

## Cork report

by Laura

On Thursday 24th February, 13 people for Edinburgh University Kendo Club traveled to Cork for the Goodwill Irish Taikiki. Twelve of our intrepid explorers arrived at Waverley Station ready to hop onto the airbus and to be greeted by Neill's beaming face of happiness. Or maybe not... In the stress of checking in, we ended up losing four of the girls somewhere around security and once arriving in Dublin, Kristin wasn't allowed in country whilst Wei and Yoko snuck in under the pretence of being a married couple. Yet, in Kendo Club tradition, all was calmed as the nearest bar was found and pints of Guinness began to be consumed although consumption of numerous pints was not the best idea before heading onto a gazillion hour coach journey to Cork.

On Friday morning, with new hakama tying skills in tow, the journey to Little Ireland began. The morning seminar that day was led by Holt Sensei and people were split up according to grade, with the beginners having Ishkubo Sensei \*general swoon by most people who went to Cork\*, learning kata and more basic shinai techniques. The evening seminar was a little more interesting and on the other side of Cork, in a tiny dojo, where we got to practise ji-geiko against sensei and having the opportunity to watch them fight against each other. And, after a long day of practise, we retreated back from Little Island back to the Cork for good curry, beer and much needed sleep.

There was a different atmosphere on the Saturday morning, especially in the boys' dorm – particularly from Matthew, with his little black notebook, in which he had ominously written all his opponents weaknesses... The Edinburgh warm up also got special attention off the sensei, mainly as it was the biggest and the loudest, causing Steve to brim with pride. There were three teams competing; Edinburgh 1 being Koji, Ruairidh and Neill, Edinburgh 2 being Wei, Matthew and an unknown man who ended up being affectionately called Jack (whether that was his name or not) and Edinburgh 3 being Anusiya, Erika and Tasun, it being Tasun's first competition. The first competition was the women's individuals, a first for both Erika and Anusiya, the latter scoring an impressive men point against the lady's gold, unfortunately however, neither made it to the second round. In the pooled individuals, Ruairidh, Wei and Tasun were selected to represent their teams in which Wei made it into the quarter finals and Ruairidh gained second place, working his way through the strong Irish. In the teams event, Edinburgh 2 (Wei, Matthew and 'Jack') clashed with two well trained teams in the pools; Dublin 5 who got silver and Ukraine who got to the quarter finals. They fought bravely, but lost in the end. Edinburgh team 3 had passed the pool with Tasun's first ever point in a match (and his first time entering a taikai as-well!). and setting good spirits for Erika and Anusiya's following fights Unfortunately, Edinburgh 3 lost in the first knock out round but still an impressive achievement when so new to competition. Most impressively, Edinburgh 1 was in the

semi-finals gaining bronze medals. They originally lost to one of the Cork teams, but beat Dublin in the starting pools and then beat Bray, to be knocked out by one of the Dublin 1 in the semi-finals, the winners of the competition. The beginners helped out in the scoring, operating the most efficient score board and having the best-whistle blower (out of two) in the whole of the Dojo, even if I do say so myself.

On Sunday, with the beginners and non-grading sempai grabbing the chance at an extra hour asleep; Ruairidh, Matt and Koji headed to register for grading. Only... they weren't the only ones to be grading. On arrival to the dojo, it turned out, to the beginners surprise, that they too would be grading that day and a Steve-intensive hour of Kendo occurred (still with the horror that he was placing them into grade and leaving me to question whether this was a twisted joke or actual reality). Alike Friday's seminar, practice was split between junior sempai, who were focusing on bogu practise and the rest of the sempai focusing on kata – with specific focus to be ready for grading.

As the lowest grades, the beginners were the first to grade. Arman bravely went first, possibly a reflection in him earning the highest grade (third kyu), in sets of kirikaeshi and basic cuts. Following Arman, Kristin, Laura and Mike all graded, earning fourth kyu. After gradings of other kendoka from Cork and Dublin clubs, Matt, Koji and Ruairidh all graded; yet one of the most notable aspects of the gradings were the motodatchi. For comedy value, Matt - a giant, Koji -a child (a very terrifying 5 foot teenager – at least from a beginner's perspective) and Ruairidh got Neill... There was a brief gasp when Ruairidh's opponent in kata forgot the kata. However, there was a happy ending as Matthew, Koji and Ruairidh all graded, earning Shodan (1st Dan), Nidan (2nd Dan) and Sandan (3rd Dan) respectively.

After gradings, more kendo, a brief tour of an industrial estate, a missed train and two rogue taxis, we arrived at Cork airport ready to head home and collapsed, waiting, in the bar drinking our last Guinness's and Tasun taking on for the team and ordering the only Irish coffee of the trip. To then be joined by Steve and two more sensei. There was no escaping him! Seriously. Not even on the plane. However, exhausted and happy, the majority of us fell asleep on the plane and were greeted back to cold gusty Edinburgh and the realisation that a fantastic trip was over.

Hopefully it will not seem too long until next year, when we will all be back in Cork (in bogu!)...