

# Chris Denwood Seminar Report – Lancaster

By Anthony Oliver

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We don't tend to host courses and seminars at St Martin's as often as we perhaps should; - it's a combination of laziness (sorry guys!) and the fact there are so many top class people in the area, that, at club level, it's easier to pop down the road to their dojo's and train there. So, to even get the booking, we have to think you've got something to teach us, and, the ability to teach it well.

We'd first heard of Chris Denwood a couple of years ago, when one of the new students at the club told us about a charity seminar in aid of cancer research being run up in Cumbria. Ollly and Emma braved the two hour drive and both enjoyed the seminar so much, they recommended we try and bring the organiser of the seminar, Chris Denwood, one of the most enthusiastic and well versed instructors we've come across, down here to run a session at the college. Some two years on, we finally got around to it. In the meantime, Chris has been making a quite a name for himself, becoming a regular contributor to the UK's leading martial arts magazines "Combat" and "Traditional Karate", with his articles gaining very positive reviews.



Well, normally, if the seminar is due to start at eleven, we set up at half ten, expecting people to roll in about quarter to eleven. There were about twenty people there when I arrived at half ten. Damn, they were keen! In fact, the majority of people attending the course had travelled for over an hour to attend, the furthest travelling down from Kilmarnock. The styles represented were Shotokan, Shito Ryu and several flavours of Wado Ryu. And they were lively too! There was a definite buzz in the air, with the anticipation that we would be getting something worth missing the hangover for.

After the warm up, the seminar began with the open question "What does kata mean to you?" Not as silly a question as it sounds, as it seems that there is still a spectrum of emphasis and meaning attributed to kata, or not, as the case may be! A few minutes spent setting the baseline and ground rules meant everyone was clearly aware of what Chris

intended to focus on, and the criteria to be met for success in an individual's analysis of the movements of a sequence from a kata of their choice.

We then moved onto the stages of kata analysis, in three parts, (Omote, Henka and Ura,) drilling in pairs on a starter example from Pinan/Heian Godan, plus your interpretation of a sequence of your own, progressing from the set moves, to variations, to the principles fulfilled by the movements and how, if the principle is applied, the movement can be varied, giving a huge variety of applications from comparatively few movements! A truly 3 dimensional application of a comparatively simple teaching tool, we could have gone on for hours, trying out different variations, but with the arrival of the buffet the morning session was called to a halt to allow the hungry martial artists to replenish the calories burned.



The afternoon session was aimed at developing tactile awareness and how to put it to good use in close quarter combat. We started by setting our distance, starting from long range and progressively closing in until everyone was at arm's length, and suddenly the strikes were getting in. At this point we looked at flow drills and how once forearm contact was made we could now react with sufficient speed to prevent (heavy) contact from being made to the head and torso, guiding the opponents force and using it to our advantage before finally moving onto the idea of using flow drills to practice creating (defender) and overcoming (attacker) barriers to striking attacks.

As with the morning session, we could have gone on for far, far longer, and it's to Chris's credit as a teacher that at no point did he run out of ideas, enthusiasm and tangents to put a twist on something you thought you knew and had a handle on, and send you off on a different tack! Everyone I spoke to on the day had not only learned something, but was enthused about how to work it in with their existing way of doing things, and keen to pass it on. The staff at the sports hall were very patient with us and allowed us to finish what we were working on and get a group photo before throwing us out!



Seminars like this are a rarity, as it seems that, while a lot of senior grades have a wealth of valuable knowledge to pass on, with all due respect, some of their methods have, in recent years started to seem hidebound and limited. With the advent of the internet and the vast amount of research out there, it's no longer enough to say "here is a technique, go and practice it." Today's karate-ka are generally better informed and inclined to question; - a more holistic approach is needed, with the ability to teach around the technique, (strategy, concepts, principles, tactics, drills, exercises, variation, improvisation and so on.)

It is so refreshing to find someone who unquestionably has the knowledge, but with the versatility, enthusiasm and skills to put such ideas across to a group of different backgrounds, focuses and grades and make it seem effortless and fun at the same time!

I strongly recommend you check out the stuff Chris and his group the E.S.K.K. are working on, and get yourself to one of his seminars. You'll learn something, and hopefully have as much fun doing it as we did!