

# NEWSLETTER

## A Snapshot of Modern Japan

by Samuel Rosen

When asked what they know about Kagawa Prefecture, most people have very little to say. Few people outside of Japan have even heard of this little strip of land on the edge of the Inland sea, let alone visited it. It has few internationally or even nationally famous sites: the oldest kabuki theatre in Japan, which is only open for a couple of weeks a year, and the site of the ancient battle of Yashima, recorded in the Tale of the Heike, but marked only by a faded map and a few rain-bleached signboards. Even within the Tale of the Heike, the battle at Yashima is not known as 'the greatest battle' nor is it remembered as the final resting place of that great warrior clan. The 16th century gardens at Ritsurin, despite their great beauty, technical perfection and high standard of maintenance are number six on the list of the five great gardens in Japan (despite which they are well worth a visit). As far as most people are concerned, the Prefecture's sole outstanding feature, apart perhaps from the local culinary speciality, Sanuki udon noodles, is that at a little over 1800 km<sup>2</sup> it holds the title of the smallest Prefecture in Japan.

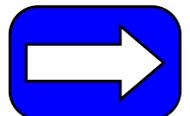
But having lived in this oft-forgotten little corner of Japan for over four years in total, and watching the areas in which I have lived slowly develop from a collection of sleepy farming towns into the thriving modern mish-mash of shopping centres and rice fields, night clubs and izakaya (drinking bars) it has become today, Kagawa for me has come to epitomise the microcosmic

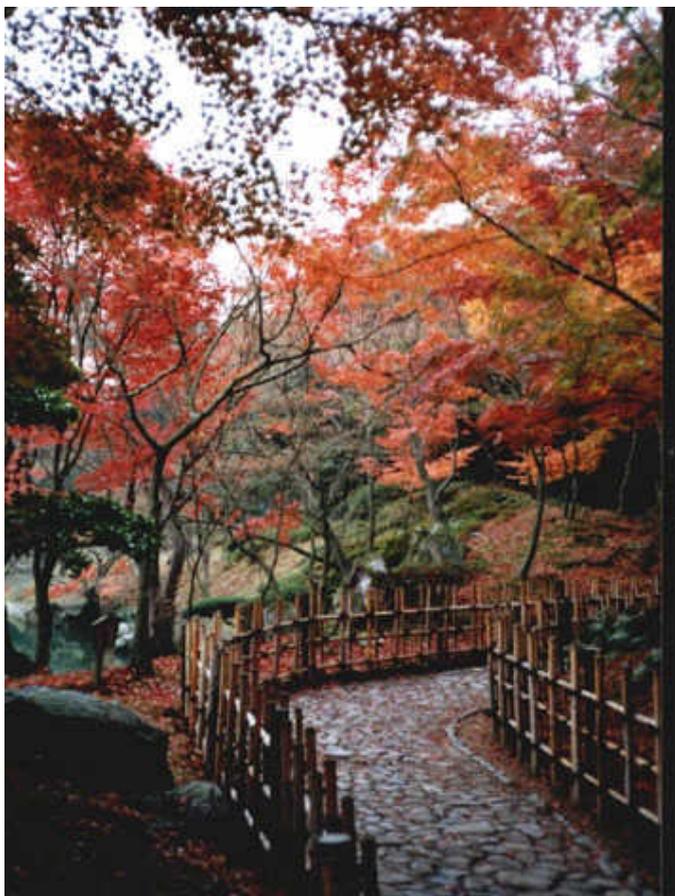


Kagawa Countryside

image of much of modern day Japan, with so much of its beauty as well as so many of its problems.

The central shopping district of Takamatsu, which like many others





[Ritsurin Park](#)

across Japan is often touted as the longest in the country, has lost much of its sheen. Whilst the chain stores and new fashion shops in the central section continue to boom and bustle, the more traditional shops on the outer reaches of the covered shopping malls have begun to close down, losing their business to ubiquitous supermarkets, with their wider product ranges. The elderly owners, nevertheless, still sit smiling benignly from behind overstocked shelves of antiquated products. Aside from the magnetic "you can buy everything here in one store" power of the supermarkets, businesses in the town centres have also had their custom sapped by an obvious shortage of parking facilities, the continuing growth of out-of-town shopping centres, lower population growth rates and a host of other factors. On the other hand, there is a close-knit, thriving underground culture of fashion shops, live music and clubs powered by those young people who, for whatever reason, have chosen to stay rather than head off for the sprawling gold-paved megalopolises of Tokyo and Osaka. A fair proportion of these young people have left the Prefecture after graduating from high school only to return home disillusioned by life in the big city, or life abroad. Many

of them speak with great enthusiasm about what Takamatsu and Kagawa have to offer them, which they have sought elsewhere in vain. Often, their arguments revolve around being able to get to work without spending an hour or so a day on a crowded train, or the other common pressures of city life, such as high rents and isolation. Some, simply, have returned to their homes to be closer to their families. Having lived in Tokyo myself, many of these arguments do ring true; for whilst there may be more people, more bars and more clubs in major cities, the compactness and indeed the friendliness of a city like Takamatsu, which is the prefectural capital, makes it the embodiment of the Japanese word *sumiyasui* – easy to live in. As far as I am concerned, it is just big enough to offer as wide a selection of restaurants, bars and entertainments as you could wish for, without being big enough to bring out the stresses of big city life.

Another obvious advantage to living in Kagawa, is that once you leave these relatively compact metropolitan areas like Takamatsu and Sakaide, much of the Prefecture remains unspoilt. A few minutes on any local train brings you past the beginnings of out-of-town shopping centres and into a world of vegetable gardens and rice paddies. The rural nature of Kagawa means that many areas have retained a strong traditional sense of community. Many people still live as families with three or even four generations in the same house, and often clusters of houses all have the same family name gateposts; although as with the rest of Japan, these things are becoming less common.



[Making Sanuki Udon](#)

Takamatsu for all its modernity and its two new skyscrapers, the only buildings above six or seven stories for miles around, retains much of the rustic charm that characterises these surrounding areas. Unlike truly major cities like Tokyo or Osaka, where the concrete jumble of apartment blocks and mansions stretches as far as the eye can see in every direction, a few minutes on a train, bus or even bicycle will bring you out into the traditional Japanese countryside of old-style houses and rice paddies. Herein lies one of Kagawa's

famous rock garden, in Kyoto or the futuristic allure of Akihabara or Shibuya, in Tokyo, there is a beautiful balance between the old and new which is fast fading across the rest of the country, and which has left once incomparably beautiful places like Kyoto as neon-strewn, overcrowded blocks of concrete punctuated by the now out-of-place tranquillity of the temples and gardens of yesteryear.



**Sanuki Udon**

strongest features, in that, with the exception of the out-of-town shopping centres, which do lie on the outskirts, the major development in the Prefecture has, for the most part, been kept within the cities, leaving the surrounding area free from what has in other areas become the inevitable urban sprawl.

Although some of the local attractions may not have the solemn aspect of places like Ryoanji Temple, with its



**Sunport: Takamatsu's two tall buildings**

If you get the chance when you visit Japan, it is well worth taking the time to travel down to this beautiful haven with its contrasting bold new developments thrusting skywards beside the cobalt Inland Sea and its deep green miniature walnut whip mountains swelling gently out of the rice paddies and woodlands which have remained virtually unchanged for centuries. And of course, there is always the pleasure of real Sanuki udon.

### **Samuel Rosen**

Sam studied Japanese at SOAS London university, his specialist subjects being Japanese language and Japanese Culture. He won a Japanese Ministry of Education scholarship in his second year and studied for one year at the prestigious Keio University in Tokyo. After graduating, he went to Japan on the Japanese government-sponsored JET programme as a coordinator for International Relations and worked for local government in Kagawa Prefect, Shikoku for 3 years.

## January Event



numbers over 15,000 and is still growing, to audiences in the North West.

The venue is Rainhill Village Hall, Dane Court, Rainhill, L35 4LU, which is just 1 mile from junction 7 of the M62 and is a 2-minute walk from Rainhill railway Station. More detailed directions are available on the Society's website.

This event, which begins at 7.30pm, is free to members and is also open to non-members at £2 for adults and £1 for children.

Venue: Rainhill Village Hall, Dane Court,  
Rainhill, L35 4LU

Date: Wednesday 25th January 2006

Time: 7:30 pm

### Japan in Focus

Japan is one of the most photographically rewarding countries – as keen amateur photographers and Society members, Martin Byrne and David Woolf, will prove on Wednesday 25th January.

Martin Byrne is an engineer who made more than 50 visits to Japan over a 20-year period, visiting Japanese nuclear power stations throughout the country. He usually travelled alone or with an interpreter and, as most of the power stations are in remote areas, he had the opportunity to see "the real Japan" (one hotel receptionist said she had "seen westerners on TV but you are the first one I've met") as well as cosmopolitan cities such as Tokyo and Osaka.

David Woolf photographed Japan over an 11-year period, living there for 4 of those years. He is a member of the Manchester Geographical Society, travels widely, gives talks and shows slides, from a collection that now



## February Event

### Kodo

Kodo return to the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, on Sunday 12th February. World-renowned for their breathtaking physical performances, Kodo are the masters of Japan's traditional and contemporary taiko drumming. "Nothing will prepare you for the 1000 lb. Drum assault, the precise timing or the wall of sound. An essential experience." – Time Out

Your Society has booked a block of £22 seats in the Side Circle. Members enjoy a £2 reduction on the seat price; accompanying non-members must pay the full price. The evening can begin at 5.30 pm when, if you wish, you can join other members at Tampopo in Albert Square and enjoy various Japanese and other Eastern cuisines before moving on to the Bridgewater hall for Kodo at 7.30pm.

If you would like to attend this event, please complete the enclosed booking form and send with your cheque to David Woolf, to arrive by Monday 23rd January.

Venue: Bridgewater Hall, Manchester

Date: Sunday 12th February 2006

Time: 7:30 pm

鼓童

KODŌ



## March Event

### 俳句

#### Haiku in Lymm

Find out about a traditional form of Japanese poetry that is still very much part of 21st Century Japanese culture. At Lymm Village Hall, Lymm, Cheshire on Saturday 25th March, British Haiku Society members will join JSNW members to present and explain a variety of Japanese Haiku. Traditional Haiku are short poems with a 5-7-5-syllable pattern and contain a seasonal reference word. We will talk about the history of Japanese poetry and the development of the haiku in Japan, and subsequently its influence on the West and in its English form. During the workshop Japanese speakers will read

some particular poems and talk through some of the typical images and features linked to Japanese aesthetic and cultural concepts.

The event will begin at 2pm, ending around 5pm. A bento style supper will be arranged for anyone who would like to stay on to eat afterwards.

A separate flyer will be sent out giving final information and booking arrangements.

The venue is in the centre of Lymm village with easy access from the M6 (junction 20) and M56 (junction 7 westbound or 9 eastbound).

Venue: Lymm Village Hall, Lymm, Cheshire

Date: Saturday 25th March 2006

Time: 2:00 pm

## Regional Events

Now	Feb 2006	<p><b>The Cruel Beauty of Masumura Yasuzo</b></p> <p>Never before distributed in the UK, eight rarely seen feature films by Masumura Yasuzo one of the forgotten founders of modern Japanese Cinema, tour 15 venues around the country. Masumura's work is thematically wide-ranging from eroticism to politics, and encompasses some of the most inventive cinema in the world. It's a vital body of work, which no lover of cinema can afford to miss.</p>	<p>Bradford Pictureville, Hebden Bridge Picture House and Kendal Brewery Arts Centre.</p> <p>Visit Japan Foundation website <a href="http://www.jpjf.org.uk/whatson.html">www.jpjf.org.uk/whatson.html</a></p>
31 Jan	-	<p><b>2005-6 UK-Japan Business Seminar Series</b></p> <p>The Changing Face of the Japanese Salaryman. Speaker: Dr. Niall Murtagh</p>	<p>South Yorkshire International Trade Centre: Tapestry Room, Firth Court, University of Sheffield.</p> <p>Gil Watts 0114 201 2578 <a href="mailto:gwatts@syitc.com">gwatts@syitc.com</a></p>
12 Feb	-	<p><b>Kodo</b></p> <p>See the Society's Upcoming Events.</p>	<p>Bridgewater Hall, Manchester.0145 345 0009 <a href="http://www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk">www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk</a></p>
21 Feb	22 Feb	<p><b>Arts &amp; Crafts of Japan</b></p> <p>Experience two days of Japanese culture in these workshops with community artists Katie Chaplin and Jill Clay – together they form the company Vintage Kimono, offering creative workshops inspired by their travels in Japan.</p>	<p>Tullie House Museum &amp; Arts Services, Carlisle. <a href="http://www.tulliehouse.co.uk">www.tulliehouse.co.uk</a></p>
28 Feb	-	<p><b>2005-6 UK-Japan Business Seminar Series</b></p> <p>My 50 years of direct involvement with Japan – business &amp; culture. Speaker: Professor Geoffrey Bownas</p>	<p>South Yorkshire International Trade Centre: Tapestry Room, Firth Court, University of Sheffield.</p> <p>Gil Watts 0114 201 2578 <a href="mailto:gwatts@syitc.com">gwatts@syitc.com</a></p>

### Embassy Webmagazine

There is more reason than usual to visit the Japanese Embassy's website: sign up for the new e-mail Embassy Webmagazine. It provides a view at a glance of what's new in Japanese current affairs at home and abroad, whilst highlighting the wealth of Japan-related resources

available on the internet. To keep up to date with what's going on in Japan's foreign policy, economy, social trends, cultural events and travel, as well as Japan's relations with the UK, subscribe to the Webmagazine by filling in the form via the Embassy's website:

[www.uk.emb-japan.go.jp/en/webmagazine](http://www.uk.emb-japan.go.jp/en/webmagazine)

## Event Review:

### Bonenkai

As many members will know, JSNW (and its predecessor Society) has for several years met at Manchester's Samsi restaurant for a Christmas get-together, and to celebrate the passing of the old year 'Japanese-style', with a Bonenkai party. This year's event was even better attended than last, with 26 members gathered in the downstairs 'Shabu Shabu' eating area. The Shabu Shabu followed a series of 'starter' courses including Miso and Sashimi, and was cooked for us just adjacent to our tables (we had the chance to have it done on each table but that seemed just a shade too hazardous!). Everyone seemed to enjoy a very active and sociable evening and it was approaching 11.00 before the group properly dispersed. All in all an excellent event to get to meet quite a few new JSNW members and to prepare ourselves for the party season!

### Your Committee

Two more Committee Members introduce themselves:

#### David Willis

Without doubt I can claim to be the Committee Member least knowledgeable about Japan. However, the others still talk to me (!) and this Society (and its predecessor) has helped considerably to develop my interest in Japan and things Japanese during the past few years. My wife Ginny and I joined the group after a two-week trip around Japan back in 1996, when we visited our son Neil (later Membership Secretary of JSNW) who had got a job in Yokohama.

That stimulating experience set me on a course of several years evening class study of the language (now sadly disappearing from my brain at an alarming rate) and an urge to maintain contact with the culture through the various activities arranged through JSNW. Ginny and I have both thoroughly enjoyed our time with fellow Japan enthusiasts and have even more cause now to keep up the interest, as Neil has given us a Japanese daughter-in-law!

#### David Woolf

In the late 70's the extent of my knowledge of Japan was my car and hi-fi. Fast-forward ten years and I was responsible for sales and contracts with Japan worth several billions of pounds. Forward another eight years and I was setting up a subsidiary company and preparing to move to Japan with my wife Ann. We arrived in the extreme summer heat of August 1995 to live in the Roppongi area of Tokyo for the next four years. Whilst living there we got to see most of the country, for my customers were the ten regional electricity companies. Life in Japan was always busy, never dull, and sowed the seeds for what seems destined to be a lifelong interest in the anything and everything Japanese. The first-time visitor thinks he will never understand Japan, after several visits he mistakenly believes he understands the place, but after a year he knows he never will: there is always another layer to peel back - hence its endless fascination. I am now a small-time ambassador for Japan: a country that, despite having the second largest economy in the world by a very long way, remains poorly understood, not to say misunderstood.

## Some pictures from Nihon at Tatton



# ニュースレター

No. 7

NEWSLETTER

2006年1月

### Event Review:

## Nihon at Tatton

In September of this year the Society visited beautiful Tatton Park, close to Knutsford, as two weeks of Japan-related events under the banner "Discover Japan" were drawing to a close. Of the estate's 400 hectares, the gardens comprise about 20 hectares and consist of many interesting and beautiful examples of European and Exotic styles, with perhaps the most outstanding garden being the Japanese garden, well-known throughout the UK and in other parts of the world too.



The Society was privileged to have an extremely interesting talk given by Brendan Flanagan, the General Manager of Tatton, who spoke of the history of the Estate with particular reference to the Japanese connection. He talked of the Egerton family, who maintained the Park and gardens so well, and how the family prospered during the second half of the 18th century and began making changes, building a new mansion which can be seen today, and is a gem in the National Trust's portfolio. He explained how the Japanese garden had been built in 1910 by Alan de Tatton, the 3rd Baron Egerton, and how its design had been based on a book written in 1893 by

Josiah Condor called "Landscape Gardening in Japan", and also with reference to both "The Flowers and Gardens of Japan", by Florence du Cane (1908) and "Japanese Gardens", by Mrs. Basil Taylor (1912). He also told us that the wooden Shinto Shrine had been built by Japanese craftsmen who had been invited to Tatton by Alan de Tatton at the time of the Anglo-Japanese Exhibition held at the White Palace in 1910. He concluded by speaking a little about the restoration of the garden between 2000 and 2001.

After the talk we enjoyed the famously delicious bento boxes provided by Society member, Takayasu Takemoto and then, as if on cue, the rain stopped and the sunshine provided the



perfect setting for viewing the Japanese garden in its autumnal colours, which were spectacular. There were exhibitions of Japanese artefacts on display in the Mansion House and a number of members also took part in the special Kyudo archery demonstration being held that day.

Kyudo (literally 'The Way of the Bow') involves a bow over 2 metres in length and usually made of bamboo wood and leather using techniques that have not changed for centuries. The arrow shafts are traditionally made from bamboo and the feathers used now are from non-endangered species of birds. It requires long training to be able to draw the bow and shoot an arrow, so our members were just shown the techniques and how to hold the bow. Like many of the martial arts, Kyudo is as much about spiritual development as mastery in the art. All in all it was an extremely interesting and enjoyable day.

As Shelley's poem says: "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?..." and so we can look forward to a visit to Tatton in May, with the cherry blossoms at their best, when we will have a special tour inside the Japanese garden to explore its delights at close hand under the expert guidance of Sam Youd, Tatton's renowned Head Gardener.