



BRITISH FENCING

BRITISH FENCING
1 BARON'S GATE
33-35 ROTHSCHILD ROAD
LONDON. W4 5HT

t: +44 (0) 20 8742 3032
f: +44 (0) 20 8742 3033
headoffice@britishfencing.com
www.britishfencing.com

Tribute to Dame Mary Glen Haig
24th June 2015

Given by Georgina Usher, CEO British Fencing.

It is my great pleasure and honour, on behalf of British Fencing, the governing body for the sport, to pay a brief tribute to the lady we must regard, as one of the greatest figures in our fencing history.

I will focus on her achievements specifically in the sport of fencing – yet in doing so I am conscious that I have only time for the edited highlights from an impressive career.

Dame Mary Alison Glen-Haig was the daughter of Captain William James, an official at the 1908 Olympic Games and founder of the Polytechnic Ladies Fencing Club.

She competed in four Olympic Games – 48, 52, 56 and 60. She represented Great Britain at nine individual and team world championships, and achieved the best result ever by a British woman in a World Championships by coming 4th in 1950.

Her style was aggressive and focused and she was said to have had a “fine hand” – which in fencing is a great compliment!

Despite losing some of her best competitive years to the War, when fencing restarted she became British champion in 1948, and again in 1950. She won Commonwealth gold in 1950 & 1954, twice winning the international De Beaumont Cup and, from 1950 to 1957, she was captain of the British women’s team.

So, Mary was a formidable opponent on the piste. But she surpassed all her achievements as a competitor with her outstanding 30 years as a national and world class administrator. And in talking to those that worked with her, it was clear she was a formidable opponent off the piste too.

Starting in 1956, whilst still competing, Dame Mary became Honorary Secretary of the Amateur Fencing Association.

In 1964 she became President of the Ladies Amateur Fencing Union until 1973 when she was then elected as President of the AFA, the first woman in the job, and a position she held until 1986.

As the Fencing President, she took over an organisation that, under her predecessor Charles de Beaumont, had been virtually a one-man band. Her forceful personality and brisk chairmanship made the Association less London focused, more democratic - *but certainly not quieter!*

She tried hard to drop the word “amateur” from the Amateur Fencing Association in favour of the British Fencing Association – something that was not to happen until 1996.

Dame Mary was a strong supporter of equality for female fencers, and paved the way for future generations of women in fencing to get involved in many other aspects of sport. She played an active role in the FIE to establish Women's epee as a World Championship level discipline.

I have no doubt that Mary would not have had much time for the establishment view that women were too weak to fence epee.

Mary was honoured and amused to be the first female member of the prestigious Epee Club.

Her outstanding contribution to fencing was formally recognized throughout her career:

For services to fencing, Mary received the MBE in 1971.

In 1986 she was made honorary AFA president, a tribute only one other fencer has received – Sir Winston Churchill.

In 1999 she was made an Honorary Member of the International Fencing Federation.

Dame Mary's lifetime of achievements is a source of great inspiration for many, including myself. For what she has done for the sport of fencing she cannot and will not be forgotten.

Dame Mary Glen-Haig, on behalf of the sport of Fencing, British Fencing and all its members, I salute you.