



Vol.4 John Stewart Renaldy Former Protocol Officer of British Hills
Assuming the responsibility
to represent the British culture

Let One Embody
the Authentic British Culture

With the wish to provide the students with a facility to learn English language and culture in the same environment as the one in the United Kingdom without leaving Japan, in 1994, Kanda Gaigo Group has established an international training facility combined with hotel called "British Hills". It recreates the authentic atmosphere of the United Kingdom in Japan. In order to realize this concept, there is a person who has been working at British Hills as a leader in the service sector for 16 years, and that person is Mr. John Stewart Renaldy. This article will tell the story about the experience of Mr. Renaldy dedicated to serve as an ambassador representing the British culture to realize this exceptional educational facility. (Text: Takeshi Yamaguchi, Photos: Yutaro Yamaguchi / titles omitted)

I was born in Edinburgh in 1950. I was sent to boarding school in Newcastle. And I graduated from college and then university there. When I was at university, we protested against the government. It was the time of the hippie movement and we camped out for weeks in Hyde Park in London. At Hyde Park, I remember seeing a concert where the Beatles and the Rolling Stones played together.

In my younger days, I did think about becoming part of the police force because I watched movies with policemen. But my eyesight wasn't good enough to be a policeman. So, my next dream was becoming a chef. I enjoyed cooking. However, since I didn't want to spend my life in the kitchen, I focused on learning the entire hotel management, and so my major in the Newcastle University became hotel management.



After I graduated from university, I joined a hotel company called Scottish & Newcastle under the logo of Thistle Hotels. I got a four-year graduate degree but I was still washing pans, making beds and rooms. I started from scratch. That's how one learns the business essence.

Anything can happen in the real hotel. Being a manager requires to do everything by myself, not just to tell the staff what to do. In this way you gain respect and the staff actually sees you can solve the problems. For those reasons, one must have various experiences and must be able to do the routines necessary in each part of the hotel work.

I worked at Scottish & Newcastle for five years, and after I left the company, I joined a company called Star International, which owned casinos and nightclubs, not only hotels. I was responsible for their buildings and their properties there. Whenever our competitor opened new location, we would find some other location close enough to open as his competition. I was responsible for signing various contracts and managed the construction companies. I also interviewed managers and assisted them to run the location.

About five years, I left Star, and I went self-employed. At that time, England went through a bad period of recession, so in the places where hotels and nightclubs had gone bankrupt, we moved in with my staff and reopened the hotels. My role was to reopen the hotels because it's easier for real-estate companies to sell an opened building rather than a closed one. Around that time, I found one advertisement, which was the application for the British Hills. It was in 1994. (1/9)



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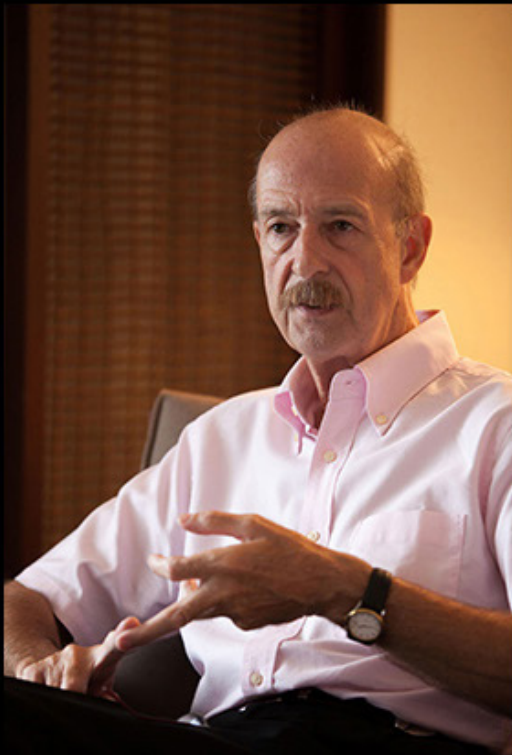
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For the students who cannot study abroad to create a village where they can experience the British culture and language

The advertisement said "an English village as an educational cultural center including hotel," that was being built in Japan. It looked inviting for me. Within no time, I applied for hospitality manager position. I didn't hear anything for a while and after some time had a phone call saying, "We'd like to invite you to join British Hills."

It was a gentleman called Dan Simmons and he was responsible for the education of British Hills. And I answered, "Yes, okay, let's do it." Joining British Hills wasn't just a challenge. It was a unique experience that probably would never happen again in my lifetime.

I arrived in Japan in June 1994. It was about a month before the opening. The buildings were all ready, and they were still putting the finishing touches in. Furniture arrived at the docks of Yokohama one after another and sometimes 15 trucks of furniture were transported to British Hills. Our task was unloading trucks and bringing them and putting them the room, called Refectory now. We would put electricity in the building and fit the furniture into place. It was a physically hard work but it was also great enjoyment. It was amazing time for me.



Telling the truth, I didn't really know much about the concept of British Hills until I arrived there. The concept was to build an English village for students to go by bus or Shinkansen and to experience what it is like to live in England without getting on an airplane. Air travel back in those days was so expensive.

To make a real English village, Kanda Gaigo Group went to England and researched the possibilities there for years. They contracted a design company called Border Oak in England. They actually bought the oak in the U.K. and the buildings of British Hills were built there, and it was all dissembled and loaded on ships and transported to Japan. Every piece was numbered, and rebuild there. So it was one giant jigsaw puzzle. After arriving Japan, I found to realize that British Hills was such a spectacular plan.

The building company of British Hills was Obayashi. Some of the British carpenters from Border Oak were there. It was so interesting to find such opportunity that British carpenters were interacting with Japanese architectural craft workers.

Tools for the carpenters in Britain are different from the ones in Japan. Japanese had this handsaw that has double blade compared to the British one which has single. British carpenters were amazed: "How do you use this, so quick and efficient?" So, cooperation and friendship across the sea were born between the carpenters and architectural craft workers from both countries. The reason why two cultures came together in friendship was British Hills learned culture in Britain and the faithful challenge to build real British buildings. (2/9)



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The people who gathered in order to embody the authentic Britain in British Hills

The choice of staff for the opening of British Hills was perfect.

First of all, Director-General and Supervisor was Mr. Yuki Kawada. He was a truly nice gentleman, very strict, forthright, and direct, he would always express what he thought. Mr. Kawada was more European than Japanese in a sense and also very respectful. He had been at Mitsubishi Corporation for years and had a deep knowledge of the culture and history of Britain and Europe. When I arrived in British Hills, Mr. Kawada explained passionately the concept of British Hills.

A butler was hired to give authenticity to British Hills as being truly British. Every large household in England had butlers. Butler is a private secretary to the owner and in a sense was the administrator for the service in the house. The butler of British Hills was Peter Stanbury. He was a qualified butler who came from Ivor Spencer, the professional butlers' Association. His main responsibility was to aid the Chairman (Ryuji Sano, present CEO of Sano Educational Foundation) and the VIPs.



Bill Brown was already there. He was publican and was responsible for Falstaff Pub. Bill was a Londoner. The pub in British Hills was more of a country pub, but he was perfectly successful in recreating a traditional London pub. Bill had the fish and chips menu and his guests were referred to as "punters" in the London accent. Bill could use the rhyming slang. "Dog and bone" is a phone, "apples and pears" are stairs. He had a strong personality, but he needed to make sure everything is under control as in a real London pub.

The gentleman who contacted me in England, Dan Simmons and his wife, Becky, were also in British Hills. Their role was education and they had been involved with Kanda Gaigo Group long before. Becky was referred to as the Iron lady. She was teaching at the Craft House. She was careful in research and had a strong will to achieve what she wanted.

And there was Moto (Motoyasu Sano, present Chairman of Sano Educational Foundation). He was to me something similar to a younger brother. We used to have such a good time together.

I didn't meet the Chairman, Mr. Ryuji Sano until probably about a week or two before the opening. I didn't really know him in person. The Chairman was a man to take on the responsibility of something that his parents started, that is to build an English village for students to experience what it is like to live in England and to speak in English without studying abroad. He went to England by himself and did the research on the project, and realized that project in the exact form as it was planned through the end. (3/9)



British Hills opened the curtain with the same ceremony as one of the Houses of the Parliament in London

The service staff had arrived right before the opening. Everyone in the first group were Australian from a hotel school. And they said, "We have to put everything in place for the opening". They were truly professional. We finished fitting the furniture and we were fully ready for the opening.

I remember we also had rehearsal for our opening ceremony, because everything has to run on time in Japan, just like the Shinkansen.

We had an English-style opening at British Hills. For the opening and closing of the Houses of the Parliament in London, there's a gentleman called "Black Rod" who strikes the doors of the houses and demands entrance of Her Majesty the Queen.

So we decided to do the same ritual for the opening of British Hills. All the front doors were closed. It was the butler, Peter Stanbury, who took the part of the Black Rod and banged on the door. During the rehearsal, the door was closed, he banged on it and we opened – it went perfect!

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The time of the official opening came and all the distinguished guests were there, as well as the people from the Embassy and all the VIP guests. The ceremony took place in front of the Manor House. After the cutting of the ribbons, finally the Black Rod appeared. The door was opening outwards, so I was at the back of the door waiting. And Peter was at the front, and when he had to bang on it, I had to open.

Peter began to bang on the door and I tried to open. But the door jammed, and I just couldn't open. He was banging on the door, I wanted to let him in and pushed. It was a brand new door, but I had to kick it open.

So finally the door opened and I was relieved. People fortunately thought it was all part of the opening ceremony. It seems the doors was swollen, so we couldn't get it opened. It was really funny episode. On the next day, Mr. Yamanaka, the maintenance staff, scraped the doors down, so that we wouldn't have the same problem.

By the way, Mr. Yamanaka was a enigmatic character. Nobody knew details about his background. Usually he was wearing worker's clothes, but once he got dressed up, he looked very dandy and make women look back at him. I taught him how to use properly knife and fork. And he taught me how to use ohashi. If we wanted anything, Mr. Yamanaka would find and get it for us. No one knew how he would do that. (4/9)



**Our job is to provide such supreme delight
that our customers had never experienced before**

At the opening ceremony, we had over a hundred guests and we've only got some 18 service staff that included reception, waiting, the pub, swimming pool and sports. Dan Simmons, Becky and other educational staff were always ready to help for serving wine and serving the tables on big functions. We were a team like one big family. And Dan loved wearing waistcoats.

Service and educational staff always collaborated beyond their roles. And we always provided them with any education program necessary that is hospitality orientated – from all the table manner classes and wine classes through such ones as trying dancing classes. Guests could experience the feeling of living in England even though they are in Japan. We all felt enormous pleasure when we could realize that experience for our guests.

Every one of us from outside Japan had our own weaknesses and strengths. It allowed us to become a family. I'm including the Japanese staff also. We helped each other and formed a bond such as the one a family has with British Hills in our heart.

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I was hospitality manager but I did hands-on the same as everybody else. I served tables and poured wine, escorted guests and even carried luggage from the Manor house to the rooms when they checked in. I shoveled snow, and rescued people when they got trapped in the snow. That was part of the job, and I was there for it.

It didn't matter to me whether I was a manager or not. Hospitality was my job – it's all that mattered for me. We were there to make guests' stay the most enjoyable time they could ever have. It was not just for private guests, but for students as well.

I have a certain belief for hospitality. Hospitality is not a job. Hospitality is a passion. It's a tough business. If you haven't got the passion, you'd better leave it. It is a blessing and passion itself.

There weren't so many guests for the first three years. The Chairman, Mr. Ryuji Sano had promised every Kanda student would come to British Hills. One group had around 120 students. For the students, the daily meal was buffet service at the Refectory. We still had private guests coming and they would use the royal balcony where they could see around the whole room. And study tours of other universities and high schools to British Hills were increasing too. (5/9)



All the staff is dedicated to help bringing out the customers' English speaking and communication ability

Why do we reproduce England in British Hills? The first priority is students. We provide the students, who can't afford to go and study in England, with the experience of English culture and language at British Hills.

British Hills is a fairyland. It is England in Japan, without having to worry about getting on a plane. You can get on the Shinkansen or a school bus and come. As soon as you arrive at the gates of British Hills, it is like a door to another world.

There is long driveway up to the Manor house. And when the students on the bus see the buildings of the Manor house, they start to share their impressions and their facial expressions change too. I welcome the students and the first thing they ask me is "John, Wow, do you live here?!". And I reply "Yes, it's our home." And they say "Wish I could live here!" with a beaming face.

Using Japanese language was forbidden at British Hills. The moment you get off the bus, it feels like you are in England. No one was allowed to speak in Japanese, the staff especially – to get the students draw out that language from Japanese. Once you help them open up, they don't stop, they want to talk and talk in English.

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And it's not actually the same as being in the classroom with textbooks to learn English. They're actually performing the classes, learning English language better through having to work and do things. So, it's a two-way street of communication, not the one-way method of teaching tutors have in class. It's the only way you learn, and you learn by making mistakes. Japanese people are afraid to use English. But when you find yourself into that English environment and you have no alternative but to speak English, you just have to use it. If you make mistake, you laugh and joke about it. It's the easiest way to learn.

The truth is we were service staff, so we did not have to teach classes as teachers. We were not responsible for teaching. However, we all supported our guests at British Hills. Talking to guests in English and making them talk in English, and telling them how to speak in English through our service.

We actually learn Japanese culture and history from the Japanese staff, older guests, and students. I didn't know how much influence England had on Japan until I went there. The railway system, the postal system, government system, roads system, and the education system are all from England. I never even thought the roads in Japan were built on the basis of the British system during the Emperor Meiji era. (6/9)



Rather than the Japanese staff it was us who was responsible for creating British Hills the way it is, embodying Britain

For us, the staff from foreign countries, it was our responsibility to make it British. Especially, as Englishmen, I and Peter, a butler and Mr. Kawada, the Director-General who had deep knowledge about English culture were responsible for that role. So, we had to speak the Queen's English that was British English. When I used to lead the tour around British Hills, I used to explain in English, make jokes and use humor. It's our culture, it's the way we are.

Mr. Kawada, Peter and I worked as a team. There were never things like, "Well, I'm the boss," or, "I'm the butler," or "I'm the hotel manager." There was never any of this kind of talk. We could refer to the old English comedies and plays. Mr. Kawada was an amazing man with a broad knowledge about the plays in the UK too.

I remember once, the three of us came dancing down the stairs of the Manor House stairway. For any sake we had a lot of fun. It was perfect English environment to re-enact the English culture. We always said "One day when we are gone, please bury us here, at British Hills."

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We used to play Sherlock Holmes on Christmas and all the staff took part. Peter was always the Sherlock and I was the robber. It was great fun. And the New Year's parties, we played the bagpipes and had haggis. The ceremony was the same as the one in England.

The original advertisement of British Hills didn't go down too well at times for us. It said "How would you like to be an ambassador of your country?" We were cultural ambassadors and represented the country. It was our role to make British Hills real England. It was our belief. English staff that had such responsibility joined British Hills. It was amazing!

That meant that even on my days off I was wearing shirt and tie. And I never wore a pair of jeans or a pair of shorts, unless I was playing tennis. British Hills was representing England and so I was loyal to its concept. It was our role to make British Hills real England. It was the reasons why we were staying in British Hills.

Around the time of the opening, the background staff was Japanese. We, the foreign staff, were front staff and supported the Japanese one. It was not the Japanese staff's responsibility to make British Hills British because they didn't know enough about England. It was our responsibility, for us who were Britons, to make it English. (7/9)



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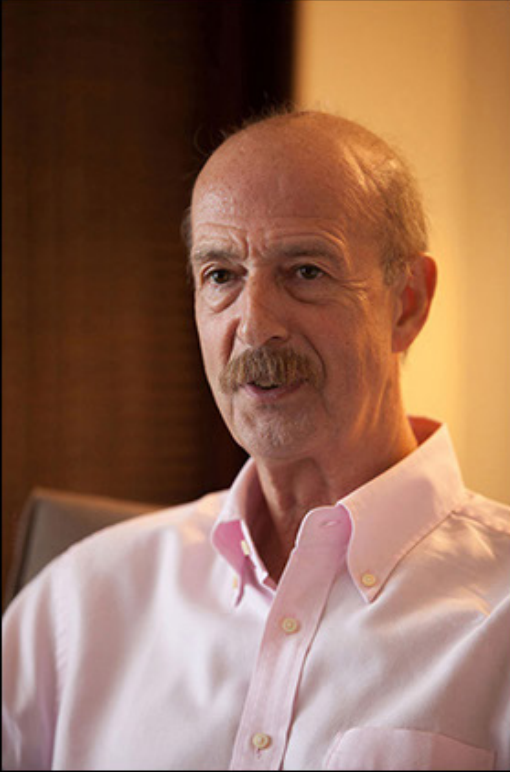
Becoming like “home” to the Embassy is a true honor for the British Hills

Peter Stanbury, the butler, left British Hills three years after the opening. After Peter departed British Hills, we had one more butler join us. And after he left too, a decision was made to stop having more butlers.

The Chairman, Mr. Ryuji Sano, decided, "It's okay, John's there, he can take care of it – no problem!" Actually, when Peter was on holiday or wasn't there, I took care of it anyway. So, it didn't matter. In addition to serve as a hospitality manager, I took the role of the butler, and took up also the post of protocol officer. Taking care of British Embassy was also my role.

I worked with five different ambassadors during my time in British Hills for 16 years. Sir David Wright was very precise in what he did. I went to pick the ambassador up from Shirakawa station. He got in the car, turned around and said, "I'm here John. What's my schedule? I will do as you tell me." I've earned the ambassador's trust and fulfilled my responsibility.

We've always got the “Ambassadors' Cup” at British Hills. We had the great pleasure of hosting Peter Pan Foundation whose honorary president was Princesses Diana. So, we always kept the venue as an option in case the Embassy was involved with any large events.



We were given that privilege to have British Hills be used as an extension of the Embassy far away from Tokyo. It was a privilege for the British Hills to be put in that class, as a home for the Embassy.

We got sponsorship from Jaguar, the British car manufacturer. I formed a partnership with a gentleman called David Bloom who was the President of Jaguar Japan.

I approached him and said, "Look, we're British Hills. Why can't we have a Jaguar?" Unfortunately, the first attempt failed. However, at the second attempt we were successful and we received a brand new Jaguar XJS every year. Jaguar would never give you a car just like that. But they did it for us!

At British Hills, Jaguar used to be parked outside the Manor House, and was used for pickups and deliveries of British ambassadors and other VIPs. If our guests were interested in that, we taught what a Jaguar was about, and what kind of car Jaguar was. It was a good and fruitful collaboration for both British Hills and Jaguar. (8/9)



Never forget the importance of being true to the concept

In 2010, I left British Hills. 16 years have passed since I arrived in Japan for the first time. Allowing me to serve there for 16 years is an honor for me.

I don't think I would have ever stayed in Japan for 16 years if the Chairman, Mr. Ryuji Sano hadn't been the owner of British Hills. He is an amazing man to take on the responsibility of something that his parents started. And for him to see it bear fruit in a sense must be an amazing satisfaction and I also have the greatest respect for him having done this.

He believes the true nature of people is honesty. And for me too, I've always been forthright with the Chairman. Whenever he had asked me something, I would have told him how I felt, whether he might have liked it or not, I've always been honest with him and always told the truth. But I've always respected him, he's the boss. And I cannot put into words the feeling that I have for his family. It has been an absolute privilege.

The Chairman is a very unique person. He is not a usual Japanese CEO. I've seen people cower in front of him. Whenever he said something people were really afraid to say no or disagree as it is in Japanese culture. This also a huge sign of respect for the person, however he is also a human being and no different than anyone else.

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Compared to the time of opening, the management environment has changed. The value of the yen at exchange rate has been diminishing. So it became necessary to reduce the foreign staff and get more Japanese staff. But this would not be British Hills, you might rather say Japanese Hills. I hope the legacy carries into the future. It's how we make our history. I hope that the staff of British Hills continues to work with showing their spirit of "This is a true England!". If not, I think I have to go back and remind them.

"The very reason why you are staying here is to make British Hills real England. Please keep in mind the importance to be loyal to the concept."
(9/9)

John Stewart Renaldy

Born in 1950 in Edinburgh, U.K. Graduated from Newcastle University and worked in the hotel business for 10 years, then shifted to freelance work. In 1994, came to Japan and joined British Hills as a hospitality manager. During his service, took up a post as protocol officer. In 2010, left British Hills and relocated to the Philippines. At present, teaching students practical business of hotel business as a lecturer at universities in Manila.