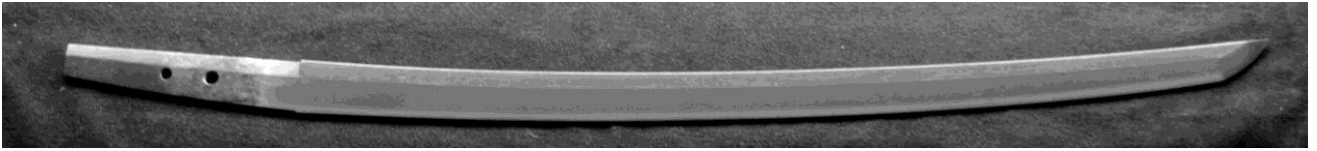


## Enju Wakazashi from the Kamakura period



### **Introduction:**

One of the benefits of talking to experienced collectors is there is a wealth of knowledge and advice available and freely given regarding what and how we should collect. I confess that as I have spent the majority of my adult life studying and collecting swords I have more occasions when I am asked for advice than there are when I seek it. Giving advice can become over simplified and formulaic, following it, especially your own, can prove more of a challenge!

A standard response when asked by someone starting out “what should I collect?” might be:

1. Buy the best you can afford.
2. Fewer good pieces are far better as a collection than many mediocre.
3. Any addition to a collection should enhance it.

More recently the market has become somewhat paper obsessed. It is not difficult to see comments on message boards such as “I am looking for a Juyo katana”. In this case the important thing is not the sword but the level of paper it has achieved. While I fully endorse the first three points the paper obsession worries me a little (actually more than a little) Papers seem to be seen as an easy and safe alternative to study. The aim of the collector is not the type or quality of swords in a collection but the number of pieces that have a high level paper. I am concerned that this approach results in some very fine pieces being ignored because they lack documentation.

Now having said I fully support the initial three points I have a confession. I sometimes buy something simply because I like it, regardless of who made it and when or what attribution it has. The following write up is about such a blade. I have discussed this before in a presentation to the Token of GB last year so for those who are seeing it again, my apologies, but after a little introspection I thought it worth telling the story because we sometimes lose sight of why we collect.

The reality is I think that those who stick with the subject do so because they truly love what they see and appreciate the craftsmanship, history and just downright beauty achieved over many millennia with a hammer and anvil and a massive degree of skill.

I bought this sword originally from Aoi-Art some 10 to 15 years ago. Their original images of the blade are reproduced below. As described in the body of this article I sold it only to repurchase it 12 months later. What amazed me was that I was lucky enough to buy it not once but twice and that something I believe to be truly beautiful remained ignored at one of the two biggest sword shows in the USA. Was this because:

- a) It is an o-suriage mumei wakazashi or:
- b) I have seriously weird taste and what I like fails to appeal to anyone else.



Original images on Aoi Art website

**The School:**

The Yamato smith Hiromura is said to be the founder of the Enju School. But it was his son Kunimura who is regarded of the founder of the Enju style. Working in Higo province, Enju work is unique amongst Kyushu schools. Although originating in Yamato it is said that Hiromura was Rai Kuniyuki's grandson or son in law, and Enju work does show great Rai influence. The Enju School worked from the mid Kamakura though to the Muromachi and is divided in to ko, chu and sue Enju. Ko Enju and Chu Enju produced similar Jigane. It is said that Enju gane looks darker and stronger than Rai work. Other distinguishing features are that Enju produce predominantly O-maru boshi where Rai is typical Ko-maru and Rai work exhibits nie-utsuri where Enju, where utsuri is present, tends to be shirake.

At its best Enju work is said to be indistinguishable from Rai work. As with so many schools the quality of work deteriorated as it progressed. Sue Enju jigane is said to look hard and lacks the Yamashiro characteristics of the earlier periods.

**The Sword:**

An O-suriage wakazashi, shinogi-zukuri, iori-mune, tori-sori

Nagasa 46.5cm    sori 1.0cm    kasane 0.56cm  
Motohaba 2.61cm    sakihaba 1.83cm

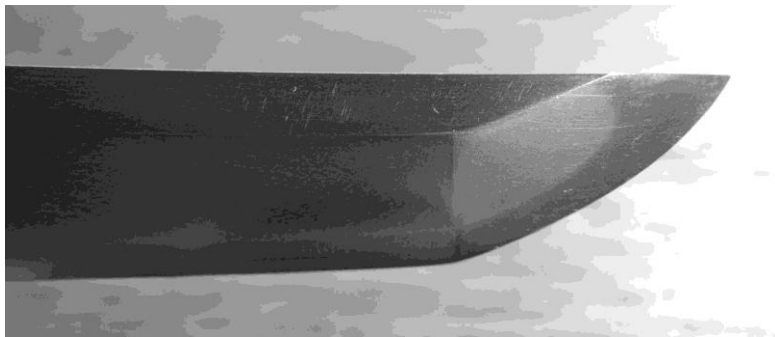
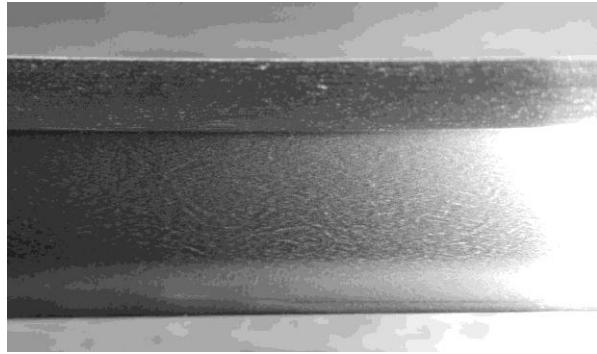
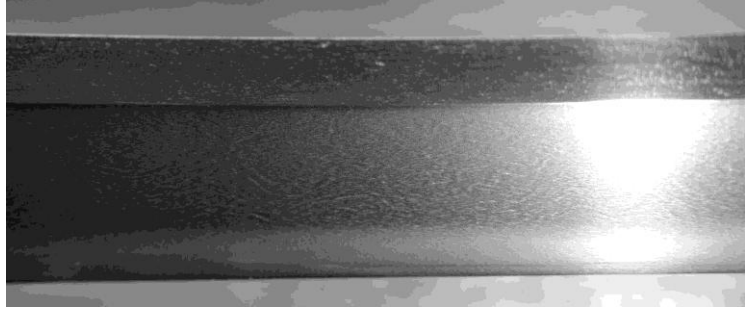
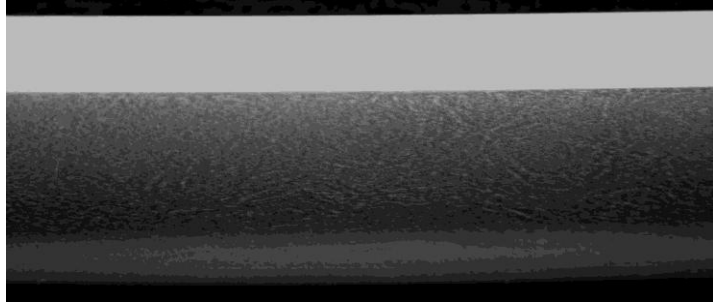
The sword was originally a tachi blade which has been greatly shortened during its long life. The remaining part of the blade exhibits an elegant sugata. Its slim proportions and ko-kissaki look very much like the work of the "unchanging smiths" who were noted for maintaining the elegant proportions of the early Kamakura period in their work.

Jigane- This blade has one of the most beautiful jigane I have seen. Superbly healthy it exhibits a tight ko-itame hada which is rich in chickei and ji-nie. There is little or no evidence of the plain Enju hada (areas of plain dark steel not dissimilar to Rai-hada) which so often appear in Enju work. The Jigane is lustrous and the chickei and ji-nie shine out and then turn black as the blade is re-orientated in a single light source. Altogether the hada is extremely fine.

Hamon- Suguha in ko-nie deki with ko-nie running through the nioi guchi. The hamon has a great deal of activity with ashi and inazuma clearly visible

Boshi- O-maru with a short turn back again covered in ko-nie.

Nakago- O-suriage, mumei and with two mekugi ana.



### **Comment:**

As might be gathered from the description above I regard this as a truly beautiful piece of work. The Sugata, the hada and the hamon with its profuse nie place this blade in the mid to late Kamakura period so ko or chu Enju. As previously mentioned good Enju work is often confused with Rai School production. In this case I believe the Enju attribution was based on the o-maru boshi and the lack of nie-utsuri. Some months after buying this sword I examined a wakazashi which had been attributed to Rai Kunitoshi and awarded Juyo papers. At the risk of sounding sacrilegious, I believed this Enju piece to be the more beautiful in terms of hada and activity within the Hamon. I believe that were it not for the o-maru boshi this work could easily be considered as early Yamashiro Rai

The sword currently holds NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon papers.

It was with some considerable regret that I let this sword go at the beginning of 2012. I was in pursuit of an extremely rare blade and the only way I could make the numbers work was to offer the Enju sword in part exchange. While absolutely delighted with the Sword purchased I was still unhappy at having to let go of what I considered a very special sword. This feeling was compounded when I received feedback from a very well respected dealer and good friend whose comments on the Florida sword show I have partially quoted below. In mid May I was in touch with the dealer with whom I had traded the Enju. He confirmed that while it had been greatly admired no one had bought it and although listed as on hold it was available. So I bought it back for exactly the same price I had traded it for originally. It will find its way back in to my collection and stimulate some new research on the links and development in Yamashiro style Jigane.

Comments on the Enju Wakazashi (As a courtesy I have not named the individuals making the comments):

1. Commenting on the Florida show in 2012:

**Some of the things that were available at the show: Yoshioka Ichimonji; Higo Enju, good enough to be mistaken for Rai Kunimitsu;**

On the news that I had bought it back:

**I am glad to hear that you are going to recover the Enju. It is really a stunning blade. Normally Enju are paled by Rai Kunimitsu, this one not so. Were the boshi different, I am sure that it would be attributed to Kunimitsu.**

2. it is perfect and old.

In my opinion if it were a daito it would be Juyo easily. I think at this price level it's not possible to get this combination of quality and age at all.

3. I did not know you traded the Enju and I am very happy you're getting it back. I remember it as a lovely and elegant sword.

4. I'm glad you decided to buy back the Enju wakazashi. Although I have not seen it in hand, the photos illustrate that it has top-level Yamashiro jigane.

**Conclusion:**

In the above I am attempting to re-think (and possible re-justify to myself) my own approach to collecting. I have continued for many years to follow the three rules listed in the introduction. While I have never bought anything I didn't like, I have on occasion been swayed towards something because it had a higher level of paper than something else. This is a safe and relatively comfortable thing to do and I think understandable. However if I were to rely totally on papers and stop looking at the sword I think there is a real possibility to overlook and miss something special. I think this wakazashi is amongst the best Enju workmanship I have seen. It compares very favourably to much Rai work I have had the opportunity to study. It will never (or at least it is very unlikely) obtain higher papers than it has. I bought it not because I thought it enhanced or added monetary value to a collection, I bought it because it was beautiful.

Having sold it reluctantly, it then sat on the website of a very well known dealer, was shown at the Florida show and other than the views expressed by other dealers above, it was largely ignored. Why? Well I can only guess but firstly it is Enju which in simplistic terms is regarded as a lower quality offshoot of Rai and secondly it is an O-suriage wakazashi with limited papering potential. The quality of the workmanship, the condition and all the other good things this sword had to offer seem to pale in to insignificance.

All of the above points regarding collecting are important and valid and I will continue to quote them if asked. But first and foremost it is important that as a collector you like what you are buying and take joy in looking at it and studying it. Once you have established that you like it then the other factors should come in to play. At that point you can decide whether or not something has a place in your collection.