Voice! from Alumni member

Vol.8 Dr Luke Gartlan

Luke Gartlan with family descendants of Samuel Cocking and members of Fujisawa City in front of excavated greenhouse foundations, Samuel Cocking Garden, Enoshima, July 2007.

Dr Luke Gartlan spent his two-year fellowship at Nihon University in Tokyo. During his stay, he had some wonderfully fruitful experiences in his research and exchanges with local people. He tells us about some of his dramatic discoveries and experiences in Japan

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Biography

1999-2004	PhD Art History, University of Melbourne
2005	Sessional Lecturer, Department of Art History, University of Sydney
2005-2007	JSPS Postdoctoral Fellow (Standard), Nihon University, Tokyo
2007	Lecturer, School of Art History, University of St Andrews
2010	Visiting Fellow, Australian National University
2011-12	AHRC Early Career Fellow
2013-	Editor, *History of Photography*
2016	National Library of Australia Fellow in Japanese Studies
2016-	Senior Lecturer, School of Art History, University of St Andrews
2017	Josef Kreiner Prize, Hosei University, awarded for *A Career of Japan: Baron Raimund von Stillfried and Early Yokohama Photography* (Brill, 2016).

The success of any application is a cause for celebration, but looking back the two years I spent in Tokyo as a JSPS fellow were pivotal in the transition from postdoctoral student to professional academic. When I applied for the fellowship, I had only recently completed my doctoral thesis and was a sessional lecturer at the University of Sydney. My doctorate had been based on a nineteenth-century Austrian photographer, Baron Raimund von Stillfried, who had spent fifteen years in Japan, but up until then most of my research had been conducted in Vienna. The opportunity to spend two years based at Nihon University College of Art in Tokyo provided the crucial time and experience to conduct research in Japan and to get to know Japanese researchers, curators, and archives.

My host at Nihon University, Professor Takahashi Norihide, was not only a leading authority in the early history of photography in Japan, but also a conscientious and generous mentor who guided me through the intricacies of Japanese society and academia. For the first six months, I attended Japanese language classes in the Tokyo district of Ichigaya and studied diligently in the evenings. I was fortunate to be accommodated in Sugamo, which is known for its older population as well as some beautiful gardens where one could escape the bustling city.

One of the great benefits of the fellowship was the time it afforded to work toward one's own research goals and to build relations with local scholars. Whereas in the past questions about my research had often resulted in quizzical expressions, I was delighted to meet attentive and knowledgeable respondents both inside and outside academia in Japan. Curiosity and intrigue seemed the abiding response to my research. In fact, an enthusiasm for education and the arts remains my abiding impression of Tokyo: the high levels of exhibition attendance, the students with open textbooks in cafes, and the subway full of readers. In this respect, I was very fortunate that my fellowship coincided with a rising tide of interest in Japan's own photographic history. The Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography in Ebisu, recently renamed the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, had organised a number of groundbreaking exhibitions and this newfound exposure of long-neglected historical photographs had inspired other institutions to unearth their own collections.

As is the nature of coalface research, I could never be sure where the archival rabbit hole would lead me. A research project might stall for several months before a chance encounter or conversation with a scholar or librarian would provide a crucial new lead and the search would resume. In this respect, the JSPS fellowship was invaluable because its two-year term enabled such opportunities and relations to form – and indeed transform. For my own part, I only realised long afterwards not only the wealth of materials gathered during this time, but also how the conversations and discoveries were no less exciting for Japanese colleagues and scholars – like working on a giant jigsaw we each brought our own pieces, skills, and viewpoints to the puzzle.

To give an example, I had been working for several years on a merchant named Samuel Cocking who first arrived in Yokohama to make his fortune in 1869 and spent the rest of his life in Japan, eventually dying there in 1914. Over the years, I had slowly built up a picture of Cocking as a pivotal figure in the photographic circles of nineteenth-century Japan, but the trail of sources had gone cold and few additional revelations had come to light. Saitō Takio, then senior curator at the Yokohama Archives of History, thought that Cocking may have been buried in a local Buddhist cemetery rather than the better-known foreigners' cemetery. And indeed, having asked a Buddhist priest responsible for the cemetery grounds, I was directed to Cocking's gravestone. At this point, I explained to the priest the reasons for my visit and was informed that the family descendants regularly tended the gravesite. This was a revelation as, although I had known Cocking had married a Japanese woman, I had no idea there were living descendants.

The following week, having been introduced, I accompanied the family descendants to Enoshima, a beautiful and popular coastal island a little more than an hour by train from Tokyo. At Enoshima, the local authorities had only recently excavated the summit of the island in preparation for a new lookout tower, but had, in the process, unexpectedly discovered the brick foundations of a Victorian greenhouse. After some research, it was discovered that Cocking had lived the final two decades of his life on the site and had built a state-of-the-art greenhouse on his property grounds in the 1880s. In honour of its former resident, the site is now known as the Samuel Cocking Garden. What had begun as a small research interest had lead me into dialogue with the city authorities who were keen to know more about its former resident as part of their tourist promotion of the site. These kinds of serendipitous, unexpected encounters brought additional contemporary relevance to my research.

After my fellowship I was fortunate to gain a position in the School of Art History at the University of St Andrews. In retrospect, I experienced a kind of reverse culture shock on moving from the centre of Tokyo to the rural university town of St Andrews. But time is proving that the distance between Tokyo and St Andrews is not as incommensurable as it had seemed on first impressions. Friendships formed during my time in Tokyo continue the conversations that occurred during my fellowship. Early this year, I returned to Tokyo on two separate occasions: the first to accept the Josef Kreiner Prize for International Japanese Studies at a ceremony at Hosei University, awarded for my book on the Austrian photographer von Stillfried; and, on the second occasion, to speak at a major conference held at the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum. The latter event was organised by Keishi Mitsui, who I first met during my fellowship and is now a senior curator at the museum. Last year Keishi visited St Andrews to view the historical photographs held by the university, a selection of which will be included in a major exhibition on Victorian-era photography to be held in Tokyo in 2020. A decade after my fellowship the conversations continue and the ties forged then continue to enable exchanges and projects to this day.

Speakers at a conference held at Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, Ebisu, March 2017. From right front in anticlockwise direction: Takahashi Norihide, Christian Polak, Sebastian Dobson, Luke Gartlan, Juju Fan, Philippe Dallais, and Keishi Mitsui.