

**Phoebe Roberts and Emily Diana Watts: Edwardian women's judo pioneers.**

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**Abstract**

This paper considers two early pioneers of women's judo in Great Britain; Phoebe Laughton-Parry (Roberts) and Emily Diana Watts. The emerging role of women in sport at the turn of the twentieth century in Great Britain has been seen to parallel the emerging role of women in politics and wider society. The efforts of Roberts and Watts laid the foundations for the role of *ju-jitsu* in the women's suffrage movements, leading to the term 'suffrajitsu'.

The Women's Social and Political Union was formed in 1903 by Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst. Focussing on the period 1903 – 1908 when Roberts and Watts played an important role in popularising *ju-jitsu* and judo in London, the paper presents original research based on archival documents.

The popularity of Japanese wrestling in the UK can be attributed in part to the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japan war.

By around 1903 Phoebe Roberts and Emily Watts had joined the Golden Square School of Jujutsu, in Piccadilly, London run by Uyenishi Sadakazu, and Ohno Akitaro. Uyenishi, had been brought to the UK by Edward Barton-Wright, the founder of Bartitsu in 1900. Later Roberts trained at the Japanese School of Jujitsu, in Oxford Street, where she was taught by Tani Yukio, who had arrived in England in 1899.

Tani performed extensively alongside Uyenishi in theatres such as the Tivoli. By 1902 he split with Barton Wright and was promoted in the music halls by William Bankier.

The paper chronicles and analyses the role of these two women in the early introduction, and popularisation of *ju-jitsu* and judo in the West.

## **Introduction**

The emerging role of women in sport in the early part of the twentieth century in Great Britain has been seen to parallel the evolving role of women in politics and wider society, epitomised by the women's suffrage movements (Crawford, 2006; Godfrey, 2012; Williams, 2014). A number of authors have considered the emergent role of women in sport at this time (Fields, 2016; van Ingen, 2016; Williams, 2014), and others have looked specifically early pioneers in judo (Mike Callan & Spenn, 2009; M Callan & Spenn, 2016; Miarka, Marques, & Franchini, 2011). The term "suffrajitsu" has been used by authors in relation to the role of jiu-jitsu, judo and Japanese martial arts in the women's suffrage movement (Godfrey, 2012; Wolf, 2015).

This paper considers two early pioneers of women's judo in Great Britain; Phoebe Laughton-Parry (Roberts) and Emily Diana Watts.

Emily Ashton was born around 1867. Born into a wealthy family in England, she studied dance from a young age. She married Roger Watts on 11 October 1902 in Warwick.

Phoebe Parry, was born on 22 October 1887 in Bedwelty, Monmouthshire. Her parents were Thomas and Sarah Jane Parry of Pentwyn Farm in Blaina, Monmouthshire. By the age of three she was the youngest of five children. Soon she was adopted by Mrs Roberts, the wife of a manufacturing chemist in London, P. Roberts.

The Women's Social and Political Union was formed in 1903 by Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst.

By around 1903 Phoebe Roberts and Emily Watts had joined the Golden Square School of Jujutsu, in Piccadilly, London run by Uyenishi Sadakazu (aka Raku), and Ohno Akitaro, who from April 1905 travelled between the USA, Cuba, Europe and the UK. Uyenishi, born in Osaka in 1880, had been brought to the UK by Edward Barton-Wright, the founder of Bartitsu in 1900. In 1899, Barton-Wright had introduced jujutsu to William Garrud and his wife Edith, and in 1904 they too became students of Uyenishi in Golden Square.

Writing in The Daily Mirror 'Self-Defence Made Easy', in December 1903, Evelyn Sharp recommends that women take the special ladies classes offered by Uyenishi in Golden Square. The newly appointed lady instructor is Miss Roberts.

The April 11<sup>th</sup> 1904 issue of the Gloucestershire Echo reports ladies studying jujitsu in a basement in Golden Square under the auspices of S. K. Uyenishi ("The Miscellany," 1904). Explaining that he is teaching English Ladies, Uyenishi says

“Balance and quickness will always win, and women are always quick. When a great storm sweeps through the forest the heavy and sturdy trees suffer most. The smaller plants possessing plenty of elasticity can withstand the storm because they offer the least resistance to the opposing force. It is so with Ju-jitsu. It is the only system in the world which could enable an ordinary woman to defeat a strong man.”

Another Japanese jujitsu expert brought to the UK by Barton-Wright was the young Tani Yukio, who arrived in September 1899 (Hashimoto, 2011) with his elder brother. Tani performed alongside Uyenishi in theatres such as the Tivoli. From 1902 he split with Barton Wright and was promoted in the music halls by William Bankier. By 1904 Tani was also teaching at the Golden Square School.

Other establishments in London at that time were the Japanese School of Jujitsu, at 305 Oxford Street, taught by Tani and Miyake, Eida and Kanaya, and the Anglo-Japanese Institute of Self-

Defence, 3 Vernon Place, Bloomsbury Square. In 1905 the Anglo-Japanese Institute was also taught by Uyenishi. (Sandow July 6 1905)

Popularity of Japanese wrestling in the UK can be attributed in part to the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japan war. Reported in The Times in May 1904 as 'applying the principles of ju-jitsu to the art of war' ("The War in the Far East," 1904). This coincided with a damning report into the nations' health and fitness and preparedness for war (Searle, 1971).

In December 1904 both Tani and Uyenishi gave a demonstration at Caxton Hall along with Mrs Watts and Miss Roberts ("Display of Ju-jitsu," 1904). Also mentioned are other Japanese, Messers Eida, Kanaya and Miyake. Miyake is likely Miyake Taro.

April 1905, Professor Uyenishi, demonstrated at the annual gathering of the public schools at Aldershot. The wrestling display was given after the boxing championships at the Gymnasium, Queen's Avenue. One of the professor's lady pupils from London more than once triumphantly floored her male opponent. (Wolf, 2016a)

An indication of the popularity and support in high social circles was the invitation for Phoebe Roberts to attend the Garden Party given by the Japan Society at The Royal Botanic Gardens, Regents Park in June 1905. The party was held in honour of Prince & Princess Arisugawa, who were visiting Europe as representatives of the Emperor Meiji. In the evening they attended a banquet at Buckingham Palace. Miss Roberts performed as part of a Japanese display of ju-jitsu, in a marquee. She was described as;

“... a light, slim girl of some sixteen or seventeen years, who was able to throw heavy male opponents with the utmost ease.” ("Our Japanese Guests," 1905)

The Penny Illustrated Paper carries a photograph of Miss Roberts and mention of her performing at the Garden Party ("Miss Roberts," 1905).

Sandow's Magazine run by Eugene Sandow carried a number of articles promoting ju-jitsu for women. The August 10<sup>th</sup> issue quotes Mrs Roger Watts as claiming she is the only woman teacher of Ju-jitsu ("Our Ladies' Pages," 1905). Responding in the September 7<sup>th</sup> issue, Prof Vernon Smith disputes her claim, stating that a Miss Williams is teaching at the Anglo-Japanese Institute. He is also critical of her earlier article suggesting that by this time there had been a difference of opinion between Mrs Watts and Professor Uyenishi (Smith, 1905).

The claims continue as the following week the same Sandow's Magazine states;

"A pretty little Welsh girl, Miss Roberts, of Blaina, Monmouthshire, has the distinction of being the youngest professor of Jiu-jitsu in the western world." ("Jiu-Jitsu Notes," 1905)

It explained that she had moved from Golden Square to Oxford Street to work with Tani. One of the principals at Oxford Street states;

"Society women in particular, are enthusiastic about the new science, which makes for grace as well as all-round symmetrical development." ("Jiu-Jitsu Notes," 1905)

1905 November 16<sup>th</sup> Sandow's Magazine tells of another demonstration, this time at the Marlborough Hall, Regent Street, featuring Messrs Kanaya, Tani, Maiyake, Huji, Eida and Miss Roberts, who is described as "undoubtedly a very fine exponent of the art" (Lancaster, 1905).

Health and Strength Magazine also carried a number of features about ju-jitsu. In the May 1905 issue the article 'The Old-New Science of Ju-Jitsu', was illustrated with photographs of Phoebe Roberts ("The Old-New Science of Ju-Jitsu," 1905). An advertisement for Japanese School of Ju-jitsu in Oxford Street, illustrating Phoebe Roberts, states; 'There is a separate school for ladies'.

Ladies Realm Magazine also carried an article 'Ju jitsu for Ladies' by Annesley Kenealy. (Kenealy, 2014) Jujitsu for ladies was not only popular in London, in Cambridge, both Newnham College & Girton College announced that jujutsu was to be taught to the female students ("Ju-Jitsu," 1905).

It was fashionable for ladies in London to host “jujitsu parties”. Instructors such as Yukio Tani would be hired to offer basic instruction. Invitation cards were distributed with the word “wrestling” discreetly printed in one corner. (Wolf, 2016b)

In 1906 Koizumi Gunji arrived in the UK in North Wales and made his way to London via Liverpool. He was offered employment as instructor in Ju-Jitsu on 7 September 1906, by Professor W. H. Garrud, who had taken over as the manager at the Golden Square School from Uyenishi a few weeks earlier. It was through meeting Ohno Akitaro there that Koizumi first became acquainted with Kodokan judo.

Phoebe Roberts appeared in the *Sporting Life* in 1906, along with Miyake and Mr Robday, at the Japanese School of Ju-jitsu in Oxford Street. Meanwhile Emily Watts was teaching a class of 15 boys at the Prince’s Skating Rink in Knightsbridge (Godfrey, 2012).

As well as teaching her own classes, Emily Watts also published a book, ‘The Fine Art of Jujitsu’ (Watts, 1906). At the same time, Uyenishi published ‘The text book of ju-jitsu as practised in Japan’ (Uyenishi, 1906), whilst Miyake and Tani published ‘The game of ju-jitsu for the use of schools and colleges’ (Miyake & Tani, 1906).

The musical ‘The New Aladdin’, ran at the Gaiety Theatre, London, from 29 September 1906 to 27 April 1907. Starring French actress Gaby Deslys and S.K. Eida it featured the Ju-Jitsu Waltz. Eida at that time was teaching alongside Tani and Miyake in Oxford Street.

Phoebe Roberts had met another Japanese, Hirano Juso at the Japanese School of Ju-jitsu. They were married in Marylebone, London, in March 1907.

Koizumi continued on his travels to America in May 1907, to seek employment in the new electrical industry. He was not to return to the UK until 1910.

That year at the Hygiene Congress at London University there was a display of ju-jitsu by Mrs Roger Watts and Miss Lauder Brunton (Alice). Reported in the *Dominion Newspaper* 11th December 1907

("Ju Jitsu for Women," 1907). Sir Lauder Brunton, Alice's father had written the foreword for the book "The Fine Art of Ju-Jitsu" (Watts, 1906). Alice also wrote an article 'Jujitsu by Sir L Bruntons daughter' for Apollo Magazine.

On April 8<sup>th</sup> 1908, Matsudaira Tsuneo gave an important lecture at the Japan Society, London, entitled 'Sports and Physical Training in Modern Japan'. During which he extolled the virtues of ju-jitsu, yet was not positive about the efforts of the female pioneers.

"The question may arise, whether in Japan either Judo or Jujitsu has become popular with the young ladies. My answer is in the negative. Many attempts seem to have been made to persuade ladies to practise it as their physical training, even modifying the form of Judo, but so far they have not been successful, except in a very few instances." (Matsudaira, 1908)

Husband and wife, Phoebe Roberts and Hirano Juso performed a Ju jitsu display at the Palace Theatre Manchester in 1908. They did demonstrations along with Tani and Miyake. Phoebe was billed as 'Miss Roberts, Lady Champion Ju-jitsu Wrestler of the World'.

Maeda Mitsuyo had arrived in London in February 1907, to meet up with Ono, who was working for music hall impresario William Bankier, known as Apollo. Maeda then travelled to Spain in June 1908, accompanied by Fujisake, Ono, Hirano and Roberts. October 1908, Uyenishi was in Barcelona, with Miyake, and along with Maeda and colleagues, offered demonstrations of Ju-jitsu between June and August.

On July 31<sup>st</sup>, Miss Roberts performed a show in Barcelona, teaching women to defend themselves against aggression. Following that Juso (Yuzo) Hirano fought 'as a present to his son' (Bowen, 2011). This suggests that by July 1908, Phoebe Hirano (nee Roberts) had had a son.

In 1909 Hirano Juso founded a Ju-jitsu Academy in Barcelona, before moving to Portugal with his wife.

When Uyenishi left the UK in 1908, William Garrud had already taken over as the owner and manager of the Golden Square School and Edith Garrud became the instructor of the women's and children's classes. The Garruds popularised jujutsu by performing numerous exhibitions throughout London and by writing articles for magazines. Beginning in 1908, Edith also taught classes open only to members of the Suffrage movement. From 1911, these classes were based at the Palladium Academy, a dance school in Argyll Street. Edith Garrud was to go on to play a significant role in the women's suffrage movement.

Marriage of Emily and Roger Watts was annulled in 1908. The divorce court found that the marriage had not been consummated.

In 1914 Emily Watts produced her second book using her middle name, Diana, "The Renaissance of the Greek Ideal", which presented an original system of exercises inspired by ancient Greek statues and dance, and based on judo training exercises. On the 23 February 1914, Diana Watts sailed on the SS Lusitania for New York from Liverpool, she listed her residence as London.

Hirano died off a beach in Portugal in 1915, his body never found. Phoebe Roberts, as Phoebe Laughton-Parry went on to marry Don Carlos de Castro Henriques in 1916.



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