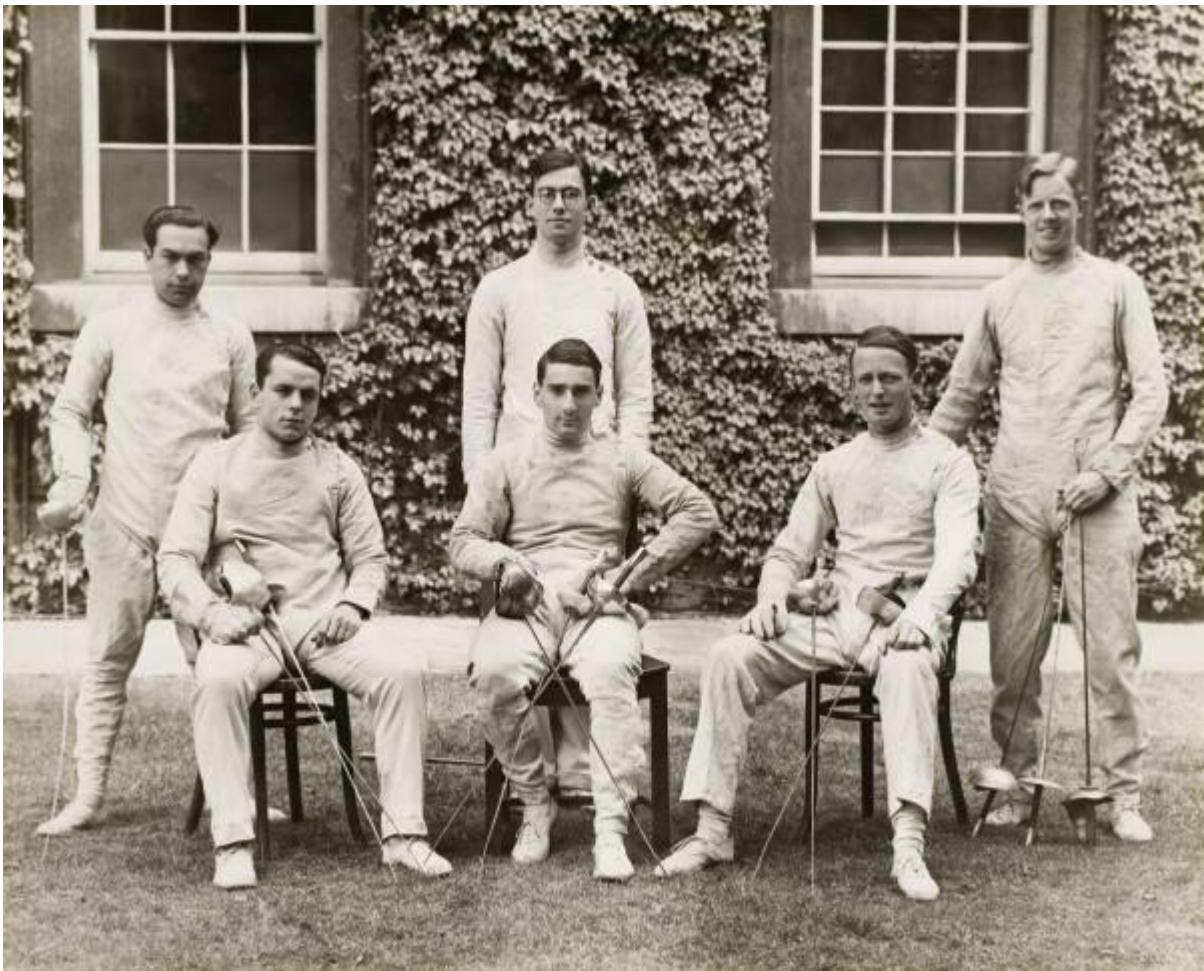


University College London Union Fencing Club: A History



UCL Men's I Team, 1929-30

UCL Fencing Club History: the Early Years

UCL Fencing club was originally established for the 1925 academic year but was, on 12th February 1927, re-formed to constitute the University College and Hospital Fencing Club (UCHFC), in which incarnation it would continue to exist for many years to come. The London University Women's Fencing Club was founded soon after the Men's in October 1926 by a student at the Slade School of Fine Art, Miss Barbara Price-Hughes, and an Inauguration ceremony was held, presided over by the noted Fencing instructor, Professor Tassart (of Tassart's Fencing academy), in the Botanical theatre on Gower Street.

The early years saw UCHFC on a steep learning curve as they fenced many of the established London Fencing academies. 1927 saw defeats to Grosvenor Fencing Club, Tassart's Fencing academy and to 'The Masks', the Fencing team of the armed services. Much more impressively however that year also witnessed UCHFC victorious over Westminster School, St Thomas' Hospital, Eton, Pangbourne Nautical School, Sandhurst, the fencing team of the Royal Automobile Club and the Royal Horse Guards. As the year drew to a close the success of UCHFC undoubtedly contributed to the creation, on the 15th December 1927, of the University of London Fencing Club (now University of London Union Fencing Club). The first honorary secretary of the UoL Fencing club was C.P. Collins who had been a driving force in UCHFC since its inception and had been both Captain of UCHFC and lynchpin of the Epee squad throughout 1927. This closeness (and friendly rivalry) between the UCL and UoL fencing clubs continues to the present day with many former UCL students who stay in continuing education within the University of London choosing to fence with UoL while preserving links with UCL Fencing Club.

The next few years continued this trend, with UCHFC fencing London clubs, Universities and representatives of the services. By 1931 however UCL was hosting the London University Fencing Championships (for more information on UCL Fencing Club's record of hosting prestigious fencing tournaments see *LIUF*) in all three weapons. 1931 saw D. M. Patterson from Guy's Hospital dominate in Foil and Sabre while C. P. Collins took home the gold in Epee for University College and Hospital Fencing Club. Also notable in this competition was the fact it was mixed (in-keeping with UCL's long history of equality) and so this saw Miss V. D. M. Playfair, later to be a noted artist, come fourth in Epee and sixth in Sabre.

UCL continued to Fence in unofficial leagues until the creation of standardised University Sports leagues however UCL Fencing Club continues to appreciate friendly Fencing matches against non-University teams which have been a vital part of the Club since its inception.

Finding information about University Sports teams so long ago is obviously extremely difficult and that is why we are indebted to the mindset of the twenties and thirties when *The Times* deemed University Fencing to be worthy of a few column inches each week in its sports section, probably due to the fact that fencing was one of the few sports which required reporting in a respectable newspaper.



The sport of fencing has been part of UCL for over a century with this, the Royal Free Charity Fencing Challenge Cup, being the first of many UCL Fencing competitions. It does, in fact, pre-date the forming of the club.

Expansion

During the 1990s UCL Fencing experienced a small, but astonishing, boom of its own. Archive copies of the UCLU Sports Review (albeit with huge gaps where years are missing) document the Club's progress within this decade from 1993 to the eve of the new millennium, and buried within their pages are the evidence of a revolutionary change in the way the club was run.

THE '90S

The club in 1993 appears to have been a small and very close-knit community, focusing on high level team training of already talented individuals. In the years preceding the club had hired a coach - Wlodek Stefanczuk - from Poland. This is the first written reference to coaching at UCL, and Wlodek can be assumed to be UCL's first fencing coach.

In the concise words of former UCL Fencing Captain, Matthew Kingston:

"The coach, Wlodek Stefanczuk improved our Fencing Team – from being knocked out in their first round last year to only very narrowly being knocked out in the third round this year in the UAU's [University Athletic Union, forerunner of BUCS, the British Universities and Colleges Sport]. Also, on an individual scale, he trained Alessia to become the Women's Épée UAU Individual Winner, and myself to be currently in the U20s GB Squad and the Senior Welsh Squad."

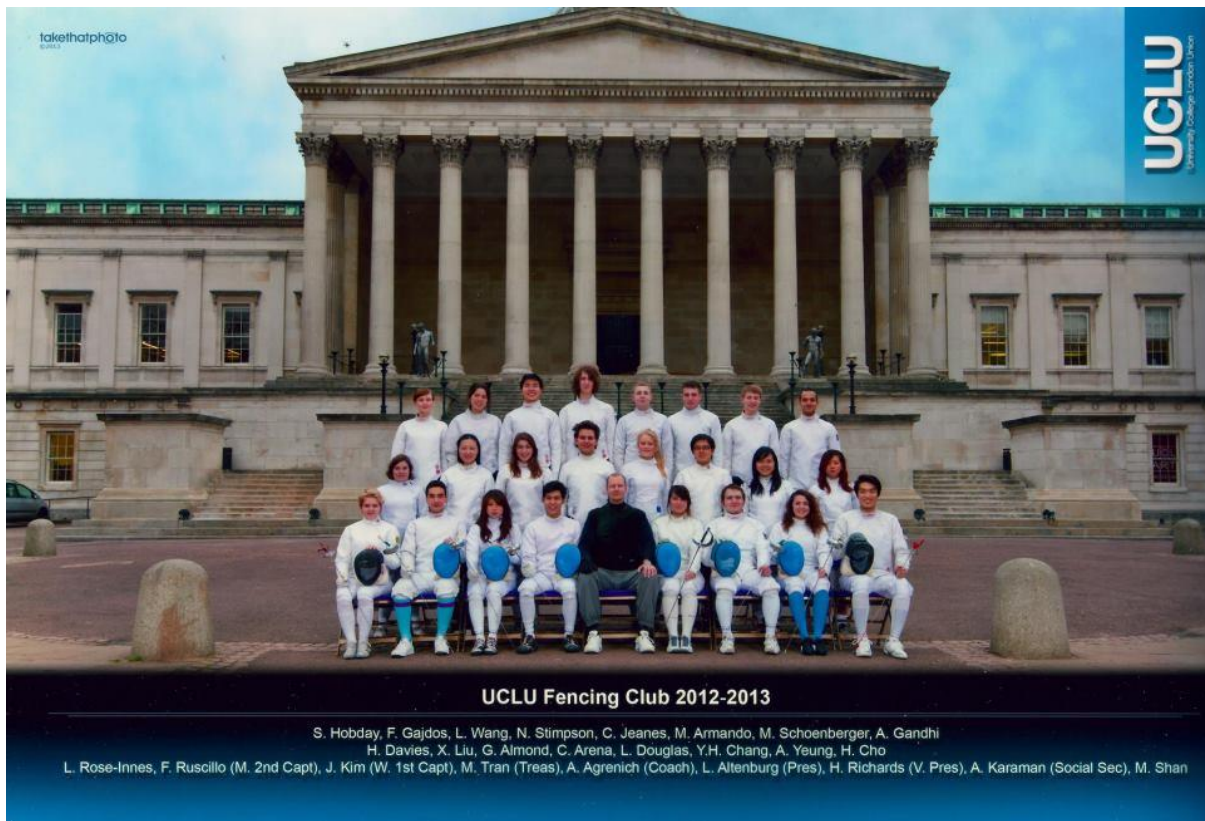
There can be no doubt that Mr Stefanczuk's coaching was of huge help in bringing the standard of the team up. However it seems this was the limit of his involvement with the Club. The coaching of novices (for it does appear there were novices by this point), according to Matthew, was primarily carried out by a member of the club, Leo McKibbins. This is in stark contrast to the club of today, where much more focus is put on the nurturing of our novices, and many of our top-level fencers choose to supplement their training at one of the many quality clubs in the London area.

In this year, Matthew Kingston was awarded the accolade of UCL Sportsman of the Year, beginning (or possibly continuing) a long tradition of fencers winning this prestigious award. In the 14 years between 1993/4 and 2007/8 Sportsman of the year has been won by a fencer at least seven times.

The New Millenium

Since the year 2000, both UCLU Fencing Club and University Fencing in general have irrevocably changed. The British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) fencing leagues now have a huge number of Universities competing and fencing is no longer the preserve of a few elite institutions. Despite this UCL continues to go from strength to strength, with the Men's I team placing third in Premier League South in 2009 and the Women's I placing second twice and finally first in League 1A between 2009-11. The arrival at UCL of internationally renowned fencers such as Valerian Langton, Elizabeth Highton, Alexander Upcraft, and Filippos Nissim meant that the club saw itself getting results from both National and International competitions in addition to the results from the British University leagues.

With more international fencers also came more novices and fencers with less experience. This led to the formation of, in 2005, a second Men's team and, in 2011, a second Women's team, reflecting the club's expansion in membership. This makes UCL the second largest student club in terms of number of teams in the UK.



UCLU Fencing Club photo 2012-13, absent are the Women's II and Men's I teams, which had away matches.

B. G. E. Wiedemann October 2013