



*The world debut of the new telescope at Hatfield House*

## **The Return of Japan's Lost Telescope after Four Hundred Years**

by Sean Curtin

Four centuries ago King James I gave Japan its very first telescope, at the time this was a cutting-edge piece of technology. The gift was the perfect symbol to mark the beginning of what was to become an extremely fruitful and long-lasting bilateral relationship. Sadly, the original telescope has been lost to the mists of time, but as part of the Japan400 celebrations to mark four centuries since the first official encounter, a new telescope has been constructed using traditional methods. The idea of restoring a lost symbolic artefact has deep cultural roots in English mythology and literature stretching back to the Arthurian legends.

The original telescope's tale begins back in April 1611, when the East India Company ship the *Clove*, under the command of the intrepid Captain John Saris,<sup>1</sup> left England and set sail for distant Japan. After a dangerous sea voyage lasting more than two years, it arrived in Japanese waters in June 1613.<sup>2</sup> The

Earl of Salisbury, a close advisor and Chief Minister to King James, supervised the complex task of sending the first British vessel to Japan and organizing the dispatch of the telescope, which was the most advanced scientific instrument on the planet at the time.<sup>3</sup>

This was a daring mission to what was then the very edge of the known world. After an arduous sea voyage, Saris eventually landed at Hirado, located in modern day Nagasaki Prefecture.<sup>4</sup> Here he was warmly greeted by the local ruler, Matsura Hoin, the Lord of Hirado. Lord Matsura may have been the first Japanese official to see the instrument and helped ensure its safe passage to Japan's paramount ruler, Tokugawa Ieyasu. Along with the aid of William Adams, an Englishman who had arrived in Japan in April 1600 on a Dutch ship, Saris was able to gain an audience with the ruling elite and initiate the first official contact.

On 8 September 1613, Saris had an audience with the immensely influential retired Shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu. He gave the legendary leader a letter from King James and several gifts, including the nation's first ever telescope, a device which had just been invented in Europe. The spyglass brought by Saris was the first to leave Europe for any destination, as well as the first ever sent to Asia. To the people of the time, the telescope was a fabulous piece of technology and certainly a truly impressive gift. Sadly, all physical traces of this magnificent device have completely vanished and we do not even have a picture of it. The surviving written Japanese texts describing the telescope are contradictory, so we have no real idea what it was actually like.



*The new telescope recreated after four hundred years*

In many respects this first gift of such an innovative piece of world-changing technology was the perfect symbol to inaugurate a highly successful, centuries-long relationship of scientific, economic and cultural exchange. It is a shame that this potent emblem of friendship no longer exists. Not surprisingly, as the 2013 celebrations to mark four hundred years since the first Japan-British formal contacts picked up momentum, voices arose requesting that a new telescope be made. Thanks to the vision of the Japan400 co-chairs, Professor Timon Screech and Nicolas Maclean CMG, along with the very generous funding for the project by Robin Maynard MBE, a new telescope was commissioned. Robin Maynard is a permanent resident of Japan and honorary member of the British Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He was so inspired by the idea of creating a replacement telescope that he donated the funds to realize it. The new instrument was painstakingly created over a year-long period by Ian Poyser, one of Britain's foremost craftsmen in the field of traditional brass telescope construction.

Having recreated such a historic symbol from the genesis of the Japan-British relationship, a fitting location and occasion had to be found for the telescope to make its global debut. Monday 9 September 2013, almost four hundred years to the day from the original presentation, was selected as the date to reveal the newly-commissioned brass instrument. Hatfield House, built by the 1st Earl of Salisbury, who helped organize its dispatch to Japan, was selected as the special venue. To add a further layer of historic resonance, two direct descendants of key 1613 dramatis personae were present at the ceremony. These were the Marquess of Salisbury, descendant of the 1st Earl of Salisbury, and Mr Akira Matsura, descendant of the Lord of Hirado, where the *Clove* had landed 400 years ago. Mr Matsura's forefather was the first Japanese leader to meet Captain Saris and helped ensure the telescope's safe passage. When the two present day descendants met for the first time at Hatfield House, a brief silence spread across the crowded room until the Marquess of Salisbury warmly shook Mr Matsura's hand and declared, "I think it's about time we met." Mr Matsura responded, "I hope the next 400 years will be even more successful than the first." Alluding to the fact that it was four hundred years and one day since the telescope was given, Nicolas Maclean commented, "This is the first day of the next four years."



*A close encounter after 400 years - Mr Akira Matsura, descendant of the ruler of Hirado and the Marquess of Salisbury, descendant of the 1st Earl of Salisbury.*

A lunch was held to celebrate the historic Saris-Tokugawa encounter and the first public appearance of the newly crafted spyglass.<sup>5</sup> It was announced that the beautifully crafted instrument was to be a gift to the Japanese people from Japan400, being given as a renewal of the original gift. It is hoped it will symbolise the centuries-long exchanges in culture, diplomacy and trade between the two great nations as well as the long-standing and mutual cooperation in science and technology.



*The inscription on the telescope plaque*

Later that same day, the telescope made its second public outing, this time at the world-famous Tower of London, where the Shogun's gift to King James, a magnificent suit of Japanese armour, is on display. The stunning telescope was

symbolically placed in front of the armour during its public viewing. This was a well-attended gathering and was comprehensively covered by the media. Despite these two public excursions, there was still a tremendous amount of internal work to be completed on the telescope. Therefore, after its day in the sun, it was returned to the workshop of expert craftsman and telescope maker Ian Poyser, which is located in the beautiful Welsh hamlet of Ystrad Meurig.

While work continued on the telescope, word spread of its construction. This created a huge demand for further opportunities to view the elegant instrument. So it was again temporarily taken from Mr. Poyser's rural workshop and the public were furnished with another chance to see it. This time at the "Two Cultures United by Tea" event organized by Japan400 and held at the magnificent Banqueting House in Whitehall on Sunday 15 September 2013.<sup>6</sup> At this spacious location many people were able to admire it and the general impression of the gleaming brass device was extremely favourable. 'It looks brilliant,' remarked one enthusiastic 11-year-old boy upon seeing it. This was perhaps the best chance the British public had to see it before it returned once again to Mr Poyser's workshop for a final series of refinements to its optical array. Like the original telescope, it was destined to be dispatched to Japan, but fortunately there would be one final opportunity to view it before it left the UK.



*Tea and Telescope steal the show at Banqueting House - Japan400 co-chairs Professor Timon Screech and Nicolas Maclean CMG with the Duke of Gloucester and Mr Akio Miyajima, Minister Plenipotentiary of Japan*

On 17 January 2014, Japan400 and the University of Cambridge organized a unique seminar entitled 'From King James's Telescope to the Present and the Future: the Japan-British partnership in science and technology' at Jesus College, Cambridge, which is one of the university's most ancient colleges.<sup>7</sup> This conference was kindly sponsored by the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and Toshiba of Europe and functioned as a farewell event for the telescope. A highly distinguish academic gathering was assembled to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Japan-British scientific relations and bid adieu to the glistening optical device. Speakers included Lord Rees FRS, Astronomer Royal, Professor Roberto Cipolla, Professor Eileen Reeves from Princeton University, Sir Peter Williams, former Chairman of Oxford Instruments, and Professor Ian White, Master of Jesus College, *inter alios*.<sup>8</sup> The highly engaging symposium was chaired by Professor Timon Screech and Nicolas Maclean CMG, the co-chairmen of Japan400 and by Professor Roberto Cipolla, Fellow of Jesus College. The main focus of the day-long seminar was on Japan-British partnerships in scientific instruments and global science & technology over the 400 year period since King James initiated official ties by presenting the original silver-gilt spyglass to Tokugawa Ieyasu.



*A Farewell for the Telescope - From King James's Telescope to the Present and the Future – Symposium and Celebration of the Departure of the Japan400 Telescope for Japan*

After the stimulating conference, there was a dinner in honour of the departing telescope, which was placed in a prominent position. The meal was held in one of the oldest parts of the college, which was built on the site of a twelfth-century Benedictine nunnery. This ancient venue gave the proceedings an almost spiritual quality and as I looked at the telescope, it made me recall the Bible passage, "Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost (Luke 15:9, King James Version).

The dinner was attended by many of the conference speakers, representatives of the sponsors<sup>9</sup> along with the generous funder of the restoration project Robin Maynard MBE and his wife Midori, both of whom had also attended the symposium. Professor Lynn Gladden, the University's Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research, gave the main after dinner speech, several others also spoke including Robin Maynard, the telescope's sponsor, who gave a well-received and entertaining speech.

After its farewell party, the next phase of the telescope's life begins with its departure to Japan, arranged by Japan400. It will firstly be proudly on display at No. 1 House at the British Embassy in Tokyo. This will be for several months until HM The Queen's Official Birthday Reception. Then it will tour a number of Japanese cities with strong British historical connections, before finally coming to rest in Shizuoka City. The telescope will be a key part of the Ieyasu400 celebrations, which will commemorate the life of the great Japanese leader Tokugawa Ieyasu, who died in June 1616. The telescope will eventually be placed on permanent display in a specially reconstructed tower of Sunpu Castle in Shizuoka City. This impressive structure is being built for Ieyasu400 and should be ready by 2015.

It is sincerely hoped that the magnificent telescope, which has been given as a permanent gift to the Japanese people, will be a prominent symbol of the longevity and mutually beneficial partnership between the two nations in cultural, scientific, technological, commercial and all other types of exchange.



*Artist's impression of the planned reconstruction of the tower of Sunpu Castle which will be the permanent home of the telescope in Shizuoka City.*

### **Notes**

1) John Saris was Commander of the 8th East India Company voyage, and as such held a post much more senior than that of a ship's captain. The mission was made up of three ships, of which only the Clove went all the way to Japan. His commission was to go to Yemen and the Spice Islands first, primarily to seek trade, and then to Japan, if possible. Because his first two ports of call were not especially successful, Saris was even more motivated to go on to Japan.

2) Saris' journals were published in 1900, as 'The Voyage of Captain John Saris to Japan, 1613,' edited by British scholar, diplomat and Japanologist Sir Ernest M. Satow. Saris died in 1643, and is buried at All Saints Church, Fulham, London

3) We assume Salisbury was involved with the Clove dispatch preparations, but there is no clear historic evidence on show this. The East India Company would have done a majority of the work, although Salisbury would most probably have been the most likely person to have ensured the King's cooperation, as well as arranged the letter and presents.

4) Saris opened a trading post and factory in Hirado, which he subsequently handed over to his colleague Richard Cocks upon departing in December 1613. Cocks managed the trading post for almost a decade before he was recalled by the British East India Company.

5) Some of those who also attended the celebratory lunch held at Hatfield House on Monday 9 September 2013 and not mentioned in the main article

included Mr. Akio Miyajima, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Japanese Embassy, Mr. Yuichiro Hanyu, Director of the Japan Local Government Centre, Mr. Takaaki Hanaoka, Secretary General of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the UK, Professor Kozo Hiramatsu, Director of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, and Mr. Sean Curtin, Director of the Japan Matsuri.

6) The Banqueting House ceiling represents the 'Apotheosis of King James I,' and 'The Peaceful Reign of James I.' It depicts 'The Union of the Crowns' and was painted by Sir Peter Paul Rubens. James was king of Scotland from 1567 until 1603, when he also became the first Stuart king of England and Ireland as well, so creating the kingdom of Great Britain. He is often referred to as King James I of England and VI of Scotland. The kingdoms of Scotland and England remained individual sovereign states, keeping their own separate parliaments, judiciary, and laws, even though they were both ruled by James.

7) The First Astronomer Royal, John Flamsteed, nominated in 1675, spent some time at Jesus College and his portrait is on display in the Master's Lodge. In September 1670, Flamsteed entered his name as an undergraduate at Jesus College, but never appears to have taken up full residence.

8) Other speakers at the "From King James's Telescope to the Present and the Future" seminar held at the Jesus College, Cambridge on 17 January 2014 included Professor Paul Alexander of Jesus College, Professor Fumiya Iida from ETH, Zurich, and Professor David Cope of Clare Hall, and former Director of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology.

9) The conference sponsors were represented by Mr. Koshi Noguchi, Vice President-Corporate Government and External Relations, Toshiba of Europe Limited, Dr. Hironori Asai, Deputy Managing Director, Cambridge Research Laboratory, Toshiba Research Europe Limited, and Professor Roberto Cipolla FREng, Managing Director, Cambridge Research Laboratory, and by the Earl of St. Andrews, Chairman of the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and by Mr. Stephen McEnally, Chief Executive, Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation.