

# 英国北西部日英協會

## Japan Society North West

### NEWSLETTER

## Pilgrimage into Your Mind



The talk by Professor Ian Reader of University of Manchester started with huge applause at Padgate Community Centre on 21st May. His enthusiastic and entertaining talk about the Shikoku pilgrimage captivated the audience. Based on his extensive knowledge and experience of the Shikoku pilgrimage, Professor Reader, who is an expert on Japanese modern religious practices, told us how each pilgrim decides to embark on a long journey. Though the reason is unique to each person, it is often a pilgrimage into one's mind, to find oneself through the long process of the pilgrimage. His use of slides and the objects of the pilgrimage brought life into the talk. His talk was followed by a lively discussion.



How was it?

聞かせて！日本の話

## Member's Experience in Japan

Some of you might remember the article by Levi Booth in the Spring 2010 issue, who went to Sendai as a Church missionary. Did you ever wonder if his friends were all right after that earthquake? Well, so did he, and he decided to go and check in person. In this issue, he tells us how it was in the aftermath of the tsunami in Sendai.

Having lived in Sendai for a bit over a year back in 2008–2010 (doing volunteer work with a Christian church) it was with a great deal of shock that I watched the news story unfold about the earthquake and subsequent tsunami on March 11th. Even once I had heard back from friends and knew that everyone I knew was OK I still felt a great burden for Japan and especially the Tohoku region, which I had come to love in my time there, and so when the chance to visit Sendai for 2 weeks came up I took it gladly. I left for Japan on Monday 16th April.

The excitement I had felt the first time I touched down in Japan a few years ago was replaced with trepidation and uncertainty as I came into Narita airport. This was heightened by the surprise of the customs officer who upon hearing I intended to go to Sendai replied, 'What?



Levi at Shichigahama Volunteer Center



Road in Matsushima

Why? Why do you want to go there?' However he did let me through and so I headed down to Shinjuku where I had a hotel for the night and found it looking fairly normal. Besides the posters of encouragement up in shop windows it seemed like nothing had changed from last time I was in Tokyo... And then I experienced my first earthquake! It was one of the recurring aftershocks. Looking out of the 2nd floor window of my hotel to see trees and lampposts swaying from side to side was quite surreal, especially given how jet-lagged I was. However, soon it was over and given how well the buildings and people coped with it I was wondering whether things in Sendai would be that bad.

When I was heading for Sendai, the trains weren't working up to Sendai, so I had to catch the bus. It was surprisingly

empty, only about 8 people on the entire bus. It was a rather uneventful journey, except for the old guy who bought me drinks every time we stopped, which combined 2 of my favourite things about traveling in Japan: banter with random people and canned coffee!

Sendai was, at first glance, unchanged from when I was last there: a convenience store had taken over the spot previously held by a café but that was it. But on closer inspection, the signs that something major had happened became apparent. The station was only half-open, older buildings were in various degrees of needing repair and roads were cracked, especially on the joints of bridges. The number of posters encouraging people to 'work



Ruined Possession



Sakura and Ruins

together!', or 'believe in the power of Japan!' had increased from Tokyo and it may have been my imagination but there seemed to be a general feeling of weariness in the way people moved about: the usual bustle of businessmen, students and housewives had become more of a determined trudge.

This became even more apparent when I started to meet up with my friends and families from my church. The regular (i.e. *several* each day) aftershocks had people slightly on edge: they normally only lasted a few seconds, but there was no guarantee that another larger shock



A Family Photo on the Rubbish Pile

would not come. This obviously was very tiring, especially for those with young children to look after as well. Added to this was the all-present spectre of the nuclear-power plant situation, with jargon-filled news reports serving mainly just to further people's confusion. However despite all this I was once again bowled over by the incredible hospitality and generosity of the Japanese people. For example, friends and church families insisted on having

me over to stay, taking me out for dinner and treating me to trips to onsens [hot spring resorts]. One lady from my church even gave me food to take back to England because there hadn't been time for me to go over for dinner. I was reminded afresh of the warm-heartedness and kindness that first won my heart for Japan.

The pleasant surprise of my friend's welcome was however surpassed by the shock of seeing the destruction wrought by the tsunami out towards the coast. A team of us went out to Higashi Matsushima to help with the clean-up and so I was able to see first-hand the level of the damage that had been caused, and it was devastating. A team of about 10 of us spent an entire day cleaning clay out of a house



Matsushima Team

that was so far from the coast I would have thought it out of the tsunami's reach had I not seen it myself. And this was one family out of thousands: all needing practical and emotional care and support.

But this was nothing compared to the sight when I helped to take waste to the make-shift tip next to the sea. It was like driving through a life-sized film set: a tanker in the middle of a rice-field, cars embedded in the remains of



Adding to the Rubbish Tip

houses, wave-breaker walls pushed aside or split in 2 as though they were made of cardboard. Possibly more heart-breaking than any of that was the driver of the van – clearly a very tough old guy – and his reaction to my friend pointing out when the sea came into sight, “That’s not a cute sea. It’s the devil. I don’t even want to look at it!” Looking at the carnage all around us I was tempted to agree with him.

Then I visited Shichigahama, a town which lies south east of Higashi Matsushima. Whilst I wasn’t able to see where people were staying in Shichigahama, it sounded like most were living in top floor of their houses or with friends or relatives. But amidst all the hardship and havoc, it was incredibly uplifting to see the spirit of unity and co-operation as people of all ages and backgrounds came together to help bring relief to needy people. The huge piles of shoes, clothes, blankets and other goods that had been donated by the community to be distributed to those who needed them was further testimony to the community spirit and desire to do whatever people could. There was even a group from the local Nepalese Society cooking curry for the other volunteers! A phrase I heard often was “I just



Coast near Shichigahama

want to do whatever I can to help.” My chance to do just that came when I went out to a community centre with an American missionary and ended up working alongside a retired fisherman, a student and members of the Japanese Self-Defence Force!

Talking to people, although limited by my poor language skills, gave me an insight into the settled determination and sacrificial spirit of the Japanese people in working through this dark time.

I’m still trying to process the things that I saw in Sendai, and I think I will be for quite a while to come. The scale of the disaster is something that simply cannot be conveyed in words or photos. But what can also not be captured in ink or film is the depth of the Japanese resolution and so it is with a heavy but hopeful heart that I continue to watch and pray for those in the Tohoku region as they continue along the long, hard road to recovery.

[Please also visit the JSNW Blog on [jsnw.org.uk](http://jsnw.org.uk) for Graham Worth’s blog, which documents the days shortly after the earthquake in the Tokyo area.]



Working with the Army

## Past Event Report: AGM

Immediately following Professor Ian Reader’s talk, we held our Annual General Meeting. For the first time, the meeting included the use of a Powerpoint presentation, and it was revealed that the Society’s membership was now 177. The members voted to approve the annual Financial Statement.

Graham Worth urged the members to continue to support the victims of the tsunami. The members voted unanimously for the Society to make a donation of £500 to the Japan Society Tohoku Earthquake Relief Fund.

Nine members were elected to the Committee, and in the first meeting of the new Committee, roles were assigned.

Our New Committee:

[Kevin Howes \(Chairman\)](#)

[Angela Davies \(Vice-Chairman\)](#)

[Joan Horley \(Secretary\)](#)

[Sandra McFarlane \(Treasurer\)](#)

[Tim Evans \(Membership Secretary\)](#)

[Nigel Cordon \(Events Coordinator\)](#)

[Yuko Howes \(Newsletter Editor\)](#)

[Graham Worth](#)

[Rob Bierman](#)

## Past Event Report: Go Workshop



Chris Kirkham from Manchester Go Society began the workshop with an introduction to the history and rules of Go. The game is believed to have originated in China (where it is called Weiqi) and was introduced to Japan during the 8th Century. Following the explanation of the history and rules of the game, all present were able to try their hand at playing Go on smaller "practice" boards (see the photo), to allow time for more than one game. Participants were absorbed by the games, some of which could not be finished because time ran out!

Further information about the British Go Association can be found on their website [www.britgo.org](http://www.britgo.org) (Report by Tim Evans)

## Future Events (visit our website for details)

### Japanese Garden Workshop with Professor Fukuhara

September 2011  
Venue: Calderstones Park, Liverpool  
Contact: Nigel Cordon  
([events@jsnw.org.uk](mailto:events@jsnw.org.uk))



### Bonenkai with Taka's famous buffet and origami demonstration by John Roberto

Saturday 10 December 2011  
Venue: Padgate Community Center  
Contact: Nigel Cordon ([events@jsnw.org.uk](mailto:events@jsnw.org.uk))

### Tatton Park Japanese Garden Viewing

October 2011  
Venue: Tatton Park  
Contact: Nigel Cordon ([events@jsnw.org.uk](mailto:events@jsnw.org.uk))

### Japanese Conversation Evening in Manchester

23 July and September 2011  
Venue: Samsi In Manchester  
Contact: Yuko Howes ([editor@jsnw.org.uk](mailto:editor@jsnw.org.uk))

### Doki Doki – The Manchester Japanese Festival

Sunday 13 November 2011  
Venue: TBA (in Manchester)  
See [www.dokidokifestival.com](http://www.dokidokifestival.com)

### Japanese Conversation Evening in Liverpool

August and October 2011  
Venue: Etsu Restaurant, Liverpool  
Contact: Angela Davies ([angela@jsnw.org.uk](mailto:angela@jsnw.org.uk))

### Editor's Comment

Yuko Howes

編集後記

I hope everybody is enjoying the long summer days. This issue featured the behind-the-scenes story of the successful Taiko group, Tantara Taiko. I hope you enjoyed it. It also brought to you Levi's first-hand account of the aftermath of the tsunami in Sendai area, with the vivid images of the area taken by Levi. As a Japanese, I feel very grateful to all of you who are supportive of the victims of the tsunami. I appreciate continuing support.

If you have your own special story to share, please contact [editor@jsnw.org.uk](mailto:editor@jsnw.org.uk)

Photos: Levi Booth, Hugh McAdam, Alison Smith, Tim Evans, Joan Horley, Kevin Howes.



Tell me more!

もっと知りたい!

## Japan Day in Depth

I hope you enjoyed the Taiko drumming performance by Tantara Taiko at Japan Day 2010. In this issue, John Bolwell, the leader of the Tantara Taiko, will reveal to you an intriguing story about how it all happened. If you are interested in taiko drumming, we are holding another workshop in next February, so don't miss it!

I suppose my journey into Taiko drumming began around 1997. I had been learning African style drumming for some years and was attracted to a concert by Mugenkyo Taiko Drummers at the Met Theatre in Bury. The performance was high energy and was both visually and aurally compelling. I knew immediately that it was something I would like to study but at the time, there did not appear to be any opportunities to do so.

A few years down the line I was talking to Stewart, another member of our small drumming circle. He ran World Spirit Travel ([www.worldspirit.org.uk](http://www.worldspirit.org.uk)) that specialised in arranging trips to Japan for enthusiasts in Japanese gardens and he was about to go there on a tour. I asked if he could look into the possibilities for training in Taiko whilst in Japan. A few weeks later he was back in the UK and amazingly had begun arrangements to organise a trip there the following year!

So in November 2002, I met up in Japan with Liz Walters and around 8 of her group from Bucks Taiko and also a similar sized group of Taiko players from the West Coast of America. We had travelled about 2 hours from Kyoto to Fukui where we were to train with Liz's teacher Masaaki Kurumaya at his newly opened Dojo.

Kurumaya-Sensei is a master musician who has over 40 years experience of playing and performing Taiko, having founded his own group and inspired many other groups



Outside of the Dojo in Fukui with Kurumaya Sensei



Tantara at Rochdale Dojo

and players. The Dojo was situated in a rural setting to which we would take a daily half hour train ride out of the city. Once off the train it was a further 15 minute walk through scenic woodland and along side a river to arrive at the purpose built Dojo.

The daily training was from 10.00 to 4.30 with a break for lunch. Each day started with warm up exercises, followed by time for sitting Zen and then drumming. The end of each day we joined Kurumaya-Sensei in green tea and there was time for any questions.

For me, the training was a whole new vocabulary of drum language and body movement to learn and I had to work hard to hang in with the others who were familiar to Taiko style playing. The tunes are traditionally learnt and passed on not in a written notation but by singing or chanting them in the drum language. Also, as it is very much a performance art, the body movement and ensemble interaction is an important and integral part of what is taught.

Taiko style drumming uses bachi (drumsticks) to play the often quite large drums. Depending on the style of playing, these may be played in the upright position, side on position or in a diagonal orientation. Each requires the appropriate body position to direct the playing energy into the drum and hence bring the best sound out.

Over a couple of weeks we learned and gradually built up a piece which we performed on a showcases evening in

front of Kurumaya's regular students and various visiting dignitaries. During the visit there was also the opportunity to see some Taiko performances, visit temples, and do some sight seeing. One evening we visited Daianzenji Temple to join their meditation and on one weekend I took a journey to the famous Eiheiji Temple situated amongst hills and waterfalls. The time of year was a particularly scenic one with autumn just starting.

The whole experience was a fantastic insight into many aspects of Japanese culture and partaking within a living part of that culture gives a privileged view and a closer contact with the people than would otherwise be possible.

Upon my return to the UK I was keen to keep up my practice and so started a small group in my home town of Rochdale. These were mainly people I knew who had an interest in drumming or with some background in martial arts and an interest in the culture of the East. Due to the cost of drums, our initial instruments were upturned plastic dustbins.

However, as the group grew in enthusiasm and skill we started to acquire drums. Some of these were imported from Japan, a couple made by Hughie, a member of our group and some were made by other drum makers in the UK. The drums vary from the small and tightly bound 'shime' drum which gives a high clear sound, to the large



Kurumaya-Sensei with giant Odaiko drum

bodied 'nagado' drum with its deep booming sound and is traditionally hollowed out of a single section of tree trunk.

As offers came in for us to play gigs we realised that we needed a name. Yvonne in our group came up with the name that was favoured by most people and so we were christened Tantara.

We now have a good selection of drums, quite a few years experience as a group and a dozen or so members, some of whom play in our performing group, some who just prefer to play for their own enjoyment. Our training space is in a mill where we meet weekly and enjoy enhancing our skills and perhaps playing up to a dozen performances a year. These have been for a wide variety of events such as: local carnivals, rushbearing festivals, private parties, international martial arts tournaments

and the JSNW Japan Day.

Taiko drumming has now become a thriving scene in the UK with many groups springing up and lots of opportunities to both watch and to play. On a Sunday evening we welcome people who would like to come along and learn Taiko drumming, though please do contact us first to check on details. We are also happy to talk about bookings for performances at a variety of events. For information contact John on: [spiralmyth@lineone.net](mailto:spiralmyth@lineone.net) Or see our website: [www.tantara.org.uk](http://www.tantara.org.uk)

I will finish this article with I quote I picked up from Eiheiji Temple; it was written in both Japanese and English and

hung on the wall. It illustrates to me some of the Japanese attention to detail and how small things affect the larger things in life.

#### Illumination from our Feet

Arranging our shoes neatly,  
We bring harmony to our minds.  
When our minds are harmonious,  
We arrange our shoes neatly  
When we take them off.  
Our minds won't be disturbed  
When we put them on.  
If someone leaves shoes in disarray,  
Let us silently set them in order.  
Such an act will surely bring harmony  
To the minds of people around the world.



John (on left) at Asian Music Circuit Concert in London

# Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami Fund Raising Events

Since the Tohoku Great Earthquake, there have been numerous charity events throughout the North West. They show how people are concerned about and supportive of the victims of the tsunami and earthquake. We showcase here scenes from some of the charity events held around Manchester and Liverpool.

A: Japan Fun Day at Etsu, Liverpool      B: Japan Day in Lymm      C: Japanese Night at Indulgence, Bramhall

