

## A Short History of Modern Fencing in Scotland

(1896 First Modern Olympic Games takes place. Fencing is one of nine sports.)

1909 Scottish Fencing Club is formed, with Professor Leon Crosnier as master, assisted in due course by his son Roger.

1920's Bon-Accord Fencing Club starts in Aberdeen, is revived, or re-formed in 1954, by John King and Dr Charles Marsh of the Rowlett Institute, with the encouragement of Colonel Brock, who is head of physical training at Aberdeen University. The club continues into the 1970's, under the captainship of Dr Peter Hobson, also of the Rowlett Institute, producing several members of the Quadrangular teams, also John King and David Hunter represent Scotland at the Commonwealth Games.<sup>1</sup>

1923 Scottish Amateur Fencing Union (SAFU) is established, with the Duke of Atholl as President and Captain C.M. Usher as Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. Scotland versus United States of America match takes place in Edinburgh.



Poster for Scotland v United States of America Match<sup>2</sup>

1924 The annual match between Scotland and N. England. This becomes an Anglo-Scottish match in 1928, a Triangular match with the inclusion of Eire in 1939, and a Quadrangular with the inclusion of Wales in 1950. The King Edward VII Cup, a handsome bronze vase assigned to the match from



J.L. Hope

<sup>1</sup> Information regarding Bon-Accord fencing Club from Prue King.

<sup>2</sup> Poster for Scotland v United States of America Match from Lewis Smith.

its inception, is contested by Scotland and England alone and first won by Scotland in 1938. Captain of the team is J.L. (Tommy) Hope, President of SAFU from 1949 to 1958 and kinsman of Sir William Hope, the seventeenth century founder of the Scottish Society of Swordsmen.<sup>3</sup> Also in the team is Dr L. (Leslie) G. Morrison, President from 1959 to 1973.

1929 Hannah Gunn wins the Scottish Open, then again much later in 1949. She does much to keep fencing going in Scotland, before and after the war.

1933 Merchiston Castle forms the first school fencing club in Edinburgh.

1939 The Edinburgh Trophy for the best team results in the Inter-University Team Championships is presented by Colonel Hay, veteran of Scottish fencing; who fought in the historic Scotland versus United States of America match in 1923. In 1981 he presents it to Edinburgh, the first Scottish University to win.<sup>4</sup>



Colonel Hay

1946 Professor Leon Crosnier returns from France, to teach for two winters; not in his own Salle, but in a gym provided by Colonel Charles Usher, who succeeds Campbell as head of Physical Education at Edinburgh University and who encourages the Polish Major Wladyslaw Segda to teach at both Edinburgh and Glasgow. Segda had been a Polish sabre champion in the 30's and had served as an evacuee with the Polish army in Scotland, during the war.<sup>5</sup> He represented Poland at the Olympics in 1928 at Amsterdam and in 1932 at Los Angeles; winning sabre team bronze medals on both occasions.<sup>6</sup>

1948 SAFU is revived after the Second World War, Colonel Ronald Campbell as President. Early post-war fencing is concentrated in the four universities. Adele Mackinnon at Aberdeen is a key figure. The outstanding competitor is a Pole, Zbigniew Czajkowski, who would later return to his native Poland to represent it at foil and sabre. Czajkowski served on the Polish destroyer 'Blyskawica' during the Normandy landings. He received leave from the Navy and began his medical studies at Edinburgh University. Here, he resumed fencing and was very successful. He fenced for Edinburgh University and the Scottish Fencing Club, and also founded the fencing section of the Polish Students Association in Great Britain, where he was an amateur

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<sup>3</sup> Photograph of J.L. Hope from *Modern British Fencing 1964-1981*.

<sup>4</sup> Photograph of Colonel Hay provided by Bert Bracewell.

<sup>5</sup> Additional information on Major Segda, from Alison and Neil Melville, following a discussion with David Mends.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Paterson recalls that he was chosen to fence for Scotland against other home countries in the mid 1950's but his coach, Maitre Segda would not allow him to accept, as he thought the Committee's decision premature and this would stand in the way of fulfilling the promise that he believed he had. Segda told him that he would stop teaching him, if he accepted. Consequently, thinking him to be right he refused the invitation, because he respected him so much. Sadly though, within a few months, he left for a new career in West Africa and never fenced again.

coach.<sup>7</sup> Other notable fencers include Neil L'Amie from Edinburgh, who becomes the prime mover in school fencing; and from Glasgow, Christine Tolland, John Fleck and Alex Rae.

1950 Fencing is first introduced into the Commonwealth Games. Scotland has twenty fencing clubs.

1951 Scotland is divided into two fencing sections: East and West.

1954 Fencing is started at Glasgow High School for Girls, by Principal Frances Barker, and rapidly flourishes, especially from 1956 when Mrs Moya Barrie, the former Scottish International, takes over coaching. The club soon has 150 members; producing Judith Herriot, Sue Youngs, Gillian Ritchie, Sandra Robertson and Barbara Williams. Moya Barrie's own club is Caledonian.

1957 John King wins the British Junior Amateur Epee Championship. Sandy Leckie wins it the following year. Quadrangular, London. The Scottish team:



**Back from left: L. Morrison, T. Broadhurst, .....J. King (second last)... Front from left: C. Tolland, J. MacNair, .....<sup>8</sup>**

1958 Quadrangular, Edinburgh. The Scottish team: (This photograph appears to be taken in Edinburgh University's fencing Salle, located in The Pleasance.)

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<sup>7</sup> Additional information on Dr Czajkowski from 'Zbigniew Czajkowski – His Colorful, Adventurous and Successful Life' by Maciej Luczak, as it appears in *Understanding Fencing – The Unity of Theory and Practice*, by Zbigniew Czajkowski.

<sup>8</sup> Photograph from Prue King.



**Back from left: J. Tapley, R. Richardson, A. Watson, A Leckie, anon. Middle from left: T. Broadhurst, L. Morrison, anon, John King. Front from left: anon, C. Tolland, I. MacNair, J. MacNair, D. Plews.**<sup>9</sup>

1959 Alex Rae starts the *Newsletter*. Inception of the Inverclyde Tournament in Largs, organised by J. Innes MacNair. The Australian-born John Fethers, a pupil of Roger Crosnier in Paris, is appointed Maitre d'Armes to SAFU, a minimum salary being guaranteed personally by Committee members and others, whose pledges fortunately did not need to be redeemed. An outstanding foilist, he was British Amateur Champion in 1954 and twice Commonwealth silver medallist at Men's Foil at Auckland in 1950 and Vancouver 1954. He fosters a gradual expansion of schools fencing and his work for the team is reflected in Scotland's victories in the Quadrangular matches in 1966 and 1967. He resigns in 1966 to become Australian National Coach.

1960 Quadrangular, Dublin. The Scottish team:



**Back from left: R.Bowie, W. Coulson, O. Rock, D. Hunter, A. Watson, J. King. Front from left: F. Shield, R. Richardson, C. Tolland, T. Broadhurst, D. Plews, J. Tapley.**<sup>10</sup>

1961 North and Central sections are added. Scottish Schools Championships inaugurated. Usher Awards for Scottish Athletes who represent Great Britain in international

<sup>9</sup> Photograph from Prue King.

<sup>10</sup> Photograph from Prue King.

events, or the equivalent, awarded to Sandy Leckie; who wins the gold medal for Men's Foil at the Commonwealth Games in Perth.

- 1964 Financial assistance is obtained from the Usher Trust to enable Scottish fencers to participate in national competitions in London. Arrangements are made between London Fencing Club and SAFU to enable Scottish fencers to fence in the club, when in London. Colonel Usher is made Honorary President of SAFU.
- 1965 Janet Little and Alexandra Wilson of Glasgow, and George Sandor of Edinburgh, are the first Scots to fence in the World Student Games. A Scottish team enters the British Team Championships, for the first time since before the war. The Usher-Vaux scheme provides financial support for this season, giving grants to eight younger fencers for training and travel. Sandra Robertson, Sue Youngs and Judith Herriot regularly commute south.
- 1966 Bert Bracewell becomes Scottish National Coach, by arrangement with the Scottish Educational Department, the first and only National Coach; running a National Coaching Scheme, partly financed by government grant; he was trained by Professor Alf Simmonds. A circular to directors of education soon has widespread response. In his first season there is an impressive growth in schools fencing in the Edinburgh Area. He becomes a full Professor in 1967. The only other Scottish professional, apart from the national coach is Mrs Jane McNair, whose Glasgow FC boasts Tony Mitchell, Joe Rorke, Judith Herriot, and Margaret and Ian Duthie. J. Innes MacNair, husband of Jane MacNair, retires from business and eighteen years active work for fencing in the West of Scotland, particularly as organiser of the Inverclyde tournament in Largs. Aberdeen is another significant centre for fencing, Dr Peter Hobson teaching at the Bon-Accord Club, which boasts the epeeist John King; while Pat Cormack, another international, teaches at Aberdeen Academy. Judith Herriot is fourth in the British Foil Championship, the best position for a home-trained Scot in thirty years. After moving South, she fences for Britain in the 1968 Olympics. This year the Quadrangular is reduced to a triangular, owing to the absence of Eire, fencing at Largs, but results in the first Scottish win since 1938. Sandy Leckie loses only one bout out of twelve. George Sandor is impressive at foil and epee. All fence well. The team:



**Back row from left: J. Rorke, A. Leckie, G. Sandor, J. Gordon, J. Harris, A. Mitchell, R. Wilson. Front row from left: M. Joyce, P. Roberts, A. Wilson, R. Richardson, J. Herriot, J. Little, T. Broadhurst.**<sup>11</sup>

- 1967 Basic Coaching Certificate introduced.
- 1969 Scottish Coaches Association established. The Scottish Schools Fencing Committee (SSFC) is set up, with nineteen school clubs in Edinburgh, but only one in Glasgow. All the School Championships are fenced together over one week in the Easter holidays. This was Bert Bracewell's idea and is organised by Neil L'Amie, Convenor of the SSFC. By now there are eight university clubs.
- 1970 Intermediate Coaching Certificate introduced. SAFU stages the fencing events for the Edinburgh Commonwealth Games, with an efficiency unsurpassed, in C-L de Beaumont's view, at any World Championship or Olympic Games. Amateur Fencing Association Gold Medals are awarded to Leslie Morrison and Tommy Hope and the Award of Merit is made to Christine Tolland. Scotland wins five medals, including Sandy Leckie's gold medal for sabre; three more than in 1966. Professor Hans Mater appointed Assistant National Coach, but only stays a couple of years. Bert Bracewell starts Meadowbank Fencing Club, initially as a class. Lothian Fencing Club is founded by Mark Maclagan, where Wheelchair fencers and able-bodied fencers successfully integrate. Lothian Fencing Club quickly becomes the top club in Scotland, with a number of paraplegic and able bodied fencers representing Scotland and Great Britain. Lothian closes in 1982. Many of its members transfer to Meadowbank. In the mid 90's the club moves from the Meadowbank Stadium and renames itself Edinburgh Fencing Club. During the 70's, there is a change in the pattern of clubs, due to the opening of sport centre.
- 1971 An award scheme is started, primarily for schools. The brain-child of Bert Bracewell, it is organised by Neil Melville and comprises six levels per weapon. Mark Maclagan dies aged twenty-five, while playing squash. A recent recruit to the (SAFU) Committee, he had been an enthusiastic coach at Napier College and elsewhere; and an admirable armourer in the 1970 Games. Hannah Gunn dies. Barbara Williams becomes the first home-based Scot to gain British Colours. Aviemore Tournament starts, organised by Dr Peter Hobson and runs until 1974. Leslie Morrison becomes

<sup>11</sup> Photograph from *Modern British Fencing 1964-1981*.

Vice-Chairman of the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland; in 1974 becomes Chairman.

- 1972 Professor Leon Crosnier dies. More than anyone he sustained Scottish fencing for two generations. Tommy Hope retires as Secretary and Treasurer after nearly fifty years of service to Scottish fencing. He was Scottish Champion at sabre in 1934, 1936 and 1952; and at epee in 1930, 1939 and 1946. He was drawn into administration when he succeeded his brother Arthur as Secretary of Scottish Fencing Club in 1929. In the war he rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel His devotion to the Union was shown in his willingness in 1958, to step down as President, to take on the lesser, but no less onerous post of Secretary and Treasurer. He lavished incalculable time, care and energy, as well as the knowledge and training of a professional lawyer. He was the motive force behind many of the developments in Scottish fencing, including the National Coaching Scheme and the establishment in 1967 of the Scottish Fencing Trust, to raise funds for a permanent headquarters. He received a Torch Trophy for his work in 1975. He was succeeded as Treasurer by Christine Tolland and as Secretary by the 25-year-old accountant Sandy McDougall. Under their auspices an individual subscription to SAFU is introduced for the first time. Henceforth, a SAFU Licence is required for all Scottish and senior Section events. This year, instructors who lack a specific teacher-training qualification, are excluded from all teaching positions in state schools. This means that fencing coaches cannot continue their most fruitful work. Bert Bracewell moves from Scottish Fencing Club, first to Lothian, then Meadowbank Sports Centre. Later, he also teaches at Craiglockhart Sports Centre, teaching schoolchildren.
- 1973 Derek Titheradge becomes Assistant National Coach. Leslie Morrison retires after fourteen years as President and is succeeded by Neil L'Amie. Following the example of the schools, a universities week is now established, combining all their mutual matches. SAFU officers are somewhat galled to learn of the choice of Ottawa for the Commonwealth Games Championships, only six months before the event; having been unrepresented at the Commonwealth Federation meeting, which made the decision at the 1972 Olympics. There is some movement in trying to obtain full national status, if not at the Olympic Games, at least as a separate member of the FIE and as a participant in the mooted European Championships. SAFU's jubilee dinner is held to celebrate fifty years. Professor Roger Crosnier cannot attend, but sends a recorded message. The dinner is attended by most of the leading figures in Scottish fencing, from Colonel Usher onwards, although Alex Rae cannot be present to receive a trophy marking his exceptional services as Editor of the *Newsletter* which continued in spite of his move to Leeds in 1967.
- 1974 Scotland wins only two bronze medals at the Commonwealth Championships. In October of this year, Adele Mackinnon, mainstay of fencing not only for Aberdeen, but for universities in general for many years, is awarded the first of SAFU's Swords of Merit. Sadly, the same month Frances Barker dies. She was a teacher of wide interests, who had been instrumental in founding the Scottish Schoolgirls Athletic

Association. She played a key role in post-war Scottish fencing. After her retirement, Glasgow High School for Girls becomes Clevedon Comprehensive School and fencing is gradually squeezed out. Having decided in 1972 that resident Scots should be given preference over those South of the border, in team selection; the committee decides in January, on a further tightening of selection rules, in favour of resident Scots, in these terms: 'As far as possible, only Scottish based fencers will be included in teams for major events.' Non-residents are required to take part in main Scottish events and in squad training. Only rare exception will be made, such as those obtaining more than one result of a very high order in a non-Scottish event.

- 1975 The number of sections increases from four to six: North, East, West, Central, Border (later called South) and Fife-Tayside. A points system is introduced, but does not bind selectors. It is criticised by Hugh Kernohan and Gordon Wiles, for under rating the strength of non-Scottish competitions. The Sword of Merit is awarded to John Fleck, who fenced in the Triangular Match in 1949. An Under-13 Championship is added to the calendar. Elizabeth Wright succeeds Neil L'Amie as Convenor of SSFC.
- 1976 The first Highland Open, at RAF Kinloss, is organised by Dave Jerry. Dr Frank Riddell takes over as Match Secretary from Tony Mitchell, who had held the post from 1966. Scotland wins the Quadrangular, held in Huddersfield.
- 1978 Scotland wins the Quadrangular, held in Northern Ireland in the secluded atmosphere of Coleraine University, well away from the 'Troubles'. Glasgow is host to the Commonwealth Championships. Once again Christine Tolland takes on a great deal of the organisation. Scotland only wins two medals, Team Epee silver and Team Men's Foil bronze. A mainstay of the North Section for many years, Dr Peter Hobson retires. John Fleck takes over from him and goes on to become the President of SAFU on the retirement of Neil L'Amie in 1981.



Back from left: G. Henderson, G. Mackay, M. Mayo, M. Peat. Front from left: R. Elliott, F. McIntosh, L. Smith, J. Cooksey, A. Mitchell, C. Robertson, D. Paterson, F. Riddell (Manager).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Photograph from *Modern British Fencing 1964-1981*.



- 1979 John (Jock) Russell dies aged 53. He ran fencing (and the history department) at Kingussie High School. He was Team manager in the Commonwealth Championships in 1974 and 1978; known for wearing a kilt.
- 1980 An Under-12 Championship is added to the calendar. Christine Tolland, who had been fighting off cancer for a number of years, dies. She was Scottish Ladies Foil Champion four years running from 1959 to 1962 and Ford Cup winner no less than seven times. In 1961 she had been the first Scottish lady fencer, at least since the war to reach the final of the British Championship. She had been largely responsible for keeping the Jard Club alive and was organiser of the Jard Trophy, an event for clubs in the West section. She was secretary and treasurer of the Section from 1955, responsible for ten competitions. In 1965 she was awarded the Torch Trophy for her sterling efforts. As Secretary, she had carried most of the administrative burden of SAFU from 1972. The SAFU constitution is revised under the leadership of Dr John Ross, a university administrator, who becomes Treasurer in 1980 and Secretary from 1980 to 1981. For the first time, there is provision for representation on the Committee as sections of non-geographical areas of activity. Schools' fencing is the first such area to be represented. The number of representatives per Section is reduced from four to three, making it easier for more remote sections to be as strongly represented as nearby ones. The Fife-Tayside Section is merged with Central Section. For the office of Vice-President, the title of Honorary Life member is substituted; formalising what was already in practice. Working parties are set up to study coaching, team management and selection. New Instructor Certificates (Grades 1 and 2) are set up for those unable to take the Basic Coaching Certificate. Team manager and team captain positions, holding office for at least a complete season, are instituted. The publication of the *Newsletter* becomes an annual event, while *The Point*, a newssheet produced speedily by modern methods, is started under the editorship of Karen Kernohan, whose husband Hugh has become Match Secretary in 1980.
- 1981 Jard Fencing Club discontinues. Bellahouston Sports Centre becomes the main centre of fencing in Glasgow. Moray House College of Education in Edinburgh, where Norman Millar teaches, is another institution which admits outsiders. Much fencing activity is concentrated in the central belt. Elsewhere, fencing depends on individual amateur coaches. In the south, the main centres are provided by Mr and Mrs John Wilson at Annan and by Fred Green and Colin Scott at Hawick (where the Under-13 Championships were held). In the north, Aberdeen University Club continues and Dingwall Academy Club continues under John Fleck's care. It is estimated that there are over a thousand active fencers. David Mends of Edinburgh, Scottish Champion at foil in 1951 and 1952 and at epee in 1953, takes over as Secretary. Piers Jones of Stirling succeeds John Ross as Treasurer. Colonel Usher dies in January, aged 89. Educated at Merchiston and Sandhurst, he had been commissioned into the Gordon Highlanders in 1911. The army and sport were his life. In the First World War he was a prisoner of war for over four years. In the Second World War, he won a DSO at

Dunkirk. A well known rugby international, at age fifty, he only missed the 1950 Commonwealth Games epee final by one hit.

- 1986 At the British Commonwealth Fencing Championships, it is recognised that Finlay McLachlan, the Head of P.E. at Ainslie Park Secondary School, has started 3 out of the 5 weapon team captains, in his school club. In recognition of his coaching achievements, he is awarded the Roger Crosnier Memorial Trophy.
- 1994 By this time, there are fencing clubs in the Northern Isles: the Orkney club in Kirkwall, founded by Dr Linda Hamilton and the Shetland club in Lerwick, formed by coach Andy Alderman with Yvonne Clarke and David Carruthers, later joined by Derek Titheradge.
- 2000 West Fife Fencing Club is formed by Ken and Lorraine Rose; it will produce a long series of young fencing champions.
- 2001 The first Glasgow Open, organised by Graeme (Dusty) De Sainte Croix.
- 2004 Like many other sports organisations by this time, SAFU gives up its long-standing status as a voluntary association and incorporates as Scottish Fencing Ltd, a private company limited by guarantee. The Foundation for Scottish Fencing is formed, becoming a registered charity.
- 2010 Keith Cook wins the British Foil Championship.
- 2012 First Scottish Plastic Foil Championships for primary school pupils, organised by Mike O'Donnell. Ready Steady Fence basic coaching certificate inaugurated.
- ...
- 2023 Looking ahead, it will be time to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Scottish Amateur Fencing Union.

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**Other Photographs (provided by Prue King):- identifications welcomed.**

The Bon-Accord Fencing Club, 1961?



**From Left: J. King, Julian Tyson's father? (hidden). P. Hobson, .....far right Julian Tyson (about 11 years old).**



**John King, executing a fleche, as taught by Dr. Czaikowski in 1958/9, at Rosemount School, Aberdeen. His opponent is Charles Marsh. (Evening Dispatch, Edinburgh)**



**Welsh Quadrangular, Cardiff 1959?**



**John King (left) and Malcolm Lyall, at Delagatie Castle Gathering in the mid 1950's.**