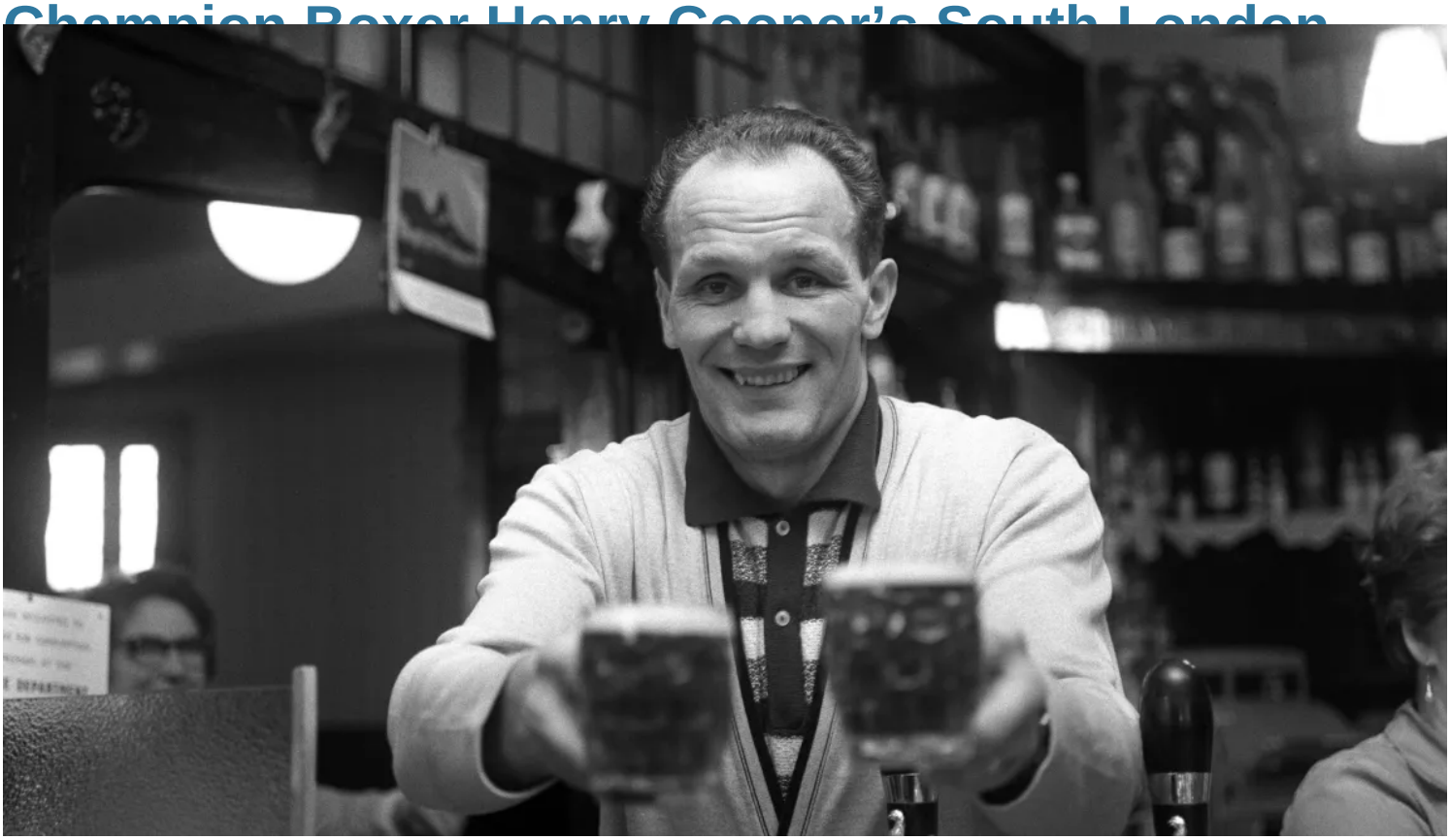
Champion Boxer Henry Cooper's South London



Henry Cooper behind the bar of The Fellowship Inn, South London in 1963

The semi-derelict South London pub, where champion heavyweight boxer and local lad Sir Henry Cooper lived and trained ahead of his 1963 fight with Muhammad Ali (then Cassius Clay), is to be revived and made sustainable thanks to £4million from the Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) Heritage Enterprise programme.

Built in the 1920s for returning First World War veterans and their families, The Fellowship Inn sat at the centre of the new Bellingham 'Homes for Heroes' estate designed to ease inner city overcrowding.

Vast in scale, the building originally comprised: two bars; a 200-seater dance and music hall; a 2260ft function room which often hosted wedding receptions; an off-license bottle shop as well as family accommodation across two floors.

Henry Cooper's training camp

In 1963, heavyweight boxer Henry Cooper lived and trained at The Fellowship in the lead up to his first fight with Muhammad Ali at Wembley Stadium.

A local lad who had grown up with his parents and twin brother George on Farmstead Road on the Bellingham estate, he moved into the pub so he could focus solely on his training.

The story was covered at the time in renowned magazine *Sports Illustrated:* "For weeks he had lived at the Fellowship, taking his meals there, training in the back room when a wedding reception or tea party did not interfere."

It reported that ahead of the fight: "The menfolk [at the Fellowship Inn] munched pork pies and lifted their nightly pints of lukewarm bitter in salute to the doggerel posted over the bar by one of the regulars. It made the point that Humble Henry would soundly thrash Gaseous Cassius 'and once again prove that very old adage: Action speaks louder than strong verbal cabbage!'".

Decline of The Fellowship Inn

In the 1960s and 70s, The Fellowship Inn hosted many well-known music acts including Fleetwood Mac and Eric Clapton but since the 1980s the Fellowship has fallen into serious disrepair. Its decline mirrored the estate and Bellingham is today one of the most deprived areas in the UK with 40 per cent of children living in poverty.

A sustainable future

Social landlord Phoenix Community Housing is leading the revival of The Fellowship Inn alongside operating partner Laines London. The newly developed pub will be made commercially sustainable and include a:

- cinema
- new live music venue - at a time when many of London's venues are closing
- café
- microbrewery – with beer using locally grown hops
- bakery
- artists' studios

The project will create 70 new jobs and 45 apprenticeships over the next 15 years.

In addition, the main bar area will be fully restored and remain open as part of the project.

Heritage Enterprise

This new money has been awarded through HLF's Heritage Enterprise programme. It is designed to help when the cost of repairing an historic building is so high that redevelopment is simply not commercially viable. Grants of £100,000 to £5m bridge the financial gap, funding the vital repairs and conservation work needed to convert derelict, vacant buildings like The Fellowship Inn, into new, usable commercial spaces that can have a positive impact on local economies.

Stuart Hobley, Head of HLF London, said: "This fascinating historical building has long been at the heart of the community. What makes this project particularly exciting is its innovative and commercially-focused approach to securing a sustainable future for this much loved local landmark. It is exactly the kind of project for which HLF created Heritage Enterprise."

Heritage Minister Tracey Crouch said: "It is fantastic that this once vibrant pub will be restored to its former glory thanks to the generosity of National Lottery players.

"This restoration, through the Heritage Enterprise programme, shows how reviving our nation's rich heritage can have added economic benefits, creating new jobs, businesses and opportunities for local communities"

Jim Ripley, Chief Executive of Phoenix Community Housing, said: “This is the best news Bellingham has had in decades. We’re so proud to have the opportunity to restore this historic pub and create a thriving venue for our residents and the wider population of south London to enjoy. This project will bring new jobs, new investment and new hope to our area.”