



BRITISH VETERANS FENCING

NEWS LETTER

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WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Carl Morris BVF PRESIDENT

Hi all

Welcome to our first newsletter of the year.

Pleased to report that the AGM was held successfully. Always a bit tricky on Zoom and I know that it's not to everyone's liking, but we had a good turnout and the organisation's business was concluded satisfactorily. Being not absolutely confident of the technology, we decided not to answer questions on the day and asked for them to be sent in beforehand, but unfortunately nobody took advantage of this opportunity. It's not the norm to have a Q&A session during an AGM, but this has been something that members have been used to in the past and it has been suggested that we might be able to have a physical Q&A session with the committee at an open meeting at the Winton Cup, or similar event, if time allows and it's what people would like.

At the AGM all reports, including the accounts, were accepted. Lynn Robinson was welcomed as a new committee member and Gillian Aghajan was welcomed back. Both Lyndsay Watkiss and Nick Fihosy were thanked for the service they had put in during their time on the committee.

In my report I thanked everyone who had contributed to the achievements of the past year with the exception of Nicola who has been the driving force behind the Newsletters. Mea culpa – thanks Nicola, it's no easy task.

Pleased to report that the Age Groups were successfully held in both London and Cardiff and I have to thank both Lyn and Mike Robinson and Kola for the work they put into organising the competitions. I think this is the first time that we have had the Age Groups split over two venues and two separate weekends. Rest assured this wasn't out of choice but necessity. It's not something that we will be looking to repeat.

The problem that we have with the Age Groups is that, in this one competition, fencers understandably wish to measure themselves against their own cohort, but the organisers never know whether they are going to have poules too large or too small. Previously three fencers were chosen for European and World selection from this event and so, in the event of a small poule, although there may have only been three or four actual bouts there would at least be three fencers selected. However, now we have a Ranking Selection Scheme this is not necessarily the case and paying the money for entry and travel for just a couple of fights is not such an attractive proposition. So, this year, to ensure people got more fencing, we gave the organisers and fencers the options of either merging categories or fencing for 10 hits within the poule. This did mean that neither the fencers nor the organisers were exactly certain which format they would be experiencing until the day. We need to know whether we are satisfying the majority of our fencers with this flexible approach or not and to this end we have asked for comments which we intend to study carefully and make firmer decisions for next year.

Enjoy the newsletter!

Carl



Words from our Nations

Tales from Wales

Welsh Veterans are participating in the newly formed Welsh Athlete Development Programme, working and training with the Welsh cadet, junior and senior fencers at training events that have encompassed non-fencing topics such as anti-doping, weapons control, refereeing, nutrition, wellbeing, core fitness and strength and conditioning, with more to come.

The fencing activities during these training sessions have focussed on technical aspects, as well as tactical applications and teamwork.

This is especially useful in the run up to the Commonwealths for all our Welsh fencers.

Welsh Veterans across all the disciplines at a recent WF ADP training day.



Welsh Fencing Closed Individual and Teams Championships

At both events veterans were well represented in all disciplines as part of the WVFA selection ranking events for the Home Nations. Veterans were fencing against juniors and seniors, for whom this was a critical event for Commonwealth selection, making it a tough competition.

Some notable results in the individual events were Marion Thomas and Margaret Myers achieving double bronze in foil while Lyn Robinson won bronze in sabre. In a nail-biting épée final, fencing point-for-point to a final score of 14-15, Marc Burchalter took silver.

In the team event, veterans made up more than 12 teams across all the weapons and gender categories, each veteran team gaining the respect of their far younger competitors.

With veteran ladies in every team, there were close fought matches ending 45-43, 45-42, 45-43 and the teams from Gwent, Crafangau Ddraig (Dragons Claws) and The Mixed Up Ladies took gold, silver and bronze while the second team from Gwent came 4th.

In the ME teams, Cwrw, Rob Brooks, Oliver Massey, David McKay, David Victory bagged a well-deserved silver, while the Whitchuch team of Neale Thomas, Rupert Nute, Paul Stelb and Andrea Bertilli just pipped the Moldy Boys to bronze.

The veterans foil teams acquitted themselves well with Gwent taking a well-deserved bronze with the veteran ringer Richard Thomas a huge part of that team.

The Vets Sabre team of wily technical vets Ceri Thomas, Nick Hill, Steve Ellwood and Carl Morris were just edged out by the sheer speed of the youngsters in an exciting bronze play-off with the scores toing and froing, finally giving the youngsters the win at 45-43.

Photograph: Welsh Ladies Veterans foilists at the WF Team Championships



Wales is looking forward to a great weekend in Bristol at the Home Nations in April. See you all there!

Lyn Robinson. Chair, Welsh Veterans Fencing.

Scottish veterans bring home the medals

After two years of stop-start fencing we had hoped we would be able to start 2022 with some competitive action. However, the Scottish Government put us into a lockdown that prevented adults over 18 years doing any indoor contact sport ... again. This prevented us from training and restricted our ability to travel to compete.

The Guildford international was our first competition of the year. A couple of Scottish-based fencers made the journey, but the majority stayed at home. Our England based Scots were less restricted and able to go. Notable results were:

- Gold for Sheila Anderson in Cat 3 women's foil
- Silver for Mike Mckay and Bronze for Nick Mort in the Cat 2 men's foil
- Gold for Michele Narey in Cat 2 women's sabre
- Gold for Viv Frith won in Cat 4 sabre with Yvonne Walls getting Silver.

By the end of January adults were allowed to train indoors again and the next event on the calendar was the Scottish Open. This was held on 26/27 February at the National Sports Centre for Scotland in Largs. This facility has had a huge revamp over the past few years and the accommodation is new with all areas of the facility accessible for wheelchair users. If you choose to stay on site you get access to the gym facilities and can even use the cryo baths if you wish!

There was a good turnout of veterans, which was great to see. Notable results were Georgina Usher winning the women's épée with Karen Grant coming 7th and Lorna Smith 15th. In the men's épée, Hugh Kernohan came 7th, Andrew Brown, Malcolm Downie, Niall Campbell all got a last 32 and Peter Hoffmann and Andrew Munley a last 64 in a tough field. In women's foil Sheila Anderson came 20th.

On the Sunday in the women's sabre Rosalind Graham got Bronze, Michele Narey came 5th and Viv Frith 8th. Lorna Smith and Yvonne Walls coming 19th and 21st respectively. Men's sabre had 6 veterans, with 4 in the top 16. Mo Mansoori was 12th, Julian Ghosh 13th, Richard Foster 15th and Paul Vaughn 16th. Keith Davidson was 20th and Kev Milne 28th.

In the men's foil, another tough field, there were four veterans, Iain Fielding placed the highest at 17th, Paul Stanbridge 21st, Mike Mckay 22nd and Alasdair Urquhart 24th.

It was good to see so many veterans at the event and good to be back fencing again. We have been choosing our teams for the Home Nations and are looking forward to the Commonwealths.

Karen Grant

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The BVF would like to take this opportunity to welcome new members who have recently joined or in some cases re-joined. Some have kindly taken the time to introduce themselves. Look out for them at competitions and don't forget to say hello. We hope this information will also help team captains select for Winton, Four Nations and Commonwealth Teams.

WELCOME

Naomi Donaldson Army sabre. Naomi has been looking forward to joining the veteran ranks and can't wait to get involved in the competitions going forward. Especially the Commonwealths at which she will be both competing and helping.

William Hoodless Reading Fencing Club, epee

Richard Batchelor St Albans, epee

Sandy Barnes Gravesham Fencing Club, epee

Paul Nash Gravesham epee, foil, and sabre

Rory Gibson a new member for Scotland. Fences foil at Salle Boston. Rory has been fencing since 10 years old, but took a 10 year break until last July, for typical reasons - kids and his work in the IT industry. Now fencing foil at Salle Boston in London and Happy to be back!

Susann Altkemper Brixton epee. Susan has loved being part of the BVF community and received a warm welcome from fellow epeeists. She has picked up her weapon again after almost 30 years and feels it is one of the best things she has done in a long time! Was born and grew up in Germany where she started fencing in a small local club at the age of 9. Now a member of the Brixton Fencing Club and very much looking forward to joining the BVF competitions and events circuit.

Ian Brown Dacorum Fencing Club, epee, foil, sabre

Eitan Alon Lansdowne foil. Eitan has been a member of BVF a few years back so re-joining. He is glad to be a member again and looking forward to meeting fellow fencing buddies on the piste. His weapon is foil and he has been fencing at the Lansdowne for the last 10 years, however not been competing due to personal priorities such as work. This year, he is trying to turn things around and will endeavour to participate in competitions. Loves his fencing and very much enjoys the friendship he has developed through fencing with his fellow club members.

Tim Harding, Tenterden epee.

Joseph Williams Saxons, epee

Richard MacDonald Luso International Fencing, epee

Edward Johnson, Watford Fencing Club & Dacorum Fencing Club, sabre. Edward generally fences sabre and intends to come to some competitions. A young vet who started fencing three years ago. Feels he is a pretty decent club fencer.

Andrew Holding, Wrekin Sword, sabre

Andrew Hall Haverstock, epee. Has been a member at his club for the past 6 years. Started fencing in 1983 but took a 16 year break to raise a family. Believes strongly in technique even if it's an aspiration. Looking forward to meeting some vets.

Hugh Jackson Brighton and Hove Fencing Club, sabre. Hugh competed a lot when he was younger and had more energy. Now has far more fun fencing socially at his club. He's looking forward to coming competing at veteran events.



CELEBRATING A FENCING ICON

Lady Janet Cooksey, an inspiration to us all



One of the most familiar figures on the veterans' fencing circuit has had to accept that her knees will no longer propel her down the piste, bringing the curtain down on an outstanding 68 year career that few will ever aspire to match. Lady Janet Cooksey, affectionately known as Poppy, now age 82, won her first schoolgirl championship in 1954, competed at three Olympic Games and collected many European, Commonwealth and World medals as a senior and as a veteran.

Her glittering career began when she arrived at Cheltenham Ladies College in the early 1950s, with some backhanded encouragement from her father.

"Shortly before I went to CLC my father said to my mother, at tea, in my presence 'are there any extras on the list?' She replied, 'yes, fencing and ballet', to which he said, 'Well, she's far too fat to do ballet so she better fence'. Mortified or what!

"At first, I did not like fencing at all. We had a boring old man to teach us six new ones and he just did not fire me up. But about three weeks later in came the French Madame Perigal – very theatrically, in a swirling green velvet cloak. She watched us doing our tentative moves – parry riposte etc, and then she said 'I want you. You, come here'. In my whole life I had never been chosen for anything. I said, 'Why me?' She replied, 'Well you have eef'. 'What is eef?', I queried, and she said, 'I don't know but you have eef so come along'.

"We worked together very hard. I was totally inspired. The following term we had a little competition. I came 5/6, not very brilliant, but then she announced that the top five would go to London for the junior schoolgirl championships. Ah, weekends in London! Thrilled to bits, I did my best, and reached the semi-finals.

"She was very pleased after only a handful of lessons, and she said, 'Next year you will win it!' And I had to. All I could do was parry and riposte and stop hit. And so began a winning habit. Looking back, I now realise I had I had three great gifts. First my father's remark that I should fence, when he had unwittingly

identified the one thing I could and would shine at, second my long friendship with Madame Perigal, and lastly, but so importantly, I was left handed."

That first Junior Schoolgirl Championship came in 1954 and was repeated the following year, before winning the Senior Championship in 1956, a seminal year in her fencing career as she was also crowned Under 20 Foil Champion.

"When I almost won it the year before, Gillian Sheen, then on her way to becoming Olympic Champion, said to me 'Next year you must win it' – and I did. I realised then how important it was to have role models who believed in me and thought I could achieve more than I thought myself. To have goals are important if you are to make progress."

The following year, she hit the international circuit as part of the British Junior team that travelled to Paris for the World Championships.

"I then gave up fencing for a year or two, thinking more about boys, and again my father prodded me and said, 'Go back, it is the only thing you can do'. Of all my family, he was the only one who came and watched me fence in the great competitions at home. In those days, Margaret Somerville was the Ladies Team captain, and after all the competitions she would be on the phone at the de Beaumont centre, relaying the results to *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*, and there were the results the next day."

For the next decade she dominated women's foil in the UK and was crowned British Ladies Foil Champion six times and runner-up on three occasions.

She was also a force internationally, representing GB in Olympic fencing teams in 1964 (Tokyo), 1968 (Mexico), and 1972 (Munich) and in World Championships from 1963 to 1972. "My best performance was 5th in 1966. I lost to Schmidt 4/5, 5/4, 4/5 and I was desolate, having come so close. It was worse than being jilted!"

She was a double gold medallist at the Commonwealth Games in Jamaica in 1966 in individual and in team and again at Edinburgh in 1970: "...in 1970 with baby attached which complicated things".

Her fencing career then paused as she moved to Scotland in 1973, restoring property and bringing up three children. She also studied for a PhD at St Andrew's on the Scottish painter Alexander Nasmyth and embarked on a new career as an art historian and picture restorer. At the same time, she started to build up an impressive CV of voluntary work which saw her serve as Deputy Lieutenant of Hampshire in 1998 and made an OBE in 2004.

She picked up her foils again in 1998 and so began another two decades of podium finishes at competitions around the world. It hadn't been part of her plan, however: "By chance Richard Cohen contacted me, by which time I was living in London and Hampshire at weekends, and so began my veteran fencing life alongside my other life".

Winning foil competitions at national, European, Commonwealth and World level wasn't enough, so she took up épée and immediately started collecting gold medals in that too, often winning both competitions at the same championships.

By the time she arrived at the European Championships in France in 2011 she was fencing all three weapons and as well as golds in foil and épée, took home a silver in sabre. The next year at the Commonwealth Games in Singapore she won gold in all three weapons, after which she put her sabre away, probably to the relief of other fencers.

Her final appearances on the international stage came at the European Championships in France in 2019 when she was a double silver medallist in foil and épée.

"Now I run a busy B&B in the Cotswolds. In 2017 and 2018 I had two total knee replacements in my right leg, and so began my difficulties as a fencer. I was nearly 80, so it was not too bad an innings. I staggered on in some pain until 2019, but since then, despite my best efforts, I just could not do what I used to do so became unable to win a fight!"

They say winning is a habit. For Janet Cooksey it was second nature.



The last hit of an Epee World Championship against Silverman where she was dangerously 7-9 down in 1st to 10.

THE SABRE CLUB

There's a new club in town – the Sabre Club – but what's it all about?

It aims to bring together all things sabre. It was born out of a desire to promote the sport of sabre fencing, for everyone. The Sabre Club is 100% owned by the Sabre Club Charitable Foundation, which was set up to promote participation in the sport of sabre fencing at all levels. The charity was formed as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in order to provide a vehicle for those wishing to support sabre fencing specifically, as well as to provide sabre fencers – regardless of their background – with a specific place to seek funding to help them fulfil their aspirations.

Who's behind The Sabre Club Charitable Foundation?

The founding trustees – Patricia Aiyenuro, Jacqueline Esimaje-Heath and Peter Howes – are all sabre fencers who want to make a difference and have themselves benefitted from the joys of sabre fencing. As a CIO (Registered Number 1189637) with a Foundation constitution, only the trustees have a formal say in the running of the charity and they must ensure all activities undertaken further the charity's objectives. The current policy of The Sabre Club Charitable Foundation is to primarily fund activities that are not usually funded by other bodies and which are in line with the charity's objectives. The current focus of our activities, in line with our policy, can be found [here](#).

What does the Sabre Club aim to do?

We have big ambitions, some of which we have already started to realise:

- Having a central calendar where all the sabre events can be publicised.
- Supporting team participation in international competitions.
- Have an easy method of inviting referees to officiate at competitions.
- Be able to organise referee courses with proper scheduling for the mentors, trainee referees and various levels of referees.
- Facilitate referee development by tracking referee stats in the system.
- Support clubs in running competitions at low cost for Directoire Technique (DT);
- Be able to easily publicise coaching courses, referee courses, updates etc.
- Generate sabre rankings for all age groups, encourage others in each age group; as well club rankings by club rankings to develop both inter-club competition and a team league structure.

How can I become involved in the work of the Sabre Club?

The Sabre Club welcomes volunteers to help with our work. This could be in the form of organising, promoting, coaching, refereeing, event reporting, blogging - you name it! If you're a keen advocate for sabre and would like to help, please contact admin@thesabreclub.uk.

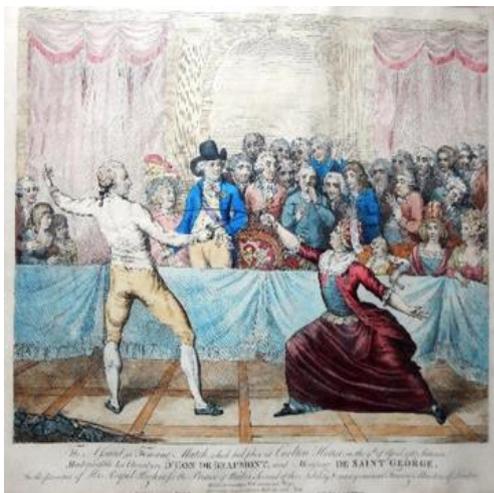
How can I help support The Sabre Club Charitable Foundation?

The biggest challenge faced by most sabre fencers is the financial cost of training and competing. They receive little or no funding beyond what their parents can afford or stretch to, so your donations can make a real difference. You can support our work, by donating [here](#). You can Gift Aid your donation, which means you can make an even bigger difference to the charity and the sabre fencers we support.

Jax Esimaje-Heath, Founding Trustee The Sabre Club

THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S FENCING PART ONE

The first female fencer to attract international attention was not actually a woman! The Chevalier D'Eon (1728-1810) was one of the most extraordinary and controversial society figures of the late 18th century. Secret agent, soldier, diplomat, and accomplished fencer, he spent the first 49 years of his life dressed as a man and the remaining 33 years as a woman. When he died, his landlady was astonished to be told by his doctor that the old 'lady' she had looked after for 14 years was in fact a man.



His most important fencing match took place against the Chevalier de Saint-Georges before the Prince of Wales in 1787, an event depicted in a famous print by James Gillray [left]. The Morning Herald reported that D'Eon, aged 59, defeated his 41-year opponent by seven hits to one, although supporters of Saint-Georges claimed he was deferring to D'Eon's age.

D'Eon was a friend of Domenico Angelo, founder of the Angelo dynasty of fencing masters, and his son Henry was the first to encourage women to take up fencing, although he restricted their activity to performing the elaborate salute. In 1816 he also welcomed and fenced with the first real female fencer to make a name

for herself, an Italian variously known as Signora Chili, Madame Cain, Madame Kelu, Madame Callée, Madame Culloni or Signora Cigali. These names are inscribed on several of the pen and watercolour sketches drawn by Thomas Rowlandson. The picture below shows fencers wearing simple clip-on wire face masks for the first time.



During the second half of the 19th century, fencing became increasingly accepted as a suitable pastime for women, although not without some resistance. In 1866 Miss Blaise Fitzroy was elected a member of the London Fencing Club, then an exclusively male institution. Alas, officials were so embarrassed by the

frequent visits of this lady, well known for her beauty and charm, that the committee passed a rule forbidding women, even as visitors.

In New York, fencing started to become popular with women in 1878, when Mrs John Jacob Astor was identified as one of the best fencers in the city, according to an article in *The Modern Sportswoman*. A decade later, a drawing in *Leslie's Magazine* of the Fencers Club showed how enthusiastically women had taken up the sport [below].



The daughter of the famous French fencing master Jean-Louis became an instructor herself and married one of her pupils. She may be depicted in an 1884 print by Paul-Leon Jazet showing a lady fencer pleased with herself after defeating an army foilist [below]. Another notable French woman fencer of the time was the sculptor Ernesta Robert-Merignac (1858-1933), daughter of one fencing master (Georges Robert) and wife of another (Emile Merignac), who

made a name for herself in exhibition matches in the 1880s all over France and Italy.



In 1885 the Austrian fencing master Josef Hartl took a group of his female students on a tour of Europe (and in 1889 of America), giving exhibitions in theatres in which he would give lessons to two pupils simultaneously [below left]. Clubs exclusively devoted to women's fencing began to spring up all over Europe. The picture below right shows a late 19th century watercolour of a Parisian ladies' club by Albert Mantelet, who developed a reputation as a painter of elegantly dressed women shown in scenes of fashionable life.



Fencing did not become an acceptable pastime for women in England until the late 1880s, when the Prince of Wales, himself a keen fencer and member of the London Fencing Club, sent his three daughters – Louise (1867-1931, later Duchess of Fife), Victoria (1868-1935) and Maud (1869-1938, later Queen of Norway) – to be taught by his old fencing master, Baptiste Bertrand. In 1898 the fencing artist Frederick Townsend produced a detailed watercolour drawing of the master's women's class, with Bertrand in the background keeping a watchful eye on his pupils [below].



Malcolm Fare



BRITISH VETERANS
FENCING

If you have a submission for the BVF Newsletter or any comments,
please email nicola.broadbartlett@gmail.com

