



## **President's Report 2022/23**

### **1. Looking backwards**

Due to circumstances beyond our control, we held our Annual General Meeting unusually late last year. This report therefore covers a period of only ten months.

The Society has paused for breath over the past year and has taken the opportunity to contemplate its role in the new post-pandemic world. We've held less events than we might have done under normal circumstances, and for that I am sorry. However, we have been able to build important new relationships and lay the groundwork for some truly exciting events during the year ahead.

In February, the Australian Wooden Boat Festival returned to Hobart. There was a strong Japanese presence this year, with our members helping to accommodate visitors from Japan. A traditional Japanese wooden boat was built during the festival, with a memorable Shintō ceremony being held to launch it. Visiting from Canberra, Hiroshi Yamaguchi held a two-day wagata-bon tray workshop and then gave a display of traditional chopstick-making techniques. Douglas Brooks also delivered a fascinating lecture on his experiences as an apprentice boatbuilder in Japan.

During April and May, we once again partnered with the City of Hobart to deliver the annual celebration of Japanese Children's Day. The Japanese Garden at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens was festooned with koinobori and artwork from schools around Hobart. During the final weekend, a program of children's activities was also run at Wellington Court.

Later in May, we held an all-you-can-eat dinner at Osaki Japanese Restaurant. Our members enjoyed letting their hair down for the evening and filling their bellies with delicious Japanese food. Unfortunately for those that missed this event, the restaurant has since closed down.

In August, we held a special event at the International Wall of Friendship in Hobart. The Wall is a symbol of goodwill and recognition of the contribution that multicultural groups have made to the development of Tasmania, including over 54 stones donated by migrant communities. In conjunction with the Japan Club of Tasmania, the Society erected a stone on behalf of the local Japanese community in 2015. However, our connection with the Wall was subsequently lost. We renewed that relationship through a private tour, during which we learnt about the history of the Wall and its ongoing mission to bring Tasmania's communities closer together. The Society will be careful to cherish the relationship in future, including using the Wall as a venue for events.

Finally, on 24 September, we held our third hanami picnic in Deloraine. This event has now become a firm fixture in our annual calendar. More than 50 members of the Japanese community from around Tasmania gathered on a fine spring day to enjoy a picnic beneath the cherry blossoms. We once again thank Lisa Walkden for her outstanding efforts in making everything happen, including running sumi-e classes throughout the day. One sobering footnote is that our annual hanami picnic is already experiencing the impacts of climate change. The event has originally scheduled to take place during the first weekend of October, as in the previous two years. However, we decided to bring it forward after Tasmania experienced its hottest winter on record. We were lucky that we did, as it enabled us to experience the cherry blossoms in full bloom.

In addition to these events, we were also able to continue running a series of monthly language exchange sessions throughout the year. The language exchange group once again ran a popular

Aussie-style BBQ on Christmas Day, catering for any Japanese students or visitors who might not otherwise have had plans for the day.

Although the pandemic is now officially over, COVID-19 continued to influence our activities during the year. The Umitaka Maru paid its annual visit to Hobart in February, but the risk presented by the virus prevented the crew and cadets from leaving the ship. Prior to the pandemic, the Japanese Film Festival Satellite and the visit of the Umitaka Maru were the two highlights of our annual calendar. With the Japanese Film Festival Satellite having been discontinued in 2021, we were not able to hold either of these events this year.

## 2. Looking forwards

At the last Annual General Meeting, we set ourselves the mission of reinventing the Society so that it can continue to thrive in the post-pandemic world. I am delighted to say that we have risen to this challenge and that we are now undergoing a process of renewal. Earlier this year, the Committee conducted a brainstorming exercise and identified the following priorities for the future:

- Running Japanese language classes.
- Holding a diverse program of events, including regular annual highlight events.
- Working in partnership with other organisations to promote Japanese culture.
- Demonstrating leadership in the relationship between Tasmania and Japan.
- Delivering greater value to our members through a discount scheme.
- Communicating more effectively with our members and supporters.

We have subsequently been working to reinvigorate the Society accordingly. Through our renewed relationship with the International Wall of Friendship, we will begin by holding a Bunka no Hi event at the Wall on 4 November. We firmly expect this to become a regular annual event in future. We are also working with the Japan Club of Tasmania on plans for a joint annual mochitsuki event to celebrate the new year. In conjunction with the hanami picnic at Deloraine, the celebration of Japanese Children's Day and, hopefully, the annual visit of the Umitaka Maru, this will give us five regular highlight events that we can run each year in future.

During the year ahead, we can expect to hear much more about *Tasmania Story*. Filmed in Tasmania in 1989, it succeeded in bringing Tasmania to the attention of Japanese audiences. Yet, despite its cultural and historical significance, the film has never been released outside of Japan. For some time, we have been working to give *Tasmania Story* the local premiere that it so richly deserves and that is so desperately overdue. This is proving harder than we had hoped, but we will continue to persevere. Recently, the ABC has picked up on the story and has discovered that a house built in Tasmania by the film crew is still standing. It is remarkable that such an important landmark has been hiding in plain sight for so long but, now that we know it exists, we are hoping to organise a visit for our members. Expect to hear more about this soon.

Other priorities for the year ahead will include working more closely with the City of Hobart to support the Hobart-Yaizu sister city relationship, as well as working more closely with businesses and cultural organisations to highlight the diverse connections between Tasmania and Japan.

In conclusion, as always, I would like to thank our members for their continuing support. I would also like to thank the members of the committee for all their efforts over the past year.

Steven Phipps  
President  
27 October 2023