

SHEPPARD, ARNOLD ALONZO ('KID') (1908 - 1979), boxer

Name: Arnold Alonzo Sheppard
Date of birth: 1908
Date of death: 1979
Spouse: Margaret Sheppard (née Taylor)
Spouse: Elizabeth Christina Sheppard (née Allison)
Child: Virginia Sheppard
Parent: Alonzo Sheppard
Parent: Beatrice Louisa Sheppard (née Eley)
Gender: Male
Occupation: boxer
Area of activity: Sports and Leisure Pursuits

Arnold Sheppard was born on 14 May 1908 at 35 Sophia St, Butetown, Cardiff (the area known as Tiger Bay), the third child of Alonzo Sheppard (b. 1885), a merchant seaman from Barbados, and his wife Beatrice Louisa (née Eley, 1887-1948) of St. Fagans, Cardiff. Arnold's siblings were: Beatrice Eley (b. 1906, uncertain father), William Charles Sheppard (1907-1978), Lucy Sheppard (died shortly after birth in 1909), Joseph Sheppard (b. 1911). The house at 35 Sophia St (now demolished) housed four families in seven rooms.

In his early teens Sheppard went to work as a miner in the Ferndale and Maerdy area of the Rhondda Valleys, and became one of the rare group of Black miners, men who were almost written out of the history of the Welsh coalfields.

When Sheppard first took up boxing is not clear, but on 4 April 1925, at the age of 17, he had his first professional contest against Ivor Williams of Wattstown, at the Wattstown Athletic club, winning by a first round knockout. He stood at five feet six and three quarter inches and fought at lightweight. He also fought at bantamweight, featherweight and welterweight during his career. Even though a native of Cardiff, he was often billed in his fights as 'Arnold Sheppard of Ferndale'. He adopted the ring nickname 'Kid' because of his boyish looks.

From 1925 to 1926 Sheppard fought 29 times, mostly in south Wales. From 1927 on he began to travel the UK widely, fighting in the east end of London, the Midlands and other areas. His final fight was at the Mile End Arena, London in 1939. Between 1925 and 1939 his statistics highlight, in graphic detail, a punishing and brutal career. With a total of 338 official contests, he is one of two or three men that are thought to have the greatest number of official bouts ever. Over the whole of his career, this works out at approximately 24 fights a year or 2 a month. News reports speak of him fighting with injuries still bandaged up from a previous bout. He won 110 fights, lost 181 and drew 47. Sadly, he is also credited with being the man to have lost the greatest number of fights in history, often being ridiculed for this. To put the statistics into perspective, however, he actually won more fights than Mike Tyson and Joe Frazier put together.

A major issue for Black boxers in the UK at the time Sheppard was active in the ring was the notorious 'colour bar' which was in force between 1911 and 1948. This basically meant that any boxer who did not have two white parents could not fight for titles. This must have been particularly frustrating for Sheppard as on 8 October 1926 in Port Talbot he beat [Bill Beynon](#), previously the British bantamweight champion. Sheppard also beat Pat Butler of Leicester, the British welterweight champion in the mid-1930s, and fought a draw with his great friend Billy Wood who had been featherweight champion of Scotland. Sadly, boxers such as Sheppard were ultimately denied the chance to represent their home town or their nation at national or international level. The racism faced by Black boxers at this time was not confined to the rule makers of the British Boxing Board of Control. It is sickening to read reports in national and local newspapers, as well as boxing publication articles, in which Sheppard is referred to in all manner of derogatory racial terms, even though these same reports also praise his courage, strength and endurance.

Sheppard also held merchant seaman cards, and during the 1920s and 30s had at least three periods at sea, working as a trimmer. This was used as recovery time and a way to maintain fitness, shovelling coal below deck.

Sheppard married Margaret Taylor of Peel Street, Cardiff in 1932. In 1939 he married Elizabeth Christina Allison (1919-1982) of Stepney, London, and they had one daughter, Virginia Sheppard (1940-2021).

Sheppard retired from boxing in June 1939 at the age of 31, but he was already showing the effects of his gruelling ring career. His eyesight was diminishing and he suffered mood swings. However, in 1940, instead of retiring and recuperating, he once again entered the merchant navy, running the gauntlet of German U-boats. During the course of the war he served on several ships, such as the '*Jamaica Producer*' and the '*Sambre*', and all were damaged or sunk at some time during the conflict.

At the end of the war Sheppard's boxing injuries began to take an enormous toll and he became unable to work. At this time, his wife made the decision to move to Canada with a Canadian soldier, abandoning Sheppard to the medical authorities and Virginia to the care system. For the next three or four years he was in the notorious St. Matthews Hospital on Shepherdess Rd, London, which was described in 1952 as a 'dump for the chronically sick'. From there, he was moved to the Claybury Asylum in Woodford Bridge, Essex, by now suffering almost total blindness and the physical and mental disabilities resulting from the brain trauma caused during his boxing career. He had very few visitors during his time at Claybury, and even placed an advertisement in the *Ring Magazine* to let his old boxing friends know where he was if they wanted to visit him.

A nurse who worked at Claybury commented that 'during 1969-70 Arnold was on ward R1 and though blind he had a quick left hook for anyone who upset him, or he would instinctively hit out if he felt threatened. Generally, he maintained a good rapport with the nursing staff but he did not respond well to strangers.'

Arnold Sheppard died on 5 February 1979 at Claybury. He was cremated on 8 February and his ashes were scattered at the nearby East London Cemetery. He was survived by his daughter and two grandsons.

Author

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Sources

Personal correspondence with members of Arnold Sheppard's family and friends

Miles Templeton and Richard Ireland of www.boxinghistory.org.uk

[General Register Office](#)

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