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SELF-DEFENCE WITH A WALKING-STICK: REVISITED

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DOI

10.18573/mas.132

KEYWORDS

Walking stick, Blackthorn, Malacca cane, Bartitsu, Pierre Vigny, Barton-Wright, Jujutsu

CITATION

Brough, David. 2021. 'Self-Defence with a Walking Stick: Revisited'. *Martial Arts Studies* 11, 101-109.
doi: 10.18573/mas.132

ABSTRACT

Primarily an aid to assist mobility (or in the case of the umbrella, to stay dry) the walking stick also has a history as an object of considerable martial value. This article discusses the development of the walking stick as a martial art weapon within the British Isles over the last two centuries. From before the Victorian era the Irish Blackthorn was considered to be the best stick for self-defence purposes. In the late Victorian and Edwardian period the stylish fashion accessory, the Malacca cane, was the fulcrum of the cane fighting system developed by French Master at Arms Pierre Vigny. This was assimilated into the early British fighting system of *bartitsu*, developed by Edward William Barton-Wright. The walking stick persisted in the background throughout the development of jujutsu in the U.K. and further evolved with the introduction of Eastern fighting systems such as *hanbo jutsu* and *hapkido*. The last 20 years saw the bartitsu method undergo a renaissance following its rediscovery. Thus in the context of British jujutsu and self-defence, it may be considered that the walking stick has undergone several evolutions as a weapon, with each evolution reflecting distinct influences and ideals, and each one effective in the hands of the knowledgeable user.

Sometimes thought to be the preserve of Asian fighting systems, weapons-based martial arts also have a rich tradition and history in the West, including in Great Britain. It was in London, where, in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, East met West to accelerate the development of mixed and hybrid empty hand and weapons fighting systems. For a long time, the English had established weapons training for military use, and for recreation, including fencing, singlestick and cudgel play, quarterstaff fencing, and bayonet fencing amongst the disciplines practised [Wolf 2005]. The walking stick and umbrella were also considered to have practical value as weapons. In 1835, de Berenger published *Helps and Hints How To Protect Life And Property* [de Berenger 1835]. Charles Random, Baron de Berenger was born in 1772, and as a noted marksman joined a company of rifle volunteers known as the Duke of Cumberland's Sharpshooters [Credland 2006]. The sharpshooters were established in response to the Napoleonic threat and de Berenger became notorious for his role in a stock exchange fraud in 1814 where he falsely let it be known that Napoleon was dead, resulting in the increase in value of stocks that were subsequently sold. de Berenger would serve a year in jail for this fraud [Credland 2006]. de Berenger was also an enthusiastic inventor and sportsman and became the proprietor of some land in Chelsea in 1930 that became known as the Stadium, which became a facility for his sporting interests [Credland 2006]. In his 1935 text, de Berenger writes about the use of the walking stick, and how it is used to great effect in the hands of an experienced broadsword man, and gives several illustrated examples of its use. de Berenger discusses the merits of various types of stick and states his own preference for the Irish blackthorn, in part for the protection offered to the knuckles by its many knobs [de Berenger 1835: 115]. de Berenger described a good grip to be light, and between the thumb and forefingers. A knob at the handle was considered useless and an impediment [de Berenger 1835: 116].

In describing one of his stick defences, de Berenger suggests, if you are nimble enough, filling your hand with the contents of your snuff-box, and throwing snuff in to the eyes of your attacker whilst hitting them in the head with your stick [de Berenger 1835: 124]. de Berenger's comments on the umbrella are that the point of an umbrella is useful in an emergency, and that an open umbrella could serve as a shield to hide your pulling a pistol out of your pocket [de Berenger 1835: 118]. Another application of opening an umbrella mentioned by the author was to dissuade a large, mad, dog from attacking him [de Berenger 1835: 118]. The self-defence capabilities of the walking stick and umbrella were again discussed in the later text *Broad-Sword and Single-Stick* by Allanson-Winn, first published in 1890 [Allanson-Winn 1911]. Rowland George Allanson-Winn, the 5th Baron Headley, was born in London in 1855 and was an enthusiast of boxing and the other combat exercises that were prevalent at the time. In 1913, Allanson-Winn converted from Catholicism to Islam and adopted the Muslim name

of Shaikh Rahmatullah al-Farooq. The following year Allanson-Winn established the British Muslim Society. In *Broad-Sword and Single-Stick* Allanson-Winn appraises the qualities of sticks made from different types of wood and also draws the conclusion that the Irish blackthorn is the preferred stick stating that it 'possesses all the strength of the oak, plus enormous toughness, and a pliability which makes it a truly charming weapon to work with' [Allanson-Winn 1911: 73]. As with de Berenger, Allanson-Winn relates the use of the stick to knowing how to use a sword [Allanson-Winn 1911: 75]. For practise with the stick, Allanson-Winn offers the following advice:

When walking along a country road it is a good plan to make cuts with your stick at weeds, etc., in the hedges, always using the true edge, i.e. if aiming at a certain part of a bramble or nettle, to cut at it, just as though you were using a sabre. By this sort of practise, which, by the way, is to be depreciated in a young plantation or in a friend's garden, you may greatly increase the accuracy of your eye.
[Allanson-Winn 1911: 76]

When describing the value of the umbrella as a weapon, Allanson-Winn acknowledges that it is of no use for hitting, as it lacks strength, but is effective for thrusting, prodding, and guarding [Allanson-Winn 1911: 78]. The wire ribs and soft covering of an umbrella, he suggests, guard against heavy blows when held with both hands, and can even be used to thwart the attack of a large powerful dog, which may spring at your throat [Allanson-Winn 1911: 78]. Allanson-Winn also mentions the shillalah (also often spelled shillelagh), a stick made from blackthorn, oak, ash, or hazel that was used for fighting by Irishmen. Strikes with the shillalah were delivered by twirling it around the head with the right arm, with the left forearm used to protect the left side of the head [Allanson-Winn 1911: 71]. Thus, the preferred walking stick for self-defence in Great Britain up to the late Victorian period was the Irish blackthorn, used in the way an Englishman would handle a sword. The umbrella was good for thrusting and guarding, and seemed to have several applications against dog attacks, which may have been a more common occurrence at the time.

ENTER EDWARD WILLIAM BARTON-WRIGHT

In Great Britain, the rudimentary use of an Irish Blackthorn could have remained the extent to which a walking stick was used for self-defence were it not for the efforts of a man called Edward William Barton-Wright (1860-1951) (Figure 1). An article by Graham Noble originally published in the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* in 1999 and later reproduced in the first volume of the *Bartitsu Compendium* [Wolf 2005]

gives an account of Barton-Wright's life. Barton-Wright was born in India in 1860 to an English father and a Scottish mother. Following an education in Europe Barton-Wright embarked on a career as an engineer that took him to Japan in the mid-1890s. While in Japan, he spent his time learning jujutsu with several instructors, one of whom was Jigoro Kano, who at this time had been pioneering judo for more than a decade. Upon his return to England, Barton-Wright wrote a series of articles on self-defence, the first two of which appeared in *Pearson's Magazine* in 1899, both titled 'The New Art of Self-Defence'.

The first two articles, in the March and April editions of *Pearson's*, see Barton-Wright demonstrate some of the self-defence techniques he learned in Japan [Barton-Wright 1899a, 1899b]. In these articles, Barton-Wright can be seen demonstrating jujutsu techniques with a Japanese instructor [1899a, 1899b]. In the April article, Barton-Wright provides the name for his collective methods of self-defence as 'bartitsu', a portmanteau of his surname and the word 'jujitsu' [Barton-Wright 1899b]. Barton-Wright opened his 'Bartitsu School of Arms and Physical Culture', at 67B Shaftsbury Avenue in London [Black and White Budget 1900]. Through correspondence with Jigoro Kano, and perhaps others, Barton-Wright coordinated the arrival of several Japanese instructors to help deliver the teaching of jujutsu. The most notable of the Japanese were Yukio Tani and Sadakazu Uyenishi. In addition to jujutsu Barton-Wright determined that a fighting system could be improved by incorporating the best of the various systems he had studied, and seen, and thus invited instructors of other disciplines to teach at his club. These additional arts, including boxing, fencing, French kickboxing (*savate*), and most notably, a variety of savate that relied on fighting with a walking cane called *la canne* [Jennings and Delamont 2020], epitomised the eclectic collection of arts comprising the bartitsu system [Wolf 2005]. Jennings argues that creation in martial arts is born from moments of crisis [Jennings 2019]. The 'crisis' leading Barton-Wright to create bartitsu was the insecurity felt by London's middle and upper classes from muggings by working class roughs [Jennings 2019]. Indeed, the original members of the Bartitsu Club were all members of high society, and who together as a committee, led by William Grenfell (the First Baron Desborough) as their president, rigorously reviewed new members for their suitability of character, and ability to pay the fees [Wolf 2015].

To teach cane fighting Barton-Wright brought French Master of Arms Pierre Vigny to his club (Figure 2) [Black and White Budget 1900]. An article published in *Health and Strength* in 1904 provides a portrait of Pierre Vigny [Wolf 2005]. Vigny was born and educated in France. In 1886, Vigny served with the Second Regiment of French Artillery at Grenoble, where for three years he served as fencing master. He left the army in 1889 and opened a fencing academy in Geneva in Switzerland



Figure 1:
Picture of Edward William Barton-Wright from 'The
New Art of Self Defence' [Barton-Wright 1899a]

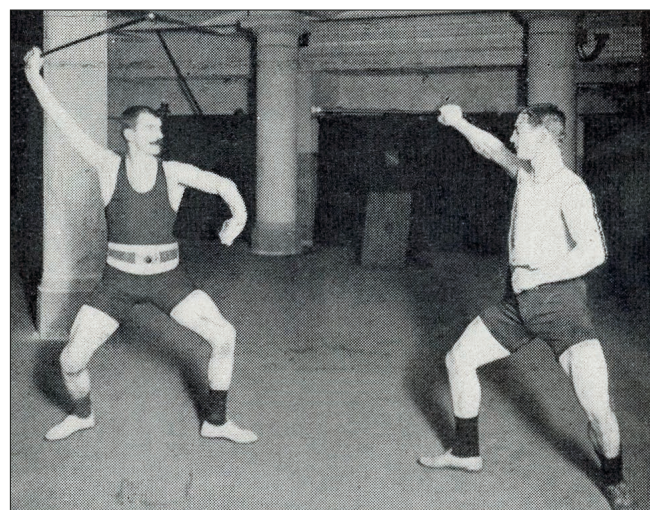


Figure 2:
Fighting with walking sticks at the Bartitsu Club with
instructors Vigny and Hubert [Black and White Budget 1900]

where he developed his system of cane fighting. In 1900, Vigny arrived in London and became a Chief Instructor at the Bartitsu School on Shaftsbury Avenue.

In 1901, Barton-Wright wrote a further two articles for *Pearson's Magazine*, this time focusing entirely on self-defence with a walking stick. In the first article, titled 'Self-Defence with a Walking-Stick' Barton-Wright draws some clear distinctions between sword or single stick fighting and fighting with a cane or walking stick [Barton-Wright 1901a]. Firstly, he points out that a cane has no hilt to guard the hand, and thus must be held such that an opponent's cane is deflected away from the hand. Further, the system devised by Vigny is just such a method and that he has assimilated it into his bartitsu fighting system [Barton-Wright 1901a]. He also describes how a cane should be held, with the thumb overlapping the fingers so that the cane is manipulated with the wrist and the blows delivered by swinging the hips, in contrast to the grip and movements practised in sword-play.

In a lecture to the Japan Society in 1901, Barton-Wright stated that the walking stick system of self-defence made it practically impossible for the fingers to be hit [Wolf 2005]. Rather than an Irish blackthorn, the stick previously favoured by the Englishman, Barton-Wright describes the formidable use of a Malacca cane [Barton-Wright 1901a]. Malacca (or rattan) is a flexible wood obtained from climbing palms and is named after its shipping port of Malacca City in Malaysia. In an article published in *Health and Strength* in 1903, Pierre Vigny comments on the fashion for owning a silver mounted Malacca cane and how useful it is for self-defence [Wolf 2005]. In the same article, Vigny describes how he has his own canes made out of Malacca and mounted with a thick metal ball for the handle [Wolf 2005]. Barton-Wright's first article on the walking stick method of self-defence goes on to illustrate a number of ways in which a Malacca cane can be used to defend oneself against an opponent also armed with a cane, but also includes a cane defence against a boxer, and against an expert kicker [Barton-Wright 1901a]. The defences illustrated in this first article consist mainly of guards, parries, and strikes, though several take-downs are also shown (e.g. Figure 3) [Barton-Wright 1901a].

In Barton-Wright's second article in 1901, also titled 'Self-defence with a Walking-stick' [Barton-Wright 1901b], we see more use of guards, strikes, and parries, with a straight cane. However, we also see defences using a hooked walking stick, where the crook of the handle is used to pull an opponent off balance by either pulling round their neck, or round their ankle. In this article, we also see an interesting evolution, which is the appearance of jujutsu techniques applied with the cane. For example, technique number 7 shows the bent arm lock, *ude-garami*, applied after a parry (Figure 4 overleaf). Do these techniques show

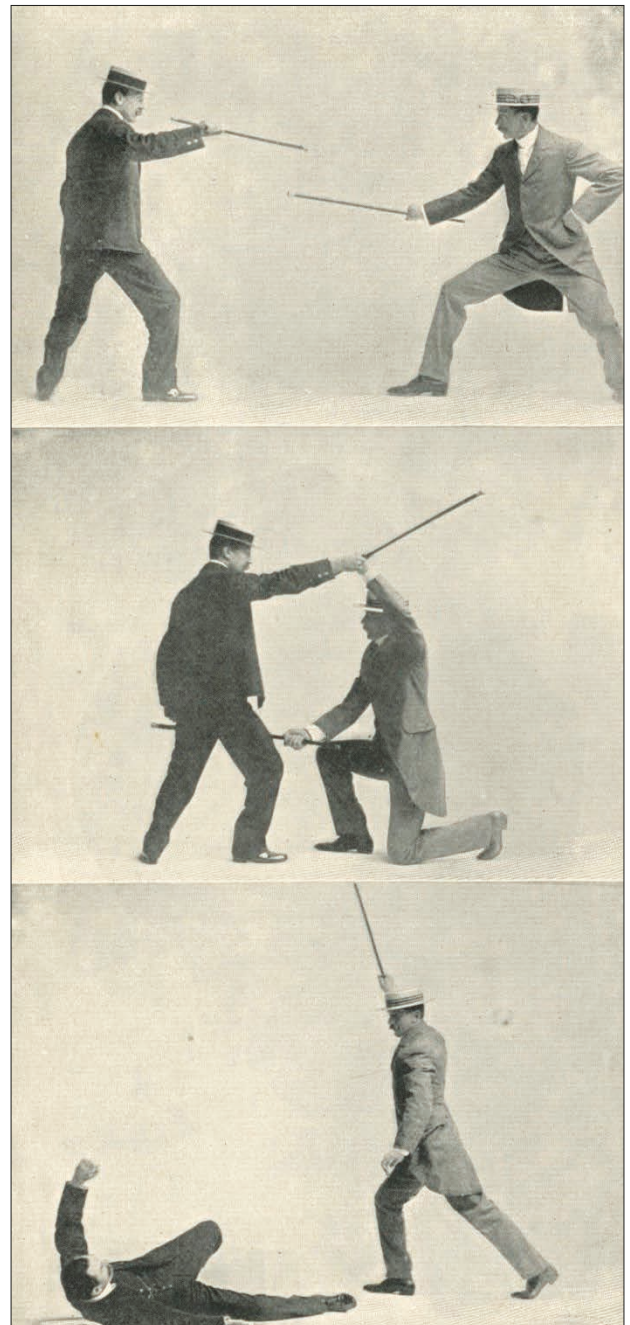


Figure 3:
Demonstration of a take down from 'Self-defence with a Walking-stick' called 'One of the best ways of knocking down a man in a general scrimmage when there is not room to swing a stick freely' [Barton-Wright 1901a].

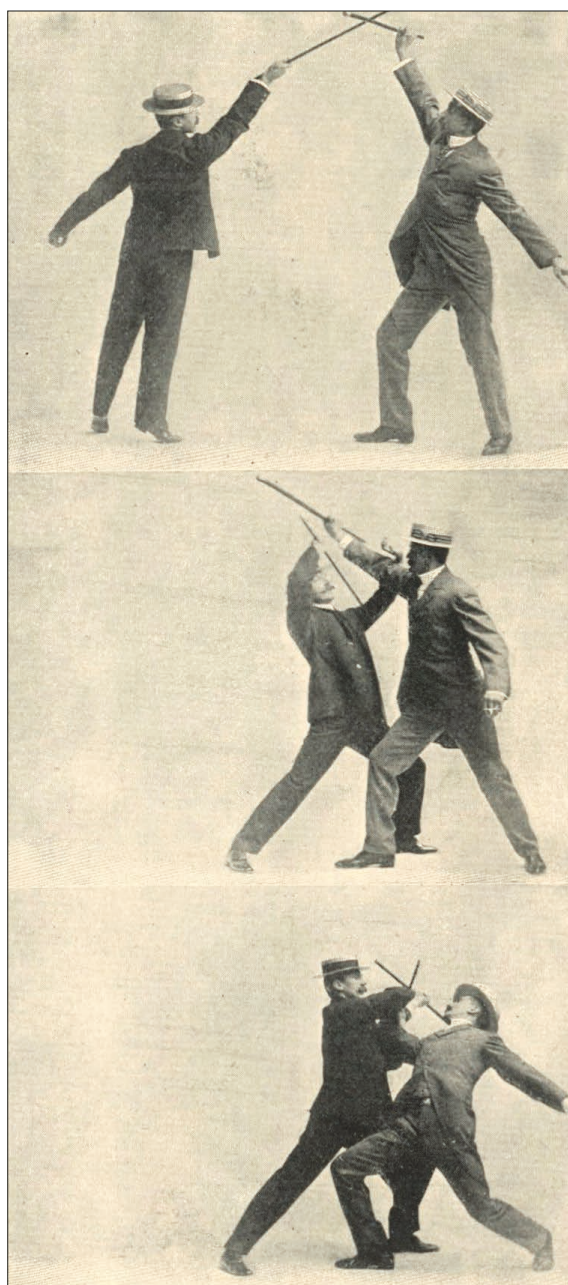


Figure 4:
Demonstration of ude-garami with a cane called 'Another way,
when armed with a light cane, to disarm and overpower an
opponent who carries a superior stick'
[Barton-Wright 1901b].

that Vigny and Barton-Wright, who trained intensively with jujutsu experts Tani and Uyenishi, started to hybridise use of the cane with jujutsu techniques? It would certainly be in keeping with the ethos of both Vigny and Barton-Wright who were driven to experiment and optimise their fighting systems. Indeed such an assertion is supported by an article written by a Captain F. C. Laing, who became a student of Barton-Wright's in 1901 whilst on furlough from the Bengal Infantry [Laing 1903]. In his article, Laing describes some basic cane fighting defences, and alludes to a future planned article where he would describe walking stick techniques combined with the falls and grips of jujutsu [Laing 1903].

By 1903, Barton-Wright's club had closed and he seems to have stepped back from practising martial arts as the popularity of jujutsu took off, with Tani and Uyenishi establishing their own dojos [Brough 2020]. The reasons for the closure of the Bartitsu Club are not clear, though we know that Barton-Wright and Tani were involved in a major row which may have precipitated Tani leaving [Bowen 2011: 134]. Barton-Wright was also reported to pay his Japanese instructors poorly [Bowen 2011: 136] and they realised they could earn more through the more effective promotion of William Bankier [Brough 2020]. Former student Percy Longhurst also suggested that the enrolment and tuition fees at the Bartitsu club were too high [Wolf 2005: 82]. For these reasons, and perhaps also because the popularity of jujutsu rapidly consigned bartitsu into the background, Barton-Wright pursued a fairly unsuccessful new career in electrotherapy [Wolf 2005: 63]. Vigny established his own club in London in 1903 where he continued to teach and give demonstrations until 1912 when he returned to Geneva to establish a self-defence academy [Wolf 2005]. In a 1904 portrait of Vigny in *Health and Strength*, the author, a certain J. St. A. Jewell, describes Vigny giving demonstrations with his wife, Marguerite Vigny, also known as Miss Sanderson [Wolf 2005]. An illustrated article published in *The Royal Magazine* in 1903 shows Marguerite Vigny demonstrating a number of self-defence techniques using an umbrella (Figure 5) [Fryers 1903]. The premise of the article is that a young hooligan is going to attack a woman as she leaves a house on Berners Street. Unfortunately for the hooligan, the house is number 18 Berners Street, Pierre Vigny's residence, and this woman is one of his best students. Similar defences with an umbrella feature in an article in the *Daily Express* in 1908, where a woman demonstrates a number of take-downs and strikes [Daily Express, 2 Sept. 1908: 7].

In *Jiu-jitsu and Other Methods of Self-defence* first published in 1906, author Percy Longhurst includes several illustrated examples of self-defence using a walking stick and an umbrella [Longhurst c1930]. Making specific reference to Vigny's system Longhurst states:

It is impossible to convey on paper any idea of the marvellous system of strokes and parries this master has evolved. Against one skilled in his system half a dozen assailants would be powerless, so effective is the use he teaches of an ordinary thick Malacca cane. Standing on guard with the feet in a line, he grasps his stick with a hand at either end, his arms being held above his head. Whether the blow will come from the right or left depends altogether on the attack he intends. The side of the head, elbow, throat, and knee are the usual points of attack, though perhaps his most effective stroke is a terrible upward slash at the inside of the legs.

[Longhurst c1930: 105]

Vigny's method of cane fighting would later appear in H.G. Lang's 1923 publication *The 'Walking stick' Method of Self-defence* [Lang 1923]. Lang, an officer in the Indian police, received recognition for his training of police officers and boy scouts in the walking stick method of self-defence in India [Lang 1923]. It was in 1920-1921 that Lang learned the Vigny method of stick fighting from Percy Rolt at his gymnasium in Brighton. Rolt had been a student at the Bartitsu Club in London [Wolf 2017]. In 1926 William Fairbairn, then of the Shanghai Municipal Police and later a military combatives instructor, published a book on self-defence called *Defendu* that contains a chapter on strikes, holds, and strangles, using a walking stick [Fairbairn 1926]. Like Vigny, Fairbairn describes the best class of stick as a Malacca cane [Fairbairn 1926].

There is little written evidence that the Japanese jujutsu instructors who passed through Barton-Wright's Bartitsu Club continued to teach the walking-stick as a method of self-defence though it is possible that they will have practised it at the Bartitsu Club. What seems clear however is that self-defence using a walking-stick persisted within the jujutsu clubs of the U.K. In the years either side of the World Wars it may be that walking-stick techniques were directly passed down from the first generation of instructors, or perhaps newer instructors picked it up from the literature published by Barton-Wright, Laing, Longhurst, Fairbairn, and Lang, and developed it further. In *Get Tough* by Fairbairn, a book on hand-to-hand combat taught to British and American commandos during WWII, a section titled 'Miscellaneous Advice' contains several ways of using a cane [Fairbairn 1942a]. Fairbairn also wrote a book called *Self Defence for Women and Girls*, in which he presents a sequence of six self-defence moves using an umbrella called the 'umbrella drill' which is followed by a description of the practical application of the moves [Fairbairn 1942b]. In 1942, American martial artist Charles Yerkow included a section on Vigny's method of walking stick defences in his book *Modern Judo: The Complete Jujitsu Library* and makes reference to its use by the Indian police suggesting he may have learned Vigny's methods from Lang's 1923 text [Yerkow 1943: 449].



Figure 5:
Defence shown as 'thrusting the point of her umbrella into his neck as he rushes at her', from Lady Versus Hooligan [Fryers 1903]

After WWII walking-stick defences continued to be practised within the jujutsu dojos of the U.K. For example, Liverpool based jujutsu teacher Eric Marshall started jujutsu in 1965 with local instructor Bert Roberts who taught him walking stick techniques [Keegan 2019: 126]. Roberts had been a student of Liverpool jujutsu teacher Gerald Skyner, who had been teaching since 1928 [Keegan 2019]. Eric Marshall incorporated the walking stick into his curriculum and in the 1970s performed demonstrations as part of the British Jujitsu Association team [Keegan 2019: 126] (Figure 6).

Furthermore, in this post-war period there was an explosion in interest in martial arts in the West. Many British martial artists now sought to broaden their martial experience by travelling to Japan and learning from Koryu Schools. For example, in the 1960s British martial artist Quintin Chambers travelled to Japan, where, amongst other experiences, trained with Masaaki Hatsumi learning Kukishin Ryu [Keegan 2019: 111]. In 1971, Chambers and Hatsumi published the English language book *Stick Fighting* [Chambers and Hatsumi 1981]. The techniques demonstrated in this book belong to the Kukishin Ryu and focus on the use of the hanbo, a stick that is typically 2 feet and 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, or the length of a walking stick [Chambers and Hatsumi 1981]. Experimentation and cross fertilisation of these stick fighting techniques (and similar to other styles such as the cane fighting of Korean martial art hapkido which was appearing in British martial arts culture (e.g. [Plumb 1990]), likely led to an expanded repertoire of walking stick techniques in U.K. dojos. There may even have been an influence of popular culture in that the character John Steed of the 1960s TV series *The Avengers* frequently used an umbrella to defend himself. The inspiration for the use of the umbrella in *The Avengers* could have come from the cane techniques demonstrated by William Fairbairn during WWII [Wolf 2016].

In the immediate years of the new millennium, the work of Barton-Wright, and other early pioneers, were rediscovered by martial arts enthusiasts, with these discoveries leading to the formation of the Bartitsu Society [Wolf 2021]. Members of the Bartitsu Society, such as Tony Wolf, started giving demonstrations and seminars on bartitsu, including the Vigny method of cane fighting (Figure 7) thus stimulating a rebirth of Barton-Wright's and Vigny's teachings and philosophy [Bowman 2021].



Figure 6:
Liverpool jujutsu instructor Eric Marshall
teaching walking stick techniques in 2020



Figure 7:
Tony Wolf of the Bartitsu Society delivering a
bartitsu seminar in Banff, Canada, 2006.

SUMMARY

Domaneschi conducted an ethnographic study of an Italian Wushu Kung Fu association with the aim of investigating in depth the relationship between habitus and materials [Domaneschi 2018]. Such a study of the walking stick in jujutsu is complicated. The walking stick or cane, as was practised as a weapon in Victorian England, is culturally European. The cultural features of a Japanese martial art do not easily apply. The cross fertilisation described above with Japanese influences leads to a hybrid of Eastern and Western influences, which is perhaps best described as an aspect of British (or European/Western) jujutsu which originated at the beginning of the twentieth century in London. Primarily for use as a walking aid, or as a fashion accessory in the Victorian and Edwardian eras of Great Britain, the walking stick (and umbrella) have thus found an additional use as a weapon. Starting with the Irish blackthorn where the techniques of defence were strikes familiar to the use of a sword. The Malacca cane of the Vigny system assimilated by bartitsu led to the experimentation with jujutsu and the cane.

Post WWII a further expansion of the cane-fighting repertoire was observed with an influence of Eastern weapons systems, and more recently, Barton-Wright's methods have undergone a renaissance. The walking stick and umbrella are some of the few potential self-defence tools that can be carried legally in the U.K. and that one may have readily to hand in the event of an attack. Further, the U.K. climate dictates that many people carry an umbrella, and in an ever-aging society, where the chances are that at some point in our lives we will require a walking stick, there may be real value in learning self-defence techniques with a walking stick earlier in life. This is in addition to the value obtained from preserving a cultural heritage. There are also examples of instances in recent times where the walking stick has been used for self-defence. Well into his seventies, and with a six-inch titanium plate in his neck, senior British jujutsu teacher Jimmy Pape was attacked in a case of road rage in a car park. Jimmy successfully defended himself with one strike of his walking stick [Brough 2019]. Showing that the advice of de Berenger and Allanson-Winn is as sound today as it was when first published, the stick used by Jimmy was an Irish blackthorn [Allanson-Winn 1890; de Berenger 1835].

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Tony Wolf of the Bartitsu Society for useful discussions, ideas, and feedback.

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Journal DOI

10.18573/ISSN.2057-5696

Issue DOI

10.18573/mas.i11

Accepted for publication 25 June 2021

Martial Arts Studies

Journal design by Hugh Griffiths

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