

英国北西部日英協會 Japan Society North West

NEWSLETTER

The Story of One Samurai Armour Captivates Members at AGM



This year's AGM began with a talk given by Steve Smith from the Northern Token Society, which was split into two parts.

In the first part Steve recounted the tale of three important artefacts he had identified (for their owners) as originally belonging to James Lord Bowes' famous collection of Japanese objects and art. The first two pieces were pottery-ware, both found on e-bay by lucky collectors in the United States who, following purchase, checked their authenticity with Steve.

The final artefact was a beautifully-decorated norimono (a palanquin-style "carriage" used for transporting people- see above photo) Steve found in a dark storage room at Manchester Museum. Upon researching, Steve found the norimono had belonged to a Manchester councillor whose wife had told him to get rid of it, not knowing it was a historically important piece that had originally belonged to Yoshinobu, the last Tokugawa shogun of Japan!!!

The Story of One Samurai Armour Fascinates Members at AGM

In the second part of his talk Steve recounted the history of two suits of Samurai armour, one of which he had acquired. He discovered both suits were made by Nakahachiman Yoshikazu from Edo, who produced armour between 1848 and 1854. Yoshikazu was not a professional armourer but he made suits for several important families including Narihiro, the Daimyo of Awa on the island of Shikoku.



Steve explained the armour Yoshikazu made was simple in construction and in its use of materials, more so than you might expect for armour made for a Daimyo. The reason for this was complex and ornate armour was not as practical and easy to maintain on campaign as simple armour, and the protection it provided was not as good.

Although Japan had been at peace for 250 years United States naval commander Commodore Perry had recently landed in Japan, forcing Japan to open up to trade, and Narihiro expected war. The armour Yoshikazu had made was effective against the guns Narihiro expected would be used in the war- a war which, of course, never came.

Steve's talk ended with an excellent question and answer session that included an explanation of how samurai armour was tested using both guns and swords.

JSNW Committee Reports

Following a break for tea and cakes the Committee presented reports on the previous year.

Yuko Howes, who is standing down after three years as Chairman, thanked JSNW members and the Committee for their support and expressed the desire JSNW continue to expand cooperation with organisations such as JET, the Japanese Embassy and Japanese Garden Society among others to promote Japanese culture in the North West.

Nigel Cordon, Events Coordinator, presented a photographic summary of the various events JSNW has organised during the year. He explained we now had a good relationship with the World Museum in Liverpool, where we have been able to host a number of events. Sally Myers, our Membership Secretary, gave a highly detailed presentation of JSNW membership statistics since 2012. She said membership had increased slightly since last year (we now have 150 members), and JSNW has a rapidly growing digital and social media profile on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

Committee member Claire Gardner presented a summary of results from the online survey she had posted to the Facebook group and finally our Treasurer Kevin Howes summarised the year's accounts, which showed a very small deficit over the year but a healthy bank balance overall.

Following the AGM, the Committee is now-

Chairman- Claire Gardner;

Vice Chairman- Yuko Howes;

Treasurer- Paul Regan;

Membership Secretary- Sally Myers;

Secretary- Joan Horley;

Events Coordinator- Nigel Cordon;

Newsletter Editor- Tim Evans;

Rob Bierman; Joyce Ellis; Kevin Howes.

Article Tim Evans, photos Kevin Howes

JSNW Chanko-nabe Meal/ Sumo Presentation

On Saturday 21st March eleven of us gathered at Padgate for what was to be a really good event.

Taka-san from Sushi Craft prepared the Chanko-nabe, explaining it is the staple high-protein “weight gain” food of sumo wrestlers, the “nabe” being the pot the food is cooked in, with all wrestlers sharing from the same pot. Seasonal food and regional food is used for this dish so although the basis of the meal is the same, the exact recipe depends on when and in which area the tournament is being held (six tournaments are held every year: three in Tokyo (January, May and September) and one each in Osaka (March), Nagoya (July) and Fukuoka (November)).



Chanko-nabe is also popular with families as it is easy to prepare and is all cooked in one pot, and any remaining stock can be used with a variety of added ingredients such as egg, rice and soy sauce. The stock is made from kelp soaked in water and heated- the kelp being removed before the water boils, as it becomes slimy. To this stock is added dried tuna, mirin, soy sauce and then chicken, vegetables and fish- pork or beef can also be used. Turkey or chicken balls are sometimes used as they turn white upon cooking, which is thought to bring good luck (after a tournament the winner has a white circle and the loser a black one).

After we had all eaten our delicious meal, Nigel Cordon (our Events Co-ordinator and Vice Chairman) gave us a presentation about sumo. He explained that sumo originated with the samurai in the Edo period and it is from the samurai they inherited the distinctive hairstyle they still sport today.

When teenagers are being assessed to join a sumo stable their feet are looked at, since big feet indicate the potential to become big enough to be sumo wrestlers. Often fishermen's sons are chosen because their balance is good, having developed excellent balance skills on fishing boats.

Sumo wrestlers’ daily routine involves waking very early and starting training. At about 11am they eat a big meal and then go to bed. They wake in the evening and then have another big meal. Aside from traditional training and exercise, these days sumo often work with weights in the gym.

Bouts take place in a ring or dohyoo (a new dohyoo being built for each tournament) which has a Shinto shrine roof suspended over it. Surrounding the ring are partially buried straw bales called tawara, which if a wrestler gets into trouble at the perimeter can give him enough leverage to prevent an opponent from forcing him out of the ring.

The basic idea of sumo is that a wrestler tries to force his opponent out of the ring or tries to force a part of his opponent’s body (other than the base of his feet) onto the ground. There are no weight divisions and a wrestler can find himself taking on an opponent much bigger than himself. The referee or gyooji is dressed in traditional costume and indicates the winner by pointing with his war fan or gunbai- although the result can be disputed by the shimpan (five judges around the ring). The discussion which follows is known as mono-ii. A grand champion expected to win top division tournaments regularly is called a Yokozuna.

Chanko-nabe Meal/Sumo

Sumo wrestlers are highly respected in Japan, to the extent they become national stars. However, unfortunately wrestling is tending to lose its popularity, possibly in some small way due to the cost of going to watch sumo tournaments. Football and baseball are increasing in popularity. Also, Sumo doesn't now appear to be as appealing to young Japanese and many of the wrestlers are Mongolian or Russian. It is a very hard lifestyle and there can be some health issues such as diabetes due to their extra weight.

I was very ignorant about Sumo wrestling but found the whole afternoon really informative and the food was excellent. It was a most enjoyable event and one which I think we should try and repeat. Perhaps this may encourage more people to attend next time! I hope so!

Article and photo by Joan Horley

Editor's Comment

This is the summer edition of the newsletter, a time when many in the UK might wistfully be wondering when it is actually going to get warmer but, as indicated in Yuko Howes' article later in the newsletter, Japanese people are also wondering when on earth the temperature and humidity is going to drop to a bearable level.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this newsletter. If you would like to contribute an article please contact me, Tim Evans, at the following address- newsletter@jsnw.org.uk

I hope you all have an excellent summer!

Member's Review: Noriko Ogawa

At 11am on Wednesday 2015-04-22 at Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, Japanese pianist Ogawa Noriko-san performed a beautiful concert of classical piano music. The concert was presented and organised by The National Autistic Society as part of a series of concerts called "Jamie's Concerts". The program was devised as a result of the friendship between Ogawa Noriko-san and a friend with whom she originally lodged when she came to the UK. Her friend's son Jamie was born with severe autism and it is obvious from the friendship that "Jamie's Concerts" is devised for families, friends and carers of people with autism (for further details of the concert programme please see this link- <http://uk.jamiesconcerts.com>).

This is in respect of Jamie and his family and because the concerts are in the day, autistic people who may attend would find the concerts less stressful than the traditional evening concerts at a Concert Hall due to the concerts being less formal and more specified to accommodate the sensory and other needs of autistic people to minimise stress levels and create a more relaxed and carefree environment.

I myself was diagnosed, by Dr Linda Buchan, with high-functioning autism in 2013 and I myself am fine with evening professional concerts e.g. Status Quo Live in Birmingham, thus expressing the realities that every individual autistic is very different, with their unique functioning. That being said "Jamie's Concerts" is devised specifically for those who could not cope with the stress of an evening concert, a full-on crowd of people and the sensory overloads or situation and possible distress that could thusly occur.

Member's Review: Noriko Ogawa at the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester

In this respect Ogawa Noriko-san has got this finely tuned and perfected and for this she should be appreciated.



The concert was comprised of classical piano music played beautifully and professionally by Ogawa Noriko san. Her quickness, skill and dexterity at the piano are to be admired and appreciated by all, especially those who love classical piano.

Debussy, Chopin and many other important pieces were played, (including a memorable piece of classical piano as featured in the last 6 minutes of the Japanese drama "Tokyo Sonata", one of my personal movie favourites of Japanese cinema) and this exemplifies the professionalism and skill Ogawa Noriko-san has and her true understanding of music and classical piano arts. I appreciated, as did the audience too, the desire Ogawa Noriko-san has to understanding and performing professionalism for the original composers of piano music, throughout history.

For those who enjoy classical piano, this series of concerts is a must see. I really hope for the chance to see one of her evening performances, in a main auditorium.

I had a wonderful opportunity to talk with Ogawa Noriko-san following her concert and I expressed just how deeply emotional I found the music to be.

I explained about my autism diagnosis and the meaningfulness of her "Jamie's Concerts" program. I explained about my love of piano music and how Teshima Aoi's piano cover of Bette Midler's "The Rose" inspired me to incorporate piano as the main sound within my composition, for my charity song for Japan "It's Alright". This is in part, my appreciation of classical piano and my love of piano Jazz music.

Thank-you & Contact

An appreciated thank-you to Yuko Howes san from Japan Society North West, for e-mailing me in regards to Ogawa Noriko san's piano concert. Thanks to Tim Evans (JSNW) for explaining to me how to contact Sanaburi Foundation. Arigato gozaimasu.



If you would like to contact me as a penfriend, then please write to me via the postal address in my previous two articles, which were published in these newsletters:

Spring 2013, number 34- about my March 2013 visit to Kansai and autism in Japan/visit to the Sakura Kids' School and

Summer 2014, Number 39- about the recording of my tsunami charity song "It's Alright"

(please see on Youtube at-

<https://youtu.be/OMTJ5eboCVM>).

Article by Adrian Summersell, photos Bryony Bell

春夏秋冬

Seasons are one of the most important things to understand Japanese culture. This is the second of a series of articles about the Japanese four seasons (四季) in which I, Yuko Howes, shall try to explain the feeling of each season by describing relatively less-known events that happen typically during that season.

Summer

Have you ever been to Japan during summer? If you have, I'm sure you'd agree that it is unbearably hot and humid! Someone like me who is not athletic can't even think about moving in the heat. However, one of the most popular sports events in Japan takes place during this mercilessly hot season. It is 高校野球 (Koko Yakyu), the baseball tournament for high schools. The proper name is 全国高等学校野球選手権大会 (zenkoku kotogakkou yakyu senshuken taikai! Wow, that's a mouthful). It started in 1915, and this year marks the 100th anniversary of Koko Yakyu. The Koshien stadium (甲子園球場), the only stadium used for this tournament, was completed in 1924, nine years after the tournament started.



There are spring and summer tournaments, but the one in summer is by far the more exciting one, because the participating schools need to win through the Prefectural tournament. Only one school per prefecture is allowed (although, for Tokyo and Hokkaido, 2 schools are allowed due to the large number of schools).

The tournament usually starts on August 8th, and continues for 2 weeks. When it starts every summer, it is just like Wimbledon; you cannot help noticing that it has started, as it is always on TV whenever you turn it on! And again, just like Wimbledon, when it finally comes to an end with the excitement of the final game, it feels so sad. From the next day, the TV feels like it's missing something very important.



In Japan, I think it's safe to say that the most popular sport of all is baseball, not football. So many boys join a baseball club/team during junior high and high school. For those, the Koshien stadium is a dream; only the best teams who survived the Prefectural tournament can participate in Koko Yakyu at the stadium. During the summer tournament, once you lose, you need to go. So, you will often see the team members of the losing team collecting the soil from the baseball field, crying heavily. It is very moving. The boys at Koko Yakyu, unlike professional baseball players, are so pure, so genuine; no money involved, no greed involved, they just do their very best at each game.

That's the beauty of Koko Yakyu, and that's the reason people will never stop loving it.

When the tournament is over, it is approaching the end of August, and the long school summer holiday is nearing an end. Although it is still hot for a while in Japan, you will notice a subtle change in the air. Autumn is coming.



Article by Yuko Howes.

Member's Recipe: Sukiyaki

Sukiyaki is a popular Japanese winter dish which is cooked in a shallow iron pot (or you can use a pan). It can be cooked on the hob or, more commonly, in front of everyone on a camping stove in the middle of the table. Sukiyaki consists of thinly sliced beef (or sometimes pork) and vegetables cooked in a sauce made from soy sauce, mirin, sugar and sake. As some ingredients are hard to find, alternatives are in brackets below. A vegetarian alternative uses thinly sliced vegetables instead of beef.

Sauce (Tare):

200 ml soy sauce

200 ml mirin

200 ml sake (an alternative is 1 tsp dashi or ½ a veggie stock cube and 1 cup water)

2 tablespoons sugar (add more for sweeter taste)

Microwave in a bowl or heat in saucepan and stir until sugar is dissolved.

Sukiyaki:

Small amount of oil for frying

400g thinly sliced beef

2 diagonally cut giant spring onions/negi (or

2 thin leeks)

1 pack of seared tofu

1 pack of shiitake mushrooms, cross notched (or chestnut mushrooms)

1 pack of enoki mushrooms (or sliced white mushrooms)

½ a small hakusai (aka Chinese lettuce), roughly chopped

2 large carrots, thinly sliced

1 pack of konyaku noodles (or rice noodles)

Beaten raw egg for dipping (optional).



Fry the sliced beef in the oil until almost cooked then add the Welsh onions and gently fry for another minute. Arrange the other ingredients in the dish (any extra can be added later). Pour over the sukiyaki tare/sauce and cover. Simmer for 10-15 minutes until the vegetables are cooked. Dip the cooked ingredients into the beaten raw egg for a more traditional way to eat sukiyaki.

Article by Tobietta Rhyman/ Photo- "Cookingsukiyaki" by Kapichu - photo from the english wikipedia.

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<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cookingsukiyaki.jpg#/media/File:Cookingsukiyaki.jpg>

Future JSNW Events

Film Screening

September

Padgate Community Centre



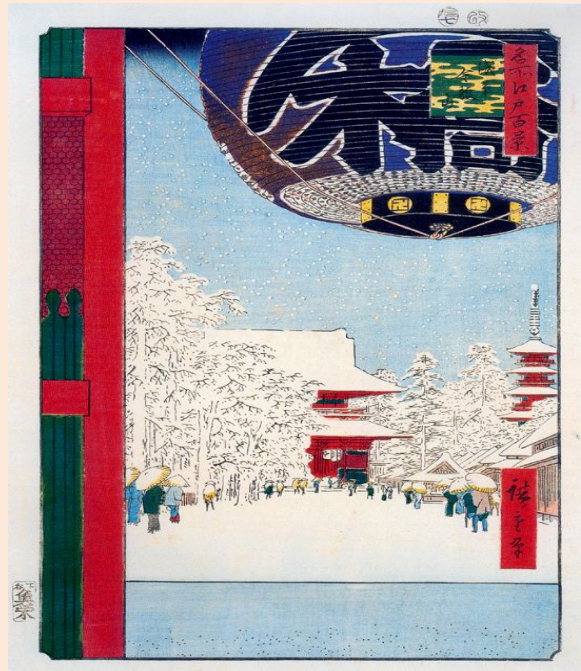
(Although the film we are screening has yet to be decided, this is the movie poster for “東京物語/ Tokyo Story”, directed by Yasujiro Ozu).

Further details will be provided on our website closer to the event.

Talk about Japanese Art

Saturday 3rd October

Friends Meeting House, Manchester



Further details will be provided on our website closer to the event.

Japanese Social and Conversation Evenings

Our Japanese Social/Conversation evenings are held every month alternately between Liverpool and Manchester. Please check our website for details.



VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT WWW.JSNW.ORG.UK, WE ARE ALSO ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER.