60th Anniversary of Shukokai Karate

by Adam Neill

On Sunday 28th June 2009 Karate practitioners from around the globe met in the city of Kobe, Japan to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Shukokai Karate-do. From Argentina to Australia, Great Britain to India representatives from over 20 countries made great efforts to fly to Japan to show their appreciation to the head of the Shito-Ryu Shukokai Karate-do association, Hiroshi Yamada Sensei (9th Dan), for the enduring success of Shukokai Karate.

The occasion involved wonderful celebrations, tremendous Karate training seminars and the opportunity to meet with old friends and to make new ones. A world championship tournament was also organised with hundreds of talented competitors competing in kata and kumite categories.

The group was fortunate to not only train in mainland Japan but were also given the honour of being invited to train on the island of Okinawa (the birthplace of karate) by five masters of Karate. Here the group spent a week of intensive karate training that involved use of traditional Okinawan weapons (Kobudo).

Week 1: Mainland Japan: Superb Training Seminars, Championship Tournament and Anniversary Celebrations

24th June
Arrival in Japan

After spending more than twelve hours in the air, our flight arrived at Osaka Kansai airport on the morning of Wednesday 24th June.

Once we had collected our baggage, we commuted to Amagasaki train station, a short walk from our hotel in Kobe.

The day was then spent exploring Kobe city and acclimatising to the hot, humid Kobe weather (Japan's famous humidity that follows its 'rainy season' or *tsuyu*), before being joined by representatives from the USA and Argentina at dinner in the evening.

It was great to be reunited with old friends and many of us couldn't resist exchanging knowledge of a few techniques in the international bar that night!

25th June
Kata Training at Honbu Dojo

On the following day, many of us travelled to Yamada Sensei's head dojo (*honbu dojo)* in Hyogo prefecture, Amagasaki. There we greeted our distinguished teacher and were given permission to train at the evening kata class led by a number of Yamada Sensei's senior students.

Later that day, we travelled en masse to the honbu dojo and changed into our gis. For many of us this was an experience in itself as the humidity of that day meant many of us were sweating profusely before we had even stepped onto the training mats!

We all enjoyed a superb kata training session which focused on the Nipaipo kata. It was wonderful to be training at the head dojo and we were all amazed by the beauty of its décor and the quality of instruction provided to us by the senior students.

The session ended with the floor being cleaned in the traditional manner using wooden brushes (a process called *souji* in Japanese).



Traditional sweeping of the mats after training (Souji)

27th June
Yamada Sensei Training Seminar

Assembling at St Thomas University in Amagasaki, karateka competing in the following day's tournament were instructed in the rules of the competition and the schedule for the day.

Yamada Sensei then led an excellent karate training seminar that focused on the Rohai kata, where the kata's movements and practical application (*bunkai*) were both demonstrated.

28th June *Shito-Ryu Shukokai World Cup*



Adele Gill achieves Gold in Women's Kumite

Competitors from all over the world gathered in Amagasaki for the Shito-Ryu Shukokai World Cup.

Despite very high standards shown by their fellow competitors the British squad competed with great spirit and aptitude with **Adele Gill achieving 1st place** in Women's kumite.

In the evening, all kareteka gathered for the 60th Anniversary Shukokai Karatedo celebrations at Amagasaki where sentiments of gratitude were given to Sensei Yamada for the enduring success of the Shito-Ryu Shukokai style.

A wonderful banquet of Japanese food and drink was provided and presents exchanged amongst us all. We were also treated to a night of superb entertainment including traditional Japanese *Taiko* drummers and singers - as well as one or two impromptu comedy performances from Jersey representatives!

29th June *Ashiya University Training*

With the tournament having come to an end, today was a chance to centre ourselves once again, to reflect on the values of karatedo and the pillars of respect and discipline that it is built upon.

An inspiring karate training session at Ashiya University helped us to do this perfectly, taught by three of our finest teachers – Yamada Sensei, Kamohara Sensei and Ohshita Sensei.

As well as tuition in practical karate technique, the seminar also highlighted the importance of showing humility and respect when training or competing with other karateka, reminding us all of the need to bow deeply, to avoid over-celebrating when victorious and to be dignified in times of defeat.

The session closed with an extraordinary demonstration of acupuncture taught by Yamada Sensei to stress the importance of an awareness of energy flow (*ki*) when training. This fascinating display reminded us that deep knowledge of karate could be used for healing as well as self-defence (Yamada Sensei is both a skilled bone setter and healer as well as being a master karateka).

After a buffet lunch kindly organised by Ashiya University, we made our way to the University's lecture theatre to participate in the 1st International Budo Symposium. Enlightening talks with given concerning Budo and Bushido and the event was attended by Masters of various martial arts including Kendo, Judo and of course Karatedo.

"...a chance to reflect on the values of Karatedo"

30th June *Trip to Kyoto*

As a farewell sentiment to close the 60th anniversary celebrations of Shukokai, Ohshita Sensei kindly organised a trip to the beautiful city of Kyoto.

We were treated to sightseeing and a boat trip on Kyoto's famous Kamo River. The Kamo River flows through the city of Kyoto from north to south and is beloved as the embodiment of the spirit of Kyoto.

After the boat trip we stopped for an authentic Japanese lunch in a picturesque location.

The event was a poignant and memorable close to our time in mainland Japan.

"...a poignant and memorable close to our time in mainland Japan"

Week 2:
Training on the Japanese Island of Okinawa, the birthplace of Karatedo

1st July *Arrival in Okinawa*

After travelling to Osaka Kansai airport where our trip to mainland Japan had started a week ago, the British representatives took a two-hour flight to Naha, the capital city of the tropical island of Okinawa.

All of us were excited at the prospect of visiting the birthplace of karate and training with masters of traditional Okinawan karate and *kobudo* (traditional Okinawan weapons training that forms part of their karate syllabus).

A twenty-minute commute on the very efficient Okinawan monorail took us to the centre of Naha where our hotel was located.

Shortly after arriving at the hotel we were welcomed by Kenichi Yamashiro (9th Dan Kingai Ryu Kobudo, a kind and considerate man) and Ishiki Hidemasa Sensei (7th Dan Kingai Ryu Kobudo, a very humble and friendly man with a good sense of humour).

Both instructors were very welcoming and keen for us all to train with them.

Our first evening was spent exploring the vibrant city of Naha where we ate at a traditional Yakitori restaurant.



A symbol of Okinawa: Shuri Castle the famous palace of the Ryukyu Kingdom.

2nd July *Traditional Okinawan Kobudo Training*

Our first day of martial arts training took place at an impressive traditional dojo located in Naha city.

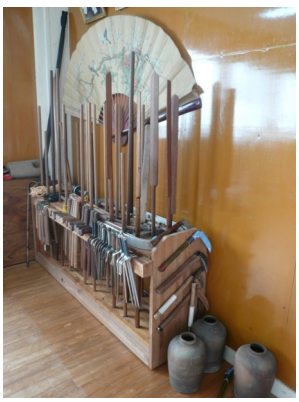
Upon arrival at 10am, we were formally introduced to Maeshiro Shei Sensei (10th Dan Kanan Ryu Karatedo Kobudo) who was 77 years of age and a humble man with a real presence.

We were also introduced to Shimabukuru Tsuneo Sensei (9th Dan Kanan Ryu Karatedo Kobudo) who was 67 years of age, and a former three times All Japan Karate Champion. Shimabukuru Sensei was a quiet man with a very pleasant manner who was an exceptional martial artist and teacher.

After a fascinating display of kobudo and kata from their school of Okinawan karate, we were treated to a display of self defence using an ordinary walking cane and taught the kata relating to the walking cane using a *jo* (a wooden staff measuring just over 4 ft long). The session was a real eye-opener and we all felt energised and inspired by our tremendous teachers.

With the session formally brought to a close, our gracious hosts took us to a hotel where, incredibly, we were gifted a sumptuous banquet of traditional Okinawan food and drink. It was a kind, thoughtful gesture and testament to the welcoming, generous nature of Okinawan people.

"we all felt energised and inspired by our tremendous teachers"







Left: A selection of Okinawan weapons and training equipment.

Centre: **Maeshiro Shei Sensei** ***using the jo.***

Right: Our Group with the kobudo Instructors.

3rd July *Kata Training with Sakamoto Sensei*



The class including Sakamoto Sensei and his students

Our next day of training took place at Shuri University of Arts located near the world-famous Shuri castle with Tsuguo Sakamoto Sensei (8th Dan, Ruie Ryu, former three times World Karate Kata Champion).

Upon our arrival we were greeted by Sakamoto Sensei and a number of his most talented students. We were then treated to an awe-inspiring kata demonstration by the current World Champion Ladies Kata Team that perfectly demonstrated the speed, power and focus of Sakamoto Sensei's style of karate. It was also fascinating to see some of Sakamoto Sensei's teaching methods that particularly tested his students' form, speed and balance whilst they progressed from one kata movement to the next.

Sakamoto Sensei then allowed us to join a kata class with his students in which we trained in the Heiku kata.

The session closed with an excellent performance of Suparimpei by the current All Okinawan High School Champion.

4th July *Traditional Okinawan Sai Training*



The Budokan Centre

Our next two days of training took place at the magnificent Budokan Centre, a purpose-built centre dedicated to martial arts training which was commissioned by the Okinawan Government.

On arrival we were reunited with our instructors, Kenichi Yamashiro (9th Dan Kingai Ryu Kobudo) and Ishiki Hidemasa Sensei (7th Dan Kingai Ryu Kobudo) and issued with *sai* (a pair of pointed, dagger-shaped truncheons, each with two curved prongs - *yoku*- projecting from the handle) and *bo* (similar to a *jo* but six ft long, therefore roughly two ft longer than the *jo*).

Our first lesson began with being taught the very basics of sai, such as the best way to hold them and how to use the weapons for striking and the trapping and damaging of other weapons such as the Japanese sword (*katana).*

We were then taught the first sai kata which many of us found challenging but was made to look easy by our expert teachers.

The session was enjoyed by all and we were left feeling excited at the prospect of learning more on the following day.

Our evening was spent at a superb *sushi* bar located in the heart of Naha city.

5th July *Traditional Okinawan Bo Training*



The class with Yamashiro Sensei and Hidemasa Sensei

Our final day of training in Okinawa was an enjoyable end to a fantastic trip.

Arriving again at the Budokan Centre we greeted Yamashiro Sensei and Hidemasa Sensei and then lined up in readiness for the *bo* training session.

The key basics of the bo were shown to us all with the focus of the session being directed towards a challenging bo kata.

This session on the bo, and the previous day's training on sai left us all with a hunger to learn more about these remarkable weapons and to continue to practice the basics and kata that we were taught.

Our three days of traditional Okinawan kobudo training ended with a fun and entertaining display of Okinawan dance and combat movements performed by two young students. We then offered our thanks to Yamashiro Sensei and Hidemasa Sensei for their excellent teachings.

Our final evening at a *Tepenyaki* restaurant in Okinawa was a chance to reflect on the training that we had been part of in mainland Japan and Okinawa, the success we had enjoyed at competition and the friends that we had made during our fortnight away. Reluctantly, we prepared for our journey back to the UK hopefully to return once again to mainland Japan and Okinawa in the near future.

Further Photographs



Above: Inside the Honbu Dojo, Amigasaki, Japan.

Below: Outside Shuri Castle, Okinawa.



Above: A number of the British representatives preparing to join the 60th Anniversary of Shukokai celebrations in Amigasaki, Japan.

Below: The banquet provided by Maeshiro Shei Sensei and Shimabukuru Tsuneo Sensei.







Above: The entrance to Shuri Castle, Okinawa.



Right: Maeshiro Shei Sensei (1oth Dan) demonstrates the strength of Sanchin stance performed by Shimabukuru Tsuneo Sensei (9th Dan), Naha, Okinawa.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to Hanshi Haruyoshi Yamada (9th Dan President of Shito-Ryu Shukokai Union) for his continued leadership and development of Shito-Ryu Shukokai Karatedo.

We are also indebted to all the instructors who generously gave up their time to teach us in mainland Japan and Okinawa.

A special thanks to Mr. Tsutomu Kamohara (8th Dan Hanshi) for graciously securing invitations that allowed us to train with the Okinawan Masters.