

A mighty tough Dame

Dame Enid was a Deputy Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Health, probably no taller than 5' 2" and weighing perhaps 8 stone. One heard rumours about her. She was unmarried; she was a jujitsu expert, a black belt holder, a 'Dan', a fearsome lady. I for one was terrified of her and later on when I knew her better I found dozens of others, even MPs, who shared my terror.

One day I found the opportunity to talk to her. I asked her about her martial arts prowess and whether she had ever had cause to use it in self-defence. She thought for a minute or two and said yes, she had, and it had turned out to be something of a damp squib. She had spent a long late day at the office and was walking to her London flat at a time of night when no woman but she would have dared to do alone, and a man dashed at her and tried to grab her handbag. She held on to the bag and let the man's impetus bring his face close to hers. She growled at him "go away you stupid man" – and he went, empty-handed and, if he was wise, thankful to get away.

If Dame Enid had been my Army Colonel I would have followed her into any battle.