

Minutes of the 123rd Annual General Meeting of The Japan Society

Held via Zoom

at 11.00 a.m. on Tuesday, 28 July 2020

Bill Emmott

Bill Emmott, Chairman of the Japan Society, opened the meeting by welcoming members to the AGM in such strange circumstances; the Japan Society's first ever virtual AGM. He thanked so many members for joining the online meeting, noting that the virtual format allowed members from outside London to attend. However, he assured everyone that we would again in future hold the AGM in person. While we would continue to offer online programming as part of the Society's activity, it was particularly important to meet together for the AGM.

He welcomed the Society's President, the Japanese Ambassador, Yasumasa Nagamine to his first AGM, together with Ambassador Paul Madden who was joining from Tokyo.

The Chairman invited Ambassador Nagamine to say a few words.

Ambassador Nagamine

Ambassador Nagamine thanked Bill for the introduction and reflected warmly on the Christmas party he had hosted at the Japanese Embassy in December. He hoped that PM Boris Johnson's prediction that things would get back to normal by Christmas, so we could meet again for a party this year. He wished good health to the Society's members.

These were challenging times for everyone, with enforced changes to planned events. However, he did not wish to look back with sadness at events which had had to be postponed such as the visit by the Emperor and Empress in spring, or the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. On the positive side, their Majesties' visit was only postponed and would take place when the time was right. The Olympics were now planned to take place in 2021, and all hoped that these events could be completed successfully.

He noted that our two governments were negotiating a new economic partnership agreement, which was expected to create a set of new rules to cover trade and investment between the two countries. He hoped that it would not only enhance trade cooperation, but give impetus to further promote cooperation in defence and security areas as well as culture and civic society.

It had been encouraging to see, from the early stages of lockdown, that the Japan Society was able to adjust rapidly to the new environment by switching to online programmes including the series of insightful weekly webinars and a wide range of events with topics ranging from politics and economics to culture and social affairs. In fact, ties with Japan seemed even to have deepened at this challenging time. In recent months, the Japan Society had gained new members, who had been attracted by the variety of events being staged. The Embassy had endorsed these events by registering them under the UK Japan Season of Culture 2019-20, which as of July had included some 800 events. These represented continuous efforts by organisations and individuals to maintain momentum during lockdown. Despite the challenges, it was important to continue to promote Japan

under this banner going forward. As President of the Japan Society as well as Ambassador, he hoped that the Society would continue to play a central role in doing so.

Ambassador Nagamine closed his remarks by expressing his gratitude for the virtual AGM and pledging his commitment to ongoing cooperation by the Embassy and its staff.

Bill Emmott thanked Ambassador Nagamine for his forward looking thoughts and for the Embassy's constant support, particularly in these strange times. He looked forward to continued cooperation. He then invited British Ambassador Paul Madden, who was joining from Tokyo, to say a few words.

Ambassador Madden

Paul Madden conveyed greetings from Japan, noting that 2020 had not turned out as he had predicted when he spoke to members of the Japan Society in March. The Olympic and Paralympic Games and the State Visit had been postponed, amid the tragic impact of Covid-19 on people's lives and livelihoods. He noted that Japan had come through Covid relatively well so far compared to many countries. No one can quite explain the reasons, but cluster busting policies, the 3 Cs and good underlying health had meant that there had been few spikes as things relaxed, and there had not been such a big lockdown as elsewhere. The Ambassador had travelled to Tohoku the previous week, for his first visit outside Tokyo since March. He noted good social distancing and other measures, but noted that life felt more or less normal.

The Embassy was operating as normal, with most staff working at home. They were attending meetings, but no events were anticipated for the foreseeable future. Good progress was being made on the free trade agreement with the UK, though there were some difficult points to overcome. However it looked as though the agreement with Japan could be the first for the UK post-Brexit, which would be an important symbol of the relationship between our two countries continuing to deepen and strengthen.

Bill Emmott

Bill reiterated the thoughts of the two Ambassadors that this year had not gone as planned. He noted that the Japan Society's Patron, HRH The Duke of Gloucester, had recently written to Ambassador Nagamine to express his support for all involved in staging the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games and his hopes that the Games would go ahead in 2021.

The Chairman then paid tribute to two former Ambassadors to Japan who had died during the year: Sir John Boyd and Sir Sydney Giffard, as well as Ben Thorne who had served for 12 years on the Council of the Japan Society, including six as Vice Chairman, and who had remained closely involved in its activities until his death.

Since lockdown, the Society had switched entirely to online programmes, but in the first few months of the year had held some excellent events. These included a lecture by President Gonokami of Tokyo University, an event with Carolyn Fairbairn of the CBI, the annual lecture by the British Ambassador, when Paul Madden spoke to members in March, and a smaller corporate event with Nigel Higgins of Barclays Bank.

Online, we had a busy programme of current affairs webinars, as well as other lectures and workshops. He expressed great thanks to those who had given their time to speak to the Society. This format had enabled participation by many members who could not easily attend events in London. It also allowed us to invite members of other Japan societies to join these events, and we looked forward to continuing to do so, in order to help connect people throughout the UK.

Bill outlined the Society's financial position as detailed in the accounts, which remained stable, before handing over to Heidi Potter who reviewed the activity, particularly education, over the past year.

He then invited comments and questions from members before moving on to the formal business of the meeting.

Agenda Items

The Chairman gave a brief reminder of AGM vote and the board and trustee structure and tenure. Two board members were standing down at the meeting, or had done so during the year: Yoji Saito and Jenny White. He thanked them for their enthusiastic support of the Society's activities and contribution to the board.

Five candidates were standing for re-election/election as ordinary trustees: Sue Hudson (re-election), Yuko Kawai, Yuuichiro Nakajima (re-election), Clare Weaver, and Rie Yoshitake. Biographies for each candidate had been circulated in official AGM papers.

In the exceptional circumstances of an online AGM, members had voted by proxy in advance of the meeting.

The following resolutions were passed:

1. To receive and adopt the audited annual accounts for the financial year ended 31 December 2019 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 Sue Hudson as an ordinary trustee of the Japan Society.
4. To elect Yuko Kawai as an ordinary trustee of the Japan Society.
5. To re-appoint Yuuichiro Nakajima as an ordinary trustee of the Japan Society
6. To elect Clare Weaver as an ordinary trustee of the Japan Society.
7. To elect Rie Yoshitake 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.