports when it is likely that Breton wrestlers will add an international flavour to the home-grown fare. Eskdale Show, on the last Saturday in September, puts on the Boys Under 15 Years Championship. In addition, in the same region, has the Under 18 Years/10st Championship at the ancient Egremont Crab Fair. The healthy continuation of the wrestling academy at Waberthwaite and the huge interest in wrestling amongst the boys of Wyndham School, Egremont, make these West Cumberland events doubly attractive.

Not far away at Cockermouth, the blue ribbon event, the All Weights Championship will take place at the agricultural show on the first Saturday of August. There is always an excellent atmosphere round the wrestling ring at Cockermouth, which can only be enhanced by the major championship.

Luckily the Championship scales are not required at Cockermouth, for they are needed in Northumberland on the same day. The lightest senior championship, the 10½ stones, will take place at Powburn in the ring where last year Rab McNamara rewrote the record books by winning his tenth All Weights title.

Northumberland has four other championships: Kirkheaton (15st); Allendale (14st); Alwinton (12st) and the Under 18 Championship will be held at Rothbury on the last day of August. The Rothbury event is aimed at giving an aim to the new wave of wrestlers brought on by the Rothbury Academy. Most of their wrestlers are under 18 years old and big with it, so no other championship would have been so appropriate.

Andrew Carlile will have a short journey to defend his 11st title, for Dalston Show is only four miles from his home in the middle of Carlisle.

The only championship in the South of the county is the Under 15 Years/8st competition at Ambleside Sports. The Governing Board was not being partial for there were no other applications from that area.

Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling Association World Championship Venues 2007

All Weights - Cockermouth Show - 4th August

15st - Kirkheaton Sports - 16th June

14st - Allendale Show - 18th August

13st - Ennerdale Show - 29th August

12st - Alwinton Show - 13th October

11st - Dalston Show - 11th August

10½st - Powburn Show - 4th August

Under 18 Years - Rothbury Mart - 31st August

Under 18 Years/10st - Egremont Crab Fair - 15th September

Under 15 Years - Eskdale Show - 29th September

Under 15 Years/8st - Ambleside Sports - 26th July

April 25th 2007

TRIP TO ISTANBUL

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

"Roger, do you fancy a trip to Istanbul in May all expenses paid?" Willie Baxter of the Scottish Wrestling Bond was alerting me to the "European Belt Wrestling Championships, that will take place in Istanbul (Turkey) during 4 – 6 May 2007 within the limits of the 1st European Green Festival of Traditional Wrestling Sports".

I can remember when a trip out of Northumberland to compete at Aikton Sports seemed an exotic adventure. Keeping your feet on the ground can be difficult at any time when you are wrestling, but the computer age now brings lots more opportunities to disappear into flights of wrestling fancy.

Forty years ago we sort of knew that Cornish Wrestling went on at the other end of England, that the Scottish Highland Games had "Cumberland Wrestling" and that a couple of Breton wrestlers had come exploring in our area, but otherwise our horizons were limited to the North of England and the Borders of Scotland.

That changed in 1985 when the International Federation of Celtic Wrestling was founded and we took our place alongside the Bretons, Scots and Icelanders who were the competitors at the first European Championships in 1986. Since then we have established contacts with traditional wrestlers in a dozen countries, and each extra contact emphasises how little we know of the global scene.

A quick flash onto the International Belt Wrestling Association web-site verifies that it is bona fide, with a wide membership of countries. The Scottish wrestlers went along in November last year to a huge wrestling festival at Almaty in Kazakhstan so this organisation does actually exist.

On the other hand some organisations seem to exist only in someone's head. The following e-mail was forwarded to me recently:

Traditional Wrestling Association Great Britain.

I am a representative of a newly formed organisation that represents the traditional wrestling of Great Britain. The styles represented are: Cumberland/Westmorland Wrestling (Back hold style); Cornish Wrestling (Jacket wrestling); Loose wrestling; Lancashire Catchas Catch; Norfolk Wrestling; Scottish Highland Wrestling (Back hold style); Irish Clollar and Elbow. (All spelling as original)

The signatory is unknown to me, and Willie Baxter commented that he had noticed odd references to this fellow on the internet but had no idea who he was and that he had absolutely no standing or credibility in wrestling. "For some reason wrestling is plagued by oddballs and this fellow is obviously one".

Dates

In the real world the opening of the 2007 wrestling season is imminent, with two very down-to-earth events staged by vintage machinery enthusiasts.

On Sunday, 6th May the season starts at Carlisle Airport with Hethersgill Vintage Society and on the following Sunday, 13th May it is the turn of the Eden Valley Vintage Society to host wrestling at Dalemain, near Penrith.

Television cameras will be at the latter and the producers are particularly keen to see a good turn-out of wrestlers in the traditional wrestling strip.

April 28th 2007

ANDREW CARLILE, ON HIS OWN.....

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

..... was the England team at the European Championships of the International Federation of Celtic Wrestling, held in a mountain village near Leon in Northern Spain. Nine countries were represented with the team championship going to Brittany who pipped the Leonese team by two points (103 to 101), with the Canarians close behind.

Carlile had a hard first day of wrestling in the Gouren Style saying that he had never been so tired in a wrestling ring. He began well in the alien style by gaining a good fall against an Austrian by hanking off a back-heel. Having gained a Kostin he defended well for the rest of the encounter so that became a winning score. In his next bout of Gouren he felled his old rival, Rab Clark of Glasgow, by two Kostins.

The third bout pitted him against the Breton Champion, Tudy Le Meur, who gave such a good account of himself when he wrestled at Grasmere and other venues here last year. Le Meur won by two Kostins to one, but at one point Le Meur thought he might have been Lammed by Carlile which would have been a knockout blow.

These results in the pool, sent him through to the semi-final cross-ties, where he had a good bout against a Canarian but went down to a Kostin late in the five minute bout. Much the same happened in the wrestle off for third and fourth place so that Carlile ended up fourth and "shattered".

After a night's sleep and the help of a Scottish physiotherapist, Carlile was in more familiar territory the next day, wrestling in the backhold style. He showed the full range of his talents varying his style for each opponent. The Leonese and Canarian wrestlers were strong and forced him to wrestle from the left, using buttocks and back-heels. The Friesland wrestler was less forceful and Carlile sent him flying with outside hipes. Against Tudy Le Meur he knew that the main danger lay in the Breton's hanks, so twice he leapt straight into action with swinging inside-hipes before the Breton could gather his wits. Another fall saw him lift Le Meur high in the air, all the time locking his legs together to prevent the hank. An outside hipe sent the Breton's legs one way and set him up for a left side cross-buttock to finish the job.

All this action took him to the 68kg final with Robert Clark who had gone through without losing a fall. Within five seconds of the command to "Wrestle!" Clark would have swung his opponent up in the air and inside-hiped him.

Andrew Carlile knew what was coming and took evasive action, each victory coming from counter-attack wrestling. In the first of the best-of-five bouts, Clark went for hold, and Carlile let him have it so that he could tire him out. When Clark eventually played the outside-stroke, Carlile stepped over it and hit Clark with the same trip, successfully. After a dog-fall, Clark went to hipec, but Carlile slid off it and back-heeled to win.

Clark then won a spectacular fall when he caught Carlile with his trade-mark hank. Having had that success, Clark then tried to repeat it, and for a moment it looked as if he had. A good hanker always has to load up his man before falling back over and twisting with leg and arms so there is a moment when his right foot stamps down close to his opponent. Inexperienced wrestlers have no idea what is happening at that point, for their opponent seems to be lying down backwards, almost as if giving in. But Carlile knew exactly what was happening and hit that tiny window of opportunity when Clark's standing leg was within range for a back-heel. Once the back-heel catches the leg the hank is nullified and the hanker, Clark, went down on his back.

If we had had a team of seven Andrew Carliles then England would have won the trophy, for his average points score was better than any other team, but only by taking a full team can one hope to win a team trophy at such a tough event.

Best back-hold wrestler was John Taylor of Glasgow who won in style in the toughest group of all. Best Gouren wrestler was Kevin Jerome, another seasonal visitor here.

Our Heavyweight Champion from Scotland, Robert McNamara, was injured in the Gouren on the first day, when he was back-heeled of the mat and hit his head on the unprotected floor. He spent the night in hospital with drips. The medical staff were unable to do the normal tests because his neck was so thick, but the next day he was cleared by scanning.

The Leonese deserve congratulations for an excellent event well organised in a beautiful mountain village. The locals were enthusiastic and hospitable, mingling and interacting with the wrestlers.

May 4th 2007

THE 2007 CUMBERLAND AND WESTMORLAND WRESTLING SEASON....

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....begins this weekend. With a background of old tractors and steam engines the first bouts of the season will be on Sunday at Carlisle Airport where the Hethersgill Vintage Machinery Society holds its rally. Such stirrings seem as natural as the swallows returning, but it is worth standing back and reflecting why wrestling continues to entertain the crowds and stir up the wrestlers year by year in this corner of England:

Tradition:

Newspaper articles from the early eighteen hundreds record the excitement of the wrestling on the Swifts in Carlisle, and at the Ferry on Windermere. Wrestling has come down through the generations in the Northern Counties and the Borders of Scotland. Wrestling families, such as the Harringtons, Brocklebanks and Davidsons, are the backbone of the sport.

Ambience:

Wrestling does not search out beautiful places, but much of the action takes place with a backdrop of Lakeland Fells, the Dales, the Cheviots, or in parkland, by castles and rivers. The rings are the focus of skill, effort and good humoured banter.

International travel:

Although mainly a local sport, hundreds of wrestlers from the region have competed in Austria, Brittany, the Canary Islands, Holland, Iceland, Ireland, Sardinia, Scotland, and Spain over the last twenty years. In February this year, 24 people from our area travelled to Brittany for their Backhold Championships.

Money:

No one is likely to make a fortune at C&W wrestling, but there are cash prizes to be won, and profit to be made. No expensive equipment is needed and no annual subscriptions necessary. Poverty never stopped anyone from wrestling.

Friendship:

C&W wrestling is like a freemasonry, without the secrecy and funny handshakes. New competitors are warmly welcomed and can hardly avoid being helped by wrestlers old and new.

Sportsmanship:

The handshake at the beginning and end of each bout is no empty gesture. The sport needs toughness both physical and mental, but in a framework of good manners and sporting acceptance of defeat or victory.

Controlled aggression:

Youngsters often don't know how to get rid of their excess energy and aggression. Wrestling is ideal for them, as it needs vigour and effort, but by gripping their own hands there is no punching, and gouging. The lack of ground wrestling cuts out other unpleasant elements of conflict.

Fitness:

No matter how fit you think you are, C&W wrestling will test you out, and your first session will leave you feeling stiff the next day. The sport brings all the muscles of the leg, upper body and neck into play, and a weekly session would enhance anyone's general fitness.

Excitement:

"It gets the adrenalin going. It's a bit like boxing, but you don't get your face punched." Mark Lowry expresses the intense excitement of a sport which pits man against man in a sport where your strength and skill are tested to the full in public view.

Satisfaction:

Nothing in sport quite beats the feeling when you outwit a good opponent and you feel him touch the ground before you after an all action bout. Without that basic, primitive, satisfaction, none of the previous points would matter at all, and C&W wrestling would never have existed.

The North Cumbria Young Farmers Field Day takes place the following Saturday (12th May) with its mixture of novice and experienced wrestlers representing the various clubs.

On the following day wrestling will be on display for the television cameras at the Eden Valley Vintage Machinery Rally at Dalemain. A programme for national ITV will be shot at the event. The programme makers are keen to have wrestlers in their traditional kit, and have sponsored a costume competition, to complement the wrestling programme. One problem and a sign of the times is that they must have parental permission to film youngsters.

Dates:

May 6th (Sun) 12.30pm Hethersgill Vintage Rally at Carlisle Airport U12/U15/U18/12½/AW

May 12th (Sat) Northern Federation YFC Field Day

May 13th (Sun) Eden Valley Vintage Rally, Dalemain

May 11th 2007

THE 2007 WRESTLING SEASON....

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

..... roared into action amongst the old tractors and steam engines at the Hethersgill Vintage Machinery Rally at Carlisle Airport last week-end.

Juniors

Despite taking place in the fiefdom of Carlisle Wrestling Club, it was the Northumbrians of the new Rothbury Academy who dominated the boys' wrestling. Carlisle's Kieron Miller won the first competition of the season when he felled Cade Whitfield of Rothbury in the Under 12 Years, and Craig Ridley won the first fall of the Under 15 Years final by inside-clicking the big Rothbury lad, Jack Hale, but after that it was Northumberland all the way. Jack Hale won the next two falls with a backover twist and then a cross-click. And in the Under 18 Years Northumberland and their big lads won all the prizemoney, with Andrew Ord back-heeling Jamie Oliver twice.

Seniors

Once the Carlisle senior wrestlers were introduced into the action, the Northumbrians' good progress was put into proportion. Often the Carlisle wrestlers were smaller and lighter than their opponents, but they had too much speed and experience to be troubled by the younger wrestlers. The culmination of this period of wrestling was the final of the 12½st between Andrew Carlile and John Harrington. Harrington won the first fall by a short head as they hit the turf together. Carlile struck back with a neat outside-stroke to equalise, and then Harrington won the decider with a back-heel cum outside-stroke.

Highlights

One of the best falls of the day came in the wrestle-off for third place when Richard Dixon felled Andrew Fox with a classic hank

The final of the All Weights pitted the two coaches of Rothbury and Carlisle, Darren Whitfield and Andrew Carlile, against each other. Although giving away around seven stones, Carlile managed to take a surprise first fall with a snappy back-heel. Whitfield regrouped to win safely by lifting Carlile well clear of the ground and flicking his legs side-ways.

Look Ahead

This weekend sees the wonderful mix of strength, skill, experience and innocence which is the wrestling at the North Cumbria YFC Field Day on Saturday. On Sunday there is a special call for wrestlers male and female to attend at Dalemain, near Penrith, where a TV programme with a well-known national celebrity will be filmed. As part of the wrestling there will be a traditional costume competition when he will join Mrs Molloy and Tom Harrington as judges.

Results:

Hethersgill Vintage Rally

Under 12 Years 1, K Miller; 2, C Whitfield.

Under 15 Years 1, J Hale; 2, C Ridley; 3, J Thompson.

Under 18 Years 1, A Ord; 2, J Oliver; 3, J Hale.

12½st 1 John Harrington; 2, A Carlile; 3, R Dixon.

All Weights 1, D Whitfield; 2, A Carlile; 3, J Hale.

Dates:

Sat May 19th Sedbergh Gala

May 19th 2007

A BIG MAN ADDED SOME INTEREST

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

...to the wrestling at Dalemain, but he was never in the ring. Robbie Coltrane, the Glasgow actor, Hagrid in the Harry Potter films, spent the afternoon finding out about wrestling for a series of programmes to go out in August about interesting activities lying on his route home from London to Glasgow.

He spoke at length with Mrs Molloy about the costumes, with Tom Harrington about the action, and with me about the history of our local sport. The media company sponsored a costume competition, and two of their researchers figured briefly in the women's wrestling.

Their day had started early at the Hodgson family farm in Dentdale, for they were following Tracy on her way to winning yet another competition. A second thread developed when her father, Trevor, reached the final of the All Weights, but there the ideal script foundered, for Trevor found Jason Davidson in good form.

His role as coach of Rothbury Academy has trimmed him up physically and sharpened him up, too. He felled strong opposition in the form of 15st Champion Joseph Robson with an outside-hipe and was in control of Trevor Hodgson in the final. His protégés added greatly to the entertainment, and Jack Hale proved his quality by winning a tough Under 15 Years competition to add to his win at Irthington the previous week.

David Parsons, the coach at Milnthorpe Academy had reason to be pleased, for the smallest academy took two wins in the boys' wrestling. Sam Lashley won the Under 12 Years, and two Milnthorpe wrestlers, Sam Wilkinson and Tom Mason contested the Under 18 Years final, with Wilkinson, who also wrestles at Kendal Academy, winning the day.

Amongst a feast of good wrestling, the best was focused in the finals of the 12½ stones, when Richard Fox felled John Harrington in the semi-finals and Andrew Carlile in the final. Imagine my frustration when I noticed that the camera crew were having a tea-break just at this point so some of the best wrestling of the day went unrecorded for the Robbie Coltrane programme which we hope will show our wrestling in a good light.

At the North Cumbria Young Farmers Field Day at Irthington, Caldbeck YFC were overall winners, helped in no small way by John Harrington's performance in the wrestling when he won both the 11½st and the All Weights. He was given some stiff tests by both novices and the experienced wrestlers but his skill won the day.

Results:

North Cumbria YFC Field Day, Irthington

9½st: 1, M Haskins; 2, P Mattinson; 3, S Dinwood.

11½st: 1, John Harrington; 2, C Pollock; 3, R Dixon.

All Weights: 1, John Harrington; 2, R Fox; 3, K Fox.

Girls 11st: 1, E Groat; 2, M Graham; 3, L Donald.

Girls All Weights: 1, K Wigham; 2, R Marrs; 3, L Donald.

Eden Valley Vintage Rally, Dalemmain.

Under 12 Years: 1, S Lashley; 2, M Fisher; 3, K Miller.

Under 15 Years: 1, J Hale; 2, S Brocklebank; 3, J Thompson.

Under 18 Years: 1, S Wilkinson; 2, T Mason; 3, F Healy.

12½st: 1, R Fox; 2, A Carlile; 3, John Harrington.

All Weights: 1, J Davidson; 2, T Hodgson; 3, J Robson.

Girls: 1, T Hodgson; 2, D Thompson; 3, H Hodgson.

Wrestling Strip: 1, R Dixon; 2, J Brown; 3 (equal), T Hodgson and John Harrington

Dates:

May 19th (Sat) Sedbergh Gala

May 28th (Mon) Northumberland County Show, Corbridge.

May 31st (Thurs) Killington Sports

May 30th 2007

RICHARD FOX OF HETHERSGILL.....

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....turned out in a new neat and simple wrestling strip and was too smart for most of the opposition at the Northumberland County Show, Corbridge. He signalled his intentions when he entered the fray in the 13½ stones first round when he swept John Harrington aside firstly with a hipe and back-heel and then with a straightforward left leg back-heel. His confidence is high and he made his slight weight advantage tell.

It was nearly a brotherly final, as big brother Andrew, now working for the National Trust at Grasmere, was going well until Richard Dixon of Lesssonhall took the deciding fall in the semi-final with a text book hank. Although Dixon weighs in below 10½st, he is capable of felling wrestlers of any weight, but Richard Fox was in full flow and came out on top with strong twists.

Fox's day was not yet over, for if anything, he wrestled even better in the All Weights. In the first round he dispatched one of the favourites, Darren Whitfield, who would weigh half as much again as Fox, by bustling and twisting from unexpected angles. Then he felled John Harrington by swinging him fast then cross buttocking in the opposite direction. His brother Andrew gave him pause for thought when he took the first fall in the semi-final, but that deficit was rectified with a buttock and a hipe.

His final opponent, the Rothbury Academy coach, Jason Davidson, had seemed vulnerable as he wrestled through the rounds, twice losing the first fall with Robert Leiper and Andrew Murray, but always coming back to win. The nearest Fox got to the Northumbrian, however, was a dog fall. Davidson twisted him over the knee for the first fall and inside-hiped him for the third.

Seniors

John Harrington won the other senior event, the 11½ stones, much in the same way as Davidson, for he too gave the opposition a head start by losing the first fall but fighting back to win against Watchai Noimai in the first round and Simon Hamilton in the final. Hamilton was a local wrestler with a plenty of support in the crowd and a big smile on his face. For the first fall he lifted Harrington, hitched him up further and twisted him back. Northumbrian hopes were dimmed when Harrington won the next fall by lifting on the right side and twisting his man down, and then extinguished by a clever right leg outside-stroke which felled Hamilton before he knew what had happened.

Good entries and good wrestling was the order of the day for the boys events starting with a well contested Under 9 Years, and ending with a Rothbury clean sweep in the Under 19 Years with Andrew Ord of Morpeth, the winner. Jack Hale of Rothbury caught the eye with his determined, skilful wrestling. He must be well ahead in the lists for the Under 15 Years this new season, but he is also able to take falls from older and heavier competitors.

En Français

An e-mail from Jean-François Hubert, the Breton Wrestling President, has indicated that a Breton team will very likely visit here around Grasmere Sports time. He also passed on an invitation from the town of Guingamp, for one of the main events of the Breton

calendar: "The Guingamp Festival in on his 50th birthday and wants to invite some non Breton wrestlers. Could a few Cumbrian wrestlers come? The event is on the 19th August. The festival will provide accommodation and money for travel." Any takers?

Results:

Northumberland County Show

Under 9 Years 1, J Stewart; 2, C Whitfield; 3, G Aynsley.
Under 12 Years 1, W Aynsley; 2, T Dodds; 3, C Whitfield.
Under 15 Years 1, J Hale; 2, J Brown; 3, J Thompson.
Under 19 Years 1, A Ord; 2, N Birdsall; 3, J Hale.
11½st 1, John Harrington; 2, S Hamilton; 3, R Dixon.
13½st 1, R Fox; 2, R Dixon; 3, A Fox.
All Weights 1, J Davidson; 2, R Fox; 3, A Murray.

Dates:

June 9th (Sat)

Roman Wall Show - U13/U17/11½/13½/AW

June 10th (Sun) 2pm

Morpeth - U10/U13/U16/U18/10½/13/15½/AW

June 16th (Sat) 2pm

Kirkheaton Show - U12/U15/U18/12/15 Ch'ship(£350)/AW

June 1st 2007

BAD LIGHT STOPPED PLAY.....

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

..... as usual, at Killington Sports where the last race was run in the near-dark with car headlights at the bends. Two mass charges called heats had sorted out the three-legged race. An uncountable number of youngsters had charged round the field. Children and adults battered each other on the bolster and bar for nearly two hours. Some high quality runners led the crowd on track and hill. And the wrestling drew big entries.

Carlisle wrestlers took all the prize money in the 13 stones but had to work hard for it. Young wrestlers from South Cumbria gave 13st champion, John Harrington, a hard time. Graham Brocklebank had taken four falls out of Harrington at Sedbergh Gala a fortnight ago, and he set about Harrington again, trying to power into his short ribs. This time, though, Harrington was prepared and won by resisting and then counter attacking, particularly with the leg-up buttock. In the next round Sam Wilkinson took a surprise fall from Harrington and pushed him hard but unsuccessfully in the next two holds.

In the meantime Richard Fox had been using the early rounds to practice his hank, a trip that he usually only resorts to when in difficulties. By the time he reached the final he was in full flow and dispatched John Harrington in straight falls using his two basic chips, the back-heel and the cross-buttock. Fox continued his good form in the All Weights, adding in a few hipes for variety, but his virtuosity was trumped by the power and concentration of Thomas Brocklebank.

These days Brocklebank wrestles more and more like his father, former heavyweight champion Harry. He lifts high and twists back, and especially he rushes opponents forward off his right hip. That is what he did with Richard Fox in the semi-final, and with little brother Graham in the final.

The girls wrestling was easy for Tracy Hodgson, felling both of her younger sisters, but the boys wrestling was hard work for the winners. Bradley Thompson and Fred Whit could not have put another ounce of energy into their final as they buzzed and twisted around in the final of the Under 12 Years. Scott Brocklebank had several rounds to wrestle before he reached the final of the Under 15 Years with Milnthorpe's Jack Lashley and promptly lost the first fall to a buttock. However he picked himself up and won the next two falls with the patent Brocklebank right side rush.

Results:

Killington Sports

Under 12 Years 1, B Thompson; 2, F Whit; 3, I Hammond.

Under 15 Years 1, S Brocklebank; 2, J Lashley; 3, S Mason.

Girls Under 16 Years 1, T Hodgson; 2, H Hodgson; 3, C Hodgson.

13st 1, R Fox; 2, John Harrington; 3, A Fox.

All Weights 1, T Brocklebank; 2, G Brocklebank; 3, R Fox.

Dates:

June 9th - Roman Wall Show
U13/U17/11½/13½/AW

June 10th, 2pm - Morpeth
U10/U13/U16/U18/10½/13/15½/AW

June 16th, 2pm - Kirkheaton Show
U12/U15/U18/12/15 Ch'ship(£350)/AW

June 13th 2007**THE ROMAN WALL SHOW.....**

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

..... used to take place in a bog near the Military Road, but for many years now it is perched high on the Great Whin Sill, right alongside Hadrian's Wall with a spectacular view of crags and lakes. The wrestling too was a grand spectacle with Carlisle Wrestling Club supplying most of the winners.

Jack Brown of Haydon Bridge is necessarily having a lean year after his fine season in 2006, for he is a year older and finds himself facing older and bigger opposition all the time. At the Roman Wall Show, a rare 'Under 13 years' gave him the chance to shine again, and he took it, buttocking and twisting James Walton in the final.

Jack Ewart of Westward, after many years of regular attendance at the Wrestling Club, missed last winter because of cadets, but he showed that he remembered how to wrestle when he felled Watchai Noimai twice with the buttock in the Under 17 final.

John Harrington was central to all the action in the men's wrestling, for he won the 11½ stones and contested the other two finals. Simon Hamilton of Bavington managed to gain a fall against Harrington at the recent County Show, but there was no sign of weakness from Harrington here when he hiped Hamilton to win.

Richard Fox, on his best form this year, won the 13½ stones after a finely balanced (literally) final with Harrington who gained the middle fall with a late twist. In the decider Harrington tried to bring Fox over on a leg-up buttock, but was twisted off it.

Harrington's good form continued into the All Weights when he felled Fox in an early round and then managed to contain the rampant power of local favourite Andrew Murray. A local sheep farmer, Murray got a good grip and turned Harrington for the first fall as if he were going to clip him. In the next two falls Harrington negated Murray's power and sat him on his backside with an inside-click.

In the All Weights final, Jason Davidson had too much weight and nous to be caught like that and won easily with hipes and twists.

Morpeth Gala

Morpeth Gala with its £800 prize money, brought out a good entry from Rothbury Academy to try to keep the Cumbrians at bay. Jimmy Pringle had sought to make the wrestling youth friendly, so there were four age categories for boys. All of them were won by Northumbrians, but one of them, Craig Ridley of Slaggyford, we claim as an honorary Cumbrian as he learns his wrestling skills at Carlisle. In the Under 16 Years final with the massive Nathan Birdsall, he proved conclusively that C&W Wrestling is not just about weight and strength.

Andrew Carlile outside-hipes Richard Dixon

For a while it became the Andrew Carlile Show for he dominated the 10½ stones and then allowed David Barnes of Dearham to do all the hard work for him in the 13½ stones before felling him in the final. Carlile who is one of the main coaches at Carlisle showed his full range of chips from the sneaky backover twists, which end a bout almost before it starts, to full-blooded swinging hipes.

The last two categories were dominated by big Northumbrians, while John Harrington worried away at them like a fox terrier. Jason Davidson won the day with outside hipes to win the 15½ stones. Then in the final of the All Weights, Richard Younger looked invincible as he twisted and outside-stroked Davidson.

Lowgill

The Brocklebank and Hodgson families turned out in force to new event at Lowgill in North Lancashire; the score was Brocklebanks 4, Hodgsons 2.

Mrs Dorothy Clarke of Grayrigg, a long-time member of the Governing Board, wife of CWWA President, the late Bob Clarke, and for over fifty years the main lady at the ringside table, has died at the age of 89 years.

Results:**Roman Wall Show**

Under 13 Years 1, J Brown; 2, J Walton; 3, R Coates.

Under 17 Years 1, J Ewart; 2, W Noimai; 3, J Brown.

11½st 1, John Harrington; 2, S Hamilton; 3, W Noimai.

13½st 1, R Fox; 2, John Harrington; 3, S Hamilton.

All Weights 1, J Davidson; 2, John Harrington; 3, A Murray.

Lowgill

Under 12 Years 1, D Hodgson; 2, J Stubbs; 3, R Theakston.

Under 15 Years 1, S Brocklebank; 2, J Hodgson; 3, B Brocklebank.

Under 18 Years 1, G Brocklebank; 2, S Brocklebank; 3, B Brocklebank.

Ladies 1, J Hodgson; 2, G Hodgson-Stainton; 3, H Hodgson.

12½st 1, G Brocklebank; J Hodgson; 3, B Brocklebank.

All Weights 1, T Brocklebank; 2, G Brocklebank; 3, T Hodgson.

Morpeth Gala

Under 10 Years 1, C Bertram; 2, C Whitfield; 3, H Bertram.

Under 13 Years 1, T Marley; 2, S Brewis; 3, J Brown.

Under 16 Years 1, C Ridley; 2, N Birdsall; 3, J Hale.

Under 18 Years 1, A Ord; 2, J Oliver; 3, J Hale.

10½st 1, A Carlile; 2, A Ridley; 3, R Dixon.

13st 1, A Carlile; 2, D Barnes; 3, John Harrington.

15½st 1, J Davidson; 2, John Harrington; 3, R Dixon.

All Weights 1, R Younger; 2, J Davidson; 3, John Harrington.

Dates:

June 16th (Sat) 2pm Kirkheaton Show U12/U15/U18/12/15Ch'ship(£350)/AW

June 17th (Sun) 1.15pm Silloth Vintage Rally U12/U15/U18/11½/13/AW

June 24th (Sun) 2pm Patterdale Lakeland Fair U12/U15/U18/11½/13/AW

June 21st 2007

FOR SOME WEEKS NOW.....

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....Joseph Robson of Grayrigg has held back from wrestling after a shoulder injury at Sedbergh Gala took him to hospital for a check-up. Last Saturday was the big test, as his 15st World Championship was open to all-comers at Kirkheaton, a tiny Northumbrian village well lost in rolling stock-country.

Northumberland was an appropriate area for the championship as they have some big lads well capable of lifting the trophy. Robson's first task was to deal with a lightweight from Carlisle Wrestling Club. Richard Dixon is capable of winning against heavier opposition, but Robson kept him under close control, lifted him high, kicked out the hank and landed him on his back.

A bye in the next round allowed Robson to watch his Northumbrian rivals at work before meeting them in the finals. Robert Leiper twice back-heeled James Oliver who learned his wrestling at Rothbury, but now lives near Hawick. Jason Davidson put paid to Alan Jones's latest foray from retirement with a swiping outside hipe.

The semi-final brought Robson and Leiper together and the powerful Northumbrian took the first fall. Leiper went on the offensive again in the second with a back-heel, but Robson wriggled out of it and twisted. Having weathered the storm, Robson went more on the attack and caught Leiper with a neat outside-stroke.

The final brought him against the Rothbury coach, Jason Davidson, who had weighed in with little to spare. Davidson went for hold and a lift and Robson was lucky to turn his man with a cross-click and land with Davidson's leg under him. Once more Davidson went for his chips and lifted Robson high on an inside-hipe, but Robson slipped off it, regained his feet and twisted strongly to win.

Silloth

John Harrington was by far the most successful wrestler of the week-end for he had a win at 12 stones at Kirkheaton, and was unbeaten at Silloth the next day when he won at 11½st, 13st and All Weights. At both venues he lost his first falls. At Kirkheaton Andrew Carlile gave him his wake-up call when he squirmed free from a buttock, and at Silloth David Barnes scored with a series of non-stop moves which ended with a cross-click. Harrington's great quality is to read a situation and change it to his advantage, so that in subsequent bouts he is always fractionally ahead of the opposition, able to ride and counter any attack.

The other wrestler with wins at both venues was James Oliver who was a long way from his Hawick home on both occasions. At Kirkheaton he felled Ross Wilkinson in straight falls in the final of the Under 18 Years; and at Silloth he had a ding-dong battle with Jack Ewart before winning.

Results:

Kirkheaton

Under 12 Years 1, C Ash; 2, O Rankin; 3, C Whitfield.

Under 15 Years 1, J Hale; 2, J Wragg; 3, J Brown.

Under 18 Years 1, J Oliver; 2, R Wilkinson; 3, J Hale.

12st 1, John Harrington; 2, R Suddes; 3, A Carlile.

15st World Championship 1, J Robson; 2, J Davidson; 3, R Leiper.

All Weights 1, J Davidson; 2, J Robson; 3, John Harrington.

Silloth Vintage Rally

Under 12 Years 1, K Miller; 2, J Dixon; 3, J Bradbury.

Under 15 Years 1, C Ridley; 2, J Thompson; 3, D Ewart.

Under 18 Years 1, J Oliver; 2, J Ewart; 3, C Ridley

11½st 1, John Harrington; 2, C Ridley; 3, R Dixon.

13st 1, John Harrington; 2, D Barnes; 3, R Dixon.

AW 1, John Harrington; 2, D Barnes; 3, M Fisher.

Dates:

June 24th (Sun) 2pm Patterdale Lakeland Fair

U12/U15/U18/11½/13/AW

July 1st (Sun) Langdale Gala

Distington

July 7th (Sat) Alston Gala

July 8th (Sun) Haltwhistle

July 11th (Wed) Plumbland

June 28th 2007

ULLSWATER COUNTRY FAIR, PATERDALE.....

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....wrestling conditions don't get much better than this with the naturally formed ring of spectators on the springy outfield of the local cricket pitch, all encircled by mountains and trees ... then it rained. But the wrestling continued to shine, with a series of close bouts.

Shaky start for under 12s

The wrestling had a shaky start when only two boys entered the Under 12 Years and Ben Keyworth felled Haydon Barnes. After that entries improved and the crowd was well entertained for more than an hour. The final of the Under 15 Years proved to be one of the best wrestling feats of the year so far, with Craig Ridley of Slaggyford felling the significantly heavier Scott Brocklebank from Kendal Academy. Brocklebank is a heavy, powerful youth, and he is also a good and experienced wrestler not easily taken unawares, but he was well caught by a cross-buttock from Ridley for the first fall.

Their second hold went along more predictable lines with Brocklebank going for hold, then flicking Ridley sideways and down. The decider was on a knife-edge for some time as Brocklebank once more gained all the hold. This time Ridley stuck in a hank and Brocklebank struggled to shake it out. Often such a hank is merely a defensive ploy designed to keep the hanker in the bout, but Ridley has shown already this season that he can use the hank as an exciting attacking chip. Eventually, Brocklebank bore down on him, and as they fell together Ridley popped out from underneath by straightening the hanking leg to pull himself on top.

Two more finals for under 18 winner

Graham Brocklebank then showed what a good champion he is by sailing through the Under 18s, even though there were good wrestlers in the entry. In the final he inside-hiped Jack Lashley of Milnthorpe Academy, and then in the second hold twisted him back. Brocklebank's day was far from finished, for he contested two more finals going down to John Harrington in the 13 stones and to big brother Thomas in the All Weights.

John Harrington kept his recent run of good form flowing with two wins. He felled Craig Ridley, carefully, in the 11½ stones, before moving on to more testing times in the 13 stones. David Barnes once more took the first fall from him with a bout which visited five or six chips of attack and counter, played one after the other as the wrestling flowed across the ring to end in a cross-buttock. After that Harrington took the initiative on the basis that the first to lift would be the first to win, and gained two falls with outside-hipes.

Harrington now has his strategy well sorted for Graham Brocklebank who had felled him in their first bouts of the season. In the 13st final a hipe for the first fall and an inside-click for the second did the business.

That same inside-click gained a consolation middle fall for him in the All Weights against Thomas Brocklebank, but Brocklebank relied on a right-side wrench-buttock, just like his dad's, to win the day in an early round. After that it seemed that Brocklebank was striving to lift his opponents high enough to sit them on a nearby mountain before flinging them earthwards.

Results:

Patterdale

Under 12 Years 1, B Keyworth; 2, H Barnes.

Under 15 Years 1, C Ridley; 2, S Brocklebank; 3, S Lashley.

Under 18 Years 1, G Brocklebank; 2, J Lashley; 3, A Ridley.

11½st 1, John Harrington; 2, C Ridley; 3, M Fisher.

13st 1, John Harrington; 2, G Brocklebank; 3, D Barnes.

All Weights 1, T Brocklebank; 2, G Brocklebank; 3, A Fox.

Dates:

July 1st (Sun)

Langdale Gala U12/U15/U18/12½/AW

2pm Distington, West Cumbria Vintage Club U12/U15/U18/12½/AW

July 7th (Sat) Alston Gala U12/U15/U18/Ladies/11½/13/AW

July 8th (Sun) Haltwhistle U12/U15/U18/11½/13/AW/Novice

July 11th (Wed) Plumblund U12/U15/U18/13/AW

July 14th 2007

TEXT

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

Graham Brocklebank of Warton ,,,,

.....was the main man at Langdale Gala. The Under 18 Champion first won his age group and then won both of the senior events as the showers and sunshine swept down the Langdale valley.

The event was a celebration of youth for there were few senior competitors, and none of them was much heavier than the on-form Brocklebank. His first bout, though, gave little indication of the successful day that lay in store, for a wrestler from just down the valley swept him away with a dynamic attack of hipes and twists for the first fall.

Graeme Benson of Skelwith Bridge has built up some good experience in the past two years, but he had not wrestled for some time. A good rugby player, he had been training with Kendal for two nights a week, and the county rugby squad for another two right through the winter so had missed out on the winter coaching at Kendal Academy.

Brocklebank simply used the set-back as a wake-up call, and he fought back with his brand of positive wrestling, hiping and twisting, or turning his man in to drive him forward and down with a right side wrench buttock.

Benson had a second chance to shine when he again met Brocklebank in the 12½ stones, and again he gained the first fall only to have Brocklebank overhaul him.

The All Weights final was another good challenge for Brocklebank. Robin Parsons came home to Levens for the week-end from his work as an architect in Newcastle and decided to go with his father, the Milnthorpe Academy coach, David Parsons, to the wrestling at Langdale. He is only an occasional wrestler these days, but except for a bit of heavy breathing after a tough bout, you would never have noticed. He came through tough bouts with his cousin David which swirled across the ring, but Graham Brocklebank, with his strength, skill, experience and match fitness, was too much for him.

Some far travelled wrestler had success at Distington Vintage Club Rally. Watchai Noimai of Carlisle was in the money for three events, the best being the runners-up spot to John Harrington in the 12½ stones. Craig Ridley from Slaggyford near Alston continued his good form by winning the Under 15 Years against the local but experienced wrestler Paul Murray. And furthest travelled of all was Fin Healy of Tynemouth who felled Jack Ewart in the final of the Under 18 Years and wrestled up to John Harrington in the All Weights. As is already obvious, John Harrington had another good day with two wins to add to his growing tally for the season.

Results:

Langdale Gala

Under 12 Years 1, T Maloney; 2, H Barnes.

Under 15 Years 1, S Brocklebank; 2, B Brocklebank; 3, J Thompson.

Under 18 Years 1, G Brocklebank; 2, G Benson; 3, S Wilkinson.

12½st 1, G Brocklebank; 2, G Benson; 3, S Wilkinson.

All Weights 1, G Brocklebank; 2, R Parsons; 3, S Wilkinson.

Ladies Open 1, Z Dewdney; 2, H Barnes; 3, E Hayhurst.

Distington

Under 12 Years 1, A Armstrong; 2, J Webstall; 3, L Hodgson.

Under 15 Years 1, C Ridley; 2, P Murray; 3, D Ewart.

Under 18 Years 1, F Healy; 2, J Ewart; 3, W Noimai.

12½st 1, John Harrington; 2, W Noimai; 3, W Rothery.

All Weights 1, John Harrington; 2, F Healy; 3, W Noimai.

Dates:

July 15th (Sun) 2pm Bampton Sports, near Shap U12/U15/U18/Girls/12½/AW

July 21st 2007

BAMPTON

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

Bampton Sports in the high ground between Ullswater and Shap, has not had wrestling since 1951. We knew this because one of this week's judges, Cyril Bragg, won the 10½st World Championship in that year.

The wrestling was very much an away-day for Kendal Academy, coaches and all, for they provided the bulk of the entry.

Assistant coach Joe Robson finished off senior coach John Wilson with an outside-hipe in the semi-final of the All Weights, then moved on to the seemingly easier task of defeating Anthony Wilson in the final, only to find himself a fall down in double-quick time. Two powerful cross-buttocks averted embarrassment for the 15st Champion. Anthony Wilson has been away from the ring for many years, but he would enjoy his day (until his muscles seize up) for he won the 13 stones before coming near to a double in the final of the all Weights.

The other class act was Craig Ridley of Slaggyford who was a credit to himself and his Carlisle coaches when he won both the Under 15 and Under 18 Years with great aplomb.

Great Ecclestone

Far from the quiet world of Bampton in the Cumbrian fells Great Ecclestone Show must be one of the noisiest venues with Tractor Pulling duels going on in the vicinity of the wrestling. Milnthorpe coach, David Parsons, with no microphone, had to find a strip of higher ground to avoid losing the wrestlers in the mire. The wrestling was dominated by the Brocklebank family, especially Graham who won thrice.

By far his hardest task was the final of the All Weights when he met former champion Richard Threlfall, who had just felled Thomas, the biggest and oldest of the present Brocklebanks by surviving the power and buttocking, twice, when the chances arose. In the final Graham upped the tempo, and wrestled with speed and deftness which caught out the ring-rusty Threlfall.

Tomorrow the Cumberland Show is giving about £1000 of prize-money for the wrestling. As well as the usual programme, there will be a challenge match between two big, strong and skilful wrestlers: Joseph Robson of Kendal and Robert Leiper of Ponteland, Northumberland. Another change from the usual is the weight competition for boys weighing less than 7st and aged under 15 years.

The following week holds some of the elite traditional events: Ambleside Sports and Langholm Common Riding.

Results:

Pumbland Sports

Under 12 Years 1, D Foy; 2, B Hunt; 3, E Hopkins'
Under 15 Years 1, J Thompson; 2, J Brown; 3, P Murray.
Under 18 Years 1, P Housby; 2, J Thompson; 3, K Brown.
13st 1, John Harrington; 2, M Fisher; 3, J Thompson.
All Weights 1, John Harrington; 2, P Housby; 3, R Skelton.

Bampton Sports

Under 10 Years 1, S Wilson; 2, R Hebson; 3, D Frith.
Under 12 Years 1, B Thompson; 2, W Atkinson; 3, H Barnes.
Under 15 Years 1, C Ridley; 2, J Thompson; 3, T Barnes.
Under 18 Years 1, C Ridley; 2, J Thompson; 3, T Barnes.
12½st 1, A Wilson; 2, J Thompson; 3, M Atkinson.
All Weights 1, J Robson; 2, A Wilson; 3, J Wilson.
Girls 1, J Hebson; 2, O Wilson; 3, E Heaviside.

Great Ecclestone Show

Under 12 Years 1, J Hayhurst; 2, I Hammond.
Under 15 Years 1, S Brocklebank; 2, S Mason; 3, W Hayhurst.
Under 18 Years 1, G Brocklebank; 2, S Brocklebank; 3, W Hayhurst.
11½st 1, S Mason; 2, J Hayhurst; 3, B Brocklebank.
13st 1, G Brocklebank; 2, S Mason; 3, W Hayhurst.
All Weights 1, G Brocklebank; 2, R Threlfall; 3, T Brocklebank

Dates:

July 21st (Sat) 4pm Cumberland Show U12/ U15(7st)/U15/U18/12/14/AW
July 22nd (Sun) 3.30pm Coniston U12/ U15/U18/11½/13/AW
July 26th (Thurs) Ambleside Sports
July 27th (Fri) Langholm Common Riding
July 28th (Sat) Penrith Show
July 29th (Sun) Flookburgh

July 28th 2007

CHALLENGE MATCHES

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....were the order of the day in Victorian times, but they are a rare animal these days, so there was a special piquancy about the match between Joseph Robson and Robert Leiper, best of nine falls, at the Cumberland Show.

The match brought together two well matched wrestlers weighing in at around the 15 stone mark, who have both had their share of the 14st and 15st World Championships in the past few years.

No damp squib

The fear for the organisers of such an event is that it goes off like a damp squib in a one-sided encounter. At first Robson took the lead when he twice rode Leiper's hipe to twist on landing(2-0), but then Leiper pulled one back with a back-heel (2-1). Robson took the fourth with a typical low and powerful cross-buttock (3-1). With defeat in the offing, Leiper changed up several gears and won the next three falls to swing the momentum his way: 5, hold, hipe and twist back; 6, a twist off the back-heel; 7, Leiper ducked a cross-buttock so that he gained all the hold and twisted down (3-4).

The pressure was now on Robson, and it looked as if Leiper's hold and powerful lifts would carry the day only for Robson to rescue himself by inches with a desperate cross-click. (4-4). You could not have scripted it better as the two tiring men took hold for the deciding fall. Robert Leiper said afterwards that he wasknackered and unable to apply his usual power, but he certainly started well enough when he stopped Robson's attempt to buttock. He tried to pick his man up and twist back but Robson hit with a cross-click which did a lot of damage, as it made Leiper drop down to earth, and from that position Robson struck with his original ploy and brought Leiper to earth with a cross-buttock to win the match.

John Harrington was the star of the main menu of wrestling at the Cumberland Show. He was annoyed with himself when Alan Jones cut past him in the semi-final of the All Weights, but he had already won both the 12 stones and the 14 stones before that, so the Guinness Trophy for the best performance of all the wrestling went inevitably to him. In his present form he seems to have the answer for most situations.

Returns

Over the week-end several wrestlers made their mark after a rare return to the ring. The head prize at Carlisle, the All Weights, went to Russell Housby, who was a regular wrestler as a lad, when he trained at Carlisle Wrestling Club. Now weighing in at 22st and retaining his quick footwork and natural twists, he is a formidable opponent. Next week at Cockermonth he would be one of the few wrestlers able to match Rab McNamara as he defends his All Weights title for another year.

Another occasional wrestler, Adam Hird, shone in the Under 15 Years where he was able to cope with the power of Scott Brocklebank, a regular winner of that age-group. His winning fall came from a buttock and a low swing round to finish the job. Jack Brown enjoyed the luxury of wrestling opponents no heavier than him when he won a rare weight category for boys, the Under 15 Years/7st. He felled Bradley Thompson, a rising star from Kendal, in the final. Thompson had already won the Under 12 Years, and did the same the following day at Coniston Lakeland Country Fair. He is a wonderfully active and fluent wrestler, able to survive attacks, and capable of buttocking heavier opponents low by the ground.

At Coniston

The theme of occasional wrestlers winning was continued at Coniston when Stuart Fleming won the All Weights in a final with the Kendal coach, John Wilson. Apart from that it was business as usual: Scott Brocklebank won the Under 15 Years; Graham Brocklebank won the Under 18 Years, and John Harrington won at 11½st. Then came one of those moments when the out come was in severe doubt when Graham Brocklebank met John Harrington in the final of the 13 stones. Early in the season in their first encounter Brocklebank had swept aside the 13st champion, but thereafter Harrington has kept the younger man in his place. This time the pendulum swung the other way and Brocklebank won in straight falls with a late twist for the first and an inside-click and follow down for the second. The scene is set for more glorious action when John Harrington returns from holiday.

Results:

Cumberland Show

Under 12 Years 1, B Thompson; 2, W Atkinson; 3, T Piele.

Under 15 Years 1, A Hird; 2, S Brocklebank; 3, J Thompson.

Under 15 Years/7st 1, J Brown; 2, B Thompson; 3, T Piele.

Under 18 Years 1, J Oliver; 2, C Ridley; 3, A Hird.

12st 1, John Harrington; 2, J Thompson; 3, C Ridley.

14st 1, John Harrington; 2, R Fox; J Wilson.

All Weights 1, R Housby; 2, A Jones; 3, John Harrington.

Challenge Match: Joseph Robson beat Robert Leiper 5 falls to 4.

Guinness Trophy: John Harrington.

Coniston

Under 12 Years 1, B Thompson; 2, S Wilson; 3, J Woodhouse.

Under 15 Years 1, S Brocklebank; 2, J Thompson; 3, T Barnes.

Under 18 Years 1, G Brocklebank; 2, J Ewart; 3, S Wilkinson.

11½st 1, John Harrington; 2, T Barnes; 3, J Thompson.

13st 1, G Brocklebank; 2, John Harrington; 3, G Benson.

All Weights 1, S Fleming; 2, J Wilson; 3, T Brocklebank.

Dates:

July 27th (Fri) 2.30p Langholm Common Riding U16/11/13/AW

July 28th (Sat) Penrith Show Cancelled

July 29th (Sun) 12.30p Flookburgh U12/ U15/U18/11½/13/AW

Aug 4th (Sat) Beetham Sports

Cockermouth Show U12/ U15/U18/Ladies/11½/13/AW Ch'ship (£1000)

Powburn Show 10½st Ch'ship

Aug 5th (Sun) Lowther

December 21st 2007

FOR 200 YEARS CARLISLE HAS BEEN A MOTHER RING.....

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....for Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling. This year's Heavyweight Centenary Challenge was held in Rickerby Park. Before that Bitts Park and the Cumberland Show hosted major wrestling competitions. And earliest of all, the old racecourse at the Swifts was the major event of the wrestling year.

In 1809 wrestling, sponsored by the local aristocrats and gentry, was added to Carlisle Races programme to boost flagging attendances. In October 1811 on the first day of the races, 20 guineas were wrestled for on the Swifts in a roped ring, sixty yards in diameter the wrestling was most severely contested in the presence of 10,000 people, by some of the most sinewy and active youths we ever saw enter a ring. We observed among the spectators the Marquis of Queensberry, the Earl of Lonsdale, Lord Lowther etc.

The Carlisle wrestling was a major sporting event, and that is confirmed by a watercolour of two wrestlers painted in 1813. Two paunchy men stripped to their sark and britches grapple on what is clearly the Swifts, with the River Eden meandering behind them and a horse-race in action. To the left of the figures is the finishing post and flag; to the right in the background is Rickerby House, later to become Eden School.

The painting, however, is not recording a wrestling event, but is a political cartoon.

The painting was loaned to Tullie House as part of the Blood Sweat and Tears exhibition earlier in the year and Matthew Constantine, Keeper of Social History at the time, but now moved on to Bolton Museum, wrote a short paper about the cartoon's interpretation. The image is a fascinating piece of political commentary from a crucial period in the social history of Carlisle and Cumberland. Like many pieces of satire from the past, the exact contemporary meaning is now obscure, but some educated guesses can be made.

His educated guesses explore the political power struggle between the Tories and the Whigs, and a new factor, the wealthy middle classes who had lots of money but no vote in the old electoral system. After years of expensive and violent political rivalry between the Tories (the Lowther family) and the Whigs (the Howards of Corby Castle) a cosy arrangement was drawn up for them to share the two Carlisle seats between them. For the 1812 General Election the pact was shattered when a third candidate entered the scene, supported financially by the mill owners such as Dixon and Ferguson. The Whig candidate James Curwen had made himself politically unpopular over several years and he came to realise that he was going to lose, so he resigned leaving the independent, Sir Henry Fawcett to become an MP.

Under the wrestlers' bellies a three horse race is underway with the jockeys wearing silks of the appropriate political colours. Fawcett is in the lead, and Curwen is last. The two wrestlers who dominate the picture wear ribbons in their belts, blue for the Whigs and yellow for the Tories. Matthew Constantine suggests that the likeliest interpretation is that although an independent' MP had won the election race, in fact the age-old county power struggle between the yellows and the blues was continuing as it ever had.

The picture is unsigned, but from the style it may possibly be by William Brown, a local artist who painted other scenes loaded with local references.

Two international wrestling events are on offer to our wrestlers next year. We have been invited to send a team to the Breton Backhold Championships which take place on Saturday 24th of February in the town of Carhaix. The organisers are willing to subsidise transport if we take twelve male, six female wrestlers and two referees.

The European Senior Championships of the IFCW will be held in Leon, Northern Spain April 19th to 23rd

December 31st 2007

2006 - THE ONE HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY.....

(CLICK on thumbnail to see a larger picture - CLICK anywhere EXCEPT on the larger image to return to this page)

.....of the Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling Association, has been a wonderful year for wrestling..one of the best I can remember.

>A special year needs special events, and this year the Centenary Challenges, the European Espoirs Championships and the CWWA Centenary dinner were all huge successes.

Jimmy Pringle, the mainstay of wrestling in Northumberland, was the man who suggested the series of high prize-money events, which became known as Centenary Challenges. The idea was to allocate categories to the three main areas of wrestling, Northumberland, North Cumbria and the Borders, and South Cumbria and North Lancashire, and ask Governing Board members in those areas to provide extra sponsorship, venues and formats. The Cumbrian Centenary Challenges were attached to the county shows at Carlisle and Kendal with the Ladies Challenge going to Penrith Show. Each of these provided an extra buzz to existing events which lifted the entries, the expectations and the crowd.

Best of all was the Northumbrian response when a special evening in the old Rothbury Mart brought a full house to the tiered seating round the ring and all the best wrestlers in great fettle from Scotland, Brittany and all our home regions. Even the old lags who fondly remembered the intense action and support of the old Academy League, fifty years ago, reckoned that the Rothbury Centenary Challenge had surpassed it all.

There were times when the organisers of the European Espoirs Championships of the International Federation of Celtic Wrestling thought they had been mad to pick up the responsibility of organising the event at ultra short notice after the Dutch had to cancel. But in the end the region did us proud. We found a perfect venue at Lime House School with a modern Sports Hall, good accommodation and food. An Olympic Quality Freestyle wrestling mat was hired from the British Wrestling Association. The County Council, Neighbourhood Forums and healthy range of local businesses helped to cover the several thousand pounds needed to stage the Championships, which were acknowledged as a great success by our international partners.

The Championships coincided with the CWWA Centenary Dinner, so the international teams joined over two hundred wrestlers and friends for a lavish presentation night at the Shepherds Inn, Carlisle, when old photos and old memories were enthusiastically reviewed.

Successful special events are fine and good, but would be a hollow matter if the annual routine was below par. Of course, there were occasional events with poor entries and wrestling rings blasted with rain, but, in general, the whole season was a joy to follow. The surge of interest in wrestling amongst youngsters at the old academies of Carlisle, Kendal, Milnthorpe and Waberthwaite was enhanced by the influx of wrestlers from the newly reformed Rothbury Academy who travelled widely and wrestled well. A ten week course of wrestling at Grasmere School brought wrestling back to the Rush Bearing, and extra wrestlers in the Lakeland events. At the end of the year an upsurge of interest in wrestling at Wyndham School, Egremont, led to over fifty lads turning up to after-school sessions.

There is no shortage of venues for wrestling, with sixty events spread over the Northern Counties and the Borders of Scotland from April to very late and damp October. The standard of wrestling, and the attacking style in general use, kept big crowds enthralled for hours, and came to a climax round the Bank Holiday weekend when one of the best teams of Breton wrestlers to compete in our area lifted the wrestling to new levels of intensity and skill.

From the moment that wrestling season roared into action beside a massive static engine running at full decibels at Hethersgill Vintage Society Rally at Carlisle Airport, to the time when Emily and Jenny squelched around in their spotted wellies at Buttermere Show, I have enjoyed every minute of a vintage wrestling season. And I have watched thousands of others delighting in the entertainment and excitement of our ancient and wonderful sport.

