

## To-Ken Society Meeting Report

11 Dec 2014

The meeting constituted the Society's annual general meeting and it was opened with a number of administrative topics. Sadly, but understandably, some of these were notices of retirement by officers who had committed a lot of energy and numerous years of their time to our Society. We would therefore like to use this forum to express our gratitude and recognition of the esteemed members who have served and helped us voluntarily over time.

Clive Sinclair, our honourable chairman, who has been involved with the Society for over forty years, and has been our chairman for twenty years, tendered his notice to retire at the end of 2015. During his long Society tenure, he has lectured, coached, guided, published, organised events and contributed in many other immeasurable ways. Thankfully, he will remain closely involved with the Society in an advisory and mentor role. Undoubtedly, given Clive's immense energy (he is still actively practising both kendo and judo), ardent passion for nihonto and great knowledge of the subject, he will continue contributing and participating in our events, for which we shall be deeply grateful. Clive – arigatoo gozaimashta.

Maurice, our prudent and numerically adept treasurer, has helped the Society manage its budget thriftily over the years. He will slow down in his financial activities but will retain a watchful eye over the Society accounts. Earlier in 2014, he transitioned the membership management duties, and in 2015 we shall implement more online and electronic banking to help streamline operations.

Steve Hughes, our very capable IT administrator and website manager, who helped fully transition our Society to the digital era, has also resigned given his increasing professional workload. Steve's contribution has been very extensive – he has fully created a modern-looking website, kept members updated and helped enormously in our membership electronic communication, managing our overall electronic presence single-handedly over the last few years.

Therefore, if Society members are interested in the vacated website manager position, please contact us in due course. We welcome the involvement of energetic and knowledgeable individuals who would be prepared to dedicate their precious own time and energy to the running of the Society. Similarly, Clive and the rest of the committee members of the Society intend to put in place a succession plan for the chairman role in the course of 2015.

Next, Rob Warren reminded the attendees that he was in the process of organising a study session of the nihonto held by the V&A museum. Most likely, such a visit will take place on Saturday, at the V&A Earls Court repository, although there is a remote possibility for a late Friday-evening visit at the museum.

The following part of the AGM was the traditional sword viewing the explanations by the owners of the blades presented. Clive started off by talking about the handachi koshirae mounted Hizen-to forged by Shinshinto smith Hayashi Shigehide. A long and heavy sword, it is characterised by chu-suguha hamon in nie and nioi, ending in yakiotoshi as well as ko-itame hada and extended chu-kissaki midarekomi boshi.

The shodai Shigehide, known as Tanon, was born into a samurai retainer family of the small Omura Han (close to Nagasaki) in 1808. He learnt under Naotane in Edo and worked for the Omura daimyo Matsudaira Tadakazu as well as Matsubayashi Iizai and Watanabe Noburu during the Bakumatsu period. Shodai Shigehide had two sons who trained under him and he chose his second son, Sukesaku to learn under the Naminohira swordsmith group (they practised a family tradition known

as Isshi Soden, i.e. handing over the secrets or techniques to only one successor). The rule was never broken, except under direct orders from their lord, which is what happened in Sukesaku's case.

David Maynard talked about his two NTHK-papered tanto: a Taisho gendaito and a sue-Seki Mino blade. The first tanto, a hirazukuri blade with complex nie-deki midare hamon, was forged by Horii Hideaki. He was born in 1886 as Horii Kanekichi, and worked under the tutelage of Takease Oko, the founder of NTHK. In 1912, he was bestowed the right to use the character Hide by NTHK and following the birth of the crown prince Akihito he adopted the name Toshihide. He produced itame hada and vivid midare gunome hamon.

The sue-Seki blade was forged by the Mino smith Kanemichi, who was considered a descendant of the Mino-den founder Shizu Saburo Kaneuji. He made swords for the emperor, Ogimachi-tenno, who granted Kanemichi the right to use the prefix "O" from his name. That was later followed by the bestowal of the title Mitsu no Kami. In the 12<sup>th</sup> year of Eiroku (1569) he moved from Mino to Kyoto with his four sons, who were known as the Mishina brothers. The Mishina brothers together with Omi Kami Hisamichi became popular as the five great smiths of Kyoto.

The slender and graceful Kanemichi tanto itself has marked saki-zori, Jizo style boshi and running itame hada, with some mizukage transforming into shirake utsuri (typical of Mino-den). The gumone-midare niedeki hamon is also quite vivid and active, with numerous sunagashi crossing the choji and gunome lobes.

David Wells presented a beautifully mounted Sukesada katana. It was forged by lesser-known Mago Daijo Sukesada, whose brother was the renowned Kozuke Daijo Sukesada (believed to be the most famous Shinto-era Sukesada smith). The blade has a shallow koshi-zori, in line with the fashion of the Kanbun era. Its overall slender sugata and lightness is complemented by its bo-hi. The gunome midare hamon is in ko-nie and the bade has tobiyaki. It is plausible that the bonji carving has been added at a later stage to conceal a blade flaw.

Members had brought along other interesting items, including Maurice's robust Shinshinto katana, yanone and various tsuba.

Fig.1 Shigehide Hizen-to

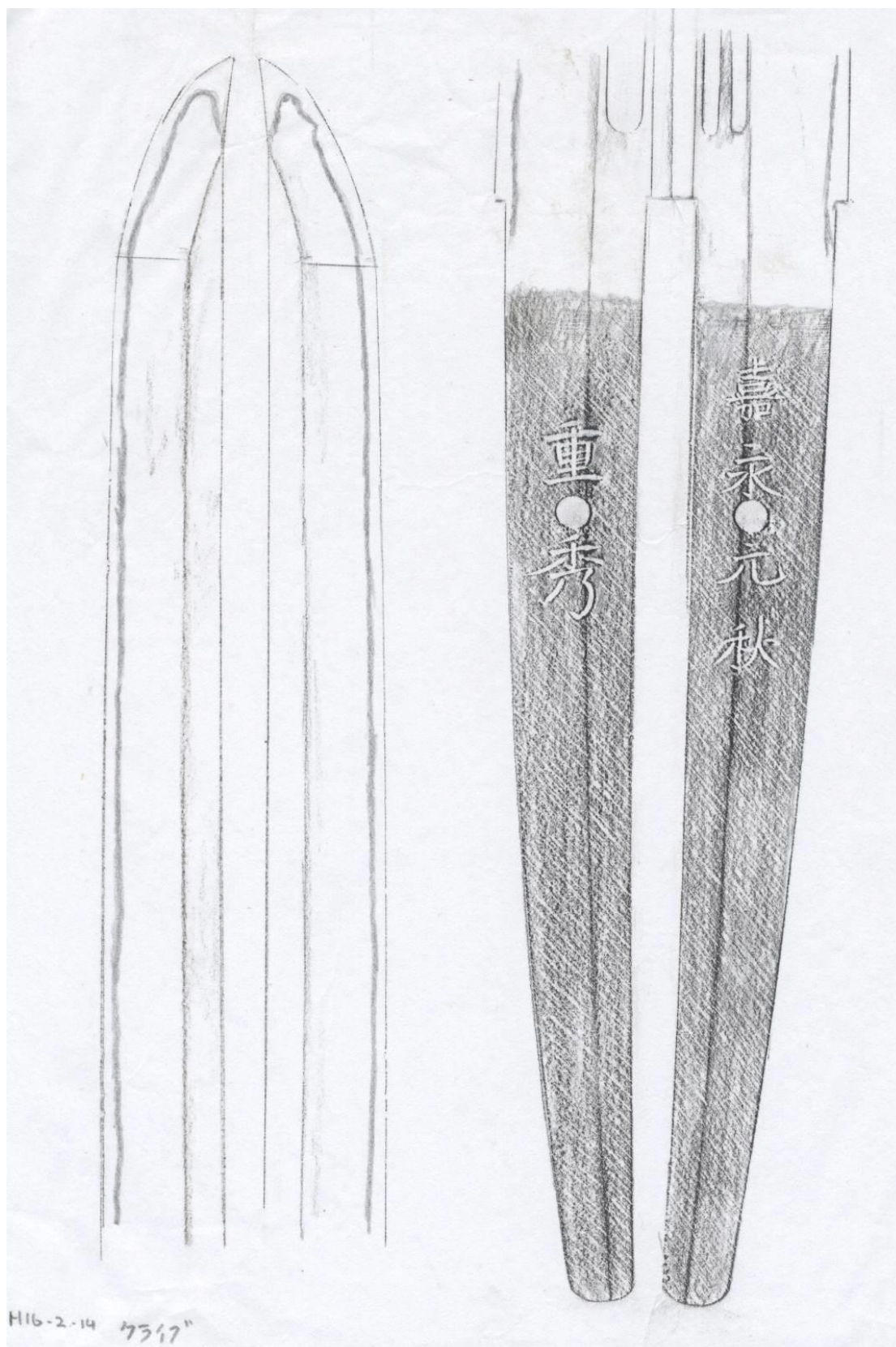


Fig.2 Hideaki tanto



Fig.3 Seki Kanemichi tanto



Fig.4 Sukesada



Fig.5 Shinshinto katana

