

JKS England 20th Anniversary

In 2023 JKS England celebrated its 20th Anniversary. It was a year full of fantastic courses, visiting instructors from the Honbu Dojo, successful competitions and numerous very notable gradings. The association offers so much in the way of opportunities for students and instruction that it is worth mentioning much of what is available as well as honouring those involved in making it so. As we now look forward to an exciting 2024 and on the weekend of Kagawa Shihan's annual visit, the following represents a tribute to the determined work of all of the instructors and students which make JKS England all it can be.

Head of JKS England, Alan Campbell Sensei passed his Hachidan (8th Dan) grading in Japan, only a few months after Kagawa Shihan had last visited England. At Kagawa Shihan's seminar a special presentation was made by him to Alan Sensei. Kagawa Shihan started by speaking about the history of the JKS and how karate had developed over the last century before turning his focus to the present day and the beginning and development of JKS England. Noting that 2022 marked one hundred years since Funakoshi introduced karate to Japan and ending by awarding Alan Sensei with two unique, handwritten certificates it was a special treat and pleasure to watch Shihan tell stories which such enthusiasm and devotion. Receiving one in a Japanese and one in signature style, Kagawa Shihan had made a touching and personal contribution to commemorate the last two decades of progress and co-operation with JKS England as the certificate were received with the utmost respect.



The growth was something which Kagawa Shihan mentioned explicitly, talking very affectionately about Asai Sensei and in particular his ability to generate power. Kagawa Shihan recounted how this was done through fluidity, delivering whip like movements which had the support and co-ordination of his whole body. This understanding of style and how different body shapes and mechanics can perform is something which Kagawa Shihan says he is advancing with his complementary layers of knowledge and interpretation about what the future holds for karate-do. Kagawa Shihan discussed his admiration for Alan Sensei sharing this openness of the mind and body, and how this filters down through to students at all levels. This shared philosophy is something which allows an evolution of technique and training methodology to prevent stagnation or disillusionment, which can sometimes happen if interest wanes.

Alan Sensei also told a very energising anecdote about being lined up adjacent to the Japanese team and marking the first time he "met" Kagawa Shihan in Dubai on the world stage in 1990. Alan Sensei added how Kagawa Shihan was warming up in the practice area and how his speed and closing of distance was "so compelling that the rest of the hall stopped to watch". This spectacle, Alan Sensei commented, perfectly illustrates that Kagawa Shihan is one of the most precise technicians there has ever been but also maintains the character of a true budo karateka and it is these qualities which mean there is in Alan Sensei's words, "no-one better to lead the JKS".

Kagawa Shihan left the class at his seminar with the happiness he shares in how JKS England has flourished and how he is "very humbled" to be able to play a part in this. Remarking that "today will never come again, feel this in your practice", Kagawa Shihan had succinctly reiterated that solid training is the base of all success which he said he hopes "everyone enjoys for a very long time".





The inception of the JKS is something which Robin Reid Sensei, 5th Dan recalls very well. Being a part of JKS Bradford, the longest running JKS club in the country and now running it, Robin Sensei is perfectly positioned to relive many of the developments which it has seen in the last 20 years. Set up but a year previously JKS Bradford offered Robin Sensei a place to train after his local club closed down.

Robin Sensei was a 1st kyu when Paul Massheder become his new instructor and remembers how Paul Sensei, now sadly no longer with us, “waxed lyrical about the JKS, not only because of its direct connections with Japan but also because of its focus on basics and body mechanics”. Robin Sensei would hear about Asai Shihan and Kagawa Sensei and how the JKS “taught not just karate but a way of life: it provided opportunities to train in Japan, learn the Japanese way, and live like a Japanese person, even spending time with a Japanese family”.

As the early courses gathered attendance, Robin went on to meet Alan Sensei, appreciating his superior karate skills whilst enjoying the pattern of training which led to many conversations with the instructors, not the typical pattern held by other organisations Robin Sensei had been with. Robin Sensei says this was another positive of the JKS, having a family feel to it where “everyone seemed to genuinely care about everyone else, and everyone had a mind to make JKS succeed in England”.

With the content so breathtaking, learning was a pleasure and with Kagawa Shihan’s exhibiting his supreme technical capacity with mawashi-geri to the head of the tallest student present, standing so close he was almost on their toe and ultra slow-motion jodan yoko-geri with perfect poise, Robin Sensei recounts how his “respect bordered on reverence” and that it was “truly inspiring to see what could be achieved with patient practice”.

In October 2004, Asai Shihan brought almost the whole of the Honbu Dojo over to instruct and was the one and only time Robin Sensei got to train with this master, whose karate was “simply out of this world and unbelievably fast, with whippy techniques that could leave a partner wondering what just happened”. It was at this event that Robin Sensei achieved Shodan, perhaps one of his scariest gradings, conducted in front of such an imposing table. Robin Sensei stated, “By this time, there was no turning away from JKS; then as now, I simply could not imagine a better organisation”.



Robin Sensei, along with Wendy Campbell Sensei are part of a very exclusive club of two who have graded from Shodan to Godan all within the JKS system. Wendy Sensei is very much the beating heart of JKS England and responsible for the organisation and delivery of so many of the JKS England events held, also dealing with the membership/licencing on a day-to-day basis and corresponding with the HQ. It is characters such as Wendy Sensei who make courses run smoothly and ensure communication is made for all elements in the running of the association and whose value can never be understated. Creating an atmosphere where training takes centre stage, JKS England delivers an environment which puts students in the right frame of mind to level up and maximise the time spent under the watchful eye of the instructor leading the class.

JKS England is also fortunate to have a forward-thinking Headquarters in Japan. During the very different times when lockdowns were initiated the Honbu Dojo hosted multiple seminars with the resident instructors, as well as Kagawa Shihan’s International Seminar. Sometimes from the headquarters itself, and sometimes from their own residences this perfectly illustrated a determination to continue progress in whatever manner possible. The JKS is also publishing some excellent content on its YouTube channel for its membership around the world to benefit from.





The influence of Asai Shihan still permeates the JKS in the teachings, syllabus and katas which are trained. The many koten kata which Asai Sensei engineered or modified epitomise the subtleties within the training of which Asai Sensei's movements were based. Often with a softness but borne from strong hips and a supreme control of bodyweight and joint action, there is much to learn. Many senior grades within JKS England have an excellent grasp of many of them but Hans Rana Sensei, 6th Dan from JKS Loughborough, another long time JKS member is often a beacon for learning and guidance when these are being taught. With a great attachment and aptitude for the understanding of these katas, Hans Sensei's recall is always helpful and he is ever willing to oblige any student wanting to expand their karate and koten kata education, a tremendously enthusiastic instructor, he is an example to everyone.



Steve Carless Sensei, 6th Dan Chief Instructor at the very successful Walsall Karate Dojo has a great awareness of the technical proficiency which the JKS leverages to create World Champions and some of the most exciting instructors within Shotokan. Steve Sensei notes "The JKS is a well-established traditional karate organisation but is very aware of the need to develop its karate in a holistic sense for now and the future. In order to do this, the senior instructors are constantly developing a further understanding of techniques. This is led right from the very top with Kagawa Shihan, the headquarters instructors, and the Senior instructors in JKS England. All for the benefit of its members through courses and seminars and in daily teaching at its member dojos".

Steve Sensei is one of many JKS instructors who are constantly refining techniques and training methods to gain an edge, both from an anatomical and biomechanical standpoint. Accompanying this, many external elements have been introduced which sit in line with the teachings of the founder of the JKS, Asai Shihan. Steve Sensei has an affinity for delivering expert instruction to all levels and says on a personal level that "it is certainly a great journey as a Shotokan practitioner with JKS".

Another long-term advocate of JKS England is Paul Brant Sensei, 5th Dan who has seen the JKS as an organisation develop steadily both in Japan and in England over the last twenty years. In line with traditional Eastern values, Paul suggests this has not been a "shouty" rise to fame but has been focused on "strength in depth" especially regarding the instruction, both in Japan and here at home. Paul Sensei has appreciated first-hand how the JKS brings its members "karate with opportunities", whether they are just starting out or progressing through Kyu or Dan grades.

The JKS ensures statutory compliance in Safeguarding through a highly experienced officer within JKS England and in line with the EKF, the country's governing body for karate. Paul Sensei, having had a major role in running a club has been reassured how prospective members and parents can be confident that they are accessing a bona fide club registered through the EKF and Instructors who have qualifications that are awarded by the Association and are registered in Japan.

Paul Sensei values the mix of full time, part time and volunteer instructors in dojos spread across England and the JKS offers many opportunities for them to develop within the organisation. Instruction and examination for Coaching, Instructor, Examiner, Referee and Judging qualifications is available directly from or can be facilitated





through JKS England, much of which can be done domestically but some, best undertaken at International Seminars.

Paul Sensei has seen how the JKS supports its membership to develop and says that it is not uncommon for individuals to train at multiple locations and how those who aspire to a vocation in karate have benefitted from finding positions within JKS England clubs. Many Dan grades within JKS England have had the opportunity of training widely throughout Japan and more focused training at the headquarters in Tokyo, for many “a once in a lifetime experience”.

Paul Sensei sums up the family orientated nature of the organisation very nicely; “So those within the JKS family can draw on the opportunities available as they find their way on their karate journey, this is karate-do, the way of karate”. JKS England has come a long way in its first twenty years, but it is not sitting on its laurels and the process of increasing the JKS’s “offer” is forever ongoing. Paul Sensei, along with many others is very much looking forward to what the next twenty years will bring.



Matt Price Sensei, 7th Dan took the role of JKS National Coach in 2012 and has been extremely fortunate to work alongside some great coaches. Nick Heald Sensei, 7th Dan was integral for many years and Matt Sensei advises that Nick Sensei was “invaluable in the organisation of the squad”. Nick Sensei has now relocated to the referee world and has just qualified as a British Karate Federation referee.



Matt Sensei has also seen “Ashley Scott-Heald transition from one of our most outstanding competitors, with numerous successes and titles including JKS European Female Champion, British Karate Federation Champion and all styles team member to an excellent coach”. Ashley Sensei still plays a role as a tatami coach for the association when available. Ben Richardson is another high-level karateka who has made the leap from respected competitor with national and international medals to become part of the coaching team.

Matt Sensei has huge thanks to all others involved in the current coaching setup of “Myself, Ben Sensei, Paul Stanley, Neil Halsall, Zoe Price and our fabulous admin ninja Clare Holyoak”. Over the years the squad has gone from strength to strength and is now a highly respected entity, competing on the EKF and BKF tournament circuit. Matt Sensei, in conjunction with squad members’ home dojo instructors, have worked in synergy to build many champions and amass many other podium finishes at competitions of the very highest standard.

Matt Sensei says that one of his most notable highlights for the squad “was coming in second place on the medals table at the JKS World Championships in Dublin in 2019, when JKS England was just pipped to the first spot by the JKS Japan team” and that “We are proud to be able to give JKS England members the chance to make the most out of their competitive years and give them memories that will stay with them for a lifetime”. Matt Sensei, along with many supporters, is looking forward to the JKS World Championships in Tokyo in July 2024 and working hard to send a squad to represent JKS England in a setting few will ever get the chance to experience.





Matt Sensei draws motivation from the successes of the Japanese JKS squad who have continued to medal and remain a dominant force in the WKF. Kagawa Shihan was All Styles National Coach for many years and was a driving force in the resurgence of Japanese karate on the world tournament stage. Headquarters instructors Nagaki Sensei and Arimoto Sensei both hold WKF World titles, along with Inada Sensei who holds a World Games title. Matt Sensei says, "The incredible karate demonstrated by all the headquarters instructors always leaves you inspired!"

Matt Sensei remarks that for him personally "Joining the JKS was the best move I have ever made in karate (and I have constantly strived to make good movement in karate). I have loved working with the squads and seeing the successes. As well as training and teaching on seminars, I absolutely love travelling to Tokyo a few times a year to work on my own karate and development as an instructor. Congratulations to JKS England for 20 years!"

Shyam Raithatha, 6th Dan from JKS Harrow joined the JKS in 2010, affiliating directly with Sensei Alan's dojo, as there was no JKS club in London until he founded JKS Harrow. Since joining, Shyam Sensei has "had the privilege of completing two Kangeikos, two International Seminars, and graded for my 5th and 6th Dan, in a total of six trips between 2011 and 2022 to Japan". Shyam Sensei recounts that one of his fondest memories was from Japan in April 2012. Having been the previous year, Shyam Sensei decided to skip the sightseeing and instead train in the morning session at the old Sugamo Honbu Dojo. Greeted by Nagaki Sensei, who quickly ran to the Instructor's office, Kanayama Sensei then popped his head out, nodded, and returned to the office. Expecting a class with Nagaki Sensei, the surprise of Kanayama Sensei taking the lesson instead was immediate and warranted. "Myself, another JKS England member and an adult white belt. That was it!" Shyam Sensei said that Kanayama Sensei, often affectionately nicknamed "The Machine", "gave us one of the best technical lessons I've ever had". The famous "Kanayama Beasting" leaving Shyam Sensei unable to walk for two days but a memory to be treasured forever.



Many JKS England members will have specific moments where teaching has "clicked", an instructor has done something inspirational, or they have received one-to-one training from the some of the world's best. It is these examples which may only be noticed by the person in question but represent the individual level which the JKS England instructors always pay particular attention to when they teach. Invested in anyone in the line with the right attitude and showing the requisite effort, the JKS England Instructors lead from the front.



JKS England has also been fortunate to benefit from a Referee Development Programme, under the watchful eye of Geoff Dixon Sensei, 6th Dan from JKS Grantham. Geoff Sensei has had a pivotal role in the success of many JKS tournaments and the running of these as Head Referee. After progressing through the system to achieve qualifications which have provided Geoff Sensei with a very comprehensive knowledge of the rules and their application, Geoff Sensei now uses this skill to instruct others. Geoff Sensei has been able to pass on his experience and understanding to JKS members, crafting a team of officials with the confidence and clarity with which a competitor would want to step on the tatami with.

Geoff Sensei has echoed at many courses and Referee Development training sessions, the magnitude with which Kagawa Shihan emphasises the importance of refereeing. Kagawa Shihan gives substantial merit to a karateka's ability to not only train and perform, but also have the capability to officiate, especially if of a grade or age where they can repay, as judges and referees, occasions which they may have had in competition previously.

