

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



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PROGRAMME

NEXT MEETING Monday June 10th 1968 at The Masons Arms, Maddox Street, London W.1. at 7.30 p.m.

SUBJECT The true and original fighting sword. Alan Bale will give a short and informal talk on "Some Aspects of Tachi Mountings" illustrated by slides, some of which recently came from Japan. Please bring along mounted Tachi, as early as possible, or as late as you like. Within the formal limitations of Tachi mounts there is a great variety of personal variation. This is what we want to discuss and the other information which Alan will lead us to in his talk.

LAST MEETING Was the blade judging session. This was a great success. We all learnt something and one point became clear, we all have learnt something. There was a time when the membership tended to divide itself into the experts and those who thought the experts were experts. This was reflected in the points awarded to the blades in the judging session we had two years or so ago. The marks then were some high and some low, the experts with the bulk of the scores somewhere in the average middle - in effect the "don't knows" or afraid to say so's. This time all the blades received marks which were very close indeed, either high, medium or low, depending on the blade. This was good, and I hope ample proof to those old "don't knows" to trust their own judgements and realize they have graduated to "experts" since the formation of the To Ken Society in 1964. A pat on the back to all of us! Top marks of the evening, 74% to a blade by YASUTSUGU I. Second highest, 70% to a blade by ONIOMARU. Third place was jointly shared at 68% by three blades, a SUISHINSHI MASAhide, NAGASONE KOTETSU and UDA KUNISADA.

SWORD SHOW

Last month I announced the "Japanese Sword Show" in Minneapolis, and we gave out the leaflets concerning this at the last meeting. Here follows a letter from Tom Buttweiler giving a full report of the show. Readers will note that it remained open all night! I'm afraid we can't claim that for the Ashmolean. I quote:

"Thank you ever so much for the fine plug you gave the show in Minneapolis. Quite a number of people wrote about it. Unfortunately I got the announcements to you far too late for any travel to the show from Europe or the British Isles. The show was a great success - we filled over 35 tables with some of the finest blades, tsuba and fittings ever to be assembled in the U.S. The buying, selling and swapping went on at a furious pace throughout the show. To illustrate the enthusiasm the show did not close ever between Friday 10.0 am and Sunday 3.00 p.m. I went down to check security at 4.0 a.m. Sunday morning and found about 15 collectors sitting around discussing the merits of two blades. I had intended to go back to bed but got involved in the discussion and never made it back to my room!

We had about 75 collectors at the show from all over the U.S. Dr. Thomas Hooper was at the show and gave freely of his knowledge of Japanese history, art and weapons. Ed Erickson showed up with his Kunihiro tachi 48", 20 lbs. and proceeded to light a fire under every collector at the show. Those of us who know Ed howled with delight as he deflated the ego of experienced and novice collectors alike, by casting doubts on their prized pieces and pet theories.

The dinner came off quite well with the Saki flowing like wine. R.B. Cauldwell of Dallas gave the after-dinner address. Mr. Cauldwell was primed for the occasion with about 2 qrts. of Saki. The remaining diners were in a most receptive mood after 1 quart each! Fortunately, R.B. had written out the speech. No one, including R.B. could remember what was said except that it was a great talk!

There were also a large number of tsuba of very good quality at the show. Graham McGuire who complained bitterly in your last News Letter about the lack of tsuba information, left all his tsuba in the Bank Vault so I cannot comment on them. Since I am primarily

interested in swords, I can recall only two tsuba. Both of these are recent emigrants from your shores; one was a Goto Ichijo (Best Tsuba) the other was a very fine iron tsuba signed Kotetsu. I don't know whether the Kotetsu was a genuine signature or not, but it impressed me greatly.

The show ended Sunday afternoon amid a flurry of last minute purchases, swaps, and offers. In my rather punchy condition (80 hrs. with 3 hrs sleep) I agreed to hold another show next May. I shall be sure to get the announcements to you early enough to allow some participation from across the Atlantic.

If any collector from the Old World is ever in the area, I would hope he would drop in to talk swords. I am sure that we might also persuade Graham McGuire to give a private showing of his collection. I leave you with a toast from the New World collectors. May the Samé on your Tsuka never crack in the heat of battle.

Awards were given as follows:

Best display of Show Keith Evans, Dallas, Tex.
 Best Sword display. Joe Bott. Los Angeles;
 Best Tsuba display Bob Trojin. Virgin Isles
 Best Kosharae (katana) Art Yates. L.A. Calif.
 Best Tsuba (Goto Ichijo) R.B. Cauldwell. Dallas.
 Best Sword (Soden Bizen) Tom Buttweiler -
 Albertville, Minn.

Tom Buttweiler."

COMMENT

Thank you Mr. Buttweiler, the samé on my tsuka is fine at the moment! I trust we are using the same interpretation!

NORTHERN BRANCH OF THE TO KEN SOCIETY. Report by Andrew Ford.

Next Meeting Tuesday, July 23rd 1968 at the Seven Oaks Hotel, 5 Nicholas Street, Manchester at 7.30 p.m. John Hymas will be giving a talk on 'Animals in Japanese Art'. Please bring examples in any art form. The remainder of the evening will be devoted to problems and enquiries so bring articles under this heading as well.

Last Meeting The subject was 'My favourite piece from my Collection'. We were glad to welcome two new members and two guests. Here follows a list of those articles seen with apologies for any inaccuracies or discrepancies:

Ian Bottomley. A katana blade in military mounts signed Nio Kiyohisa (c.1469) with a tameshigiri inscription on the reverse dated 5th Feb.1633; two bodies cut by Nakagawa Saheita.

Andrew Ford. A dirk by Chounsai Tsunatoshi, pupil of Masahide. No.137 in the catalogue of the To Ken Society exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum.

John Hymas. Two tsuba (i) concave iron plate carved to look like matting with rats on it in relief, signed Tomoyoshi. (ii) iron plate decorated in relief with shishi in silver with gold foliage, unsigned.

J.W.Ince. A katana in han-dachi mounts, the blade by Kii no Kuni Yasumitsu (c.1673). The mounts are en suite in iron carved with kiku, the blade and all the mountings are in very good condition, a nice tidy katana.

Stan Kirby. A katana in black laquer saya signed Yamato no Kami Yoshimichi. It is difficult to tell without the blade which generation it was; but both generations rate Wazamono in the sharpness ratings. A very fine shakudo guard of an insect on bamboo shoots in open work, the blade in very good condition and apart from the hilt binding, a very tidy piece.

Frank Knighton. A tachi, all the mounts are repousse brass work which shows traces that it may once have been silver plated, decorated with Tokugawa mon. Although this type is generally thought to be touristy, this is the finest example seen by those present. The engraving on the brass tsuba was excellently done. The blade is koto and unsigned with an ubu tang.

Bernard Marsh. An unsigned koto katana of beautiful shape thought possibly to be Soshu, in much need of polishing due to surface discolouration. The tsuba signed Soten and of usual Hikone-bori type.

C.Nowell. A poor quality blade mounted like a helmet breaker. The mounts are laquered wood carved to form a dragon, the tsuka being the dragons head. The head was very well carved with a ball in the mouth.

Frank Sandiford. An unsigned shinto katana with O midare yakiba tending towards hitatsura but really only tobiyaki, repolished would be very beautiful. The habaki has an inscription on it: one side reads 'much good fortune' and the other starts 'receive this' then follows the numerals 39 and the last character defeats translation to date.

Bryan Bateman. A finely mounted aikuchi signed Yoshimitsu. Silver mounts en suite with rats signed Yoshitsugu. There is a horimono on one side of Fudo and on the other a renza and bonji. The blade shows remarkable similarities to Awataguchi Yoshimitsu (Toshiro) and may well be genuine. A fine piece.

Derek Dillon. A katana in Higo style mounts with provision for umabari, the metal mounts in silver, carved relief of dragons and very fine. There is no kurikata but provision for a ring. The blade is signed tachi mei Bishu Osafune Moto (?)mitsu. However there were some doubts expressed due to the position of the signature relative to the supposed original tang hole, it purports to be either MO 696 7 or 8. The blade seemed a little stout for the Oyei period or earlier but as this man is Kanemitsu school it may not follow, if the blade is genuine.

There then followed a general chat in which a fine Yoshimichi, with typical sudare yakiba, a daisho and several Katana and dirks were shown. The blades were signed: dai Kaneuji and sho Kagemitsu.

ANTEI, TATE

Short quote from a letter from Han Bing Siong:

"Thank you so much for the rectification in the programme for May. If I am not wrong "tei" also means "belt" or "zone", so "antei" could be translated as "dark belt" or "dark zone". However, I have not succeeded in translating the whole explanation which the Nihon To Zenshu gives for "antei" and it was regarding this text in the Nihon To Zenshu that I have expressed the hope that Mr. Vincent will provide a translation, and not with respect to the two characters only."

Mr. Vincent has not proclaimed from Japan on the subject, but a little bird has told me that the characters concerned are not normal sword terminology, and this is where the misinterpretation has crept in. Mr. Vincent please?

Apology to you Mr. Han. The attached oshigata to your last letter had completely slipped my mind. The quickest way to answer you now is probably this Programme. The signature looks extremely good to me, confirmed by the correct position of the original mekugi-ana, the lower one, used before suriage style of the latter period of the swordsmith's life, when he was about 45 years old, about 1680. Probably has a nice sweeping Toran-ha, plenty of niye?

RESEARCH

A short article from member Ian Bottomley, long overdue for publication, which is of interest and which will I hope, provoke comment. Mr. Bottomley is willing to supply greater details to members who care to write to him on the subject.

"Results of an Investigation into Blade Construction"

The generally accepted theories on blade construction seem to be well supported by photographs and descriptions, but one or two points seem to be incorrect to me. To verify or disprove these points a blade was dissected and the results and conclusions form the basis of this letter.

The Blade. This was a corroded and much abused wakizashi that had been made by shortening a longer sword. No real identification was possible because of the condition, but it was typically shinto with a straight, slightly irregular hamon. The internal structure suggested a mokume-hada but this was not visible on the blade surface, even after polishing and etching.

Dissection. Since the sword was much shortened, the existing tang was typical of the old blade, a section was cut from the end of the tang. A further cross section was cut from a point about 1" from the boshi and the remainder of the boshi was sectioned longitudinally.

Since both the cross sections were identical only one will be described.

Results. After polishing and etching with "Nitrol" the cross sections showed the blade to have been made from three separate pieces of steel. The three were welded together sandwich fashion, but with the filling so to speak, protruding from one side. The filling formed the cutting edge and ran about half way towards the back. The other pieces formed the sides, or rather the body of the blade. Closer examination with a lower power binocular microscope showed the body metal to have been made from different steel layers and showed a distinctly folded structure. The layers met the plane of the jigane at an angle of about 45 degrees.

The edge metal showed no evidence of structure even under high power and was stained black by the etch, presumably the result of carbon being revealed as the metal was dissolved.

Separating the three pieces, along the lines of the welds, was a thin band of silvery metal that was not attacked by the etch and was therefore left standing proud of the surface. This alloy is probably the

result of absorption of a component of the flux used in welding.

The section of the boshi showed the same general features except that the edge metal was here much deeper, in fact it runs right up to the back, so that the hard edge can be carried around the boshi.

Conclusions. The above evidence is of course, open to various interpretation but the following seems to me to be the most logical, even though it differs in some detail with the standard accepted ideas.

Firstly, construction of the blade must have been as follows: The smith made the edge metal and body metal by the normal technique of folding. When the two types of metal were judged to be correctly prepared, they were drawn out into strips of the correct shape and welded together. I say this for two reasons. The increase in depth of the edge metal at the boshi would have been impossible to achieve had all three pieces been welded together into a block before drawing out into strip form. The fact that the strips have almost identical dimensions at both ends of the blade also suggests this was the method used for the construction. This same evidence also seems to suggest that the edge was not shaped by forging, which would have distorted the edge metal to a triangular shape, whereas it is rectangular until it emerges at the blades surface, but that the surplus metal was removed by cutting.

The significance of this last fact did not strike me at first, but a little thought will show that the yakiba has nothing to do with a heat treatment, but is simply the exposed edge metal. The nioi results from the thin band of silvery metal being exposed where it separates the edge metal from the body of the sword. It is possible that the same alloy may be formed during the forging of the body metal and that this then becomes dispersed during the folding to be ultimately revealed as niye. An attempt was made to measure the hardness of the edge metal at the edge and deeper inside the blade, but this did not prove possible because of the sample size and the difficulty of holding it in the instrument. That there was a considerable difference was quite obvious however during the cutting of the sections. When the hacksaw had cut almost through, from the back, all the teeth were removed from the blade and it was necessary to break the last eighth of an inch in a vice. This does show that the blade had been differentially quenched by the method of coating in clay the parts that are required soft,

but this is not the way the smith makes the yakiba, that was already made and finished during the forging.

Since this work was carried out, I have seen similar opinions expressed by Newman in his handbook for the Collector of Japanese Art. He also describes the use of two colours of clay to imitate various methods of varying the hamon and by this method it is quite easy to reproduce all the usual patterns.

THE FREE
MASAMUNE

At long last I am able to publish the results of the offer I made in the January Programme this year, to give away absolutely free a genuine Masamune with eight holes in the tang to the writer of the first letter I received from Outer Space. I received no less than sixty-four letters claiming this prize! After much hard work I managed to saw the Masamune into 64 pieces, each 2.37 cm's long. All these genuine pieces have now been despatched to the winners. I apologise to the two members who received the extreme tip of the kissaki and of the nakago, and to the eight members who received a mekugi-ana. The blade was of course, unsigned so no member received the signature!

SWORDSMITHS OF JAPAN

KOTETSU OKISATO BY B.W.Robinson, Part I.

Kotetsu was born of yeoman (goshi) family at Nagasone on the shores of Lake Biwa in 1599, and was given the name of Saikichi, with which he subsequently signed a few sword-guards. His father was a smith in the employ of Ishida Mitsunari, one of the leaders of the confederacy against Tokugawa Iyeyasu, and having married a daughter of one of the Shimosaka smiths of Echizen province, had been adopted into that school. When Iyeyasu crushed the confederacy at the bloody battle of Sekigahara in 1600, father and son fled northwards to Fukui in Echizen, where Kotetsu lived until he was fifty.

At Fukui he was apprenticed to a helmet-maker, and achieved a certain reputation with his armour, horse-trappings and sword-furniture, while producing a few short swords and spear-heads in his spare time. His bridle-bits and helmets in particular were much sought after, and eventually the merits of the latter so impressed Matsudaira, the Lord of Fukui, that he decided to pit the skill of Kotetsu as an armourer against that of a certain swordsmith among his retainers, named

Kaneshige. Kotetsu was therefore ordered to make a helmet which no sword could cut, and Kaneshige a sword which would cut through any helmet. When both craftsmen had completed their tasks, Kotetsu's helmet was placed on a stand, while Kaneshige himself, being an expert swordsman, prepared to cut it with the blade he had forged. Kotetsu was none too sanguine of the result, and at the critical moment, when his rival had already raised his sword, he darted forward on the pretext of adjusting the position of the helmet, thus putting Kaneshige off his stroke so that he failed to cleave it. But the baffled swordsmith immediately leapt out in to the garden and cut in two a large bronze vase which stood on the terrace. There is another version of the story which makes the nobleman Mayeda of Kanazawa and the swordsmith Kanemaki or Kanemitsu.

This incident probably happened about 1640, and soon afterwards Kaneshige left Fukui and established himself at Yedo. Before his departure, however, he appears to have instructed Kotetsu in the art of sword-forging, with the result that in 1647 the latter also decided to try his fortune as a swordsmith in Yedo. The cause of this decision is variously given by the authorities; he may well have been uneasy about the helmet-cutting incident, and his ruse may have been detected and held against him, or perhaps with the establishment of peace under the Tokugawa Shoguns, the armourer's trade declined, though that of the swordsmith continued to flourish. A more sensational reason however, is widely alleged. It appears that during his last year at Fukui, Kotetsu was working regularly as a swordsmith, and a certain samurai who had commissioned him to make a blade expressed dissatisfaction with the finished article in the most insulting terms. The infuriated Kotetsu snatched up the blade and cut down the rash critic on the spot. Whatever the reason, he left Fukui, passed a year at his birthplace of Nagasone, and reached Yedo in 1648. His house at Nagasone can still be seen, and although it is extremely uncertain that he ever forged swords there, the well whose water he is said to have used for tempering is confidently pointed out under a large pine tree with a little shrine of the Buddhist divinity Jizo nearby.

The affair of the murdered samurai seems to have not quite blown over, for on his arrival at Yedo, Kotetsu found it necessary to take temporary

sanctuary in the Kwanyeiiji Temple. But his freedom was procured by the good offices of Inaba Fusaharu, chief retainer of the Matsudaira family, whose more powerful cousin, Inaba Iwami no Kami, later took Kotetsu into his service.

SALE REPORTS

SOTHEBY'S SALE 29th April. by Alan Bale

The sale started with iron tsuba of no great interest with up to 8 in a lot. These made an average of £3 - £4.10.0d each mainly to dealers. One nice item was Lot 27 by Ikkin, a pupil of Ichijo with silver plum blossom in the rain; not dear at £13. Lot 69, a fine tsuba of shakudo nanako with a shishi and peonies in soft metal, signed Omori Teruhide, made £65. Lot 76, shakudo plate with inlay of a tiger below a cliff in soft metals, by Enju, another pupil of Ichijo, £60. Lot 77 a very good Kaga tsuba of shibuichi with gold, silver and shakudo inlay, made the very high price of £125.

SWORDS. Lot 110 a katana with a fine blade signed Kanesada and Kanenori with the remnants of a gold tameshigiri inscription (futatsu do) on the tang, the rest being shortened off; if genuine this would be the work of 'No Sada' and a pupil working together, £85. Lot 138, a pretty Aikuchi with copper mounts was quite cheap at £40. Lot 140, an Itomaki no tachi the blade signed 'Soshu no ju nin Masahiro' late 14th century, made £100. This was originally a Han-dachi but had been altered at some time, probably for tourists. Lot 143 a fine Court Tachi with good silvered mounts and nashiji scabbard, the blade by Hizen Yukihiro, was expensive at £300.

BOOK

Alan Bale has the reprint of Inami Hakusui's "NIPPON TO", at £5 plus two shillings (2/-) postage. Originally published around 1947, was long out of print; has useful basic stuff and sword history. Write direct to Alan Bale, please.

NEW MEMBERS

We have pleasure in welcoming the following new members to the Society :

John Simpson,
Rath Keale,
Pinewood Hill,
Fleet, Hampshire.

Captain Raymond Johns,
4, Lower Belgrave Street,
London S.W.1.

Dr. J.P. Lissenden,
Ker-Anna House,
High Street,
St. Aubin,
Jersey. C.I.

Barrington John Underdown,
104, Shrewsbury Road,
Forest Gate,
London E.7

NEW MEMBERS

(Cont'd) . . .

Donald F.Green,
19 East 82nd Street,
New York,
N.Y. 10028,
U.S.A.

S.G.Wildman
5, Greenacres,
Putnoe,
Bedford,
Beds.

LIST OF
MEMBERS

New Members, since February 1968, might like a list of Members. Please send a stamped and addressed envelope to Society Headquarters and we will have some more printed.