

## Chiba Sensei believes Aikido regardless of style should always enrich lives

Travelling extensively, I have seen many styles of Aikido in the world. Some of them were beyond my imagination to be called Aikido. I used to worry about this, and think about what I should do about it. But gradually I became less and less worried, and in fact I am no longer worried about it at all.

First of all, there is nothing you can do about it - you can't be responsible for it. Secondly, I came to the realization that as long as the people practising enjoyed it, and as long as Aikido enriches their lives or is meaningful in their lives, I should be pleased and happy regardless of its physical form.

Of course we should not be blind to what's going on in the Aikido world today. We should strive hard to maintain and preserve the quality as best we can. However, the nature of Aikido is strongly self-developmental and allows itself to develop harmoniously with the environment and various human conditions. Idealistically and hopefully, we have to rely on the conscience and sincerity of the individual teacher. In other words, whoever is involved in teaching has to be competent, with a strong foundation and responsible in their teaching. Furthermore, I believe it is important to have a historical sense of this profound

art left to us by the generations before us, supported by deep conviction and respect.

There is a Japanese expression 'mixture of diamonds and rocks'. Of course I see that in the Aikido world today. So what does it matter? A diamond as a precious stone carries its own value and beauty. At the same time, a rock also carries a value and use. If Aikido is the path that truly reveals the principles of nature, we should be able to live with the contradiction between order and freedom.

This world is so interesting. It is so dynamic and beautiful in its as-it-is-ness, because there are things like diamonds and rocks coexisting without conflicting against one another, and everything is in its place in its own right.

Needless to say, this should not be our excuse to avoid responsibility. The law of nature, of cause and effect, is evident and inescapable, and therefore what is to perish will perish in its natural course.

**Shihan TK Chiba**

**Birankai Founder**

**Article originally published in Summer/Fall 1994 issue of Sansho - the Aikido Journal of the USAF Western Region and precursor of Biran.**

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Shihan Tony Cassells

**Student, friend and Shihan**

Mark was brought to Ei Oh Kan aikido dojo in 1985 by Brian Marriot – one of my old instructors from East Birmingham hospital dojo, with a request to teach him aikido before he ended up in prison!

At the time Mark was a weight lifting, street smart bouncer....nothing to worry about there then.

He started the aikido with the other beginners as one of 'Stella's boys' learning the basics. He soon showed a great comprehension of Aikido and progressed up the ranks to join the more intense classes.

Mark quickly moved through the grades and began running Cocks Moors Wood dojo with Julie Flood.

When he became an instructor Mark really began to shine. He developed an understanding of his students and their

insecurities; he instinctively knew how to get the best out of them and how to build their trust.

Over the last 15 years Mark and I have travelled, teaching in Europe and I am so proud of the teacher he has become. He has shown the true depth of his Aikido knowledge and the true spirit of an Alkidoka eager to be a student or teacher when required. His depth of knowledge is amazing and his understanding of weapon work second to none.

I have always been happy to call him my student from 6th kyu to 6th Dan but now I also regard him as my equal.

I will always be thankful for the loyalty and friendship he has shown me and couldn't want a better student, friend or shihan!

**Shihan Tony Cassells 7th Dan**





## Such an honour of being part of it

This year we had the wonderful news that sensei Mark Pickering has been awarded the title Shihan. Mark is the first individual to be awarded this grade of 'teachers of teachers' since the passing of Chiba Sensei, indicating the recognition and strong bond sensei has now gained from Hombu Dojo.

I know personally that this is something he has been working towards for a great deal of time. To succeed in this has been the best of his achievements.

Knowing Sensei Pickering now for just over 30 years, he still amazes me. The things he pulls out of the bag during teaching makes his classes so informative and enthusiastic.

After my 5th kyu grade when I was 18 years old Sensei Pickering spoke to me about teacher student relationship. A little while after I became one of three uchidechi's for Sensei Pickering, the other two being Paul Robinson and Rupert Richards.

After this things changed in my life and it made me into the person I am today.

Shihan Pickering was also captured as I was down an early aikido path. Eventually becoming one of Shihan Cassells Uchi-dechi's. By working hard like Chiba Sensei had to with O Sensei back in his

time, he gained recognition from Shihan Cassells. Sensei often tells us that it is this that helped him to change his life to what it needed to change to, away from the trouble he seemed to get in.

Shihan Pickering has always been able to get the best out of each individual, pushing them to the limit and beyond, especially when a grading approaches.

I remember how I once said 'I'll never be a teacher' but he kept saying that I had what was needed it would just take time. How right he was and I am deeply grateful for his belief in me.

Over time and with great energy Shihan Pickering has been able to produce some great instructors with still more up and coming. This shows the true reflection of being a teacher of teachers.

I am so grateful for being part of his journey; we have become so close not just as a student and teacher but also as very close friends. Even now he inspires me so much and on and off the tatami.

Honored student

**Stuart Lovering 5th Dan Shidoin**

**Tudor Grange Dojo**



## Very inspiring

When I started with Sensei Mark Pickering I was new to martial arts and had no idea what this "aikido" business was all about. Fortunately sensei and his students were more than happy to fix that for me! When I felt sensei's aikido technique I realised there was something real there in a way that a video can't bring across. I found that very inspiring. And as my studies with Sensei Pickering continued I began to appreciate just how lucky I was to have such a skilled teacher. Congratulations on you shihan sensei, I hope to continue being your student for many years to come.

**Anna Jigoulina 2nd kyu**

**Cocks Moors Woods dojo**





## Lucky Aikidoka



Looking back I think I have been pretty lucky where Aikido is concerned.

I was lucky the first club I visited when I moved to Birmingham, and the most local to me was Cocks Moors Woods. I felt extremely lucky there were so many students on the mat and of such a high standard - I had never trained with any more than one yudansha on the mat.

I felt really lucky to have come across the Birankai Style and to have such a knowledgeable teacher practically on my doorstep.

I felt I was lucky to also have such a wealth of students around and available courses with the opportunity to train in such a diverse syllabus – even if I didn't really appreciate the weapons at the time!

So the training turned from weeks into months and was so great that I felt something was missing from my week if I couldn't attend. I felt lucky that I never had the same lesson twice and I was always seeing something new. I could be pushed and shown something I had missed (or forgotten).

I felt lucky I had remembered techniques too and that I attained grades I wasn't sure that I had the knowledge to gain. I became more able to do the techniques without stopping (as much) and even started to like to weapons work as I felt I could retain some of it.

This process has continued until now I am beginning to help the juniors and some of the novice students.

So where is this odd ramble going you may ask? Only now I begin to realise that my turning up at this Dojo was lucky. Yes

I liked what I saw but there was a bit more to it than that.

The attitude of the students and the standard of practise were not a fluke, the reason the classes were big and people stuck around was also not down to chance.

There was a neuroscientist talking recently on the radio saying anybody can do anything but the difference between someone who plays the violin as a good amateur and a 1st chair professional musician can be nearly 4000 hours to greater than 10000 hours practise

. Natural aptitude for a skill is a head start but it is the time and hard work that reaps the rewards.

My progression in aikido is down to how the lessons were adapted to work on my weak points without my knowledge. I don't slap my head every time I get it wrong, although I haven't stopped cursing myself under my breath, and don't have to do it half as frequently. It is down to someone's dedication.

Both in their dedication to their own training, working through injuries, when most of us would have thrown in the towel. Their background research from sources old and new to continually improve and come up with new ideas and new approaches to teaching. To travel and disseminate the knowledge across a number of countries trying to 'steal', as he likes to phrase it from other instructors critically pulling techniques apart and allowing them to evolve. Building and maintaining bridges between organisations, to help preserve the wealth of knowledge that is so easily lost if we are not careful. Planning students progressions and helping them to achieve their potential, possibly exceeding it in my case.

So it is his hard graft, blood, sweat, and I very much doubt tears (I'm not brave enough to imply it anyway) that brings all his students on and makes the Cocks Moors Woods dojo a success and something for us all here to be proud of. This has rightly been acknowledged by Hombu Dojo in Japan, for his contribution to Aikido and the extent of his experience.

Mark Pickering Shihaan isn't lucky to have

been awarded his title he has definitely earned it!

**Trevor Doxsey 1st Dan Assistant Junior Instructor**

**Cocks Moors Dojo**

## BRITISH BIRANKAKAI SUMMER CAMP.

Details in notices below and the

[website](#)

Please like and share Events on our  
face book pages

## One of his friends and students.



From the first day I joined Sensei Mark Pickering's Dojo as a novice some ten years ago he immediately made me feel that I was part of a close family group. He has always been very careful to pay equal attention to all of his students at every grade and to teach with great clarity to bring out the best in all. His own unwavering commitment to Aikido is very evident and is inspiring to be around. It is that same level of commitment to the Dojo that gives me, and I'm sure Sensei's other students, a reassuring sense that he and the Dojo are always there as a consistent and valued part of our lives, not only for the Aikido, but also for friendship and social events. Sensei Pickering worked hard to bring out the best in my Aikido at every stage and I have seen him do that with every student without exception leaving no one behind. It is a privilege for me to be one of his friends and students.

**Conrad Elliot**

**2nd kyu Cocks Moors Woods Dojo**

**Immensely proud**



I started Aikido in January 1994, this is where I met my teacher Sensei Mark Pickering. When I look back I could not envisage that this man would become not only a member of the teaching committee but also a Shihan. His teaching his spirit and his own ability inspired me to take up the art. But I did not for one minute think about how this person and art would capture me.

Over the years my knowledge and experience evolved but so did my teachers. I could start to see my teacher changing he has always been a fighter in many ways but it was his outlook on life and

family both aikido wise and personally that I saw the biggest changes. When I gained shodan and he gained Yondan in 2000 that the biggest changes started to show in him. But one of the fundamental pivot points was 2003 when his journey with his teacher really started and he became the teacher and great friend he is today. I was lucky enough to join my teacher on his journey and witness it first-hand. I also saw the teacher and student relationship with him and Shihan Cassells develop.

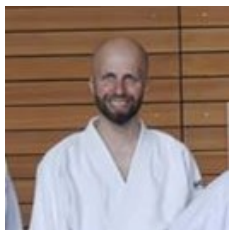
I have been lucky enough to be around to see my teacher become a shihan and his teacher to be a 7th Dan Shihan. Both of which is thoroughly deserved for the commitment and dedication to Aikido they have shown. I look forward to the continued journey ahead and can't wait to learn more from these to inspiring people. I have a great lineage that I belong to, O Sensei to Chiba Sensei, Chiba Sensei to Cassells Sensei, then Cassells Sensei to Pickering Sensei, finally from my teacher to me. You could say my lineage is one single cut of the sword so to speak. It makes me immensely proud and honoured to have such a teacher and their respective teachers.

**Andy Colclough 3rd Dan Fukushima**

**Cocks Moors Woods Dojo**



## Hell of a ride



I first met Shihan Mark Pickering in Shihan Tony Cassell's dojo in 2002.

He had just passed his Yondan exam.

I wasn't a Birankai student at the time but vividly remember my first training session with him at the old Ei Oh Kan dojo in Birmingham on a cold and freezing January evening. He was very patient and gentle with me and didn't show me his powerful, uncompromising Aikido. When I officially became a student of Tony Cassell's in 2003 this changed.



At our first Austrian summer camp in Dornbirn that year I quickly realised that taking Ukemi for him was going to be a hell of a ride. Mark pushed us to our limits and beyond and taught us so much about what it meant to be a student of Tony Cassell's and his senior students. We have been to many Aikido seminars together and share a lot of stories and memories. I was over the moon when I heard that Mark was awarded Shihan. He has given so much to the study of Aikido and has successfully passed it on to the next generation. I am so happy for you Mark and wish you many more happy years practising and teach-

ing Aikido and spending quality time with all those friends from all over the world that you have made along that way. You are an inspiration.

**Wolfgang Petter**

**4th Dan**

**Dornbirn Dojo, Austria**

## A Guardian of the Art

I was a real nobody when I first met Mark Pickering Sensei, who was 5th Dan at that time. It was the Austrian Spring



Course in 2009 and my very first Aikido seminar. As an absolute beginner without any grade whatsoever, you lack every technical knowledge of course. You simply feel if somebody masters an art or not. It was evident that Sensei Pickering had profound technical expertise. He definitely "knew the stuff", he was moving his Ukes with ease and sovereignty and was purely in control of the situation. Yet only years later was I able to understand what quality made Pickering Sensei truly standing out, not only as a martial artist but as an excellent teacher and devoted guardian of Aikido: Mark Pickering Shihan has always had the ca-

pability to recognise the potential of people. It so happened that my Aikido career gained momentum after another seminar a few years later, where Sensei Pickering took me as main Uke and my potential aptitude to be a good Aikidoka was perceived. But I observed and witnessed his natural knowledge of people – their physical abilities and limits as well as their character traits – on many international seminars and in his own dojo.

What does a beginner, an intermediate student or a higher ranked Aikido practitioner need in order to unfold his or her full potential and to evolve even further? Pickering Sensei is aware of the challenging demands a student has to face by him- or herself and the teaching support a practitioner needs to find the essence and profundity of the martial art. Now, ten years later, I see Pickering Shihans devotion to transmit the art in its depth and detail on every single seminar, to students of all ranks and to the next generation of teachers. With an abundance of patience and a sense for martial principles beyond mere technical form, Pickering Sensei is a guardian of Aikido and truly merits the title Shihan. I wholeheartedly congratulate him.

**Christina Vacaro**

**Dornbirn Dojo, Austria**



© by Aikikai Dornbirn



## Congratulations!

### 50 years of Aikido



October 2018 saw Beecham Sensei attain 50 years of Aikido.

Steve originally commenced training in 1968 under TK Chiba Sensei.

In 1973 Steve was awarded Shodan (1st Dan) and began teaching in the late seventies. He soon had a thriving dojo in South London. In 1978 he was awarded Nidan (2nd Dan).

In 1979 Steve renewed contact with TK Chiba Sensei who had left the UK to make his home in the U.S.A. Having informed TK Chiba Sensei of his hopes to visit Hombu Dojo in Tokyo for an intensive period of training he was delighted to be given letters of introduction to Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba and others making his trip very successful.

Although the visit was a short one he trained intensively at Hombu Dojo with the current Doshu and Senseis Yamaguchi, Osawa, Shibata and many other Shihan.

In 1983 Steve met Tamura Shihan 8th Dan who had recently established the National Aikido Federation and in 1987 Steve was invited to serve as the technical Director. In 1987 Steve was award-

ed Yodan (4th Dan) under Tamura Shihan.

In 1989 TK Chiba Shihan invited Steve to teach at the Aikido London Headquarters, Shinmei-kan Dojo. In that same year TK Chiba Sensei confirmed Yodan Grading with Hombu Dojo. Steve taught at Shinmei-kan for 17 years until his sabbatical in 2007.

Apart from teaching in the UK he has also taught in the U.S.A, Canada, China, New Zealand, France and Spain.

Steve continues teaching, now at Gen Pu Kan dojo in Walthamstow, London.

### Patricia Blake 3rd Kyu

Gen Pu Kan dojo in Walthamstow,



In January 2003 he was awarded Godan (5th Dan) by TK Chiba Shihan and has been a Shidoin with the British Aikikai/Birankai since its inception and also a Member of the Teaching Committee.

**Steve Beecham 6th Dan Shidoin  
London**

In August 2011 he was awarded Rokudan (6th Dan) by TK Chiba Shihan.



# Announcements

Congratulation to Mark Pickering of gaining his Shihan.

It's been an honour and amazing to see the change while we all grow in aikikai life. I have been particularly blessed to see Mark develop and shine from 6th Kyu to 6th Dan Shihan with Stuart working along side of Mark and been part of that family.

## **Tony Cassells Shihan**

Congratulations for Stuart Lovering my senior student, in gaining his 5th dan shidoin on behalf of myself and the BB.

## **Mark Pickering Shihan**

Congratulations to Waldemar Frank passing his Nidan on the 10.12.2018 from our Dojo Gen Ei Kan Landau/Germany.

## **Alexander Broll**

## **Our thanks to Dee Chen Shihan**

I am sure by now you are all aware of Dee Chen's resignation from the post of general secretary. She has worked tirelessly for the British Birankai since its formation, often taking on the difficult and tedious tasks that no one else wanted to do. Her knowledge and experience has been essential in the day to day activities of this association.

We would all like to offer her our thanks for her many years of service to all the members of British Birankai.

## **Message from the stand in General secretary.**

Hi All

At present I am standing in as general secretary.

I don't think I have a full list of email addresses so please forward this info to anyone I have missed with my apologies. With summer school just a few weeks away I would like to remind anyone grading or re-testing for Shidoin/ fukushidoin that it would be a great help if you could get your application forms and essays to me by July 26th so that I can print them and have them ready for the teaching committee. Info can be sent to me by email or post.

If you need any help please don't hesitate to ask and I will try and find the info for you. Please email enquires and paper-work primarily to stellacassells207@gmail.com

**Stella Cassells**



Event: Demo at Agricultural festival 2015 Landau/Germany

Photographer Achim Goldemann

Uke: Julius Krebs, 3. kyu



# NOTICE-BOARD



**A week of world class aikido instruction**

All aikido organisations welcome



**Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> - Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> August 2019**

**Miyamoto Tsuruzo Shihan**

8<sup>th</sup> dan, hombu dojo

**Seki Shoji Shihan**

8<sup>th</sup> dan, hombu dojo

**Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August 2019**



**University of Worcester  
St John's Campus  
Henwick Grove  
WR2 6AJ  
UK**

Booking available via the links below

- Tickets start from £20
- Accommodation available



British Birankai and United Kingdom Aikikai are members of the Joint Aikikai Council and registered organisations with the Aikikai Foundation.



<http://www.britishbirankai.com/courses/summer-school-2019/>

<https://ukaikikai.org.uk/summer-school-2019>

## British Birankai Summer School 2019

Hello all

Summer school is not long now so last information is listed below.

We are getting the mats there for the Friday night and will be laying them down on the Saturday morning.

Please try and assist with the mats on the Saturday morning from 11am as more the merrier.

Unfortunately there is no more Accommodation for the British Birankai available at the University

but local B &B listed on booking .com in Worcester.

Also no more places for social meal.

There is still places available for the training during the week.

The AGM and Yudansha meetings will be held on the Sunday from 6.15pm.

Looking forward to seeing you all there.

Stuart

## BB Summer school schedule

Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Times
	Zazen	Zazen	Zazen		6.30-7.30
	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	7.30-8.30
	Miyamoto Sensei	Shihan Body art	Miyamoto Sensei	Miyamoto Sensei	8.30-9.30
Dojo set up	Miyamoto Sensei	Shihan Tanto	Miyamoto Sensei	Miyamoto Sensei	9.45-10.45
	Miyamoto Sensei	Shihan Weapons	Miyamoto Sensei	Shihan Weapons	11.00-12.00
Registration 13.00	Lunch 12.00 -14.30	Lunch 12.00 -14.30	Lunch 12.00 -14.30	Mats up 12.00	12.00 -14.30
Shihan Body Art	Shihan Body Art	Miyamoto Sensei	Shidoin/Fukushidoin Body Art		14.30-15.30
Miyamoto Sensei	Shihan Body Art	Miyamoto Sensei	Shidoin/Fukushidoin Body Art		15.45-16.45
Shihan Weapons	Shihan Weapons	Shihan Iaido	Shihan Iaido		17.00-18.00
TC meal	AGM and Yundansha meeting 18.15	Group Meal 20.00	Social 20.00		

Subject to change.