



***SEIDO KARATE***

***CHRISTCHURCH***

-

***A BRIEF HISTORY***

## Introduction

In 2015 Christchurch Seido Shibu marks its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a dojo. It has touched the lives of thousands of people, directly and indirectly. More than 350 black belts have come out of this dojo. Countless kicks, punches and kata have occurred within its walls; the wooden floor is seasoned with the sweat of generations of karateka who have come to share the energy found in one of the oldest dojo in New Zealand. If you listen carefully, you can hear the kiai of all who have gone before. Christchurch Shibu – one of two head branches of the World Seido Karate Organisation in New Zealand – is central to the development of karate in this country; it is a special place for many.

### A note on karate titles

Over time, the titles of karateka change with promotion from one grade to another. The dates of these changes are not always known, so to avoid errors, no titles are used when referring to people in the past. Titles as of 2015 are used for all quotations supplied for this history and when referring to the current actions of karateka.

### Thanks and sources

Thanks to all who have assisted with this history, either through providing information or support in other ways:

Hanshi Renzie Hanham  
Shihan Doug Holloway  
Sei Shihan Gavin Lowe  
Sei Shihan Peter Searle  
Sei Shihan Neil Mathieson  
Sei Shihan Harry Roelofs  
Jun Shihan Bu Windsor  
Kyoshi Ellen Hampson  
Kyoshi Bryan Carter  
Senpai Garry Szeto  
Senpai Jennifer Dray  
Senpai Andy Welch

Material is drawn from a range of sources:

Personal historical research on martial arts in New Zealand (and see Bronwyn Dalley. 'Martial arts - Martial arts in New Zealand', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 21-Jan-15, [www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/martial-arts](http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/martial-arts)) and interviews with Shihan Doug Holloway (2013) and Hanshi Renzie Hanham (2013, 2015, as well as pers comm 2015)

'Hands and Feet' (Christchurch Shibu newsletter)

Information on the building is from *Star* and *New Zealand Tablet*

Diana Looser , 'The development and characteristics of the martial arts experience in New Zealand', Master of Social Science thesis, Lincoln University, 2003

[andrebertel.blogspot.co.nz/2012/01/interview-hanshi-renzie-hanham-8th-dan.html](http://andrebertel.blogspot.co.nz/2012/01/interview-hanshi-renzie-hanham-8th-dan.html), accessed 28 August 2015

## Origins and influences

Today, Christchurch Shibu is known as a Seido Karate dojo. Its history dates back to the founding of Kyokushinkai in New Zealand in 1965, but its roots lie deep within the story of martial arts in this country.

### The jiu-jitsu legacy

Jiu-jitsu was the first martial art seen in New Zealand. From the early 1900s, Japanese jiu-jitsu experts gave displays or fought local wrestlers or boxers on the popular entertainment circuit – MMA for the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of these touring masters, Ryugoro Fukushima (Ray Shima), finally settled in New Zealand in the 1930s, making his home in Christchurch.

### Judo influences

Shima's gym-dojō was central to martial arts in Canterbury. He taught jiu-jitsu, wrestling, and most importantly, judo. This was the first martial art to be properly established here. Kiwi soldiers based in Japan after the Second World War picked up some judo and brought their skills home; Dutch and English migrants who had learned judo overseas moved here in the 1950s and set up clubs. The first was in Auckland (1948), but the second was in Christchurch, formed by one of Ray Shima's students and Dutch migrants. It opened in 1953 and its name – Can Am Ju (Canterbury Amateur Judo) – came from the Ken-Am-Ju club in The Netherlands.

Many karateka key to the story of martial arts began as judoka. Renzie Hanham was one, practising judo at Can Am Ju from 1959 and gaining his shodan in the style at the age of 18. Doug Holloway was another, who started judo in Invercargill in 1961. Judo became an Olympic sport in 1964, and its profile lifted even further

### Towards Kyokushin

Doug Holloway slowly became more interested in karate than judo. It was hard to find good information – a few karate books were available – and even harder to get instruction. Shihan Doug Holloway remembers lessons from visiting Japanese seamen in his hometown and grabbing whatever teaching he could find through books and magazines. He even took the very bold step of writing directly to Masutatsu Oyama, founder of Kyokushin Karate, to get further information.

Mas Oyama invited Doug Holloway to train at Kyokushin Honbu in Tokyo. It was a hugely formative experience for him, one of the few Westerners to train there at the time. After four and a half months of training six hours a day, seven days a week, including personal sessions with Mas Oyama, Doug received his shodan.

### Kanku Karate Academy

Back home, and true to his word to his sensei, Doug formed New Zealand's Kyokushin Karate Organisation in 1965. He was a student at Canterbury University, so it was natural to base the national organisation in Christchurch. Doug decided to encourage judoka to try karate: 'judoka understood the discipline inherent and necessary in a martial art', he recalls. He visited Can Am Ju in May 1965 to meet his first Christchurch student – Renzie Hanham, a shodan who was head instructor at Can Am Ju. 'Of course I was keen', he remembers.

Soon afterwards, the Kanku Karate Academy, an official branch of the Oyama Karate School, held its first Kyokushin class at Can Am Ju in London Street. University students and judoka interested in karate turned up – people like Tony Young, Wayne Wendelken, Russell (Jamie) Tulloch, Alistair Spain, Hilton Lebeau, Trevor Trainor and Chris Wilson, amongst others. Some people were serious about the new martial art, and others were just curious. And of course, some thought karate was plain weird. 'My judo colleagues thought I was crazy', Hanshi Renzie Hanham recalls. 'They used to watch me train and laugh a lot, and took great delight in telling my why I would never be any good at karate.'

There may have been some mystique about the new martial art in town, but with the formation of the Kanku Karate Academy, an important new chapter in New Zealand's martial arts story began.

## **From Kyokushin to Seido**

Martial arts boomed in the 1960s and 1970s. Bruce Lee and Chuck Norris were big stars, and on TV, series such as 'Kung Fu' and 'The Avengers' took martial arts into living rooms, and people into dojo – the judo moves of the slinky Mrs Peel brought many women and men to martial arts, no doubt for different reasons.

### **Early days at the dojo**

Like every other style, the Kanku Karate Academy reaped the benefit of the growing interest. 'We'd get a hundred turning up at a beginners' class', Hanshi Renzie Hanham remembers, and there are stories of huge classes of eager women and men, keen to give karate a go. One early member recalls a Saturday morning class at the university with 130 students – too many to fit on the training floor.

Classes were long and tough, up to three hours of line work and basics. It was hard yakka – and without the glamour of the Chuck Norris or Bruce Lee movies that many would have seen. The drop-out rate was high. Of the 130 in that university class, only three remained at the end of the year, one of whom still trains – Sei Shihan Ben Otang who leads the Brooklyn dojo in Wellington.

Everyone who stayed was keen to learn, Shihan Doug Holloway recalls, and they trained hard. Classes gave people a thorough immersion in Kyokushin. It was 'basics, basics and when you were getting bored, more basics and lots of kumite', Hanshi Renzie Hanham reflects. Looking back, some senior karateka appreciate the emphasis on basics: 'it was a great grounding', Sei Shihan Neil Mathieson notes.

Kumite was important. 'There was a lot of sparring because there wasn't a lot of syllabus', Sei Shihan Neil Mathieson remembers. Everyone sparred, including beginners who had just walked in the door. Those who stayed the distance learned to take a punch the hard way.

It could be difficult for some people. 'If you had an ego, you got it beaten out of you', Sei Shihan Peter Searle recalls. As Hanshi Renzie Hanham tells it, 'people who survived in that system were tough anyway; they were tough when they started, they didn't have to develop that, they already had it.' [Quoted in Diana Looser, 'The development and characteristics of the martial arts experience in New Zealand', Master of Social Science thesis, Lincoln University, 2003, p.132.]

### **The club grows**

Black belts were few and far between. For some time, Doug Holloway was the only dan grade in the Christchurch club. Hanshi Renzie Hanham recalls: 'When I started training ... there were hardly any black belts in karate; you know, they could walk on water, godlike, and all that sort of stuff'. Thinking back many years later, he admits getting his shodan was a 'bit of a shock ... and realised that, actually, it wasn't like that at all'. [Quoted in Diana Looser, 'The development and characteristics of the martial arts experience in New Zealand', Master of Social Science thesis, Lincoln University, 2003 p.150.]

Kyokushin dojo opened all over New Zealand in the 1960s; some were new, and others had been unaffiliated styles that saw an advantage to joining with Kyokushin. There were enough dojo to run the first national championship in 1967, and Christchurch was the obvious host.

In 1968/69, a group of students from the dojo travelled to Kyokushin Honbu in Tokyo for intensive training under the direction of Mas Oyama: Doug Holloway, Renzie Hanham, Trevor Trainer, Wayne Wendelken, Jamie Tulloch and Hilton Libeau. It was a huge experience for these young men, training most days and pitting

themselves against their Japanese counterparts. There was special tuition – in sai, nunchaku and kick-boxing. Their hard Kiwi Kyokushin training had been good: Renzie Hanham and Hilton Libeau were models in Mas Oyama's book *Advanced Karate*, and two of the group were offered contracts in kick-boxing.

### **Change at the top**

Doug Holloway left Christchurch in 1969, and as the senior student, running the Christchurch dojo fell to Renzie Hanham. There was a renaming – Kanku Karate Academy became Josai-Kan in 1970 – and the club continued to go from strength to strength. New members streamed in, including Andy Barber who moved to Christchurch in 1970. Some of the earliest members still train at Shibu and are all now Sei Shihan: Gavin Lowe, Peter Searle, Neil Mathieson – theirs is a precious 40+ year friendship.

Many women took up martial arts from the 1960s and those who trained in Kyokushin at the Christchurch dojo notched up important firsts. Karen Hanham was the first woman in the club to grade to shodan, in 1975. That year, club member Christine Wilby trained at Kyokushin Honbu, the first woman to Australasia to do so; she went on to become Mas Oyama's 'foreign secretary', responsible for various international aspects of the style.

The club's fighters had a national and Australasian reputation. Four of the five-member national Kyokushin team to Australian in 1970 were from Christchurch, and they cleaned out the opposition: 1<sup>st</sup> (Andy Barber) and 3<sup>rd</sup> (Renzie Hanham) in the open kumite, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the middleweight.

Some of the world's great martial artists passed through New Zealand in the early 1970s – top practitioners in Kendo, Tae-Kwon Do and Kyokushin. In 1974 the club brought out Mas Oyama's two best students, 6th dans (Shihan) Tadashi Nakamura and Shigeru Oyama, to run a national clinic. It was a pivotal event for Christchurch Shibu: at the end of the clinic, Renzie Hanham and Andy Barber received sandan, their instructor's certificates, and were named branch chiefs.

### **From Kyokushin to Seido**

Now known as Mas Oyama Karate Do Inc., the dojo sent 9 members to New York to prepare for the first Kyokushin World Open Tournament. It was a hard, testing time for the group. Sei Shihan Gavin Lowe, Peter Searle, and Neil Mathieson – all kyu grades at the time – point to this event as a key moment in their karate journey: their friendship formed there, they reflect, and without the mutual support of each other (and fellow team-mates Dick Ivess, Kevin McGuire and Bill Bowie), they would not have made it through the experience.

By this time, there was a lot of debate in New Zealand karate circles about the future of Kyokushin. In 1976 Renzie Hanham wrote a bold opinion piece in national martial arts magazine *South Pacific Martial Arts*: 'Is Kyokushinkai Karate in Trouble?', he asked. Senior karateka – Renzie Hanham and Andy Barber, by then leading his own dojo in Nelson – felt the lack of some technical aspects while training in Japan, and, having done zen sessions, thought a more spiritual dimension was missing from the style.

When Tadashi Nakamura withdrew from Kyokushin in 1976 to set up a new style of karate – Seido Juku, the sincere way – Renzie Hanham and Andy Barber travelled to New York for the opening. Tadashi Nakamura invited both men to join his style, and they accepted. At the end of the visit, both received their promotion to yondan – with the title of Sensei – making them the highest graded Seido members outside New York, where Grandmaster Kaicho Nakamura still runs his dojo.

The Christchurch Kyokushin dojo became a Seido Karate dojo in 1976. For those who switched styles and made Seido Juku their karate home, an exciting new journey was underway.

## **Our own dojo**

A dojo is more than four walls, a floor and a roof, but having somewhere to train is central for every club. The dream for most, of course, is to own a building. Christchurch Shibu was the first martial arts club in New Zealand to do this, moving into its current premises in 1972.

The Christchurch Kyokushin club first based itself at the judo clubrooms, Can Am Ju, in London Street. It was the logical venue, given the strong connections with judo, and a good way for the new karate style to get on its feet and be accepted in town.

The club stayed in Can Am Ju for the next eight years, with some classes at the university as well. But members wanted somewhere to call their own – easier wished for than done. ‘We had no idea if it would work’, Hanshi Renzie Hanham says, but like everyone else in the club, he thought it was better than renting. The building the club chose was the Hibernian Hall, at the intersection of Ferry Road and Barbadoes Street, and it had a long and colourful history.

## **Community hall**

The Christchurch Branch of the Australasian Catholic Benefit Society – the Hibernian Society – originally owned the dojo building, known locally as the Hibernian Hall. The Hibernian Society was a welfare, educational and social group for Irish Catholics. It bought the land at the corner of Ferry Road and Barbadoes Street in 1879 and Francis (Frank) Petre drew up plans for a hall in 1882.

Petre was a prominent architect who designed important Catholic buildings, including the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament (the ‘Basilica’) further along Barbadoes Street. He planned a two-storey brick building, faced with Oamaru stone, and a corrugated iron roof with skylights. Inside, there would be the main hall (with stage), a gallery and room on the upper floor for the Catholic Literary Society, and out the back, two more rooms, including a chess room. [*Star*, 10 January 1882 – can give document if able to hyperlink through]

Economic depression hit in the 1880s, and plans for the building stalled. The Benefit Society finally raised enough money for the work and in 1888 architect John Whitelaw completed the design and Petre’s firm constructed the hall – at a cost of £610 all up (\$119,000 in today’s money). The building opened on St Patrick’s Day, 1889, with songs, speeches, and toasts appropriate to the occasion: to the Queen, the Pope, the clergy, the Hibernians, the ladies present, the press, and ‘Irishmen at Home and Abroad’. [*Star*, 18 March 1891]

The Hibernians and local Catholic groups used the hall for all their events – meetings, fundraisers, socials, dances and conventions. But the hall was really a community venue, used by all sorts of groups for all manner of things. There were benefit concerts and card tournaments (including a few illegal ones), welcome home events for soldiers, socials and dances for football clubs. In the 1920s the Rosemary Jazz Band held regular dances there, with live bands playing the latest numbers. Many community groups held jumble sales and bazaars in the hall, and a few couples used it for their wedding reception. The hall’s central location made it a prime spot for important civic events: politicians held rallies there – it was a stronghold of left-leaning politicians – and it was a polling booth in local and national elections. During the November 1918 influenza epidemic – when over 450 people in Christchurch died – the Hibernian Hall was headquarters for the relief and medical teams in the vicinity.

During the 1950s it became one of the major dance and music venues in town. Rock and roll had burst onto the scene, and everyone under 25 wanted to hear the bands belt out the new music. The Hibernian Hall – especially

its 'Teenage Club' – was one of the places to be. Local band Max Merritt and the Meteors played up a storm there from 1961. Max later said of the venue: 'the Hibernian Hall was a bloodbath at times because you'd have the Maori guys in one corner, the Samoan guys in the other, the seamen who used to come into Lyttelton Harbour in one corner, and the Demo Boys were the local ruffians. It was a volatile situation and anything could set it off, but it was exciting because we were playing rock'n'roll and everyone was enjoying it'. [Quoted in Chris Bourke, *Blue Smoke: The lost dawn of New Zealand popular music*, Auckland, 2010 p.294.]

### **From dance hall to dojo**

The club moved into the Hibernian Hall in 1972. Its large main room was perfect, but even so, changing the building from a dance hall to a dojo was a big job. The sprung rimu floor was worn but still too good to rip up, so another floor was laid over the top. The stage eventually became the shinzen, the upper floor the men's changing area, and the rooms out the back the women's changing space and another training room.

All of the work cost time and money. Training fees helped, and members did the work and raised funds wherever they could – bottle drives, pig in a barrow raffles at pubs on a Saturday. And there were times when senior members paid the mortgage out of their own pockets. It was all run on the 'smell of an oily rag', Sei Shihan Neil Mathieson remembers. The mortgage was cleared in the late 1980s, allowing the club to channel money into member development.

Since then, there have been a few paint jobs, repairs and improvements: showers installed, bathrooms upgraded, and skylights added (2005). Heaters hang from the walls, although winter morning and evening training can still be chilly. But the basic form of the dojo has stayed largely the same – and that familiarity is a huge source of comfort to club members. Sei Shihan Peter Searle summed it up: 'you can change your car, change your clothes, but the dojo remains the same – it hasn't changed in 40 years'.

### **Canterbury earthquakes**

The importance of the building was obvious to everyone in September 2010 when the first big earthquake hit Christchurch. Buildings all over town suffered damaged, but the dojo came through relatively unscathed. Paint and plaster inside cracked. Outside, the parapet over the front door was damaged and the door cordoned off. Scaffolding went up at the side to give safe access through the alley door. Surrounding buildings were not so lucky, and the one on the corner of Ferry Road was demolished.

The dojo was fully operational after members made running repairs, but this would not be the case after another earthquake rocked the Canterbury region in February 2011. Buildings collapsed, hillsides crumbled and 185 people lost their lives; people were left homeless as their houses fell or became uninhabitable through liquefaction; roads and bridges were twisted, and the infrastructure suffered massive damage. The emotional toll was huge.

Christchurch Shibu remained standing, but at a cost. The masonry façade at the front crumbled, and there was more damage inside. This time, the dojo closed.

### **Seido spirit**

'We often talk about the Seido family, and now is the time to see what that really means', Shibu's 2011 winter newsletter reported. It was obvious straightaway. Seido dojo everywhere rallied to support Christchurch Shibu, in messages and thoughts; donations arrived from Honbu and Seido's Grandmaster Kaicho Tadashi Nakamura, from Australia and England, and even former members. The Seido spirit kicked in as dojo around greater Christchurch opened their doors so members from Shibu could train.

It was a stressful and difficult time, and members spoke of feeling displaced in all parts of their lives. The club offered assistance to all members: accommodation, shovelling liquefaction, helping find jobs, financial support.

During this time, turning up to training gave stability, even in unfamiliar, non-Seido dojo. In a huge act of generosity, judoka and martial arts shop owner Graeme Spinks made his dojo in Stanmore Road available; his regular dojo (as well as his shop and home) had all been destroyed. The club trained there for some months while members set to work, arranging engineers' reports, collating material for insurance purposes, overseeing repairs and getting designs for remodelling; they gave their time, skills and resources to get the dojo up and running again.

Training in temporary locations was not the same as being in the dojo: 'training elsewhere didn't work', Sei Shihan Neil Mathieson reflected, 'the building is really important'. The dojo reopened to members in winter 2011 on a streetscape that looked very different. Neighbouring buildings had been bulldozed and familiar landmarks vanished. Outside, the brick façade and arched windows designed by Frank Petre a century before had gone and the dojo presented a plainer front to the world. Designs are in place for a new look to the dojo. Hanshi Renzie Hanham has designed the exterior in collaboration with Senpai Bill Skews, a prominent architect. In keeping with its historical roots, the curved windows will be reinstalled. Senpai Atsushi Minagawa is undertaking the building work, which will also extend the upstairs changing room and meet local council requirements through the addition of wheelchair access and toilets. For Shibu members, the essential spirit of the dojo continues regardless: the building has a presence.



## **The shinzen**

At the front of the dojo floor is the shinzen where Christchurch Shibu places its precious things: gifts, trophies, mementos, items marking significant events in the dojo's history, and, of course, the emblems and kanji central to Seido Juku.

## **The scroll**

The symbols of Seido Juku hang above the centre of the shinzen. Most prominent is the scroll, with the kanji spelling out Seido Juku – sincere way or special place. Japanese calligrapher and poet Iwako Graham created the work for the dojo at the suggestion of club member Dennis Logan. The scroll has been part of the dojo for more than 20 years.

## **The shrine**

The word shinzen literally means 'in front of the god' – a connection with old Shinto dojo. There is no religious aspect to the shinzen in Christchurch Shibu, but it does have a shrine. It is inside a black lacquered cabinet, made in the 1980s by Brother Dunstan (a shodan in the club) who taught at Catholic Cathedral College in Ferry Road. The cabinet is a physical reminder of the building's origins as a meeting place for Catholics.

## **Taonga Pounamu**

A number of taonga pounamu – greenstone treasures – sit at the shinzen. One is an axe, donated to the club in 2011 by former member Geoff Love who generously assisted with repairs following the earthquakes. The other is a large piece of pounamu gifted to the club in 2005. Pounamu is precious, and a source of power and energy. This piece is a touchstone, transferring to and receiving from energy and spirit from all who touch it.

The pounamu pieces are not the only taonga – Maori treasures – in the dojo. On the top of the shinzen is a taiaha, gifted some years back. It is an appropriate piece for the dojo, given its role in the arts of mau rakau – Maori weapons training.

## **Asahi**

One of the few items purchased for the shinzen is Asahi, the samurai warrior standing watch in the corner of the dojo. Asahi arrived in 2007, bought for the dojo by Sei Shihan Harry Roelofs and Michael Baldwin from a second-hand shop at Matsumoto Castle in Japan. Asahi represents several eras: his clothing is thought to be 18<sup>th</sup> century, his facemask 19<sup>th</sup> century, and he carries a modern (non-collectable) sword. The warrior armour was given the name Asahi, a tongue-in-cheek reference to the rumour that Sei Shihan Harry had been drinking that brew at the time of purchase.

## **RIP Seido members**

Hanging from the rafters near the shinzen are the obi of several Seido members who have passed away. The obi are a constant and physical reminder of the spirit of those who have gone: Arthur Barrett, Graeme Bonnell, Murray Bowden, Steven Cope, David Maraki, Robert McGuinn, Wayne Wendelken.

## **The Christchurch feel**

Every martial arts dojo has its own unique feel or style. Many things form that: the martial art itself, the dojo's history, people who train there, geography, the philosophies of the instructors. The feel of a dojo can change over time as people come and go, instructors keep learning and growing, or aspects of training develop. So is there a Christchurch feel or style?

### **Leadership**

A successful martial arts club is built by many people over many years, but head instructors play a special role. The first head instructor, Doug Holloway, set up the dojo, and brought an emphasis on basics and strong technique, and this has endured. The leadership of Hanshi Renzie Hanham has done most to mould the character of Christchurch Shibu.

Few martial arts clubs can boast of such steady and imaginative leadership. Sei Shihan Gavin Lowe believes the club would have been a minnow, or non-existent without that leadership, and he sees Hanshi Renzie as one of a kind. Even after training with him for 40 years, 'Hanshi can still spring surprises'; 'there is not another instructor who has the same repertoire of skills and knowledge', Sei Shihan Gavin says.

There is the martial arts knowledge, of course – a grounding in judo, and an openness about the skills to be picked up from all forms of martial arts. But there is also a broader knowledge and desire to explore new ideas and approaches. Hanshi Renzie has long been interested in the work of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, a Swiss psychiatrist famous for her work on grief and life stages. The influence of those ideas comes through in gradings, in meditation and relaxation sessions at summer camps, or in classes generally. Outside the dojo – but so clearly connected with years of martial arts study and training – Hanshi Renzie is involved in the area of sports psychology and mental skills coaching.

All of the knowledge comes back into Shibu, and it is there for students to access. Sei Shihan Neil Mathieson captures the mix that Hanshi Renzie provides: 'He's cherry-picked the best pieces of all sorts of things...different philosophies, all the things he has been through'.

It should come as no surprise that Hanshi Renzie's unique skills have been recognised: in 2012 he was inducted into the Australasian Martial Arts Hall of Fame (and therefore the World Karate Union Hall of Fame), and in the same year, he received a Queen's Service Medal for his services to the community. Seido Karate acknowledges him through a Lifetime Achievement Award.

### **Stylistic weaving**

Christchurch Shibu has played a leading role in Seido Juku in New Zealand. It hosted the first national Seido tournament (1979), and in the following year, the first Seido black belt clinic.

Shibu has a strong tradition of enabling students to learn about many martial arts styles. As a Kyokushin club, and then through its long Seido history, the two karate styles predominated, as they should, but aspects of other martial arts supplemented and complemented the karate core: judo, pressure points, tameshiwari (breaking), boxing, wrestling, MMA, iaido – the list goes on

From its earliest days, Shibu has built links with other martial arts. The judo origins of many early members shaped the Kyokushin dojo, and training out of a judo club helped make karate – the new martial art kid on the block in the 1960s – more acceptable in Christchurch. Under the guidance of Renzie Hanham, the links with judo blossomed. 'I maintained some of those connections', Hanshi Renzie says, 'and still do.' Grappling skills

and judo have long featured in training routines at the dojo, and also as separate specialist classes run by Hanshi Renzie himself or current judoka.

In the early 1970s, local martial arts clubs got together for joint training sessions. These could be rough and tumble. 'It usually revolved around sparring', Hanshi Renzie notes. 'A set of rules would be established but after the first punch was thrown, forgotten.' Some styles even found an organisational home in the dojo – a dojo within the dojo, so to speak. The first aikido club in the South Island was based there in the early 1970s.

Practitioners active in other styles also trained at Shibu if they did not have their own dojo: Jerry Yee was a Tae-Kwon Do shodan who moved to Christchurch in the early 1970s and joined the Kyokushin club. People from a range of martial arts backgrounds still come to Shibu to train in Seido, or to run classes or workshops in other styles. That diversity 'adds immeasurably to the dojo feel', Hanshi Renzie believes, and he sees the variety as a great opportunity for all students to grow and develop.

'The word eclectic springs to mind', says Sei Shihan Neil Mathieson when describing the learning on offer in Shibu. Whether through formal classes, or more indirect means, aspects of other martial arts are integrated into the Shibu style. The effect of this stylistic weaving is magical: 'the variety brings out the best in people. You can never relax in your comfort zone as your comfort zone isn't there', Sei Shihan Peter Searle says. Sei Shihan Gavin put it simply: when you walk in the dojo, 'expect the unexpected'.

### **Gradings**

The unexpected can happen at gradings. The format of senior dan gradings is special to Christchurch (and privy only to those who have been through them), but any grading in this dojo can have a surprising twist. And it is not just a physical challenge.

During the 1980s, grading candidates expected kumite, syllabus and press-ups, but got a lot more. Some were given paper and pen and asked to write a poem during their promotion. In the 1990s, some had to draw a tree. Students were out of their familiar routines – was this really martial arts, some wondered? These were mental tests to sit alongside the physical – a challenge for mind and body, and a way for students to explore different parts of their lives.

Hanshi Renzie, the designer of these mental tests, sees gradings as important personal development milestones: 'there are very few situations in western culture where people can be challenged physically and mentally outside of the competitive arena. I've always felt it's important that people be tested and taken to their individual limit.' [Quoted in [andrebteel.blogspot.co.nz/2012/01/interview-hanshi-renzie-hanham-8th-dan.html](http://andrebteel.blogspot.co.nz/2012/01/interview-hanshi-renzie-hanham-8th-dan.html), accessed 28 August 2015.]

### **Kumite**

Students who train at Shibu from other dojo and who decide to don their sparring gear quickly experience the Christchurch kumite style – a strong approach cemented in the club's earliest days.

As a Kyokushin club, the dojo produced top fighters who won at national and international level: tournaments in Australia (1970), Denmark (1972), Japan (1975). Seido Shibu has produced outstanding kumite practitioners. It hosted the inaugural national Seido tournament in 1979 and club members won all the major events. The dojo's team at the first Seido World Tournament in New York in 1996 took out many titles: the light, middle and heavyweight men, the women's middleweight, and the Masters. The dojo's champion tradition continues, and

club members regularly compete in Seido (and sometimes Kyokushin) tournaments at local, national and international level.

The kumite and exchange of technique can be vigorous, but things have mellowed since the 1960s and early 1970s. Then, no protective gear was the norm and the emphasis was on toughness – Kyokushinkai styled itself as ‘the strongest karate’. Members from those days know they would not be training today if sparring were done the same way. ‘It was a young person’s activity’, Hanshi Renzie says. The transition to Seido moved the emphasis from hard kumite to a more inclusive approach: people did not have to be the toughest or the best fighter to find a place.

## **The Shibu community**

A core part of Seido Karate is its inclusiveness: no one has to be super-fit, the best fighter, or the most flexible to fit in. As a style, Seido opens itself to all, and there is a space for anyone, regardless of age, ethnicity, sexuality. Christchurch Shibu follows this path.

### **Children's programme**

Like many other dojo, Christchurch Shibu runs classes specifically for children, and has done so since 1974. At that time, with black belts rare on the ground, kyu grades had a formal teaching role. Gavin Lowe, a brown belt, began the children's programme; in 1975/76 Charles and Jenni White – both yellow belts – took over the class, and then ran a sparring class specifically for children from 1978 at Manning Intermediate where Charles was a teacher.

Some of the students from those earliest days of the children's programme stayed the distance, going on to gain their black belts. Few children's instructors can best the record of Sei Shihan Gavin Lowe: one of his students in 1974 was Harry Roelofs, now a Sei Shihan himself.

Now, the Seido children's programme (run by Sensei Cheryl Porter) includes classes and camps just for children, as well as an annual children and youth tournament. These tournaments are also an opportunity for the club to acknowledge the contribution of dojo members who have passed away. Four memorial cups are available in these tournaments: the Sensei Steven Cope Memorial Cup for the most outstanding senior, the Wayne Wendelken Memorial Cup for the most outstanding junior, the Art Pickering Memorial Cup for the karateka who most strongly upholds the Seido philosophy, and the Caleb Phillips Memorial Trophy for the student who strives the most.

### **Family focus**

There is a strong family focus in the dojo, where children and their parents can train together. Several Shibu students interviewed for a study in 2003 said they took up Seido because it could help build family relationships. Some parents took up Seido because of watching their children train: 'my son was interested in doing some form of martial arts and I thought that seeing I was going to be there with him that I may as well do it, too, instead of just on-looker'. And some came along to support their children and just kept on training even when the kids got bored and moved on to something else. [Quoted in Diana Looser, 'The development and characteristics of the martial arts experience in New Zealand', Master of Social Science thesis, Lincoln University, 2003, pp.65ff.]

It is easy to take the family focus for granted. But where else can parents train with their children, or learn from their children who might be senior in rank? As Hanshi Renzie Hanham says, 'there are not too many sports where this can happen without it being artificial'.

### **Seido family**

'The club has been a family for many people', Sei Shihan Neil Mathieson suggests, and it is a comment that many people make. It is the people who make the difference: 'I'd miss the people if I stopped training', Sei Shihan Harry Roelofs says.

Relationships forged in the dojo endure, and these personal connections keep people coming back to the dojo even after 40 years of training. 'I'm training because the others are', Sei Shihan Neil says, referring to his fellow Sei Shihan. 'We are all here because of someone else', Hanshi Renzie remarked when receiving his Queen's Service Medal in 2012.

Christchurch Shibu offers tangible support to its members. With no mortgage on the building since the 1980s, funds have been freed up for member and club development. This could be funds to assist members train in Honbu or travel to tournaments, or it could be social gatherings – Thursday night 'shouts'. At times, the club makes Seido Scholarships available for secondary school students to begin training: 'the scholarship recognises and rewards enthusiasm and strength of character and encourages students to pursue the practice of Seido Karate'. ['Hands and Feet', Nov 2009]. The scholarships provide two years of fees (training, affiliation, grading and camp), a gi, and a Seido jacket once the student reaches blue belt.

The Seido emphasis on respect and people development is strong in Shibu. Sei Shihan Gavin points to a philosophy of respect as a core component. It is important for senior members such as himself to make appearances, at camps or gradings – 'we must give others the respect they deserve', he says. When asked about the best part of training, Sei Shihan Peter Searle says without hesitation, 'it's seeing people grow, and playing a role in that'. Growth can only occur in a safe and inclusive place, and Shibu offers that. For a time in the 2000s, there was a class just for those who had returned to training after taking a break – always a scary step to take. From the 1990s especially, lesbians and transgendered people found the dojo a welcoming place. 'You certainly see people change', one senior member said. 'We've seen massive changes in people, and women coming through who have been abused – serious abuse, sexual abuse...and they've ended up happy, adjusted people. Not simply as a result of karate, but I think it's more as a result of the support and the structure, and the structure that affords the support.' [Quoted in Diana Looser, 'The development and characteristics of the martial arts experience in New Zealand', Master of Social Science thesis, Lincoln University, 2003, p.141.]

Shibu is the sum of its many parts, built up over half a century. Each person who has trained there has made a unique contribution, and brought something different. Sometimes this is excellence in sports or work or creativity – and there are many who have performed at high levels across a range of areas; it can be service to the community, or family. And of course it is turning up to the dojo to support, to train and to be part of the dojo community.

**In my experience it's important to enjoy the process, rather than fixate on an outcome. Especially if you want to sustain an effort over a long period of time. Every martial art has their heroes and its own mythology and it's great to have these heroes as role models but theirs is their own story. We can't copy that. In the beginning we try to model ourselves on others which is great but eventually we have to find our own voice and tell our own story. If we do this for ourselves, we need to allow this in our students, once they reach a certain point. Then, in many cases we become the student.... Once you're in a position of leadership things are not so black and white anymore because you become more aware of the individual's story and what brought them to this place and time. I think this makes us more compassionate and I would hope makes us all more magnanimous. ... We never lose that competitive spirit but I think as we get older we look for and desire those things that connect us rather than those things that keep us separate. This way we can make a meaningful contribution to the society we live in.**

Hanshi Renzie Hanham interviewed by André Bertel, 2012

[andrebertel.blogspot.co.nz/2012/01/interview-hanshi-renzie-hanham-8th-dan.html](http://andrebertel.blogspot.co.nz/2012/01/interview-hanshi-renzie-hanham-8th-dan.html),

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