

## Evening event held on 15 November in Oxford

The UK JSPS Alumni Association held an evening event on 15 November 2004 in Oxford. This was the second event organised by the alumni association after the success of the first annual general assembly in June 2004 held at the Royal Society in London and was the first time for the association to venture out of London.



The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford



Keynote speech from Professor Arthur Stockwin

Approximately forty alumni gathered for the event, which took place in the impressive surroundings of the Eastern Art Galleries of the Ashmolean Museum. Under the gaze of a statue of Buddha, Professor Arthur Stockwin, who has recently retired from St Antony's College and the directorship of the Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies at Oxford University gave the keynote speech and focused upon the continuing importance of Japan, the significance of its study and the state of Japanese Studies in the UK today. He also spoke of his experiences of living and researching in Japan and entertained the audience by recalling his most embarrassing moment in Japan – a theme that continued in the

speeches that followed. Another theme that emerged in these speeches was people's experience not only of Japan but specifically the Kansai region. Ms Melody Liles and her supervisor Dr Andrew Quantock both of Cardiff University spoke about their time at Kyoto University hospital. Whilst Dr Lakshmi Sharma, who by coming from Japan no doubt completed the furthest distance to attend the event, is a chemist currently based at Kyoto University and living in Osaka. After the speeches, a commemorative photograph was taken followed by a reception and buffet that provided the opportunity to meet old friends and make new acquaintances.

The executive board are always keen to hear suggestions from alumni on a broad range of matters – the content of this newsletter, the kind of events and activities the association could organise in the future and possible venues.

(Dr. Hugo Dobson, Executive Committee Member)



# Experience in Japan

## *Lakshmi Sharma*

I have been in Japan now for nearly 5 years and will shortly return to Europe. In terms of research, I have been very lucky to have had the opportunity to work with Professor Kanaya at Kyoto University. Unlike most Japanese laboratories, our laboratory operates under European working hours with no hierarchical environment. To my delight, I have also been encouraged to speak Japanese. It was in this laboratory that I began to realise that good research is in fact possible in Japan. With the endless support of the laboratory, the knowledge I have gained has been invaluable in learning new techniques, perceptions and theories. It has occurred to me throughout my time in Japan that it is a pity that the majority of fellows do not have the chance to research in such an outstanding laboratory.



In terms of society, Japan is extremely homogeneous and although this is slowly changing, blatant racism can be witnessed almost everyday by foreigners. Astoundingly, even in Tokyo, there still remain places that have “no foreigners” placards posted outside. Japanese society also exhibits signs of being extremely sexist, with women portrayed in mass media as fragile china dolls squealing in high pitch voices, appearing innocent, naive and educationally challenged, with their only goal being to be married, have children and never work. However, there are Japanese women who fight this perception to become academics or business figures and it is these women, who fight in the face of adversity, who one has to stand back and admire.

I have been lucky to have lived in both Kanto and Kansai. I love Kansai: the food is delicious and the places are amazing. When I had an apartment in Gion, Kyoto, I would visit the temples and shrines at the weekends. My favourite is Heianjingu where I would see Geisha and Maikos. One of my hobbies is collecting kimono (including furisode), haori (formal kimono jackets) and obi (kimono belts).

I wear kimono most weekends during the kimono season from October to May and can tie obi in every way – or, I should say, in case I get challenges - in many ways. Honestly, it is not as difficult as it appears!

My experience in Japan has been wide and varied and it has been both difficult and enjoyable. However, in fairness, I would probably have experienced the same had I researched in Korea, Thailand or any other Asian country. I would definitely recommend researching in Japan to anyone, provided they are familiar with the laboratory they will research in. The experience, although challenging, is essential to shaping an international researcher. JSPS provides a generous fellowship and I am very grateful to them for allowing this opportunity to be possible.

# Eastern Promise

## Melody Liles



As a roving reporter for the hardline JSPS Alumni newsletter, last year I won a short term JSPS Fellowship at Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine under Professor Shigeru Kinoshita. Japan is a land of subtle complexity; something I have come to learn few gaijin (foreigners) can ever appreciate.

With initially no knowledge of Japanese, setting-up a Kyoto base proved tricky. For instance, I had some interesting grapples with the air con in my flat, resulting in an arctic breeze throughout the day (instructions only in Japanese *kanji* characters, *kan-who?*, *kan-me?*, yes exactly), but my stoic sense of British stiff upper lip shone through and the beast was tamed. Or, at least, broken.

Grammatically correct Japanese transpired to be a lifetime's feat, and I quickly decided to favour a more rudimentary line of conversation in Jinglish (my hybrid, nonsense language). Success was noted one

afternoon in the lift heading to the lab when a very old, very small Japanese couple got in, and proceeded to stare up at me, like surveying a grand tree. The diminutive old lady decided to measure herself against my elbow and launched into a torrent of Japanese, of which I only caught "igirisu-jin" (English person). I replied, "lie, nihon-jin desu" (no, I'm Japanese) and then got on my knees so we were the same height. The wee couple exploded into fits of laughter with tears streaming down their faces, much to my bemusement, damn that Lileswoman charm! There was so much thigh-slapping, they wouldn't have looked out of place in lederhosen...

Japan has a culture married of tradition and dynamics. My counterparts are fashion obsessed, and even school uniforms incorporate the idyllic status symbols of designer couture. Louis Vitton successfully eschewed, I was seduced by the art of Japanese leg massage. Vicious things. As a newcomer to spa luxury, my masseuse asked me if I would like gentle or hard manipulation. I no doubt used the wrong word because the resulting action was like filleting a chicken. She virtually ripped my calves from the bone, and it was a white knuckle ride hanging onto the sides of my chair. Repeatedly asking if I was ok, Masseur Lady would return to work with renewed vigour when I nodded weakly. After half an hour of being pummeled into a state of exhaustion, my tormentor seemed contented with her efforts and concluded that my legs had been tired.

*Lost in Translation* has done little to further our western view of Japan. The culture, to me, is sublime and heralds a modesty lost in our snapshot tours. The work ethic remains the strongest driving force to success, and to have experienced a fragment of this has been my greatest pleasure. I am hoping to return.

# Introduction of executive members

## **Peter Sammonds: Chair**

I am Professor of Geophysics at UCL and am Chair of the UK Alumni Association.

I have had a long involvement with Japan, dating back to 1991/92 when I was a JSPS Research Fellow at the Earthquake Research Institute, University of Tokyo. My research aims are to investigate the mechanics of the Earth's crust and ice sheets by studying the fundamental physics and mechanics of geological materials. I do research directed towards studying the impacts of climate change on the cryosphere and towards studying geohazards (earthquakes and volcanoes). It was for this reason I was particularly keen to do research in Japan. My host, Professor Miti Ohnaka, himself had been a JSPS Research Fellow in my lab at UCL in the past. So there was a long-standing collaboration.

Working in Japan was certainly a formative experience. I loved Tokyo and made many friends there. The research on earthquake mechanics I did at ERI was both novel, because of the facilities available, and had an immediacy about it, because of the importance of geohazards in Japan. Four of my research students have since done research in Japan and I returned in 1999 as a Visiting Professor at Tokyo University. It continues to be a place for research excellence in geohazards and a country always full of surprises, even when you think you know it.

## **Martyn Kingsbury: Vice-Chair**

A long interest in Japan and Japanese culture that stemmed from an interest in classical Japanese martial arts led me to explore the chance of continuing research in Japan on completing my PhD at the university of Bath. I was lucky enough to be awarded a JSPS fellowship in 1990 and I spent two years working on cardiovascular pharmacology at Tohoku University in Sendai. I did a return fellowship back at Bath and then moved on to Imperial College School of Medicine where I am a research lecturer looking at various aspects of heart failure. I also had a short study visit to Japan in 1995.

I am the vice-chair of the alumni association and my role is to assist the chair and to stand in when the chair is unavailable.

## **Hugo Dobson: Treasurer**

Hugo Dobson is lecturer in the international relations of Japan at the University of Sheffield. His research and teaching interests include international history and international relations in the East Asian region. He is the

co-author of Japan's International Relations: Politics, Economics and Security (Routledge, 2nd edition 2005), co editor of Britain and Japan in the Contemporary World: Responses to Common Issues (RoutledgeCurzon, 2003) and is the author of Japan and United Nations Peacekeeping: New Pressures, New Responses (RoutledgeCurzon, 2003) and Japan and G7/8, 1975 to 2002 (RoutledgeCurzon, 2004). He is currently planning a research project on the representation of Japan's international relations in film, and a co-edited book on East Asian postage stamps as propaganda.

## **Melody Liles: Secretary**

Melody Liles is currently a third year PhD student with the Structural Biophysics Group in the School of Optometry and Vision Sciences at Cardiff University. Melody gained a Short-Term JSPS Fellowship at Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine under Professor Shigeru Kinoshita, an international leader in pioneering vision research.

Her research interests centre around the relationship between corneal structure and function. Using state-of-the art techniques such as synchrotron X-ray diffraction combined with a range of biochemical studies in collaboration with the Cardiff School of Biosciences, Melody's work aims to better understand corneal transparency. Her findings have been presented at a number of conferences, including the international IOVS research meeting, ARVO.

Melody is also enthusiastically involved in a number of projects, including National Science week, Researchers in Residence, Women in Science and Engineering, and is a keen adventure runner.

## **Lakshmi Sharma**

Hello Alumni Members! I have been in Japan now for nearly 5 years. I initially started on the European Commission INCO STF 14 fellowship at AIST in Tsukuba, where I stayed for 2 years. I then received the Royal Society awarded JSPS fellowship to research at Kyoto University with Professor Kanaya for a further 2 years. I enjoyed the laboratory so much that I extended my time here and am currently a visiting international research associate. My research field involves polymer chemistry especially structure, crystallisation, blends, rheology and biomaterials.

## **What is UK-JSPS ALUMNI ASSOCIATION?**

### **Aim:**

The aim of the Association is to promote scientific exchange between the UK and Japan. In pursuit of this objective, the Association will carry out the following objectives;

- (1) Provide personal and expert guidance to young researchers under JSPS Postdoctoral Fellowships for foreign researchers and to support Japanese researchers working in the United Kingdom.
- (2) Exchange information amongst the Association's members.
- (3) Conduct joint activities with academic institutions and organisations of science promotion.
- (4) Collect and disseminate information regarding science, technology, society and culture.

### **Membership:**

- a) Regular Members: Individuals who are being or were supported by JSPS or STA
  - b) Associate Members: Individuals and organizations who are interested in pursuing and achieving the Association's objectives
  - c) Honorary Members: Individuals who have a distinguished record of promoting scientific exchange between the UK and Japan
- \*The Association requires no membership fee, however the Association reserves the right to introduce a fee at any time.

### **How to Apply:**

Applications for membership to the Association should be made in writing to the JSPS London Office at 12 Berkeley Street, London W1J 8DT or alternatively you can complete and submit an application form online at [www.isps.org](http://www.isps.org).