

British Academy of Fencing **ACADEMY NEWS**

**July 2016
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"Run by coaches for coaches"



OLYMPIC LEGEND RETIRES

Italian fencing legend, Valentina Vezzali, will not grace the piste at the Rio Olympics this year, bringing to an end a remarkable run of success dating back to the 1996 Games in Atlanta.

Valentina was unable to qualify for the Individual Foil event and, due to the IOC only allowing ten fencing events, there will be no Women's Foil Team event at these games. She has, therefore, decided to retire from International fencing.

Her record at the top level of fencing is truly awesome. At the Olympics, she has won six Gold medals (three Individual and three Team), one Individual Silver and two Bronze (one each of Team and Individual). She has been Individual World Champion six times, with two Silver and four Bronze in that event, whilst she has been in ten Gold winning teams, as well as four Silvers. In 1993, she finished sixth in the Individual event and her next lowest placing was fifth in 2009. Apart from these two "failures", she has never finished outside of the medals. She has also topped the World Cup rankings eleven times and has been European Champion thirteen times (five Individual, eight Team). It is hard to believe that this record of achievement will be bettered any time soon in the future.

Fittingly, her last medal came in the venue for the Rio Olympics, as this year's World Championships for the Women's Team Foil were used as a test event, prior to the Games. Italy narrowly lost in the final to Russia and Valentina added a final Silver medal to her collection.

In 2008 she was honoured with the *Grande Ufficiale Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana* (Italian for: Grand Officer Order of Merit of the Italian Republic) and in 2013, she became a member of the Italian parliament.

Many of you will be familiar with Valentina Vezzali's style of fencing, from having seen her in action in various championships, but to get a taste of what fencing will be missing with her retirement from our sport, there is a short video on some of her Olympic triumphs at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0db2wEOIuc>.



IN THIS ISSUE

<i>Useful Info</i>	<i>p 3</i>
<i>President Writes</i>	<i>p 4</i>
<i>Den of Vice</i>	<i>p 6</i>
<i>Thoughts from Abroad....</i>	<i>p 7</i>
<i>Letters from Lewis.....</i>	<i>p 8</i>
<i>Briefs.....</i>	<i>p 9</i>
<i>What Do They Do?.....</i>	<i>p 10</i>
<i>More Useful Bits.....</i>	<i>p 12</i>

***NEXT ISSUE: Sept 2016
Contributions by August 10th,
please.***



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The following documentation is available from the Course Officer, Dave Jerry

Key Teaching Points Foil	}£7.35 (£9.45) each
Key Teaching Points Epée		
Key Teaching Points Sabre		
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or contact Professor Isobel Bruce Combes (iacombes@btinternet.com)

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THE PRESIDENT WRITES.....



Refereeing

"The attack is an initiating, rational fencing action, which from beginning to end (until the hit is made) is continuous, advancing and constantly threatening the opponent's valid target with the point or the edge, and which is not interrupted whether by a halt, an invitation or a defensive action."

*"Never should a lesson be given, and never should an attack on the part of the pupil be accepted, which does not precisely meet with the conventional specifications. Masters should use all means at their disposal to prevent the efforts and attempts of the competitors to circumvent the rules of competition, or to abuse them for their own advantage. Education, persuasion and the setting of examples and even severe lessons must be used to put an end once and for all to these deviations **which threaten the existence of fencing.**" (László Szabó, *Fencing and the Master*, Swordplay Books:NY; 1997, pp.228 -229)*

I actually do get very tired of the fact that I always seem to be having to be on the warpath about something or other to do with fencing, but the fact is that I have been taught to believe, from the start, that the duty of the Fencing Master is to protect the sport against those who wish to dumb it down or twist the rules for their own short term success. We owe a great debt of gratitude to those who have passed the sport and its rules down to us, and we should have the same dedication in protecting it for future generations.

Without the conventions and rules, there is no point in having the distinction between the different weapons. If we allow ourselves to sleepwalk into a situation where the naked aggression, running and jabbing take priority over properly executed actions, then what we will be left with is not fencing and not worth teaching.

Although I only do so reluctantly these days, there was a time when I was an enthusiastic referee: AFA grade 1 foil and épée, grade 2 sabre (grade 1 was the highest refereeing qualification award by the AFA, and grade 2 was said to be a regional level award). I have, in my time, refereed the finals of Birmingham, Leicester, Tyneside, York, Bristol and many more, including one or two foreign competitions in Germany and France (B grade women's foil competitions). And yet these days I, and several of those I trained, keep getting told that I don't know what I am talking about. Apparently "they do it differently abroad", a comment I have had to live with for decades. Never mind that the rules of priority have not changed and that at top level the game is still being refereed in the same way as it was when I was active. Nobody seems to be asking the question of why it is that we have fencers who are wildly successful in this country and then get hammered when they go abroad – unless we are genetically inferior fencers as a nation, the clue might lie in the fact that we are playing to different 'rules' in this country.

It is certainly not being played to any rules known to the FIE. Here is only a selection of what I have heard or been told recently:

"The best way to assess who is attacking is to watch the feet, the one who moves first is likely to be the attacker". Violation of rules t.56 (foil) and t.75 (sabre) Rules, book 1

"You can't score a hit going backwards; the fencer moving forward always has priority" (in the case of a *dérobement*) *"Once the fencer moves their feet, they've lost priority"* Violation of rules t.56.3 (foil) and t.76 (sabre) Rules, book 1

"You established a point in line too late" (impossible by definition – if it was after the opponent's attack began, then it was not a point-in-line, it was a counter-attack, if it was before the opponent's attack began, then it has priority.)

"You can't have a point in line going backwards" See above

"You had a point in line but it looked as if you hesitated." !!!!!!!!!?

We can't even get the start of the fight right; in this country there is little or no consistency, just stand and listen and you'll hear referees say:

On-guard – allez

Ready – allez

Prêt - allez

On-guard – fence

And the list goes on. What's wrong with 'on-guard – are you ready – play', Ref Rules, book 1 t17.10 and t42.4, fig 3: referee's signals and commands? In the eyes of other sports our referees would be a joke!!!!

We are rapidly going down the road of losing all respect for the fencing phrase and the effects are ever more visible in children's competition where larger or more aggressive fencers win by mowing down the opposition with run and jab actions which are favoured by referees who have no idea what to look for. The coach is in an impossible situation – challenge the

Continued on page 5...

referee, a useless activity which causes distress and only contributes to the growing problem of finding anyone willing to do the job, or throw fencing out of the window and teach fencers to counter brute force and ignorance with more of their own.

The rules of priority were put in place specifically to prevent what we see these days. The rules of the fencing phrase meant that running at your opponent with no regard for the risk of being hit on preparation or by a point-in-line meant that fencers had to use skill and expertise to “hit and not be hit”. This is what took it away from an ignorant brawl and made it into the dazzling game of expertise, which it is at its best. It also made it a truly inclusive game where size, speed and muscle come second to skill. Do we really want to collude in losing that?

Those who want to say they are just doing it as it is done abroad are wrong. The FIE publish dozens of videos of international competitions with the benefit of slow motion and the ability to replay hits. Go and watch those – the decisions bear no resemblance to what passes for refereeing in much of the country these days.

There was a time when a component part of coaching exams was that the candidate had to have passed a refereeing award at regional level at each weapon. Refereeing courses were led by fencing masters. Perhaps it's time to revisit this in the hope of lifting the standard of refereeing and producing more referees.

Free Tee-shirts

BAF members attending the recent BYCs received a free tee-shirt as a token of thanks for their contribution to the sport. This was the initiative of our members' rep, Lewis, so well done and many thanks to him.

Coaches be warned

Despite the best efforts of the FIE and the BFA, the repeated warnings concerning safety and proper equipment for giving lessons continue to be ignored. It is still not uncommon to see coaches giving lessons in an armless-coaching plastron and tee-shirt (even at sabre and epee). I even witnessed one individual in shirtsleeves with no mask, plastron or glove and a plastic sword giving what can only be described loosely as a warm-up lesson to a fencer in shorts, tee-shirt and mask with a foil. Some can be seen giving lessons without a glove and some at sabre can be seen giving lessons without any protection of the sword arm. One individual (though more likely, a parent) was seen at a competition having a warm-up fight with a lad at sabre, while wearing no protective equipment of any kind whatsoever! If you are one who does this, then be warned; you are in direct contravention of the rules and you are not covered by the Academy's Insurance Policy. I would also take a very unsympathetic view of this person were a complaint to be made about them engaging in such activity.

September Course

On a more cheerful note, in response to requests from a number of members, plans are underway to revive the BAF training weekend that was so successful a couple of years ago. The upcoming course will be held at the brand new sports hall and fencing venue at Kings Leadership Academy in Warrington and will be provisionally entitled “Coaching from the Ground Up – New Approaches to Grassroots and Club Coaching”. It will be held on the weekend of 17th/18th September and anyone interested in attending should contact our members' rep, Lewis McIntyre.

Philip Bruce



CAN YOU HELP?

One of retired members, Prof. John Sanders, has come across this photo, whilst researching for his memoirs, and would like some help in identifying the Who, When and Where involved.

John coached in the South West and included amongst his pupils the 1958 World Epée Champion, the late Bill Hoskyns (also N0684150 Aircraft Apprentice Merry R!), so this was almost certainly from that area. The two gentlemen at the right hand end of the front row (as you look at it) have been identified as John Evans and Derek Holt, who were at RAF Locking in the late 1950s, but this was probably not taken at Locking - the background is wrong for the hut used as the “salle” there, and the rest of people in the photo are too old to be RAF apprentices.

Does anyone have any suggestions?

DEN OF VICE

Contributions from the Academy's two Vice-Presidents



I think most coaches include some kind of footwork practice in their training schedules. Certainly, every fencing club I've attended has included footwork as part of their sessions.

There are many different approaches to footwork training, but the most common one appears to be a group session where the fencers aren't in fencing kit. Typically, they are following the coaches signals or carrying out a predetermined sequence of moves. The advantage of this method is the fencers can concentrate purely on their footwork technique without other distractions. The disadvantage is that the relationship between footwork and other aspects of fencing, such as distance or tactical application, is lost or diminished. For example, I've witnessed fencers who can execute a technically correct lunge when lunging into empty space, but as soon as they have another fencer in front of them, particularly one who is moving, they will make simple mistakes when lunging. A

common mistake is lunging from too far away and attempting to compensate by leaning forward excessively at the end of the lunge.

One way of improving your fencers' training is to include footwork sessions where the fencers are working in pairs in full fencing kit. So taking just one, very simple, example, you could do something like this:

Fencer A

- 1
- 2 **Simple attack with a step-lunge**
- 3
- 4 **Immediately recover backwards from the lunge**
- 5

Fencer B

- Half step forward to draw an attack**
- Step back during the lunge so the attack misses.**
- As soon as Fencer A starts to recover make a simple attack with a step-lunge.**

With this exercise it immediately becomes apparent if the fencers are misjudging the distance. Also, since they are practicing sword in hand with the intention of hitting each other, motivation is generally higher.

There are dangers to this approach, which the coach needs to manage carefully. You need to stress that merely hitting your partner does not equal success. Your partner is not doing much to defend themselves, so hitting them is taken as a given. Success equals using correct footwork technique while hitting your partner. Also, since the emphasis is on footwork, try to keep the blade actions very simple so the fencers don't have to worry about them too much. Like all class lessons concentrate on the particular skill you are trying to coach.

Feedback from my pupils, when I introduced this as a change to more traditional footwork practice, was very positive. They certainly enjoyed it more. Finding ways to make all training enjoyable is half the battle.

Liam Harrington, Vice President



The tail end of the summer term, for many coaches, is filled with preparation for next year. Getting out your diary and planning training and competition dates is an essential part of the process. Many clubs will also be considering how to recruit new members. It is the ideal opportunity to update the club's branding and publicity material. I started the process from scratch a few years ago when I created Southampton Epee Club.

The first thing to do was create a website. I make a habit of looking at other fencing clubs' websites and there are many good ones. However, I am always surprised when I see one that is out of date. Essential information like training times, venue, and who is coaching at the club should be current.

A club logo is also very important. You can add it to posters, leaflets and business cards for easy recognition. You might also consider some hand-outs, like key-rings or pens; these are useful, because people are more likely to keep them around long term, rather than throw them in the recycling bin after a few days.

Recognition in the fencing world is important, too, but for retention rather than recruitment. Being part of a recognisable club team or squad is really valuable for a fencer at a competition. Some easy ways to encourage this community feel are through embroidered club badges for fencing kit, or club tracksuits and t-shirts. Even within the club, it helps bring people together, meaning they are more likely to stick with fencing and the club.

Obviously a slick image is not all there is to running a successful fencing club, but it certainly won't do any harm. Good luck to everyone in creating a great first impression to kick-start your autumn term.

Andrew Norris, Vice President

THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD

*This is the first in what we hope will be a series of articles written by some of our overseas members, who have gained qualifications through attending one of our residential courses. Our first contributor is **Stuart Lee**, of **San Diego, USA**, who has attended a number of courses and gained a Diploma Foil award in 2008.*



Stuart Lee (right) with Leon Hill

My name is Stuart Lee, and I am a Foil fencing master living in San Diego, California. I run a fencing studio with 6,000 square feet, offering foil and épée classes only (sabre program in the works). I started fencing in college at the age of 20 and competed in both foil and épée regionally and nationally until my mid-thirties. I was hired part time as the Head Coach of a University program, and founded a competitive youth club. I was also a full time care giver for my ailing father. As the end of his life neared, I began to plan for my formal training as a Fencing Master. In the US the only option was an apprenticeship under another Fencing Master, and those were few and far between. So I wrote to coaching academies of several European countries, offering my services as a coach and labourer in exchange for training. It was through this process that I met Professor Leon Hill who was the standing President of the BAF.

From the outset Professor Hill was straightforward with me and my confidence in him led me down a road I have never regretted. He counselled me to maintain my coaching activities in San Diego, not move to Europe, and instead attend the BAF coaches' training courses. When my father passed away, I had the freedom to travel and so I embarked on a quest for my Fencing Master's certificate.

My first course at Denstone in 2006 with the BAF was an eye opener. I had been through a couple of weekend coaching courses given in the US and the routine was always similar: a weekend with talk about current theories in athletic training, lectures about planning lessons, some discussion of trends in competitive coaching - and precious few hours of sword-in-hand training, usually loosely structured. There are three very important contrasts regarding BAF courses and those I attended in the US: the sheer number of hours of blade work, the unity with which the staff trains the coaches, and the documentation available to students.

Within an hour of arriving, I was paired with a coach of similar ability and a long week of work began. After the second day of the BAF course, I had bandages on my fingers and feet and when I closed my eyes at night all I could see was blades crossing. By the end of these days a hot bath and a beer (or two) at the local pub was my only desire in life. I was convinced that this type of course could never happen in the US, but I also knew I loved it. I was getting every question I ever had about coaching answered and, although the information was coming as fast as I could ingest it, I was thrilled.

The unity of the training staff was also a stark difference to courses I had taken in the US, where Masters who did not share a common approach taught highlights of their technique and students cobbled together information (I should add the USFCA has improved in this area in the last decade). At Denstone, the Professors teaching the coaches communicated well with each other and there was no time in the course I ever felt left out of the proceedings. Philip Bruce and Andrew Vincent in particular inspired me with their deft technique and keen critiques of my shortcomings, but all of the Professors were not only knowledgeable but gave consistent, unambiguous analysis of coaching performance.

While there was variation in style among Professors of the BAF at Denstone, the material was presented in unfailingly constancy - a necessity given the volume of material taught in a week. This brings me to my final point of praise regarding BAF courses; that the seminars were greatly facilitated by the documentation of materials available to students. The BAF Subcommittee for Technique and Terminology produces these documents and they are not only exceptionally complete, but particularly well formatted. For a student like myself who didn't have year-round access to one-on-one interaction with a Professor, these guides filled the gap and provided me with the material I needed to progress with my own students in the US. I particularly recommend "A Compendium of the Theory and Practice of Teaching and Coaching Fencing" to anyone who teaches the sport. Professor Hill is a Master of Masters, and his mark on the teaching material is evident. I can't overstate the benefit to be found in the resources put together by the committee.

Today I have several students ranked in the top 10% of US athletes in their age groups, and the pace at which they get to those levels is increasing. I am passing down the knowledge I gained through the BAF by means of a coaching course of my own, taught to my staff free of charge once a week. Still, life as a fencing coach in America is not easy. Like most clubs in the US, the economic pressures force us to offer other activities, in my case archery. After two years in my new facility, I am finally starting to make a living, and I'm looking forward to the day when I can leave for a week or two and continue my training at Denstone - this time in épée!



Photo Credit: Miguel Mejia

LETTERS FROM LEWIS

Correspondence from your Members' Rep.



I must admit I've been struggling a bit for things to write about for this issue. It's the mid-point between Denstones and AGMs so there's little going on in the collective BAF calendar.

Having said that there have been a number of large competitions towards the end of the main fencing season. I attended one of these, the BYCs at the EIC in Sheffield, initially as a coach and member of my club, but ended up refereeing (more on this later). As part of my attempts to gain more engagement with the membership, a bit more traction between members, I was giving out some free stuff. During my spare time I managed to find nearly thirty BAF coaches to hand freebies to and was impressed to see so many supporting the sport. I'd expected (quite pessimistically) to find fewer coaches, but was particularly glad to see a large number giving warm-up lessons and enjoying the event. It was good to have the opportunity to meet a lot more coaches. Apologies if you were at the BYCs and I missed you, I don't know many of your faces to put names to.

So how do you, too, get free stuff? Easy: be at a competition (preferably coaching, but I'm not picky) that I'm also at, then come and find me. If you want to know if I'll be at a particular event then my email address is in the information section of Academy News. Dead simple. My face (in a somewhat bemused / questioning shape) is towards the top of this page, so you have a head start in finding me too. I'll hopefully have seen a lot more of you at the EYCs in Hatfield by the time this is put to print.

Now this is no secret and should come as no surprise; I/we/the academy want to establish more two-way dialogues between members. This is an organisation for coaches, by coaches, and it has a lot more potential than we're currently using. Part of this is participation between the members; coaching in clubs, supporting events, refereeing at competitions, passing on advice or tips; part of this is actual communication, one key medium still being through Academy News. That is **Academy News**, not just news from those who are obliged to write pieces. If you have a point for discussion, news or something to say then please send it to myself or the editor Bob. A sentence, anonymous or otherwise, is still useful.

And now back to the BYCs. Many of you may have heard that this key event was woefully under-supported by referees. For whatever reasons, and the reasons are really not the point of this, there just wasn't the number required. That's not to devalue the organisation or the referees themselves, I believe they all did a fantastic job of making the three-day event happen, most working much longer days than I did, and I was knackered come Sunday afternoon. I applaud them. The sadness in this is that there must have been dozens of able and/or qualified referees present; as parents, coaches, spectators, and yet few to none of them volunteered their skills or time to support their sport. There seems to be a lot more to this sport than getting fencers where they need to be, and I don't mean hitting things. The number of fencers at competitions (from anecdotal evidence, salt please) seems to be rapidly declining, and it doesn't make sense to attempt to bring other people's attempts down with a lack of co-operation or moaning. Let's not tear ourselves apart.

Lastly I want to talk about awards; awards and trophies for outstanding or notable coaches. I'd like see nominations for the various accolades the BAF offers so I can see recognition of the achievements of our members at the upcoming AGM in January. These nomination (as far as I know) need to be received by November, so time is running out. Please think hard about candidates for each award and put forward names to myself or Bob. Thanks for reading.

Lewis McIntyre, Members' Representative

BRIEFS

Academy News recently sent an email to 24 members selected at random, asking them for short contributions; coaching tips, motivational quotes, or any other comment. The selection included coaches from Level 1 right up to Full Diploma Master, active and retired, home and overseas. We are publishing some of the replies, but anonymously, as we want our readers to judge them on their own merits and not according to the status of the person writing them.

Make them laugh and keep the atmosphere light. A pupil who is happy and enjoying it will be more receptive and easier to teach. If a mistake is made, then, by lightening the atmosphere, it means they don't feel so bad about themselves. It also builds up a rapport.

Footwork sessions: they must be fast, varied and interesting. Get them to visualise their opponent in their mind. They must see the relevance and work up a sweat, otherwise the session is pointless.

Fencing will touch you in many ways. It did me.

Epée. Do not spend too much time chasing targets. Put your point where the target will arrive - in the lucky zone.

I explain that any extraneous movement is a waste of time, energy and accuracy. Trim off anything unnecessary. Be efficient and streamlined.

Observe whether your opponent is an offensive or defensive fencer, and whether they are better or worse than you (be honest). If they are worse, fight to your strengths. If better, fight to their weakness.

The pupil should never worry about questioning things I teach. If I can't justify it, I shouldn't teach it.

Finally one from a pupil, during a discussion on the difference between supination and pronation: *"Oh, that's easy to remember. Supination sounds like 'soup' and if you're holding a bowl of soup in the palm of your hand, you need to hold it palm upwards"*

Well, have you anything similar to wish to share via an occasional column like this. Don't wait for an email; the field is now open to all and all contributions are welcome. Simply email them to bobmerrybaf@aol.com. They will be published anonymously, so no glory, just the Editor's gratitude. Or perhaps you have some comment to make, whether praise or criticism, on the contributions so far. Our Letters column awaits you.

OLYMPIC SCHEDULE

Here are the dates of the fencing events at the Rio Olympics. Preliminary rounds start at 9 am each day (Local Time) and the final rounds at 4 pm. (Rio is four hours behind British Summer Time. GMT-3)

Aug 6th	Women's Epée Individual	Aug 7th	Men's Foil Individual *
Aug 8th	Women's Sabre Individual	Aug 9th	Men's Epée Individual
Aug 10th	Men's Sabre & Women's Foil Individual	Aug 11th	Women's Epée Team
Aug 12th	Men's Team Foil *	Aug 13th	Women's Sabre Team
Aug 14th	Men's Epée Team	* GBR involvement	

WHAT ON EARTH DO THEY DO?!

By Stuart Clough, Director, Treasurer and Membership Secretary



Following on from Prof Merry's article describing a day in the life of the Academy Secretary, I was asked to provide a brief overview of what I do for my roles within the Academy. I'm not sure how brief it will be, but here goes.

As Treasurer, my day to day business is all about the finances. This is a fairly broad field however and not as quick as one might imagine, even in this age of internet and phone banking. One day, it could be as simple as I receive some cheques for Proficiency Awards. You wouldn't think that opening an envelope would take much time, but then each cheque has to be entered into our accounts individually with a lot of details, like the amount, what the payment is for, the cheque number and who sent it. Again, you wouldn't think that looking at the name on a cheque is particularly difficult, but some are cheques from business accounts where it isn't immediately obvious by the business name who the coach is. If it's a regular user of the awards system, I'll generally recognise it, but otherwise it may involve a 5-10 minute Google to track them down. It's often a lot longer to work out if the cheque comes from a school. Just how many schools are there with the same name? Probably more than you think. Luckily, if this is the case, only one or two have a fencing club, but still it could end up

at 20-25 minutes of work just to put a single cheque into a holding page on our accounts. The next task would normally be a bank trip. I'm lucky enough to work in quite a nice part of town in an office that overlooks the waterfront (unfortunately my desk overlooks the wall of the building next door). A "quick trip" to the bank is about a 30 minute round-trip, walking at lunchtime, plus anything up to 5 minutes queuing, sometimes only to find that one of the cheques wasn't signed, so all the figures in the paying-in book are now wrong and have to be re-done on the spot. Eventually I escape and hopefully manage to grab a sandwich on the way back to the office to eat at my desk as I work that afternoon, having used up my actual lunchtime in the bank. Unfortunately it doesn't stop there. Once cheques have been paid in, it's back to the computer to update the accounts and move the cheques from the "holding" page to the "accounts" page. While I'm doing that, I need to check the online banking for any transfers into the accounts and spend a bit of time putting those into the ever-growing accounts spreadsheet. Then if there were any unsigned cheques from earlier, I have to e-mail or write to the person concerned to sort that. Another day, I may get an expenses claim from one of my colleagues on the committee, for example Prof Merry claiming postage expenses for sending out the Academy News. Back to the accounts I go, make the payment online, check for any other payments in and put all them into the accounts.

As Treasurer I don't just deal with the day-to-day finances though. Every month the statements need to be checked to make sure it all adds up and I didn't miss anything online, or there aren't any surprise payments. Then once a year, along comes the task of the annual accounts. Whilst we get an Accountant to do the official accounts and submit them to HMRC and Companies House, I still need to get together copies of all our statements, receipts and the now mammoth-sized spreadsheet for him to work from. This can easily take an evening or two, followed by a chain of emails from the accountant to answer questions such as "Who is the IFCA (International Fencing Coaches Association) and why are we paying them?", or other fencing specific language on some of the paperwork. Unfortunately, this also comes at the same time each year as the annual membership renewal. Once we've got the insurance costs, I spend a couple of hours working out the annual membership fees and submitting the proposal to the committee. Once approved, I then have the task of updating all the mail-merge templates to have this year's figures, printing (both letters and address labels), folding, labelling, stamping and stuffing 250-300 envelopes with reminders. At this point, I also try to get ahead of the game and print all the insurance certificates and membership cards. Unfortunately as we don't have a specialist card printer, it's sheets of A4 card which have to be run through twice (once for the front and once for the back of the cards). Each page only fits 10 cards on and inevitably there's a couple of pages in the middle that come out a bit wonky, so have to be re-done. This is then followed by about an hour of slicing these up into the individual cards and then several more hours of laminating all the cards individually. Unfortunately, it's still not over as yet more envelopes need labelling and stuffing with the insurance cover notes and cards. Then comes the calm before the storm.

Next up is processing the actual renewals. Some coaches will pay by bank transfer and then send their declaration separately, so I've got to match up all the payments and paperwork, record them in our accounts as well as the membership lists for who's renewed and at what level (Full Member, Retired Member, Overseas, etc). Then the insurance notes need finding from the pile, a stamp putting on and posting. Other members will pay by cheque, so the same process for matching up to member records and posting out insurance, then see above for dealing with the

Continued on page 11...

cheques themselves. Luckily the posting bit is easy as I go past the post office on the way to the bank, but it's another 5-10 minutes of my lunch-time gone queuing there to post the international membership cards and drop all the domestic ones in the bag behind the counter.

Surely there can't be anymore, I hear you cry. Alas, it continues. For various reasons, normally the renewal getting buried on the coffee table under more post, not everyone pays their membership straight away, so after a month or two there's reminder letters to go out to those that haven't renewed yet (more letters, labels and envelopes). Then again just after Christmas.

Throughout the year, there are other "one-off" projects outside the normal day-to-day banking. These are things like arranging payments for the examiners at our residential coaching courses at Denstone. Each examiner needs paying and a letter confirming the amount sent, plus the accounts updating again. Despite our accountant producing and submitting the official accounts, there are various other tasks at HMRC and Companies House that have to be dealt with by a Director each year, such as submitting our Annual Return (nothing to do with a tax return, but the list of Directors) and making sure those records are kept up to date.

I then finish with writing five committee reports a year, plus my annual report for the AGM.

My other role is Membership Secretary. It's not quite as intense as the Treasurer's role, as it tends to come in short bursts, but nevertheless takes time. When I receive an application for membership, I start by checking the qualifications listed against our exams database to make sure it all matches and no-one's ticked the wrong box on the form by mistake. I'll then inform our Webmaster (Prof Bruce-Combes) and Academy News Editor (Prof Merry) about the applicants so the names can be published for consideration. Next is to write to the applicant's referees and hopefully obtain two positive references. When I receive these back, they all have to be recorded and attached to the application. Assuming there are no negative comments received by any route, I get the happy job of welcoming a new member to the Academy. Unfortunately, that means more time spent with my printer sorting out insurance notes and membership cards, more stuffing of envelopes and another trip to the post office. Then back to the Membership lists to update that and another email to the Webmaster and Editor to ask them to move someone from the applicants list to the members list on the website or in the Academy News. Through this whole process, I normally receive emails from the applicant checking on the status of their application, only to find when I check that I'm still waiting for one of the references. Occasionally, the reference requests end up with the first set of renewal letters at the bottom of the pile on someone's coffee table, so another letter and form gets printed and another envelope sent.

As before, a set of five committee reports through the year as well as an AGM report.

I also do other work for the Academy outside my official roles, such as helping with all the exams administration on the residential courses. This involves turning up on the Friday, ensuring all the candidates who wish to take an exam complete the appropriate paperwork and pay the appropriate fee. Then I spend a while time-tabling the Saturday so that the candidates get their first choice of stooge wherever possible and also get as much rest as possible between taking their own exams and stoogeing for other candidates. On the day itself, I'm normally the first one in the drill hall sorting out paperwork, while the candidates finish their breakfast. We start with picking the questions, all of which have to be recorded on the mark sheets, as well as a copy of the candidate. When all questions have been drawn it's a rush to print all of the master mark sheets, as well as four sets of working sheets for each exam board, so each examiner has a scratch sheet. This doesn't always go to plan, such as the last course where the roof leaked overnight on the only printer paper I had with me, so it was too wet to go through the printer. We always keep backup forms for this sort of situation, but then it was more time spent filling the master and working mark sheets out by hand (my printer is definitely faster than my hand). When we begin the exams, I'm taking mark sheets back and forth from exams tables (with my assistant generously provided by Four of Clubs), trying to give candidates 5 minute warnings for when they are going to be on, and then chasing the candidates when it's time. I'm normally assisted in the candidate chasing by the course staff who also help to make sure we have a class of people with the right weapons in their hands for the exam. Again, a big thanks to all the Four of Clubs fencers here, who give up their day and come along to provide a class for the coaches taking exams. Finally, when the day is over, I stand back and watch as results are given, then a quick tidy-up before the 3.5 hour drive home.

I work full-time in an IT job, which, as well as the usual Monday to Friday, involves providing on-call cover evenings and weekends one week in four. I run and coach at three Fencing clubs and sit on the County Fencing committee. I'm also a Scuba Diving Instructor, so I teach that most Saturdays and help run 6-7 qualifying weekends a year for our diving students. I'm also currently in the process of trying to buy a house which, thanks to the wonders of chains in the process, has been going on since a few days into January and at the time of writing is still ongoing.

I often get people ask me how I find the time to fit it all in. I think about the hours spent doing all the work, how late I go to bed some nights (it's just gone midnight while I was writing this) and my answer is always the same, I have no idea how, but I'm happy to do it for the sport I love.

Thank you, Stuart. You've probably just ensured that the queue waiting to take over your jobs at the AGM has faded away! Bob Merry, Editor

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24th October to 29th October 2016

Course to be held at Denstone College, Staffordshire.

Fees: £440 (members) £492 (non-members)

Please contact our Course Officer, Dave Jerry, for more information

Contact details on page 3

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