

Members' autumn update

This brief missive is to provide our members with a snippet of the activities we have been organizing in the course of the last few months. As many of you are aware, we have resumed our physical meetings across various formats – both the more topic-dedicated half-days in London (which this year commenced in February-March) and also full-day study events (first such event this year being in Gullane, Scotland in April). We are concurrently continuing with our Zoom sessions, and for those of who logged in, so far this year we have listened and chatted online with Paul Bowman (phases of collecting), Paul Martin (sword update from Japan and Gotoba) and Eckhard Kremers (Kyoto sukashi tsuba master's workshop). We have another one coming up on sword metallurgy, so stay tuned.

As the colder, rainier autumn days roll by and we are increasingly enveloped by 'locally-brewed' tempests such as the UK 'mini budget', imported energy crisis and draconian price increases, or the ferocious hurricane Ian across the Atlantic, we can fondly remember the balmy, well rather hotter, summer. It was at the end of June when we held the very enjoyable and packed day-long gathering in the Village Hall of Ditchling. Our committee member Ian Chapman facilitated the organisation and helped turn the day into a success with the support of so many members and attendees.

In Ditchling, there were presentations on subjects as diverse as: how to handle and view swords, what a sword's nakago might reveal about the blade, how to tell a fake tsuba from a genuine one and why the Aoe Bitchu school is one of the most respected. Apart from this more formal didactic aspect, in reality the majority of the day actually comprised plenty of social interaction, exchanging and trading items from personal collections, viewing the exhibition of impressive items from members' collections curated on stage or sharing anecdotes over a cup of tea. We also enjoyed delicious lunch and dinner catered by the social enterprise charity Team Domenica.

We did our best to combine the educational with fun, informal side of our Society, while also providing the opportunity to study some high-quality swords, fittings, armour and lacquerware in a relaxed atmosphere. Various highly rated swords and tosogu were exhibited across Kamakura, Shinto, Shinshinto and Gendaito blades, with Bizen, Yamashiro, Yamato being represented. There were attendees from overseas as well, e.g. an Italian collector and martial artist travelling to the UK specifically for the day.

'Fast forward' three months, and we reach the end of September, which was marked in our nihonto calendar with the eventful visit to the Royal Armouries in Leeds, the leading national museum for arms and armour. The morning of the day was dedicated to talks about nihonto attributions and organisations conferring them, the Bizen Ukai swordsmith school and diplomatic-gift armours.

Following lunch, we split into two cohorts – one group examining and viewing swords and armour from the Armouries collection and another visiting the Oriental Gallery to the instructive and entertaining commentary of emeritus curator Ian Bottomley. The groups then swapped and we ended back in the lecture room, where Ian shared his thoughts on some of the armour displayed there for us to study. We had the opportunity to handle around 20 swords such as an Unji naginata, Naotsuna, Tegai, various Sukesada, a couple of Kanemoto, Yasumitsu, a number of Mishina school blades (Masatoshi, Masakatsu, etc) and others – many of them papered by the NBTHK and NTHK and in very good to excellent polish.

While we have previously held such study events at the Armouries, this is the first time we have had the opportunity to handle armour and listen to Ian Bottomley's highly informative remarks about the items laid out in the lecture room.

Some of the highlights among the remarkable blades to study: the Juyo-rated Unji naginata demonstrated the fine itame with jinie typical of the Unkai school grandee. There was a very interesting custom-made shobu zukuri ('iris leaf' shaped) Sukesada of very svelte proportions and quieter hamon. The ko-itame Yasumitsu wakizashi looked more Yamashiro in its shibui ('quite elegance') beauty. The Naotsuna was also very graceful. (Photos below courtesy of the Royal Armouries and To-ken Society).

Unji



Sukesada



Naotsuna



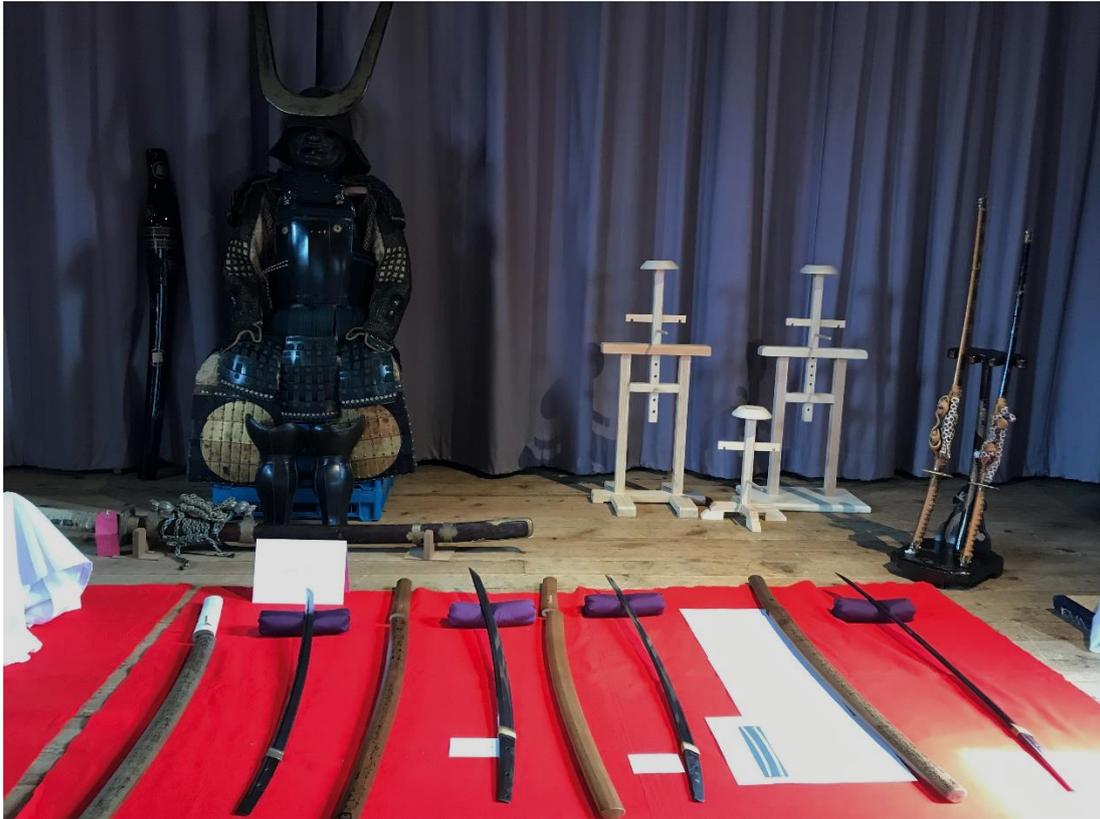
Sue-Tegai



Kanemoto



Ditchling





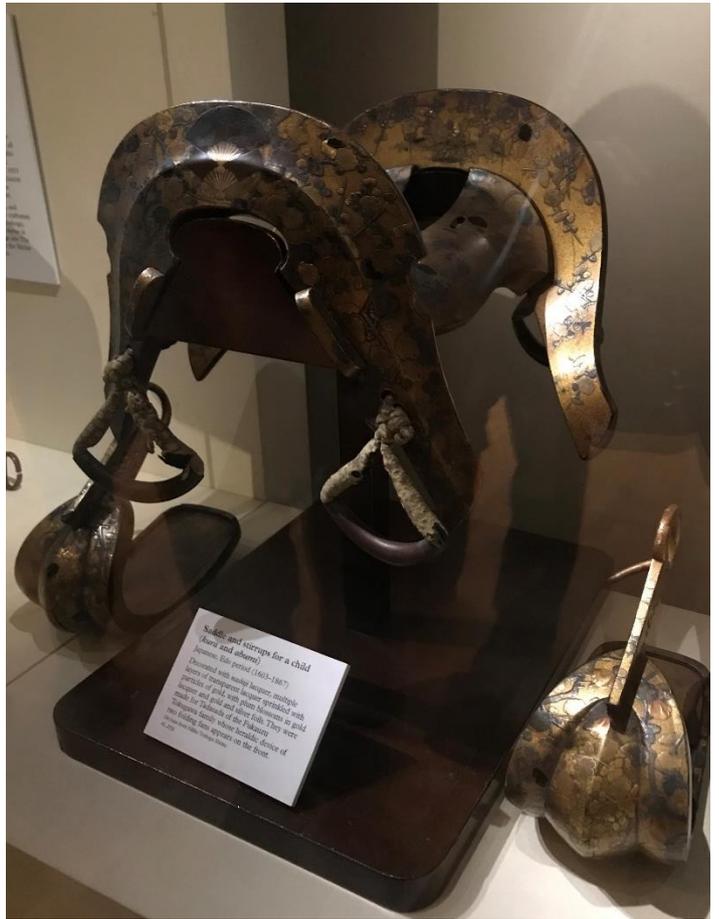


Royal Armouries – Leeds











We hope to see you again soon!

