

# The Japan Society Year in Review 2017

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The vision that drives the Society's annual activity is the enhancement of understanding of Japanese life and culture and of links between the UK and Japan. This informs all areas of the programme, whether direct school-focused education initiatives, lectures and seminars for the general public and business leaders, events introducing aspects of the culture of both countries, opportunities for people to meet in more informal settings, the provision of research facilities through our library, or the programme of small grants made in support of Japan-related projects that are organized by others.

The board regularly reviews the Society's activity to ensure that its key objectives are being met as well as to confirm their continuing relevance. In the aftermath of the UK's decision to leave the EU, and with increasing global tendencies for nations to look inward, the Society's role in creating bridges and fostering professional and personal networks retains its importance. The Trustees always bear in mind the Charity Commission guidance on public benefit and consider this when planning and evaluating our activities and in ensuring that a significant proportion is accessible to the wider community beyond the Society's membership. Many events are open to non-members, while the schools education programme and the small grants scheme extend throughout the UK, beyond the Society's base in London.

The Society encourages any who have an interest in Japan and the broad UK-Japan relationship to become members and participate in activities. Reduced membership fees for students and those under 25 years of age are set in order to make membership accessible to the next generation, who will take the relationship forward in the coming years. In recent years we have noticed a tendency for people to sign up to receive newsletters, or to follow the Society on social media, without becoming members.

## **The business network**

A busy programme of business events again included a number of events with a focus on the implications of the UK leaving the European

Union, while also covering other topical issues relating to the Japan-UK relationship in a global context. The Chairman held a series of small lunches and breakfasts in which key figures were invited to meet senior members of the Society. Three of these focused on Brexit (Alok Sharma MP, FCO Minister for Asia & the Pacific; Charles Grant, Director, Centre for European Reform; Philip Stephens, Financial Times), while in the fourth, Glen S. Fukushima, Senior Fellow at the Centre for American Progress, gave an assessment of the state of Japan-US relations and their implications for Japan and its continental neighbours.

Other larger-scale business lectures and seminars were generously hosted by corporate members of the Society, or organized in partnership with others. One such was a seminar by Gerard Lyons, Chief Economic Strategist at Netwealth Investments, who presented economic arguments for the UK leaving the EU. A briefing by Ishizaki Yoshiyuki, Special Adviser to the Fukushima Revitalization Headquarters, TEPCO, updated attendees on the progress of the clean-up at the Fukushima nuclear reactor since the 2011 disaster. On stepping down as British Ambassador to Japan, Tim Hitchens looked back at his four years in post and briefed members on the relationship between the British and Japanese governments, and likely developments over the coming year. We are grateful to Nomura International for once again hosting this popular and extremely important event. (The transcript of this lecture was printed in Proceedings 153)

The Society continued to arrange joint lunches in conjunction with the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the UK. Guest speakers for these events were Sir David King, the government's Special Representative for Climate Change and Nick Clegg, Liberal Democrat Brexit spokesperson and former Deputy Prime Minister. A special lunch was organized with members of the UK-Japan 21<sup>st</sup> Century Group on the occasion of its 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, in order to consider topics to be discussed by the Group at its conference.

A series of seminars on FinTech aimed to shed light on an aspect of the modern world which affects everyone but is understood by few. Breaking the topic down into sessions such as financial inclusion, AI, security and virtual currencies, this series enabled attendees to gain a deeper knowledge of the subject and to hear from experts in the field.

London's tech centre attracts entrepreneurs and investors from all over the world, and we were delighted to be able to showcase some of the Japanese individuals and companies who have based themselves in the UK. The series was particularly popular with younger corporate members and student members, who enjoyed the opportunity to share information and continue their discussions after the formal presentations, thanks to Mitsubishi Corporation who kindly hosted these seminars.

The Japan Society values its partnerships with other organizations with similar aims and interests in developing a programme which is of interest and benefit to the membership. In the current economic climate, the sharing of up-to-date information and best practice is particularly important. Once again a seminar was held in association with JETRO, in which Koyama Ken, Chief Economist of the Institute of Energy Economics, gave a Japanese perspective on World Energy. The Society also partnered with the Bank of Japan on a briefing by Deputy Governor Nakaso Hiroshi.

### **The general events programme**

As always, the Society's general programme in 2017 included events designed to reflect the diverse interests and enthusiasms of its members.

The conversation group under the leadership of its active sub-committee continues to play an important role in the Society, providing a valuable opportunity for participants to maintain and develop their language skills. It allows Japanese and non-Japanese, members and non-members, to talk in a friendly and informal setting. In addition to the regular monthly meetings, the conversation group organizes occasional special events, such as the annual *hanami* picnic, as well as participating jointly in other Society events. Another long-running monthly fixture is the book club, which meets on the second Monday of the month to discuss a wide range of books including literary classics, anthologies and contemporary fiction. In February, we were delighted to welcome Alex Kerr, whose *Lost Japan* had been that month's book, to join us in conversation over dinner in a special event

Other events included gallery talks and museum visits, cultural workshops, music and theatre, food and drink tastings, golf tournaments, and social events. A series of film screenings organized in partnership



Special dinner with Alex Kerr (February 2017)

with the Royal Anthropological Institute was particularly popular, and included documentaries on very varied subjects. The series started with *Gaea Girls* (Kim Longinotto and Jano Williams, 2000) about female professional wrestling and ended with *The Ainu Bear Ceremony* (Neil Gordon Munro, 1931), and *Ainu: Pathways to Memory* (Marcos Centeno Martin, 2014). In May, we arranged a special screening of *Dogs without Names* (Yamada Akane, 2015), a drama documentary about those who rescue lost and abandoned animals in Japan.

Members enjoyed the opportunity to visit the British Museum's major exhibition, *Hokusai: beyond the Great Wave* in the company of its curator, Tim Clark. Curator tours to *Flora Japonica* at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and to *Sheer Pleasure; Frank Brangwyn and the Art of Japan* at the William Morris Gallery, also proved popular. A group of members made a trip to Norwich, where they visited the *Masters of Japanese Photography* exhibition at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, joined the Sainsbury Institute of the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures for its Third Thursday Lecture as well as visiting the Institute's library where they were shown treasures from its splendid collection

of art related books and archives by librarian, Hirano Akira. Lecture demonstrations on pottery (with Ishida Kazuya) and chōchin lanterns (with Fushitani Kenichi) were also well attended and much enjoyed.

An ambitious extended project with Hashiguchi Architects and Waso Japan brought a focus on design and tradition, with engagement by Chelsea College, UAL, and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in exploring the tea room in Japanese culture through lectures, workshops and installations. Japan Society members joined Hashiguchi and his team in constructing his delicate Open-Weave tea room, made from silk thread. At the same time, students from Chelsea College designed and built three full-size tea rooms variously using straw, wood and brick. Hashiguchi's Open Weave tea room was later installed at Kew, to coincide with the *tanabata* festival celebration, held in the bamboo garden over two days in August and organized by the Society in partnership with the Embassy of Japan. This was followed in September by the ninth annual Japan Matsuri, again held in Trafalgar Square. This continues to be a true community event, organized in partnership with the Japan Association and Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, with support from the Embassy of Japan, and involving retailers, restaurants and performers from the local area.

As always, food and drink events were much enjoyed. During 2017 members had the chance to try making *wasanbon* Japanese sugar sweets, and gain inspiration from Jay Morjaria who showed the versatility of miso with a delicious menu at a supper club, hosted with Clearspring. The Society teamed up with the British Sake Association for an evening of conversation – and tasting – with Philip Harper, Japan's first and only British *tōji* (sake brew-master), and joined the team from Kanpai London Craft Sake to learn about the challenges of sake brewing in south London with a tasting at Okan Ramen.

The annual golf fixtures saw the Japan Society team again defeat the Japanese Chamber of Commerce & Industry to retain the Collar Cup, while Suzuki Koichi won the Japan Society golf tournament. We are grateful to BDO LLP for its continued support of these two events.

## **London Lectures**

The lectures programme as usual covered a wide range of subject

matter. The monthly academic lecture series formed the core of this aspect of our public programming. These are held at Swedenborg Hall, a convenient, central London venue, easily accessible to students, an audience we are particularly keen to encourage. In addition to those featured in this volume, lectures in 2017 included the Art of Nishiki Weaving by Tatsumura Amane; Japanese Castles and the Making of Regional, National and World Heritage by Oleg Benesch, Senior Lecturer in History at the University of York; Japan's foreign and security policy by Christopher W Hughes, Professor of International Politics and Japanese Studies, and Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Warwick; and the story of Thomas Walton, a British glassmaker in early Meiji Japan, by Sally Haden. The eighth annual lecture in memory of Dr Carmen Blacker, organized jointly with the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures, was given by Sasō Mamoru and is reprinted here.

Beyond the monthly lecture series, Kagami Ryūji spoke about the History of Horoscope Astrology in Japan to an enthusiastic audience. At a special event at The Frameworks, Kuwahara Wataru, Hayashi Keiji and John Shepherd explained the appeal and enduring success of the long-running Hankyū British Fair, from the perspectives of organizers and exhibitors.

### **Japan Society Small Grants**

An annual sum of up to £30,000 is set aside for grants in support of small-scale projects and events related to Japan. These grants provide opportunities for people throughout the UK to participate in education and exchange relating to Japan and thus contribute to raising awareness and understanding of the country and its culture in places where the Japan Society has no regular contact. Priority is given to applications for grassroots projects and for activities involving schools and other educational establishments.

In 2017, 31 grants were made averaging £677 with funding totalling £21,000 being awarded in support of grassroots projects in the UK. In line with the objectives of the grants scheme, most of the activities supported had an educational element, fostered exchange between the UK and Japan, or provided opportunities to bring Japanese culture to a wide group of people.

Sixteen of the grants awarded were for projects taking place in schools or for activity involving young people. Several schools organized cross-curricular events such as a whole school *tanabata* festival or Japanese culture week for a particular year group. King Edward VI Community College in Totnes organized an ambitious exhibition much enjoyed by the local community and accompanied by a range of art and craft, music, dance and food workshops for students. At other schools, it was the library which provided the Japan focus with literature workshops or manga clubs for language learners. The British Cartographic Society continued its Restless Earth workshop series using the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami as a case study to learn about disaster response activities: with a small grant enabling additional schools to be visited.

Once again the Society also supported projects involving young people outside the school system. A ten-day residential workshop in Winchester provided opportunities for children and young people with learning difficulties to participate in an arts programme focused on Japan. Another project involved high-achieving young people and their families to learn new skills and explore Japanese culture in a supportive environment. The Society supported the Kotatsu Japanese Animation Festival, which expanded its activity in 2017 and involves local schools, universities and arts institutions.

Small grants also supported community-based Japan festivals in Basildon, Bath, Cambridge, Derry-Londonderry and Kent.

## **Schools Education**

The schools education programme has been developed out of a belief in the value to young people in the UK of growing up with an awareness and understanding of Japan and its culture. In addition to historical and business reasons for learning about a key international partner, there are more general benefits of broadening horizons and raising aspirations. Through its activities for schools, the Society supports teachers who may have limited experience of Japan themselves in providing these opportunities for their students.

Throughout the year, the Society's education team provides advice and resources to schools engaged in teaching and learning activities relating to Japan. In 2017, the Japan Activity Chest was renewed, with



new items and updated accompanying teaching resources. The chest now arrives in schools in the form of a suitcase, filled with toys, clothing, books and artefacts from daily life, and labelled with luggage tags as though it has just come from Japan.

A special project in 2017 involved students from several schools working on designs for tea rooms inspired by the work of architect Shinichiro Hashiguchi (see general events). Students, who ranged from a Year 3 class of eight-year olds to a GCSE design and technology class, studied the history and conventions of the tea room in Japan, and then made their own models. Visits to the schools by Hashiguchi Shinichirō, who gave feedback on students' designs, were valued by all participants in the project.

During the year over 60 visits were made by volunteers in Greater London, Brighton, Derby, Manchester and South Wales. For most students a Japan in Your Classroom visit is their first opportunity to meet a Japanese person and to hear about Japan first-hand; the visits have a lasting impact. A series of training sessions was held to support the volunteers, covering both general matters such as classroom



Tea houses by students of Year 3 class



management and techniques for engaging pupils actively, and subject-specific content.

Support for school links has continued to be an important element of the Society's work. During 2017, new partnerships were established and existing links strengthened through exchange trips. The partnership developed by Takamatsu Daiichi Senior High School with County Upper School, Bury St Edmunds, and Newstead Wood School, London, continued with another science-based exchange in March. Annual exchange visits took place from Komaki Elementary School, Nagano, to schools in Nottingham and between staff at Reepham Primary School, Norfolk and Sakado Azuma Kindergarten in Saitama. In December, Wavell School and Farnborough College of Technology hosted a taiko group from Mizuma High School, Fukuoka. The taiko group performed at both schools, as well as running a number of workshops.

Work continued on a redesign of the Japan UK LIVE! website to make it more intuitive and simple to use. The new site will be rolled out in 2018.

Sixth form study days were held in Manchester (March 2017, with Manchester University) and London (November 2017, in partnership with Ritsumeikan University and SOAS). The London event was fully subscribed, with some 120 students and staff participating in a day of lectures and workshops on Japanese themes. Representatives from universities throughout the UK attended to provide information on opportunities for further study. The Manchester day, postponed from 2016, was opened up to GCSE students, and was found useful by the 30 students who attended.

### **Japan Society Publications**

In 2017, work was carried out on *Heaven's Wind*, an anthology of short stories by five contemporary women writers, with translation in parallel text format and an extended essay by translator, Angus Turvill;. the book was released in January 2018.

Work began on two further publications: *British Foreign Secretaries and Japan 1850-1990* (for 2018) and *British Royal and Japanese Imperial Relations* (for 2019).