

**PRESTIGE, PRIVILEGE AND POLITE SOCIETY:
THE ORIGINS OF FENCING IN NEW SOUTH WALES,
1800 to 1939**

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ABSTRACT

Fencing has been organised as a sport since the formal abandonment of dueling in the 19th century. In this new form it has attracted far less attention from historians than its bloody predecessor – perhaps, ironically enough, because of a civilising of the practice of swordsmanship. This paper demonstrates how, in the context of Australian sport, a military activity evolved into a genteel sporting experience involving some of the colonial elite. In focusing on New South Wales, the paper also sheds new light on the life of important people who were involved in the sport, such as the Premier of New South Wales, William Arthur Holman. This problem of historical invisibility is not unique to fencing; other so-called ‘minor’ sports in Australia have also been overlooked by scholars – despite what might safely be assumed is their responsibility to identify and explore ‘sport’ in its various forms and guises. The following paper is, therefore, not only an insight into Australian fencing history but a clarion call for more research into less well known, but potentially revealing, sport and physical activities.

Background

Fencing has been an Olympic sport since 1896, but even with that status has attracted little interest from historians. Internationally the major study of fencing is that of Cohen (2002),¹ which is not a history per se but rather snapshots of different people and times.² Within that potted context, Australian fencing receives no mention, though such an omission may not surprise. The history of fencing in this country is bereft of scholarly literature. In fact *Sporting Traditions* has never published a paper on 15 of the 23 Summer Olympic Sports, including fencing. If there is to be worthwhile analysis of the Olympic movement and of the Games, surely an understanding of all of the sports of which the Olympics are comprised is a necessity. Further, while these 15 overlooked sports may be considered 'minor' in Australia, many other countries ascribe great value to them. Indeed, in terms of fencing, World Championships typically have television coverage in more than 50 nations.³

Fencing differs from many other sports in that it is an individual discipline. In that respect a competitor cannot attribute failure to someone else, but equally they can claim success as their very own. To advocates of fencing it is more than a mere sport. It involves both the appreciation and application of stylised principles of human movement, as well as the acceptance of formal instruction and discipline to achieve competency, and thereby respect, among weapon wielding peers. According to Finckh, who was a coach, supporter and keen observer of Australian fencing during the first half of the twentieth century:

Fencing is a Science and an Art in one. It is a Science because every movement in fencing can be described, explained and demonstrated with scrupulous accuracy. It is an Art, because as such it depends on the acquisition by arduous exercise, of that which has been laid down scientifically.⁴

Finckh could equally have been describing highly technical attributes of karate or judo; fencing, like these disciplines, is a martial encounter that evokes both the art of combat and the science of performance.

The first known record of a sporting encounter using swords is derived from a relief carving in a temple near Luxor, Egypt, built around 1200 BC. It depicts two men using

swords with protective tips while wearing masks.⁵ Although the sword has long been used for hunting and fighting, its application as a sporting implement is more recent, though its lineage uncertain. By 1500 AD European knights were involved in what was called a “passage of arms”, which meant a controlled test of various weapons skills in, what was for that age, a friendly and safe manner.⁶ The routine practice of wearing swords ceased to be customary in Europe and Britain during the second half of the eighteenth century,⁷ when the sword was superseded by the pistol. Munitions technology, therefore, had a direct impact on the supplanting of knives and swords with firearms.

Historically, the custom of dueling with swords was the province of upper class males, and thus not commoners.⁸ It was acceptable for a gentleman to offer up his life in a duel to prove his manhood or sense of chivalry. From this class-based, essentially masculine context the rules for dueling were refined by the French and the Italians, and from them slowly emerged the modern sport of fencing.

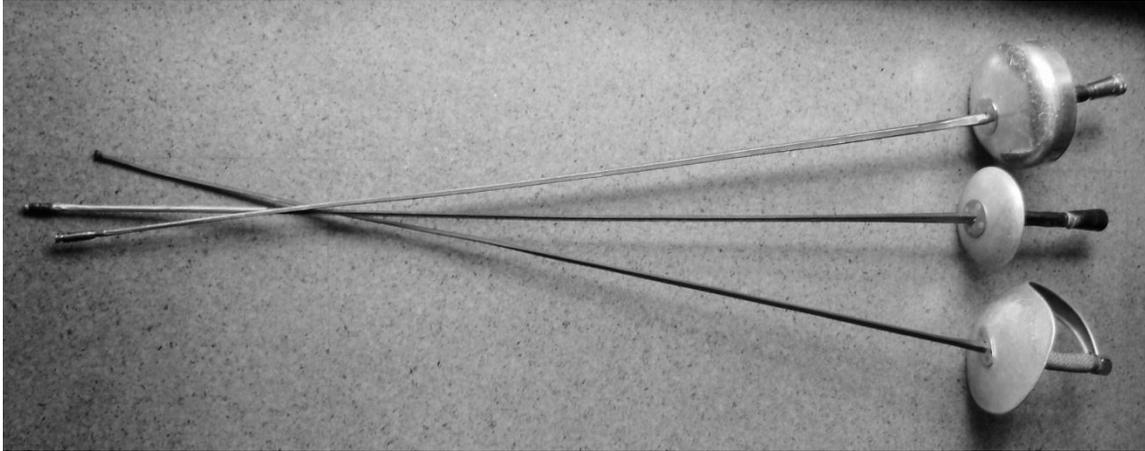
In the first half of the 19th century, a time when dueling was generally legal in Europe, sword duels were typically conducted with the epee or smallsword, hence these weapons were taught in the fencing clubs. As they were combat weapons only, the rules of courtesy were applied to them, meaning that fencers would salute each other and shake hands both prior to and after a bout. More importantly, no ‘dangerous play’ was allowed. This included physical contact with the opponent, such as hitting with the guard or pommel and “jabbing”. This is where a fencer attacked his opponent at close quarters by withdrawing the sword arm and rapidly punching at his opponent; this sometimes caused the blade to break and penetrate the unfortunate opponent. But there were initially no other rules.⁹ In a sword duel, a gentleman does not seek to hit his opponent in the face, for this is considered an attack without honour, nor does he want to hit him on the arms or the legs as this will not kill. So the body was designated as the target for the foil. Rules were also imposed as to when a person could attack based upon good practice in a duel.¹⁰

In the nineteenth century the sabre was the weapon of the soldier, while the officers’ preferred weapon was the smallsword. The sabre could be taught easily while the use of

the point of the smallsword was difficult to learn. The smallsword and its practice weapon, the foil, required an agile mind and an ability to understand tactics; it has often been referred to as a physical and very fast game of chess. The sabre is more of a cutting weapon with the use of the point often overlooked.¹¹ It required a strong arm but little thought. The lack of tactics in the use of the sabre was the key reason that this weapon and its users were looked down upon as being of lesser stature than a foilist.

The sabre and the bayonet were purely military weapons of force, but could not be used for fast compound attacks due to their significant weight.¹² The practice weapon for the sabre was the smaller singlestick, which was replaced in the 1930s with a very light instrument consisting of a wooden blade of ash about 900mm long and about 25mm thick, with a basket guard of wickerwork. This change coincided with the demise of the sabre as a weapon of modern warfare. Moreover, in terms of the sport of fencing, a lighter weapon was capable of much faster and thus more dynamic sword play.¹³ The bayonet practice weapon was a wooden replica of a rifle with fixed bayonet and the target area was the body. The point and cutting edges and the rifle butt were all used against bayonets, sabres and smallswords.¹⁴ The target area was the body above the hips as well as the head and arms, as these were considered to be the best killing and disabling areas.

Fencing has been part of the modern Olympics since their inception in 1896. Before then, as has been shown, fencing had a long lineage as a military art in a similar fashion to archery and javelin. When the military use of swords was abandoned owing to changes in the technology of warfare, fencing became purely a sport. The word fence is derived from defense, and refers to the art of defending oneself with a sword rather than with a shield.¹⁵ Today there are three different weapons for international competition: the foil, the epee, and the sabre. The first two are point weapons, so hits can only be scored by hitting the opponent with the tip of the blade. The sabre differs as points may be scored with the blade's edges as well as the point. There are rules in foil and sabre regarding the allowed target area, and conventions for making a hit. The epee is a combat weapon and does not have these conventions.



These weapons are, from the top, epee, foil sabre. (Photograph held by lead author).

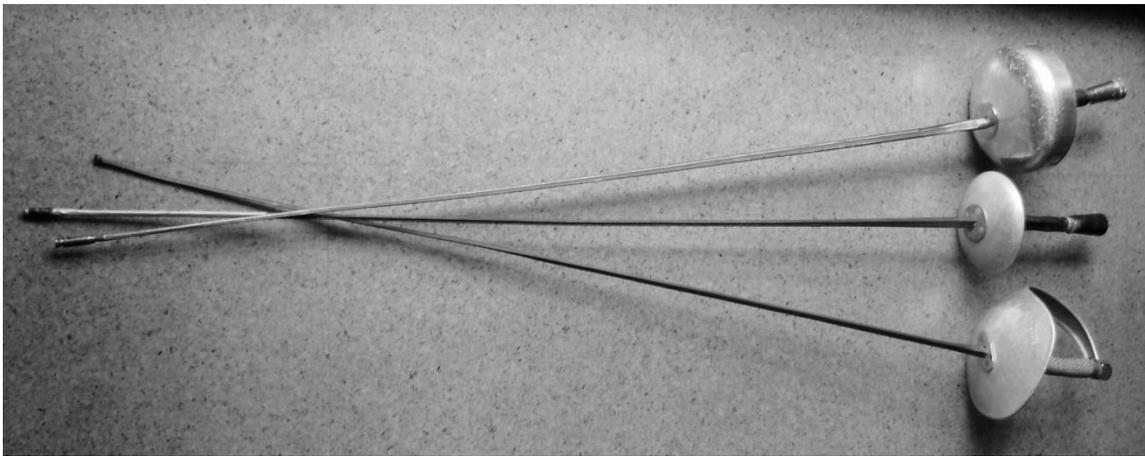
An edge weapon is much heavier than the point weapons and must be swung using the forearm and the wrist, a much slower movement than the thrust. In view of this, the point weapon in the hands of a well-trained fencer is superior. The speed at which a point weapon can be used facilitates the use of attacks consisting of more than one movement, which are referred to as compound attacks. Learning how to execute these moves and the defence against them is a time consuming activity, which is the reason that *Salles des Armes* (a school where the use of the sword as a civil and military weapon was taught)[¶] and fencing clubs were formed.¹⁶ The foil and the epee, also known as the dueling sword, are developments from the smallsword and are point weapons. The smallsword was a fairly rigid weapon with two edges and a point, but due to the speed at which the point could be manipulated it was used as a point weapon. Its successors, the epee and foil, are completely point weapons. A point weapon can only be used to thrust as it has no sharp edges. This type of sword can be manipulated at a very high speed by the use of the thumb and fingers of the hand holding the weapon.¹⁷ These are the weapons that arrived in Australia with the early settlers and formed the basis of fencing in this country.

Origins of fencing in Australia

The custom of dueling was proscribed in the 1850s in both Britain and Australia after being deemed unwelcome in a new era of formal policing; it was now deemed

[¶] British tradition is to use the French term rather than the Italian.

incongruous to the rule of law. In Continental Europe, however, dueling remained legal in some countries until the 1930s.¹⁸ With dueling outlawed in the British Empire, the foil and the epee became sporting weapons along with the sabre, although the sabre was still being used as a supplementary weapon by the military.¹⁹ Up to the 1930s, club fencing in Australia involved not only the foil, the epee and the sabre, but also the smallsword and the sabre practice weapon, the singlestick, as well as the bayonet. During this period duels were still legal in some parts of the world, so fencing was to some extent still taught with the idea that the sword remained a weapon and was not just for sport.²⁰



These weapons are, from the top, epee, foil sabre. (Photograph held by lead author).

After the sport of fencing was codified in Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century,²¹ it soon appeared in New South Wales under the auspices of the Volunteer Militia. The historian Richard Cashman is certainly right to point out the significance of this group in spurring on combat sports in the colony.²² Indeed, the sword had already come to Australia with the New South Wales Corps in 1788, and there are references to swords and their application soon after.²³ Besides the military use of the sword, the first evidence of fencing in NSW is an advertisement placed by a Mr. T. Florance in 1818.²⁴ He operated a fencing school for ‘young gentlemen’, offering them lessons in this martial art. Not until the 1830s, though, were there regular references to fencing in the press. For example, in 1835 an advertisement for Jno. T. Wilson, Ironmonger, listed fencing foils as “in stock”.²⁵ Similarly, in 1839, a Monsieur E.C. Greene announced that his Academy for

Teaching Fashionable Accomplishments was reopening and that fencing would be taught two days per week.²⁶ Similar advertisements began to appear in the newspapers of other colonies.²⁷

The next evidence of swordsmanship in New South Wales coincided with the extraordinary career of one Professor George Parker, a member of H.M. 12th Regiment (Foot). The self-styled professor, apparently from Saville House, Leicester Square in London, presented himself in the colonies as winner of the gold medal at the Scottish Fetes, Holland-House in 1851.²⁸ In 1853 he gave a broadsword exhibition in Melbourne.²⁹ He is next recorded in a Hobart paper,³⁰ which described him as a tutor of defence. In 1859 a fencing competition was won by Mr. M. Lerie, son of the Inspector-General of Police and taught by Professor Parker. In the same newspaper article Parker said that he intended to visit Victoria, hoping to add the Victorian Championship to his current New South Wales Title.³¹ This had involved a competition at Dawes Point, Sydney, with reports of an estimated 800 spectators. The event was attended by many prominent citizens, including Sir Daniel Cooper, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Captains Ward and McLean, as well as the Inspector-General of Police, Captain Lerie.³²

Parker's claim to the New South Wales title is interesting as there was no formal sporting body at that time, and so the championship appears to have been acquired by challenging and defeating anyone who nominated to be at the required standard.³³ Parker's claim to the title of professor seems explicable in that most coaches who used this salutation were taught by the military, typically rounding off their education by teaching in private fencing schools.³⁴ In March 1859, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that "[under] the example and leadership of Mr. Parker many of our colonial youth have attained to great skill in the use of the broadsword, the small sword and the bayonet".³⁵ Clearly he was operating some form of fencing club in Sydney. In April 1859 he was involved in a display of arms in Tasmania,³⁶ where he gave exhibition matches of bayonet and foil. He also performed sword feats, including cutting a sheep carcass in two with one stroke of a broadsword. By 1861 Parker had a flourishing fencing club at the School of Arts in Pitt Street, Sydney, where he taught foil, broadsword, singlestick and bayonet fencing.³⁷ In

July of that year Parker resigned from H.M. 12th Regiment and moved to New Zealand, where he appears to have remained for three years.³⁸ From thereon he returned to Australia, moving frequently around the Australian colonies, where he pursued his profession of fencing instructor until retirement in 1896.³⁹

Aside from Parker's work in New South Wales, information about other fencing activities in the late nineteenth century is sparse. In 1880 the Sydney retailer, F. Lassetter and Co. Limited, placed a series of display advertisements for fencing equipment, foils, masks, singlesticks and gloves.⁴⁰ According to the *Maitland Mercury*,⁴¹ a Professor West from Sydney gave fencing exhibitions with locals at Maitland. Fencing clubs appear to have been operating in various parts of Sydney by this time. In 1888 there was a club in Sydney, the Academy of Arms, involving mounted swordsmanship as well as other weapons.⁴² There was a club in the town of Joadja in the Southern Highlands running singlestick competitions in the 1880s. In October 1889 a fencing medal was awarded to H. Thompson; the item bore the inscription Joadja F.C., undoubtedly Joadja Fencing Club.⁴³

Fencing in development: rules, clubs and coaches

In Australia, fencing competitions from the beginning of the twentieth century involved three key weapons – bayonet, smallsword and epee. The bayonet was taught in fencing clubs, but there were no formal competitions for this military type of weapon.⁴⁴ Similarly, the smallsword was also only used for exhibitions, having been replaced in tournaments by the lighter epee. Rules about the weapons of fencing, both in Australia and abroad, had been fine tuned for competition. In addition to weapons, there were also strict rules about prevention of injury. From the inception of fencing in Australia, all training and club competitions were conducted with the use of specialised safety equipment. The face mask, a glove for the weapon hand, and a thick jacket were each required. Competitions were conducted on a piste, 1.5 metres wide and 13 metres long, usually made of cork or linoleum. Each bout was under the control of a president and a jury consisting of four judges, two judges being positioned at each end of the piste. The jury's role was to decide whether or not a hit had been made; they were communicated to by the president, who had absolute control of the conduct of the bout. In 1932 the jury for epee bouts was

superceded by technology after the successful introduction of electrical scoring apparatus.⁴⁵

The first generation of fencing coaches in Australia were mainly European migrants. However, the sport did feature an Australian-born fencing coach in the name of Alfred Edmund Finckh, who was born in Sydney in 1866. Finckh entered Sydney University in 1894 to study medicine,⁴⁶ and while at university an ex-Hungarian Army officer, Adolf Schuch, agreed to teach him how to fence. Alfred Finckh was the first Australian member of the F.I.E. and the only Australian to hold an F.I.E. licence until 1932.⁴⁷ By 1910 Finckh had progressed sufficiently to establish his own fencing school in Castlereagh Street, Sydney.⁴⁸ There he recruited an ex-member of the Royal Scots Greys (2nd Dragoons), a Captain J.A. Alexander, to be the club's inaugural professional coach.⁴⁹ A strong link between military service and propensity to engage in fencing was noticeable, with locally-born Finckh the sole exception.

In 1913, Frank Stuart, who had been a master-at-arms on a British naval ship, established The Swords Club in Elizabeth Street, Sydney. This was followed in 1917 with the formation of the Australian College of Physical Education, whose purpose was to train young women in the skills required of physical education teachers.⁵⁰ It also assured the income of Stuart and his profile in the sport. He later claimed that his was the first such fencing club in Sydney, rather than that of Finckh, though this also overlooks the pioneering efforts of Parker and others outlined in this paper. When Stuart established his club, many members of the Sydney Fencing Club joined him, ironically enough taking with them Finckh's equipment.⁵¹ This decision precipitated a bitter feud between the two clubs, with members of each refusing to speak to the other. J. Eddis Linton,⁵² who was a student of Finckh, recalls that this state of affairs continued until the death of Stuart in 1950.⁵³ Miss Catherine Pym, in a recent interview with the lead author, stated that while she was the New South Wales State Ladies Foil Champion in 1949, as well as a member of the Swords Club under the tuition of Frank Stuart, she never went to any other club in Sydney. What was more, she did not even know any fencers from outside her own club.⁵⁴ Certainly fencing could not grow and prosper while two of Sydney's major clubs

were at loggerheads.⁵⁵ This point was reiterated by Miss Pym who stated that, by way of contrast, when she had lived in Paris, friendly intercourse between various French fencing clubs was commonplace, and all of the coaches were quite happy to interact with members of other clubs.⁵⁶

Australia and world fencing

As mentioned previously, fencing was part of the inaugural modern Olympic Games at Athens in 1896. World Championships for male and female fencers were first held in 1906, while the international body, the Federation *Internationale d'Escrime* (F.I.E.), was created in 1913.⁵⁷ Women's fencing was not included in the Olympics until 1924, and was then one of only four sports contested by women – the others being swimming, diving and tennis. Fencing has led the way on inclusion of women in sport on an equal basis to men, with major tournaments including events for both males and females.

However, the Olympic Games and the formation of the F.I.E. had little impact in Australia as there were no national or state fencing bodies. Competitions were restricted to clubs, with The Swords Club taking a lead role by staging what it described as 'national competitions' involving entries from various clubs around the country.⁵⁸ In 1927 there was an attempt by Finckh to form a New South Wales Amateur Fencing Association, which he conceived as a first step towards creating a national body. But this move did not meet with the approval of Stuart, who sent two members of his club to the meeting with instructions to frustrate the formation of a state body.⁵⁹ Intriguingly, this eventually worked against the interests of Stuart. A few years later he was eager to send a fencer to the 1932 Olympic Games, at which time applications for international licences were made.⁶⁰ However, the F.I.E. would not accept nominations for the Olympic Games except from a national body.⁶¹ The New South Wales Amateur Fencing Association was therefore formed quickly in 1932, but not in time to allow Australian fencers entry into the Olympic Games that year.⁶² Indeed, the first Olympic Games to include Australian fencers was Helsinki in 1952, in the wake of a national fencing body having been formed in 1946. One impact of this focus on the Olympics and the formation of a state body in New South Wales was the emphasis placed upon the amateur status of fencing institutions

like the Swords Club which featured two participating groups: the Amateur Swords Club, for bona fide amateurs, and the Swords Club for those unable to meet the criteria to be deemed amateur. However, the problem of adequately defining amateur competitors in fencing continued well into the post World War II period.⁶³ Not only were professional coaches denied amateur status but also anyone involved in paid sports or associated professions, such as school physical education teachers.⁶⁴

In Victoria the state's Amateur Fencing Association suggested the following amateur definition for the sport:

An amateur is one who has never competed for a money prize, staked bet, or declared wager, or who has not knowingly and without protest, competed with or against a professional for a prize of any description, or for public exhibition, or who has never taught, pursued or assisted in the practice of any athletic exercise as a means of livelihood or for pecuniary gains.⁶⁵

However, the Australian Olympic Committee's less strident definition was eventually applied:

An Amateur is one who participates and always has participated in sport solely for pleasure and for the physical, mental or social benefits he derives therefrom, and to whom participation in sport is nothing more than recreation without material gain of any kind direct or indirect and in accordance with the rules of International Federation concerned.⁶⁶

Fencing, in this respect, was fundamentally influenced by the cult of amateurism that emerged in late 19th century British sport and, subsequently, became the *raison d'être* of the modern Olympic movement.

Following the formation of the New South Wales Amateur Fencing Association in 1932,⁶⁷ state championships were held on an annual basis and internal club competitions continued.⁶⁸ However, the state association did not survive beyond World War II. By 1940 it was deemed defunct and did not re-form until 1946.⁶⁹



Frank Stuart in the Swords Club in the 1930s. (Photograph held by lead author).

Fencing and social history

There are three themes that may be usefully highlighted by a social history of fencing in New South Wales. First, the role of migrants in both fencing and coaching; second, the role of women in both fencing and coaching; and third, the social elitism associated with the sporting use of swords. In nineteenth century New South Wales coaches appear to have come principally from Britain, the exception being Alfred Finckh who was the son of a German immigrant born in Australia but who received part of his education in Germany. The sport was very difficult to learn, and to teach it was even more difficult. Therefore, for fencing to be developed to a reasonable standard, well-trained coaches were essential. As there was no practical way for fencing coaches to be trained in the Australian colonies it was important that British-trained coaches migrated to the Antipodes. Fencing could not have started here without them.⁷⁰ Even today Australia has

a large contingent of migrant coaches, with European coaches having relocated from post-war Hungary and, by the 1990s, post-Soviet Russia. After the Tiananmen Square incident in 1988 Australia accepted a number of Chinese fencing coaches as political refugees. This incoming stream of coaches allowed the sport to expand locally.

Women have long had an association with the sword; indeed, duels between women have been recorded as early as 1650.⁷¹ International competition for women's fencing commenced in 1906 with the first Women's World Championships.⁷² In Australia there are records of women fencing from 1914 in South Australia,⁷³ and in New South Wales at The Swords Club from 1913.⁷⁴ The first championship for women fencers in Australasia were held in the Swords Club in June, 1919,⁷⁵ and in that year Miss Hera Roberts was described by Sydney's *Triad* journal as 'one of the finest women fencers in the Southern Hemisphere'.⁷⁶ By 1924 women's fencing was included in the Olympic program;⁷⁷ this allowed the expansion of female participation in Australia, with regular competitions for ladies between the two world wars.⁷⁸ The first Australian woman to hold any fencing championship title was Miss Kathleen Meek, who was national champion for 1913-14-15.⁷⁹ By 1938, the Swords Club alone had 30 women members and a female assistant coach, Miss Sylvia Forrest.⁸⁰ A pupil of Stuart, Forrest obtained the title of Maitre de L'Academie d'Armes de Paris and an honours diploma in fencing from London. In 1935 Stuart considered her to be the best fencer, male or female, he had encountered.⁸¹

In pre-World War II days, fencing was less physical than it is now and so women were more competitive with men; in that era there are references to Sydney women soundly defeating men with the sword.⁸² However, the sport has since changed. Prior to the advent of electrical scoring apparatus in 1955, fencing bouts could be considered as fairly sedentary, with hits being scored by technique with little body movement. The electric scoring apparatus required the introduction of a new weapon - the electric foil.⁸³ This flexible blade demanded a more active role for the fencer with less emphasis on blade technique, and so fast footwork became essential.⁸⁴ This allied with the need for stamina separated men's from women's fencing as the female foilists could not compete equally at the elite level with testosterone-laden male speed, strength and stamina.



Sylvia Forrest, 1925. (Photograph held by lead author).

Fencing has a rather exclusive, even elitist pedigree. Chamberlayne's *State of Great Britain*,⁸⁵ in its reference to English pastimes, places the use of the sword with the nobility and the gentry. Cashman, a doyen of Australian sport history, notes the interest of the colonial military in swordsmanship, with officers engaged in fencing as an expression of their elite status among fellow soldiers and in the wider community.⁸⁶ The establishment of colonial militias from 1860 gave broader impetus to the practice of fencing, along with other European martial arts.⁸⁷

With most sports there are few barriers to entry; a pair of shorts, shoes and a ball or a bat is all that is required to play many activities. Active participation can commence in most sports without amassing a great deal of knowledge about it; participants may not be very effective but they can at least compete. Fencing has always been the opposite. The equipment required, even in the early days of the last century, was expensive; a fencer needed a weapon, mask, glove and jacket – apparel not readily possessed. Fencing was thus an elite sport in New South Wales based upon cost. This is an ongoing trend: in 2009 the basic equipment needed to begin fencing amounts to some \$500; to compete at a national level the equipment will cost at least a further \$1000.

Elitism and hierarchies have been common within fencing, from its inception to the present. It has long been simpler and less expensive to manufacture pole-arm heads than swords; this has meant that the sword owner has been in a superior class to the pole-arm carrier.⁸⁸ Even as technology improved, the manufacture of sword blades and mountings were expensive and their purchase generally limited to the wealthy. When the F.I.E. was formed in 1913 various conventions had arisen around fencing; some were designed to accentuate the ‘prestige’ of the sport. There were strict requirements for gentlemanly garb and behaviour, with competitors saluting their opponent, the president, the judges, the scorers, and the audience, prior to the commencement of a bout. At the conclusion of the bout the same salutes were performed and the competitors were expected to shake hands. This was very formalised and stylised behaviour. The fencers were not allowed to disagree with the president’s ruling and no violent behaviour between participants was tolerated. Controlled aggression was the mark of a gentleman.⁸⁹ The F.I.E. accepted these conventions and included them in their rules for competitions.⁹⁰ Participants needed to have enough money to purchase equipment and formal lessons and, in the case of men, had to act like gentlemen, which meant that they had to act with decorum and demonstrate sportsmanship in their swordsmanship. Stuart, while running The Swords Club up to his death in 1952, even refused members the right to use each other’s Christian names.⁹¹ They also had to learn an extensive vocabulary of fencing terms, most of which came from Italy and France in the 17th century. This vocabulary varied from

150 words⁹² to 60 pages,⁹³ with a fencer expected to recognise and understand most of them.

Being in an individual sport a fencing competitor stands or falls on his or her own merit; there is nowhere to hide a poor performance. All of the above points can cause people to consider themselves to be 'special' and to form themselves into a community of fencers that encourages an attitude of elitism. The aspiring fencer needs weeks of instruction and practice in the basics of where to put feet and hands, how to step forward, backwards and lunge. The fencer must have sufficient training to enter into a bout, let alone be competitive in a match. This means that anyone taking on the sport must have discretionary money and dedication, as well as an understanding that fencing is a complex combination of art and science that requires years of practice to master. Today virtually all fencing competitors in Australia have at least one university degree. This leads to the formation of a sporting community that considers itself to be elite both socially and intellectually.

Conclusion

The pioneering fencing activities of Professor Parker showed how highly the use of the sword was considered, with some of the most influential people in Sydney participating in his demonstrations and competitions. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, many prominent people were involved in the sport. The Premier of New South Wales, W.A. Holman, was a student of Stuart and considered one of the best amateur swordsmen in Australia.⁹⁴ He was also president of the Swords Club for a number of years. Holman's biographer, H.V. Evatt,⁹⁵ does not mention Holman's involvement in the sport, yet the notions of chivalry, fair play and competitiveness must have influenced Holman's political decisions. Another good fencer, and member of the Swords Club, was Sir Munro Ferguson, Governor-General of Australia, while F.R. Jordan, the Chief Justice of New South Wales, took two lessons a week from Stuart over a twenty year period.⁹⁶ Many of the women who commenced fencing in the 1920-1930 era were students at the Australian College of Physical Education who were learning to become teachers, and teaching was then an elite occupation.

Fencing in the period up to World War II had no obvious or outward impact upon New South Wales society. In fact it runs counter to the prevailing culture. When the industrial revolution was under way in Britain and the old sports of pugilism, backswording, cock-fighting and bear-baiting were being replaced by the team sports better suited to the new industrial culture, the use of the sword fell out of favour except as a supplementary military weapon. The rise and popularity of the various football codes and cricket consigned weapon-based martial arts sports to minor roles. Fencing was not a mainstream activity owing to its faded military connection, the cost of fencing equipment, and the technical difficulty of becoming proficient the sport. Despite the involvement of some high-profile participants, and the involvement of both sexes, fencing was a minor sport in late colonial and early 20th century New South Wales. Despite having no obvious influence on society as a whole, fencing continued to provide middle and upper class individuals, particularly those with a university background, with a sporting outlet and social interaction among elite peers.

Fencing continues today as a highly specialised activity with few followers. The sport's strength internationally, particularly in Europe, and the use of non-traditional mass media, such as the internet, has allowed fencing to become part of the world scene. In the case of Australia, this has also enabled local coaches to better stay abreast of latest developments in the sport. The resilience of fencing in New South Wales' elite private schools has helped to facilitate new members in fencing clubs. The sport also provides an active social outlet for a small number of university trained individuals. It is, of course, a highly technical sport and thus a competent coach is required for a club to flourish. This helps to explain why so many of Sydney's early fencing clubs did not survive for long periods. When a coach leaves a club in Australia it is very difficult to find a suitably qualified replacement, particularly in a country so geographically remote to the cultural hub of fencing, which is Europe. Even today in New South Wales there is an insufficient volume of coaches in the state or country to meet the needs of local fencers.⁹⁷

Further research is necessary to enhance our knowledge of fencing in Australia, particularly in the post-WWII era when the sport underwent changes in equipment, rules

and technology. This was also a time when European and Asian migrants contributed significantly to the sport as coaches and mentors. Finally, there is a broader point to make here. It is important for historians to consider the subtle role of various ‘minor’ sports in Australia, of which fencing is merely one.

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- ¹ Richard Cohen, *By The Sword*, Pan, London, 2002.
- ² A number of books appear to be fencing history, such as William M. Gaugler, *The History of Fencing*, Laureate Press Bangor, 1998. It is actually a history of fencing technique. Another example is Malcom Fare, *A Century of Fencing in Britain*, British Fencing Association, London, 2002. This briefly covers the history of the British Fencing Association.
- ³ Federation Internationale d’Escrime, Special Edition, *Fencing and the Olympic Games*, 2005, p.17.
- ⁴ Finckh, Alfred E., *Academic Fencing*, Sydney. 1946, p. vii.
- ⁵ Marvin Nelson, *Winning Fencing*, Contemporary Books, Chicago, 1975, p. 3.
- ⁶ Alfred Hutton., *The Sword and the Centuries, or Old Sword Days and Old Sword Days*, Charles E. Tuttle, London, 1973, p. 3.
- ⁷ Robert Baldick, *The Duel, A History of Duelling*, Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, Feltham, 1970, p. 74.
- ⁸ Hutton, *The Sword and the Centuries*, pp. 206-208
- ⁹ The foil was developed as a practice weapon for the epee. It has a smaller guard and is lighter than the epee, and a separate set of rules was developed for it.
- ¹⁰ Finckh, Alfred E., *Academic Fencing*, Sydney, 1946, pp. 3-4.
- ¹¹ J.M. Waite, *Lessons in Sabre, Singlestick, Sabre & Bayonet and Sword Feats*, Weldon, London, 1880, p. viii.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Hutton, *The Sword and the Centuries*, p. 348.
- ¹⁴ Arthur Wise, *The Art and History of Personal Combat*, Arma Press, Greenwich, 1971, p. 218
- ¹⁵ William Little, H.W. Fowler, Jessie T Coulson, *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary On Historical Principles, Vol.1*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978, p. 739
- ¹⁶ C-L de Beaumont, *Fencing Ancient Art and Modern Sport*, Kaye & Ward, London. 1960, p. 257
- ¹⁷ de Beaumont, *Fencing Ancient Art and Modern Sport*, p.29
- ¹⁸ Cohen, *By The Sword*, pp. 167 – 192.
- ¹⁹ Waite, *Lessons in Sabre, Singlestick, Sabre & Bayonet*, p. Viii.
- ²⁰ Interview with Miss Catherine Pym on 15 October 2008, by Pamela Zoff and Richard Emmerick. Pym was New South Wales State Ladies Foil Champion in 1949.
- ²¹ de Beaumont, *Fencing. Ancient Art*, p. 11.
- ²² Cashman, Richard, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995. p. 24.
- ²³ *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 11 March, 1804. p .2
- ²⁴ *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 3 January, 1818. p. 3.
- ²⁵ *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 14 May, 1835, p. 4.
- ²⁶ *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 22 January, 1839, p. 1.
- ²⁷ Mr. Tulloh offers such tuition to young gentlemen in *Courier (Hobart)*, 6th January, 1847, p. 1.
- ²⁸ The British Fencing historian, Malcom Fare, says there is no trace of a Parker in British fencing history. Fetes College is a famous Scottish school but was not founded until 1870. So Parker’s claim of a gold medal win is unclear.

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- ²⁹ *Courier (Hobart)*, 30 April, 1853, p. 2.
- ³⁰ *Courier (Hobart)*, 24 March, 1856. p. 3.
- ³¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 March, 1859, p. 5.
- ³² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 March, 1859, p. 5.
- ³³ The first sporting association, the New South Wales Amateur Fencing Association, was not formed until 1932.
- ³⁴ The awarding of the title of Professor following a *recognised* course of study began in 1949. De Beaumont, p. 260. An example of the training coaches received is that of J. M. Waite. He was taught by M. Provost, Fencing-Master to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales and trained in sabre and singlestick by Mr. Platts, who had learned from Mr. Bushman, a well-respected broadsword coach. After twenty years of tuition and assistant coaching he assumed the title of Professor and commenced coaching by himself.
- ³⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 – 19 March, 1859.
- ³⁶ *Courier (Hobart)*, 23 April, 1859, p. 2.
- ³⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 July, 1861.
- ³⁸ Articles on him and his advertisements appear in New Zealand papers from 1863 to 1865.
- ³⁹ *West Australian*, 23 March, 1896, p. 5.
- ⁴⁰ *Sydney Mail*, 3 July 1880, p. 1.
- ⁴¹ *Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, 17 August, 1880, p.3; and 6 August 1881, p. 4.
- ⁴² *Brisbane Courier*, 12th June, 1888. p.5.
- ⁴³ *New South Wales Fencing Association Records*, 17th February, 2000, Author, Pamela Zopf.
- ⁴⁴ *Sydney Mail*, 11th May, 1921.
- ⁴⁵ John Sullins, 'A hit, a very palpable hit: Electronic scoring and the loss of the art of fencing', Presentation to the Society for Philosophy and Technology's XIII Conference, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, 7-9 July 2003, <https://evals.whitman.edu/fencing/Articles/Palpable.doc>, accessed 14 February 2010.
- ⁴⁶ *The Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy Bulletin*, No. 4, July 1992, p. 63.
- ⁴⁷ Linton, 12 June, 1996.
- ⁴⁸ J. Eddis Linton to the New South Wales Amateur Fencing Association 12th June 1996. NSWFA Inc. Records.
- ⁴⁹ J. Eddis Linton to the New South Wales Amateur Fencing Association 12th June, 1996. NSWFA Inc. Records.
- ⁵⁰ Twenty Eighth Annual Demonstration Programme, 1945. Held by Professor Joan Beck.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵² Linton went on to become the first president of the Australian Amateur Fencing Association, was an honorary life member of the New South Wales Amateur Fencing Association, and wrote the Foreword to Finckh's book, *Academic Fencing*.
- ⁵³ Linton, 12 June, 1996.
- ⁵⁴ Interview with Miss Pym on 15 October, 2008 by Pamela Zoff and Richard Emmerick.
- ⁵⁵ This point was made by both Pym and Emmerick.
- ⁵⁶ Interview with Miss Pym on 15 October, 2008 by Pamela Zoff and Richard Emmerick.
- ⁵⁷ Federation Internationale D'Esgrime, <http://www.fie.ch/Fencing/History.aspx>, accessed 11 October, 2008.
- ⁵⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 November, 1928.
- ⁵⁹ Linton, 12 June, 1996.
- ⁶⁰ To compete in an international competition a competitor must hold a licence from the F.I.E.
- ⁶¹ Linton, 12 June, 1996.
- ⁶² New South Wales Fencing Association Inc., records.
- ⁶³ Correspondence Eddis Linton to Swords Club, 28 January 1946, stating that to become affiliated all members must be amateurs. Letter from Eddis Linton, President New South Wales Amateur Fencing Association, to J.C. Pollack, President Australian Amateur Fencing Federation, 9 December 1955, discussing the definitions of an amateur.
- ⁶⁴ Booth Douglas., Tatz. Colin., *One-eyed: a view of Australian Sport*, Allen & Unwin, St.Leonards. 2000. p p 51-52.

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- ⁶⁵ Mr. Tanner, Secretary of the Australian Olympic Federation quoted in correspondence from Mr. J.C. Pollack, President Australian Amateur Fencing Federation to Mr. E.G. Stephenson, President Queensland Amateur Fencing Association, 24 August, 1955. AFF Inc. records.
- ⁶⁶ Eddis Linton to J.C. Pollack, 5 September, 1955. AFF Inc records
- ⁶⁷ New South Wales Fencing Association Inc. Unfortunately the Association records for the period 1932 to 1939 have been lost.
- ⁶⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 September, 1933.
- ⁶⁹ Australian Amateur Fencing Association, letter to the Amateur Swords Club, 8 February 1947.
- ⁷⁰ In the 1950s a club commenced in Wagga Wagga. It had no coach and no experienced fencers to lead them. They members taught themselves from a text book. They thought they were doing well until an experienced Melbourne fencer visited them. They then learned that they had little idea of how to use a foil properly. *Wagga Daily Advertiser*, 7 September, 1967.
- ⁷¹ Baldick, *The Duel*, p. 169.
- ⁷² Federation Internationale D'Escrime, <http://www.fie.ch/Fencing/History.aspx>, 11 October, 2008.
- ⁷³ Searcy Collection, PRG 280/1/13/378, State Library of South Australia.
- ⁷⁴ *Woman*, 1 August, 1935, p. xi.
- ⁷⁵ *The Mercury*, 31st May, 1919 p. 2
- ⁷⁶ *Triad*, 10 October, 1919.
- ⁷⁷ Federation Internationale D'Escrime, <http://www.fie.ch/Fencing/History.aspx>, 11th October, 2008.
- ⁷⁸ *Triad*, 10 October, 1919; *Woman*, 1 August, 1935, p. xi.; and New South Wales Fencing Association Inc., records.
- ⁷⁹ *Woman*, 1 August, 1935, p. xi. This championship does not appear to be a state or national event but rather a Swords Club competition.
- ⁸⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 November, 1938.
- ⁸¹ *Referee*, 10 October, 1935.
- ⁸² *Sydney Mail*, 11 May, 1921.
- ⁸³ Because the blade had to support a switch in the tip of the blade it made the blade extremely flexible. This meant that while the hand made a series of movements the tip of the blade lagged and made larger than required movements.
- ⁸⁴ R. Crosnier, pp. 18 – 20.
- ⁸⁵ *Sydney Gazette & New South Wales Advertiser*, 13 January, 1829, p. 3.
- ⁸⁶ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 54.
- ⁸⁷ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, pp. 23-25
- ⁸⁸ Pole-arms are weapons mounted on a long pole and include spears and halberds.
- ⁸⁹ Hutton, *The Sword and the Centuries*, pp. 356 – 361.
- ⁹⁰ The Amateur Fencing Association, *Rules for Competitions*, Authorised Translation of the F.I.E. Rules from the French (1940 Edition), C-L De Beaumont, London, 1946. The F.I.E. records were stolen by the Gestapo during WWII; this edition is the only one readily available.
- ⁹¹ Interview with Miss Pym on 15 October, 2008 by Pamela Zoff and Richard Emmerick
- ⁹² de Beaumont, *Fencing*, pp. 251 – 255.
- ⁹³ William M. Gaugler, *A Dictionary of Universally Used Fencing Terminology*, Laureate Press, New York, 1997.
- ⁹⁴ *Triad*, 10 October, 1919.
- ⁹⁵ H.V. Evatt, *William Holman Australian Labour Leader*, Angus & Robertson, 1940. Other internet references to Holman ignore his sporting life and his presidency of the Swords Club.
- ⁹⁶ *Referee*, 10 October, 1935.
- ⁹⁷ New South Wales Fencing Association Inc. has employed an Italian coach in an attempt to rectify this deficit.
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