

AGM & Lickey Meeting report, 15 February 2025

The AGM and Lickey regional meeting was attended by 35 members in person with a further 12 members joining virtually via Zoom allowing us to 'broadcast' live the AGM and presentations. We hope to repeat this feature at some future meetings. Altogether this was one of the best attended meetings of recent years. As well as items exhibited to illustrate the presentations detailed below, a number of members brought items for exhibition all of which added to the enjoyment of the meeting.

AGM

The AGM briefly recapitulated the detailed report produced by our Chairman, Michael Spasov, which included the following:

- A summary of the Society's 2024 activities
- An outline of our proposed activities for 2025
- Advanced notice of two events of interest to members - in May NBTHK organised meeting in Berlin and in June Japan Art Expo in Utrecht
- Membership statistics
- The Society's media interactions
- The Society's financial position

There was unanimous agreement to grant Honorary Life Membership to former Chairman Graham Curtis in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the Society.

The current committee was unanimously re-elected. The committee continues to request a volunteer to the post of Society Treasurer which at present remains vacant.

Paul Bowman - Re-looking at the Influence of Shizu

Paul started his presentation by outlining the beginnings of the Sōshū tradition with the first sword-smiths summoned to Sagami (abbreviated form - Sōshū) in the Kamakura period with the eventual rise of Shintōgo Kunimitsu, regarded as the founder of the Sōshū school, and his most famous acolyte Masamune. Paul then briefly discussed Masamune's Jittestu (10 brilliant students) and the likely reality rather than the myth surrounding these sword-smiths.

One of the Juttestu was Saburo Kaneuji, a talented smith from Yamato province and part of the Tegai school. He outlined Kaneuji's move to Sagami to study with Masamune, ultimately settling in the village of Shizu in Mino province. As Paul pointed out, early Kaneuji work shows all the traits of Yamato and the NBTHK designate this work as Yamato Shizu with the kanji for Kaneuji as 包氏. Work from his stay in Sagami and Shizu village is designated as Shizu and the kanji for Kaneuji changes to 兼氏. This work combines Yamato and Sōshū features and some Japanese scholars regard Shizu's workmanship as having the closest characteristics to Masamune.

Kinjū (Kaneshige) from Echizen, supposedly a fellow Jittetsu, also travelled with Kaneuji to Mino and together they are regarded as the founders of the Mino tradition, one of the Gokaden or five traditional koto schools, which as Paul pointed out is a relatively modern concept developed to help in sword kantei. Students of Kaneuji later moved to the village of Naoe in Mino and their work is designated as Naoe Shizu by the NBTHK. These smiths include Kaneyuki (son of Kinjū) and Tametsugu (probable son of Gō Yoshiro).

By the middle Muromachi period the Mino school had gained an excellent reputation and was largely based around Seki. The two most famous smiths were Kanemoto (Magaroku) and Kanesada (No Sada). This area produced both high quality blades from the likes of Kanesada and Kanemoto as well as kazuuchi-mono (more utilitarian swords produced for export or to satisfy high demand in Japan). Paul pointed out that towards the end of the Muromachi period many Mino smiths travelled to other provinces. Paul's personal opinion is that as many Shinto period blades exhibit masame hada in the shinogi-ji which reflects a feature of many Mino blades construction this suggests the widespread influence of former Mino smiths. For example Kanemichi (Daido), reputed to be the 11th generation from Kaneuji, and his sons founded the Shinto Mishina school. So perhaps Mino had one of the greatest practical influences on later

manufacture as evidence of their manufacturing techniques can be seen in many of the Shinto schools of the early and mid Edo period.

Next attendees had the opportunity to view a number of blades related to the presentation. The first was a Ko Hōki blade, then a Juyo Yamato Shizu katana (with Homma Nishu sayagaki) and then two Juyo Shizu katana, one with Tanobe sayagaki and one with Honma (Kunzan) sayagaki. There was then a Naoe Shizu katana and finally a Kanemichi (Daido) blade. Seeing the sugata of these blades lined up in chronological order was most instructive.

Thorsten Schoeppner - A Blade by Norishige 則重

Thorsten introduced us to a katana by the koto smith Norishige. He began with some biographical details of Norishige who was born in Etchū province in the Kamakura period. Early records confirm he was a pupil of Shintōgo Kunimitsu, regarded as the founder of the Sōshū tradition, and it is likely he was one of Shintōgo's students along with Yukimitsu and Masamune. Again early records suggest he also studied under, or with, Gō Yoshihiro, which means he was part of one of the most talented group of sword-smiths of the early koto period.

Next, Thorsten gave us a detailed description of the katana (which was also exhibited) pointing out its key features. In particular he highlighted the jihada and Norishige's tell-tale matsukawa (pine bark) hada with very visible chikei. Pictures from an excellent oshigata of the blade were used to illustrate the hamon and hataraki of the katana. Whilst the hamon is ko-notare mixed with ko-midare, nie based hataraki crosses between the jihada and hamon producing kinsuji, sunagashi, inazuma and yubashiri such that the boundary between hamon and jihada is not always distinct.

The hamon could be thought of as 'Ko-Hōki style' and indeed both Masamune and Norishige were inspired by the Ko-Hōki school. We were shown some of the distinguishing features of Ko-Hōki (and were fortunate to have a Ko-Hōki blade in the exhibition). In particular the inscription "Shō/Kachi/Katsu" (勝, lit. "victory") often appear on Ko-Hōki smith Ohara Sanemori blades and a Norishige tanto with the same inscription exists. This supports the idea of Ko-Hōki inspiring Norishige.

Finally, Thorsten went on to describe the horimono on the katana. Bo-hi are present on both sides and then goma bashi (ceremonial chopsticks) and a bonji appear on one side and shin no kurikara (dragon swallowing a sword) on the other. Thorsten explained there is a Buddhist prayer ritual using goma-bashi to burn prayers to the deity Fudō Myō-ō who is identified by the bonji (a sanskrit character) which is on the katana and so the two are related.

Furthermore, Fudō-Myō-ō is often represented wielding a straight double edged blade. Thorsten explain there is a legend in which Fudō is challenged to a dual by another deity with both transforming into different shapes during the fight including flaming swords. At this point Fudō transforms into a dragon and entwines the opponent still in sword form and proceeds to devour it from the tip. The form of Fudō as a dragon devouring the sword is the shin no kurikara motif which appears on the ura of the Norishige katana. Thus all the horimono are related.

Attendees were able to see the Norishige katana, Tanobe senses extensive sayagaki, its Edo period koshirae and a beautiful framed oshigata of the blade.

Mark Radburn - Japanese Literature Inspired Tsuba Designs - Ise Monogatari

Finally, as a change to nihonto, Mark gave a presentation on tsuba. He reminded members that we have recently had a series of presentations designed to help identify and understand the motifs on tosogu, namely:

- Mark's earlier presentation on daimyō and samurai desire for fittings with Nō drama and falconry motifs
- George Millers's presentation 'Do Tōsōgu Themes Matter'
- John Miles's presentation 'Oni Spirits & Legends on Tsuba'

In introducing his theme Mark briefly outlined the three types of Japanese literature from the Heian period (794-1185), namely 'poetic anthologies' (e.g. *Kokin Wakushū*), 'prose narratives' (e.g. *Heike* or *Genji monogatari*) and finally 'poem tales' of which the *Ise monogatari* is the most famous of this genre. This literature appealed to *daimyō* and *samurai* giving them 'cultural legitimacy' and was reflected in the *samurai* philosophy of *bunbu ryōdō* (the way of sword and pen). The literature was also related to aesthetic genres such as 'wabi' and 'mono no aware' (the pathos of things) which greatly appealed to the *samurai*.

He went on to give more information on the *Ise monogatari*, which records in prose interspersed with poems, the travels and romantic adventures of an unnamed aristocrat (but most likely the courtier *Ariwara no Narihira* [825-880]) from youth to old age.

The most famous episode or chapter (the ninth) includes the *Yatsunashi* scene, an eight plank bridge with surrounding iris (*kakitsubata*) which inspired *Narihira* to compose an acrostic poem. The motif which is widely seen in many Japanese art forms (garden design, screen paintings, lacquerware, *ukiyo-e* and even clothing) first appeared in *tōsōgu* as a motif of late *Muromachi* period *Kyo sukashi tsuba*. Mark also showed examples from *Kyo Shoami*, *Akasaka* and the *Hayashi* and *Shimizu Higo* schools. These covered a period of at least 250 years and the design continued to be used until the *Haitōrei* in 1876.

He explained that 'Yatsunashi' was an excellent example of a Japanese design concept called *ruso-moyō* or 'vacant pattern' which is a way of conveying a story without portraying the main character(s). Thus whilst *Ariwara no Narihira* sits at *Yatsunashi* and composes the acrostic poem and is the central character, all the *tsuba* illustrated only show the bridge and iris motif.

Mark went on to show a number of *Owari tsuba*. The first with the motif 'The Narrow Road of Ivy' also from the ninth episode, followed by the 'Stirrups of *Musashi*' from the thirteenth episode and finally 'The Measuring Well' motif from the twenty-third episode.

Afterwards attendees were able to view a number of the *tsuba* that Mark used to illustrate his presentation including examples from *Kyo sukashi*, *Kyo Shoami*, *Owari*, *Hayashi* (*Matashichi* and *Tohachi*), *Shimizu* (4th master), and *Ko Akasaka* (3rd master).











