

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

Firstly, I'd like to thank the Asiatic Society of Jaapan for this opportunity to address you all tonight. It's a great honour and I hope that by the end of the talk you'll agree that tonight's topic has something in it for everyone.

Before I begin, I'd like to mention that this is really more of a summary of the S. Shobey Silk Store and its interesting place in history. There isn't time tonight to go into a lot of detail about some of the things that will be mentioned, but I'd like to give you a general outline of this interesting and historical silk store as well as some of the items that have been discovered so far.

The photo that started it all

My interest in the S. Shobey Silk Store, probably like many other people's interests in various things, came about by accident. I became interested in the early contacts between the West and

Japan, especially towards the end of the Edo era. This led me to old photos taken in Japan in the Bakumatsu and Meiji eras so I spent quite a lot of time looking for and buying them when I could. One day in 2005, I bought this photo (SLIDE) which shows Honcho-dori, or Main Street, in Yokohama taken by a photographer named Kusakabe Kimbei around the year 1885. Kimbei studied photography under Felice Beato and Baron Stillfried and opened his studio in 1881 but that is another story. The photo is hand-coloured and about A4 size. It shows the atmosphere of the street in those days with the shops along it very nicely. Actually, I bought the photo on the Internet and I thought it was just a nice Yokohama street scene. When it arrived about a week later, I was surprised to see that on the right, if I looked closely, there was a shop sign that was visible around here (SLIDE/POINT). As you can see here in this close-up view (SLIDE), you can just make out the sign and it reads 'S. Shobey Silk Store'. I became interested in finding out more so I googled the name and was surprised to see that the company still seemed to be operating. Not long after that, I called the number on the

website and spoke to a man who was very interested to hear about the photo and wanted to see it. On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1923, the Great Kanto Earthquake struck, killing around 140,000 people and the S. Shobey Silk Store, along with countless other buildings either collapsed, were destroyed by fire, or both. Sadly, all the records and stock of the company were lost that day and the business as it was previously known more or less ended. The man who I spoke with on the phone invited me to an event they were holding and I gladly accepted the invitation. I showed him the photo and he was excited to see the sign with the shop's name. It was the first time he had seen that photo. That day was the beginning of a kind of quest that still continues today; a quest to try to track down other items made by, or related to, the S. Shobey Silk Store. The man I spoke to that day, and later met, was Mr. Hidesato Shiino, the great grandson of the founder, but I'll talk a little bit more about him later.

(SLIDE) An even earlier photo

In 2007, another interesting coincidence concerning a different old photograph occurred. Terry Bennett, the well-known photo historian listed an old photo album for sale in one of his catalogues. The rare album was of the First National Industrial Exhibition (or the Naikoku Kangyo Hakurankai in Japanese), which was held in Ueno, Tokyo in 1877 and the photos in the album were taken by Mr. Shinji Matsuzawa. Each prefecture displayed items made by local manufacturers. Although there were 118 photographs in this album, Terry Bennett selected just two prefectural photos for his catalogue and, by coincidence, one of them was of Kanagawa prefecture's booth. In that photo, on the left (SLIDE/POINT), we can see a glass case containing some ladies' gowns (SLIDE). On the top of the case, we can easily make out the words (SLIDE) S. Shobey ...ore - Yokohama written in English and Japanese. Importantly, the gowns can be seen in some detail (SLIDE) so that gives us an idea of a couple of Shobey's designs at the time. Of course, the other nice thing about this photo is that it can be dated precisely to 1877, making it the earliest known photograph relating to the S. Shobey Silk Store.

Surely some other early photos of the store or other events that Shobey participated in exist, but they are yet to be found.

Mr. Shobei Shiino (1839-1900)

The S. Shobey Silk Store was founded in the year 1859 (Ansei 6), by Mr. Shobei Shiino (椎野正兵衛) (SLIDE) the same year that Yokohama opened to the West. He was born in 1839 in Odawara, Kanagawa prefecture into a family that was well connected with the government. He was just 19 or 20 years old when he started his business. It is believed he realized, or was told, that his family name, Shiino, was difficult for Westerners to read and/or pronounce so he decided to shorten it to 'S' and make his given name Shobei easier to read by changing the 'i' to a 'y', thus the name S. Shobey was born. He hung a sign reading 'S. Shobey Silk Store' outside his shop at No. 28 Honcho-dori, Yokohama's main street. From now on in this talk I will refer to him as Shobey.

Not much is known about the early years (i.e. the 1860s) of the business but Shobey opened a factory at Kiryu in Gunma in the

early 1860s to produce the silk he needed. The Meiji government selected Shobey to join the Japanese group attending the 1873 Vienna World's Fair in order to investigate the European silk market and to get ideas for new products. This was the first international exposition that the Meiji government officially participated in. Although at the second London International Exposition of 1862, a Japan booth was set up to display items collected by Sir Rutherford Alcock, the then British diplomatic representative in Japan. Then at the second Paris International Exposition of 1867, the shogunate, the Satsuma clan and the Saga clan exhibited some items as well. For the Vienna World's Fair in 1873, the Meiji government decided that in order to promote a new, more enlightened Japan to the world, some impressive exhibits would be necessary, so in an area the size of about 1,300 tsubo (1 tsubo = approx. 3.31 m<sup>2</sup>), the government built a Shinto shrine and a Japanese garden featuring a white wooden gate. Behind the gate were the shrine's main structure, a traditional music and dance hall, and an arched bridge. At the Industrial Pavilion, the government exhibited ukiyoe works and industrial

art products. The exhibits that drew public attention included the Kinshachi (golden dolphins) of Nagoya Castle, a model of the Great Buddha of Kamakura, a model of a five-story pagoda approximately four meters high, a big drum about two meters in diameter, as well as a lantern four meters in diameter with a picture of a dragon on a waterfall. All in all, it must have been quite an impressive sight.

Shobey was a logical choice for this trip to Vienna as his business had already been going for about 14 years and he was already dealing with Western customers so his brand name was becoming more well known. After he returned from Vienna, he continued to make high quality, handmade silk clothing and accessories targeting the Western market overseas as well as Westerners living in Japan. There isn't time tonight to discuss the silk industry in Japan but, as you may know, the Tomioka Silk Mill in Gunma was established in 1872 by the Meiji government and Europe was still affected by silkworm disease that meant European silk imports from Japan were continuing to increase, so

the 1870s were a very active time for the Japanese silk industry. An entry in 'Japan Biographical Encyclopedia and Who's Who', published in English in 1958, mentions Shobey's business success and I'll read the entry (SLIDE/READ).

'Shiino Shōbē (1839-1896) Businessman. Born in Kanagawa Prefecture. He exported textiles early in the Meiji Era and made a great fortune. His establishment was well known as Ono-Shō. After an inspection tour abroad (1875), he expanded his business and set up mills in Yokohama and elsewhere for manufacture of silk handkerchiefs for export. Also developed export trade of necktie, shawl, embroidery and other textile manufactures. Contributed much to the development of embroidery in Japan.'

Note that Shobey's year of death here appears to be incorrect and also it is unclear whether the 'inspection tour abroad (1875)' mentioned is actually the Vienna World's Fair of 1873 or another trip made by Shobey. 'Ono-Sho' was the name of the holding company of the S. Shobey Silk Store.

It is said that there were three-year waiting lists for his custom made, hand embroidered gowns such as the one on display here (POINT) tonight.

## Shobey's Range of Products

Shobey advertised in numerous English guide books and the earliest ad appears in the 1880 edition of the Japan Directory (SLIDE). As you can see, Shobey advertised clothes for men, women and children along with, (READ) 'Smoking jackets, hats, curtains, handkerchiefs, dressing gowns, neckties (for men and women), embroideries, fringes, tobacco pouches, card cases and all kinds of cloth, silk, brocade and crape.' In this ad from the late 1880s, (SLIDE) he also mentions, (POINT/READ) 'Tea & dressing gowns, jackets, kimonos, pyjamas, bed & table covers, cushion covers, sashes, shawls, parasols, doilies and screens,' so Shobey was producing and selling a wide range of silk products. Here are a couple more examples of Shobey's advertisements (SLIDE) from hotel guide books published in the 1890s in Yokohama. Note that

this one (SLIDE) mentions '16 Silver and bronze medals awarded' which of refers to the awards he won at various World's Fairs.

## The Box

In 2009, a very interesting item was listed for sale on the Internet and was acquired by the great grandson. The item was a box made of thin wood and coated in urushi (lacquer) measuring about this size (INDICATE). The box was found in the attic of an old Cape Cod, Massachusetts estate. The box had a S. Shobey label (SLIDE) on it so it was obviously made for a Shobey dressing gown. Inside the box was a very interesting typed note (POINT) that reads, 'Dressing-Gown made for Mrs. John Heppingstone in Yokohama in 1860. Mr. Heppingstone was a cousin of Dr. David Livingstone. Presented by Mrs. Albert Mathews of South Yarmouth, Mass." John Heppingstone (1831-1914) was a whaling captain (SLIDE) who was born in Western Australia. In the late 1850's he met Adelaide Coffin Morgan (1835-1901) and they apparently eloped and were married in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1861.

It is unlikely that Adelaide sailed to Japan with John and chose this dressing gown herself because he was still a young sailor then (about 30 years old) so we can assume that John purchased it from the S. Shobey Silk Store knowing his future wife's measurements. Considering the date of 1860, it's tempting to think it may have been a silk wedding dress because they were married in 1861, but it was probably a dressing gown as mentioned in the note inside the box. Based on the 1860 date, this is the earliest known S. Shobey item to have been found. Unfortunately, it is not known what happened to the dressing gown itself. The connection to David Livingstone also mentioned in the note hasn't been researched yet but apparently it is true. This S. Shobey dressing gown box is one of the most exciting discoveries made so far.

### References to S. Shobey in Meiji era books

The S. Shobey Silk Store is mentioned in a number of English publications from 1868 onwards and I'll show you some of them.

The earliest reference in English to the S. Shobey Silk Store that has been found so far is in a periodical (SLIDE) titled The China Magazine, a Weekly Miscellany corrected by C. Langdon Davies and published in Hong Kong in 1868. (POINT TO DATE). This is an article titled, 'A Trip to Japan' and the pertinent section refers to a visit to Yokohama and reads, (POINT/READ)

'The principal town industry seems to be the selling of curios, or rather the trying to sell them. The trade is a slow one and customers are few and far between, even in the best locality – 'Curio Street', which is a fine wide thoroughfare. The stocks in some of the shops are very large, and, if they are really worth the quoted prices, extremely valuable. Their system of demanding much more than they will accept renders shopping very tedious and unsatisfactory; and the prices generally paid are very much in advance of those for which articles can be purchased in Hongkong. It seems that most of the shops are mere agencies, or branch establishments, in the care of a shopman, with a few assistants at small salaries, none of them having any interest in the result of

the business.’

And below that, (POINT/READ)

‘The best time to purchase is the day before the Mail steamer leaves, when the shopkeepers, thinking it is their last chance, will sell at more reasonable prices. There are a few cases of exceptional fair dealing, such as Shobey’s silk shop, and one or two ivory ware stores, where they will not abate their price. Shobey marks all his silks in English figures, and makes no abatement.’ (p.105)

The 1872 book, ‘Other Countries’ by Major William Morrison Bell (SLIDE), who travelled the world in 1871, contains another positive Shobey reference, namely, (SLIDE/READ)

‘Shobey,’ the silk man, is a very good tradesman, and his silk dressing-gowns, at 8 dollars each, are cheap.’

In a book called, 'Dottings Around the Circle', written in 1876 by Benjamin Robbins Curtis, who went on a trip around the world in 1875, (SLIDE, Note that this is the 1878 5<sup>th</sup> edition), a reference can be found to Shobey. It reads (SLIDE/POINT/READ),

'August 28 [1875] – We spend the morning in Curio Street, and are delighted with the multitude of beautiful and useful things that are to be found everywhere. One of the first places a foreigner should visit is Shobey's silk-store, where silk articles of all sorts can be obtained at prices which seem incredible. Magnificent bed-spreads, with a monogram exquisitely embroidered on one side; elegant dressing-gowns and smoking-jackets of heavy quilted silk; handkerchief-cases, monogram pincushions, scarfs, embroidered handkerchiefs, sofa-pillows, screens, - all these are to be found, of the finest quality and the best workmanship.'

Another reference can be found in the Japan Weekly Mail of June 16, 1883, (SLIDE) and concerned a fire that broke out in Yokohama. We can see that the S. Shobey Silk Store was by now

well known enough to be referred to as a shop most would know, namely,

‘At about 0.20am on Tuesday a fire broke out in the narrow street running parallel with Honcho Dori, just at the back of Shobey’s silk store. In a remarkably short time the engines and fire brigade were on the spot...’ (June 16, 1883 p.149)

Lastly, in the 1891 Club Hotel Guide (SLIDE) written by Douglas Sladen, he mentions, (SLIDE/READ)

‘Yokohama is a great place for buying silks. Most ladies spend a good deal of time at Shobey’s or Nozawayaya, and the former has I think the best stock of silk handkerchiefs I ever saw.’

### Shobey at World’s Fairs

As mentioned earlier, Shobey was sent to the Vienna World’s Fair in 1873 (SLIDE). He was sent there not only to learn more about

the European market and what kinds of new products would be in demand, but also to exhibit there. He subsequently exhibited at most World's Fairs until his death in 1900, including Philadelphia in 1876 (SLIDE), then Paris in 1878 and then Australia at the Melbourne International Exhibition in 1880. I'd like to show you the entries in the Official Record (SLIDE) for this 1880 Exhibition in Melbourne but before that, a general description of 'The Japanese Court' (SLIDE).

'.....There were also large show-cases of beautiful manufactured silks, materials for dresses; and bright designs of flowers and birds, and tapestries, for decorative purposes. Some handsome silk coverings were embroidered with flowers. One piece was ornamented with the stem of a tree, from which branches forked in all directions, with long delicately-coloured leaves. The loveliest groups, and single birds, clustered about these, the dark-blue glossy plumage and white breast standing out with great beauty against the very light-blue background. Embroidered silk shawls were also displayed – waste silk fabrics, and photographs of every

kind of machine and loom in use for silk manufacture. Silk and cotton carpetings were shown, and various cotton and hemp fabrics.' And.....

'Silk cravats and handkerchiefs, fancy neckties, and umbrellas were amongst the clothing.'

No doubt some of the items mentioned were made by S. Shobey. As we can see here (SLIDE/POINT), S. Shobey exhibited in three categories, namely, embroidered silk shawls, (POINT) silk handkerchiefs, and cravats of crape as well as (POINT) ladies' silk gowns. Shobey was awarded for both his dressing gowns (SLIDE/POINT) and his shawls (SLIDE/POINT).

### A Note on Scarves

In the summary of my talk I mentioned that there is 'evidence' that Shobey was the first to make 'decorative scarves.' I probably should have written 'anecdotal evidence' as the evidence is based

on a story that has been passed down through the Shiino family. The story goes that Empress Shoken, the wife of Emperor Meiji had requested Shobey to bring some silk products for her to see. Amongst the items he brought were some hand embroidered handkerchiefs. She was interested in their decorative designs and suddenly picked one up and tied it around her neck. As she was a rather petite lady, it was easy to tie the handkerchief around her neck. This supposedly happened around 1874 after the Vienna World's Fair and before the Philadelphia Fair when embroidered scarves were exhibited for the first time. Prior to this there apparently were similar items sometimes worn around the neck but they were predominantly white and made of cotton or silk. Sometimes ladies wore scarves on their heads. Similar items have been worn since ancient times but more for practical reasons of cleanliness (i.e. to wipe away sweat) than as a decorative accessory. So perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Shobey may have been the first to produce decorative, embroidered silk scarves specifically designed to be worn around the neck as a fashion accessory. It would be interesting to find out

more about this as the history of scarves seems to be somewhat unclear because of the overlapping uses of handkerchiefs, scarves and shawls.

Miss Thomas (SLIDE)

Last year a very interesting and tantalising reference to Shobey was found. It appeared in an obscure monthly art journal published in Australia in 1885. (SLIDE). Allow me to read it.  
SLIDE/POINT/READ.

‘Lady artists like Rose Bonheur, Elizabeth Thompson, and even Miss Eleanor Bell, are rare in every clime and age, but Sydney may be proud to possess, in Miss Thomas, a lady practicing and teaching a peculiarly feminine branch of real fine art, viz:- the highest class of embroidery. Miss Thomas is a pupil, and clearly a very gifted one, of Shobey, the celebrated art embroiderer to the Government of Japan, at Yokohama, under whom she studied for several years. Subsequently she proceeded to London, in order to

start the fashionable and highly appreciated school of embroidery at Liberty's, the well-known dealer in Japanese and other Oriental art-products in Regent Street. Miss Thomas has now elected to settle in Sydney, where she will shortly open a studio of her own for the sale of the charming creations of her pen and needle, and for the instruction of ladies in her fascinating art. When one thinks of the perennial horrors of shop-sold dresses, mantel-boards, piano-fronts, antimacassars, and Beelzebub only knows what, it must be patent to everyone how vast a field of practical and everyday aestheticism lays before this enterprising young lady. Miss Thomas, as we understand, has sent to Japan for various belongings that she left there; but meanwhile she has with her a few examples of her work, which are to be seen at Mr. Levy's gallery, where the artist herself may also be interviewed. Among the most noticeable are a full-sized quilt of delicate azure blue repped silk, the decorative treatment of which is exquisitely conceived and carried out, and a set of flower and foliage groups, embroidered on black velvet, and intended to form the panels of a screen. But the gem of all, perhaps, is a costume of Lyons silk

velvet of the richest purple, the delicate and lovely sprays on which are quite entrancing. Heath or apple-blossom, sedge or lily, Miss Thomas is equally at home in all; and while her work will almost bear comparison in finish and minutest execution with the celebrated church embroideries of Bruges, it possesses the freedom, freshness, and true living vegetable growth for which Japanese decorative art is so remarkable, further refined by the proverbial good taste of a cultured English lady. The essence of individuality of bird and insect are also depicted with singular ability combined with some degree of quaintness; and like Friar Pacificus' illumination in the Golden Legend, the work in general may be truthfully described as finished, 'Down to the eyes on the peacock's tail.'

This intriguing reference of course leads us to Liberty's department store in London, which was founded in 1875 and is still in business today in Regent Street. (SLIDE).

Although I haven't yet been able to discover much more about Miss Thomas, there was a Captain Thomas and a Miss Thomas

who are listed in the 1884 Japan Directory living on the Bluff at 24A but, with Thomas being a very common family name, it has been difficult to confirm so far. It also hasn't been confirmed whether she lived in Australia before she went to Japan but it seems logical that she did. Even though she is described as an 'English lady' in the article, remember that prior to 1901, Australia was not a nation but a continent that consisted of six British colonies (New South Wales, Victoria etc.) so basically everyone living in Australia then was British. Considering the reference mentions she lived in Japan for a few years to learn embroidery and the article is from 1885, one theory of mine is that Miss Thomas may have seen Shobey items exhibited at the Melbourne Expo in 1880 and became interested, or even fascinated, by the embroideries on display. Again, this is only speculation but perhaps she met Shobey at the fair and she asked about learning the art of Japanese embroidery. Then maybe she decided to go to Japan from 1881-1883 and then went to England to start Liberty of London's first embroidery school. Then she is back in Australia by 1885 and holds her exhibition in Sydney. The

fact that she was selected to establish Liberty of London's first embroidery school, if true, means she was highly skilled at embroidering. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to find any more information about her from Liberty but I'll be in London in September this year so will see if more information about Miss Thomas can be found.

Another reference to her Sydney exhibition is in the Sydney Morning Herald newspaper of November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1885. (SLIDE) It contains basically the same information as the journal article but also mentions the exhibition by Miss Thomas has, 'attracted a great deal of attention,' and that, 'the work is exquisite, and the designs are admirable in form and colour.'

In Linda Cluckie's book, 'The Rise and Fall of Art Needlework – Its Socio-Economic and Cultural Aspects.' (London, Arena Books, 2008), she devotes a whole chapter to Liberty and its business selling oriental wares. She mentions Christopher Dresser's visit to Japan from 1876 to 1877 and that he, 'devoted a chapter on

Japanese embroidery in [his book] *Japan, its Architecture, Art and Art Manufacturers*, published in 1882 where he stated that embroidery was carried on as a manufacture and it seemed never to be practiced by ladies as an accomplishment, and that as in Europe it was men that designed the pattern to be stitched. This suggests that in principle there was the same division of hierarchy, men as designers, woman as executor, yet it implies that the creation of that work carried greater status. Embroidery was not deployed as a leisure pursuit, but was a mode of manufacture employing male and female staff.' (p.121). Regarding an embroidery school, she writes, 'It is not clear whether Liberty's costume department and needlework department were initially one and the same. It would appear they were opened at the same time, 1884, but later when embroidery became the signature of Liberty dress, the embroiderers were probably absorbed into the costume department. There was almost certainly an embroidery school, which is referred to in Liberty's *Catalogue of a Valuable Collection of Ancient and Modern Eastern Art* for an exhibition in November 1885. The catalogue listed many types of embroidery

from China, Japan, Spain, Portugal and Italy and included twelve items made by the Liberty School of Embroidery, stating that the school had completed its first year. The report apologised that the school were only able to exhibit a dozen items due to the large number of private commissions received, but at least the few items displayed would represent the style and character of the school's work.' So it is interesting that Miss Thomas is not mentioned at all in Ms. Cluckie's book. Hopefully more will be discovered about this adventurous lady, Miss Thomas, who seems to have immersed herself in the culture of Japanese embroidery in the late 1870s and/or early 1880s.

### The royal embroidery

In around 2011 a search for Shobey items showed that the Cooper Hewitt Collection at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington was in possession of an embroidered coat of arms made to commemorate Queen Victoria becoming the empress of India which occurred in 1877. The item was donated to the Smithsonian

in 2008 by Mr. Paul Walter, a collector of India-related items. Here is a picture of it. (SLIDE). It is a very deluxe embroidery using a lot of gold thread. At the lower left is a small stamp (SLIDE). As you can see here, the stamp reads, 'S. Shobey Silk Store, Yokohama, Japan'. About one year after this information was posted on the current S. Shobey Silk Store website, a man in England made contact with the S. Shobey Silk Store saying that he had a similar embroidery. After some negotiation, the great grandson managed to acquire it. Although this second embroidery isn't signed, it is clearly of the same quality as the one in the Smithsonian's collection and appears to be actually from the same roll of silk (IT IS ON DISPLAY TONIGHT) which may explain why doesn't have Shobey's stamp on it. It is not known who commissioned these items nor where they were displayed, but it's quite likely that they were requested to be made as Shobey had made two large embroideries for the Vienna World's Fair in 1873. One of them being the Japanese Emperor's chrysanthemum crest (SLIDE) and the other being an Austrian coat-of-arms (SLIDE). It is thought that the Queen Victoria embroideries would have been

hung in a British diplomatic office in India or the UK or possibly elsewhere. The fact that such embroideries for official occasions were made by Shobey also indicates that his products were known for their quality. One wonders whether other such embroideries were made for other royal occasions. Until others appear, we can only guess.

### Other Shobey Items

As we saw from the early Shobey advertisements, a wide range of products was made and sold. However, considering this, it is somewhat surprising that only a few items have been found so far that were definitely made by Shobey. We know they were made by him because they were found with their original box and/or label. These include a roll of unused silk dyed blue in its original wooden Shobey cylindrical container (SLIDE), about this long, and dating from the 1860s, it is believed because it is the same type of dark, lacquered wooden material as the Heppingstone dressing gown box. It has its original Shobey label (SLIDE) and it is thought that

this roll of silk would have been bought by a foreign visitor to Yokohama and the material (SLIDE) looks as if it was going to be made into a pair of silk trousers. Some small printed silk squares in their original box (SLIDE) that appear to be from the 1890s have also been found and they are on display here tonight, too. Aside from these few items, some beautiful gowns that are almost certainly by Shobey have also been found (SLIDE) (SLIDE) and this last one (SLIDE) is the only one that has been found so far with its original S. Shobey tag, which has the same stamp as was found on the embroidery at the Smithsonian. This dress is in the collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute and dates from about 1875. It is logical to assume that more items are waiting to be discovered, especially in Europe or the US, where some big, old homes still contain such vintage clothing and accessories. It would be wonderful if a smoking jacket or embroidered bedspread, for example, turned up somewhere. Now that you all know a little about the S. Shobey Silk Store, please keep your eyes open and let me know if you come across any vintage Shobey items!

Mr. Hidesato Shiino

Lastly, I'd like to talk a little about the great grandson of Shiino Shobey, who could easily be the topic of another whole talk! He was born in Yokohama in 1947 and grew up there. As a young man he enjoyed making things and loved jazz music. He joined Yamaha Music in 1968 and ended up making guitars by hand. Being somewhat of a perfectionist like his great grandfather, he was only satisfied making the best quality guitars. To understand his quest for quality, he even took apart a Stadivarius violin to try to learn more about the secrets of its sound, the way the wood was carved, as well as its varnish, and then reassembled it! Here is a photo of someone playing one of his handmade guitars. (SLIDE)

Does anybody recognise him? Apparently, Prince was very fond of this guitar and used it for many years from the early 1980s onwards. Mr. Shiino also made guitars used by Stevie Wonder, George Benson and Earth, Wind & Fire amongst many others. In 1977, he established his own company and there he delved into the world of making high quality amplifiers and other musical

equipment as well, again all made by hand. His guitars are well known in the music world and originals are very collectable. He has been described as, '...the legendary Japanese luthier Hidesato Shiino' according to a website listing one of his guitars for sale. Although his own father wasn't involved in the silk business (he worked for the government), Mr. Shiino knew about his great grandfather's work and in the early 1990s he started investigating the feasibility of restarting the S. Shobey Silk Store. The idea would be for it to be like the restarting of an art rather than a business. He wanted to produce the highest quality silk products and he spent five years researching what would be necessary to achieve the rebirth of the brand. The products would only be completely made in Japan with 100% Japanese silk. The date he chose to relaunch the S. Shobey Silk Store was 22/2/2002 (February 22nd, 2002), signifying the second coming of the brand. Over the past sixteen years an array of silk products has been produced. Numerous events have been held and links with Yokohama silk and the Tomioka Silk Mill in Gunma have been made. He managed to re-establish the brand virtually

single-handedly, with all designs and marketing done by him. When the G8 summit was held at Toyako, Hokkaido in 2008, S. Shobey products were also given as gifts to the overseas visitors. Also, when the International Olympic Committee meeting was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2013 and Tokyo was selected to host the 2020 Olympics, the then Tokyo Governor, Mr. Naoki Inose and his team gave S. Shobey products as gifts to other IOC committee members. The cost of producing the best silk items in Japan is high but he truly believes that quality is worth paying for and there are still customers who also know this.

Finally, I'd like you to recall the embroidery made to commemorate Queen Victoria becoming Empress of India in 1877. When Shobey's great grandson, Mr. Hidesato Shiino heard about the embroidery, the seed of an idea was planted. The idea was to send some of the highest quality S. Shobey products to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and inform the Queen about this interesting royal connection. In late 2016, contact with

Buckingham Palace was made and Her Majesty's private secretary informed the S. Shobey Silk Store that such gifts would be gratefully accepted. This was actually quite difficult because, understandably, the royal family tends not to accept gifts as they would probably receive items every day but, because of the historical connection, it was possible to do so. Here is a slide of the items sent (SLIDE) and the letter of thanks from Buckingham Palace confirming that her majesty had received them (SLIDE). It reads,

‘Dear Mr. Shiino. The Queen has asked me to thank you for your kind letter and for your gift of silk scarves from the Shiino Shobey Silk Store, which Her Majesty was pleased to receive at Buckingham Palace. It was extremely thoughtful of you to send these items to The Queen. This message comes to you with Her Majesty’s good wishes. Your sincerely, Edwards Young, The Deputy Private Secretary to The Queen’

Thank you very much.

If you have any questions, I'll do my best to answer them.