

The global ring? Boxing, mobility, and transnational networks in the anglophone world, 1890–1914

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Abstract

This article examines professional boxing as a compelling and dynamic example of globalization from below between 1890 and 1914. It explores the sport's fluctuating legal and organizational status and maps the movement of professional boxers – and the networks that facilitated this movement – across the anglophone world. Boxing was particularly suited to cross-national mobility because it developed alongside, and built upon, the global circuits of the late nineteenth-century entertainment industry. Yet the main sites of the anglophone boxing world were not connected in any structured or standardized fashion. Channels of communication and routes of traffic were continually shifting, with no one city, region or nation emerging as a consistent hub of activity. This article explores boxing's fluid, multiple and loosely structured 'networks', and shows how the sport remained largely resistant to international regulation and standardization in this period.

Keywords boxing, international regulation, mobility, networks, transnationalism

Reflecting upon the sporting events of the year, the Milwaukee journalist and boxing writer Tom Andrews suggested that 1914 had been, in spite of the beginning of the European war in August, a 'banner year' for boxing worldwide. He estimated that a total of 9,740 contests had taken place that year, with 4,800 of these in the United States, 1,040 in Australia, and 3,900 in England and France. The 132 bouts he selected as the most important of the year were mainly spread across the anglophone boxing world, ninety taking place in the USA, twenty-eight in Australia, ten in Britain, and one apiece in Canada and Ireland, with two in France.¹ Many of those involved were itinerant performers, sportsmen who criss-crossed continents and oceans as part of a worldwide boxing labour market. Connected through international circuits constructed and consolidated by managers and entertainment entrepreneurs, and via the circulation of numerous press reports and still and moving images, these men constituted a significant, but largely neglected, transnational popular cultural network during the so-called 'first wave' of modern globalization.²

1 *El Paso Herald*, 26–27 December 1914 (weekend edition).

2 Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and globalisation: networks of people, goods and capital in the British world, c.1850–1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 61.

This article uses boxing as a case study to map and explore the nature of the sporting networks that linked different parts of the anglophone world. Focusing on the mobility of people and information, and on organizational links, it seeks to examine the degree to which boxing in Australia, Britain, and the United States was interconnected and networked in this period. Moreover, it assesses how far the sport and its associated subculture were reflective of global identities and ways of thinking. In tackling these questions, this analysis speaks to a number of interrelated strands of recent scholarship on the ‘British world’ and the ‘Angloworld’, transnational labour history, and what might be termed the history of transnational lives.³ Common to all these approaches has been an interest in the plethora of networks that supposedly facilitated mobility and bound distant people and places tightly together.

Thinking in terms of ‘networks’ and ‘webs’ of connection has proved extremely fruitful for historians dealing with transnational or global themes and perspectives. Tony Ballantyne, for instance, has argued for empires to be understood as ‘assemblages of networks, complex threads of correspondence and exchange that linked distant components together and ensured a steady, but largely overlooked, cultural traffic’.⁴ Yet as Simon Potter has argued, the idea of networks as characterized by the proponents of these approaches in terms of loosely organized, informal, competing, and dynamic linkages does not necessarily equate to the nature of global connections as they developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In his own work on mass media, Potter has demonstrated the tendency for connections and lines of communication to become increasingly institutionalized and deep-rooted, limiting, in some respects, the more diverse earlier patterns of interconnection, and thus resembling what globalization theorists have labelled ‘systems’ rather than ‘networks’.⁵

For all the emphasis on networks as a type of ‘cultural glue’ binding peoples together, popular forms of culture have largely been marginalized in this literature.⁶ The movement and interconnections of academics, administrators, middle-class professionals, humanitarians, labour politicians, and suffragettes have been widely analysed.⁷ There have also been some interesting forays into theatrical circuits and the emergence of transnational networks of popular entertainment.⁸ Sport, however, seems to be something of a blind spot for

3 The literature in these areas is vast, but see Alan Lester, *Imperial networks: creating identities in nineteenth-century South Africa and Britain*, London: Routledge, 2001; Simon Potter, *News and the British world: the emergence of an imperial press system, 1876–1922*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; Jonathan Hyslop, ‘The imperial working class makes itself “white”: white labourism in Britain, Australia and South Africa before the First World War’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 12, 4, 1999, pp. 398–421; David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds., *Colonial lives across the British empire: imperial careering in the long nineteenth century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

4 Tony Ballantyne, ‘Empire, knowledge and culture: from proto-globalization to modern globalization’, in A. G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in world history*, London: Pimlico, 2002, p. 133.

5 Simon J. Potter, ‘Webs, networks and systems: globalization and the mass media in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century British empire’, *Journal of British Studies*, 46, 2007, pp. 621–46.

6 Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, ‘Mapping the British world’, in Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, eds., *The British world: diaspora, culture and identity*, London: Frank Cass, 2003, p. 6.

7 See, for example, Tamson Pietsch, ‘Wandering scholars? Academic mobility and the British world, 1850–1940’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 36, 2010, 377–87; Alan Lester, ‘British settler discourse and the circuits of empire’, *History Workshop Journal*, 54, 2002, pp. 25–48.

8 See Veronica Kelly, ‘A complementary economy? National markets and international product in early Australian theatre managements’, *National Theatre Quarterly*, 21, 1, 2005, pp. 77–95; James W. Cook, ‘The return of the culture industry’, in James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O’ Malley, eds.,

researchers working in the field of transnational and global history. There has been some valuable work on the movement and the shifting racial and gendered identities of individual athletes, such as the cricketer K. S. Ranjitsinhji and the boxer Jack Johnson, as well as on the significance of touring sports teams, particularly in imperial contexts.⁹ Yet, despite the fact that many sports were rooted in cultures of mobility, touring, and international exchange from the nineteenth century, there remains a reluctance to incorporate these into broader analyses of global history and to consider sport beyond the framework of national culture and identity.¹⁰ This is particularly evident in relation to the transatlantic world, where sport has tended to be regarded less as a channel for interaction and more as a site of cultural division between the United States and Europe.¹¹

As a popular activity on the boundary between sport and theatrical entertainment, boxing offers a unique insight into the nature and extent of the links between the popular cultural worlds of Australia, Britain, and the United States. Without doubt, boxing was closely associated with conceptions of place and identity. It was a sport which, in many respects, was bound up with particular localities and cities. Where a boxer was from mattered: it was included in bills and advertisements for fights and was thus a part of the performer's public identity. Yet focusing solely on local and national frameworks fails to capture adequately the complicated and shifting transnational circuits through which boxers and boxing capital pulsed. The main sites of the anglophone boxing world were connected throughout the period but not in any structured or standardized fashion. Boxing's legal status was rarely secure and its popularity waxed and waned within and between nation, colony, and state. No one nation or city remained the hub of the anglophone boxing world across this period. Channels of communication and routes of traffic were not constant but continually shifting. Boxing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was composed of a set of fluid, multiple, and loosely structured 'networks'. Despite some efforts to create international regulations and standards, it remained relatively chaotic and resistant to standardization. This meant that boxing networks, while far from truly global, were to some degree less restrictive and more open than the formalized international connections of other sports.

This article contributes new insights to our understanding of globalization and the rise of the commercial sports and entertainment industries. It identifies the movement of

The cultural turn in US history: past, present, and future, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008, pp. 291–317; Matthew W. Wittmann, 'Empire of culture: US entertainers and the making of the Pacific circuit, 1850–1890', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2010.

- 9 See Satadru Sen, *Migrant races: empire, identity and K. S. Ranjitsinhji*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004; Theresa Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, rebel sojourner: boxing in the shadow of the global color line*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012; Geoffrey Levett, 'Sport and the imperial city: colonial tours in Edwardian London', *London Journal*, 35, 1, 2010, pp. 39–57.
- 10 Exceptions include Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor, *Moving with the ball: the migration of professional footballers*, Oxford: Berg, 2001; Barbara Keys, *Globalizing sport: national rivalry and international community in the 1930s*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- 11 See Maarten van Bottenburg, 'Why are the European and American sports worlds so different? Path dependence in European and American sports history', in Alan Tomlinson, Christopher Young, and Richard Holts, eds., *Sport and the transformation of modern Europe: states, media, and markets, 1950–2010*, London: Routledge, 2011, pp. 205–25; Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: the Americanization of the world, 1869–1922*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005, pp. 168–9.

professional boxers – and the networks that bound boxing together – across the anglophone world as an integral part of the early globalization of popular culture. Boxing was particularly suited to cross-national mobility because it developed alongside, and built upon, the global circuits of the late nineteenth-century entertainment industry. Its popularity among the industrial proletariat in cities such as London, New York, San Francisco, and Sydney – and its central role in constructing notions of whiteness and masculinity across national borders¹² – was the source of both its global appeal and its insecure and shifting legal and organizational status. As such, it offers a compelling and dynamic example of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ‘globalization from below’.¹³

The boxing world, 1890–1914

The popularity and social significance of boxing fluctuated substantially in the period from 1890 to 1914. This ‘state of flux’ was the result of both changes in the form of the sport – the overlapping decline of bareknuckle prize-fighting and the emergence of gloved contests – and what some scholars have regarded as a shift from British to American pre-eminence in influence and control.¹⁴ A number of historians have identified the famous bout between John L. Sullivan and James J. Corbett in New Orleans in September 1892 as the symbolic ‘end of the bare-knuckle era’.¹⁵ It certainly crystallized a number of important changes in the character and organization of the sport. To begin with, it was the first heavyweight championship bout to be contested by gloves, and hence an important moment in the universal acceptance of the Marquess of Queensberry Rules. What is more, an athletic club – the New Orleans Olympic Club – organized the fight, indicating a shift from pugilism’s challenge system to a more bureaucratic system of match-making and promoting. Local politicians had recently legalized fights in the city under certain conditions and introduced standard weight categories, a limited number of rounds, and increased powers for referees.¹⁶ While Sullivan had fought clandestine bareknuckle fights ten years previously, he was now performing in front of an audience that included ‘middle-class businessmen and their wives’.¹⁷ A reformed version of boxing thus emerged in the 1890s, though any progression to a position of respectability was to be slow, partial, and uneven. In the United States, Britain, and Australia, the sport ‘continued to move in and out of legality’ over the next thirty years.¹⁸

12 See Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson*; Patrick F. McDevitt, *May the best man win: sport, masculinity, and nationalism in Great Britain and the empire, 1880–1935*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 58–80.

13 Bridge and Federowich, ‘Mapping’, p. 6.

14 Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: a cultural history*, London: Reaktion, 2008, p. 110.

15 For example, Elliott J. Gorn, *The manly art: bare-knuckle prize fighting in America*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986, ch. 7; Dennis Brailsford, *Bareknuckles: a social history of prize-fighting*, Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1988, p. 160.

16 Gorn, *Manly art*, pp. 239–42; Jeffrey T. Sammons, *Beyond the ring: the role of boxing in American society*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990, pp. 12–15; Jack Anderson, ‘A brief legal history of prize fighting in nineteenth century America’, *Sport in History*, 24, 1, 2004, pp. 55–7.

17 Kasia Boddy, ‘Peter Jackson and Jack Johnson visit Britain’, in Michael Berkowitz and Ruti Ungar, eds., *Fighting back? Jewish and black boxers in Britain*, London: University College London, 2007, p. 52.

18 Boddy, *Boxing*, p. 113.

Boxing's insecure legal status and the variable political and social reactions to it across the anglophone world have only been hinted at in the existing scholarship. Opposition to professional boxing was often underpinned by broader concerns over the uncivilized and immoral nature of the spectacle and the potentially damaging effects this could have on its largely working-class labour force and audience. In all three sites, the distinction between 'prize-fighting' and 'boxing' was the central issue with which lawyers, legislators, and police officials grappled. The 1878 *R v Orton* case in Britain had established that 'a mere exhibition of skill in sparring' was not illegal but that a display at which the parties 'intended to fight till one gave in from exhaustion or injuries received' was a prize fight and a breach of the law, whether gloves were used or not.¹⁹ However, the distinction was difficult to uphold in practice. A gloved contest at London's Pelican Club between the heavyweight champions of England and Australia in November 1889 was considered by the Attorney and Solicitor General to be 'of an illegal character' but an absence of corroborating police evidence led to the case being dropped.²⁰ A series of fatalities led to a number of high-profile inquests and court cases between 1898 and 1901.²¹ In each instance, the defendants were acquitted of manslaughter but boxing was not legalized; as one letter-writer to *The Times* noted, 'so long as the "knock-out" is tolerated every glove contest tumbles on the verge of legality'.²² Indeed in a high-profile case in September 1911, the Home Office intervened to prohibit a planned world heavyweight championship contest at Earl's Court between the black American Jack Johnson and Britain's 'Bombardier' Billy Wells. A few months later, the Chief Constable of Birmingham prevented a championship fight taking place in the city on the grounds that it was 'a prize fight, and therefore illegal, as overstepping the limits of a mere trial of skill'.²³

In Australia and the United States, boxing floated in a similarly murky space somewhere between legitimacy and prohibition. A patchwork of constantly shifting colonial, state, and city laws and jurisdictions complicated the picture further. The Sydney authorities banned boxing in the city following the deaths of two contestants in fights at the California Athletic Club in December 1892 and March 1893.²⁴ In Adelaide a municipal byelaw prohibited boxing exhibitions during the early 1890s, while in Perth pressure from religious groups to

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- 19 The National Archives, Public Record Office (henceforth TNA, PRO), HO 45/9709/A50982, Glove Contest at the Pelican Club, Minute, 14 November 1889. See also Jack Anderson, 'Pugilistic prosecutions: prize fighting and the courts in nineteenth century Britain', *Sports Historian*, 21, 2, 2001, pp. 47–51.
- 20 TNA, PRO, HO 45/9709/A50982, Glove Contest at the Pelican Club, Opinion and Advice of the Attorney and Solicitor General, 14 January 1890.
- 21 See TNA, PRO, HO 45/9709/A50982, Extracts from *Morning Advertiser*, 18 and 22 November 1898, 3 and 7 February 1900; *Police Chronicle and Guardian*, 3 February 1900; Guy Deghy, *Noble and manly: the history of the National Sporting Club*, London: Hutchinson, 1956, pp. 147–59.
- 22 *The Times*, 23 November 1898, letter from E. H. Pickersgill to the editor.
- 23 TNA, PRO, HO 45/10487/110912, World's Boxing Championship, note of an interview between Sir William P. Byrne, Mr E. R. H. Blackwell, Mr S. W. Harris and Mr James White, Mr W. Woodhouse and Mr W. Lints Smith, 25 September 1911; Charles Haughton Rafter, Chief Constable of Birmingham, to Under Secretary of State, Home Office, 14 October 1911. The racial implications of the proposed Johnson–Wells fight for Britain and her empire have tended to overshadow the interconnected legal and social concerns that it raised over the status of professional boxing as a legitimate spectator sport. See McDevitt, *May the best*, pp. 77–9.
- 24 *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 20 December 1892; *Brisbane Courier*, 21 December 1892; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6, 7, and 9, March and 5 April 1893, 15 July 1936; *Singleton Argus*, 8 March 1893; Peter Corris, *Lords of the ring: a history of prize-fighting in Australia*, Melbourne: Cassell, 1980, p. 50.

suppress contests that had a ‘demoralising effect’ on the young and encouraged ‘larrikinism in its worst form’ led to a similar measure in the mid 1890s.²⁵ As in Britain, the increased popularity and profile of the sport towards the end of the 1900s led to renewed pressure to curb its more commercial and supposedly ‘brutal’ excesses. Anti-boxing propaganda was fuelled by reactions to international events such as the aborted Johnson–Wells fight as well as by local developments such as the death of the young Melbourne boxer James Fogarty in November 1910.²⁶ The government introduced a raft of regulations – limiting the number of rounds, padding the rings, prohibiting the supposedly American innovation of in-fighting, and giving the police power to stop an unevenly matched contest – to ensure that ‘boxing contests were not allowed to develop into prizefights’.²⁷ Yet there was no serious consideration, as the prime minister, Andrew Fisher, stated in July 1910, of banning the sport outright.²⁸

The geography of the boxing world was constantly redefined by the sport’s shifting legal status. As the first two American cities to permit boxing under certain conditions, New Orleans and New York have been posited as the main centres of the reformed sport in the 1890s.²⁹ In New York, the Horton Act of 1896 allowed for sparring matches to be organized in the premises of private athletics clubs. It was repealed in 1900 by a coalition of Republicans led by Assemblyman Lewis, who objected to the iniquitous and brutalizing tendencies of ‘professional prizefighting’, as well as to its alleged links to gambling and criminality.³⁰ Even under the Lewis law, however, boxing maintained a subterranean existence in saloon bars, back rooms, and private ‘membership’ clubs. According to a New York *Evening World* article in December 1903, ‘private’ fights were ‘becoming as regular as theatre matinees’. Five years later there were at least twenty boxing clubs in the city operating covertly but apparently with official approval.³¹ Even under these conditions, as shown in Figure 1, New York accounted for by far the largest concentration of boxing contests in any city in the world.

In 1911, local Democratic politicians pushed through the Frawley Act, which established a three-man athletic commission to regulate boxing in New York state. Bouts were limited to ten rounds, clubs and referees had to be licensed, and medical arrangements became standardized. The return of legalized boxing convinced some commentators in New York that the city was likely to become ‘the centre of the boxing world’ once again, and indeed by November 1912 there were forty-nine licensed clubs operating in the city, with nearly US\$1 million paid in gate receipts over the previous year across New York state.³²

25 *Barrier Miner* (Charters Towers, Queensland), 7 May 1891; *West Australian* (Perth), 7 February 1894.

26 *The Argus* (Melbourne), 16, 21, and 23 November 1910; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 December 1911, letter from F. B. Boyce to the editor; Wray Vamplew, ‘Boxing’, in Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart, eds., *Sport in Australia: a social history*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 53.

27 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 (quotation) and 8 December 1911.

28 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 July 1910.

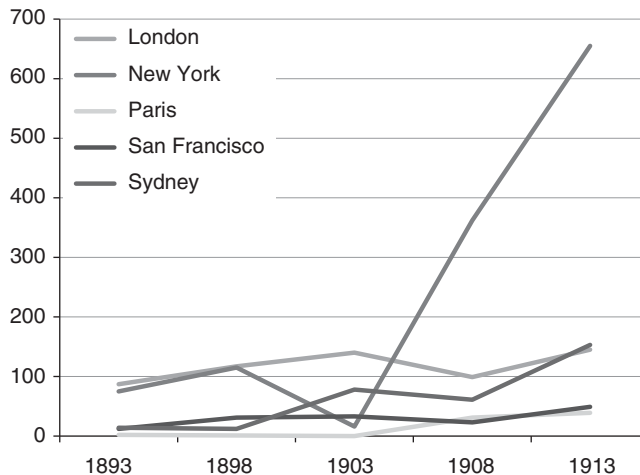
29 Steven A. Riess, *City games: the evolution of American urban society and the rise of sports*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991, pp. 173–4.

30 *Los Angeles Herald*, 16 March 1896; *Washington Evening Times*, 28 April 1896; *Evening World* (New York), 9 February and 2 August 1900; *New York Daily Tribune*, 8 February and 2 March 1900.

31 *Evening World*, 28 December 1903; *Mirror of Life and Sport* (London), 22 August 1908.

32 *Sun* (New York), 13 April, 30 May, and 1 September 1911; *Evening World*, 8 (quotation) and 21 June 1911; *San Francisco Call*, 27 April 1913.

Figure 1. Number of promotions staged in the world's main boxing centres, 1893–1913. Source: annual figures established with data from BoxRec website, <http://boxrec.com/> (consulted between June and September 2012), using searches by 'location' and 'year'.



Mainstream boxing histories have normally seen the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a period of rising American pre-eminence and control in the professional sport. Yet the reality was far more complicated than this suggests. There was no fulcrum around which the boxing world rotated. It is more accurate to think of a constant shifting of the balance of influence and power, as well as in the paths of movement and communication, between key connected points on the boxing map. With boxing in New York restricted under the Lewis law, San Francisco especially, and to a lesser extent, Los Angeles and the smaller towns of Daly City, Colma, and Vernon, began to stage an increasing number of championship fights in the early years of the twentieth century. In other US cities where the sport had formerly been popular, such as Chicago and Philadelphia, boxing was either banned outright or severely restricted.³³

As the decade wore on, significant international challengers to the supremacy of American cities in championship promotion began to emerge. The staging of a series of world heavyweight title fights by Hugh McIntosh in Sydney in 1908 was a significant turning point. Thereafter, a cluster of prominent international promoters fought separately and in combination to stage the main world titles. In late 1909, it was mainly Californian and Australian entrepreneurs who placed purse bids for the Jack Johnson–John Jeffries world heavyweight title bout to be staged the following summer.³⁴ A Nevada businessman, Tex Rickard, and the San Francisco promoter Jack Gleason bid the most, and eventually put the fight on in Reno, Nevada. Yet it was McIntosh's failed bid, which included proposals for the bout to take place in London, Paris, or Sydney, that signalled a shift in major titles bouts

33 Riess, *City games*, p. 175; Steven A. Riess, 'Closing down the open city: the demise of boxing and horseracing in Chicago', in Elliott J. Gorn, ed., *Sports in Chicago*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008, pp. 43–61; *Sporting Life* (Philadelphia), 23 February 1895.

34 *Sporting Life* (London), 4 December 1909.

Table 1. Locations of world championship title fights, 1890–1914

By city	No. of fights	By country	No. of fights
London	21	United States	64
New York	14	United Kingdom	24
San Francisco	14	France	10
Paris	9	Australia	7
Los Angeles	6	Canada	3
New Orleans	4	Cuba	1
Sydney	4		
Melbourne	3		
Other	34		

Source: *Boxing news annual and record book*, 1972, London: City Magazines, 1972.

going to Europe and Australia rather than the USA over the next four years.³⁵ Table 1 indicates that, across the divisions, London was actually the most popular location for world championship fights, with San Francisco, New York, and Paris some way behind, although many of London's contests were in the less prestigious, lighter weight categories.

Below the high-profile championship bouts, informal local, national, and transnational boxing circuits based on small clubs, halls, theatres, and other venues grew along particular lines but were frequently reshaped and redirected. Though far from static and entrenched, London's boxing infrastructure was probably the most stable across the period. There were at least fourteen venues used annually for boxing contests in London in selected years between 1893 and 1913.³⁶ Some, such as the National Sporting Club (NSC) and Wonderland on Whitechapel Road, staged regular contests over much of the period. The number of shows staged at London's venues was high, at 87 in 1893, and staying above this figure in each year, reaching a peak of 145 during the sport's worldwide boom in 1913. In New York, the number of events was affected by the wider regulation, with an annual figure of 115 in 1898 dropping to just 16 in 1903 and then leaping to 655 by 1913. The post-1910 boom was significant, though not as dramatic, in Sydney, where 61 shows were staged in 1908 and 153 by 1913 (see Figure 1).

At a time when national and international governing bodies were being established in a range of sports, the regulation of boxing was limited. In Britain, the creation of the NSC in 1891 had seemed to lay the basis for a new era of legitimate and respectable professional boxing.³⁷ A private club based in Covent Garden with an exclusively middle-class clientele, the NSC set itself up as the 'Home of Boxing', 'an institution that set standards, defined and refined codes'.³⁸ It soon established itself as Britain's foremost boxing venue and its effective

35 W. W. Naughton, *Heavy-weight champions*, San Francisco, CA: John Kitchen, 1910, p. 190; Anon., *The life and battles of Jack Johnson*, New York: Richard K. Fox, 1912, pp. 61–2.

36 TNA, PRO, MEPO 2/555, List of halls used for boxing competitions in London, 23 February 1904; Stan Shipley, 'Tom Causer of Bermondsey: a boxer hero of the 1890s', *History Workshop Journal*, 15, 1983, pp. 45–6.

37 Anderson, 'Pugilistic prosecutions', p. 47. On the National Sporting Club more generally, see Deghy, *Noble and manly*.

38 John Harding, *Lonsdale's belt: the story of boxing's greatest prize*, London: Robson, 1994, p. 3.

headquarters, a situation that was reinforced by the inauguration of the system of Lonsdale Belts for its designated champions in 1909 and its monopoly over Britain's major championship fights. The predominance of the NSC underscored London's pre-eminent status as the main, but by no means the only, locus of British boxing and a vital point of connection – through its clubs, promoters, and press – with overseas boxing cultures. Yet there were few comparable regulatory institutions outside Britain, at least until the foundation of the New York State Athletic Commission (NYSAC). What is more, national and local differences in the rules of the sport, the weight divisions of boxers, and the allocation of championships ensured that international cooperation and regulation were to be problematic.

Boxers on the move

Boxing was a sport and a profession built on traditions of geographical mobility. From the regency period, prize-fighting, though centred on London, had drawn in competitors from a host of provincial circuits. British pugilists had travelled across the Atlantic in significant numbers since the 1830s, while the flow of migrants increased markedly in the wake of the widely publicized transatlantic contest between Tom Sayers of Britain and John Heenan of the USA in 1860. By this time, Australia too had become absorbed into an early international network of pugilistic exchange.³⁹ Prize-fighting's culture of mobility was further enhanced during the 1880s when American managers such as Billy Madden, Al Smith, and Pat Sheedy organized a series of large exhibition tours involving troupes of fighters. Inspired by the promotional techniques of vaudeville and the circus, and utilizing the structure of existing theatre circuits, some of these, such as John L. Sullivan's tour of England in 1887–88, were major transnational ventures.⁴⁰

We know that geographical mobility was an increasing feature of gloved boxing as it developed during the 1890s. But the degree and scope of this mobility has never been calculated. This section aims to provide new and robust data on the scale of mobility, and the routes of travel, among boxers across the main sites of the boxing world. Tracing the movement of boxers across and between continents is a tricky task. The general absence of established national and international governing bodies and the chaotic nature of the granting of titles, and challenges and defences, means that it is impossible to be precise about individual boxing records and championship histories. Nonetheless, the BoxRec website, hosted and updated by boxing historians throughout the world is a crucial and reliable source of data. In particular, I have used data from Barry Hugman's *History of world championship boxing* – in conjunction with other published records authored by Hugman and others – to trace the competitive record of 301 of the most prominent professional boxers who fought in Australia, Britain, and the United States in the period from 1890 to 1914.⁴¹ I have included the records of all boxers who have been recorded as having fought for British and Australian titles (the latter up to 1909), as well as for the most widely recognized version of World titles (dominated for most of the

39 Brailsford, *Bareknuckles*, pp. 139–50.

40 Gorn, *Manly art*, pp. 219–22; Gerben Bakker, *Entertainment industrialised: the emergence of the international film industry, 1890–1940*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 27–9, 35–6; *York Herald*, 24 October 1887; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 13 November 1887.

41 *Barry Hugman's history of world championship boxing*, available at http://boxrec.com/hugman/index.php/Barry_Hugman%27s_History_of_World_Championship_Boxing (consulted between May and June 2012).

period by American boxers) in the six established weight classes in the pre-1914 period: bantamweight, featherweight, lightweight, welterweight, middleweight, and heavyweight.

Using these criteria, the boxing careers of 97 British-based, 68 US-based, and 136 Australian-based boxers have been identified. The careers tracked span a slightly wider chronological range than the parameters of this article, with one or two beginning in the prize-fighting era of the late 1870s and 1880s and some continuing into the First World War and the early to mid 1920s, but it was felt important to include boxing lives in their totality and most are, in any case, firmly based in the two and a half decades before 1914. Such an approach also necessarily focuses on the elite of the boxing profession and hence those most likely to be mobile and to cross national and oceanic boundaries in search of championship bouts, larger purses, and pugilistic experience. This is borne out by the data, which show that a large proportion of the boxers from all three centres travelled internationally at least once during their careers. Interestingly, among the US-based boxers – admittedly a smaller and perhaps more select group than the other two – 82.3% had travelled beyond the United States to fight. The proportion was slightly smaller among the British-based boxers (at 74.2%) and was lower still for the Australian-based fighters (at 47.1%). The precise destinations of these journeys, however, and the more detailed trajectories of the fighters' careers, provide us with plenty of evidence about patterns of sporting mobility across the period.

The US boxers tended to travel to two main destinations: Britain and Canada (see Table 2). Close proximity to northern US towns and cities – and a connection with the boxing cultures of these places – made Canada the most common cross-border destination (48.5%). In fact, a number of Canadian cities and venues – such as Toronto and Fort Erie – were enmeshed in wider North American boxing circuits. Boxing experience in Britain – or more particularly London – was favoured by 45.6% of the US boxers across the period. This often extended no further than a specific journey for a one-off bout; indeed, for much of the period ambitious US boxers tended to travel almost exclusively to the NSC. Boxing's fluctuating legal status in New York and elsewhere was a crucial determinant of the outflow of talent. In 1897, London's *Illustrated Police News* had reported on a sizeable contingent of American boxers located in training camps in Hertfordshire and the West Midlands.⁴² By 1900, the introduction of the Lewis law led American observers, such as the manager William Brady, to predict an exodus of boxers from the east coast of the United States to England, and the British press noted periodic 'invasions' of American competitors in its boxing halls.⁴³ Multiple fights or larger British or European tours were more common towards the end of the 1900s, particularly as Paris promoters started to compete seriously with their British and American counterparts. A smaller proportion of US fighters – just 19.1% – travelled to Australia; as in the case of France, this happened mainly in the years immediately before the war, largely as a result of the endeavours of a coterie of prominent Australian sports entrepreneurs including McIntosh, Reginald 'Snowy' Baker, and John Wren.⁴⁴

A significant proportion of the boxers who travelled outside the United States were African Americans. Men such as Frank Craig and Bob Scanlon, and later the so-called

42 *Illustrated Police News* (London), 20 November 1897.

43 *Evening World*, 2 August 1900; *Boxing* (London), 12 February 1910.

44 Richard Cashman, *Paradise of sport: the rise of organised sport in Australia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 192–3.

Table 2. Main foreign fight destinations of a sample of US-based boxers, c.1890–1914

Destination	No. of boxers	As a % of all boxers	As % of all boxers who fought outside US
Canada	33	48.5	58.9
United Kingdom	31	45.6	55.4
France	15	22.1	26.8
Australia	13	19.1	23.2

Source: created using data from the BoxRec website.

heavyweight ‘Coloured Quartette’ – Joe Jeannette, Jack Johnson, Sam Langford, and Sam McVea – were part of a larger diaspora of black boxers and performers who spent much of their professional careers overseas. In many respects, the foreign mobility of black Americans was a reaction to their ‘disenfranchised status politically, economically, and socially within the United States’. Theresa Runstedtler has argued that the departure of numerous black boxers from the United States could be seen as ‘a clear rejection of white American racism’, with Europe and Australia offering the potential of greater earnings, freedom, and professional recognition.⁴⁵ As with black jazz musicians, such overseas journeys could be productive of experiences of cosmopolitanism and fellowship, although ultimately a variety of restrictions based on colour and race shaped their opportunities throughout the anglophone world.⁴⁶

Overseas travel for British boxers generally meant either visits of varying duration to the United States or shorter trips to France (see Table 3). Over 40% of the top British boxers fought in the US at some stage in their careers and 33% boxed in French rings. Of the seventy-two who competed abroad, only six (8.3%) had no experience in either France or the United States. Integration into imperial boxing circuits in the southern hemisphere was less marked. Only 16.5% fought in Australia, a smaller percentage than among their American compatriots, and only 6.2% went to South Africa. Distance of travel and the more limited opportunities to fight probably ensured that aspiring British boxers tended to choose to gain experience, money, and prestige by touring the United States or, towards the end of the period, closer to home in continental Europe.

Between 1890 and 1909, 136 Australian-based boxers fought for either Australian national or world titles. Sixty-four of these (47.1%, as we have seen) fought outside Australia. Just over 62% of these itinerant boxers sailed to the United States. Britain was the second most popular destination, at 42.2%, with South Africa next at just over one-third and New Zealand at 32.8% (see Table 4). As these figures indicate, most of those who travelled did so more than once in their careers, regularly circulating around a number of chosen destinations or moving between key boxing centres in the anglophone world. The first half of the 1890s, in particular, witnessed a period of extraordinary mobility of Australian boxers to the United States. Of the leading boxers considered in this data,

45 Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson*, pp. 133, 136. See also *Mirror of Life and Sport*, 1 August 1908.

46 Rachel Gillett, ‘Jazz and the evolution of black American cosmopolitanism in interwar Paris’, *Journal of World History*, 21, 3, 2010, pp. 471–95; Tyler Stovall, *Paris noir: African Americans in the city of light*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1996, pp. 67–8; Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson*.

Table 3. Main foreign fight destinations of a sample of UK-based boxers, c.1890–1914

Destination	No. of boxers	As % of all boxers	As % of all boxers who fought outside UK
United States	39	40.2	54.2
France	32	33.0	44.4
Australia	16	16.5	22.2
South Africa	6	6.2	8.3

Source: created using data from the BoxRec website.

Table 4. Main foreign fight destinations of a sample of Australian-based boxers, c.1890–1914

Destination	No. of boxers	As % of all boxers	As % of all boxers who fought outside Australia
United States	40	29.4	62.5
United Kingdom	27	19.8	42.2
South Africa	22	16.1	34.4
New Zealand	21	15.4	32.8

Source: created using data from the BoxRec website.

twenty – many of whom were former or future national champions – could be found competing in American rings at some point between 1890 and 1895. In an interview in the *Los Angeles Herald* in 1892 concerning Australian fighters ‘who are coming here’, the Australian journalist A. G. Hales mentioned Tom Williams, Joe Goddard, Sandy Ross, Sid Barnes, Bill Jennings, Chiddy Ryan, Dummy Mace, Jim Burge, George McKenzie, Charley Dunn, Billy Murphy, Abe Willis, ‘and lots more’. ‘The big purses offered here’, Hales said, ‘is [*sic*] the reason why our men want to come.’⁴⁷ As has been noted, various state restrictions on public boxing limited opportunities over the next decade or so but a contract to fight in the United States remained a central aspiration for those plying their trade in the boxing halls of Sydney and Melbourne. Trips to Britain tended to follow on from American experience: relatively few Australian boxers travelled directly to Britain but a significant number stopped off as part of an extended global trip eastwards.

The changing geopolitics of the Angloworld help to explain why some of boxing’s most dynamic transnational connections were centred on the Pacific rather than the Atlantic. The extension of American strategic interests into the Pacific from the mid 1870s onwards coincided with a period of interaction and intellectual exchange between Australian and American politicians. The friendship between the two countries was ‘symbolically consolidated’ when the US fleet visited Australia in 1908 as part of an extended tour of the Pacific, an event around which McIntosh arranged the nation’s first major world championship contest.⁴⁸

47 *Los Angeles Herald*, 23 January 1892. See also Corris, *Lords of the ring*, pp. 49, 53.

48 Desley Deacon, ‘Location! Location! Location! Mind maps and theatrical circuits in Australian transnational history: Presidential Address, July 2008’, *History Australia*, 5, 3, 2008, pp. 81.5–81.6 (quotation p. 81.5); Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the global colour line: white men’s countries and the international challenge of racial equality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 190–208; *Melbourne Argus*, 28 May and 25 August 1908.

Considerable population interchange and effective communication links ensured that people in California and Australia both knew a great deal about, and were interested in, one another, reinforcing 'a sense' among citizens of San Francisco, Sydney, and Melbourne 'that their places had much in common'. The existence of a perceived 'anglophone Pacific world' encompassing boxing alongside other areas of trade and culture was demonstrated by the role of the steamships themselves in facilitating Californian–Australasian connections.⁴⁹ John D. Spreckels, for example, owner of the Oceanic (Steamship Navigation) Company, was also a prominent member of the California Athletic Club in San Francisco; and both the captain and the purser of the RMS *Alameda* acted as agents and intermediaries between boxers, promoters, and club officials in Sydney and San Francisco during the 1890s.⁵⁰

The trips and journeys outlined here could be conceptualized in a number of ways. In most, though not all cases, they were a form of short-term labour migration that stopped short of permanent relocation. The majority of boxers returned 'home' at some stage but there is a difference between the occasional return trip and a more circulatory pattern of mobility involving regular touring and a peripatetic lifestyle. The data suggest that the wandering boxer was in a minority but that this minority was fairly sizeable, particularly at either end of the period. Numerous illustrative examples could be flagged up, such as the Poplar bantamweight Jack Ladbury, who travelled between the United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, the United States, and New Zealand on nine occasions between 1901 and 1915, or New York's middleweight Willie Lewis, who moved twenty-four times along a transatlantic axis linking the US, Canada, and Cuba to the UK, France, and Belgium over the same period.⁵¹ In total, the 301 boxers moved across national borders an average of 3.5 times over their careers. The British and the US-based were more mobile, with an average of around 4.7 moves, while the Australian boxers moved just twice on average. Among those who did venture across national borders, the figures were an average of 6.4 moves for the British, 5.7 moves for the Americans and, 4.3 moves for the Australians (see Table 5). At the very least, these statistics suggest that mobility across the anglophone boxing world was a recognized feature of the professional lives of a significant number of American, Australian, and British fighters in this period. One could go further and suggest that boxing was emerging as an industry that, like the circus and popular theatre, was not only characterized by, but sustained itself on, the transnational circulation of its labour force.⁵²

A slightly different picture emerges, however, if we shift our focus from the movement of individual boxers to the sites of boxing performance. Further data have been collected on the nationality of boxers appearing at venues in three of the main centres of the boxing world – London, New York, and Sydney – in selected months at five-yearly intervals starting in 1893

49 Katrina Gulliver, 'Finding the Pacific world', *Journal of World History*, 22, 1, 2011, p. 93.

50 'The Australian ring', *NZ Truth*, 15 November 1913, 3 January and 21 March 1914; Gilbert Odd, *The fighting blacksmith: a biography of Bob Fitzsimmons*, London: Pelham, 1976, pp. 45, 49–50; Bob Peterson, *Peter Jackson: a biography of the Australian heavyweight champion, 1860–1901*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011, pp. 53–5.

51 On Ladbury, see *Northern Miner* (Queensland), 21 November 1905; *New York Tribune*, 24 April and 18 December 1910; on Lewis, see *Boxing*, 6 May 1911; *Evening World*, 22 January 1906, 29 November 1911.

52 For comparisons, see Wittmann, 'Empire of culture', pp. 191–230.

Table 5. Cross-national career mobility of selected US, UK, and Australian boxers, c.1890–1914

	Total no. of moves	Average no. of moves of all boxers	Average no. of moves of itinerant boxers only
US-based	321	4.7	5.7
UK-based	462	4.8	6.4
Australian-based	274	2.0	4.3
All boxers	1,057	3.5	5.5

Source: created using data from the BoxRec website.

and finishing in 1913.⁵³ These show plainly that the overwhelming majority of boxers who competed in events in these cities had not crossed national borders to do so. In London, the percentage of foreign boxers ranged from 2.2% in 1893 to 13.7% in 1913; the figures for New York were similarly low, at 11.3% in 1893 and less than 8% in both 1898 and 1908. The Sydney figures were slightly higher, particularly at the end of the period, with overseas boxers accounting for 25% by 1913. But even here, the average percentage across the whole period was much lower. In fact, this evidence indicates that most boxers lived in the city in which they fought. A fair proportion seem to have been casual fighters, boxing only when they required the money to do so. Those who fought more regularly tended to be connected to specific venues or else to have moved within smaller, localized circuits that could function independently, but which often, and increasingly, intersected with larger national and international circuits. These data caution us against overemphasizing the mobility of the boxing profession as a whole, indicating the existence of a large subsidiary tier of boxers performing in mainly local and national circuits alongside, yet interconnected with, the peripatetic elite.

Transnational networks and boxing lives

The mobility of boxers between and across different parts of the anglophone world was dependent on the existence of a variety of supporting networks. Some historians have been fairly casual in their application of the term ‘network’, utilizing it as a general metaphor and often failing to differentiate between different types, or characteristics, of networks.⁵⁴ At its most general, as a set of links between people and places, the concept has limited explanatory value. Yet recent studies have insisted upon much more detailed analyses of not just how networks developed and were sustained but also, crucially, how they actually functioned. For Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, whose work focuses on the British world, networks represented the informal ‘software of empire’ that ‘connected private, unofficial and provincial interests in Britain with their overseas contacts and communities’.

53 The months chosen were March and November. This data is also drawn from searches in BoxRec, <http://boxrec.com/location.php> (consulted May and June 2012).

54 See Magee and Thompson, *Empire and globalisation*, p. 45; John F. Wilson and Andrew Popp, ‘Districts, networks and clusters in England: an introduction’, in John F. Wilson and Andrew Popp, eds., *Industrial clusters and regional business networks in England, 1750–1970*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003, pp. 8–11.

Through networks, they have argued, ‘ideas and information were exchanged, trust was negotiated, goods were traded and people travelled’.⁵⁵ Personal connections between individuals and groups – which may or may not have been bolstered by institutional linkages – were fundamental to this conception of ‘networks’. In a similar vein, Enda Delaney and Donald MacRaild have observed that the preference for a ‘network’ approach to migration history has accompanied a shift away from structures and institutional forces towards more personal narratives of the migrants themselves.⁵⁶ In this view, informal, family, and community ties contributed to a multiplicity of social networks that provided reliable information connecting people across borders and sustaining migration flows. The boxing networks that developed in the 1890s and beyond were, as will be argued below, characterized more by personal relationships and partnerships, and loosely structured flows of information, than by formalized institutional links.

Information about boxing was carried across the anglophone world via a range of communication networks. Technological developments were, of course, vital to this. An Atlantic telegraph route in 1866 was followed by the connection of Australia and Britain in 1872 and an ‘all-red’ empire cable route linking Australia and New Zealand to North America from 1902. Improvements in shipping greatly facilitated networks, with more regular and reliable ship-mail and passenger services both between Britain and Australasia and across the Pacific.⁵⁷ The press was the main vehicle for the circulation of news and information on all aspects of boxing. Historians of the transatlantic press have recognized that sports coverage was central to the emergence of the ‘New Journalism’ of the late nineteenth century, centred on more personal, sensational reporting, marketing gimmicks, and a lightening of tone. Joel H. Wiener placed sport together with crime and gossip as part of a ‘trinity of interests that attracted large numbers of readers’.⁵⁸ In the United States, newspapers such as Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World* and the *Chicago Tribune* began to construct sports departments and employ ‘sporting editors’ during the 1880s. In Britain, evening sports editions of local newspapers became common in the 1880s and specialist sporting newspapers such as the *Sporting Life* and *The Sportsman* flourished, the latter becoming the world’s first sporting daily in 1876.⁵⁹

Matt McIntire has argued that it was baseball and cricket that best exemplified how sporting news was ‘embraced’ on either side of the Atlantic in the era of New Journalism.⁶⁰ Yet boxing arguably played an equally significant role and, moreover, demonstrated most

55 Magee and Thompson, *Empire and globalisation*, p. 16.

56 Enda Delaney and Donald M. MacRaild, ‘Irish migration, networks and ethnic identities since 1750: an introduction’, *Immigrants & Minorities*, 23, 2–3, 2005, p. 30.

57 Joel H. Wiener, *The Americanization of the British press, 1830s–1914: speed in the age of transatlantic journalism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 66; Potter, *News*, pp. 30, 62; John Griffiths, ‘Were there municipal networks in the British world c. 1890–1939?’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37, 4, 2009, p. 576.

58 Wiener, *Americanization*, p. 136.

59 Matt McIntire, ‘Embracing sporting news in England and America: nineteenth-century cricket and baseball news’, in Joel H. Wiener and Mark Hampton, eds., *Anglo-American media interactions, 1850–2000*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 36–8; Alan J. Lee, *The origins of the popular press, 1855–1914*, London: Croom Helm, 1976, p. 127.

60 McIntire, ‘Embracing sporting news’.

clearly the interactions that existed between the American, British, and Australian sporting press and their employees. The popular daily press was not always the most important element of this. A small number of specialist sporting and boxing publications functioned as both promoters and commentators on the sport through the 1890s and 1900s. Richard Kyle Fox's *National Police Gazette* had long played a key role in organizing contests, backing contestants, and stimulating interest in prize-fighting in the United States.⁶¹ London's *Sporting Life* and *The Sportsman* both featured boxing prominently and regularly included news and reports of bouts from across the Atlantic. So did the *Mirror of Life*, founded in 1894, whose owners created a cheaper, boxing-based publication in 1909, *Boxing World and Athletic Chronicle*. Another London-based weekly, *Boxing*, had been established earlier in 1909, marketing itself as 'the only paper in the world solely devoted to boxing'.⁶² In Australia, boxing was covered heavily by the Sydney-based *Referee*, launched in 1886 as a weekly competitor to the Melbourne *Sportsman*, and in other sporting weeklies such as *The Arrow* (founded in 1896) and the *Sydney Sportsman* (1900).⁶³

Potter has suggested that telegraph technology, and the subsequent influence of news agencies and newspaper cartels, actually had the effect of restricting and homogenizing the flow of news around the British empire: the 'structure of connections between press enterprises' in the early twentieth century equated to an 'imperial press system' rather than a network.⁶⁴ News was often filtered through London, and painted with a British gloss, with the result that the coverage in Australia and New Zealand of major events such as the South African War of 1899 to 1902 tended to be increasingly uniform.⁶⁵

As a popular form of entertainment, boxing, with its continual stream of incident built around the movement of boxers, contract negotiations, and fight previews as well as results and reports, was a small but regular element of the 'cable news' of British, American, and Australian newspapers. Yet it also offers an example of the continuation of loosely defined press networks operating at the margins of these more systematic connections. This is especially true of the specialist sporting publications, which generally preferred to base their international boxing news on the reports of overseas correspondents, their own travelling journalists, or personal letters written to the paper. The Sydney *Referee*, for example, had sent its boxing correspondent, A. G. Hales, to the fight between Australians Peter Jackson and Frank 'Paddy' Slavin in London in 1892.⁶⁶ It also employed W. W. Naughton, a New Zealander and a leading boxing writer for the *San Francisco Examiner*, for many years as its American correspondent.⁶⁷ For the John Jeffries–Jack Johnson heavyweight

61 Gorn, *Manly art*, p. 181.

62 See, for example, *Boxing*, 5 February 1911.

63 R. B. Walker, *The newspaper press in New South Wales, 1803–1920*, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976, pp. 230, 233; Gerald Crawford, 'Referee (1886–1939)', in Wray Vamplew, Katherine Moore, John O'Hara, Richard Cashman, and Ian F. Jobling, eds., *The Oxford companion to Australian sport*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 287.

64 Potter, 'Webs', p. 635.

65 Potter, *News*, pp. 45–53.

66 Deghy, *Noble and manly*, p. 104. *The Sportsman* reported on 31 May 1892 that 'Colonial and American journalists were much in evidence and the demand for Press tickets was unusually great'.

67 *Evening Post* (Wellington), 11 April 1911; *Barrier Miner*, 24 March 1914.

championship bout in Reno in July 1910, it published 'two special and independent accounts', one cabled by Naughton and the other by its chief boxing writer, W. F. Corbett, who had travelled to the event from Sydney.⁶⁸ British newspapers similarly made regular use of overseas contributors. The *Mirror of Life and Sport* included a double-page column on 'American boxing gossip', which became *Boxing World's* 'Our American letter', penned by George O. Almy.⁶⁹ When the two were amalgamated as the *Mirror of Sport and Boxing World* in 1912, its 'continental', 'colonial', and American correspondents were retained alongside its London staff.⁷⁰ *Boxing* was devoting at least two pages to its 'American news and notes' by 1910 and also had whole-page or half-page columns for its 'special' Paris and Australian correspondents.⁷¹ As in other sectors of the entertainment industry, the boxing trade press was itself 'instrumental in building the very networks of commerce and discourse' through which performers became conspicuous in different parts of the world.⁷²

The world heavyweight championship bout in 1897 between James J. Corbett and Bob Fitzsimmons in Carson City, Nevada, offers an interesting case study of the way in which boxing news was carried across the anglophone world. British and Australian newspapers followed the convoluted negotiations for the contest and, when a contract was finally made, previewed the fight itself and the excitement it was generating in the United States. The English boxing referee Eugene Corri recalled in his 1927 memoir that popular enthusiasm spread across the Atlantic: 'Evening papers sold in Fleet Street as when great victories were announced during the war'.⁷³ Interest reached far beyond London and the pages of the major sporting publications and national dailies: newspapers across Britain drew on fairly standard cabled information but often offered a localized commentary that constituted rather more than a 'cosmetic' editing procedure. The *Dundee Courier and Argus* acknowledged that its 'sporting readers' were awaiting the result 'with great enthusiasm' and printed an account written by Sam C. Austin, the sporting editor of the *Police Gazette*, on the day after the fight.⁷⁴ The *Western Mail* also covered the event extensively. It published Austin's cablegram, along with biographical sketches of the combatants, accounts of their training preparations, and reports of the public reaction across America. It came out firmly for the new champion, noting that it would be 'a popular victory in Cardiff and South Wales, where Fitzsimmons made many friends when he visited Cardiff' while giving boxing exhibitions in the UK; Corbett, by contrast, was considered 'a braggart of pronounced type'.⁷⁵ A West Country newspaper reminded its readers that Fitzsimmons was 'a Cornishman' as well as a 'naturalized American'.⁷⁶ Coverage of the fight was similarly widespread in Australian

68 Reported in the *Daily Press* (Perth), 15 July 1910.

69 See *Mirror of Life and Sport*, 1 August 1908, 27 November 1909; *Boxing World and Athletic Chronicle*, 2 December 1909.

70 *Mirror of Life and Boxing World*, 16 March 1912.

71 See *Boxing*, 1 January and 28 May 1910.

72 Cook, 'Return', p. 301.

73 Eugene Corri, *Gloves and the man: the romance of the ring*, London: Hutchinson, 1927, p. 53.

74 *Dundee Courier and Argus*, 16 and 18 March 1897.

75 *Western Mail* (Cardiff), 18 March 1897.

76 *Trewhman's Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornwall Advertiser*, 18 March 1897.

newspapers, but decidedly more uniform, drawing for the most part on identical information cabled directly from London.⁷⁷

The Corbett–Fitzsimmons bout also enjoyed a significant afterlife through the Veriscope film of the fight, which was exhibited internationally. Dan Streible has demonstrated the significance of the Veriscope tours, where the *Corbett–Fitzsimmons fight* drew large crowds eager to witness a novel ‘representation’ of the famous sportsmen in action. Both Dan Stuart, the Dallas entrepreneur and promoter of the original fight, and Corbett’s manager, William Brady, went to considerable lengths to publicize the film as both a money-making venture in its own right and an advertisement for a potential re-match.⁷⁸ Stuart offered possible descriptions of both the exhibition and the fight itself that newspapers could use, even providing written copy for journalists. In the United States, the film reached ‘a wide and diverse audience’, being exhibited in music academies, opera houses, theatres, and fairgrounds, with over two hundreds showings in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston.⁷⁹ The film was also sent around the world, with one machine exhibiting in Australia, China, Japan, India, South Africa, and Egypt.⁸⁰ It reached Australia in September 1897, where it played to ‘crowded houses’ in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, and Perth. As in the US, the film was also taken to smaller towns: in Western Australia it went to Kalgoorlie, Coolgardie, Southern Cross, Northam, and Kanowna, as well as a longer run at the Theatre Royal in Perth.⁸¹ The cinematic representation of the Corbett–Fitzsimmons fight brought boxing to a larger, more socially diverse, and more global audience than ever before. It encouraged spectators to connect with the participants and the spectacle: in Melbourne the boxers were ‘called to or encouraged with as much earnestness as if they were in the arena in Carson City’.⁸² The fight had ‘secured perpetuation, so to speak’, the *Edinburgh Evening News* noted, ‘not by the pen only but by the instrumentality of the veriscope’.⁸³ It also helped keep the exploits of American-based boxers in the public eye in Australia and Britain for months and even years.

Alongside journalists and boxing writers, promoters, managers, and agents played an important role in linking local sites and buttressing the networks of the boxing world. Hugh McIntosh’s career as a sporting and theatrical entrepreneur offers an excellent example of the way in which connections could be established that ‘criss-crossed the internal boundaries’ of the empire and the wider Angloworld. Born in Sydney in 1876 as the son of Scottish and Irish immigrant parents, McIntosh was one of those ‘restless entrepreneurs’ of the Victorian

77 See *Daily News* (Perth), 18 March 1897; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 March 1897; *South Australian Register*, 19 March 1897; *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 19 March 1897; *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 20 March 1897.

78 Dan Streible, *Fight pictures: a history of boxing and early cinema*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008, ch. 2.

79 Streible, *Fight pictures*, p. 77; William A. Brady, *The fighting man*, Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1916, p. 147; advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 September 1897.

80 Brady, *Fighting man*, p. 147.

81 *West Australian* (Perth), 2 December 1897.

82 *The Argus* (Melbourne), 4 October 1897. See also comments in the *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 5 May 1898.

83 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 22 February 1898.

and Edwardian age who ‘moved about in search of commercial advantage’.⁸⁴ In 1899 he took ownership of a north Sydney catering company selling pies at racetracks and prize fights, before investing in hotels and moving into sports promotion, initially in the world of professional cycling and then boxing. In 1908 he contracted the Canadian world heavyweight champion Tommy Burns for three fights in newly constructed stadiums in Sydney and Melbourne. The last of these saw Burns lose his title to the black American Jack Johnson in front of 20,000 spectators. For the next few years, McIntosh travelled between Australia, Europe, and North America, initially promoting the film of the Burns–Johnson fight, then putting on his own shows in London and scouting international talent for his Sydney Stadium enterprise. In August 1912 he purchased Harry Rickard’s Australia-wide Tivoli theatrical circuit and sold his interest in the Sydney Stadium. Yet he remained involved in the interlocking worlds of boxing promotion, theatrical production, and newspaper ownership, continuing to travel regularly between, and at times to live in both, Britain and Australia.⁸⁵

Between 1908 and 1914, in particular, McIntosh travelled extensively around the anglophone world, building a network of personal and business contacts. In September 1910 it was claimed that he had travelled 180,000 miles (equivalent to eight times round the world) over the previous eighteen months. After securing the Burns–Johnson bout in 1908 he made ‘hurried trips between Australia and England and again between England and the United States and again between Australia and the States’. He then travelled to Reno for the Johnson–Jeffries contest, after which he journeyed ‘to New York, back to Chicago, back to New York, over to England and back and then from New York to Vancouver’.⁸⁶ By this time, McIntosh had extended his boxing interests to Britain and France as well as Australia, leading the *New York Times* to describe him as ‘the London–Paris–Australia fight promoter’.⁸⁷ He was apparently planning to “corner” all the stars and arrange title fights for England and Australia’, as well as to acquire large venues in London and Birmingham to add to his three Australian stadiums.⁸⁸ While these ambitions were not fully realized, he put on a series of fights at Olympia and other London venues, centred around the ‘search for a white champion’ to match against Jack Johnson.⁸⁹ McIntosh had already demonstrated the potential of boxing’s global reach in 1909 when his world tour of the Burns–Johnson fight film took in Australia, the US, Britain, and France, but also Fiji and Ceylon en route; his Australian heavyweight Bill Lang similarly stopped off for exhibition bouts in Hawaii and Fiji during

84 Simon J. Potter, ‘Empires, cultures and identities in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain’, *History Compass*, 5, 1, 2007, pp. 58, 56.

85 Richard Broome, ‘The Australian reaction to Jack Johnson, black pugilist, 1907–09’, in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan, eds., *Sport in history: the making of modern sporting history*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979, p. 345; Chris Cunneen, ‘McIntosh, Hugh Donald (1876–1942)’, in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mcintosh-hugh-donald-7373/text12811> (consulted 26 June 2012).

86 *El Paso Herald*, 3 September 1910.

87 *New York Times*, 7 May 1911.

88 *Boxing World and Athletic Chronicle*, 11 August 1910; *El Paso Herald*, 27 August 1910.

89 *Boxing*, 25 February 1911; *New York Times*, 4 February 1911; *El Paso Herald*, 10 September 1910; *Washington Times*, 30 May 1911; Eugene Corri, *Refereeing 1,000 fights*, London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1919, pp. 56–7; Stan Shipley, ‘Boxing’, in Tony Mason, ed., *Sport in Britain: a social history*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 94–6; Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson*, pp. 114–15.

a 'world tour' in 1910.⁹⁰ In 1911, McIntosh tried to contract Johnson to fight a series of opponents in Australia and then conduct an exhibition tour through India, China, Japan, the Straits Settlements, and Fiji.⁹¹ He even considered staging a bout between Johnson and the contender Sam Langford on a luxury ocean liner off the coast of Australia.⁹²

While McIntosh contributed to the linking of different sites in the boxing world through his own personal contacts, he also made extensive use of new communication technologies and the press. He regularly sent personal letters and telegrams to journalistic contacts in all three countries and made sure that the details of personal communications to boxers and/or their representatives concerning purse offers and contract negotiations were widely publicized.⁹³ A network of transnational representatives and contacts aided his international influence. Frank Morley and the American boxer Jimmy Britt looked after his interests in London.⁹⁴ W. C. J. Kelly, an Australian business associate in the sports goods industry, acted for a time as his American representative, while Duke Mallins scouted talent in the United States and trained many of the contracted boxers in Australia.⁹⁵ The influential Milwaukee journalist, boxing promoter, and booking agent, Tom Andrews, also became a close associate, after McIntosh paid him \$10,000 to organize and chaperone a troupe of American boxers, including Billy Papke and Jimmy Clabby, on an Australian tour in November 1910. Andrews was also involved in attempting to negotiate terms with Jack Johnson for a return visit to Australia in 1912.⁹⁶ Other journalists such as W. W. Naughton, New York's Bat Masterson, London's William Will, and W. F. Corbett of the Sydney *Referee*, were also connected to McIntosh in what became a transnational web of partners and acquaintances.⁹⁷ *Boxing* reported in 1912 that McIntosh's letter headings 'show that he has established agencies and banking connections in every town of importance in the world, with the exception of Hong Kong and Yokohama'.⁹⁸

Relationships of this type were often fostered in specific contact zones, such as at major international contests like the Johnson–Jeffries encounter in 1910 (where McIntosh first met Andrews), and even on board steamships themselves, where business partnerships could be

90 Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson*, pp. 68–9; *Evening Bulletin* (Honolulu), 22 June 1910; Bill Lang, 'How I became a white hope', *Townsville Daily Bulletin* (Queensland), 30 March 1936.

91 *Queenslander* (Brisbane), 24 June 1911; *Clarence and Richmond Examiner* (Grafton, New South Wales), 2 September 1911; *Northern Miner* (Charters Towers, Queensland), 5 September 1911; Geoffrey C. Ward, *Unforgivable blackness: the rise and fall of Jack Johnson*, London: Pimlico, 2006, p. 263; Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson*, pp. 116–17.

92 *New York Times*, 15 June 1913; Hugh D. McIntosh, 'Phantom fortunes: I call Jimmie White's bluff', *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 1 December 1936.

93 See, for example, *Daily News*, 4 November 1909; *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* (Hobart), 3 March 1911; *Daily Arizona Silver Belt*, 8 April 1909; *Honolulu Evening Bulletin*, 14 June 1910; *Hawaiian Star*, 26 July 1910; *Daily Capital Journal* (Salem, OR), 22 September 1910; *Medford Mail* (Oregon), 15 January 1911.

94 *Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* (London), 1 May 1909; *New York Times*, 4 February 1911.

95 *New York Times*, 9 October 1912; *El Paso Herald*, 15 and 16 October 1912; *Daily News*, 28 November 1910.

96 *Milwaukee Journal*, 1 December 1941; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 March 1947; *Washington Herald*, 30 December 1911; *Tacoma Times*, 18 January 1912.

97 *Hawaiian Star*, 13 October 1908; Greg Growden, *The Snowy Baker story*, Sydney, Random House, 2003, p. 240; *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 7 June 1910; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 January 1910; *El Paso Herald*, 3 September 1910.

98 *Boxing*, 20 January 1912.

forged, friendships could be strengthened, and ideas about global space (and one's place within it) could be developed and reworked in the process of travel.⁹⁹ Sociability and camaraderie oiled the wheels of these transnational networks. McIntosh's party of the former world champions Tommy Burns and Bob Fitzsimmons were entertained at special functions on their arrival in Melbourne and Sydney in December 1909.¹⁰⁰ Naughton was similarly wined and dined by various sporting bodies during his trip to Australia and New Zealand in 1911, while his own California Press Club was 'renowned for its lavish entertainment of visitors'.¹⁰¹ Boxers, too, could develop close relationships as they travelled together for long periods and regularly crossed paths in the world's main boxing cities.¹⁰²

Fluid networks and the 'limits' of international regulation

Networks such as those that developed around McIntosh and his associates were always contingent and subject to reconfiguration. When McIntosh officially 'retired' from boxing promotion to concentrate on his theatrical initiatives, his position as Australia's leading promoter was soon assumed by the former Olympic boxer, referee, and journalist 'Snowy' Baker. Yet, while Baker was able to retain some of his predecessor's business links, he also spent considerable time cultivating new connections and diversifying his sources for acquiring boxing labour. He continued McIntosh's policy of importing the best overseas talent – with eighteen foreign boxers contracted by August 1913 – but felt it necessary to enhance his personal reputation in the United States and Europe through a lengthy recruiting and networking tour during the first half of 1914.¹⁰³ Like McIntosh, Baker was able to establish a complex set of international contacts and informal partnerships that resembled Veronica Kelly's notion of a 'mobile freemasonry' in the theatrical world, in which 'commercial competition and professional camaraderie were held in a mainly productive balance' and through which a worldwide labour market could be accessed.¹⁰⁴

Attempts to standardize these networks through international regulation met with little success, however. In late 1909, London's *Sporting Life* began a campaign for the formation of an international boxing board of control that would frame universal rules for the conduct of world championships, decide who the champions were, and standardize the weights at which such fights were to be contested.¹⁰⁵ At the crux of the problem, the paper argued, was

99 *Milwaukee Journal*, 1 December 1941; Potter, 'Empire', p. 56; Tamson Pietsch, 'A British sea: making sense of global space in the late nineteenth century', *Journal of Global History*, 5, 3, 2010, pp. 423–46.

100 *Sporting Life* (London), 21 December 1909.

101 *West Australian*, 26 March 1914.

102 See Bill Lang's serialized 'memories' in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, especially 10 February and 9 and 16 March 1936.

103 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 December 1912; *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 23 August 1913; *Singleton Argus*, 10 February 1914; *The Argus* (Melbourne), 12 June 1914; *Day Book* (Chicago), 10 February 1914; Growden, *Snowy Baker story*, pp. 173–9.

104 Kelly, 'Complementary economy', p. 78.

105 The board was to be chaired by Lord Lonsdale of Britain and to consist of two representatives each from Britain and the US, and one from both Australia and France.

the contrasting weight scales for boxers in different countries, meaning that ‘all titles with the exception of the heavy-weight must remain more or less in dispute’.¹⁰⁶ Other anomalies, such as in the number of rounds, refereeing methods, and the timing of the weigh-in, could also, it was felt, be ironed out through the creation of an international regulatory body.¹⁰⁷ Reactions to the proposals highlighted the significance of local autonomy and diversity within the networked world of international boxing. Objections were raised for nationalistic reasons. Few were as forthright as Charles J. Meegan of the New York *Morning Telegraph*, who wondered why the British should consider themselves worthy of equal representation with the United States on the proposed board: ‘We have the universally recognized pugilistic champions of the world here, and why should we be willing to accept the minority position on a board to “control” them ... it is the land of champions where these rules should be formulated’.¹⁰⁸ The *Washington Herald* was also sceptical, acknowledging that, while the idea was good, Britain’s claim ‘to be the grandparents, father, mother, and a few other things of the game’ meant that it would ‘certainly give no other country a say in making rules’.¹⁰⁹

While most commentators applauded the principle of universal standards, a number considered an international body unworkable. *Boxing World* backed the proposal but felt that the United States would be ‘the weakest link in the chain of the co-operative scheme ... every promoter is a law unto himself, and about as independent as a Seminole Indian wandering through the Everglades of Florida’.¹¹⁰ Other British observers feared that the jealousies between promoters and the power of the champion boxers themselves meant that an international board would have limited authority in America.¹¹¹ In a wide-ranging critique of the scheme, the *Sydney Morning Herald* proclaimed an international control board ‘theoretically admirable but practicably impossible’. The different regulations within the United States – where, for example, the number of rounds ranged from six to forty-five, and some states prohibited referees or judges from deciding who had won the bout – represented the first stumbling block. But more problematic for the *Herald* was the limited power a body of this type could hope to wield. Because boxing championships could ‘only be obtained from the ring, and not from the official declaration of any board’, boxers invariably had a monopoly over their titles and were thus ‘virtually independent’ of any wider authority. In a sport that was still largely based on pre-modern pugilistic traditions of challenge and response and where contests ‘depend[ed] upon local laws and mutual agreement between contestants’, it was small wonder that moves to standardize were likely to be treated with disdain.¹¹² The sporting editor of the *Daily Phoenix* wondered how an international board could possibly carry the authority ‘to curb the chase of promoters,

106 *Sporting Life* (London), 30 November and 1 December (quotation) 1909. See also Deghy, *Noble and manly*, pp. 177–83.

107 *Sporting Life* (London), 8, 14, and 15 December 1909.

108 Quoted in *Sporting Life* (London), 22 December 1909; *Boxing World*, 30 December 1909.

109 *Washington Herald*, 4 January 1910.

110 *Boxing World and Athletic Chronicle*, 9 December 1909.

111 Mr E. Zerega, timekeeper of the NSC, quoted in *Sporting Life*, 8 December 1909; *Boxing*, 12 February 1910.

112 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 January 1910.

managers and fighters for the golden flow of dollars which follows vaudeville engagements and boxing bouts, staged not with a view to universal rules, but to the box office and moving picture rights'.¹¹³

The original proposal ran out of steam during the summer of 1910 when the NSC refused to back it and when its English promoters, led by the *Sporting Life* editor, William Will, failed to attend a planned meeting prior to the Johnson–Jeffries fight in Reno. The NSC's decision was prompted by its concern that no established national representative bodies existed overseas with which it could negotiate.¹¹⁴ Two years later, when the NYSAC resurrected the idea of international cooperation after the Illinois middleweight Billy Papke had broken a contract by leaving New York to fight in Paris, similar objections were raised. Californian commentators, in particular, were critical of what they saw as the New York body's attempts to engage in international negotiations as a national representative. W. W. Naughton claimed that it was 'folly to talk of universal control in boxing' until common rules and regulations had been established in the United States. The suggested 'American–French–Australian alliance' was, in his view, simply 'an understanding among certain cities in these countries' and hence limited in its wider application.¹¹⁵ An International Boxing Union was formed in Paris in 1911, with representatives from the French, Belgian, and later Swiss boxing federations, and became aligned for a short period with the NYSAC, but the NSC refused to become involved and its authority was limited. In practice, informal understandings and alliances – such as those between the NYSAC and the Société de la Propagation de la Boxe Anglaise, or London's NSC and the Sydney-based Stadiums Ltd – often emerged in the absence of worldwide regulation.¹¹⁶ Free from bureaucratic structures and universal regulations, international boxing may have been considered chaotic and uncontrollable by its critics but the very fluidity and complexity of its networks marked it out as a more genuinely transnational sport than most of its competitors.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the boxing cultures of Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom – and of important cities within these nations – were closely connected for much of the period from 1890 to 1914. These connections were most evident during the 1890s, when the partial reformation of boxing from its bareknuckle prize-fighting days led to a boom in popularity in all three territories, and then again from the late 1900s, when the burgeoning of big promotions led to what was defined as a 'worldwide ... interest in glove contests'.¹¹⁷

A significant proportion of leading US, UK, and Australian-based boxers (63.8% of those sampled) travelled across national boundaries to fight. Some of these moved irregularly and

113 *Daily Phoenix*, 22 December 1909.

114 *Los Angeles Herald*, 26 August 1910; *New York Times*, 11 February 1912; Deghy, *Noble and manly*, pp. 180–2.

115 *El Paso Herald*, 19 October 1912. See also Charles Harvey's comments in *Troy Northern Budget*, 8 February 1914.

116 *Boxing*, 25 February 1911; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 May 1913; *The Day* (Connecticut), 23 October 1912; *New York Times*, 3 October 1912 and 1 August 1915; *The Times*, 6 April 1914.

117 *El Paso Herald*, 11 April 1911.

over short distances but many others traversed the English-speaking world (and sometimes continental Europe) as labourers in a flourishing and fluctuating transnational and interconnected entertainment circuit. The rank and file of the profession was less nomadic, working in narrower local and national circuits. But even then, the presence of visiting boxers, the overseas experiences of compatriots, and press gossip about decisions and knockouts in far-flung rings, ensured that the ‘mind maps’ of boxers, promoters, and followers of the sport extended beyond the nation.¹¹⁸ News and information flowed through personal communications and the interlocking imperial and transatlantic press systems, allowing the boxing world to be narrated, debated, and imagined by those who stayed at home. Such developments were not always seen in positive terms. In Dundee, the Reverend David Macrae complained in 1897 that

but for the newspapers that [Corbett–Fitzsimmons] prize fight would never have been heard of ... At the cost of thousands upon thousands of pounds the account of how these two men battered one another had to be cabled and telegraphed hither and thither to all quarters of the globe, that people might have all the disgusting details in their hands within a few hours after the fight.¹¹⁹

Boxing’s circuits and interconnections prior to 1914 suggest a cultural field that was bound not by a global bureaucratic system but a series of provisional and constantly shifting transnational networks. Despite a number of attempts, especially from 1909, to bring the boxing world together, no effective international governing authority was established in this period. With little of the institutional anchoring that other major professional sports were beginning to establish, the linkages between individuals and groups were often loose and easy to uncouple. Partnerships across national boundaries flourished, and some promoters were able to wield considerable power and influence, as the case of Hugh McIntosh demonstrates, but such arrangements were invariably provisional and short-lived. Barbara J. Keys has argued that, by establishing monopolistic or near-monopolistic control over their spheres of influence, international sports organizations were able to ‘constrict the parameters of sporting life’ and provide ‘a major forum for the expression of nationalism on a global stage’.¹²⁰ Boxing’s lack of regulation meant that it was not only more open than other sports to foreign influences and interests but also offered greater opportunities for alliances and allegiances that were cross-national in origin and sentiment.

Historians interested in the nature and scope of global interconnections would do well to pay more attention to entertainment, sport, and other realms of popular culture. This article has shown that professional boxing’s geography was not simply reflective of wider geopolitical or imperial patterns. Its trajectories were multiple, complex, and constantly changing. As in the theatre, New York, London, and Paris were important boxing centres but none became a global hub. With no institutional headquarters, boxing hotspots could emerge and disappear quickly as entrepreneurs moved capital across the globe or invested in other sectors. In the early 1890s and from 1908 onwards, the Pacific connections between

118 On the notion of ‘mind maps’ in relation to theatrical circuits, see Deacon, ‘Location’.

119 *Dundee Courier and Argus*, 22 March 1897.

120 Keys, *Globalizing sport*, p. 43.

the west coast of America and Australia were particularly pronounced; boxing's Atlantic links were more established but subject to similar fluctuation. Boxers travelled along different routes and in a variety of directions. Some paths were certainly better trodden than others but none were sufficiently entrenched to limit opportunities when good money and the right offer presented itself. All this suggests that, while boxing between 1890 and 1914 was some way short of being a genuinely global sport, its fluid networks and interconnections ensured that relationships that crossed nations were often as important as those within and between them.

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