



## The Kano Society Bulletin



Issue No. 32

November 2017

### Contents

- A Life in *Judo* – Bob Thomas 8<sup>th</sup> dan (1938 – 2017), by Llyr Jones;
- Obituary: Bob Thomas, by Ronnie Saez
- Bob Thomas, by Stan Brogan

### News

It is with great sadness that we must report the death of one of the Kano Society's earliest members, Bob Thomas, who died early on 6 November 2017. Bob is sadly missed by his many friends and family, and with his passing the *judo* community has lost an extremely popular and knowledgeable individual.

A recipient of the Kano Society Trophy for his services to *judo*, Bob was a remarkable man who embodied Jigoro Kano's vision of a complete *judoka*. His *judo* career paralleled that of the great Toshiro Daigo *Kodokan* 10<sup>th</sup> Dan – starting out as an uncompromising competitor and later becoming a prominent authority on *kata*. A gentleman in every sense of the word, Bob was deceptively cultured – having a wide range of interests, including the arts and literature. His energy and infectious enthusiasm would constantly light up a room. Bob was warm, full of humour, and always had time for everyone – usually to provide some advice, or tell a story. He will be much missed.

Llyr Jones

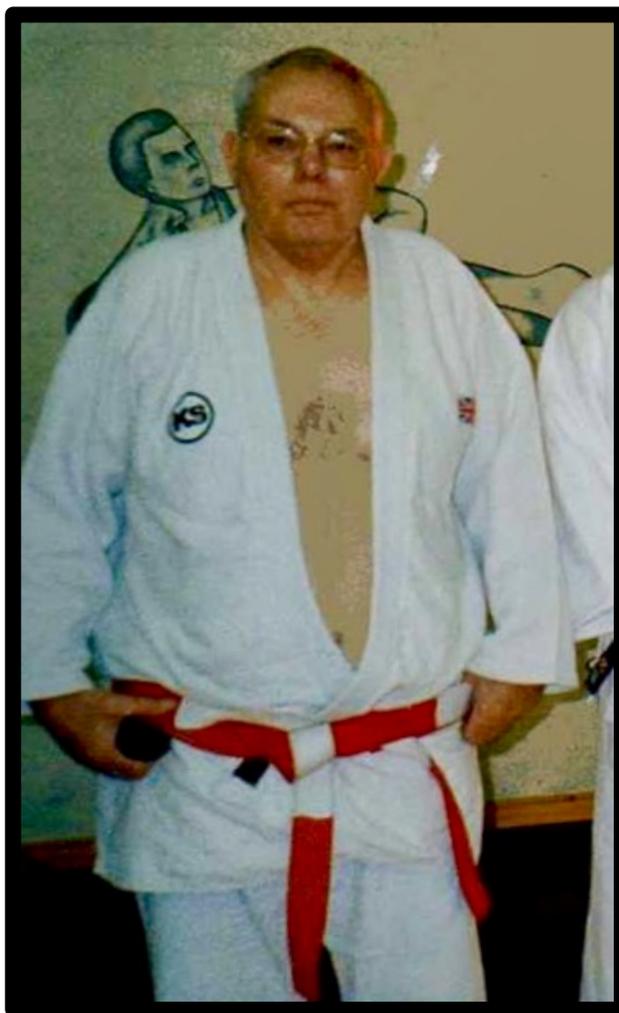
### In this edition

Contributions to this special tribute issue of the Kano Society Bulletin have been provided, from the *judo* community, by Llyr Jones and Ronnie Saez. We also reproduce an article, about Bob Thomas, by the late Stan Brogan that appeared in an earlier edition of the Bulletin from 2002. Note that Llyr Jones also prepared and edited this edition.

Thank you all.

Regards Diana Birch

## A Life in *Judo* – Bob Thomas 8<sup>th</sup> dan (1938 - 2017) By Llyr Jones



Born on 11 November 1938, and raised in Blaengwynfi, a village in the Neath Port Talbot area of South Wales, Robert (Bob) Thomas was one of the most knowledgeable people in the British *judo* community. Bob began his study of *judo* in 1955 at the *Koizumikwai* Judo Club in Bridgeton, Glasgow under Scotland's first *yudansha* [black belt holder] Tam (Thomas) McDermott and John Fraser. One of his most memorable times at the *Koizumikwai* was in 1958, when the prominent Japanese *budoka* [practitioner of the martial ways] and *Budo Senmon Gakko* [school for training young people in the martial ways] graduate, Kenshiro Abe took a weekend training course.

In 1961, Bob moved to London where he continued his training at the *Budokwai* and the *Renshuden*. After spending 1963 in the North West of England, he returned to Scotland and Glasgow, where he remained for the rest of his life. A dedicated and skilful *judoka* he progressed rapidly through the grades – being promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Dan in 1963, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dan in 1965 and 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan in 1966.



**Kenshiro Abe throwing in 1958  
(Bob Thomas is sixth from the left)**



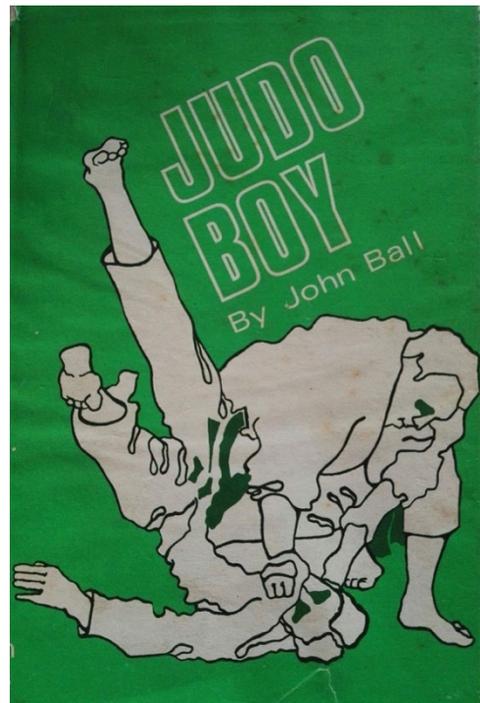
**Bob Thomas throws with  
Tsurikomi Goshi in 1964**

In 1964 and 1966 Bob was Heavyweight Champion at the Scottish National *Judo* Championships, and consistently medalled at the Inter-Area and Home International *Judo* Championships in the mid and late-1960s. Also, in 1964 he was a member of the Scottish *Judo* Team for an international match against the Netherlands where he fought the legendary Anton (Antonius) Geesink – ultimately losing by *osaekomi* [hold down]. In 1965, he participated in the Jadran Cup held in Split in, the then, Yugoslavia where he progressed to the quarterfinal stage. A year later he participated at an international team event in Utrecht in the Netherlands where he fought the equally renowned Wim (Willem) Ruska, losing to an *osoto-gari* [major outer reaping throw] after four minutes.

The above photograph, from 1964, shows Bob throwing with one of his *tokui-waza* [favoured technique] – *Tsurikomi-goshi* [Lifting and pulling hip throw]. This action was immortalised on the original cover of the 1964 book “*Judo Boy*” by the accomplished author John Ball. (“*Judo Boy*” set in the San Fernando Judo Club, California is one of the very few fictional books that covers *judo*.)



**Hard randori – Bob Thomas and Tony McConnell  
(at the Osaka Judo Club, Glasgow in 1962)**



**The cover of “Judo Boy” by John Hall (1964)**

In 1964 and 1966 Bob was Heavyweight Champion at the Scottish National *Judo* Championships and consistently medalled at the Inter-Area and Home International *Judo* Championships in the mid and late-1960s.

Also in 1964, Bob was a member of the Scottish *Judo* Team for an international match against the Netherlands where he fought the legendary Dutchman Anton (Antonius) Geesink, ultimately losing by *osaekomi* [hold down]. In 1965, he participated in the Jadran Cup held at Hajduk Split’s Stadium, Split in, the then, Yugoslavia where he progressed to the quarterfinals.

A year later he participated in an international team event in Utrecht in the Netherlands where he fought the equally celebrated Dutchman Wim (Willem) Ruska, losing to an *osoto-gari* [major outer reaping throw] after four minutes.



Bob Thomas (second from the left) at the 1965 Jadran Cup



Departure of Scottish Judo Team for Utrecht in 1966  
(Bob Thomas is second from the right)

Bob was a British Judo Association (BJA) Level 3 Coach and was Senior Coach at Paisley Samurai from 1970-1985, and Weirs of Cathcart from 1986-1988. He was also the original coach to Joyce Heron an Olympian and European, and World Judo Championships Bronze medallist. Over the years, he received further grade promotions – to 4<sup>th</sup> Dan in 1977, 5<sup>th</sup> Dan in 1982, 6<sup>th</sup> Dan in 1989 and 7<sup>th</sup> Dan in 1996. In 1990, the Kodokan Judo Institute ratified Bob's 6<sup>th</sup> Dan, and at the time of his passing he was the highest Kodokan-graded male judoka in the United Kingdom (UK).

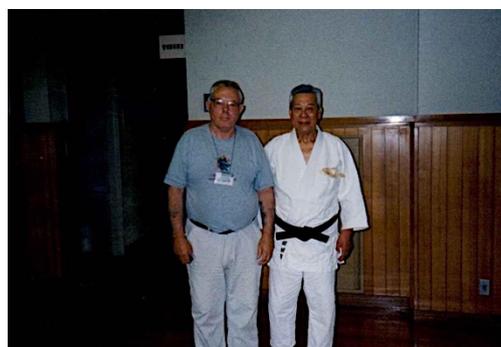
A BJA Senior Examiner since 1983, Bob conducted countless Dan Grade Promotion Examinations and Technical Assessments. Also, from 1970-2004 he had an active refereeing career, including many years as a BJA National (A) Referee, during which he refereed at the 1986 and 1998 Commonwealth Judo Championships, and multiple British Open and Scottish Open Championships.

In recent years, Bob was best known for his expert knowledge of all the Kodokan kata [formal techniques]. He was a member of the BJA Kata Working Party since 1986 and its successor - the BJA Kata Commission since 2010. This focused group of senior judoka kept the flame of kata alive in the UK at a time when the bulk of the Association thought only of competition and tournaments. He also conducted countless kata master classes all over the UK. In addition to judging multiple British Kata Championships, Bob was a World Masters Kata Judge and judged the Koshiki-no-kata at the Kodokan, in Japan, in 2003, and both the Koshiki-no-Kata [Forms of Classics] and the Kodokan Goshinjutsu [Kodokan Self-defence] in Vienna in 2004. He re-

garded judging kata at the Kodokan, the physical and spiritual home of judo, as one of the highlights of his judo career.



Bob Thomas (far left) on the judging panel for Koshiki-no-kata at the 2003 World Masters Kata Championships, Kodokan, Japan



Bob Thomas (left) with Toshiro Daigo Kodokan 10<sup>th</sup> Dan (right) at the Kodokan, Japan in June 2003

Bob received his final promotion, to 8<sup>th</sup> Dan, from the International Judo Federation (IJF) on 17 November 2014 and was presented with his certificate by BJA Director and Chairman of the Kata Commission, Eddie Awford at the BJA National Kata Examiners Seminar in Walsall, on 31 May 2015.



Bob Thomas being presented with his IJF 8<sup>th</sup> Dan certificate by Eddie Awford on 31 May 2015

Previously, on 22 November 2014 at the BJA's 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Awards Dinner, Bob's lifetime of excellence and achievement in *judo* was recognised through him being awarded The President's Award, the highest award of the BJA.

Off the mat, Bob married Margaret in 1966. Together they had a daughter, Wendy. Our thoughts are with them both on their loss.

## Obituary: Bob Thomas

By Ronnie Saez

Chairman, British Judo Association  
Chairman, Judo Scotland

We are extremely saddened to announce the passing of Bob Thomas, 8<sup>th</sup> Dan.

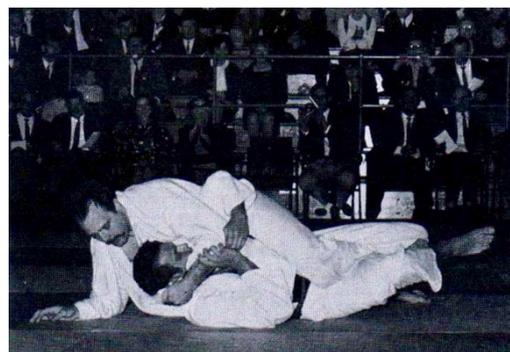
Bob was a well-known and much loved *judoka* both in Scotland and Great Britain, as well as internationally.

Bob was originally born in Wales and arrived in Glasgow as a teenager, where he initially trained at the *Koizumikai Judo Club* in the east end of Glasgow, under the tutelage of Tam McDermott, Scotland's first black belt.



Bob Thomas (right) with Joe Curran. Photograph taken in 1958

After enjoying a successful competitive career in the 1960s, including becoming Scottish champion on numerous occasions, alongside representing Great Britain internationally, Bob began his teaching career at the Paisley Samurai *Judo Club* where (amongst others), he coached the future World Bronze medallist, Joyce Heron.



Bob Thomas and Keith Remfry (1976 Olympic Silver Medallist) battling in ne-waza [groundwork] during the semi-final of the 1967 Inter-Area Championships between Scotland and the Northern Home Counties

During this time, Bob also developed his interest in *kata*, where he rose to become one of Britain's foremost *kata* experts, serving on the British Judo Association (BJA) *Kata Commission* and undertaking judging roles at *kata* competitions internationally.



The BJA's foremost *kata* experts (L-R) Bob Thomas 8<sup>th</sup> Dan, Mick Leigh 8<sup>th</sup> Dan, Dennis Penfold 7<sup>th</sup> Dan, John Cornish 7<sup>th</sup> Dan



Bob Thomas teaching the *Kenshu-no-bai* [Pistol attacks] section of *Kodokan Goshin-jutsu* during a *Kata Course*, held at Port Glasgow in March 2013. (Uke is Eddie Cassidy IJF 8<sup>th</sup> Dan)

Bob lived and breathed judo and was always ready to help *judoka* by sharing his knowledge and giving wise words of advice.

I fondly remember practicing with Bob at the Bellahouston Judo Club and learning of both his and Scotland's *judo* history throughout the 1960s and 1970s. He will be sadly missed within Scottish *Judo* community.

My sincerest condolences to his wife Margaret and daughter Wendy.

Rest well my friend.



Bob Thomas and Han Ho-San

## Bob Thomas By Stan Brogan

A version of this article, by the late Stan Brogan, was first published in issue 5 of this Bulletin, March 2002

Bob first became interested in *judo* in 1955 when he was seventeen years old. This came about because someone he knew was boasting about his own ability at the sport and invited Bob to come along to his club in Bridgeton. They arranged to meet but the guy did not turn up so Bob went to the club on his own. The first thing he noticed was the strenuous physical activity, which was going on, and this was an inspiring sight. Tam McDermott was the *sensei* [teacher] there and he was urging everyone on. Bob realised very quickly that this was the sport for him. At that time, Tam McDermott was the most prominent *judoka* in Scotland and John Fraser was his very able assistant. Between them, they worked everyone extremely hard. Bob was a member of a group of teenagers between 17-18 years of age and they all practised very hard indeed. All of them without exception took some terrible poundings from the higher grades but this was accepted because they were so keen to learn and improve. Bob recalls going home on after training at weekends and evenings with his kit literally sodden with sweat! He also remembers a divisional curtain being put across the mat, which was to separate high and low grades. Some wag put a notice on the high-grade side, which said, "please do not feed the animals."

In 1961 Bob and some friends went to London to continue their *judo* training. They trained in the *Budokwai* and *Renshuden*. Bob attended Trevor Pryce (TP) Leggett's famous *Budokwai* Sunday class many times, where the standards was very high. He also recalls the Korean team who were *en route* to Paris for the World Championships, calling in to the *Budokwai* Sunday class to give instruction. The team consisted of Dong-Bae Kim, Duk-Yong Kim, Kim Eui-Tae and Han Ho-San. Interestingly, Bob and Han Ho-San met 35 years later in Europe, and incidentally neither of them had changed at all, and the Korean remembered TP Leggett's Sunday class. Han Ho-San is now a 9<sup>th</sup> *Dan* and a top teacher in Germany.

While at the *Budokwai*, and even though he was a black belt of the Scottish *Judo* Association, Bob was advised by Trevor Leggett that he would have to through another grading for his BJA black belt. Bob agreed, and attended a grading at the London *Judo* Society. He remembers the line-up that day for black belt was eight brown belts and everything had to be done on the day, incidentally two of the brown belts had already done their line up for first *dan*. There was no points system then! Bob got his black belt and later returned to the *Budokwai* ready to practice.

His first success in London was when after eliminations were held at the Renshuden for the British Club Championships. He was selected as first reserve to a strong team, which comprised of international 3<sup>rd</sup> *Dan* players, so Bob was quite flattered to be chosen as first reserve. Incidentally, this team won the championship.

It is now 1963 and Bob was living in Preston and the same year, after eliminations in the KNK Manchester, he was selected for the North-West Area team for the Inter Area Championships but unfortunately, they were not placed.

Bob is now back in Scotland, it is 1964, and time for him to enter the eliminations for the Inter Area teams; he was successful. At the Crystal Palace, after many gruelling contests the Scottish Team won, beating the British Universities 4 - 0 in the final. Note that three were no weight categories then.



The Osaka Judo Club, Glasgow c. 1964  
(Bob Thomas is standing, third from the left)

The same year he was in the Scottish Team against Holland

at the Kelvin Hall in Glasgow where he fought Anton Geesink and lasted 40 seconds, including the hold down. The team consisted of George Kerr, John Young, Jack Cocker and Bob.

It is now 1965 and the Inter Areas crop up again. The Scottish team reaches the finals losing to the Northern Home Counties. Bob got his 2<sup>nd</sup> Dan that year, and was a member of the Inter Area Team for the next three years. He also recalls the same year he and his friend, Bob Oliver went to Split for a *judo* competition called the Jadran Cup. The opposition was very strong with a powerful contingent of East Germans attending. The best known were Otto Smirat and Herbert Niemann. Smirat was a *kata-guruma* [shoulder wheel] specialist and Herbert Niemann was European Heavyweight Champion of that year. They were both immensely strong and skilful. The competition was held in Hadjuk Split's football stadium. Rain stopped play on the Saturday, so it was postponed until the Sunday. Bob remembers how friendly the Germans were and Niemann's quiet dignity. They could communicate a little because Bob has some knowledge of the German language.

During the evening an enormous man came over to introduce himself as Brancic, and announced that he and Bob were in the same pool. He squeezed Bob's hand very tightly to try and intimidate him, and Bob implemented a strategy he had read about in an article by Charles Palmer, during his contest career in Japan – "Friendly and smiling before the bow viz. Dr Jekyll, and after the bow – Mr Hyde." Bob attacked with everything he had and threw Brancic with *Tsurikomi-goshi* [Lifting and pulling hip throw] in 90 seconds. Charles Palmer's strategy had worked.

Eventually he advanced to the quarter finals where he was held down by Niemann after about four minutes. Bob Oliver also fought extremely well, throwing two men with *Tsurikomi-goshi*. He too advanced to the quarter finals, but lost to a large German named Schulz. Niemann of course won the Heavyweight category, and Smirat won the Middleweight.

1966 Bob got married, and was promoted to 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan. This involved a line-up of 15, and the examiners were George Kerr and Andy Bull. Bob fought in three home internationals along the way, and won the Scottish Heavyweight championship twice.

In the early 70s Bob took up refereeing. [At the time of the original article] He has been a National (A) Referee for many years, a Senior Examiner, and a National *Kata* Judge.

An amusing incident occurred at the 1989 Scottish Championships during which he had been promoted to 6<sup>th</sup> Dan, and George Kerr had presented him with his red-and-white belt. After that Bob refereed a very contentious final. As he was coming off, he heard a voice saying "Well Bob never got his 6<sup>th</sup> Dan for his refereeing – that's for sure".

On one occasion while Bob was conducting a *Dan* grading, one of the contestants had an unusual name. Bob asked the man if his name was Czech, and when this was confirmed, Bob said "Well I hope today that you don't become a bounced Czech". Afterwards when the competitor came for his points card and Bob added the 30 points – he said "I am

glad to see that you are still legal currency!"



Bob Thomas refereeing at a Scottish Closed Championship

In 1990 Bob had his 6<sup>th</sup> Dan validated by the Kodokan. The process for this *Kodokan* validation was facilitated by Teizo Kawamura. Mr Kawamura had been the teacher of Bob's own *sensei*, Tam McDermott.

[At the time of the original article] Bob is currently still refereeing, examining and involved in *kata*. Although he has spent over four decades being involved with *judo*, he has gained a lot from the discipline, and has made many friends he would never have met otherwise. He is grateful for the help, instruction and inspiration he received from other *judoka*, in particular, Tam McDermott and John Fraser.



PO Box 45408 • London • SE26 6WG • United Kingdom

[www.KanoSociety.org](http://www.KanoSociety.org) • [sensei@kanosociety.org](mailto:sensei@kanosociety.org)