



Ford was elected Chairman/Secretary. After some discussion it was decided that we would meet every two months at the Seven Oaks Hotel. A small subscription was levied to cover the cost of hiring the room. The aims of the branch then came under discussion and John Hymas suggested that we extend the scope to a wider heading, namely Japanese Art; this idea was accepted by those present. Also the idea of having a theme like the Art Circle was discussed, this was generally thought to be a good idea as a basic form to be interspersed with talks when available from the membership. There was then a brief talk on sword handling by Andrew Ford being a short synopsis of the talk published by Bon Dale in Jan.1965. We then sat down and examined the articles brought by those present - a fine collection of menuki, wakizashi in handachi mounts signed 'Ikkanshi Tadatsuna', katana signed 'Kodzuke no Kami Fujiwara Kanesada' and two other unsigned katana; these being the main items.

The next meeting is on the 21st May at 7.30 p.m. All members of the To Ken welcome particularly any Northern ones who might care to join us regularly. (Seven Oaks Hotel, 5 Nicholas Street, Manchester 1).

P.S. I don't know whether you missed my postscript on the envelope of my last letter. Namely that I have just obtained a tanto which is signed tachimei and dated on reverse Shohei (1346), if you don't know the answer perhaps you could put the enquiry in the bulletin. The question being is there any special significance in the tachimei signature. I am sure all the other tanto I have had have all been signed on the other side. The smith is Kunitoki.

HONNAMI,  
TATE,  
ANTEI

Andrew Ford has committed seppuku on the business of Honnami, we will close the subject. We all make mistakes, and let us not forget that those of us who say most in our efforts to keep this Society afloat are most likely to be picked up on occasional slips of the tongue.

The question of "tate" and Ben Vincent's remarks is more interesting. I quote a passage from his letter published last month. "No one in Japan has been able to tell me what "tate" means, when used in connection with swords". Last month I assumed tateware was meant, but I was wrong. Andrew Ford meant tate. Now I would refer Ben Vincent to Hawley Vol.2, page 713, top of the page; TATE, " a row of niye along hamon as seen in Izumo blades". The character is also given; we haven't the means to reproduce these, but it can be found in Koop & Inada, page 198, bottom of the page.

The question of "Antei" is equally interesting. Again I quote Ben Vincent "Once more may I ask the membership to teach me the meaning and Japanese characters for this word". Last month, I passed this over to Han Bing Siong, and he has replied, handsomely. He gives the characters, which indeed he did in his first letter last October, and I had forgotten this. He also gives his source, NIHON TO ZENSHU, Vol.7, page 242. The characters I cannot give, but they may be found again in Koop & Inada, AN (yami, kurai) on page 420; TEI (tada) on page 309. The first character means "darkness", the second "an emperor". I cannot make any sense out of this. Mr.Han "would be glad if Mr.Vincent could provide a translation" because Mr.Han was not at all sure about the pronunciation.

Well, Mr.Vincent, we have given you all the Japanese characters for these terms, as you requested. It is now up to you, to teach us humble members the true meaning of these mysteries.

CHIUSHINGURA "If you don't eat of a dish, however savoury, you can't enjoy its flavour, they say; and so, in piping times of peace, the loyalty and bravery of valiant samurai remain unnoticed, like as the light of the stars, unseen in the day-time, becomes visible only in the darkness and confusion of night; whereof an example will be found in the following syllabary written pages"

The above is a translation of the introduction to one of the numerous texts of the Chuishingura published towards the end of the 18th century. In 1876 Mitford in his "Tales of Old Japan" published for the first time, so far as I know, the English version of the true story entitled "The Forty-Seven Ronin".

Apart from telling the story, which is too well known to go into here, Mitford describes the scene in the Japan of his day, and gives many instances of the sanctity attached to the graves of the Forty Seven. I quote:

"On the left-hand side of the main court of the temple is a chapel, in which, surmounted by a gilt figure of Kwanyin, the goddess of mercy, are enshrined the images of the forty-seven men, and of the master whom they loved so well. The statues are carved in wood, the faces coloured, and the dresses richly lacquered; as works of art they have great merit - - the action of the heroes, each armed with his favourite weapon, being wonderfully life-like and spirited. Some are venerable men, with thin, grey hair (one is seventy-seven years old); others are mere boys of sixteen. Close by the chapel, at the side of a path leading up

the hill, is a little well of pure water, fenced in and adorned with a tiny fernery, over which is an inscription, setting forth that "This is the well in which the head was washed; you must not wash your hands or your feet here". A little further on is a stall, at which a poor old man earns a pittance by selling books, pictures, and medals, commemorating the loyalty of the Forty-seven; and higher up yet, shaded by a grove of stately trees, is a neat inclosure, kept up, as a signboard announces, by voluntary contributions, round which are ranged forty-eight little tombstones, each decked with evergreens, each with its tribute of water and incense for the comfort of the departed spirit. There were forty-seven Ronins; there are forty-eight tombstones, and the story of the forty-eighth is truly characteristic of Japanese ideas of honour."

At the end of the story is an appendix; he gives the reason for the forty-eighth grave as follows:

"In the month of September 1868, a certain man came to pray before the grave of Oishi Chikara. Having finished his prayers, he deliberately performed hara kiri, and, the belly wound not being mortal, despatched himself by cutting his throat. Upon his person were found papers setting forth that, being a Ronin and without means of earning a living, he had petitioned to be allowed to enter the clan of the Prince of Choshu, which he looked upon as the noblest clan in the realm; his petition having been refused, nothing remained for him but to die, for to be a Ronin was hateful to him, and he would serve no other master than the Prince of Choshu: what more fitting place could he find in which to put an end to his life than the graveyard of these Braves? This happened at about two hundred yards' distance from my house, and when I saw the spot an hour or two later, the ground was all bespattered with blood, and disturbed by the death-struggles of the man".

I have just received a letter from Ronny Ronnqvist of Helsinki who has recently returned from Japan. Among the many things he has to say, the following short passage is of interest, written almost a hundred years after Mitford, and let us not forget, two hundred and sixty-six years after Genroku 14th year, the date of the original event.

"One of the things to remember was the visit I paid to the Sengakuji temple in Tokyo, where the 47 Ronins are buried. It's a nice and quiet place, very well kept. You can also visit the "Relic house" where relics of the Ronins are on display, and throw coins in the well, where the head of Kotsuke was washed. Incense was

burning all the time before the tombs. I have the impression that many people visit the place, and show their honour to the Ronins. It's a very encouraging sign these days indeed, when many things in Japan and elsewhere are not so good in this respect."

### LETTERS

Two extracts, the first from member Graham McGuire of Hardscrabble Point, U.S.A. which makes the point which I also stated last month - this is not only a blade society it should deal with fittings too. Again I urge tsuba collectors to write in with information. I quote :

"Your monthly programme reports are most interesting. I look forward to receiving them - however I sincerely wish you could find a way to include an occasional article on Tsuba. An isolated collector in mid-United States finds it difficult, for there are but few here who have similar interests."

New member, Thomas B. Buttweiler has sent a number of pamphlets announcing a "Japanese Sword Show" to be held in Minneapolis, U.S.A. on May 17th, 18th, 19th. These will be given to members at our next meeting, but I publish extracts for the benefit of members who will not be present :

"This year's show will be the 17, 18 and 19 of May at the Inn Towne Motel, 14 North 10th Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota. We have acquired a very large display room on the lower level which will accommodate 100 tables.

Mr. Muniyoshi Nakajima will again be at this year's show, giving freely of his knowledge of swords and accessories. He will also present a formal demonstration of tsuka wrapping and habaki making.

Tables will be provided for the exhibitors. The tables will be approximately 3 feet by 8 feet and covered with a green cotton cover. Individual exhibitors will be charged \$10.00 for the first table, \$7.50 for the second table and \$5.00 for the third table. The reduced rate is possible this year because of the greater number of tables available and will not apply to shared tables.

Awards will be made for the Best of Show, Best Sword Display, Best Tsuba Display, Best Individual Sword, Best Individual Tsuba, and Best Koshirae. The judging and presentation of the awards will take place Sunday morning, 19th May.

The purpose of the show is primarily educational and will be limited to Japanese swords, sword fittings, armour, and related items. The local committee will allow a great deal of individual freedom in the type and character of displays but will, however, reserve the right to exclude any items not in good taste or in

keeping with the theme of the show. If you have a doubtful item, please write in advance to prevent disappointment.

The show will provide an opportunity for collectors to display their collections, purchase or sell individual pieces, and discuss Japanese swords and fittings with fellow collectors and experts.

As a gesture of gratitude to those exhibitors who attended last year's show, they will be guaranteed tables up to May 1 1968. 25 tables are already spoken for so please place your reservations early. This year's show promises to be bigger and better than last year. Some of the items scheduled for display at this time include Ohara Sanamori, Ichimonji Yoshimuni, Ko-Bizen Toshitsuna, Motoshige, Nobukuni I, O-Kanemitsu, Kunikane I and II."

The above are very brief extracts from the leaflet. Mr. Buttweiler also goes on to say in an accompanying letter that some fine blades will be for sale at "far far below Christie's prices" and that if any serious collector is interested he could save the price of a plane ticket on one blade. I don't know if any buying can be done by post; Mr. Buttweilers address is in this Programme for those who want to find out for themselves, or who want to know greater details than I have published here.

SWORDSMITHS OF JAPAN Last month I published part I of a biography of Noda Hankei by B.W. Robinson. Part II follows below. As I said then it is proposed to republish this series of articles written originally for the Apollo Magazine. Since last month I have heard from our President on the source of the biographer. This was Nippon Tosho-tan by Naruse Sekiji (Tokyo 1941). Basil Robinson still has this book which was partly translated during the war, and it is hoped that we may be able to complete the translation and so extend the series of articles.

NODA HANKEI by B.W. Robinson. Part II

Hidetada showed this blade to his hereditary sword expert Honnami and ordered him to judge it. Honnami examined it carefully and pronounced it to be the work of Masamune himself. This naturally enhanced the value of the blade in the Shogun's eyes, but he told Honnami that Masamune was not the maker, and the latter was then at a loss. When Hankei was informed of this, far from being flattered that one of his blades had been attributed to the XIVth century master, he was piqued, and maintained that although he only forged blades in the intervals of gun-making, they were far superior to those of Masamune. That his exaggerated opinion of his own work was not to be shared by posterity is shown by the fact that in 1860 the value of a Hankei blade was

estimated at 50 gold pieces (ryo), whereas a Masamune rated as high as 500. Hidetada commissioned another blade from him, which Hankei offered to him three years later.

In 1624 the Shōgun Hidetada abdicated and was succeeded by Iyemitsu. This man was fond of the barbarous practice, by no means uncommon among the swashbuckling samurai of the period, of going out into the streets at night and cutting down passers-by. His fencing instructor, Yagyu Munenori, however, who disapproved of this abuse of skill, cured him of it by crossing his path one night disguised as a merchant, worsting him in a scuffle, and throwing him down. Next day, he administered a discreet rebuke, and Iyemitsu promised to mend his ways. The sword he had been using in these nightly escapades was the one Hankei had taken three years to make for his predecessor, and in token of his reformation he presented it to the fencing instructor Munenori.

Nothing more is known of Hankei's life except its appalling conclusion. One morning in the early summer of 1646 a passer-by in a disreputable part of Yedo found a body in the road completely cut in two from the right hip to the left shoulder. The victim was a large man and had the appearance of an ex-wrestler; his only possessions were a purse of leather bearing a golden badge of three hollyhocks, showing that it was a present from the Shōgun, and a silver-mounted sword of enormous length which had not been drawn. The body was officially identified as that of the swordsmith Noda Hankei, and it was removed in due course by his pupils in a palanquin. One of the officials who had a good knowledge of swordsmanship pronounced on inspecting the body that Hankei had been killed by a tremendous upward cut made in the same movement as drawing the sword.

The murderer of Hankei was never satisfactorily identified, but it is significant that the cut by which he was killed was one of the specialities of the school of the fencing master Yagyu Munenori. The night crimes of the Shōgun Iyemitsu had evidently made a great impression on Munenori, who seems to have attributed them to some sinister quality in the Hankei blade, thinking that, like those of Muramasa, it urged on its owners to deeds of bloodshed. The fencing instructor died at the beginning of 1646, just before the murder of Hankei, bequeathing the fatal blade to his son, who took over the fencing school, with a recommendation to "bend and bury it". But a certain disciple of the fencing school named Shin-no-jō is known to have killed a man on his master's order about this time and thereafter became a "rough-tempered man", and the possibility that Hankei fell by this ill-omened blade of his own making has a sinister attraction.

But this cannot be confirmed, and if there was a good reason for Shin-no-jō to be sent out by his master to kill Hankei, it has not come to light.

Hankei's character does not seem to have been very attractive. Though he is said to have been a devout Buddhist he was conceited, dissolute and slovenly. He was very remiss in the training of his pupils, and the circumstances of his death are a

sufficient testimony to the irregularity of his habits. But he was a master of his craft, and his blades are among the most highly prized as practical fighting weapons, their reputation in this respect having been made in the "Amakusa incident", a sanguinary repression of a rising of Japanese Christians in 1637-1638. They are remarkable for the dark colour and pronounced graining ("like an old chestnut tree") of the steel, the distinctive shape of the tang, and the individual style of engraving the signature. Forgeries of his work are numerous. His two best blades, now classed as "national treasures", are to be seen in the temple on Mount Koya, where he originally offered them with the following letters:

- (a) "I have the honour to offer a treasured sword to Kobo Daishi at the Kongo-buji Temple on Mount Koya. Sitting on a rough straw mat and purifying myself, I, Ono Hankei, forged this sword for seventy days."
- (b) "This treasured sword which I offer to the Kongo-buji Temple on Mount Koya I forged using every secret method for tempering iron. Now I, Ono Hankei, present it, offering my prayers for happiness after death."

Both letters are dated the twenty-first day of the 8th month of the first year of the period Kwanyei (1624) and signed with the swordsmith's full name, Noda Zenshiro Ono Hankei.

#### NEW MEMBERS

We have much pleasure in welcoming the following new members:

Daniel L. Erling,  
1239 S. 49th Street,  
W. Milwaukee  
Wisconsin 53214  
U.S.A.

Robert M. Lewart  
5534 S. Blackstone Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois, 60637  
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Tom Buttweiler,  
Albertville,  
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C. Nowell,  
226 Manchester Road,  
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Dr. Alexander Gordon,  
17 Swanston Gardens,  
Edinburgh 10.  
Scotland

E. G. Keep,  
Lattin Down,  
Pye Corner,  
Speen, Aylesbury,  
Bucks.

W. B. Hagen,  
62 Arngask Road  
Catford, S.E.6.

#### CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Dr. R. A. Mills,  
82 Madrid Road,  
Barnes, S.W.13.

David Butler,  
76 Clifton Hill,  
London N.W.8.