

Michael Jay



Michael Jay, a British Airways long-haul pilot now retired from flying the Boeing 747-400 from London's Heathrow Airport, has combined his flying career with a lifelong study of Japan and, in particular, its martial culture.

His work and fascination since childhood with the martial arts of both England and Japan has taken him to Japan nearly four hundred times to study, work, train and teach.

祖馬野馬追

Soma Noma Oi

In 1975, courtesy of the family of his Japanese wife, Tokuko, Michael was invited to become the first non-Japanese person ever to take part in the Sōma Nōma Oi (Sōma Wild Horse Chase), a unique three-day celebration of skill in samurai horsemanship held in the full heat of the Japanese summer in the Tōhoku (Fukushima) region of North-east Japan.

This great event combines religion, culture and martial skill and has taken place annually for more than a thousand years since the time of Taira Masakado. Led by the Lord of the Sōma Clan, around 800 fully armoured horsemen and thousands of foot soldiers, priests, shrine helpers and dignitaries make this truly the most spectacular horse event in the world.

The Sōma region is in the area affected by the great earthquake and tidal wave of March 2011, and Michael is directly involved in charity work for the relief of the survivors, particularly the children orphaned by this disaster.

In spite of the great loss of life both of people and horses on that terrible day, a small Nōma Oi went ahead only four months later, thus demonstrating the unquenchable spirit of Sōma.

Nōma Oi involves mounted samurai racing in full armour, a battle chase to catch shrine flags fired more than 1,000 feet into the sky, and a roundup of wild horses in the area.

Since first taking part, he has achieved the rank of *'Kumi-Gashira Sōma Odaka-gō Gō-Taishō Tsuki'* (Group Commander for the General, Sōma Odaka Horse Association).

Sōma Nōma Oi has been designated by the Japanese government both as an *Important Cultural Folk-Property* and as an *Intangible Cultural Treasure of Japan* (無形文化財).

The only other non-Japanese person ever to hold a similar samurai rank was William Adams, the English navigator of a Dutch ship who, after being shipwrecked in Japan in the year 1600, became an advisor to the first Tokugawa Shogun, *Ieyasu*, and settled in Japan. Curiously, the birthplaces of both William Adams and Michael Jay are close to each other in Kent.



Michael Jay at Odaka Jinja – Seat of the Sōma Clan

天真正伝香取神道流

Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō Ryū

Michael Jay is a master swordsman of Japan's oldest and most famous classical martial school, the *Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō Ryū*, having been awarded the Kyōshi Menkyo

(Teaching Licence) by its Headmaster, Shihan Ōtake Risuke. With teachings unchanged since its founding in the 14th century, this school has always been renowned for both the dynamic skill of its swordsmen and the highest quality of its moral teachings. For these reasons, it is also designated by the Japanese government as an *Intangible Cultural Treasure* (無形文化財).

Michael is the UK's most senior representative and instructor of *Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō Ryū*.

Most certainly no sport, this is a truly mediaeval combat school whose teachings cover *laijutsu* (fast draw of the sword), *Kenjutsu* (the use of the long sword and short sword both individually and in two-sword technique), *Bōjutsu* (long staff), *Sōjutsu* (spear), *Naginata* (a type of halberd), *Shuriken* (throwing spike), and *Yawara* (empty hand techniques). Other subjects in the school's curriculum and essential to the samurai include philosophy, religion, and military studies such as strategy and tactics.



Michael Jay with Shihan Otake Risuke, Katori Shintō Ryū Shinbukan Dōjō, Narita.

Although the school trains its members in life or death combat, its main teaching is that it is wrong to kill and that we should strive for a life of peace. This apparent contradiction can be difficult for outsiders to understand but is the essence of the philosophy and teachings of all the classical sword masters.

The Katori Shintō Ryū was, and still is, Japan's premier martial tradition and, although demonstrations are given on special occasions, the techniques of the school are still kept secret. Entry to the *ryū* involves signing, in one's own blood, a written oath that one will maintain the uncompromising principles of the founder.



Michael Jay at Oxford University Divinity School
for Alumni Lecture

Other Activities

In the second year of the Heisei Era, Michael was one of the few mounted, fully armed and armoured samurai to accompany the envoy of the Emperor of Japan at the three-day religious celebration called *Jinkōsai* held on land and water every twelve years at Katori Jingū (Grand Shrine), and which involved him demonstrating the classical swordsmanship of the Katori Shintō Ryū. This honour was repeated in 2002 (Heisei 14th year).



At JinkōSai Festival, Katori Jingū, with Ōtake Risuke, Head Master of the Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō Ryū.

Michael was also chosen to open the demonstration of Katori Shintō Ryū swordsmanship at Kashima Jingū for the 500th anniversary of the founding of the Kashima Shintō Ryū sword school and has appeared in many magazines, newspapers, and television programs around the world, including a full length BBC Television program entitled *The Soma Wild Horse Chase* in its prestigious flagship documentary series *The World About Us*, broadcast in over forty countries, about his unique participation in Sōma Nōma Oi.

In December 1991 he was invited by Raymond Brooks-Ward to lead the Sōma Horse Association Demonstration Team at the Olympia International Show-Jumping Championships in London. This was the first time the Sōma Nōma Oi had been seen outside Japan and included demonstrating, twice a day, some of the sword techniques of

the Katori Shintō Ryū and the Flag-Chase of the Sōma Nōma Oi in which mounted samurai of the Sōma clan battled for shrine flags dropped from the roof of Olympia's Great Hall. These specially made flags, carrying a blessing from Sōma Odaka Shrine, the seat of the Sōma clan, were then presented to disabled children among the audience.

During the Olympia Championships Michael was invited to lecture to school groups on the weaponry and riding skills of the samurai. This was in association with the Japan Festival and culminated in a spectacular demonstration ride at the Tower of London by kind permission of its Governor, Major General Christopher Tyler, the only time ever that Japanese mounted samurai have ridden at the Tower.



Michael Jay mounted for Sōma Nōma Oi.

During the Japan Festival in 1991 Michael lectured to the Arms and Armour Society at the Tower of London and to the Japan Society of London and gave many demonstrations and talks around the country on swordsmanship and the world of the classical Japanese warrior.

Michael speaks Japanese and has studied many of the Japanese martial arts and ways, holding a total of seven black belt ranks in Kodōkan Jūdō, Zen Nihon Kendō Renmei Jōdō, and Zen Nihon Kendō Renmei laidō, holding a teaching license in the last of these, and is

the only non-Japanese person ever to participate fully in, and hold senior positions in, two *Intangible Cultural Treasures* of Japan (無形文化財).

He has taught personal safety skills to a wide variety of students, including American and British police and military officers, and British Airways staff. Those who have had cause to use this knowledge have been successful in every case.

A keen archer on foot and horseback, Michael is also qualified by the prestigious Smith & Wesson Academy as a Law Enforcement Firearms Instructor for Revolver, Pistol, Rifle and Shotgun, a Handgun Retention Instructor, and as a Defensive Tactics Instructor for Handcuffs and Police Baton. Before retiring from the Metropolitan Police Special Constabulary in December 2010, he was involved in police patrol duties in London and at Heathrow Airport.

Since 1993 Michael has divided his time in the UK between flying, police work, and teaching personal safety, and shoots regularly as a member of the UK National Rifle Association. In Africa, he combines his interests in photography, animal conservation and hunting.



Receiving the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal for Police Service.

As an accredited expert of the The Japan Society, Michael regularly demonstrates and lectures on the classical martial culture of Japan to organisations such as Eton College, Oxford University, Castle Howard, The Royal Armouries both at the Tower of London and in Leeds, and The Arms and Armour Society, and was a leading contributor to the Japan Festival in 1991 and the Japan 2001 UK Festival of Japanese Culture.

The summer of 2009 found him as guest speaker both on a sea cruise around Japan and on a land tour built around his expertise to some of Japan's most ancient and historic sites.

In 2010 he addressed the Oxford University Alumni Association in the Divinity School in a presentation entitled *William Adams and the Samurai*. This lecture and demonstration of martial skill of the Katori Shintō Ryū included a rare viewing in the Bodleian Library of the actual log book of William Adams written on his voyages between Japan, China and Siam from 1615 to 1619.

Since the 2011 Japan Earthquake and Tsunami disaster, Michael has been a regular contributor to events organised to help the charities assisting the survivors, including the London Matsuri Japan Festivals.

In 2019, he was a specialist guest speaker for the Cunard Insights Program on a voyage to Japan on MS Queen Elizabeth, lecturing on Japanese history, culture, and language.

Michael Jay holds the unique positions of both Shidōsha and Kyōshi awarded by Headmaster Otake Risuke of the Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō Ryū, Japan's premier martial tradition, together with the rank of Group Commander in the world's greatest horse event, Sōma Nōma Oi.

Michael Jay

Qualifications include:

British Overseas Airways Corporation & British Airways 1968 – 2000.

Senior Pilot, Vickers Super VC10, Standard VC10,

Boeing 757, Boeing 747-100, Boeing 747-200, Boeing 747-400.

(Air Transport Pilot's Licence, Flight Navigator's Licence, Radio Operator's Licence, U.K. Civil Aviation Authority).

Sōma Nōma Oi – Intangible Cultural Treasure of Japan:

Kumi Gashira, Go Taishō Tsuki, Sōma Odaka Gō Kiba Kai (Group Commander – Sōma Odaka-Area Horse Association)

Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō Ryū – Intangible Cultural Treasure of Japan:

Kyōshi (Full Teaching Licence)

Kodōkan Jūdō Institute – 1st Dan, Tōkyō, Japan.

British Jūdō Association – 1st Dan, UK.

Musō Shinden Ryū Iai, Kenshūkan Dōjō, Tōkyō, Japan.

Shindō Musō Ryū Jōjutsu: Kenshūkan Dōjō, Tōkyō, Japan.

All Japan Kendo Association Jōdō – 1st Dan, Kenshūkan Dōjō, Tōkyō, Japan.

All Japan Kendo Association Iaidō – 4th Dan Instructor's Licence, Kenshūkan Dōjō, Tōkyō, Japan.

Metropolitan Police Special Constabulary 1993 – 2011: Patrol Duties, Aviation Security, Officer Safety Training.

Police Stations: Twickenham, West Drayton, Uxbridge, Heathrow Airport.

Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal for Police Service awarded in 2002.

Metropolitan Police Special Constabulary Long Service Medal.

Smith & Wesson Academy, Springfield, Massachusetts, USA:

Law Enforcement Firearms Instructor – Revolver, Pistol & Shotgun.

Law Enforcement Firearms Instructor – Police Rifle.

Defensive Tactics Instructor including Arrest & Restraint, Handcuffs and Police Baton.

PPCT System Defensive Tactics Instructor.

Handgun Retention Instructor.

Member, National Rifle Association UK.

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