

Minutes of the 124th Annual General Meeting of The Japan Society

Held via Zoom

at 4.00pm. on Wednesday 29 September 2021

Bill Emmott

Bill Emmott, Chair of the Japan Society, welcomed members to the Annual General Meeting, and gave a special welcome to the Society's President, the Japanese Ambassador, Hajime Hayashi at his first AGM. He noted particularly that one of the pleasures of the online format was to see people from all parts of the UK as well as overseas.

To begin the meeting, Ambassador Hayashi was invited to say a few words.

Ambassador Hayashi

Ambassador Hayashi regretted that the pandemic had meant that he had not yet been able to meet many members of the Japan Society in person, but was glad to see everyone on screen.

He noted the long-standing but still evolving activities and the outstanding contribution to bonds between the UK and Japan of which the Japan Society could be justifiably proud; the Society's continued momentum even in the difficult times of the pandemic was remarkable.

The Japan-UK Season of Culture, launched to bridge the Rugby World Cup and the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, had been extended to the end of this year. 1,200 events had already been registered as part of the Season, including nearly 180 registered Japan Society events. The Ambassador expressed his appreciation to all who had played a part in their organisation.

Ambassador Hayashi had recently attended a sakura cherry tree planting ceremony at Capel Manor College, where 50 trees had been donated under the auspices of the Sakura Cherry Tree Project, one of the flagship schemes of the Season of Culture. The story of Collingwood "Cherry" Ingram, recounted by the College principal on the occasion, and how he helped save Japan's cherry trees, was a reminder of the long history of friendship on which we could continue to build.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games had been held this summer amidst many challenges and even heated criticism in these pandemic times. However, the support and positive comments from across the UK had been a delight, and the wonderful results achieved by the British athletes were one of the causes of the success of Tokyo 2020. As people shared enthusiastic moments during the Games there was more interest in and attention paid to Japan, with stronger future demand likely for events related to Japan.

As both President of the Japan Society and Ambassador of Japan to the UK, he expressed genuine excitement at working together, and looked forward to furthering the proud legacy we had inherited and passing it on to future generations stronger than ever. He assured members that the Embassy of Japan would continue to partner the Society in these endeavours.

Bill Emmott

Bill Emmott thanked Ambassador Hayashi for his encouraging remarks about the future of Japan Society and its very welcome relationship with the Embassy.

Beginning his remarks with the financial accounts, he took opportunity to thank members and all our supporters for their continued support over many years, but particularly over the 18 months of pandemic so far. The financial results for 2020 had been fairly good, thanks to that support and increased participation by individuals as well as Japanese and non-Japanese companies in the UK. The Society had returned a £73,000 surplus before write offs, which was evidence of that great support as well as the impact of the pandemic on expenses. In accounting terms we had registered a £57,000 loss because the trustees had chosen to write down the value of the library. The previous value of £481,000 had been based on a 2005 valuation, but professional advice suggested that this was unrealistic today, and it seemed prudent to write the value down to more realistic £350,000. Large parts of the library were being put up for sale, as per board and AGM discussions over recent years, after which the actual value would be known.

Thanks very much to members' support, without which we would not exist, the Society was in a solvent and stable situation. This had enabled us to continue and expand activities in important ways over the past 18 months. Our education activities, despite the closure of schools in UK for significant periods and the inability of volunteers to visit schools even now, included the roll out of a substantial expansion of online resources of all kinds, whether for special occasions or general classroom use, as well as activities such as Radio Taiso which had proved very popular. We had also held a large number of cultural events and webinars online, which in a very welcome way enabled the Society to reach a wider audience in the UK and abroad, particularly Japan. The ability to have speakers both in Japan and the UK discussing the same topics and comparing perspectives had been particularly welcome. In public benefit terms, in line with charity commission guidelines, this had allowed us to reach people unable to attend events in London but who could benefit from what we do.

The past year had also been important in sporting terms, and Bill Emmott offered congratulations to Japan for its conduct of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. It had been welcome to see Naomi Osaka light the Olympic flame, symbolising so much that was positive about modern Japan. We had missed in 2020 the planned visit by their Imperial Highnesses and hoped it might be reinstated in a coming year; it was a very welcome connection to the UK in personal as well as political and diplomatic terms.

He noted that we were not yet in a post pandemic stage, but still in a pandemic situation, one that would continue into the foreseeable future, albeit in changing circumstances which would allow us to do more activities. The breakout discussions after the formal business would consider how to adapt to the pandemic in our future plans.

Heidi Potter then reviewed the Society's activity over the past year. Details can be found in the Annual Report to the accounts.

Agenda Items

The Chairman gave a brief reminder of the AGM vote and the board and trustee structure and tenure. Four board members were standing down at the meeting, or had done so during the year: Yuko Kawai, who had returned to Japan at the end of her posting to London, and Janet Hunter, Jason James and Eiji Wakiwaka who had each completed their six year term on the board. He recorded formal thanks for their support.

In this AGM members were asked to re-elect the Chairman, and to re-elect or elect seven candidates as ordinary trustees: Stephen Barber, Yoko Duchi, Tim Harding (re-election), Martin Hatfull (re-election), Emma Hickinbotham, Helen Macnaughtan, and Julie Rogers (re-election). Biographies for each candidate had been circulated in the official AGM papers.

He then invited comments and questions from members before moving on to the results of the vote. Many had posted very supportive comments in the chat. In person, former chairman Christopher Purvis noted that the Society had been fortunate to have its current team at this particular time; the chairman had managed to pull in every possible connection to participate in an amazing series of webinars. Although all had joined hundreds of webinars over past 18 months, the Japan Society's had really stood out. David Warren seconded those comments.

The following resolutions were passed:

1. To receive and adopt the audited annual accounts for the financial year ended 31 December 2020 and the Trustees' report.
2. To reappoint Richard Place Dobson as auditors and to authorize the Board to approve their remuneration as thought fit.
3. To re-appoint Bill Emmott as Chairman of the Japan Society.
4. To elect Stephen Barber as an ordinary trustee of the Japan Society.
5. To elect Yoko Duchi as an ordinary trustee of the Japan Society
6. To re-appoint Tim Harding as an ordinary trustee of the Japan Society
7. To re-appoint Martin Hatfull as an ordinary trustee of the Japan Society
8. To elect Emma Hickinbotham as an ordinary trustee of the Japan Society.
9. To elect Helen Macnaughtan as an ordinary trustee of the Japan Society.
10. To re-appoint Julie Rogers as an ordinary trustee of the Japan Society

Breakout Discussions

Following the meeting, members spent time in smaller ‘breakout’ rooms to share views and ideas about four areas of the Japan Society’s activity:

- (i) Business events & networking
- (ii) Arts, culture & social events
- (iii) Schools education and wider outreach
- (iv) Links with other Japanese community groups in the UK