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THE TO-KEN SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN 刀
for the Study and Preservation of Japanese Swords and Fittings



HON. PRESIDENT, KAZUTARO TORIGOYE, Dr. Litt.
SECRETARY, JEFFREY RODFORD.

PROGRAMME

Next Meeting Wednesday, 6th January, 1965. 7.30 p.m. Tudor
Room, Fulham Conservative Club, 4 Shorrolds Road, S.W.6.

SWORD THEME A general debate and appraisal session based on
Bon Dales talk of last meeting. Bring any blades you
believe to be perfect or have any of the flaws or
qualities mentioned. We should have some fun. The
talk is recorded in this programme.

TSUBA THEME John Harding will talk on the identification and
classification of some of the unsigned sword guards.
Bring unsigned openwork or any mysterious pieces that
are in doubt; we may be able to throw some light on
them.

SPECIAL FEATURE Film slides of a sword polisher at work. (We hope).

NOTES Our President, Dr. Torrigoye has addressed the
membership. A copy of which is enclosed.

Due to potential members being a little curious
we have made this programme a little fuller in order to
tell them what we have done and are doing. This may
not continue as we are considering putting out a
regular bulletin.

TALKS There doesn't seem to have been any great rush of
members to give talks. If you don't know anything find
something out and tell us about it. PLEASE!
Contact J.H.

30th November, 1964.
OKAYAMA, JAPAN.

To The Friendly Members of the Society;

Many thanks for your electing me Hon. President of your Society. Though I am not so reliable for your study, I would be pleased if I can suggest something for you.

I will write my main idea about the future proceedings of the Society and the Members here, as follows:

1. About the fundamental purpose of the Society:

The word, appreciation should be added to the written statement of the Society. It is very important. Although the word, study may contain the meaning of appreciation, it is desirable to use this word in the statement. That is, "the study, appreciation and preservation of Japanese swords and fittings."

2. I recommend you to think of several attentions according to the following order.

The first step -

1. I exhort you to inquire your possessions and draw a sharp line between right and wrong. If you keep the wrong ones a long time beside you, your knowledge will stop for the improvement. While you are hesitating to eliminate those wrong pieces, your knowledge is not enough yet to appreciate the maker's real works.
2. I suggest you to appreciate the beauty and the rank and age of the artful works. This notion is similar with all the arts on judge and appreciation. To find beauty, for instance, at tsuba and fittings, it is necessary to investigate by the ordinary observations: shape, quantity and temper of metal, plate and mimi, seppadai, shitsu (at tsuba only), and design. Do not consider the design first.
3. I prevail upon you to present your own researched contents mutually.

The second step -

I advise you, especially the managing staffs, to plan the further valuable proceedings for the Society.

Kazutaro Torigoye.

SUMMARY OF TOSHO & KATCHU-SHI TSUBA by JOHN HARDING

Smelting

Swordsmiths made the better steel. Armour smiths made the better iron.

It is a mistake to assume that swordsmiths, because of the quality and finish of their blades made better Iron or Tsuba, than the armour smiths. The swordsmith smelted for his own end product, which was first class steel, and he paid perhaps less attention to iron as a finished product.

It must be borne in mind that Tsuba making was part of the Armourers art or function and therefore iron of the highest quality was his aim. The early smith carried out the whole process from smelting the ore to polishing the finished Tsuba, and evinced fancies or preferences for certain ores, which enable experts in certain cases to distinguish genuine early work from later copies, by the colour of the plate metal. Taking into consideration a certain amount of rusting and patination through the ages.

Folding & Shaping

It appears from the examination of some pieces that sometimes a Tsuba was formed straight from the bloom into the desired shape, i.e. lines of slag running diagonally across the edge, (this would have been removed if the Tsuba had been hand forged after the smelting). However, the usual method is for the plate thickness to be made up by the folding of the iron which has previously been hammered into a thin sheet. There are only two basic methods of folding the sheet. The swordsmiths technique is quite simple; he just folded it in half and heated and hammered to make the weld. On a clean Tsuba, a thin hair line can be seen close to the edge and running across the surface of the plate, this is the line of the weld and will be seen on one side only.

Armourers on the other hand, folded the sheet into an S shape and then hammered it flat, also heating to make the weld. On a clean specimen of this type a thin hair line will be seen on both sides of the plate and a little towards the centre from the edge.

There are, of course, other methods which may occur and should these be observed on early pieces, they should be regarded as the work of amateurs, although not necessarily uninteresting.

Because of the method used by the swordsmith, the plate when finished was considerably thinner on one side than the other; in order to balance this the thicker (opposite) side was chamfered off forming a goeshigata (shape of a go piece), thus becoming one of the main identification points of swordsmiths work.

The shape and edge of the Armour-maker varied considerably according to period or fashion; as a general guide, the plate of the early pieces must be very thin, usually in the region of 2mm.

DESIGNS

The designs of the swordsmiths Tsuba, are very naive and simple, it always seems to be their last consideration. The Armourers paid a little more attention to the decoration, the most common subjects being flowers, hishi, mushrooms, etc.

Hitsuana on the early pieces are usually elongated unless they have been altered at a later date. A great deal can be learnt from the shape of the hitsuana for dating purposes.

Dating and Judging

Apart from the accepted methods of judging the age of iron, i.e. type of iron, amount of corrosion inside the piercings, there is little else that can be written in so many words. It should be made absolutely clear that 90% of true judgment is in the feeling. (By this, we do not mean physical touch); it is an inner feeling or sensation that is acquired only after some considerable experience of seeing and handling good pieces. This particular "feeling" cannot be learnt from books. You only have it when you have it, and you will know when you have it. It is the most important part of Tsuba appraisal.

The basic points to note are the general quality of the iron plate, it should be strong and have great depth (this is where feeling comes into it). Forging should be tight and free from a reasonable amount of impurities; of course, a certain amount of impurity is the character of the iron. This is why factoryed iron is dead.

Dr. Torigoye says it can be related to Fuji san. Fuji with its snow cap, trees and lake below is indeed the most beautiful of mountains. (This would be akin to Kinko, i.e. Tsuba decorators). Strip Fuji bare of its decoration and the beauty still lies in the mass rising out of the earth. So with the early iron, Imagine a Kinko Tsuba stripped of its decoration and the point of this paragraph will be understood.

Hammering should be close and in good arrangement; there should be no difference in thickness over the surface of the plate except when it is part of the design.

Edge

The edge is the most important feature of the Tsuba; it is the part which was finished last, and the smith had to exercise all his skill in hammering and shaping it. It is unlikely that a

Tsuba with a first class edge would have any bad features in its forging or hammering details.

One point that is certain when judging Tsuba is, that nothing will be learnt from balancing it on the forefinger and striking it to ring for tone. High pitch or low pitch tells nothing and furthermore, bronze, brass or copper are known to ring just as iron. If, of course, the piece is cracked then there will be no tone anyway.

Togane

It is a mistake to assume that because a Katchu-shi Tsuba is not heavily chiselled round the nakago ana, it cannot be of great age. In fact, most extant examples have very little chiselling in this area. It is assumed that the plate metal was too thin to stand much of this harsh treatment to fit guards, and that copper Sekigane had to be made each time, otherwise after two or three fittings in the accepted manner would result in the Tsuba being destroyed. The seppa dai would just disintegrate.

SWORD ETIQUETTE AND BRIEF POINTS OF CONSIDERATION

IN BLADE JUDGMENT

A summary of the talk given by Bon Dale at the Society's meeting on December 2nd, 1964.

It was suggested at the last meeting that a talk on the correct handling of blades would be a useful item to include in this meeting, one reason being that some of our members are collectors of sword fittings, rather than swords, and are not as conversant with actual sword etiquette as they might wish to be. Even those of us who do collect complete swords are apt to become careless, probably through familiarity, in handling them and in a fairly large group of people this could be very dangerous.

Swords Placed on a Rack

A sword should always be placed on a sword rack in the manner upon which it would be worn on the person. That is, for a Tachi with the cutting edge downwards, and for Katana with the cutting edge upwards. The same would apply for all other types of sword, Wakizashi, Tanto, etc., cutting edge upwards. The hilts should always be towards the left, in this manner the swords appear as they would when correctly worn upon the person.

Handing a Sword to another Person

The left hand should grip the hilt, the right hand should take hold of the scabbard, in the best tradition preferably with a cloth, to prevent moisture tarnishing the lacquer of the scabbard. The cutting edge of the blade should then be turned towards one's self. This simple movement sets the pattern for the whole of sword handling. Even when the blade is in the scabbard the edge should be turned towards the person holding the sword. The sword is then handed to the person receiving it in a horizontal position at arm's length. In the old days there were various levels of presentation, above eye level to a superior with the head bowed, etc., but this need not concern us here.

Examination of a Sword

Having received a sword, the first thing to examine are the mounts, of the hilt, tsuba and scabbard. In the old days again permission was always asked of the owner before actually drawing the blade; this is still a polite thing to do.

Drawing the Blade

Before doing this, it is a good idea to check if there is a peg in the wekugi-ana! This may seem a very simple thing, but it is an important safety precaution. When drawing the blade, ideally one should turn one's back to the owner, in a group it would be

sufficient to turn from others near-by. Most important, the sword must be turned with the cutting edge upwards, and the blade drawn completely from the scabbard in one long, slow, smooth movement. And IMMEDIATELY it is out of the scabbard, turn the edge towards yourself. It may be necessary to first loosen the habaki in the scabbard with the hands and finger, if it is as it should be, a tight fit. Never examine a blade bit by bit as it comes out of the scabbard, or half out of the scabbard, this can be damaging to both blade and scabbard, and in any case is most impolite. To sum up so far, you now have the drawn blade in your hand, the edge turned towards yourself; in this position it is safe to everyone except yourself, and this is as it should be. Before proceeding to examination do something with the scabbard, do not put it on the floor! A table, or back on the sword rack is the best place.

Handing a Drawn Blade to Another Person

It is extremely important that this is done correctly. There is, and probably will be in this Society, more passing to and fro of naked blades than sheathed swords. This should be done according to strict Etiquette, which may be summarized as follows:-

1. Turn cutting edge towards self.
2. Hold lower part of hilt in right hand.
3. Hold the sword at arms length, blade vertical.

Person Receiving Sword

1. Takes hold of hilt below the tsuba, in other words directly above the hand of the person offering it.
2. Places the other hand under the hilt to be certain that he has full control.
3. Turns the cutting edge towards himself.

To sum up the whole point of Japanese Sword Etiquette one can say this, that the person handling the sword must always put himself at the mercy of the blade.

He must be the one in danger, if he mis-handles the blade. This is even carried to the extent that he must also put himself at the mercy of anyone taking the blade from him. The point being that he is responsible for the safe handling of the drawn blade until the moment his hand leaves the hilt, and the other person takes over.

Before proceeding on to what to look for in a blade, an important point, do not run the blade up and down the sleeve when examining. There is much fine abrasive dust in the air, and this is a sure way of producing surface scratches. Use paper or a

square of folded silk, when wishing to hold the blade steady, for example to study the point. When replacing the blade in the scabbard, be sure to keep the edge upwards again, the blade on its back. Run it into the scabbard gently with a final press home as the habaki enters the scabbard mouth. All these simple rules are designed first with regard to safety, and secondly to avoid damage to a precious thing.

EXAMINATION OF A BLADE FOR QUALITY OF WORKMANSHIP

(summary of a talk given by Ron Dole December 1964)

1993?
The condition of a blade is the first important factor to be taken into consideration. By condition I do not mean if the blade was polished last week or last year. I do not mean if the blade is in mint condition, with a superb polish, or covered in rust and scratches. Mint condition is desirable but mint condition does not make a good blade. It obviously helps one to see if the blade is good or poor, but it can be mis-leading and one must not be swayed in one's judgment by surface condition alone. The answer is, ignore the mere surface condition, and look into the blade. What is the condition of the actual metal?

Is the blade tired? (Japanese. Tsukareru). In a blade which is in this state the grain tends to appear open, to be raggy looking. This condition is more likely to exist in parts rather than the whole blade. The Mono-Uchi, striking point of the blade, the first 3 or 4 inches below in the point section, being one of the usual areas affected. Details of forging, etc., will appear misty and indistinct; sometimes tiredness almost gives an appearance of UTSURI, but this must be distinguished from it.

Examine the Kissaki for KARASUGUCHI, this is a split or crack in the tempered area of the point, the BOSHI. These are usually very fine and difficult to see. May be on one side only, or may extend across the tip and down both sides. Obviously, these are bad.

Examine the HADA of the blade for TATE-WARE, these are long winding splits running lengthways along the grain of the blade. May also appear in the tempered area of the blade. Nowadays, Tate-Ware might be acceptable, depending on the extent, but in Japan in the old days a blade with Tate-Ware would be dismissed. Any blade having this should be viewed with grave suspicion, it will usually prove to have other faults. One should qualify this slightly by saying that this condition can, sometimes, exist in very fine and very old blades which perhaps only have this one fault to be weighed against superlative quality in the rest of the blade. In these circumstances it may be due to the opening up of forging folds by much repolishing, rather than true cracks or splits.

Examine the blade for FUKURA, blisters which may occur on any part of the blade, but are more usually found on the SHINOJI-JI and MUNE. When on the Shinogi area of the blade and the back,

these blisters tend to be broken out or open, and are slag pits rather than blisters. These should not be confused with old rust pits, usually they are much blacker and have no residue of old rust in them, being due to impurities left in the metal when forging was in progress. True blisters on other parts of the blade are discerned by the slight flare or distortion in the smooth surface of the metal which they produce. These should be examined carefully because there is the risk that if the blade is repolished these blisters will open into pits.

A bad fault is NIOIGIRE, a gap in the line of the nioi, the whitish line along the edge of the HAMON. This is not very often seen and is very often overlooked. In two recent examples I have seen, one was an inch or two above the habaki, the nioi line flicked upwards into the jihada, and then there was a gap of a full two inches before the nioi line recommenced. In the second the nioi line ended three inches before the point. This was easy to overlook because the blade was in mint condition and the Hamon was beautifully presented for the full length of the cutting edge. But here was an example of a poor blade tricked up for the market. It is by no means impossible to find a blade which appears to be very fine and in good condition, but upon a closer look the Hamon has no nioi line at all. The yakiba is merely etched on the blade and is therefore a complete fake, and worthless as a collector's piece.

These are but a very few of the KIZU, defects, that should be looked for and although I have given them first, they would be discovered as one proceeded to assess the worth of a blade. This should be done in the following order; Shape; Boshi; Hamon (yakiba); Hada (forging pattern); Nakago (tang);

THE SHAPE

This is the most important point, which can be taken in almost at a glance, in deciding if a blade is fine or poor. Hold the sword at arm's length to judge the proportions of curvature and shape. A little artistic sense is required, but I think anyone who collects old art forms can do this for himself. It has been said elsewhere and I cannot do better than repeat it, that a finely shaped blade was never made by a poor swordsmith. This was never done, and never could be done, because of the artistic inability of the poor swordsmith.

Proportion and shape will give many clues to the age of a blade, here there is only space to mention three varied aspects of this:-

FUMBARI, a tapering of the blade in width from the hilt to the point, technically between the MOTOHABA and the SAKI-HABA. This was originally the old tachi shape, and taken into consideration with other points may indicate an old blade.

UTSUMUKU, point straightness, after the centre of curvature the blade tends to become straight towards the point. An indication again of age, and perhaps extreme age, many swords of the Heian period have this characteristic.

IKUBI-
KISSAKI ^k Straightness of the cutting edge of the kissaki, point, of the blade. Sometimes perfectly straight. A sign of a fine blade, particularly if combined with Fumbari, because of the difficulty of preserving perfect proportion in a long blade with a flattened point. Never found on a poor blade. A little thought will show that it is impossible to fake this at a later date, although this might at first seem possible.

THE BOSHI ~~THE BOSHI~~ This has been called the face of the sword, it is here that one can really see the true worth of a blade. This is the pattern of the yakiba within the kissaki and is the first thing that must be looked for when getting down to details. This pattern must be there, and the more HATA-RAKI "work" or activity it has the better. However florid the rest of the Hamon on the blade, however exciting, if there is no Boshi, then dismiss the blade.

THE HAMON ~~THE HAMON~~ The patterns of the tempered edge of a blade are too numerous to be dealt with here, many talks and articles will have to be produced even to skim the surface of the different characteristics of swordsmiths and schools. But, let it be remembered that a good sword has HATARAKI within the yakiba and along the Hamon. This activity will be found to be less in Shinto blades than Koto, but there should still be a little activity even if it is gentle and quiet compared to the great lines of Kinsuji and ara niye that one hopes to find in a Koto blade. Two points on Hamon,

YAKI-DASHI The line of the Hamon narrowing and straightening before entering the nakago, will usually tell you that the blade is Shinto, and

YAKIOTOSHI the line of the Hamon stopping completely an inch or two above the nakago and dipping off the blade, will tell you that the blade is very old, or that it has been re-tempered, so look out for this!

THE HADA ~~THE~~ KITAE Broadly, the forging patterns of the main area of the blade, the JIHADA. This again is a wide subject, at the moment let one point suffice. In

fine old blades the grain patterns tend to be, as the Japanese texts say, "much shrunken". This means to say, tight, or contracted, the opposite of open and loose in appearance. Many old blades have ITAME Nada, which is rather like elongated irregular wood-grain; this is often described as "running".

UTSURI This is a faint misty pattern on the jihada, usually well above the line of Hamon, which may or may not "reflect" the general characteristics of the Hamon. Sometimes difficult to see and should not, as I said earlier, be confused with tiredness. Normally Utsuri runs the full length of the blade and is, therefore, easy to distinguish. There is a broken form of Utsuri which is rather more difficult. Utsuri can be used as a means of identification if very noticeable, and is invariably a sign of a fine blade.

← THE NAKAGO The tang of the blade very often bears a signature as well as other inscriptions. The problem is to decide if these are authentic. With the lack of sufficient genuine blades by renowned makers in this country the best we can do is to refer to illustrations in books. I shall hope at a later date to talk about signatures, particularly what I call "nervous" signatures; a theory based on Japanese calligraphy and the strokes of a character.

← ~~The~~ YASURIME, file marks, and shape of the nakago are also important in identifying, and checking on the signature. It is well to bear in mind that there are such things as welded on tangs; and even just welded on signatures, which can make life very difficult. But, look at the blade, it does not matter what is written on the end, it is what the work in the blade has to say that counts.

One final word about HORIMONO, grooves and ornamental carvings on blades. These may sometimes be ATOBORI, which are horimono carved at a later date than the production of the blade, very often to hide or remove defects. Atobori usually tend to reduce the value of a blade, and one should try to decide if carvings and grooves are contemporary or not.