

The Japan Society • 1891 • 125 • 1891-2016 • Celebrating the UK-Japan relationship

9 September 1891

The Japan Society is founded during the International Congress of Orientalists when Arthur Diosy explains a scheme for the establishment in London of a society for the encouragement of Japanese studies and for the purpose of bringing together all those in the United Kingdom, and throughout the world, interested in 'Japanese matters.' Its objectives are stated as the 'encouragement of the study of the Japanese Language, Literature, History and Folk-Lore, of Japanese Art, Science and Industries, of the Social Life and Economic Condition of the Japanese People, past and present, and of all Japanese matters.'

One year later, in his speech at the first annual dinner in the Whitehall Rooms of the Hotel Metropole, Diosy tells attendees that 'If the Japan Society succeeds, in the course of years, in twisting one more silken thread into the red cord between the hearts of the people of Japan and the hearts of the people in Britain, then, I think, our Society will not have existed in vain.'

A Punch caricature of Diosy:



8 December 1891

The first meeting of the council, formed by Diosy, Daigoro Goh – Chancellor at the Japanese Consulate General in London – and F.J. Piggott. The Society at this point numbers 126 members, among them merchant Arthur Lasenby Liberty, artist Alfred East and art dealer M.B. Huish. Professor William Anderson takes the chair. The Society's offices are at 20 Hanover Square, and subs are one guinea.

30 June 1905

The opening of the Society's three-week exhibition of Japanese arms and armour at the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours, visited by both King Edward VII and Prince Takehito Arisugawa.



13 May 1921

The Society gives a banquet for H.H. The Crown Prince (Emperor Showa), also attended by H.H. The Duke of York (King George VI). By this time the Society has already hosted numerous events welcoming visiting Japanese royalty, and will continue to do so.

28 September 1949

Regular lectures and social activities continue in the 1930s, but on 1 April 1942 the decision is taken to formally suspend activities. The Society is revived in 1949, and at the first meeting of the new council its membership totals 199. Lectures began again in the 1950s and the Society works towards improved understanding between the two countries in the aftermath of the war.



1891-1901

29 April 1892
For the inaugural meeting of the Society, at the Royal Society of Arts, T. Shidachi speaks on 'Jai-Ito, the Ancient Art of Self-Defence by Sleight of Body'. The lecturer repeatedly throwing Mr Goh over his head, apparently with the greatest of ease.
The Japan Society quickly became an important forum, alongside the Asiatic Society, providing stimulus for scholarship and an outlet for research.

1902-29

1 November 1892
Empress Meiji gifts 100 guineas to the Japan Society, conveying his hope for its 'continued prosperity'.

1914-1918
During the First World War, the Japan Society's ordinary meetings are curtailed, but activities are curtailed. A series of lectures is given on Japan's naval, medical and financial contributions to the war effort.



15 April 1937

This is the programme from a lunch given to mark the first flight from Japan to Europe. Aviators Masaaki Irima and Kenji Tsukayoshi flew almost 10,000 miles in just over 94 hours, landing at Croydon airport on 9 April 1937.

1910

The Society plays a significant role in the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition, Shephard's Bush, in particular presenting an exhibit on the development of Anglo-Japanese relations.



7 October 1971

The Japan Society hosts a joint reception with Nippon Club, the Japan Association and the JCCI for TIM Emperor Hirohito and Empress Nagako as part of a visit marking a new beginning in UK-Japan relations.

1988

The Society changes its name from the Japan Society of London to the Japan Society to better reflect the scope of its activities.



1994

The first Japan Society Awards are presented to Professor Charles Bowser and Mr Sadao Oba. These awards pay tribute each year to the work of unsung heroes in the field of UK-Japan relations.

1949-1970

14 November 1962
The Society, with the Japan Association and Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI), welcomes Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda to a reception marking the signing of the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation.

1971-1990

1995
Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama announces a worldwide initiative to mark the 50th anniversary of the war. The Japan Society is asked to administer the British arm of this programme, the Anglo-Japanese History Project, with the first books published in 1998.

1991-2000

1991

Planned celebrations to mark the Japan Society's centenary, grow into the nationwide Japan Festival 1991. Highlights include Sumo at the Royal Albert Hall, Grand Kabuki at the National Theatre, an exhibition of Buddhist sculpture at the British Museum, and a survey of the Mingei movement at the Burrell Collection. At a reception given by the Lord Mayor and Corporation at the Guildhall, H.H. The Crown Prince remarks that 'During these 100 years, the Society has been the focus of goodwill and enthusiasm of those who were eager to promote friendship between both our countries.' The Japan Festival Education Trust and the Japan Festival Fund ensure that the Festival leaves a lasting legacy.
1991 also sees the opening of the Kyoto Garden in Holland Park, where the dedication stone pays tribute to the work of the Society.

Japan 2001

Japan 2001 celebrates Japanese culture with a yearlong programme of over 2000 events throughout the UK. The emphasis throughout is on grass-roots education and exchange, with events involving over 750 schools. Following the festival, the Japan Festival Education Trust and the Japan Festival Fund merge to become Japan 21, which in 2007 will merge with the Japan Society. Today the Japan Society's Education programme continues the spirit of both festivals, broadening children's horizons and making Japan something accessible rather than distant and strange.



19 September 2009

Matsuri are an important expression of Japanese community and have taken various guises over the years. Today's annual Japan Matsuri is held in Trafalgar Square in early autumn and attracts tens of thousands of people. The first in this series of Matsuri took place at Spitalfields market and exceeded all expectations. Japan Matsuri is co-organised with the Japanese Residents' Association, the Embassy of Japan, the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the UK and Nippon Club.
Photo: Masaaki Moribayashi

2001 to 2002

As its contribution to Japan 2001, the Japan Society organises A Garden Boquest, an exhibition exploring the wealth of plant material introduced from Japan to the West, featuring traditional works of art dating from the 17th Century onwards. The exhibition takes place in both Edinburgh and London.

2007

The Japan Society merges with Japan 21, taking on its extensive grass-roots education programme.

2016

The Japan Society is honoured to be awarded the Japan Foreign Minister's Commendation for its promotion of mutual understanding between Japan and the UK.

2001-2016

2016
Publication of the tenth volume in the Britain and Japan Biographical Portraits series, which along with its five- sister publications has recorded the lives of over 600 men, women and institutions who have played a significant role in UK-Japan relations. 2016 also marks the launch of the Japan Society eLibrary, the first stage in an on-going digitisation project.