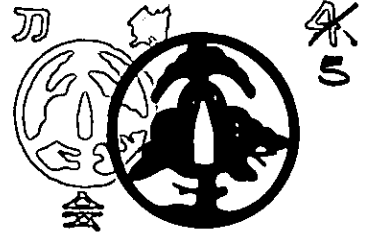


THE TO-KEN SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN
for the Study and Preservation of Japanese Swords and Fittings



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

PROGRAMME

April

- Next Meeting Wednesday 7th ~~March~~ 1965, 7.30 p.m. Fulham Conservative Club. 1 Shorrolds Road, S.W.6.
- Fittings Theme John Harding will talk on the identification of Nanako, a short talk followed by a question and answer session. Bring fittings with Nanako ground.
- Blade Theme Mr. Tudor-Williams will talk on sword polishing from a metallurgists point of view. Some very interesting slides will be shown. Bring blades with perfect polish and any blade you have endeavoured to polish yourself.
- Notes Some members are attending and not bringing exhibits, and it seems do not intend to do so. Would these members realise that if everyone had their attitude there would be no society. Please try always to bring something of interest.
- Bulletin All material for publication must be in by mid-April. So lets have it.
- We are endeavouring to devote a section to corresponding members or any members who wish to air their views, make suggestions, or any criticism. All interesting letters will be published (subject to space).
- New Members R.D.St.John, San Francisco, U.S.A.
Richard Ruth, San Jose, U.S.A.
C.P.J.Van der Peet, Amsterdam, Holland.
B.W.Robinson, London.
Philip Walker London.
Vance C. Hall, California, U.S.A.
- N.B. Owing to "clerical error" in binding the last programme, the photographs of Boshi were in some instances, reversed. If the photograph is viewed so that the points of the blades are to the right, the cutting edge downwards, the SUKENAGA is at the top and the MORIMASA at the bottom.

The debate of last meeting started very quietly and developed into a scene that even Kurasawa would have envied. This impressive display of determined men, hungry for action, was brought about by the writer attempting (but mildly) to get the debate started by airing his own views first:-

Collecting tsuba is very much a matter of taste, fortunately there are enough types to satisfy the most exacting collector. However, the writer's view is that the real tsuba is related to a definite way of life, that each piece has its place in history, has served its purpose, and is now part record of a very exciting past.

We may begin with the Asuka and Nara periods (552-784) with the Hoju tsuba, through the early, middle and late Heian (784-1185) with the Shitogi and Aoi tsuba, into the Kamakura period (1185-1392) with the Nerikawa and the small iron tsuba, developing into the Tosho and Katchu-shi in the Muromachi period, and finally the Momoyama and first part of the early Edo period, when tsuba making reached its zenith. Generally speaking it was at this time the best work was produced, it was at this time the great families developed and individual masters made their name. One can look back from this point and say with satisfaction, "this was indeed Japan". Whether the reader accepts it or not, from this point on the whole field went into gradual decline and in the 19th century, decadence. It is not suggested that these late pieces were not of the highest standard of workmanship, in fact it is readily admitted that the intricate inlays, carvings and gilding etc., are the finest in the world. BUT THEY ARE NOT TSUBA, and should one care to collect such objects he should not be under the impression that he is collecting TSUBA. These pieces were the means by which the descendants of the tsuba makers made their living, by providing merchants and others also with a living; in fact the whole of the 19th century brings to mind rather an Aladdin's cave effect, i.e. bales of silk, Shibayama, late Kinko work, and clipper ships.

It must be said that even in these late times a handful of men stood tall among the others and attempted revival, but they were too few to save what was once a titanic industry.

John Harding.

SIMILAR THOUGHTS ON SWORD BLADES

It can be stated, using a fairly broad generalisation, that nearly all art forms do in the course of time progress through very similar stages, usually ending in over refinement and decadence. One may think of early Greek, or Egyptian sculpture, both of which show this retrogression clearly. Or of many schools of painting, in particular the simplicity and beauty of the early Italian schools contrasted with the work of the later schools. Even though these later men based their work on the concepts of the earlier, their work still became debased and over refined, degenerating finally into the Baroque style.

In Japanese art an example of this movement through the stages of a simple beginning, a peak, and a decline into decadence, may be seen in the Netsuke. Many simple early netsuke are late 17th or early 18th century. The peak is found perhaps around 1780-90. By the time the 19th century was well under way, decadence had most definitely set in. A little honest thought will show that many of the elaborate and finely carved pieces, bearing famous names, could never have been used as a working netsuke. Very fine examples of carving they may be, but only one push through a tight obi, and those finely carved projections, in brittle ivory, that many of them possess, would be broken. A good working netsuke made for the job, and not for show, is simple and enclosed in form.

Japanese sword blades show the same progression as Greek sculpture, European painting or working netsuke. The early sword-smiths were striving to produce an efficient weapon, some thirty inches of perfectly balanced extremely hard cutting edge, for use and not for show. And indeed, one may say they succeeded! The swords of the early period up to Masamune and the first half or so of the 14th century are most definitely made for practical use. One feels that the form of the Hamon and the details of forging within the blade were secondary to the purpose of the weapon. The form of the Hamon and details were arrived at because the smith was working and experimenting towards his avowed purpose, of producing the thirty odd inches of perfect cutting edge. He was trying to find out how

to do it, and the great swordsmiths did find out. The result can be seen in the tight forgings, the swirls of niye, the kinsuji, inazuma, and all those things which make a Master blade. But, these things were evolved as part of the work, and were still secondary to the purpose of the finished blade. These were working blades, just as the best netsuke are working netsuke.

The decline of the sword blade began when the swordsmith began to think about the beauty of his Hamon and forging pattern, before the efficiency of the weapon. As with the Italian painters he had centuries of knowledge and techniques, not recorded but still to be studied in existing examples, to draw upon. Again, his work was based upon that of the earlier men, but again over-refinement crept in. One feels, as with the painters, that the time of trial, hard work and discipline was over, the basic principles were known. Now was the time for embroidery and elaboration, for decadence to begin. Only look at examples of the beautifully simple dragon horimono on early blades, the controlled grooves and simple So-ken, and contrast these with horimono that men like Tadatsuna could carve on a blade. Wonderful examples of intaglio rilievo carving in steel but which is the more fitting on thirty odd inches of efficient cutting edge? The question requires no answer. As the old Samurai said in the "Seven Samurai" when watching the dual between the expert swordsman and the braggart, "A waste of time, the conclusion is obvious".

Bon Dale.