

On November 20th 2010, Neill, Gary and Ruairidh traveled to London to compete in the Mumeishi 3's International Kendo Clubs Championship. It is one of the biggest events in the British kendo calendar and exhibits high national and international caliber. Unfortunately, due to extenuating circumstances, there was no other team from Edinburgh competing, so Edinburgh University was representing Edinburgh, nay, the East of Scotland! East Side!

The Three fought in the teams event, initially taking on Kagami Shin B. Ruairidh, fighting Sempo and in nito for the first time, managed to score two men cuts against a confounded kendoka who subsequently quipped "I didn't train for this!" Gary was in Chuken position and this was his first tournament for over two years. He put in a jolly good show and held his opponent to a hikiwake. This left Neill, as Taisho, needing only to draw but he swiftly ended his foe with a debana kote and hiki men to take Edinburgh to the next round. Phew! Due to the large number of competing teams, there were no pool stages, and thusly if you lose your first match, it's game over. So thankfully the team marched on proudly with one win under they hakama-obi.

After a lengthy break to allow for the numerous other teams to stride through the golden gates of glory or slink off into the shadows of shame, Edinburgh's second bout was about to come about. By this point in the day, a lovely lunch of Japanese bento boxes had been consumed and Koji had finished his exam to join us at the venue. Perhaps this added weight in the gut and the stern and judging scrutiny of our Captain precipitated a mutation of the team's previous run. No exonerating blame of course. So up stepped Ruairidh with his silly little swords against Portsmouth's Sempo. This fight would turn out to be somewhat reminiscent of a Tom & Jerry cartoon, with Tom (Ruairidh) swinging wildly and erratically at Jerry (Ms. Oshima), who adroitly dodged, ducked, dipped, dived and dodged in every evasive direction. Although before the anvil was dropped on Tom's head just as he had his claws on Jerry, the bell rang and two were forced to cease. Saved by the bell. Looking like something the cat dragged in, Tom pussyfooted off with his tail between his legs, to devise a new plan of catching that little mouse. Perhaps one sword next time.

Undeterred by this catfight, Gary stepped into the shiaiyo with purpose. Out of the Three, he was the only one to better (in this writer's opinion) his previous fight. Although the same result occurred, Gary fought strongly and tenaciously and was unlucky to score a point. He can be very proud of his re-inaugural performance. So two draws left Neill under some pressure. He could not lose; either win or draw and go to the deciding fight. After a close-fought two minutes, no point decided the two kendoka and a deciding fight was called. Neill stepped up against Portsmouth's Taisho to extend the previous fight. In deciding fights there is no time limit, and ippon shobu, meaning it is basically unlimited encho; sudden death. All very dramatic and suspenseful. After many almost- and nearly- and oo-could-have-been-ippons, a point was awarded to Portsmouth's number three. A valiant effort by Edinburgh, but their road reached a cliff. A cliff cruelly cut in front of them by a southern coastal sword. And the port below them reached up, shook their hands and turned them around.

So the Three sat in seiza, removed their men, bowed to shomen and committed seppuku. Koji, with a shake of the head, did the honours and took off their heads. Many lessons learned and experience gained, and still that lingering relief that they go through the first round. The final winners were the impressive St. Etienne from France. An admirable effort from Taiseidokai of Glasgow saw them take 2nd place, and the East Side shared in some of the West's glory. We are one country, after all.

Many high grade sensei were present and the championships, including our good friend Quentin's sensei, Guentleur Sensei from Paris. Along with him were other British 7th Dans as well as Yanai Sensei from Japan and a keiko was held on the Sunday. This was a very enjoyable morning, with much learned, even if Koji did momentarily break Yanai Sensei. Needless to say Koji later whipped himself in the changing rooms. Overall the trip was a rewarding experience and although we didn't win, as Robert South said, "Defeat should never be a source of discouragement but rather a fresh stimulus."