

LAST MEETING

The Committee decided before the last meeting to organize the procedure of the meeting rather than allow the thing to find its own way, which has been the usual form lately. To this end the many small tables at the Masons Arms were arranged into one large one. When we had all gathered around this enlarged table and when the Business had been dispensed with, members who had brought exhibits were asked to say a few words on them. This went down very well and led to much discussion. Among those who produced something, Len Holtaway showed a fine Tachi mounted in an old style with a beautiful upswept hilt. The mounts were Sendai school in brass, about 1600. The blade by Wakasa no kami Hiromasa, a student of Tsuta Sukehiro. The scabbard decorated with the "mitsu-domo-ye" mon, with chain hangers, a very definite sword for wearing with armour. Also Len Holtaway had a fine old nagamaki in shirasaya, a very noble old weapon which had seen much use, the hamon being practically ground out on the boshi. Signed Mihara Masamune, circa 14-15th cent. The tang very long and ubu, unusual for a pole arm.

Peter Cottis produced a face mask. John Anderson said it was Nara 1750-1800, and went on a lot and I wasn't able to get it down on paper. Malcom Hutchinson had a helmet which he announced as a 64 plate, to be subsequently told by John Anderson that it was a 62 plate, covered with small rivets, nearly 1000 in number. The fukigayeshi decorated with a small mon, probably a later addition, complete with inner hemp lining. The hachimanza in an early style, the "Yoshi" style of kanamono mounting. A discussion developed on the size of holes in helmet tops, very large for example are either 12th century, or more likely 18th or 19th century reproduction. Opinion was expressed on rivets and their function as an extra defence against sword cuts.

Sidney Divers showed a couple of blades in shirasaya just back from Japan. A dirk with a nice horimono of a crane, signed Kanenobu, with orikami; and an excellent katana of good shape, unsigned, but with a green paper attributing the blade to Oishi Sa.

Tim Tyrer came up with a helmet crest in lacquered wood which provoked discussion on the species of animal depicted. It was decided that it was a cross between a Shi-shi and a Kirin, it apparently being a shi-shi with a unicorn like horn. A Japanese guest then announced that it was without

doubt a male shi-shi. I think this was serious comment but its certainly a new one to me!

John Anderson gave one of his usual lucid and exact talks on Armour, a brief historical development of Armour; I hope to have notes on this to publish in a future Programme. I wish I could publish John word for word - he is very good. Many questions arose on the styles of armour and reasons for changes in different periods from Dolmen to Meiji Restoration. This was a good meeting, successful in the new format, well attended with twenty-six members and their guests.

NOVEMBER
14th 1967

A Day to Remember?

The long awaited sale at Christies began promptly at 11 o'clock not surprisingly with Lot No.1. This comprised three tsuba which fetched a modest 20 gns. Modest for nowadays, not so long ago the same lot would probably have made 2 to 3 gns.

Thereafter the sale settled down to routine, but the tsuba seemed to be a prelude to the more serious stuff to come, the Swords. Most of the bidding bounced back and forth amongst a dozen people, some good prices were attained. 140 gns. for Lot 62 for example. However, as more and more To Ken members began to arrive one had the impression that tension was rising, and the wait for Lot 108, the first of the swords, became more tedious. Not that I felt that many of our local To Ken members had much hope of buying a sword in what was to be this Sale of Sales.

The swords also began modestly enough with 50 gns. for Lot 108, a merchants sword. The next Lot, 109, a fine wakizashi by Echizen Yasutsugu began immediately to set the pattern, at 190 gns. Lot 110 a nicely mounted small Daisho, 170 gns. Lot 111 wakizashi, blade Yashimichi 180 gns. The next Lot, 112, a fine Tachi with very good quality mounts went to 400 gns, a record. A brief relapse on Lot 113 brought about one of the first bargains of the sale, a very fine Shidzu blade in Shirasaya for 150 gns.

Lot 114 went to a really record price for a sword in a saleroom in this country, 520 gns. This was for an excellent Yasutsugu blade, with a tameshigiri inscription in gold, in shirasaya. The next blade in Shirasaya, inscribed GO, made 250 gns, Lot 115. The next Lot was to my mind another bargain, a fine Tamba no kami Yoshimichi katana in Shirasaya (116) which went for 140 gns.

Lot 117 was the Ichimonji. One of the finest blades seen in this country for a long time. I said in the last programme that it would be interesting to see who had sufficient courage to dig deep enough to acquire this, and a deep dig it was indeed, 1900 gns, - one thousand nine hundred! We have avoided mentioning names, but here I would like to take my hat off and say congratulations to Sir Frank Bowden who bought the Ichimonji for, as he said to me afterwards, the honour of the To Ken Society. Good luck to him - nice to know it will stay in this country.

After that 400 gns for Lot 118 an "impressive silver mounted tachi" almost seemed modest! Lot 119, a tanto of quality, 200 gns. Lot 120 a beautifully tasteful wakizashi, 190 gns. The next, a remarkable silver mounted katana with a complete mounting by Omori Teruhide, blade by Motoshige, 14th cent. made a nice 420 gns. Another bargain next, a fine Bizen blade at 130 gns, Lot 122, blade by Norimitsu. Lot 123 katana with excellent mounts, blade by Hasabe Kunishige, surprisingly cheap at 280 gns.

An "extravagantly mounted Daisho" was the next lot (124) and it certainly was, what a pair! It made a nicely rounded 520 gns.

There were probably three exceptional swords in the sale and Lot 125 was the second of them to be offered. A superb Ito-maki-no-Tachi, the mounts held together with a sunagi. The blade in shirasaya by Bishu Osafune Shigetada. With two orikami, one dated 1706. This attained the third highest price of the sale at 800 gns. Then came the Masamune, Lot 126. Here I would like to record another moment of the sale. When the Masamune was drawn from its shirasaya and held up to the public gaze, Captain Raymond Johns, a well known figure to us older collectors and to us, one of the Old Generation of collectors, rose to his feet and bowed deeply from the waist. A fitting mark of respect to this remarkable blade. The battle joined and the Masamune fell to the hammer at the same price as the Ichimonji; 1900 gns. which was also fitting; these being the two plums of the sale, for me the Ichimonji had the edge.

After the Masamune the pace slowed down. Lot 127 a good Kanemoto in shirasaya 105 gns. Lot 128, a wakizashi, 38 gns. Lot 129 a Lot over which it is best to draw a veil, a box of bits for 40 gns.

Interest arose again in another good tachi, well mounted with a good early Bizen blade, an interest which took the price to 520 gns for Lot 130. A nice katana Lot 131, 190 gns. An Ōwakizashi in shirasaya by Tsuta Sukenao, Lot 132, also 190 gns. Lot 133 was an early blade in shirasaya signed by Bizen Yoshimitsu, Kagemitsu school, 200 gns. An elegantly mounted katana, 134, was a bargain for this sale at 170 gns. Prices remained high for the remaining lots. 135, 120 gns. 136, 160 gns. 137, 120 gns. 138, 60 gns. Lot 139 a small tanto signed Kunitoshi and very likely genuine "Niji" Kunitoshi, but very tired indeed, made 170 gns. The final Lot, a showy tachi with a late 19th century blade brought the swords to an end at 160 gns.

A day to remember? I think so because for the first time in this country Japanese swords attained recognition as the important art form that they are. A fact we have all known for a long time. And because of this recognition, the prices attained were in keeping. It is still an obvious statement that good swords are worth more than even the prices in this sale, when compared to sales of other Japanese works of art, netsuke for example. But the market is more limited, there are fewer sword collectors. How high sword prices will eventually rise is a matter for speculation. It was also a sad day for the collector of limited means, because word of this sort of thing soon gets around, even to the junk shops. The price of any Japanese sword anywhere is likely to be immediately multiplied by ten. Ah well, perhaps there are still those dream blades we all hope to find still lying around unrecognized in a musty attic. Sorry, I hope its a dry attic.

LETTER

New member, J. Raun Kristensen, Hectors alle 7, 2650 Hvidovre, Denmark, is interested in collecting sword fittings and swords, and would like to correspond with other members. He also wants a copy of SHINKICHI HARA; has anyone a spare copy to sell? Write direct if you have.

LETTER

From Andrew Ford, who has recently been to the U.S.A.

"Dear Bon, Just a note on my trip to the U.S.A. I spent most of my time in Chicago, where there are about 25 collectors. With a great deal of help from Matt Richards I managed to get round to see a few of the collections. I concentrated on swords mainly and few blades of outstanding quality stick

in my mind. Probably the greatest being a 14th century naginata blade with cut down tang mounted as a katana. It had been polished so much that the grooves were barely visible and yet there was not a flaw to be seen, or should I say I didn't find any. The blade was about 27" long and the owner was told in Japan by Yamada, who polished it, that an inch longer would have made it a Kokuho. I also saw a fine Horikawa Kunihiro, first generation Tadayoshi, a very fine Ko Bizen blade with the unfortunate attribution Kiku-go saku. The attribution was inlaid in gold and very poorly done; the owner, a Japanese, said without that signature it would have been worth more than with it. The same gentleman offered to sell me a 'Munechika', apart from the kitaware on the boshi I doubt a Japanese collector of 30 or 40 years standing would sell the genuine article to a 'Southern Barbarian'. I entertained a Shinto priest one evening who had been collecting many years and he brought a very fine early Yamashiro blade and an early Yamato blade. This picking out of blades becomes very difficult as I prefer the slender curved Koto blades and have biased my selection on this basis. On reflection I remember a very fine Tamba Yoshimichi with typical sudare yakiba; but the shape was not to my taste. For the armour collectors the prices out there were tremendous on what little armour I saw for sale. They were asking over £100 for a suit which I doubt would have fetched £20 here. The mounts I saw personally were not up to the general standard in this country; but there again I may not have seen a representative sample.

I managed to spend a couple of hours in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. There is a small gallery with the Japanese items in it, most of the stuff on display was very fine, but even with my limited knowledge of armour I feel that some of the datings were slightly optimistic. The outstanding thing for me was a tsuba signed Soten, it was so good that I feel that every other one I've seen with this signature must have been a fake.

This does not include all the nice things I saw, so apologies to all those collectors whose items are not mentioned; but lack of space prevents this. Though some mention should be made of Carl Spohr a dedicated collector of many years standing, about 60 I believe who has devoted most of his life to the study and appreciation of Japanese art and History, and in the process has amassed a very fine

collection in all fields."

LETTER

I have before me a letter from John Harding. John got himself into a fighting mood after my announcement of the January Debate, with the sub-title "Harding versus Bon Dale and probably everybody else". He rattles his Tachi in the following, which I am challenged to publish. I must say the sub-title seems to fit, I've certainly no doubt that I'm under attack. It would seem that these are opening blows in the Debate, and so with pleasure I publish John's characteristic remarks to the membership. I hope no one will die from apoplexy!

"Dear Bon, Re the debate. I think you have the subject of debate a little distorted. I must say I agree with you - should persons Like slag ridden, Blistered, cracked and otherwise flawed blades then of course they should collect them and I certainly would not question the wisdom of their choice. What worries me is their sanity, and I feel that members who genuinely like slag, blisters and cracks may find a short talk with a head shrinker useful. The subject of my talk (which you reported incorrectly) was the appreciation of fine blades - their relative points of merit etc. I see you now choose to call the above mentioned flawed blades - "imperfect blades" - this is not at all the same thing. An imperfect blade may at one time have been fine - I fear not in the case of slag pockets and blistered blades. However, I leave it to you to teach us the appreciation of these points.

Last meeting the members rose in rebellion - staunch men and true - to complain bitterly of my blunt criticism of their swords (and I use the word loosely). I can understand if a new member came and presented his first "find" - this would be harsh. Alas, I have been saying the same thing to the same members about the same swords for years it seems! When one comes in with a box and reams of paper, protecting a silk bag, and carefully produces the same slag ridden sword that he showed two months ago - and asks (hoping you've changed your mind since last time) "what do you think of this?", I explain again, its worn out, etc. and then find myself involved in an argument - the theme being, if its worn out it proves its old. I surrender and admit defeat! I must confess I fail to understand why they continue to ask me about these matters - they always end up by going away and murmuring in dark corners.

Lesson according to St. John.

Now, our great White Chief has come among us, to bring joy to all the land, and smiles across the faces of the children, and he will say unto them "Heed ye not the word of the false profet for thou art indeed in possession of fine treasures - take unto thy bosom thy crack, thy blister, and thy Tateware for the devil knows not of these things, and there will come peace over all the land, and Kizu galore to be shared equally among the children, and the citizens will meet again (probably in Doug Wright's shop) and say what is this miracle that we become enlightened. And I say unto them "Take up thy lousy sword, and march with it to St. James' and cast it with great skill in the direction of Christies - (preferably in time for the January sale). Here endeth the lesson. Go to it, lad! All the best, John. P.S. Moral - Buy with eyes and not with your ears.

LETTER

An extract from a letter from Han Bing Siong, which has some interesting thought and information. Quote:

"I know it isn't right to let one's appraisal of a work of art also be influenced by the question whether it is genuine or not. If a sword is considered beautiful, one should no longer care by whom and when it is made. To people who have not yet much experience however, to receive proof afterwards of the genuineness is of great importance as it confirms that the appraisal they endeavoured to do themselves has been correct. Moreover, without an expert teacher to point out things beginning collectors can only get an idea of what good workmanship means if they have genuine blades of swordsmiths of repute at their disposal. On the other hand it is certainly also true that a famous swordsmith can very well produce blades which do not come up to his standards. Reference Andrew Ford's list of museums I would like to draw the attention to the New Armouries of the Tower of London where among others I have seen a blade with kinzogan-mei Masamitsu and a Tadayoshi. And in the Queen's Guard Chamber in Windsor Castle is present the 15th century sword Field Marshal Count Hisaichi Terauchi surrendered to Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten in 1945. This may be of interest for the project of Mr. Gregory. If more is known about this sword of Terauchi Gensui, I hope it will also be published. Reference the

synopsis of John Harding's talk in the September-programme, I doubt if Mr. Harding has actually said that utsuri is "used only on good koto blades". I have a shinshinto blade with a clear bo-utsuri along the entire hamon. Perhaps Mr. Harding intended to say that utsuri without antei or without a broad antei is mainly to be found in good koto blades. What do you think of Mr. Harding's opinion that shortening makes a shinto blade unacceptable? Isn't this a very "purist" attitude, too? I have collected a few oshigata of swords in modern military tachi mountings. If Mr. Gregory and you need these for the project, they are of course at your disposal.

NEW MEMBERS

We have pleasure in welcoming the following members to the To Ken Society of Great Britain:

Ernst Stumpfel,
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CHANGE OF
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The new addresses for Mr. Sumida and Mr. Charles W. Arnold are as follows:

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