

## Pilgrimage to Japan October 5th 2010

I am the only daughter of Arthur Robert Jones who was a Far East P.O.W. who died February 2008 aged ninety. I was born after the war in July 1947  
I married Kevin in 1965 and became Linda-Lee Nicholls; we have two grown up daughters and five grand children.

Arthur Robert Jones was born on 4th December 1917 at East Dereham in Norfolk. He was the first of five sons born to Carrie and Arthur Edgar Jones.

Arthur Edgar Jones was born in Pembrokeshire, South Wales; he was a private in the Welsh fusiliers in the First World War, he was convalescing in North Norfolk following battles in France.

Carrie Bush was the second of five children born to Robert and Martha Bush in East Dereham, Norfolk.

We are unsure how or when they met each other but we do know they were married at the parish church in Mundesley, North Norfolk, on 12th July 1917.

After getting married they lived in East Dereham.

After a few years they moved to South Wales to live, but it was decided that the young Arthur should remain in Dereham where he was brought up by his Grandparents, Robert and Martha Bush.

After leaving school at 14 he went to work for a local baker delivering bread and cakes on the shop's bicycle.

After a few years he moved to Norwich to live with his aunt and uncle and worked at Steward and Paterson's brewery as a lorry drivers mate delivering beer to local pubs. He did that until he enlisted in the army on the 15th January 1940.

### **My Reasons for Going to Japan**

I had always wanted to go to Japan from when I was a young girl, as my Dad spoke to me about some aspects of the war. He spoke about the hardships he had endured, the shortage of food leading to malnutrition, the poor living conditions, and the variable extremes of climate.

He told me he had to bind rags around his feet to keep them warm and dry when there was heavy snow in winter. He said how glad he was when they received Red Cross parcels although they were apparently withheld by the Japanese for some time before being given to them. He said how wonderful the corn beef was when they had tiny pieces with the rice for Christmas dinner. He knew that food was very scarce for the Japanese people as well as the prisoners of war.

It was the human issues that disturbed him the most. Illnesses such as malaria, beriberi, dysentery and the sights and smells of war; the degradation is what he said he could never forget.

I was aware of how much the war time affected him as it was evident in his speech, he said he did not see any atrocities, but remembered a quarry accident happening. Dad mentioned there was one guard that was decent to them, he was grateful of that.

When Dad was captive he learnt a few words of Japanese, when I was a child I remember him teaching me to count from one to ten in Japanese, when my eldest daughter was small she remembers him teaching her too, alas we can only recall one to four now.

I felt I wanted to know more about Dad's war history and see the place where he spent two and a half years of his young life. My husband supported this as when Dad was in hospital, before he died, he was troubled by his war experiences and he spoke to Kevin about some of the things that disturbed him.

My Mother didn't like talking about the war and this caused a rift between them; they were not a happy couple for several years before he died.

Dad suffered from depression as his health deteriorated, he was unable to go out and do his usual routine things and he became very frail, often saying he had not achieved much in

his life and that his parents didn't want him when he was a child. This saddened me every time he said this, I tried to tell him how much he had achieved and reminded him of his family, his grand children and his great grand children.

This is why when he died I wanted to mark his life in some way, so I decided as he was a war survivor to have his name added to the F.E.P.O.W. Memorial Book at the F.E.P.O.W. Memorial Church in Wymondham, Norfolk, England.

I asked the Church at Wymondham if they could give me any information regarding Dad's camp they referred me to their website ([www.fepow-memorial.org.uk](http://www.fepow-memorial.org.uk)). I then listened to the Voices on the website, there was a man who was in the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Norfolk Regiment, I wrote to him, and received his reply but unfortunately he did not know my dad.

I found in my Dad's possessions a letter he had received from Tetsuji Kondoh president of Denki Kagaku, Kogyo Co, Ltd, where he worked as a P.O.W. thanking him for his hard work at Aomi, dated July 31st 1947. He had also received a souvenir booklet of Aomi Hall, dated December 1945, compiled by S. S. Abbott, J. P. Burrough and N.J.Turner, this included a note and a poem from the three compilers followed by a listing of all of the men that were held there including their regiment and their rank, (we found out later that S. S. Abbott was the senior officer at the Aomi P.O.W. camp and he wrote a book about his time there).

I also found Dads' army number, 5773984, and his rank of corporal. After finding these I then requested Dads Army Service Records (SARS), these gave me some more basic details, but not the camp where he was held.

### Dads time at War.



Dad enlisted in the army and joined the 6th Battalion Royal Norfolk Regiment on the 15th January 1940; he was a 22 year old single man.

He did his training in the UK spending many weeks patrolling the North Norfolk coast in the Sheringham area.

They continued their training in the North of England and Scotland for a few months.

The regiment received orders to join forces in the Middle East to fight the war there; they sailed from Gournock, in Scotland aboard the Duchess of Atholl, destined for Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, where they joined the 18th division. They sailed from Halifax on the 9th November 1941 aboard the U.S.S. Mount Vernon, Captained by Donald B. Beary United States Navy.

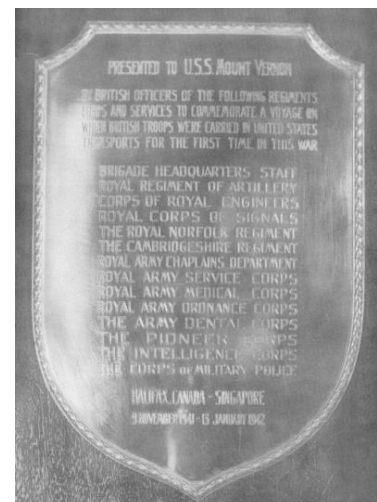
During the voyage, as they crossed the equator, he was initiated into the Solemn Mysteries of The Ancient Order of the Deep.

However they were diverted to Singapore to protect it from the Japanese invasion.

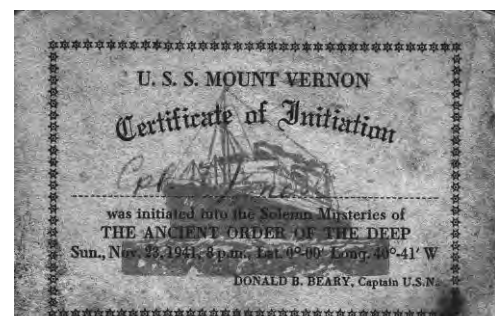
They disembarked the Mount Vernon 13th January 1942.

After a short time fighting in Malaya he along with the rest the army, as ordered by General Percival, surrendered on 15th February 1942 and became a Japanese prisoner of war.

He was held at Singapore Changi camp until May 1943. We unfortunately know little about his time at the camp other that his Commanding Officer there was Brigadier Duke.



Shield Presented to the USS Mount Vernon by the 18<sup>th</sup> Division



Certificate of the Ancient Order of the Deep

From Changi he was shipped out to Japan on the Kyokko Maru. The trip was thankfully uneventful as some of the ships carrying prisoners were sunk by American submarines. They docked in Moji, Southern Japan and continued their journey by rail until they eventually arrived at Omi, Niigata region, in June 1943, he remained there until September 1945; the commanding officer there was Lieutenant Stephen Abbot.

His Japanese card index number was Bloc no 50 M.I.9/ JAP / No 21185A, we researched this from public documents filed at The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey,, 14th September 2010 shortly before going to Japan.

In Japan his forced labour was in a cement factory, owned by the Denki Kagaku Kogyo Company Limited, working in the quarry and on the furnaces. The war ended on August 15th 1945 and at that point the Japanese guards left the camp, the P.O.W's remained there for another three weeks. During this time some American aircraft flew over and dropped supplies.

Stephen Abbott writes in his book "And All My War Is Done" that he received a call on 2nd September, on the camp telephone, from an American



Omi Camp painted by Basil Were (New Zealand) during the wait for evacuation following the Japanese surrender.

Officer from General McArthur's H.Q. to tell him that a special train had been arranged to take all of the P.O.W's, approximately 540 men, to Tokyo at 18.30 hrs on 5th September. This was the first communication they had received from the Allied Forces since the war ended.

Lieutenant Abbott writes; they assembled in the camp grounds on 5th September at 18.00 hrs, for their final parade, and then he marched his men through the high gateway, outside the walls and down the narrow dirt track to the station for their 12 hour journey to Tokyo. Dad's record show he was repatriated into Allied hands 20th September 1945 he had been held captive for more than three and a half years.

On board ship on the journey home, when the P.O.W's. could tolerate a richer diet, they were all encouraged to get food from the galley, any time they were hungry, this was to fatten them up before they got home, so their family's didn't get such a shock seeing them all so emaciated. Dad arrived at the Transit Camp in the UK on the 27th October 1945 and his next of kin were informed on the 1st November 1945, we do not know when he met up with his family but it must have been soon after.

### **Home to live a normal peaceful life**

After the war he met and married Netta his wife of 61 years, and I was born in July 1947. I had a very happy childhood and was well cared for. Dad enjoyed taking us to the local cinemas and always enjoyed seeing cowboy films; he said he used to read cowboy books by candle light when he was as a boy. He enjoyed listening to the radio, watching the television, buying pop records and playing them on his record player.

When I was a child we had many trips to Great Yarmouth and other local sea side resorts. He was always pleased to see his grandchildren and liked spending time with them.

Mum and Dad enjoyed going to the pub on Saturday evenings to meet up with friends and family. Dad was a kind, quiet, peace loving man who was contented having an ordinary simple life centred on his own family and home, who he always cared and provided for very well.

He was employed at Whitbread Malting's Kings Lynn Norfolk as a maltster until it closed in the seventies; he then worked in a Refrigerator factory until his retirement in 1982.

### **Referral to Keiko C Holmes (Agape)**

In January I sent a letter to the British Embassy in Tokyo to ask them if they could help me to find information relating to my Dad. I told them I wanted to visit Japan to find out about where my dad was held captive as P.O.W.

It was In March that I had an early morning telephone call from a member of the British Embassy staff in Tokyo, they told me about Keiko C Holmes and Agape and asked me if I was interested in going to Japan with a group of other people; I of course said I was. They emailed further information and gave me contact details for Keiko C Holmes.

That same day we spoke to Keiko, I told her that the most important thing for me was to visit my Dad's P.O.W. location but I did not know at that time where that was, Keiko said she would ask her contacts and that she may be able to take us there herself. I had every confidence in Agape and put my trust in the location being found.

We read that Keiko had made many visits to Japan taking P.O.W's. and their families on reconciliation visits; she received an honorary OBE in 1998 at Windsor Castle.

Within a few days we had agreed to go on a reconciliation trip she was organising in October. We sent the appropriate requested information which was a profile of ourselves and the deposit fee.

It was now confirmed we were going on a Pilgrimage to Japan with Agape on 5th October 2010, this all happened within a few days from getting the British Embassy phone call.

Keiko sent the initial itinerary within a few days, although we were not going for several months we felt we had something to look forward to.

We were very pleased to be going and felt happy about all aspects and confident that Keiko was the right person to take us there.

We were invited to a reception at the Japanese Embassy in London on the 22nd of July, which was something else for us to look forward to.

At the Embassy we met Keiko for the first time, and she introduced us to some of the other people who were going on the reconciliation trip with us. I was a pleased to meet them and felt at ease with them as I felt we had a common objective.

Now I felt I was meant to be going to Japan. I only hoped Dad would approve if he had known.

### **Two months before the trip**

In August I was contacted, by letter, by Mr Koshi Kobayashi.

He said he has been volunteering his help since autumn 1995, when groups of P.O.W's. and bereaved family members from Britain visited Japan, as part of Japan-U.K. friendship activities.

He has helped by arranging visits to ex P.O.W. camps in Southern Japan and by taking them on guided tours in and around Hiroshima.

He also wanted to know about my Father's experiences during the war.

He said he was given my name by Keiko Holmes, and was aware we would visit Naoetsu in October.

His friends Mr Shoichi Ishizuka and his wife Yohko were interested in how my Father was forced to work in the area.

Mr Ishizuka is the ex -president of the Japan-Australia Society of Joetsu, and when P.O.W's and bereaved family members visited Naoetsu they looked after them. He said he felt sure they would look after my husband and me whilst we were in Naoetsu.

I was also contacted in August, via email, by Mr Yoshi Kondo the current President of the Japan-Australia Society of Joetsu.

I liaised with both Mr Kondo and Mr Kobayashi via email and gave them as much information as I could.

From the information I sent to them, luckily for me, they were able to find out more details regarding my Dad's camp.

I was emailed on the 9th September by Mr Kobayashi who gave details of Dad's transportation from Singapore to Japan, aboard the Kyokko Maru, and his camp; the camp was the 13th Branch of Tokyo P.O.W. at Omi.

He also confirmed the name of the company being, Denka, where he had completed his forced labour. He was able to find this out from the information I had sent to him, as it had Dad's army details and the name of the British Officer in charge of the camp.

His name was Lieutenant Stephen Abbott; he had apparently written a book titled "And All My War is Done". Since returning home from Japan we have purchased the book, and found it to be very disturbing but compulsive reading. Although I must say it is from a commanding officers point of view. The conditions were much worse than I could have imagined them to be so it has been of no comfort to me. This has given me a better understanding of the hardships faced by the P.O.W's working in the quarry in such appalling inhuman conditions.

We also received an email from Mr Yoshi Kondo in which he said he was going to meet with us in Naoetsu along with Mr Shoichi Ishizuka, his wife Yohko and fellow members of Japan-Australia Society of Joetsu.

He also mentioned that they were organising our schedule and taking us to places of interest including the Denka factory. We were very pleased to have their support and felt glad we could rely on their help.

### **The Group**

The group comprised of Keiko Holmes the leader and founder of Agape.

Sam aged 90, an ex-P.O.W. who was held captive in Singapore and Hokkaido, Japan.

Syd aged 89, also an ex-P.O.W. he was an Iruka boy, who was held captive in Singapore, Thai-Burma railway and Kiwa-Cho, Japan. He was travelling with his wife Jeanne, who had her 87th birthday while we were in Japan.

Gabrielle, her father was on Thai-Burma Railway and her mother was in a civilian camp in Indonesia.

Malcolm and Dawn, Malcolm's father was an ex-P.O.W. and also an Iruka Boy. He was held captive in Singapore, Thai-Burma Railway and Kiwa-Cho, Japan. His father had been back on a reconciliation trip himself and wanted his son to also visit the area where he was held captive in Japan.

Terry and Lalitha, Terry's father, deceased, was a P.O.W. at Ohmine in the Yamaguchi area, working in a coal mine.

And us, my Father Arthur Robert Jones deceased, was a P.O.W. captured in Singapore and then held at Changi before being shipped to Omi Japan.

### **Tuesday 5th October**

We arrived at Heathrow airport and joined the group, we were the last to arrive but still in good time. We were soon on the ANA flight which departed at 19.35.

We had not been on long haul flight before, four hours was about the maximum time we had spent on any plane journey before. This was a new experience for us both; it was twelve hours before we landed at Narita airport. We were looked after well by the stewards and stewardesses but were glad to land safely.

### **Wednesday 6th October**

We arrived at Narita airport, and soon after Keiko Holmes sorted out our Japan Rail passes for our travels.

The main group divided into two groups, with Sam, Syd and Jeanne being met by an Agape friend who took them straight to their hotel in Narita before moving on to their destinations the following day.

The other eight people, including us, had a two hour wait before taking an internal flight to Fukuoka Southern Japan.

We arrived at Fukuoka approximately two hours later. Mr Kobayashi was waiting there to greet us, he had arranged taxis to take us to our hotel. After we had all checked in we agreed the time for our morning start. We said good night then went straight to bed. That was the first of eight hotels in total we would stay at during our trip.

### **Thursday 7th October.**

We all met for breakfast at 8.30am.

We all got to know each other and became friends. We enjoyed our mealtime chats usually eating together as a group.

After breakfast we walked to the local railway station, at Hakata, as we needed to travel by train to our new destination, which was Mine city in the Yamaguchi prefecture. The purpose was to visit the Omine mine site where Terry's father laboured as a P.O.W.

Everywhere we went we were made to feel very welcome, we didn't expect to feel so special.

On arrival at Asa station we were greeted by Mr Yamamoto who was a retired city councillor, a retired ex-High School English teacher and a retired Buddhist monk, and then taken to the Mini Grand hotel in the hotel mini bus.

After eating lunch at a local restaurant courtesy of Mr Yamamoto we proceeded to the civic building for a reception with the Mayor's deputy and other civic dignitaries.

We were applauded as we entered the room, it was a terrific welcome. We were overwhelmed as we had not expected such a warm welcome, or the television crews who were filming the events.

During the proceedings speeches were made by the civic dignitaries and also a speech made by Terry, in which he referred to his father's time as a P.O.W.

After the civic ceremony had been completed we were taken to a Primary school where we were greeted by the children waving British flags. Once inside the school hall we were taken by the children, in groups, to tables and shown the art of Origami. We each came away with a finished product of their work. After that we were taken to a row of chairs and asked to sit down, and then the children sang some Japanese songs to us finishing with Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star which we all joined in with.

After visiting the school we were taken a few miles away to the area of Shiraiwa, Shinwa-Ryo. This was the site of the prisoners' quarters where British and American soldiers were held and a memorial has been erected there. We then went a short distance to the Omine coal mine site followed by the television crew and reporters, they interviewed Terry there. It was an emotional time for him we were all quiet.

We went back to Mine City and visited the mine museum. The museum contained samples of quartz, minerals and fossils found in the area plus an exhibition of mining through the ages. On leaving the museum we all walked back to the hotel only a short distance away. Keiko told us all to gather by the television in reception before our evening meal as we would be shown on the local news. We all gathered and waited in anticipation to see Terry's interview. We were very proud of him and the way he spoke about his father, we also saw the rest of us in the background. After watching the interview we enjoyed dinner with the three gentlemen who met us at the station and some people from Mine City.

### **Friday 8th October**

We departed Mine City after breakfast and were taken by Mr Yamamoto, the Buddhist Monk and the English teacher to Akiyoshido in the hotel mini bus; to see the largest limestone cave in East Asia it lays beneath the Akiyoshidai National Park. We enjoyed going into the cave and through the park as it reminded us of the Derbyshire Dales back home especially as it was raining.

From there we went to Shin-Yamaguchi station to catch the train for Hiroshima. Before boarding the train the English teacher asked us to stand in a line and shout „Banzai' three

times before boarding the train, we thought this was good fun. Then we then boarded the train and got seated only for him to get on the train for us to say „Banzai’ three more times, we left in a very happy and cheerful mood.

At Hiroshima we were given a guided tour of the Peace Memorial Museum which we found very shocking and sad. There was lots of information and displays’ depicting the area before and after the bomb was dropped. Some of the displays of the aftermath were quite horrific. We were surprised to see so many school children there but realised that although it was horrific it should be seen and if humanly possible understood. We were unfortunately unable to visit the Peace Park outside due to the rainy weather.

When we finished the tour we went back to the station to catch the train for Onimichi.

On arrival at Onimichi station we were met by friends of Agape and taken to our hotel. After leaving our luggage we were taken by car, by the Pastor of the church, to visit a former prison camp site at Mukaishima. Mukaishima is on the opposite side of the river to Onimichi so we had to cross the river by the local ferry. Once we arrived at the former prison camp we were shown a memorial plate that had been attached to the wall of the red brick factory building that is now the Mukaishima Spinning Company. The P.O.W’s. were taken each day to work in the local dock yard doing general duties.

Although it was raining heavily people still came to welcome us. We went inside out of the rain to a community room where we had a short service followed by a social gathering.

There we were offered refreshments of tea and homemade cakes. After the gathering we went with the Pastor to look at the Peace and Friendship Monument made by a local sculptor, Hideyuki Takahashi, called the Wings of Time. After this he took us to a house where he collected his wife and baby, then we all travelled back to the ferry making our way to the Green Hill hotel. In the evening we had a very enjoyable dinner with Mr Kobayashi and friends of (Agape Hiroshima), the Pastor, his wife and baby, and others from the Christian group at Mukaishima.

### **Saturday 9th October**

We departed from Onimichi station at 10.00 by local train for Fukuyama. At Fukuyama station we boarded the train for Osaka.

At 13.03 at Shin- Osaka station we boarded the train for Shingu; Sam was already on the train along with a group of Agape friends. The train was full so the friends stood up and offered us all their seats.

After approximately one hour on the train it was stopped, we were told the train could go no further because of very heavy rain and flooding.

We all had to queue outside in the rain for 30 minutes waiting for a taxi to complete our journey, paid for by the rail company. The taxi company insisted that we should be accompanied by at least one person who could speak Japanese. Fortunately two Japanese lady friends of Agape, who could speak very good English, came in the taxi with us.

We should have arrived at Shingu station at 16.52 but after spending three and a half hours in the taxi we arrived at Shingu station at 18.00. We then transferred to the hotel mini bus eventually reaching the hotel at 19.00.

We were luckier than some of the others in the party as their taxi driver got lost, they did not arrive at the hotel until much later.

We met up at the hotel with Syd and Jeanne who had been staying in the hotel for a few days. We were glad we had reached our destination safely, we checked in the hotel with the help of Mr Jinsai Sugino, a friend of Agape, who could speak very good English.

We started our evening meal but were all anxious about the whereabouts of our friends and were all relieved when they walked into the dining room at approximately 20.30.

After such an eventful day we were glad to spend our first night sleeping in a Japanese style room with the beds on the floor. The group were all together again, safe and sound.

## **Sunday 10th October**

Time out to relax today after travelling all day yesterday we woke up to find the sun was shining so we went for walk after breakfast. Malcolm and Dawn had the same idea so we went exploring the countryside together. We walked by a river where some local men were fishing, and we saw an elderly local Japanese lady who was pushing her bike up the hill I stopped to admire the bell type trinket she had on it, she seemed happy to show it to Dawn and I, we practiced our Japanese saying "ohayoo", good morning, and bowing as did the lady, she seemed very friendly. As we were making our way back to the hotel we saw Gabrielle and Keiko Miyamoto a friend of Agape, we all walked back together conversing and getting to know each other better. We came across a house and we spoke to a gentleman there, Keiko was able to translate for us. Through our conversation we found out that the man knew the location of the copper mine where Malcolm's dad, Norman, worked as P.O.W. We all felt that this chance meeting was meant to be.

During lunch we sat with Jinsai Sugino, who was able to advise on the menu, he helped us all with practicalities while we were in the hotel, he was a very friendly young man.

Keiko Holmes had planned some sightseeing for the afternoon, first was a river trip up the „Toro Gorge'. Seeing the views of the impressive mountains and houses built along some parts of the gorge was very relaxing and enjoyable. This was followed by a trip through the countryside in the hotel mini bus to the area where Keiko was born. We passed through the flat part of the countryside and into the mountainous region where Keiko pointed out the area known as "the thousand paddy fields", where the paddy fields are built in tiers up the hillside. We travelled along the winding roads through the paddy fields to the house where she was brought up. We stopped a short while to look at the house and to admire the scenery and take some photographs. We travelled back to the hotel by a different route that took us through the trees; we stopped on the way to view a very impressive waterfall. When we got back to the hotel Keiko encouraged us all to try a Japanese spa bath. We wanted to try it so our Agape friends took us there and showed us the correct procedure for using the spa; it was a very enjoyable experience. Afterwards the group met for dinner, some of us still wearing a kimono, and others chose western clothes. We appreciated the Seiryu-So Hotel and its location, and enjoyed the quietness and the scenery surrounding it and we took the opportunity to have several relaxing and invigorating spa baths.

## **Monday 11th October.**

This would be a solemn day for us, as we were to attend a Memorial Service for the 16 Iruka Boys that died in this area as P.O.W's.

This was especially important for Syd, Jeanne, Malcolm and Dawn; as Syd and Malcolm's father were both ex-Iruka Boys held at Kiwa-Cho.

The service was conducted in the open air by a Christian priest with approximately fifty people in the congregation; some people had travelled several hours by coach to attend.

Also waiting there for us was a reporter and camera man from the national television service.

It was very hot and we were pleased to be handed umbrellas to shade us from the sun, this was very thoughtful and we were most grateful.

At the service Syd met a lady, who did some typing for the Japanese officers at the camp, she reminded him that he and his friend had repaired her typewriter that had stopped working. They were both later interviewed by the reporter and we were told this was going to be shown on the television news report later that evening.

He also met a man whose name was Mr Kawakami. He was a 15 year old school boy who along with one hundred other schoolchildren who were sent to work in the mine alongside FEPOWs. Whenever they had a memorial service in Kiwa-cho, many of them would come to meet the Pilgrims and especially the Iruka boys. Unfortunately now Mr Kawakami is the only one left.

Malcolm made a speech during the service and we were very proud of him.



At the end of the service Syd and Malcolm laid a wreath at the memorial for the 16 Iruka Boys who died there, it was very sad for Syd as the boys were his comrades. After the service was over everybody returned to the hotel and we had lunch together. We had found out earlier that it was Jeanne's 87th birthday, so we were all pleasantly surprised when a cake was presented to her with lighted candles, organised by Keiko. This lightened our spirits and we all had a slice of the cake in celebration of Jeanne's birthday. When lunch was over most of the people left and returned home.

Our group boarded the minibus to visit a museum in the village of Itaya; after the war the village was renamed it was originally called Iruka.

Malcolm's dad, Norman, had donated a special belt to the museum, it was a leather belt that was covered with army badges, this belt belonged to Albert his best friend, along with a gold ring.

Albert was ill with dysentery and said to Norman, when he visited him, that he was finished. He asked him if he did not make it home to take the ring to his sister. Sadly, Albert died that night he was only 23 years old, that same night Norman helped bury his best friend.

When working at the mine Norman was given some Japanese mine badges that he added to the belt.

Whilst being shipped home from Japan, on an American ship, several of the American crew tried to buy the belt from him but he would not sell it.

On his return to England Norman and Edna, his wife, went to Grimethorp in Yorkshire, where Albert had lived with his sister, he wanted to fulfil Albert's last wishes. On meeting her she thanked him for the ring and insisted that he should keep the belt, she wanted to know all about her brother and where he was buried. Norman decided to donate the belt, complete with the badges, to the mine museum when he visited there many years later.

So this belt was of special interest to Malcolm and Dawn, and all of us too.

Since reading Normans story about his experiences in the war I have learnt more about how awful the war was for him and others in the Far East.

We went back to the hotel and had a short walk to a small station to visit the copper mine that the P.O.W's. had worked at.

We boarded the train on the mini railway, which was very rickety and noisy, passing through a dark damp tunnel. At the end of the tunnel we got out of the train and looked at the scenery, which was very picturesque with a stream running through it, Syd said the prisoners walked along there on their way to work in the mine each day.

After looking round we boarded the train and went back through the tunnel to the little station and walked back to the hotel.

That evening we assembled in the reception area to watch the news bulletin before having our evening meal, unfortunately just as Syd was being interviewed the screen went blank as the television somehow lost its signal so we were unable to see the news report. We were all very disappointed.

## **Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> October**

Another day of travelling, after breakfast we boarded the hotel mini bus and went to Shingu station and there boarded the train to Nagoya. At Nagoya we boarded a fast train to Tokyo and on the journey we passed Mount Fuji, we managed to get some photographs from inside the train it was a spectacular sight.

On arrival at Tokyo station we continued our journey via the metro; to Kashiwa where we were greeted by our hosts and taken to the hotel in their cars. The Reitaku University Hotel was very comfortable.

Later on we had a very enjoyable meal that was kindly provided by Mr Akira Iwamoto and his wife Tsuneko, who are supporters of Agape.

Mr Iwamoto was a former P.O.W. camp guard at Kiwa-Cho, he was there for two weeks before the end of the war, and Syd said he recognised him by a mole on his cheek.

During the meal Mr Iwamoto asked what we would like to drink, Kevin said he would like to try some sake. He ordered a bottle, and as is the custom and a sign of friendship, poured

some into Kevin's glass and others, and each time the glasses were emptied he topped them up again. Kevin did the same for him as a sign of his friendship. After the meal we took a walk in the grounds before retiring to our room for the night.

### **Wednesday 13th October**

We breakfasted well before having a tour round the University Memorial Centre. We were told about the founder, Chikuro Hiroike father of Moralogy who lived from 1866 to 1938.

At 11.00am we attended a lunch reception hosted by the Tanka Club and we were given a grand welcome. It was a formal occasion; we each had to stand up as we were formally introduced to the assembled members of the club.

After the lunch speeches were made by various people including Keiko, Sam and Terry. Then we were entertained by three groups of ladies doing traditional Japanese dancing, followed by a Japanese lady singer who sang both Japanese and Western songs. After the entertainment had finished we chatted with the people sitting at our table, they were all very friendly and it was a very sociable occasion.

We said our goodbyes as Keiko was taking us to catch a train for Naoetsu in the Niigata region. We were going to meet up with the people who were taking us to visit the area where my dad was held as a P.O.W. This was the main reason why we had come to Japan. We were not sure what to expect, or how it would affect us, but the time had come to find out.

As we had already checked out of our hotel room after breakfast we needed to change out of our formal clothing into something more practical for travelling in, we were offered a courtesy room along with the dancers, so Keiko and I changed there, but Kevin didn't have anywhere to change his clothes other than the corridor, not ideal but necessary, luckily no one saw him.

We were now going to start our special part of the pilgrimage and we had little time to spare. The three of us left on time to catch the train going to Naoetsu.

When we arrived we were met at the station by Mr & Mrs Ishizuka, Yoshi Kondo, and other members of the Japan-Australia Society of Joetsu, who kindly took us to the hotel Heimat nearby.

After checking in and freshening up Yoshi, and the other members, took us to a restaurant where we had a meal and discussed our itinerary for the next day. We socialised and got to know each other a little better before leaving for a night's sleep.

### **Thursday 14th October**

After breakfast we were met by Mr Shoji Yamaga, Vice President of the Japan-Australia Society. We were taken by taxi to the Peace Memorial Park, the former site of the P.O.W. camp from 1942-1945, in the suburbs of Naoetsu.

In December 1942 an old salt warehouse was modified and turned into a camp to house 300 Australian soldiers. Over the years the labour conditions and camp buildings were improved and eventually housed more than 700 allied prisoners.

In the park the main feature is the statues of Peace and Friendship.

There is also a memorial for Lieutenant Colonel A Robertson, commanding officer, and for the 59 Australian soldiers who had died there during the war.

In addition there is a memorial to 8 Japanese guards who were executed for war crimes.

These soldiers were amongst 15 ex-soldiers and guards that were put on trial after the war at the Yokohama trials.

Apparently the families of these Japanese guards were shunned for many years but now have been accepted into society once more. I am pleased that these families no longer bear the guilt of what occurred, as no individual should have to carry the guilt of others.

In the corner of the park is the museum, we were taken inside and shown round.

We were greeted warmly by three volunteers, two ladies and a gentleman, and were offered refreshments of Japanese green tea and a cream cake. We sat cross legged on the

floor Japanese style at this very social occasion. We watched, with pleasure and interest, the lady making the tea as it is totally different to the way English people make tea. After having the tea we were shown a DVD relating to the work they had done there. We then looked at the information on the walls of the room that showed details of the war crime trials at Yokohama and mutual visits between allied countries and Japan.

On the upper floor were pictures and stories depicting life at the camp and also information on how the Japan-Australia Society of Joetsu was formed.

We learnt how in 1978, Mr T M Lee, an Australian ex- P.O.W., wrote a letter to an English learning group in Naoetsu. From this letter and continuous correspondence and contacts over the following years the Japan-Australia Society of Joetsu was formed in 1996.

Before we left the museum we were given a DVD about the Japan-Australia Society different to the one we had seen, and since returning home we have looked at it, although we cannot understand the Japanese language we can see familiar faces we recognised from our visit. It shows the Australian ex-P.O.W's. visiting Naoetsu, some visits were during the cold snowy weather, and this reminded me of what my Dad told me about it being very cold with lots of snow during the winter months.

From visiting the Peace Park, Museum and watching the DVD it has made us realise what a great achievement it all has been and how hard this dedicated group of volunteers must have worked.

The Museum building and Park gardens are all very well maintained and they should all be proud of what they have achieved.

Before leaving we thanked everyone for their kindness during our visit, and then Kevin took a photograph of us all outside the Peace Park Museum.

We were pleased to be taken back to our hotel by Miki, a member of the Japan Australia Association, in her car as we had to prepare for our busy afternoon.

At the pre arranged time Mr Shoichi & Mrs Yohko Ishizuka along with their friend Mr Shige Nakai, the translator, arrived at the hotel to take us by train to the Denka factory at Omi

We walked from the hotel to the station and boarded the local train for Omi.

While on the train we chatted and got to know each other better, we discussed what questions we had regarding our visit to the area and the Denka factory. I said I was more interested in the human issues; the living and working conditions and daily life the P.O.W's. had endured.

On arrival at the station we were greeted by two gentlemen from the Denka factory, who had come to collect us in the firm's mini bus. The two men only spoke Japanese so we were glad we had people with us who could translate for us.

After a short drive we arrived at the main office and were taken into the building where two photographers were waiting.

We were given a presentation about the history of the factory and also what they produce today.

When the presentation was completed Shoichi Ishizuka stood up and proceeded to give his presentation, in Japanese, about the conditions at the camp and the hardship endured by the P.O.W's. held there. This was translated into English by Shige Nakai and a written copy was given to us later.

After the presentations one of the photographers, who was also a reporter for the local newspaper, then interviewed Keiko and us. He was interested in the purpose of the visit and details about my Father. We then moved to the outside of the building and had our photographs taken in front of the busts of former presidents of the company. After the photographs had been taken it was pointed out to us that the bust in the middle was that of Mr Tetsuji Kondoh who was the president of the company during the time my Father was there. He was the man who sent the ex-P.O.W's. a letter thanking them for all their hard work, my Father received a copy of the letter and I still have it.

The two men from the Denka factory told us they were not sure exactly where the P.O.W. camp site was, but they could show us the approximate place it was thought to be, this was only a short distance in the mini bus. The area was an industrial site in a mountainous

region down a narrow dirt track. It looked bleak on a warm sunny day so I think it must have been quite awful in 1943 when the prisoners arrived there. We all got out of the mini bus and walked together to get a feel about the place. I felt very emotional at that point and Kevin said afterwards he had felt the same. We stood and posed for the photographers a couple of times; they were polite and seemed to be happy with the pictures.

We stopped for a while and had a little time to ourselves to reflect. We were then taken to another building in the quarry area where another Japanese gentleman, we believe to be the quarry manager, gave a further presentation relating to the minerals they extract. He also produced a photograph taken in approximately 1939 that showed what it may have been like when Dad was there. We were told we could not keep the picture so Kevin took some photographs of it that came out OK.



Picture of the Omi POW Camp site taken in approx 1939.

As we were leaving the room one of the Denka employees noticed that Kevin had an insect bite on his forehead, from when we had been in the quarry area, and offered him some lotion to dab on it. He was very

pleased to be offered this remedy as he had more bites on his legs and ankle. I was also pleased as I had received an insect bite to my arm so we applied some of the lotion to that. We both appreciated this gesture as the lotion soon soothed the bites.

We travelled back afterwards on the Denka mini bus to the railway station, on arrival we thanked the two men who had looked after us, said our goodbyes then boarded the train. On the journey back we continued our discussions learning more information from Mr Ishizuka via Mr Nakai the translator. Mr Ishizuka asked if we could continue our discussions at the hotel, we were pleased to do this.

Back at the hotel, over a hot drink, he told us about some of his war experiences and why he became interested in helping ex- P.O.W's. and their families. He explained that as a Japanese soldier he fought in China and Vietnam and how he still deeply regrets how the Japanese soldiers caused a great deal of problems for the local people everywhere they invaded.

When the war ended in August 1945 he was stationed in the suburbs of Saigon.

Soon after Japan's surrender he was taken prisoner of war by the allied forces.

The Japanese P.O.W's. were not forced to do heavy work and were given enough food to eat, he said he spent a lucky prison life for eight months protected by the Geneva Convention. He was repatriated to Japan in May 1946.

After three and a half years absence he returned home to Naoetsu to find out that sixty Australian soldiers had died at the camp there during the war. This motivated him to start a campaign to erect a memorial for the dead Australian P.O.W's.

The time spent listening and talking about his experiences of the war passed by very quickly and unfortunately we had to stop before we wanted to as we had get ready for a further engagement.

Yoshi Kondo, President of the Japan-Australia Society, and other members had arranged a welcome party to be held at a local Japanese pub.

Yoshi met us at the hotel and we walked to the pub, it was a nice evening and we did not have far to walk to get there.

When we arrived we met some new people and some we had met in the morning at the Peace Memorial Park Museum.

As is the custom we took our shoes off at the door and sat on cushions on the floor at the low table, the room was in the traditional Japanese style with tatami mats and a sliding door.

The food was colourful with lots of variety, a feast for the eyes, Yoshi explained what the dishes were we were about to eat. I used chop sticks but didn't manage as well as Kevin did. Kevin was more adventurous than I was he tried the sea snails, raw tuna fish and other sushi enjoying all he ate. I didn't try everything but liked the food I tried especially the dumplings.

During the evening we each introduced ourselves, one by one, around the table saying something about ourselves in a relaxed friendly manner. As most at the table did not speak English Yoshi had the task of translating the English into Japanese and the Japanese into English. This made the evening even more enjoyable as we were able to share our individual stories.

The party eventually came to an end; we thanked everyone for providing us with a very nice meal and giving us a very enjoyable evening. We said good night to the others and Yoshi walked with us back to the hotel.

After visiting the area in Omi where Dad had been held prisoner we felt emotional and discussed this while getting ready to go out. We went out feeling low but came back feeling happier, this party had been good for us.

We were made most welcome everywhere we went today and could not have been treated better if we were royalty.

This had been an eventful day one that we would not forget, a day to tell our children about when we get home.

### **Friday 15th October**

After breakfast Mr Ishizuka and his wife Yohko meet us at the hotel reception area, they were going to escort us to the station. Mr Ishizuka had a newspaper with him, there was an article of Kevin and I visiting the Omi prison camp area, he kindly asked the hotel receptionist to take a photocopy of the page for us to keep.

We have this photocopy which is in Japanese and Keiko has offered to translate it into English for us.

When we arrived at the station Miki and other members of the Joetsu Japan Australia society were waiting to say goodbye, we appreciated this gesture.

Although we came from another country we felt a bond between these people we had only known a short time, we felt we could be friends.

It was a warm feeling to have; we have brought that feeling home with us and often talk of them and their kindness towards us.

We continued with our train journey, destination Tokyo. We were going to meet up with the main group as we had an engagement at the British Embassy for afternoon tea.

When we got to Tokyo we made our way to our next hotel "Tokyu Inn", we arrived with just enough time to wash and change into something smarter for the meeting with the Ambassador.

After changing we met up with the rest of the group who were pleased to see us. They were keen to know what we had seen and found out.

Whilst we were in Naoetsu they said they had been on a visit to Seikei University and afterwards went shopping in Tokyo escorted by students and Agape friends.

Terry and Lalitha said they had bought their grandson a toy bullet train, which he had especially requested, and their granddaughter a kimono. They all said they were pleased to get some free time with the opportunity to do some shopping and site seeing.

The group split up into three groups, the older members travelling with Keiko Kosuge, in her car, and the others travelling in taxis to the Embassy.

We arrived at the Embassy and waited for the others, Keiko Kosuge's car was security checked at the main gate then allowed through into the grounds. The rest of us were cleared by security and walked through to the entrance of the Embassy. We were greeted

at the door by the Defence Attaché, Captain Andy Edney, and his wife and then directed through to the reception room.

After a short while the Ambassador, David Warren, and his wife came in and apologised for their late arrival. We socialised and were offered tea and coffee; we were very pleased when we heard someone asking for us by name, this person was Susan Izumi the lady who had contacted me via telephone and gave us the information about Agape.

The Ambassador gave a speech and afterwards we went outside into the garden to have our photographs taken. We continued our conversation with Susan and commented how nice the garden looked in the afternoon sunshine. After the photographs had been taken the Ambassador spoke to us individually. This gave us the opportunity to discuss with him our hopes in getting a memorial placed at the Denka factory, at Omi, where the P.O.W. camp was. He said he would help in any way he could and asked to be kept in touch with developments.

After the reception we made our way to the local underground station, caught the train back to central Tokyo and walked back to the hotel.

We changed into casual clothes and went out on our own and had an evening meal followed by some sightseeing. We enjoyed seeing a busy Tokyo in the evening.

### **Saturday 16th October.**

We had a short walk after breakfast with Sam before meeting up with the others to continue on our journey.

We walked from the hotel across the road to the train station and caught the train to Yokohama.

We were not going to book into a hotel as we were going to stay in the homes of our host families for the next two nights and we were going to meet them soon. This was the main topic of conversation on the train journey.

We arrived at Minato Mirai, Yokohama, and had lunch at a restaurant in the Landmark Tower Plaza.

After lunch Keiko Holmes contacted the friends of Agape at the Hongodai Christ Church, as they were to send their transport to collect us. While we were waiting for the transport to arrive we had some free time, so we went across the road to do some sightseeing. We looked at the ship Nippon Maru docked in the harbour and we took some photographs, Yokohama looked a very interesting city. Our transport arrived to take us to visit "Sankeien Garden" a traditional Japanese style garden in Southern Yokohama. The garden was designed and landscaped by Sankei Hara; his real name was Tomitaro Hara a wealthy business man in the silk trade. The garden was opened to the public in 1906.

During the Second World War considerable damage was done to the property and in 1953 the Hara family transferred the property into the care of the Sankeien Hoshokai Foundation. After five years the garden was restored to almost how it was before the war.

It was a hot day so our escorts provided us with umbrellas to shade us from the sun, this was a thoughtful gesture. The friends escorted us around the garden explaining the different features including a pond, small rivers, flowers and wonderful winding paths. Among the historical buildings was an elegant daimyo (feudal lord) residence, several tea houses and a three storied pagoda from Kyoto's old Tomyo Temple.

It was very pleasant there, and we could have stopped longer but the garden was about to close. We enjoyed the garden as it reminded us of the similar care that is taken to preserve properties in the UK by the National Trust of which we are members.

We boarded the mini bus to make our way to the Hongodai Christ Church for dinner with our host families and other church members.

The church friends gave us a warm welcome and we were introduced to our host families. A buffet meal was provided by the church members and we sat down with our host families and enjoyed a tasty meal.

We were given a present of some "frozen eel" from the Denka factory, in Omi, Keiko sent this ahead to the ladies who were preparing the food for tonight's meal and this was served with rice as part of the meal. I was told this was a delicacy in Japan.

During the meal our hosts Mrs Toshiko Ichimura and her daughter Mika told us they lived in a flat in Yokohama, and said we would be sleeping in Mika's bedroom during our stay with them. Mika would be sharing with her mother as Mr Ichimura was away on business; we were a little disappointed as we would have liked to have met him.

Mika, who spoke good English, told us the room was Japanese style and the flat was of a modest size; Toshiko did not speak much English so we relied on Mika to translate our conversations.

We felt pleased to be staying in the home of a Japanese family; this would be different to a hotel room and would give us an understanding of normal Japanese living. Mika took us back to her mother's home in their family car; we were made very welcome and catered for extremely well during our two night stay.

We had a long conversation with Mika and Toshiko that evening before going to bed.

They told us about their family, and we told them both about ours and about my Dad.

We had a good night's rest and found the mattresses on the floor comfortable, we had already slept Japanese style at the Seiryu-So hotel so this was not a new experience for us.

### **Sunday 17th October**

In the morning after rising we sat down at the dining table and enjoyed a nice breakfast that Toshiko had prepared for us.

After breakfast Mika drove us all to the Hongodai Christ church to attend a reconciliation service. We met up with the others in the group who had also been guests of host families so we had lots to say to each other about our experiences.

Before the service started we were warmly welcomed by the Pastor and congregation and then shown to our seats.

The service started and we noticed that there were television screens at the front and images of the Pastor and the congregation, including us, were being shown. Each one of us in our group were given a small radio, with an earpiece, when switched on we were pleased to hear the service in Japanese being translated into English for our benefit. We later found out that the church was fully equipped with a sound and TV facility for the benefit of the congregation.

During the service we witnessed a baptism conducted by Pastor Ikeda Hiroshi, of a mother and daughter; this was an unusual experience as they were both totally immersed in the water, it was unusual because this is not the type of baptisms that we have seen in England.

When the service ended we were taken, along with the Pastor and some members of the congregation, to a room at the front of the building where we were given lunch. After lunch we were told we had some free time so Terry, Lalitha, Malcolm, Dawn and us went outside and noticed there were some gardens nearby similar to the allotments we have at home. They contained vegetables including onions, cabbages, courgettes, aubergine and some of which we did not recognise.

We walked further down the road and through some more gardens and came across a house from which a local man, dressed traditionally, came out and showed us his pond containing Koi Carp which he seemed proud of. He fed the fish so we could see them more clearly whilst they were feeding. We thanked him for showing us his fish, as best we could as he obviously did not understand English, then walked back to the church.

After arriving back at the church we boarded the mini bus with our host families and went to the British Commonwealth War Cemetery at Hodogaya, Yokohama.

When we arrived at the cemetery we were all feeling solemn, through the gates we could see the well maintained graves row upon row, upon row. Waiting at the gate to greet us was the Defence Attaché, Captain Andy Edney, his wife and another Embassy official.

We walked through the main gates and made our way towards the War Memorial at the end of the graveyard passing through the rows of graves with their commemorative plates shining in the afternoon sunlight. We congregated near the memorial and held a short service. Prayers were said followed by a hymn which was accompanied on the trumpet by Mr Kiyoji Kawata and his wife Mikako leading the singing. Following this we held a minute's silence. On completion of the minute's silence Captain Edney laid a wreath of poppies on the memorial on behalf of the British Government and us all. We all found this a very moving experience.

We all walked individually or in groups through the rows of graves and noted the different regiments and parts of the country where the P.O.W's. came from. We were especially interested in the graves of the Royal Norfolk Regiment in particular those that died at the Omi camp where my Father was held.

We counted 23 Royal Norfolk Regiment graves of which 12 were from the camp at Omi and noted that the majority had died within a year of being held there. Reading the personal inscriptions on the plaques was most distressing.

Meanwhile Syd found his friends grave and stood for a while quietly remembering him.

There is also an urn in a building at the side of the graveyard which contains the ashes of 335 Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen of the British Commonwealth, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the United States of America who died as Prisoners of War in Japan. The names of 284 are inscribed on the internal walls of the building. The identity of 51 of their comrades is unknown.

We were told, while we were there, the cemetery comprises of four main sections; the United Kingdom section, the Australian section, the Canadian and New Zealand section and the Indian Forces 1939-1945 section. A Cross of Sacrifice stands in each of the first three sections. In the fourth section instead of a cross, a specifically designed monument in the form of a pylon dominates the plot. In the north wall of this section is also the Yokohama Memorial commemorating those who died while serving with the occupation forces in Japan and for whom no burial or cremation information exists.

Each year ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day commemoration services are held at Hodogaya, it is reassuring to know that this is still happening.

We said goodbye to Captain Edney, his wife and the other gentleman from the Embassy and boarded the mini bus to take us into Yokohama to go on to the Osanbashi pier.

The pier was most impressive; it includes the Osanbashi International Passenger Terminal which is where international cruise ships dock when they visit Yokohama. It is 400 metres long and has wooden walkways and green spaces that mimic rolling waves that are open to the general public. Below the walking area there are boarding facilities, shops, restaurants and a hall for small exhibitions and events. We walked on to the pier and enjoyed the views around the bay and across to the main city of Yokohama. It was becoming dusk when we arrived, and as we were walking round the sun was setting behind the Tower and other tall buildings across Yokohama giving even more spectacular views. Also viewed from the pier was the Cosmo World Ferris Wheel, which displays the time and was once the world's largest clock. After dark the wheel puts on a fantastic display of colourful lights with varying designs. We took photographs of the views before having to leave.

We all met up at the entrance to the terminal and boarded the mini bus to take us to a restaurant outside of Yokohama, to have dinner with the host families hosted by Agape. Again we sat on cushions at low tables and had a very good Japanese meal, with our host families helping us with the correct etiquette.

After the meal we boarded the mini bus to take us back to the church, and then went with our host families back to their homes.

### **Monday 18th October**

In the morning after rising we sat down at the dining table for our final breakfast with Mika and Toshiko. During breakfast Mika said that her mother would not be going to the church



with us as she needed to take her grandchild to the Doctors as her other daughter was unable to. After breakfast we said goodbye to Toshiko and thanked her for hospitality. Mika drove us to the Hongodai Christ church to meet up with the rest of the group. Once the group had assembled we said goodbye to Mika and the other church members. We boarded the mini bus, whilst Sam, Syd and Jeanne went with Keiko Kosuge in her car, to go to the Aoyama Gakuin Women's college in Tokyo.

At the college we were able to store our hand luggage before being shown round the older buildings including a chapel built in the late 19th early 20th century. We were privileged as the chapel was not normally seen by visitors and some faculty staff had not even seen it. We were told how the college was founded by a group of American Methodist missionaries including Dora E. Schoonmaker, the first principle, in 1874. She rented a house in Tokyo and started an elementary school for 7 children, from this it eventually developed into the college it is today with 2,400 students and over 100 full time faculty and staff.

We were then provided with a lunch that we ate with the faculties. After lunch we were taken to a more modern chapel for a service with the students. The female students' choir sang hymns in Japanese and English with prayers and address being given by one of them. Keiko Holmes gave a power point presentation in which she showed pictures of us and spoke about our pilgrimage to Japan.

After the service the students filed out and after a short while a second group of students came in to meet us as part of their "General Study- Peace". Keiko Holmes gave the same presentation to this second group and afterwards asked us to introduce ourselves and give our reasons for making the trip. After the introductions we were asked to sit with groups of students for a question and answer session. After answering a few questions, before the students left, we were asked to stand in line in the corridor outside the chapel so that they could shake our hands as they filed out. We were then taken to meet the Rev. Nobuhisa Yamakita, the Chancellor of the Aoyama Gakuin Educational Foundation. He was a very friendly and approachable man. After the meeting he led us out of his office and we all had our photograph take on the stairs in front of a stained glass window. Following this we moved outside to the front of the building where more photographs were taken, after saying goodbye we proceeded to the room to retrieve our luggage.

Some of us left the University by taxis; it was only a short distance to a hotel in central Tokyo where we waited for the luxury coach to take us to our last of many hotels.

The senior members in our group Sam, Syd and Jeanne went with Keiko Kosuge in her car straight to the hotel.

When we got on the coach it was late afternoon, we relaxed to enjoy the journey and the views of Japan from the coach window. We passed through Tokyo and saw it from another perspective and admired the tall buildings, the Telecoms Tower and the Ferris wheel similar to the one we saw in Yokohama. We crossed the impressive bridge and travelled round Tokyo Bay and glimpsing Disney World in the distance was all quite special. It soon became too dark for us to see much more out of the windows, but we had plenty to reflect on to keep us occupied for the rest of the journey.

On arrival at the International Garden hotel, located close to Narita airport, we all congregated by the check in desk, collected our room keys and arranged to meet later for our evening meal. Keiko Holmes pleasantly surprised us and said she had been given a gift to pay for our evening meal; this was one of many gifts we had been given throughout our stay.

After we had freshened up we gathered for our meal. A private function room was provided by the hotel so we were able to enjoy our last evening meal together. The food was good having a varied selection to suit all tastes. We were very cheerful and enjoyed the company of our travelling companions; Kevin produced a bottle of sake that he had been given by Mr Iwamoto at the Tanka Club reception, which was appreciated by some of the group.

This was a very comfortable hotel to spend our last night in Japan. We said goodnight quite soon after eating as we had the chore of packing our luggage which was now heavier due to the gifts we all received from the new friends we had made during our trip. Departure to

the airport from the hotel was planned for 08.45 in the morning so we arranged to meet for an early breakfast.

## **Tuesday 19th October**

The time had come now to travel home; breakfast was enjoyable but quieter than usual as we were all thinking about the journey to come. After eating we went back to our rooms to collect our luggage with little time to spare as the hotel mini bus was waiting to take us to the airport.

At the airport we went to the desk to check in for our flight, Keiko Homes and Keiko Kosuge helped Sam, Syd and Jeanne to check in. After checking in we all stood together to say goodbye to Keiko Holmes and Keiko Kosuge. Keiko Holmes was not travelling back with us as she was staying in Japan to continue her Agape work. Before we departed she asked us all to take care of Sam, Syd and Jeanne and ensure there were no problems for them on their journeys home. We queued to go through passport control and the two Keiko's waited to see us pass into the departure lounge, we all looked back and waved before going through. We now had a two hour wait so we passed the time looking in the shops.

Time passed quickly and we proceeded to the departure gate, Terry asked a fellow traveller to take the final group photograph.

Once on the aeroplane we had a thirty minute delay before taking off but none the less we were pleased to be going home as we had achieved our goal.

Twelve hours later we safely arrived at Heathrow, disembarked from the aeroplane, collected our luggage and went through passport control for the final part of our journey. Before leaving the airport we hugged each other and said goodbye to our new friends, with whom we had much in common, we all agreed to stay in contact.

Our taxi driver was waiting for us at the arrivals hall; we made contact with him and followed him to the taxi. After loading our luggage we got in very relieved that neither of us had to drive home as we were both feeling very tired.

We arrived home at 20.15 and calculated that we had been travelling for more than twenty hours and by 21.00 were in bed.

It took us a week get over the jet lag, which surprised us as we had no ill effects on the outward journey.

## **Reflection January 2011**

Over the last two years I have felt much sadness, with the death of both my parents.

My Father died in February 2008, and only three months later in May, my Mother died, who after sixty one years of marriage was unable to get over the loss of her partner.

Going to Japan was something I had only thought about and had never spoken to my Dad about, or my husband, but it had been in my mind ever since I can remember.

After trying various sources to get information and getting nowhere I decided to write a letter to the British Embassy in Tokyo asking them for their help. The help came via a telephone response from Embassy staff who told me of a lady called Mrs Keiko C Holmes, who had taken many other people on pilgrimages of reconciliation to Japan, and suggested it may be in my interest to contact her. Obviously I was very interested and I was emailed the details regarding Agape that very same day.

Later that day I contacted Mrs Keiko Holmes, and plans developed from there.

The help and organizational skills of Keiko, and Agape staff was first class.

The trip was managed extremely well; we travelled many miles on different modes of transport but mainly on the railway.

We would not have been able to achieve this without Agape; we are both most grateful to Keiko, and her friends, for their friendship and expertise in managing our trip.

We were apprehensive about how we would get on with our fellow travellers, but this was unfounded as we mixed very well, and found them to be supportive as our friendships began to develop. We enjoyed their company and missed them when we came home.

It was very special for us going to see the Niigata region where Dad was a P.O.W. at Omi and this was the focus of our pilgrimage and the main reason we had travelled to Japan. I am most grateful for all of the help given to me by the Japanese people especially the Joetsu Australia Association for researching the information which I had been unable to find here in the UK, and for organising our visit to the area.

The time we spent from October 13th -15th was what we had been waiting for. Visiting the location of the Omi prison camp site, where Dad was held prisoner and worked, was our main reason for the pilgrimage. As we needed to see and learn as much as possible about the area and experience as much as we could for ourselves.

We only wished we had asked my Dad more about his war years, we will always regret not doing so.

Although I didn't know what to expect, or how I would feel, it was something I needed to do; luckily my husband supported me, and was interested too.

Visiting the Denka factory, and the Peace Park Museum in Naoetsu, gave us an insight in other aspects of the war. Speaking to Mr & Mrs Ishizuka was most enlightening, as Mr Ishizuka has invaluable knowledge on the history of the war in and outside Japan.

If we had not have visited Japan we believe we would have always regretted it.

I have been lucky to have had this opportunity in my life, and thankful to everyone who has helped me achieve my dream.

We have told our children about our experience and wonder if they may like to visit one day.

However there is one thing we are both disappointed with; it is that there is no memorial in the area of the Omi prison camp or the Denka main factory building for the P.O.W's. These brave men laboured so hard in such very poor living conditions, many of them sacrificing with their lives; others with the loss of their young life and a lasting effect on their physical and mental health.

We would like a permanent memorial in respect of these brave men as in our opinion they should never be forgotten by any nation.

The war must never be forgotten and these disastrous mistakes should never be allowed to happen again, but we know this not so as wars are still happening in parts of the world today.

### **Future plans**

We have written a letter to the Denka Company as the first step in getting a permanent memorial placed at Omi where the P.O.W. camp was.

When the memorial is in place we would if possible, like to return to Japan to see it.

Although we have found out a lot more about my Dad's war time experience in Japan and elsewhere we want to continue to learn more.

Dad spent one year in Changi prison camp, Singapore, and we are trying to learn more about his time there.

Linda-Lee & Kevin Nicholls  
29th January 2011