



Trip to Athens

My first trip to Athens couldn't have been for a better reason – to celebrate the contribution that Mr Smith made to aikido in Greece over the past 15 years. To recognise this, George Koliopoulos (the head of the Hellenic Aikido Association in Greece) had invited Gordon Jones and Philip Smith to take the annual spring seminar over the weekend of the 5th/6th May, and had asked Mrs Smith to come along as well. As I was keen to see the sights as well as practice aikido, myself and Guy, along with Phil Winters and Dave Lenton, travelled out a few days early. The first thing I discovered, after Babis had kindly dropped us off at our hotel on Thursday afternoon, was that all roads in Athens lead to the cafes in Victoria Square, which is close to the dojo. I gathered that many UKA aikidoka have spent time chatting over drinks into the early hours of the morning, at these cafes. So off we headed for coffee/beer before going on to the dojo to say hello to George and his students. For Phil and Dave it was time to meet old friends, but for myself and Guy it was our first time at the dojo and we were very impressed with the excellent layout, with attractive bamboo and wooden partitions dividing the area into tatami, changing rooms and showers, office, shoe rack and benches for spectators. The atmosphere in the dojo was



The course attendees

great with the students being keen, enthusiastic and friendly. That evening, practice was devoted to revision for students taking shodan and nidan over the weekend. This was followed by some tasty traditional Greek food at a nearby taverna in a pleasant boulevard.

Friday morning, after breakfast at the café, it was off on the metro for my first look at the Acropolis. Luckily for us, Friday tends to be a fairly quiet day up there and we were able to have a good look round the buildings and museum without having to queue. The glorious sunshine enhanced the atmosphere and we were pleased to wander round the markets in the old town later in the afternoon, with Dave pointing out the places that he used to go to with Mr and Mrs Smith. Of course we had to pay another visit to the Victoria Square café before practice that evening. I really enjoyed the

first class, taken by Petros who taught in a clear and easy to follow manner, emphasising the basics – it felt very much like one of Mr Smith's classes. The shodan gradings came next and I was glad to leap into a cold shower, then watch while Guy stayed on to take ukemi. I thought George really put the candidates through their paces and kept them going for a long time – 45 minutes covering just about everything I could think of and in a very hot dojo! I was pleased they all passed. After this it was time to meet Mrs Smith, Pat, Gordon and Philip who had arrived that evening, so back to Victoria Square we went.

On Saturday, Gordon and Philip were taking the classes, following which were the nidan gradings. The course was well attended with senior grades coming from all over Greece. They were obviously pleased to see Gordon again

Editor
Cath Davies

Publications
Ren Shin Kan Dojo,
227 Halesowen
Road,
Old Hill,
West Midlands,
B64 6JG

Email
Editor@
ukaonline.org.uk



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and to make their first acquaintance with Philip. George introduced all the UK visitors to the class and said that he felt that as long as Mrs Smith was sitting watching the class, everything was okay – I think that's how a lot of us felt! Gordon taught very dynamic techniques with the emphasis being on how to react in the first few seconds of an attack and also on how to be able to move seamlessly from one technique to another rather than getting stuck in one way of thinking. I got the impression that the senior grades really enjoyed being on the end of Gordon's techniques and trying to stay with him as he threw them round effortlessly. By prior request, Philip taught a class on kaitenage, showing very clearly how to execute it from different attacks.



After a short lunch break, I was pleased to sit with Mrs Smith and watch all the uke (including Guy again) getting thrown around with great enthusiasm by the candidates taking nidan. These were also long gradings and again I admired the fitness of the candidates being able to practice all morning in hot conditions, then go pretty much straight into their gradings. I expect they are reasonably acclimatised to the heat, but when I asked George how he copes in the dojo during the extreme heat of August he replied 'I



The Travellers, Mrs Smith & George

don't, I go off to my village and leave Petros to take the classes.' So that's one advantage of being the head of the organisation! That evening we went to a restaurant, owned by one of George's students, which is situated under the Acropolis with a fabulous view of all the buildings lit up at night – very atmospheric.

On Sunday, after Gordon and Philip had taken classes, we all sat round in a circle to pay tribute to Mr Smith. George said he would never forget how Mr Smith had helped the Greek aikikai to get recognition by Hombu. Jimmy from Lesbos remembered that when he had explained to Mr Smith that he was thinking of setting up his own dojo on the island of Lesbos, Mr Smith had been very positive and encouraging about it, which had helped Jimmy to get the inspiration he needed to go ahead. He also said that he felt that Mr Smith embodied the spiritual side of aikido as well as the martial. Gor-

don told the story, which I hadn't heard before, of how, when they had been trying to get recognition by Chiba when he first came over to Britain, Mr Smith had had to repeatedly ask to take his first kyu grading (along with another couple of senior students at the time) before Chiba had finally agreed. Gordon said he'd never seen such a hard grading before or since and he didn't know how they kept going. He said we all have it easy compared to what they went through in the early days to get aikido off the ground in this country. Philip said he was very grateful to his dad for allowing him to develop his own aikido rather than wanting him to be a Mr Smith 'clone'. Also for the way that he had been able to keep his father/son relationship separate from the teacher/student relationship. Some of the Greek students who had known Mr Smith a long time were too upset to be able to vocalise how they felt, but it didn't matter because the



atmosphere was so special, it felt like Mr Smith was right there with us.

The day was rounded off with another delicious meal at a traditional taverna in a suburb of Athens, then it was back to the café for a last few drinks all together. Monday morning some of us went up to the Acropolis while Gordon took the morning class, then Babis took Mrs Smith, Pat, Gordon and Philip for lunch at the coast before they headed off to the airport. That evening, Guy took the class at the dojo and was able to use some of his Greek in the instruction, which the students thought was great. We had one more day of wandering round some of the old sights of the city in the continuing glorious sun-

shine before travelling back on Wednesday. It was a wonderful weekend with the spirit of Mr Smith ever present with us and we are looking forward to our next visit to the Athens dojo.

Anne Milner
(Wa Shin Kan)



One night in Athens

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50 years in Aikido – Hayden Foster

Recently Mr Jones and I were both invited to Bisham Abbey to help to celebrate a very special anniversary in Aikido.

This was Mr Hayden Foster's 50th year in Aikido training, a milestone in any terms.

Mr Foster was one of the original students at the Hut dojo (where he still teaches) when Kenshiro Abbe introduced Aikido to the UK in around 1955. In 1957 Mr Foster, who was already practising Judo, began his Aikido study. Three years later Abbe Sensei awarded Mr Foster Shodan, which was followed in 1962 by Nidan from Nakazano Sensei.

Mr Foster continued to train at the Hut throughout the 60's, although separate from the Aikikai of Great Britain, and was promoted to 3rd Dan by Noro Sensei in 1969.

In the 70's, Mr Foster formed what was first known as the Renown Aikido Society, which is now the Institute of Aikido.

During this milestone event we were each asked to say a few words about Mr. Foster and his contribution to Aikido and I thought Mr. Jones put the point about Mr Foster's (and the other UK pioneers contribution) rather well.

To paraphrase he said that studying Aikido then must have been like trying to complete a 1,000 piece jigsaw puzzle with no picture; and not only that but

half of the pieces were missing with the half you had got being shared with someone else! As he said, it's only by people doing this that we are where we are today in Aikido terms.

On a personal note, over the past few years I have got to know Mr. Foster reasonably well and am proud to consider him a friend. One of the most impressive things about him is that even after 50 years he has an open mind about Aikido in general. I can best illustrate this by a little anecdote about the course in Lowestoft earlier this year: during my class I did a small variation which apparently Mr Foster hadn't seen before. I only found this out when I came across him and his regular uke working it out in a corner of the mat!



That, I think, is a measure of the man and his continued enthusiasm for our art.

In conclusion congratulations to a remarkable pioneer of UK Aikido who is an example to all of us not only on your 50th year in Aikido but also your 80th Birthday and 60th wedding anniversary all of which add up to a remarkable year!

Philip Smith

(Image source -www.aikido-world.com)



Ask a Shidoin....

This month's question was also sent in by Neil Mould:
(*does no-one else have any questions?! Ed*)

" What do the shidoin feel their responsibilities are within / towards the UKA?"

Gordon Jones Shihan, Ren Shin Kan

Although the names of the UKA Shidoin are registered in Hombu Dojo, Shidoin (senior teacher) remains a UKA position which was conferred on all the existing members by William Smith Shihan. In the future promotions to Shidoin will be awarded by a consensus of the current 6th Dans

The Shidoin are the front line of UKA instruction and they set the standard in teaching and aikido skill, as such it is inherent that in their role there is no place for complacency or self satisfaction, always endeavouring to improve both skill and delivery through an open mind and a preparedness to learn from both their seniors and juniors.

Grading is a small part of our study of aikido but can be the subject of much concern with many students. The responsibility of the Shidoin is to deliver absolutely impartial decisions and use the examination process to drive up the standard of aikido in the UKA, this can often require extraordinary strength of character and the determination to put the 'big picture' of the UKA standard above the personal loyalties for students.

The study of aikido is a lifetime journey and it has to be said that many of the current Shidoin have passed the first flush of youth! Our aim should be to identify and promote the next generation of Shidoin thereby focussing on the continual development of the UKA for the future membership.

Mario Falaschi, Ren Shin Kan

I feel it is my responsibility, and indeed that of all the Shidoin in the UKA, to maintain the high standard of teaching that the UKA has enjoyed over the years, this high standard is the legacy that Mr William Smith has left to us all.

The basics are the solid foundation of Aikido and it is only by teaching the basics that the art will survive and not degenerate into something completely foreign to Aikido. This is not to say that it should be allowed to stagnate and become dormant; of course, Aikido should be progressive and allowed to develop but it must always be true to its origins and its foundation.

It is important that the Shidoin, and for that matter anyone who teaches, should keep abreast with what is going on in the Aikido community, one way of achieving this is to go and see a variety of different teachers and masters to get another perspective of the same theme. I don't know where it came from but I once heard that "there is no bad Aikido, just different Aikido" and sometimes it is only when you see "different" Aikido that you appreciate what we have.

Mr. Smith once told me that he envied the other Shidoin because they were free to teach and practice their own particular brand and style of Aikido whereas it was his duty to study and teach the basics and the pure Aikido as taught by O Sensei, his son, the last Doshu, and now his grandson, the present Doshu. This, I felt at the time, was a massive sacrifice on his part but that was the measure of the man and the love he had for his art and the commitment to all his students.