



programmes have already set the scene, so it will not be repeated here, but merely to attempt to record the highlights of what was said. (Since your reporter on this occasion was also the Chairman who at one and the same time was therefore (a) trying to record what was being said and (b) trying to get a fair hearing for all those with something to say whilst simultaneously trying to contain some of the wilder flights of fancy, or red-herrings and pay an intelligent interest, these notes may be a bit scrappy in places. No apologies).

Bon Dale opened the debate with a remark of truly oriental inscrutability, to wit: "I must point out that I agree with John Harding entirely, but for all that I think he's wrong". Having thus got us all on our toes he went on to describe his early collecting experiences, cleverly using these to illustrate his main point, namely, that one can only learn by experience and that one needs to collect many not so good - even downright rotten - pieces to develop this experience. He had often seen blades he said, that he would have cut arms off for at the time, only to encounter them again a few years later and wonder what he had originally seen in them. He ended on the note "I believe I have developed a lot of experience from examining many blades, how much I have learnt I wouldn't be sure. One thing I know, experience as opposed to knowledge cannot be gained from books, nor can judgement. Therefore I claim that John's statement is invalid in its unqualified state. One can only collect up to the level of understanding that one has at the time. One cannot start by collecting only fine blades".

John Harding then replied. He pointed out that he had not said that "only perfect blades should be collected" but re-emphasised the fact that if imperfect blades are to be tolerated, then the imperfections must arise from long use, (Tiredness), or damage in use. The unforgiveable faults were those which arose through poor craftsmanship, on the part of the smith. He quoted one of Bon's instances, a finely mounted wakizashi in perfect condition purchased many years ago for 10/-, and swopped some years ago (which has more recently been changing hands for ten times as many pounds) but which had a major fault in the shape of a 3" nioigire. He said as a mounted sword it should have been bought (for the mounts alone) but had it been in a shirasaya, then no. Bon said here that when he bought it he didn't know it had nioigire. There were many talks to members of this society at which faults, etc. were repeatedly discussed, therefore there is no excuse for members. How

can one buy a sword knowing that there is an unacceptable fault in it? If you are going to make a serious study of blades then one must endeavour to collect good blades otherwise how can one learn the good from the bad. The debate was then "opened to the House" and the following represent some of the comments, etc. that emerged:

Andrew Ford produced a sword in fine condition by NAGATSUNA in a remarkably finely lacquered and decorated shirasaya type scabbard, and offered it as a test case. Our chief protagonists commented:

J.H. Even if flawless it still doesn't measure up to a high standard. There are people who wouldn't collect it.

B.D. Would be suspicious because of the decorated shirasaya. I think I would certainly get tired of it. (Andrew was heard to observe that he was jolly well going to keep it, anyway!)

Several members ventured the opinion that one should not overlook in considering this question of collecting that there might be a case for holding a poor blade just because it was an example of a particular school or whatever. Some comments:

Alan Bale: Anyone who can't within 30 seconds, recognise the presence of the kind of flaw we have been discussing shouldn't be collecting swords at all (Cries of "Oh!").

Ings: Because I cannot afford a Gainsborough should I keep my walls bare? Because I cannot afford a Gainsborough it doesn't follow that I don't appreciate art. Can't I buy good examples of what I can afford?

Divers: I collect swords in the same way as the Japanese. If I find a cracked Masamune I buy it. I am prepared to agree that J.H. has the purist view but it is not for everyone.

There followed a lengthy discussion on the value of the various white and green papers issued by the various panels in Japan. There was no real consensus on this, presumably because not enough members are sufficiently familiar with the subject to hold strong views, but the two poles of opinion were represented by J.H. who had little regard for green papers and none for white, and Sid Divers who thought they were a good thing. Creighton commented that, Japanese dealers themselves tended to ignore all such certifications and go on their own judgement in each individual case.

More Comments:

Schofield: As I have followed the discussion, if I find a cracked Masamune I should collect it but

not a cracked Sukesada?

J.H. One must know how the flaw came about. In this case the probability could be said to be that the Masamune became damaged in use, while the Sukesada was damaged by poor forging.

Deane: Would a poorly forged Masamune get documents?

J.H. No.

Holtaway: Now I collect swords, not so much for their perfection of forging etc. but because of the 'romance', if that is the word, attached to the sword, because of the way it symbolizes and crystallizes the ethos of old Japan and the Samurai. Because this is my personal attitude, does it make me some sort of a nut?

(Note: The profundity of this comment provoked no reply. Nevertheless, Messrs.Holtaway and Ings are to be congratulated on being virtually the only members present who admitted to collecting swords because they actually liked them. What an academic - or is it mercenary? - lot we are!)

B.Dale. I take up the question of defects due to tiredness, etc. e.g. Mr.Holtaway's RYOKAI. This sort of blade I class with the cracked Masamune, it should be collected. What do you say, John?

J.H. I would agree with you. If you thought I said otherwise, you are mistaking me.

A.Ford: On this question of tiredness, is there less to be learned from a tired blade?

J.H. The whole character of a tired blade is different. For instance, if you had had experience of say, 12 tired Ryokai blades and then found an equally genuine one without tiredness, you would probably not recognise it; it would be so different. One might even suppose it a forgery!

Clark: Mr.Harding raised the question of the average member and would buy a blade knowing it to be flawed. I say yes, I would make the point that I am trying to learn the various schools and if such a blade was otherwise representative, I would collect it, at least for the time being.

Dean (darkly!): These are reasons for collecting bad blades, but they are not related to those for collecting good ones. (e.g. like no money, for instance?!).

Members having had their say, the debate was closed after which a number of blades were passed around, including a very fine MOTOHIRO, a KAGEMITSU, a NORIMITSU and a SUKEZANE.

On the whole this was a good discussion and quite fun. If the reporter may be permitted a comment, it is that both "sides" were arguing to a large extent on parallel lines and, as is well known, these by definition, can't meet. Of course there is no argument about perfection, equally there just isn't enough of it to satisfy all, let alone at attainable prices. Clearly all should be aware (and at bottom, I believe most are) of the faults in their pieces, but just what this will mean to them is best expressed in Bon Dale's remark "one can only collect up to the level of the understanding one has at the time". After all, in the words of jesting Pilate: "What is Truth?"

LETTER:

From George Ings on the last meeting, also asking for advice and comparison of methods on blade polishing; write to him please, someone who has tried polishing for himself. Roy Clark has done some work on this subject I know.

"Dear Bon, Just a few lines to say how much I enjoyed the January meeting. I am grateful to yourself and John Harding for a most enlightening and entertaining evening. More power to both of you. Such a discussion makes for a vigorous and healthy society. I for one came away with many thoughts about collecting and collectors. One point arising from the discussion and the bulletin worries me. Many words and phrases are bandied about which I find baffling. I am not conversant with a lot of the technicalities and would like your observations on the best means of learning my way about. If this is not too much trouble. As for new about my activities for your Newsletter. I am attempting to re-polish one or two blades, hoping to discover some substance or method by which the high Japanese polish is achieved. Prof. Macfarlane has sent me particulars of his researches but if you hear of any other person I should be glad if you would write to me. With every good wish for the future. George W. Ings".

COMMENT:

The whole thing about Japanese sword terminology is that there just isn't any substitute. I have made this point in a Cataloguer's Note in the forthcoming Catalogue of the Exhibition. Many of the Japanese words cannot be translated into one word, and without their use descriptions of swords would be extremely cumbersome. It follows that in conversation it is more concise to say "the boshi is hakikake" than to say something like, "the hard steel edge on the pointed bit at the end of the blade has little lines in it made up of small dots which look as if they have been brushed into lines, sort of!" In answer to Mr. Ings' question, the only way to learn the terminology of the sword is to

use it. There will be a limited glossary in the Exhibition catalogue. There are others in one or two English books on the sword. By far the most comprehensive is that in Vol.2 of Hawley's Japanese Swordsmiths. The only way to learn, is to read the words and look at blades to see what the words mean, then the words will begin to stick in the mind. Everyone knows the hamon, get down to it and find if there's any hotsure or nijuba around. There are people who scorn the use of Japanese terminology and tend to think of it as a form of snobbery. This is not so. The language of the sword was developed over many centuries by those most competent to judge the many intricate details of the Japanese sword blade. I repeat, as I often do, there is no substitute. The existence of their special vocabulary is the first thing one becomes aware of on reading one's first words about the sword. By learning to use it one's knowledge increases and consequently there is greater joy in collecting.

LETTER:

Named swords still come in from time to time. Here is one from Alan L. Harvie, California. I quote an extract from his letter. Regarding the query about the Glossary. I had to stop this when I took over the Programme last April. As I have said in the above comment, the most comprehensive glossary I know, and it has the Japanese characters, is in Hawley, Vol.2. I rather doubt if continuing our Glossary would serve any useful purpose in face of Hawley's marathon effort. However, John Anderson and I did think of an illustrated glossary and this may be a project for the future, when Exhibitions and things are over and done with.

Extract from Alan Harvie's letter :

"To add to the list may I submit one of my named swords. So far I haven't been able to make any sense out of it but the reading is clear enough. It reads "HEIANJO FUJIWARA KUNITSUGU SAKU and SAI SHA KEN which means "wheel cutting sword" and also inscribed is KATAGIRI JIRO TAIYU KORE SHOJI - "property of Katagiri Jiro Taiyu" of whom I know nothing. It is a wakizashi and has been the subject of many conversations. Seems a strange sort of test, if such it is. Am thoroughly enjoying the Programmes and hope that plans for continuing the Glossary are afoot."

COMMENT:

I would have thought that "wheel cutting sword" was just rather a nice name, nothing to do with a record of a test. It is no stranger than many other old and famous named swords, and after all,

one does not assume that "Demon cutter" was tested on a demon!

CONCLUSION:

There is still a fair amount of work to be done on catalogue extras and the exhibition in general, so this Programme will end here and be a little shorter than usual. We publish however, the revised list of Members. Check your entry and if it is lacking in some way, let the Secretary know.

By the way, in answer to the odd query now and then, the Secretary is a Lady. Mrs. Cicely Dale. She works jolly hard dealing with correspondence and financial matters, and like the rest of us is unpaid and unsung.

FINAL NOTE:

Regarding the free Masamune offered for the first letter from Outer Space. I've had several claimants for this. I will deal with them next time.

BOOK NOTE:

Alan Bale asks us to announce that due to Mr. Wilson the revised price for Hawley's books is now: Vol.1 £6.10.0. Vol.2 £4.5.0. Pricey I agree, but both well worth it.

NEW MEMBERS:

We have much pleasure in welcoming the following New Members:

Gerald Arthur Neal,  
58 Enborne Road,  
Newbury, Berks.

John Wajzner,  
76, Eastbank Street  
Southport, Lancs.

T.D. Thompson,  
St. Martins,  
Halstead Road,  
Stanway, Colchester.  
Essex.

Carl W. Spohr,  
2862 Burling Street  
Chicago,  
Illinois. 60657  
U.S.A.

W.L. Baxter,  
Flat 28.  
24 John Islip Street,  
Westminster,  
London S.W.1.