

London Meeting Report, 17th May 2025

Topic: Yoshiro and Saburodayu Inlay Tsuba and Demystifying the Hidden Tokei Tsuba

Our May meeting explored a fascinating and often overlooked area of Japanese sword fittings. In a captivating presentation, John Miles guided us through the technical, artistic, and symbolic world of Yoshiro and Saburodayu inlay tsuba. He offered a compelling investigation into the mysterious category known as Tokei tsuba.

The first part of the talk focused on Yoshiro tsuba, which are noted for their refined brass inlay work applied to iron plates. John traced the development of this style from the late Muromachi to early Edo periods, pointing out key visual characteristics such as geometric and botanical motifs and regional stylistic distinctions. He also introduced the related Saburodayu group, whose pieces often exhibit increased delicacy and finer carving.

The second half of the presentation shifted to the more enigmatic Tokei tsuba. John proposed that these may contain hidden Christian symbols, offering a fresh interpretation rooted in Japan's early encounter with Christianity and its suppression in the early 17th century. Alternative roots could be related to clocks or Amida (Buddha). All the options were examined in depth—additional insights into the rationale for the persecution of Christians. Drawing connections between tsuba design elements and Christian iconography, he suggested that some guards may have served as discreet expressions of faith during times of persecution. This unique perspective sparked lively discussion and added a rich historical dimension to the study of sword fittings.

As always, the presentation was enhanced by a hands-on session featuring a selection of inlay tsuba, including examples of Yoshiro and Tokei styles. Members had the opportunity to examine these pieces and closely apply insights from the talk.

The evening concluded at a nearby pub, where informal conversations continued in a friendly and engaging atmosphere. The session offered a rare blend of technical appreciation, historical insight, and thought-provoking interpretation—one that left a lasting impression on all who attended.











