

The Lowestoft Aikido Course 2009 - 30th/31st May A Tribute to Ken Cottier Shihan

Although attendance was down on previous years (due, no doubt, to the fantastic weather, and difficult financial climate), the weekend course was still well attended by students and instructors of all levels, from a mix of clubs and associations.

As usual, the course was intended to bring together students and instructors from the 3 different aikido associations (Yama Arashi UK, The Institute of Aikido, and The United Kingdom Aikikai), in order to share ideas, skills, and the experience of training with new people and old friends. However, the course this year was also very much focused on celebrating the memory of Ken Cottier 'Shihan' (master instructor), who died last year after several decades practice and teaching of aikido. All the instructors took time to pay tribute to Mr Cottier, sharing memories and stories of the man and his art.

This year several key ideas seemed to permeate all of the training sessions, from all the different Sensei:

- The importance of turning (*tai-no-henko* & *tai-sabaki*), and relaxed, flowing body movement.
- The importance and value of understanding and practicing sword/bokken cuts to improve empty-handed techniques.
- The concept and importance of centre.
- The importance of atemi.
- The great value of training with as many different sizes, shapes and abilities of partner as possible.

Our host, Frank Burlingham (5th Dan IOA, UKA), started both days with a minutes silence in memory of Sensei Cottier, before ensuring we were well warmed up, with stretches, *ukemi* and *tai-no-henko*, before a mix of techniques to 'ease' us into the day.

Haydn Foster (7th Dan IOA) spent time talking of the importance of bokken practice in aikido, and spent one whole session on bokken cuts - the 7-suburi and the 8-direction cut. He also combined the two, which left many a dan and kyu grade more than a little perplexed! He also touched on more abstract concepts of ki and 'one breath'.

Philip Smith (6th Dan UKA) discussed the idea, common to many martial arts, of preparation, unbalancing, and cutting within the application of techniques. As normal, he took great pleasure in picking the biggest, strongest *uke* he could find on which to demonstrate the various specific techniques he taught. Again he stressed the importance of *atemi*, using just about any part of the body. He also pointed out how your own physical and mental self will ultimately develop your own unique style of aikido (both he and Sensei Narey were students of the late Bill Smith Sensei, and have developed very different styles).

Described as a dynamo by one of the senior dan grades, our own sensei Barbara Moss (5th Dan YAUK), excelled in fast, flowing, circular technique which had *ukes* flying in all directions, from strangle and *mune-dori* (lapel-grab) attacks.

Pat Narey (5th Dan UKA) provided a real contrast to the (seemingly) boisterous techniques of Mr Smith and the 'whirlwind' that is Mrs Moss, with her demonstrations of very calm, slow, and very controlled (but in no way less effective) techniques. It was very clear to see the importance of using the centre, and of control of *uke*, before, during and after any contact is made, and she emphasised the need to learn the basics thoroughly.

This year's guest instructor, Shane Riley (6th Dan, White Rose Aikikai), was very well received, I'm sure due to his very friendly, down-to-earth attitude, and his wide experience of using aikido

in the real world (his background being in the security services). He immediately sparked great discussion and debate with a variation of *ikkyo* (arm pin), which he had found very effective in this line of work. He had many practical things to say about confrontation, the application of techniques, and always knowing where the exits are! He also reiterated the importance of atemi (but also stressed its different functions), and of using the bokken grip within empty-hand technique.

From a Stratford Phoenix Aikido perspective, it was great to see three of our lower kyu grades (Deb, Beau and Stefan) getting well stuck in, and practicing hard with dan and kyu grades of all levels throughout the weekend - when you're still very much a beginner (and I include myself!), training with a mat full of dan grades and sensei from unfamiliar clubs can be very daunting to say the least.

I'm sure Deb, Beau and Stefan all picked up very valuable experiences to help develop their own aikido.

All-in-all a great weekend, with plenty to ponder on, and build on in the future.

Russell (1st Dan, YAUK)