

## Masutaro O'Tani, A History by Henry D.C.C. O'Tani

**In 1896 Masutaro O'Tani** was born to a modest but anciently aristocratic family in rural Kamigoto on the Island of Nakadori Jima, near Nagasaki. He had not learnt Judo as a schoolboy but did study Jujitsu in Ceylon during his early teens.

**In 1919** O'Tani first took lodgings in Liverpool as a merchant seaman having served thought the First World War mainly in British ships in which he eventually earned the rank of a minor engine room petty officer in the White Star line (later Cunard).

**In 1921**, he joined the London Budokwai. When the London Budokwai had first opened, it had taught jujitsu, but in 1920 its instructors Gunji Koizumi and Yukio Tani were persuaded by Jigaro Kano to teach his more modern sport of Judo. After 5 years of judo instruction under Yukio Tani, Masutaro O'Tani was appointed his assistant judo instructor and under the auspices of the Anglo Japanese Society and Yukio Tani he ran the first Judo clubs at Oxford and Cambridge universities.

**During the 1930's** O'Tani (who believed Judo should not be taught or practiced for money) owned his own lampshade business (one of two trades traditionally permitted of samurai).

**In 1938** he married Philippa Francis Bathurst Upton (1917-1993).

**In 1942**, following the outbreak of the Pacific War in December of **1941**, Masutaro O'Tani was interned for several months as an enemy alien at an internment camp on the Isle of Man, whilst his wife was expecting their second son **William Douglas Yukio Dalston (1942 - 1975)**. He was relatively quickly released on kind representations from several influential agencies including Oxford and Cambridge Universities and senior Police officers in London for whom he had previously taught Judo.

**From 1942** with his Anglo-Japanese Judo Society requisitioned by the Civil Defence ARP and his "luxury goods" lampshade business curtailed by shortages, O'Tani, took government training and did factory bench work for the Wembley Tool Company in manufacture of small arms from which a machine gun bearing his craftsmanship was nationally exhibited as "an example of what the British worker could achieve when his peace time employment was converted to War Work."

**In 1945**, following the declaration of Peace in Europe, as English society started to pick up the threads of normality; O'Tani founded **The Jubilee Judo Club**. Although increasing numbers of British people were taking up Judo, it was to be several more years before purpose made judo gi's could be purchased. Judoka who wanted to appear authentic made their own jackets out of surplus naval hammocks (if they could get one). Much boiling and scrubbing was necessary (no launderettes then) to make them

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reasonably flexible, but a quick sawing movement from a lively opponent could remove the skin from the back of your neck. Ex-army shorts completed the outfit.

**In 1948** the British Judo Association (BJA) was formed, but over the next few years O'Tani became increasingly disenchanted with the direction that the BJA was carving out for British Judo. He was also said to be unhappy with the level of support and care that the BJA had extended to his old teacher Yukio Tani who had been incapacitated following a stroke.

**In 1954** O'Tani severed his links with the BJA and took on the role of Master of an association set up by several of his pupils called the **Masutaro O'Tani Society of Judo (MOSJ )**.

**In 1955** O'Tani took up employment with Wilkinson Sword ceremonial sword department in Acton and worked in sword making (the other trade traditionally permitted of samurai) until well after retirement age in 1969.

**In 1955** a high ranking Japanese Judoka, Kenshiro Abbe, was invited to England by the **London Judo Society (LJS)** to become their chief instructor.

**In 1956** O'Tani, who was by then a 5th Dan, made contact with Kenshiro Abbe and apparently being inspired by his style of judo began training under him. When Abbe Sensei became disillusioned with the LJS he left, taking Bill Wood with him and joined forces with Masutaro O'Tani.

**In 1958** when Kenshiro Abbe started the British Judo Council, O'Tani was given the position of National Coach and the following year was awarded his 7<sup>th</sup> Dan.

**In 1964** When Kenshiro Abbe returned to Japan for the Olympic Games he left O'Tani in charge of the BJC. Whilst in Japan, Abbe's organisational and financial resources (including family crest and signature stamps) were appropriated by a dismissed BJC senior executive and several former senior instructors who set up a Kent based version of the BJC. This effectively stranded Abbe in Japan until O'Tani could personally save up the fare to bring him back (at that time costing half a year's factory wages).

**In 1969** when Kenshiro Abbe returned from his stay in Japan he attempted to dismantle the new rival BJC and promoted O'Tani to 8th Dan and President.

**In 1970** two years before Kenshiro returned to Japan O'Tani amalgamated his MOSJ with the BJC.

**In 1977 Masutaro O'Tani died.** His son Robin O'Tani became President of the BJC.

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