

THE TO-KEN SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

for the Study and Preservation of Japanese Swords and Fittings

Hon. President: B.W. Robinson, M.A., B.Litt.

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 HON. PRESIDENT: KAZUJARO TOKIYAMA
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 XXX

PROGRAMME

NEXT MEETING Monday, December 2nd, 1968 at The Masons Arms,
Maddox Street, London, W.1. at 7.30 p.m.

FOLLOWING MEETING Monday, January 6th, 1969 at the Masons Arms,
at 7.30 p.m.

NOTE Meetings are always held on the first Monday
of each month except when coinciding with a Bank
Holiday, in which case the meeting is held on
the following Monday.

FUTURE OF THE PROGRAMME It has been decided to publish the Programme bi-
monthly from this issue. Sometimes it has been
difficult to find sufficient material to compile
a Programme approximately every three weeks. By
publishing every two months, I hope that we may
be able to expand the Programme and include more
articles from members, at home and abroad. This
is a desirable circumstance which I have always
tried to attain, that members should participate
more and more in this Programme, rather than that
it should be, as it has tended to be in the past, a
monologue from me. This and pressure of work,
are the reasons for the lack of a November
Programme; this is the first to appear since the
October Programme.

LAST MEETING Was on Monday, November 4th, and was devoted
mainly to the election of a new Chairman and
Committee for the coming year. There were five
nominations for the office of Chairman, and
ten for the Committee. On the count of votes by
the Secretary and Malcom Hutchinson, the results
were as follows:

Chairman: Bon Dale

Committee: John Anderson, Alan Bale, Malcolm
Hutchinson, Peter Cottis, David
Tudor-Williams and David Butler
and David Parker.

The last two members named each received an equal number of votes; it was decided after a quick check with other Committee members to include both David Butler and David Parker on the Committee. In addition, Andrew Ford was appointed to the Committee, it being agreed that as the member responsible for, and founder of, the Northern Branch of the To Ken he should be able to attend Committee Meetings whenever it was possible for him to be in London.

Thank you to all members who lent their support to the Meeting and to all members who sent in their postal nominations. We have a strong new Committee and as Chairman, I shall look forward to a year of increased activity, particularly in the expansion of the Programme to which task I'm sure all Committee members will lend a willing hand.

LAST MEETING
(Continued)

After the business of the elections, we had an informal talk from John Harding recently returned for a brief period from Japan. He had some common-sense and revealing comments to make on the matter of sword judging and the writing of certificates of genuiness for swords in Japan. This confirmed the view long held by some of us that "white paper" orikami are hardly worth the paper they are written on. "Green paper" panel certificates are more desirable but even these are not without their doubts. For example, a sword failing to attain a green paper at one session of the Panel in one city, might well be successful later in another city, only to fail again in a third session. All of which proves what we all should know, that judgement of the authenticity of any work of art is a matter of opinion, and that experts nearly always disagree.

Mr.K.Sayama whom we were pleased to welcome as John Harding's guest, and of whom more later, a man obviously of great experience in collecting swords made a comment which delighted me. He said in effect, what do pieces of paper matter, - white, green or any other colour, decide for yourself, and if you like it, collect it. How many times in these Programmes have I expressed the same thought. It is what your taste decides that is important. Some members will wail and say, "Oh! but we haven't any knowledge". The answer to this is simple, as your experience progresses your knowledge will improve, and with this your taste. I agree that unless you are extremely fortunate you cannot have

good taste without knowledge. But no person can hand you a parcel of knowledge. This can only come with experience, seeing swords, handling swords, buying swords - some of them will be awful! but from this experience, knowledge and taste will develop.

IMPORTANT
MATTERS

I use the above heading because in the five years this Society has existed, I have always hoped we might eventually secure a firm contact with Japan, in the important business of having blades re-polished and in obtaining materials etc. So far our contacts have been occasioned and organized on a private rather than a Society basis. Thanks to John Harding and his introduction of Mr. Sayama it now looks as if we have that firm contact. Mr. Sayama is a sword collector, but his business is import and export of goods into and from Japan. He has offered to handle the import and export of blades for repolish going to Japan, and to arrange the transport etc. of blades to polishing firms whilst in Japan. This for members not aware of the facts, is the most complicated procedure, blades entering Japan have to be registered with customs and documented with police, before even reaching the polisher. Unless someone with the knowledge of procedure is on the spot to deal with it a blade can lay in customs for years. I know this to my cost; I've had two fine blades which have probably suffered this fate in Japan for the last five years. Mr. Sayama promises a return journey of three to four months.

Mr. Sayama has just returned to Japan and I am about to correspond on details with him, prices etc. will be quoted in this Programme as soon as they are available. I propose that the Society will handle the shipping from this end and this will be done through a reputable firm of fine art shippers whom I use for other business. When we have organized details, members wishing to avail themselves of this service will pay their money to the Society, and the Secretary will handle the rest. Mr. Sayama has also offered to obtain for us at cost price, the various other gear which can make the collecting of the sword and its fittings so attractive; bags for swords, bags and boxes for tsuba, etc. Also books and last but by no means least, he hopes to arrange for other collectors in Japan to write

occasionally for this Programme. So I think we should look forward to a long and mutually co-operative association with Mr. Sayama and welcome him as a member of our Society.

NORTHERN
BRANCH OF THE
TO KEN
SOCIETY

Next Meeting. Tuesday, November 19th 1968 at the Seven Oaks Hotel, Nicholas Street, Manchester at 7.30 p.m.

Subject: Armour, pole arms, bows and other military accoutrements. Please bring any items in this field or others that are unusual.

Last Meeting: This was a pooling of ideas on general cleaning and restoration of swords, soft metal work, lacquer and ivories. One new idea on soft metal work came out of this from Ian Bottomley, so far this has only been tried on mounts which do not include iron.

Make up a 5% solution of salt and add a pinch of Copper Sulphate. Clean and polish the work and then degrease. Bring the solution to the boil and dip the work in for 5 to 10 minutes, until the right colour is obtained. The solution can only be used once when it has been boiled, and more must be mixed for further work. Ian Bottomley showed a fuchi-kashira treated in this manner and the results were quite good. The two methods for cleaning iron were mentioned that were published in the December 1964 Bulletin; these might well be re-published for the benefit of the newer members.

Ian Bottomley then gave a talk on hilt binding. Everyone was supplied with an excellent set of drawings which he proceeded to explain. He then produced a lot of hilts he had bound showing the various types of binding and the types of material available in this country to do it. An excellent talk showing that with some skill and ingenuity there are some jobs we could do ourselves.

This was followed with several blades that members had brought along for interest sake or translation:-

Katana Musashi no Daijo Shitahara Yasunao -
dated 1625

Katana Idzumi no Kami Kanesada kore wo tsukuru

Katana Bitchu no Kami Tachibana Yasuhiro
O-tanto Minamoto Masayuki (Kiyomaro) - dated
Kokwa 2

Tanto Kanenao (with 4 tang holes)
 Wakizashi Kunisane (this was an inlet signature)
 Katana Chounsai Tsunatoshi

MENUKI

An article by John Hymas.

The usual description of Menuki in the text books on the Japanese Sword - "small metal ornaments held in place on the same of the hilt (one on each side) by means of the braid. Originally supposed to cover the ends of the mekugi".

Fortunately this is not the case to-day, or collectors would be in some difficulty in dismantling blades for examination. The suggestion that by causing two small lumps on the hilt in the palm of the hand gave a more certain grip, seems as good an explanation as any.

Menuki rank first in importance of all the sword mounts, the outside one ranking higher than the inside one. From my observations on wakizashi, the menuki on the omote side (kogai) of the scabbard is nearer the tsuba, the one on the ura side (kodzuka) further away; the difference being about 2" between them. Perhaps this arrangement fits better into the hollows of the hand.

Further examination of quite a few tachi, katana and wakizashi seems to suggest that there is no fixed rule as to which side the menuki is nearer to the tsuba. It may be that left-handed samurai reversed their hands on the hilt, thereby causing this situation. The spacing apart, however, seems fairly standard.

All menuki are made of metal, usually a form of soft iron, or of copper alloys. These latter vary in colour from a pale beige, to a deep russet. Even in iron the colour can be quite varied. Details are picked out in gold or silver, some parts being in the solid metal, and solid gold and silver are not unknown.

In the making the metal would first be cast in a mould, and afterwards finished by hand. Some of the early Gōtō moulds are still in existence, so for instance a menuki using Yūjō's original mould could be cast, but the difference would be in the hand finishing. Early Gōtō menuki have designs of intricate floral and battle subjects, and some have as many as eleven piercings. On a dragon the average number of piercings is seven.

Sometimes menuki are found en suite with the design on the kogai and the kodzuka - a very desirable ensemble, not yet in my possession. This matching set is called mitokoro-mono.

The subjects of menuki are as varied as other forms of Japanese art-work, and are normally in duplicated pairs, or portraying two different characters usually in association, viz: Ashinaga and Tenaga.

Folklore tales as the tea kettle badger, Benkei stealing the temple bell, and the arm of Rashomon. Animals are popular such as horses, oxen, rats, dragons, hares, monkeys, elephants, tigers and shishi. Birds as sparrows, hawks, peacocks, phoenix, cocks and hens. Insects - cicada, wasps, ants and butterflies. Also, weapons, boats, flowers, fruit, masks, fish and the usual deities.

One advantage in collecting menuki is the small space required to house them. The writer mounts them as follows: for 10 to 15 pairs secure a photo-frame, remove the glass, cover the photograph (making sure it has no sentimental value and is thick enough to bear the weight), with black velvet, and fasten the menuki as desired with black carpet thread tied at the back. Pin the cardboard in with sprigs at the back and either stand or hang. When showing to interested persons a good reading glass is useful to show up the details which are often quite remarkable.

Some menuki bear the maker's signature on the back, often on a plate attached to the pin, and this if genuine, could be a clue to the date of manufacture.

There would appear to be some cashing in on the market with spurious imitations made of a base metal and with little skill in the finishing. Some evidence that the specimens have been fitted to a sword seems desirable. Present prices vary from about 20/- each or 50/- per matching pair for ordinary subjects, but really old and beautiful ones can go up to £15/£20 a pair.

At the other end of the scale it seems still possible to pick up junk lots with other small metal fittings for a few shillings at country shops, owing to the ignorance of the dealer, but this state of affairs may not last very long. Owing to the present scarcity there is still spice in the search, but I find it advisable to carry a specimen to show in the shop, and so save a long (and often unfruitful) description.

The writer has not seen a collection of menuki, and so can only write of his own collection consisting of 200/250 items.

SWORDS MOUNTED
IN IVORY

A long time ago, I received a letter from member Lt.Col.Smith, at that time in France. I have been intending to answer this in a Programme because I have met this question before, and what answer I can give may be of interest to other members. Also, I would be glad to hear from any one who can offer further information.

First of all, Lt.Col.Smith's letter containing the original query:

"I hope you can find someone who can give me a quick briefing on an item with "back-door" connections to the Japanese sword. I refer to the carved bone scabbards containing a poor imitation of a blade in soft steel. Don't remember ever seeing these in Japan, and only a few anywhere else until recently. Lately I have seen several. They don't appear to be of recent make but neither do they indicate any great age. They are attractive as decorations. Are they known on the market in England? Approximate value? When were they made? Why? Any other information will also be appreciated. I have recently seen several in lengths from tanto to full tachi but none mounted as katana. Anything you can give me will be of help. Sincerely, C.J.Smith."

COMMENT

I intend to answer this letter by making an assumption that Lt.Col.Smith is enquiring about swords mounted in bone and ivory. The dividing line between poor blades mounted in bone, and lesser but real Japanese blades mounted in poorer quality ivory, is often hard to define. In my experience swords and dirks with mounting of this kind fall roughly into five grades of quality. First, those mounted in bone of poorish quality with poor blades (usually hira-tsukuri) in soft steel. Second, mounts of poor quality ivory with similar or slightly better blades of hira-tsukuri form. Third, mounts of reasonable quality ivory with blades of true Japanese form, usually not correctly polished with the hamon indicated only by a coarser polish than the rest of the blade. The blade usually glued into the hilt. Fourth, mounts of a good ivory with blades of true Japanese form and of reasonable quality, usually Shin-Shinto, the blade with the

normal mekugi. Finally, a fifth quality in which the ivory is superb, the blade very good, Shin-Shinto, usually signed, quite often by pupils of reputable swordsmiths. Blades of the fourth and fifth class may have horimono, the horimono often suggest atobori and tend to be confined to the fourth class of swords. In the top quality ivory swords the blades are usually of plain shinogitsukuri form. There is a completely different type of sword to those which I have described. This is mounted in bone again, but the scabbard and hilt are bound with bands of brass or copper; in longer swords there are simplified tachi hangers in brass. The blades are always, in my experience of hiratsukuri poor quality form and workmanship. The bone carving is poor, often embellished with black ink in an attempt to emphasize the carving. These swords appear to be junk and are junk; why they were made I don't know, except perhaps in imitation of the five grades of sword which I am discussing.

To return to these, the first grade is as poor as the brass bound article. The carving is very poor, often again there is excessive use of black ink. These are still in the junk class. Grade two is still almost junk, the carving is not good, the blade although of better Japanese form is by no means good.

Grade three swords are those which are usually found, in antique shops and elsewhere, many large collections of Japanese swords include one or two of these swords. The carving is of reasonable quality, usually rather shallow, the ivory often fairly heavily stained to a deep ochre colour. The style of mounting is either tanto or tachi.

Grade four is superior in quality to the previous one, the carving is more skilful not usually so heavily stained. The subject of the carving, apart from the ever faithful entwined dragons, is usually of various popular festivals with many figures and pavilions, or battle scenes with warriors and horses. The blades as I have said, are of reasonable Shin-Shinto quality, often with horimono, usually dragon. However, these horimono are often fairly obviously atobori and are not particularly well carved. I consider that swords of this quality were made for the late 19th century tourist trade. They were probably expensive, and still can be, and were probably

made to supplement the rare supply of the real thing. Those swords which I have called grade five.

Swords in this final class are works of art in all respects. I think they can be ranked with normally mounted swords of good quality. Some collectors dismiss all ivory mounted swords as junk; this is a mistake. They have never seen this rare top quality ivory sword. In my work as a restorer I have had the pleasure of cleaning and restoring several of these rare examples of the ivory carvers art. The best of them rank with netsuke in quality of carving; one such sword was signed by Minko, a famous netsuke artist who died in 1816. This sword was decorated with horses, superbly and delicately carved. Another, the mounts excellently carved with ascending and descending dragons had a blade by Hosokawa Masakata, pupil of Masahide, was also signed by his son Masayoshi and was inscribed with the name of the owner of the blade. The subjects portrayed on the ivory mounts are more varied and sometimes of great simplicity and beauty. One sword I particularly remember had a plain ivory scabbard and hilt of superb quality and patina. The only decoration apart from the carved tachi style mounts was in lacquer, a design of a vine with leaves and tendrils. This was also signed by a netsuke artist.

All the swords of which I have had experience of this quality have been mounted as tachi. I have seen some superb dirk blades mounted as tanto in ivory, but I do not think the quality of carving quite approaches that of the tachi. I have never seen an ivory sword in this class which I would date earlier than late 18th century, or later than around the third quarter of the 19th century, a span of about 100 years. Why they were made I do not know, I would hazard a guess that they became fashionable in rice houses and were used rather as okimono were at about the same time. Again with okimono, the rare genuine pieces are superb works of art in ivory, the much more plentiful tourist and lesser pieces descend into junk. If any member can throw any further light on the subject of ivory swords I shall be glad to publish his comments.

LETTER

In the last Programme I confidently suggested that the matter of antei-tate was closed. However,

not quite it seems. I publish a letter from Han Bing Sion received since then, which he asks me to publish. Considering that he started all this! I quote in full:

"Dear Mr. Dale, The Programme for October with the interesting remarks on "Tate" and "Antei" by Ben Vincent has just arrived. I'm glad to know now how the characters concerned should be pronounced. However, as not all letters were quoted in full in the Programmes, like you I'm not sure that the publication of Mr. Vincent's comments have completely cleared the air.

He writes for instance: "In the May issue of the Programme, we learn that "AN" means dark and "tei" means an emperor. Therefore utsuri without a "dark emperor" is mainly to be found on Koto blades. This can be called a handsome reply. Is there any meaning here? My fellow student of the sword would like a translation because he is not at all sure of the pronunciation. Problems again beset us here for in Japanese it is often possible to understand the meaning of a word perfectly without being able to pronounce it correctly. Therefore is a translation or a pronunciation needed?"

I agree completely that the meaning of a word can be understood without knowing the exact transliteration. For this very reason in my first letter I gave the characters in kanji which, as Mr. Vincent has now pointed out, should be pronounced ANTAI. You published an extract of this letter in the December 1967 issue of the Programme, however, without those characters. So, when the Programme for April 1968 was published with Mr. Vincent's question about "antei", I immediately wrote to you again as follows: "Re Mr. Vincent's question about the "antei" I mentioned in connection with utsuri, I would like to draw your attention to the characters which I placed between brackets in my letter of October 1, 1967 because I was not sure at all about the pronunciation. However, when you published an abstract of that letter in the Programme, you omitted those characters. My source: Nihon To Zenshu, vol.7 page 242. I would be glad if Mr. Vincent could provide a translation of the text." In the Programme for May 1968 you did not quote this letter. Although I had neither asked for the pronunciation nor said anything about the meaning, you reported in that Programme: "Last month, I passed this over to Han Bing Sion, 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." As I myself have no copy of Koop & Inada, I cannot check whether the right character TEI was referred to.

Lastly, may I refer to my letter quoted in the Programme for June 1968, in which I already tried to explain that not the translation into English as dark belt or dark zone was my problem, but the whole text on page 242 of volume 7 of the Nihon To Zenshu. It is, however, quite possible that this June Programme had not yet reached Mr.Vincent when he sent his comments to you.

Hoping that you will publish this letter, I thank you in advance. Yours sincerely."

COMMENT:

This is positively the last letter I shall publish on this subject!

LETTER

From Andrew Ford, overdue for publication but of interest to Turkish and budding diplomatic service members!

"Dear Bon, while on holiday this year I went to Istanbul and visited the Topkapi Saray Museum, so I am now able to answer Gordon Hughes query in the Sept.'67 Bulletin. There are three swords there, unfortunately how they arrived is not known.

1. Tachi in ivory mounts, blade of poor quality and the ivory carving not exceptional, probably 19th century.
2. Tachi, blade signed katana-mei 'Bushu Takada no ju Yamato no Kami Sadayuki' either SA 432 or 433. The ashi of ring type similar to those seen on WW II swords, black lacquer saya and iron guard. A pleasant piece but nothing exceptional, blade in poor state.
3. Yefu-no-tachi of superb quality. Blade signed 'Tsugihiro', the Bizen man TS 10 in my opinion. Blade shinogi-zukuri, with single groove each side, sugu-ha yakiba. Ashi of filagree shakudo,

triangular form as on Shozoku-no-tachi, set with pawlonias in high relief in gold or good quality gilding. Hilt mounts gold and shakudo with usual rice bales and more pawlonias. The lacquer a mixture of different colour golds on an iron red base with kiku and abstract designs. Underneath the ashi was gold leaf to protect the lacquer.

Yours sincerely."

AUCTION

It was announced in the July Programme that we proposed to have an auction later this year. Members were asked to write in with details of any articles they wished to offer for sale, so that we could prepare a catalogue. I can only assume that all members are satisfied with their collections and do not wish to make any changes. The response to the auction announcement has been absolutely nil. not one offer of one object, therefore the idea is cancelled, and no auction will take place. Perhaps we will revive the idea in a year's time.

WANTED

Rowland Gregory, 14 Russell Street, Luton, Beds., would like to purchase examples of Japanese sword belts and hangers, used in the last war, as worn by Officers and N.C.O.'s. All military swords arrive on the market without these. Examples please?

NOSTALGIA

TACHI Nashige scabbard with Hoko birds in gold. Kashira is in form of a bird's head, straight yakiba dragon and Ken horimono. Unsigned, 15th or 16th century. Excellent condition, £5.10.0.

DAISHO. Both swords identically mounted black natural wood scabbards. Shakudo and gilt fuchi kashira with dragon in waves. Katana unsigned. Wakizashi, no date, signed (Tachi mei) TOMOMITSU (of ETCHU, period JOJI 1362) £8.

Both blades in splendid condition.

TACHI. Nariji scabbard with engraved gilt mounts unsigned. A typical Koto Bizen blade. Original surface but a bit scratched. £2.

COMMENT

Before members send me cables asking for the address- these are extracted from a letter from Rowland Gregory in which he mentions prices of swords offered to him in a sale list, in 1949-50. It also included excellent katana at a top price of £4.10.0 and several well mounted wakizashi at around £2 each. Tsuba seven shillings and sixpence to fifteen bob!

LETTERS

Apologies again to those members to whom I still haven't replied, I have just about caught up so I'll be with you soon.

OSHIGATA

A reminder to new members who may have difficulties in reading tang inscriptions due to inadequate references, that if they care to send a rubbing (oshigata) of the tang, addressed to Bon Dale at the Society's address, I will check it for them and send them all available information I have on the swordsmith or inscription. Please remember to make a careful rubbing of the whole tang, both sides, not just the inscription.

NIHON TO NEWSLETTER

New members will like to know and others be reminded of a venture started in Japan in January 1968, by Albert Yamanaoka and Associates. The Nihon To Newsletter is a bi-monthly publication in English, 30 plus pages, on Japanese swords and its related fields. Packed with information from authoritative Japanese sources, there is no other publication in English which can offer such a wealth of knowledge to the serious student of the sword. Members wishing to subscribe to this non-profit making publication should write to :

NIHON TO NEWSLETTER,
C.P.O Box 967,
Tokyo, Japan.

Enclose: Name, Address, City, State, etc. and remit Twenty (20) U.S. dollars or equivalent. Bank Cashiers cheque only - NO personal cheques.

AIR MAIL POSTAGE

For overseas members wishing to have their Programmes sent air mail, the subscription rates are increased as follows:

Europe.....£3.-.-.
U.S.A. and elsewhere \$10.00.

NEW MEMBERS

We have great pleasure in welcoming the following new members:

John Strode,
22 Wentworth Crescent,
Hayes, Middx.

M.I.Moad,
67 Settington Avenue,
Chatham, Kent.

Bryan B.Bateman,
43 Brodie Avenue,
Liverpool 18.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS:

Dr.G.Curtis,
7 Thames Road,
A.E.R.E. Harwell,
Berks.