



Jesse Barnick (L) Brad Gibson (R) combating in Bartitsu on 18th Street, New York City, Aug. 18.

Reviving Bartitsu, the Way English Gentlemen Fight

BY AMELIA PANG
EPOCH TIMES STAFF

NEW YORK—They are lone warriors forging a path for the revitalization of a lost art of combat. Some travel from as far away as

Pennsylvania to New York City every month to train in Bartitsu. It is a 19th century form of martial arts that English gentlemen and ladies learned to defend themselves with walking sticks and umbrellas.

The second closest Bartitsu

society is in Chicago, while a few others are scattered in remote places such as New Zealand. Many believe it is worth the long distance travel.

"It's never going to be like the millions of people who practice karate," said Rachel Klingberg,

who founded the Bartitsu Club of New York City in August 2011. "But once I knew enough people who wanted to learn, I hired an instructor and brought him to New York."

It began as a modest group of dojo-less students, with varied martial arts experience, training in Central Park once a month.

But as winter threatened to disperse the group, The Society for Martial Arts Instruction took the group in and offered them a dojo.

Today, New York's Bartitsu club has taught around 150 students, with generally 12 students per class. Most just try one class, while experienced martial artists who have a penchant for science and Sherlock Holmes fall in love with this charming form of combat.

The classes incorporate Neo-Bartitsu, which explores ways to apply traditional Bartitsu methods of fighting with modern everyday tools such as keys, water bottles and cellphones.

"It's definitely still applicable to modern self defense, except for the walking stick," Klingberg said.

"Certainly joint locking and [certain methods of] kicking are very applicable, especially for women because it doesn't require strength," she said.

Bartitsu is, above all, the art of the small outwitting the strong. "Neo-Bartitsu preserves the idea that if an object is in your hand it can be used for self defense," Klingberg said.

"Although cellphones are not designed for striking, you can use its corners to apply a lot of pressure. The same can be done with any rigid object in your hand," said Mark Donnelly, an expert in armed combat who has researched Bartitsu for years.

"But the nature of threats are different today, we are not cast in same light as Victorian gentlemen. The reason we are attacked now may be entirely different from why a Victorian gentlemen would be attacked," he added.

Neo-Bartitsu is subjective; there's no documentation. Teachers and students look at black and white photographs to surmise how the late founder would teach it today with



Jesse Barnick (L) and Rachel Klingberg (R) combating in Bartitsu on 18th Street, New York City, Aug. 18.

modern objects.

That's where physics and bio-mechanics come in.

"I'm much more interested in the science than the art. I've found that Bartitsu just has loads of it," said Jesse Barnick, the elected Bartitsu instructor for the New York club.

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Rachel Klingberg, founder of Bartitsu Club of New York City

After each class the students and teachers discuss questions, theories, and ideas such as how using force from a particular part of one's body adds more power to a strike.

"It's a little more scientific than my usual approach to martial arts. I come from Tae Kwon Doe and Aikido," said Joseph Rush, 19, a first-time Bartitsu student who attended a

session on Aug 18.

"I will absolutely be coming to more classes," Rush said. "The teacher is really awesome."

Barnick has studied martial arts since 1986, and has been teaching since 1996. He is a contract IT specialist living in New Jersey, who also teaches martial arts privately. His students include police officers and ex-military members.

He began studying Bartitsu in 2011, when he met Klingberg in another martial arts class. They were both researching the history and methods of Bartitsu.

Sherlock Holmes and Bartitsu

When walking canes went out of fashion so did Bartitsu. And it would have remained forgotten if it weren't for a spelling error Arthur Conan Doyle made in one of his Sherlock Holmes stories.

Some believe that when Arthur Conan Doyle was pressured by monetary gains to bring back Sherlock Holmes from the dead, he flipped through a copy of The Strand, the British magazine where his series was published, and read an article about Bartitsu. But he misspelled it as "baritsu" in his story.

"He dropped a 't'. And it's funny because that missing 't' is probably the only reason why Bartitsu is remembered today," Klingberg said. "People read the Sherlock Holmes stories and were determined to find out what it is."

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