

“Big in Japan” [日本でビッグ]*

Jane Cox has recently been in Japan and mention of it prompted me to reminisce about my connection with that country. In 1992, through the ‘good offices’ of Dr. Akira Matsu, a leading Japanese archaeologist, I was invited by the Japanese Ministry of Culture to go on an all expenses paid three week lecture tour of major museums and archaeological units in Japan [generously, Cath’s costs for a one week stay were also covered]. Akira and a number of colleagues had visited London on fact finding missions about the approaches to excavation techniques, raising developer funding and public archaeology of the Dept. of Urban Archaeology, Museum of London [for which I was the Principal Archaeological Excavations Officer, City of London]. At that time the DUA (which covered the City of London, the historic core of London) was the largest and leading urban archaeology unit in the world ~

https://www.academia.edu/42252935/The_DUA_Department_of_Urban_Archaeology_managing_archaeological_investigations_in_the_City_of_London_1973_1991_London_Archaeologist_50th_anniversary_proceedings

Dr. Matsui (Director of the Center for Archaeological Operations at the Nara Cultural Properties Research Center, Nara, Japan), started his archaeological career at Tohoku University, where he took a year’s leave of absence and went to the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A. He became interested in the Native American movement in the U.S. and spent some time visiting activist American Indian Movement (AIM) locations. He got his M.A. in 1980 and entered a Ph.D. program that year too. His principal interest was in wetland archaeology and applying and improving archaeological excavation techniques and he was very interested in the waterlogged London sites on its waterfront.

When in London Akira and his wife [Miyuki, meaning ‘beautiful happiness’] would stay with Cath and I and our two children in Herne Hill, London, and were very appreciative of the hospitality and the family interactions!

From left to right: Akira, me and his colleague, Mr. Yushimura outside a temple complex.



* Title courtesy of an *Alphaville* track in their 1984 debut album *Forever Young*

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Above: one of the many beautiful temple gardens in Kyoto



Above: Me enjoying a matcha tea

On our travels, as well as spending time in Tokyo, we visited other main cities for example, Kyoto, Osaka, Nagoya with its famous castle, Nagasaki, Fukuoka and Kobe. The latter [one of the first ports to trade with the West] was very memorable: located on a narrow strip of coastal land and hemmed in by the foothills of a mountain range, it had been 'expanded' through a major scheme of reclamation around former islands in the adjoining bay which included the construction of an airport.

We visited many beautiful places and landscapes complete with memorable temples and shrines and some very advanced museums in terms of their displays and facilities.

The reputation of the DUA had spread far and wide and there were numerous opportunities to speak at international conferences and to undertake lecture tours but the most memorable was the tour of Japan visiting the main archaeological units and some of the foremost museums. Akira considered that the DUA approach to urban archaeology was the best that he had encountered on his tours in Europe and the Americas and he was keen that his colleagues learn first hand about it. I was surprised to be asked to give interviews to the press and TV and treated like a celebrity! Akira organised the publication of one of my talks in Japanese ~

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John Maloney (Translations by Matsui Akira and Sasaki Kenichi).

He subsequently wrote me a letter of which the following is an extract: *Your lecture has been in press in the most representative journal of archaeology in this country. Your name has become very famous now. Your lecture has been criticised friendly in the annual review of archaeology for 1992.* He went on to explain that 'criticised friendly' meant that it had gained positive reviews! [see next page].

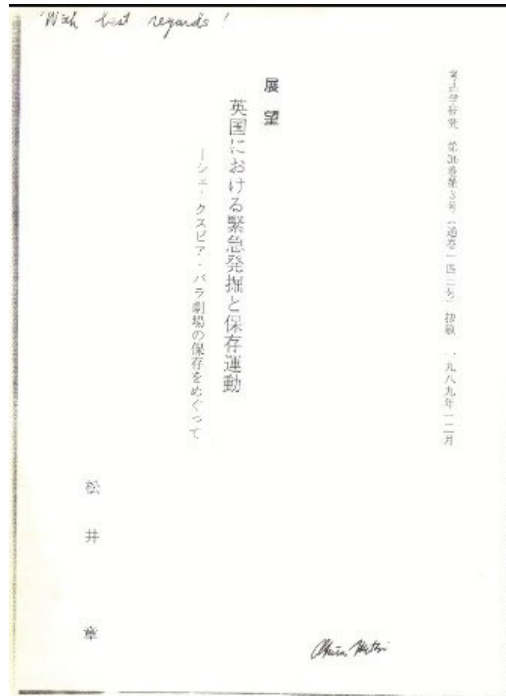
Before leaving GB I had had business cards printed with my details on both sides in English and Japanese as I was aware that an important part of meeting officials was the quite formal exchange of cards. However, once the formalities had been duly undertaken and although some of the museum curators were quite reserved, the welcome to a fellow colleague was no less warm for all that.



Above, top right: The front cover [in Japanese] of a published paper from one of the lectures that I gave in Japan.

Above: A piece of an inscribed Japanese bell of the 14th/15th century discovered during archaeological excavations on a waterfront site in the City of London dating to some centuries before there was officially trade between Europe and Japan.

Right: A letter from Akira Matsui to me about my 'fame' in Japan, the inscribed bell and his visit to London to see us



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Dear John;

I hear you are well and keep busy from Mr. Yoshimura who visited London last summer. Your lecture had been in Press one of the most representative journal of Archaeology in this country. Your name has become very famous now. Your lecture has been criticized friendly in the annual review of archaeology for 1992.

Now, my colleagues and I have been studying the bronze bell recovered from Kumagaigumi's excavation. The character style, my colleague says, should be older than the date of the site. It should be broken into pieces at that time. But it should be older than 10 AD, from the comparative analysis of inscription style. We are very pleased if we could report it in Japanese archaeological Journal. Of course, we will send our report to the museum of London.

Are there any publications on the excavation except you gave me the annual report of DUA. I want to see the archives record concerning to that finds.

As we are going to visit England from 18 June until 29 June. If possible, I want to see you on 28 June somewhere in London. My wife and I are looking forward to seeing you and your family. Please tell our best regards to your family.

Sincerely yours,

Akira Matsui
Akira Matsui
81-742 35-1558(Fax.)

What I found reassuring was that the archaeologists I met were quick to invite me and Akira and his colleagues to stay for drinks and some were as impressive 'consumers' as their English counterparts! They were keen to talk about many aspects including techniques, legislation, approaches to preservation, public interest and support [including TV and media], outreach, qualifications, and interaction with developers and construction companies. They were proud of the Japanese Archaeological Association, a nation-wide organization founded in 1948 with the purpose of promoting the progress of archaeology and fulfilling archaeologists' societal responsibilities. Then it had a membership of approximately 4,200. It set up special committees in response to the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake and the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, problems which thankfully don't afflict British archaeology although they recognised the issues of coastal erosion.



Above: A reception organized for developers and their professional teams at the Museum of London

Right: Me receiving the Freedom of the City of London *for services to – and promotion of – the archaeology and heritage of the City of London.*



Sadly, I recently learnt that Akira had died of cancer and so this is in large part a paean to him who was so much appreciated ~

Akira was always so generous with his time and knowledge, in many different areas, and a kind man.

Bryony and John Coles, Retired Wetland Archaeologist and former heads of the international Wetland Archaeological Research Project (WARP), England

For many of us, he was also a warm and friendly welcoming presence on visits to Japan. He was a great 'tour guide' and always made us feel at home and showed us a Japan that regular tourists would never have seen. I spent many happy hours on the road and was very appreciative of the hospitality both in Japan [I can wholeheartedly attest to that].

Glen Doran, Professor Emeritus, Florida State University, Florida, U.S.A

RIP Professor Akira Matsui, a lovely person, a gentleman and a fine and revered archaeologist.

John Maloney