

Recent Society Events

“Ukiyo-e: Japanese Woodblock Prints”

On 29th January members visited Blackburn Museum & Art Gallery, where the Keeper of Art, Pauline Birtwell, had a treat in store for us: she had laid out many prints of *ukiyo-e* artists including Utamaro, Kunisada and Toyokuni. The star of the show was undoubtedly Hiroshige's "The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokkaido". We were able to handle (with gloves) the prints and get a close-up appreciation of the work of the artists and, especially, of the engravers. Not least, we were transported back to a time and place that has now disappeared forever but whose memory lives on in these exquisite works of art. To find out how a colour woodblock print is made go to www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/pharos/sections/makingart/japan

Afterwards members lunched and chatted in Blakey's Wine Bar: about as far as it is possible to get from a tea house on the Tokkaido.

“The Art of Japanese Gardens”

On 23rd February members visited the gardens of Japan, and particularly of Kyoto, through the slides and descriptions of Graham Hardman, Chairman of the Japanese Garden Society. Graham, himself a garden designer, has led tours to Kyoto. With many excellent slides he showed how Japanese gardens have developed into an art form, evolving over a thousand years. We saw pond gardens, stroll gardens and *karesansui* (dry mountain water) gardens. The latter, in the writer's view, are the crowning achievement of the Japanese gardener's art - recreating nature entirely in stone and sometimes also with moss, in miniature although at varying scales. Many of these gardens, as Graham explained, are Buddhist in origin - not least amongst them *Ryoan-ji* where only fourteen of the fifteen rocks are ever visible from anywhere accessible to the viewer. The purpose of such gardens was to aid contemplation and assist in reaching enlightenment. Certainly those present were more enlightened about Japanese gardens at the end of Graham's fascinating talk.

“Netsuke – the Art of Japanese Ornament”

Anyone who asked “What is a netsuke?” when they saw this event on 23rd March advertised in the Newsletter would have received a thoroughly illuminating and enjoyable education from Steve Smith, who was Curator of the Japanese collection at Liverpool Museum from 1989. Steve, a collector himself, explained the origins and fascination of these miniature sculptures and exhibited and showed slides of some superb specimens from the museum’s collection. Whereas an *okimono* is a purely decorative object with no practical use, a *netsuke* was both functional and aesthetic – fixing the cord holding a man’s *sagemono* (lit: hanging things) to his *obi* (sash). One such *sagemono* would be an *inro* (seal case). A woman had no need of these, for she had voluminous sleeves in her kimono for storage. Steve explained that the carvers of these miniature objects, although highly skilled, had low status and were neglected in their own time; now these objects are highly collectible and can command high prices. The “miniature” theme of the evening was continued when a few members rounded off the evening in a local tapas bar.

Website

Hopefully you are all by now aware that the Society has a website. Developed by Committee member Kevin Howes one Sunday afternoon (not bad for an afternoon’s work!), it has already attracted new members. If you haven’t already visited it, please do so at

www.jsnw.org.uk

and let us have any helpful comments for its further development.

Forum of Japan Societies

The Japan Society, based in London, convenes annually a forum of the Japan Societies of the UK and Northern Ireland and Japan-related bodies such as the Japanese Embassy, the Sasakawa Institute, the Japan Foundation and others. This is an opportunity for these independent groups to meet, exchange information about how each is doing and share ideas for the future. JSNW was represented by its Vice Chairman, Scott Baron. Scott has reported in detail to the Committee; in brief he came away with the impression that, despite the fact that this Society was formed just 9 months ago, we have a programme which compares favourably with other regional societies and a membership that, whilst yet small in number, is growing steadily.

Events Programme

“Behaving Yourself in a Japanese Home”

Venue: A private home in Timperley, S. Manchester

Date: Sunday 10th April, 2005

Time: 1400

Duration: 1½ hours approximately

Charge: Members free, Guests/Non-Members £2.50

Loss of face is not something that Japanese people ever want to suffer, and they go to great lengths to avoid it themselves and not to inflict it on others. But that’s not so easy

because a minefield of customs and etiquette awaits the visitor to Japan – and it begins as soon as you meet someone: to bow or not to bow? How deeply? To exchange or not to exchange name cards? How formally do you address someone? You go to a restaurant – Who sits where? How do you use your chopsticks (*hashii* in Japanese)? What should you and should you not do with them? You visit their home – how do you enter? When do you remove your shoes? Don't have holes in your socks! You take a bath – what are the niceties of public bathing? You want to blow your nose – should you? The list is endless but Society Member Cathy Peel, onetime resident of Japan, will help you through it with a fair dose of humour en route.

"Impressions of Japan"

Venue: Lymm Village Hall

Date: Saturday June 4th, 2005

Time: To Be Announced

Following his recent visits to Japan, Award Winning Lymm based Artist Scott Baron will give an illustrated talk about his impressions of Japan including some unexpected surprises and unusual observations. Also in support is a small exhibition of work by UK and Japanese participants in the *Joining Hands Across the Water* project. This event will appeal to those who have already visited Japan together with those who are interested in knowing more about the current problems and wonderful opportunities they might discover there. If you are planning a visit or just interested in all things Japan . . . you should not miss this event.

IMPORTANT

Annual General Meeting and Meal at *Tampopo*

Venue: Friends' Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester

Date: Saturday 18th June, 2005

Time: 1500 Meeting, 1600 onwards Meal

The Society will have been operating for one year. Now is the time to review progress and elect a Committee to take it forward. Members' input is needed to lead the Society and to understand what you want, where and when. Show your support for the Society by attending and then join other Members for a subsidised (by £5 per member) meal at *Tampopo* where you can eat *gyoza* and have a bowl of delicious *ramen* or *udon* noodles.

Please put the date of the AGM in your diary now!

In accordance with the Society's Constitution, you will be sent an agenda and any further information about the AGM at least 14 days in advance.

Regional Events

Regional Japan-related events are really thin on the ground during the period April to June; we have only been able to find the following. As usual, please confirm that the event is going ahead before travelling!

18 May	12 Jun	<i>HENRO 2005 with Young Britain & Sumi-e.</i> Japanese ink painting by British children.	Organised by HENRO Committee & National Trust. Little Moreton Hall, Cheshire
22May		<i>Mugenkyo</i> Taiko drummers.	Wrexham Festival. New William Aston Hall. 01978 292015
3 June		<i>Hankawa Kagura Group</i>	Royal International Pavilion, Llangollen. 01978 860111
5 Jun	30 Aug	<i>Shogun - the Life of Lord Tokugawa Ieyasu.</i> Major national exhibition: An incredible collection of powerful and beautiful objects from the shrines and museums of Japan. <i>Shogun</i> will take the visitor on a journey of discovery using objects, live interpretations, workshops and special events. The exhibition contains over 80 amazing objects that combine power, incredible history and beautiful art, including armour, weapons, scrolls, costumes, screens, art and documents.	Royal Armouries, Leeds. 0113 220 1916 www.royalarmouries.org