

Remarks by H.E. Mr HAYASHI Hajime,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
on the Occasion of the Bestowal of
The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon
upon Sir Neil Cossons
on Monday 12 February 2024

Distinguished Guests,

It is a great privilege for me to present the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon to Sir Neil Cossons. Sir Neil has been instrumental in raising awareness of the process of industrialisation in Japan and its industrial heritage, and thereby he contributed to promoting mutual understanding between Japan and the United Kingdom.

As a pioneer in industrial archaeology and a renowned industrial historian, Sir Neil made profound achievements as Director of the Science Museum London, the most famous museum of the world in this field, until 2000. In 1991 the Science Museum organised “Robotics Japan”, a showcase of various Japanese robots and related technologies during the Japan Festival. Furthermore, in 1998 the Science Museum took a touring exhibition to Japan, introducing the historical aspects of British science and technology to the Japanese people. It was the first time for the museum to organise a large-scale event based on the British Industrial Revolution overseas through the loan of its valuable collections, including famous Stevenson's steam locomotive. This struck a chord with people in Japan as the exhibits conjured up the period when their ancestors were inspired by such British products to advance the country's modernisation process in the latter half of the 19th century.

Sir Neil's more recent contribution concerns the “Industrial Revolutionary Sites of Meiji Japan”, inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2015. This consist of 23 locations in eight prefectures where visitors can witness the history of Japan's industrial development. Based on his expertise and experience in this field, he played a valuable role in helping to bring about the registration of these locations as World Heritage sites.

Sir Neil made a great effort to help Japan nominate these places as World Heritage sites because he believed that the traces of development scattered throughout Japan, which would otherwise have been overlooked by the Japanese people themselves, Sir Neil provided his wisdom by constantly expressing that these places should be preserved as part of the history of human development and passed on to the people of today and the future. As such, they embody the “Outstanding Universal Value” that is an essential feature of World Heritage sites. Sir Neil still continues to promote the value of the sites at various international conferences and lectures.

The “Industrial Revolutionary Sites of Meiji Japan” do not just represent Japan’s heritage but reflect the history of Japan’s modernisation as a salient example of development outside Europe in the 19th century. They are also a symbol of the strong bonds between Japan and the UK in the sense that many of them attest to how Japan embraced industrialisation through absorbing considerable knowledge and technology from the world, in particular from the Victorian Britain, during a process that began around 160 years ago.

Sir Neil’s dedication to raising awareness of the significance of the industrial heritage of both Japan and the UK and to promoting recognition of the special bonds between the two countries established through the process of Japan’s industrial development make him a truly deserving recipient of this outstanding honour.

Congratulations, Sir Neil.