

Ogden's Tabs Boxing Cards (Ca. 1901 – 1903) Documenting a Lost Era

By David Luftig

Introduction

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the British tobacco company, Ogden's was producing many different cards as part of their *Tabs* series. Some of those cards featured an assortment of international boxers.

There's a lot to like about those old Ogden's boxing cards. For example, the cards have great images, feature a great selection of fighters, and are still available and affordable.

As an added bonus, these cards document an era in the sport when no other cards were being produced.

The Basics

Sometime around 1901, Ogden's began producing their multi-subject *Tabs* series. The *Tabs* series were different than Ogdens' previous *Guinea Gold* series as the *Tabs* were slightly larger and did not have blank backs. The *Guinea Gold* series was produced circa 1900-1901.

The first *Tabs* cards to include boxers were the *Heroes of the Ring* and *Series A* sets. Ogden's did include a boxer or two in their previous *Guinea Gold* series but those cards are rare and quite valuable. Additionally, there was also an Australian *Tabs* series which included some boxers but again, those cards are quite rare and valuable. I have never seen a thorough Australian *Tabs* boxing checklist.

Although there were many Ogden's series produced in the UK during this time, only five of them included boxers: The *Heroes of the Ring*, *A Series*, *B Series*, *F Series*, and *General Interest*.

In all, there are sixty-nine different variations of boxing cards in these sets with considerable overlap in the fighters' images (PSA says there are seventy variations. More on that shortly).



Ogden's *Tabs* boxers. From left to right: *Heroes of the Ring*, *A Series*, *B Series*, *F Series*, *General Interest*.

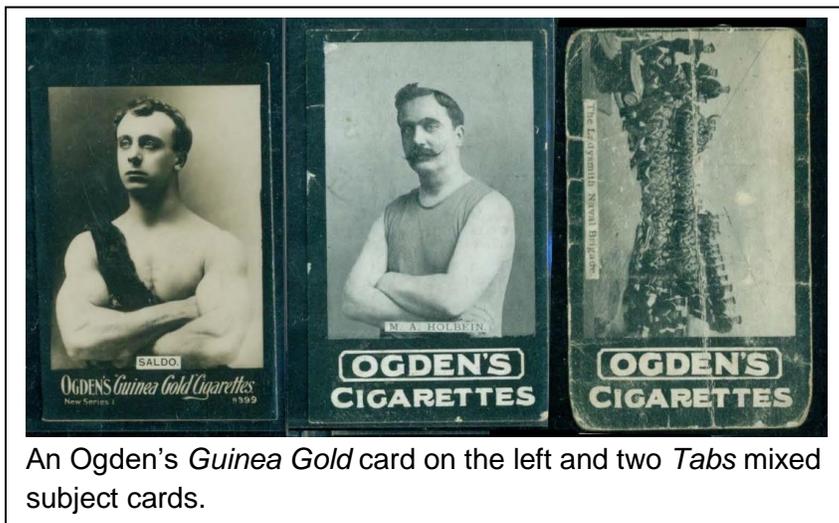
The fighters' bios on the backs of the cards occasionally changes with the series, but not always.

The *Tabs* have dark black borders that often show their wear. The cardstock of the *Heroes of the Ring* is slightly thicker than the rest of the *Tabs* series. Most of the *Tabs* series are printed on thin card stock, similar to that of a *T202* baseball card.

Tabs measure about 1.5" x 2.4" although there is a good amount of variation in size.

The Ogden's *Tabs* were created using a halftone printing process.

Many of the cards feature the same images as originally seen in the *N310 Mayo Cut* boxing set. Although smaller in size, the Ogden's *Tabs* have significantly better image quality than their *N310* counterparts.



An Ogdens' *Guinea Gold* card on the left and two *Tabs* mixed subject cards.

Because of the similarities among these *Tabs* series, it can be difficult to tell them apart at first glance. Although there are some subtle changes in the nomenclature on the fronts among series, the easiest way to tell them apart is by looking at the back of the cards.

On the back of the cards, the series name will either be at the very top of the card or right above the bio box. Each series also includes a description regarding the number of subjects included in the set. For example. The *A Series* contains "100 photographs." The *B Series* contains "200 photographs." The *F Series* has "420 different subjects" and the *General Interest* series contains "120 different subjects."

The *General Interest* and *F Series* also have numbers printed on the front of the card next to the fighter's name.

On the back of the *Heroes of the Ring* series, there is text stating that the cards were "British Made by British Labour," which is an interesting testament to the British Labor Movement at the turn of the century.

Who's in the set?

There is some general confusion regarding what cards are even in these Ogden's series. Part of this confusion stems from PSA, which has provided incorrect information about these sets for years (via their price guide).

At the time of this writing, PSA states that the *A Series* card #77 is of Jem Smith. I believe that this is incorrect and that there is no *A Series* Jem Smith. I believe that PSA is confusing the *B Series* Jem Smith for the *A Series* Jem Smith, which is also #77.

I spent several years looking for an *A Series* Jem Smith and researching that card. One day I ran across an *A Series* card #77 which was neither Jem Smith nor a boxer (I took a picture of that card but I regretfully cannot find it).

Additionally, in the PSA *Tab*s population report, the *A Series* card #77 is skipped (this didn't use to be the case as it used to be listed as Smith).

For what I believe is a correct checklist, see below.

Now let's explore each different series.

Heroes of the Ring (Ca. 1901)

The *Heroes of the Ring* series was the first boxing set of the 20th Century. It is the only *Tab*s set to be a self-contained boxing set.

There are twenty-five unnumbered cards in the set with a mix of contemporary and older fighters. For example, John L. Sullivan and Jem Mace each have a card even though they had both retired from competitive boxing. The set also includes many "rookie" cards including that of James Jefferies (an undefeated champion who would come out of retirement to be thoroughly beaten by Jack Johnson), Frank Craig (AKA the "*Coffee Cooler*"), and Kid McCoy (arguably the source for term "the real McCoy").

From my own observations, the *Heroes of the Ring* is the most sought after *Tab*s series. Cards can be had from this set in the \$10 - \$20 range with the John Sullivan card being the most desirable card of the set and costing considerably more.

The *Heroes of the Ring* cards are relatively rare but findable with a bit of patience.

A Series & B Series (Ca. 1901 – 1902)

Around the same time as the release of the *Heroes of the Ring* set, Ogden's released several huge mixed-subject sets. These cards, unlike the *Heroes of the Ring*, are numbered. Because the boxers belong to larger subsets, these numbers are not sequential for the boxers.

There are seventeen boxing cards in the *A Series* set (if we ignore what PSA tells us) and five cards in the *B Series*.

The *B Series* also includes a card titled "An American Prize Fight." This card depicts a ring off in the distance, perhaps in the American West. I'm not sure what fight this card depicts as the fighters are very hard to see.



"An American Prize Fight." *B Series* is on the left and the *F Series* is on the right.

The *A Series* and *B Series* are the most common of the Ogden's *Tabs* boxing cards. You can find boxers in this subset in the \$5 - \$10 range with the John L. Sullivan card costing a bit more.

General Interest and F Series (Ca. 1902 - 1903)

There are fifteen boxers in the *F Series* and fourteen in the *General Interest* series. I suspect that the *General Interest* series was released around the same time as the *F Series*. Both series, unlike their predecessors, have numbers listed on the front of the card.

From my own experience, there is more variations in size within the *General Interest* and *F Series* cards than within the prior series. This variance seems to come mostly in width.

The *F Series* and *General Interest* boxing subsets introduces some fighters who were not featured on earlier issues. For the fighters that were included in the earlier sets there are now updated bios for them.

Some of the new boxers featured in these two issues include George Dixon (the supposed inventor of shadow boxing) and Joe Choyinski (who defeated a young Jack Johnson before providing tutelage to him while the two were sharing a jail cell).

I've seen both PSA and a major auction house (that shall remain nameless) call this card Choyinski's "rookie," which is puzzling as Choyinski has a card in both the N310 and N266 sets (although there are some variations among these cards regarding the spelling of his last name).



Two Tom Sharkey cards from the *F Series*. The card on the left has a yellow tint.

Some of the *Series F* cards have a yellow tinted image. The tinting is not exclusive to any athlete in the set. For example, the Tom Sharkey cards in above picture are both from the *F Series*, but only one has a yellow tint.

Additionally, *Series F* also has an *American Prize Fight* card similar to the one in the *B Series*.

The *General Interest* and *F Series* cards are about as rare as the *Heroes of the Ring* set but don't seem to bring a premium.

In all, the Ogden's *Tabs* boxers are extremely fun to collect. The *Tabs* boxing cards are affordable and have great images. Additionally, between the American boxing cards of the late 1880s and 1890s (like the N28s, N310s, etc.) and the rebirth of tobacco cards circa 1909, the *Tabs* are the only available cards that detail this transitional era in the sport.

Ca. 1900 - 1903 Ogden's Boxing Checklists

Heroes of the Ring (18)

Jem (Jim) Barry
Dick Burge
Jim (Jem) Carney
James J. Corbett
Frank Craig
Bob Fitzsimmons
James J. Jefferies
Jim (Jem) Mace
Peter Maher
Jack O'Brien
Kid McCoy
Kid McRutland
Charlie Mitchell
Pedlar Palmer
Tom Sharkey
Jem Smith
John L. Sullivan
Tommy Sullivan

A Series (17)

72 Kid McRutland
74 Peter Maher
76 Jack O'Brien
78 Jim (Jem) Mace
80 Tommy Sullivan
81 Frank Craig
82 Jim (Jem) Carney
83 Tom Sharkey
84 James J. Jefferies
85 Dick Burge
86 John L. Sullivan
87 Charlie Mitchell
88 Jem Barry
89 James J. Corbett
90 Bob Fitzsimmons
91 Pedlar Palmer
93 Kid McCoy

B Series (5)

43 A Prize Fight...
76 Jake Kilrain
77 Jem Smith

78 Jim Carney
79 J.L. Sullivan

F Series (15)

201. Pedlar Palmer
202. Bob Fitzsimmons
203. Charlie Mitchell
204. Kid McCoy
205. Gus Ruhlin
206. George Dixon
207. Sammy Kelly
208. Terry McGovern
209. Frank Craig
210. Jem (James) Jeffries
211. Peter Maher
212. Jem Mace
213. Tom Sharkey
214. Frank Slavin
238. A Prize Fight...

General Interest (14)

107. Jem Carney
108. Billy Plummer
109. Frank Erne
110. Tommy Ryan
111. Oscar Gardner
112. Jem (Jim) Barry
113. Mike Sears
114. Joe Choyinski
115. Ben Jordan
116. Kid Lavigne
117. Dan Creedon
118. Billy Rotchford
119. Dick Burge
120. Eddie Curry

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Questions? Comments? Wanna trade?
Feel free to contact me at obcdavidl@gmail.com