

Remarks by H.E. Mr Hiroshi Suzuki, Ambassador
of Japan to the UK,
at the presentation ceremony of the Foreign
Minister's Commendation to
Mrs Rachel Barclay on 17th April 2026

Mrs Barclay,
Distinguished guests,

Thank you very much for coming to the
Japanese Embassy for today's presentation
ceremony.

It is my privilege as Ambassador of Japan to
the UK to present the Foreign Minister's
Commendation to Mrs Rachel Barclay.

Mrs Barclay started her work as a curator at Durham University's Oriental Museum in 2008. For nearly 20 years ever since, she has devoted herself to introducing Japanese culture and history, and to promoting academic and cultural exchange between Japan and the UK.

The Oriental Museum is one of the few institutions in the UK which has a permanent Japanese exhibition. It serves as a valuable place of learning about Japan not only for people attending Durham university but also for local primary and secondary school students.

Over the years, Mrs Barclay has organised many exhibitions related to Japan. One example is “The Happy Carp: New Japanese Works”. It was a woodblock print exhibition featuring works by Japanese printmakers, sharing the rich variety of Japanese culture with people across the UK.

More recently, in cooperation with the National Museum of Japanese History, she helped present the exhibition “Memories of the Squire Family”, held first in Japan and now on display in the Oriental Museum.

The Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle once said, “The history of the world is but the biography of great men”. However, this exhibition gently rewrites that idea.

Mr George Squire was a British engineer who travelled to Japan more than 120 years ago to work in factory management at a Japanese paper mill in Kokura, Kyushu.

Mr Squire was not a famous historical figure, but the story of Mr Squire and his family— of the lives they happily pursued in Japan — shows us that history is made through the efforts of many people, not by a single illustrious person.

Mrs Barclay also played a key role in the signing of a cooperation agreement between Durham university and the National Museum of Japanese History. Through this arrangement, she has promoted academic exchange, joint research, exhibition collaboration, and the training of young researchers, thereby greatly advancing Japan-UK scholarly partnership.

We have received a congratulatory message from the National Museum of Japanese History, which will be read later.

At present, many universities in the UK are facing increasing challenges, particularly in the study of humanities. In this difficult environment, Mrs Barclay's long-standing dedication to introducing Japanese culture and developing Japanese Studies in northeast England is truly remarkable.

Today's Foreign Minister's Commendation is a sincere expression of our deep gratitude for her many years of contributions.

I would also like to express my respect to her husband, Dr Craig Barclay. Without his support, Mrs Barclay could not have made such great achievements.

In conclusion, let me congratulate Mrs Barclay once again for receiving the Foreign Minister's commendation, and look forward to her continued success in promoting cultural and academic exchange between Japan and the UK.

Thank you very much.