

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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PROGRAMME NO. 53

NEXT MEETING - Monday, 2nd February 1970 at the Mason's Arms,  
Maddox Street, London, W.1 at 7.30 p.m.

FOLLOWING MEETING - Monday, 2nd March, 1970 at the Mason's Arms,  
7.30 p.m.

SUBJECTS: February - We follow Sir Frank Bowden's excellent suggestion and hold a Daisho evening. The idea being for members to bring either katana or wakizashi which they judge to be half of a daisho; most katana and wakizashi are, needless to say! Sir Frank has promised to bring at least four prospective halves. All members are urged to bring as many swords as possible to increase the chance of finding a matching pair. What happens then should be interesting!

March - Sydney Divers will give a talk on Sword Polishing. He has a complete set of stones and had also seen a blade being polished, so it should be very enlightening.

Swords for study should be Yedo School, Shinto and Yamato Den, Koto.

NEW COMMITTEE

At the December meeting the proposed new Committee was re-read to the members present and the meeting was asked to vote on the adoption of this committee. The show of hands was unanimous and so the officers for the next year are as follows:

President	- Basil Robinson
Chairman	- Bon Dale
Vice-Chairman	- John Anderson
Secretary	- Ci Dale
Treasurer	- Bill Baxter
Programme Secretary	- Fred Stride
Journal Editor	- Malcolm Hutchinson
Advertisements	- Alan Bale
Blade Repolishing	- David Parker
	David Butler

LAST MEETINGS

DECEMBER: The subject was Ghosts in Sword Art. Bon started with an eerie tale. The house he used to live in had rather a gloomy hall in which he kept a wall cabinet of 20 swords and a suit of armour. It so happened that the Dale family had a young lady visitor who was left alone in the house whilst they went out for the evening. About midnight, the girl heard strange noises in the hall which later were shown to be exactly similar to a sword slipping back into the scabbard. The girl looked into the hall which was dimly illuminated by light from a street lamp and was so unnerved by what she saw that she screamed and collapsed in a faint. A next door neighbour came to investigate. She told him that she had seen a figure with a frightening expression on his face reaching for a sword in the rack. The description was amazingly similar to a Samurai wearing hakama and a face mask. He was never seen again, but Bon always wonders who the unknown Samurai ghost was, what sword was he after, why did he want it, and what would he have done with it if he had found it? This tale seemed to stimulate some interesting revelations of sword lore. Len Holtaway said ghosts appear when swords go rusty. John Anderson said that armour is very noisy if you sleep with it in the same room. However, he treats his pieces very well so they should be very friendly. Syd Divers advised putting a sword under the bed. Strange things can happen! Syd recounted a dream, so vivid as to be almost real, in which he was chatting with the Meiji period smith who made the blade and told him of its subsequent history. Both were pleased to find that the blade had never taken a life. Syd believes that a blade acquires tremendous personality just like houses and can communicate emotions. His blades are happy blades. Remember the Muramasa legends - for evil blades. Ted Newman let it be known that he had slept with a sword. His comment:- "Bloody Cold!" Capt. Johns also spoke of virtuous and brutal swords. He has a Morimitsu which feels very good. Members might recall the Conan Doyle story of the Leather Funnel on this very theme.

John Anderson was asked if he had ever slept in armour! Capt. J. has roller skated in it, and incidentally is one of the very few who have carried a Japanese sword in battle. To round off the discussion, our Hon. President, B.W. Robinson, produced some really beautiful prints on the ghost theme. (His notes on these prints will be found elsewhere in this Programme). Peter Cottis also had some prints, both of actors, one of whom was playing the ghost of O-IWA. Fred Maitland brought an interesting lacquer box on the Munechika "Little Fox" subject, similar to the drawing illustrated in B.W. Robinson's little book sold by the V. & A.

Capt. Johns showed two tsuba, one a curious shape resembling a skull; the other showing Minamoto Yoshimitsu praying for victory. Malcolm Hutchinson had a samé Wakizashi with a Sukehiro blade. "Which one?", was the question. Unanswered, alas.

Syd. D. had a newly polished Sa Yasuyoshi, the blade of the very attractive wakizashi bought earlier at Sothebys. Bill Baxter had a very good wakizashi signed Musashi No Daijo Tadahiro with a very attractive tsuba by Masahisa. Peter Cottis had a puzzling blade which had a Yasutsugu mon but no signature.

Thus having provided material for both psychiatrists and fellow collectors the meeting ended.

JANUARY: John Anderson gave a talk on the Namban influence on Japanese Armour. External influences on Japan started during the 5th century which is the earliest known contact with the "outside" world. The earliest examples of excavated armour and also that depicted on Haniwa, all show a native use of solid plates whether laced or riveted together, resulting in a somewhat rigid defence. With the importation of horses in the fifth century came lamellar armour and this was readily accepted as being easier to wear. This lamella armour was developed, remodelled and re-shaped until it became the typical Japanese armour we know today.

The next and by far the most noticeable influence, was that of Europe in the 16th century. It is not true to say that the re-introduction of solid plates was due to European influences as this had started some 50 years before, towards the end of the 15th century; but the practicability of the European examples was seen and adapted by the ever alert Japanese craftsmen. However, serviceability was not the only criterion as no doubt fashion played its part, especially when people of the standing of Iyeyasu sported European armour. It was no doubt considered to be the "in" thing and native production started.

On the practical side, the European styles were better defence against the matchlock when it was introduced in 1542 and which we know, although despised by military purists as being unethical and ungentlemanly, found favour amongst such military leaders as Nobunaga, Hideyoshi and Iyeyasu. It has been said elsewhere that the matchlock was inaccurate and had a very limited range, but with their use on the battlefield in large numbers, it was a wise and prudent man who could equip himself with a bullet proof armour.

The adoption of European models took two forms: (a) the use of European specimens or (b) copies of existing pieces by Japanese smiths.

The former were traded or received as gifts from visiting Spanish, Portuguese or Dutch traders and were all "done over" to fit in with Japanese taste. The morions were for reasons best known to the armourers of the time, turned back to front before being fitted with the standard neckguards. The cuirasses, usually peascod, were sometimes used as they were, or trimmed to a more Japanese shape and fitted with hinges and tassetts. However, they all had their surfaces russetted in Japanese fashion.

The Japanese copies are either exact with false lining studs on the helmet bowls or variations on this theme. Not only were helmets copied but examples exist of flat crowned Dutch hats and captain's caps made in iron.

During the same period of strong European influence, Hideyoshi invaded Korea and a number of helmets exist which copy or were influenced by the inverted pot helmets of the Koreans. It is difficult to say whether any actual examples were re-used by the Japanese as many of these unusual bowls were crudely made.

During the whole period of the Tokugawa, the Namban influence remained even after closure of the country with earlier pieces being remounted. It was not until the very end of this period that the re-importation of European armour was again started. An armour in the Tower has the cuirass and helmet of a French Carabiniere model 1855. The leopard skin and Grecian crest on the helmet have been removed and the whole of the helmet and cuirass russetted and decorated with a nunome design of senins and clouds. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, is an armour with a monion for a helmet and a cuirass of the Napoleonic period. John passed around a morion shaped helmet of black lacquer, back to front design, and made of six plates, to illustrate his talk. Syd. Divers emphasized the susceptibility of the Japanese to external influences. Perry found Christian rites still practised after 300 years despite severe persecution. It was rather interesting to learn that the closing of Japan was largely due to an Englishman. The Shogun's favourite, who reported to him that the Spaniards used Christianity as a method for colonisation.

The Society took pleasure in welcoming Mr. Mayken Nakajima and his lady from Tokyo, who were on holiday in Europe and were keen to see Tsuba and Armour., Mr. Nakajima's speciality. He was

obviously very smitten with a beautiful arrowhead which Capt. Johns brought along. This arrow was a wonderfully delicate fret design of a Haiku poem which read:

"The hailstones falling in the paddy fields,  
So icy - seeds"

Len Holtaway brought along a very elegant and long blade by Yokoyama Sukekane, 58th in descent from Bizen Tomonari. Bill Baxter had an interesting wakizashi by Terushige (c)1661 of the Shitahara school. The hamon changing from midare with Tobiyaki at the Monouchi to Sugu-ha for most of the blade length and once more reverting to midare with tobiyaki towards the hamachi, along with a pronounced itame-mokume hada. Alan Bale showed an iron tsuba of the Kaneyama School (c)1550, very thick good iron of square silhouette form. Ted Newman brought two blades along, one signed Hizen Tadayoshi with chogi hamon, the other being a striking aikuchi blade signed Hizen Masahiro, the signature bearing a strong similarity to the desirable 2nd generation smith.

Member Wenman had an aikuchi with a Naginata shaped blade signed Sadakazu which excited more than one eminent member, also a wakizashi with nice inlaid iron mounts en suite. Finally, Malcolm Hutchinson had a wakizashi signed Omi No Ju Hisamichi with a Higo cup guard with a peony design.

#### NEWS FROM THE NORTH

Andrew Ford has sent the following Branch news:

Next Meeting - At the Seven Oaks Hotel at 7.30 p.m. on the 20th January 1970.

Subject: Mr.Chan will be giving us a talk on calligraphy, and Bryan Bateman has promised to bring along a Masamune complete with origami.

Last Meeting. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman offered themselves for re-election and were duly re-elected. Bryan Bateman gave a very interesting talk on a copy of the Kogarasu-maru in Liverpool Museum. I cannot improve on the comprehensive notes given to me by Bryan so these I duly include. We also had a guest at the last meeting from the Model Soldier Society. Mr.Turnbull has been making models of famous generals in armour, he brought along three. Kato Kiyomasa, Minamoto Yoshitsune and Minamoto Yoritomo. All of which were very fine, being of standard five inch height and in lead. The armour being in copper plates laced with cotton. Not a hobby for the impatient or those lacking in manual dexterity.

N.B. The exhibition at Manchester finishes on the 8th February and not the 18th as stated in the last bulletin. The error was mine.

### STUDY PIECES

Many members feel that they find it difficult to learn about swords even though they attend the meetings. So in future, there will be a request for blades to be brought along as Study Pieces, which show the characteristics of the various Koto and Shinto schools. There is a great shortage of suitable blades so if you have one, please bring it along. There is no better way of learning than looking, with suitable guidance of course!

We hope to introduce Study Sessions soon using Juyo Token Nado Zufu as a basis. Bon Dale now has the complete 17 volumes indexed and he will introduce these sessions.

### DISCOVERY OF JAPAN

This book by Michael Hardwick is colourfully illustrated and gives a good account of the history and customs of Japan. Sydney Divers was so impressed that he bought 60 at cost and is willing to donate the profits to the Society. Price of each book is 6 shillings (6/-d) very reasonable, and post free too! I might add that 16 were sold on the spot so members agreed with him about value for money.

Do NOT write to the Secretary. Send six shillings only direct to: Sydney Divers Esq, "Hunters Moon", Aspley Guise, Bucks.

### A FEW PRINTS OF BAKEMONO

At the Chairman's behest I showed a few prints at the December meeting to illustrate some favourite Japanese ghost-stories. I brought to the meeting two albums containing complete sets of the following:-

(i) GENJI KUMO UKIYOYE AWASE (Set of 54 + supplement of 6), by Kuniyoshi. c.1845.

(ii) OGURA NAZORAYE HYAKU-NIN ISSHŪ (Set of 100), by Kuniyoshi, Kunisada, and Hiroshige. c.1845-48.

(iii) KISOKAIDŌ ROKU-JŪ-KU TSUGI NO UCHI (Set of 71 + title page of contents), by Kuniyoshi. 1852.

These three sets, founded on the 54 chapters of the Genji romance, the 100 poets, and the 69 post-stations of the Kisokaidō road respectively, are all conceived on the same principle, in that

the upper part of each print contains a direct or symbolic representation or description of the chapter, poet, or post-station concerned, whilst the main design shows some scene from a dramatic story or legend connected in some way with it. The nature of this connection is usually tenuous and often impossible for a "Southern Barbarian" to grasp; it frequently depends on a pun - thus the Kisokaidō post-station of Oiwake is used as an excuse to illustrate the story of O-Iwa.

The first two sets were published shortly after a stringent edict ("The Tempō reforms" of 1842) prohibiting, amongst other things, the illustration of theatrical performances, but nevertheless in a number of the prints we can recognize the popular actors Danjuro VII and VIII, Utayemon IV, Kikugorō III and others. But the letter of the law was complied with in that their names do not appear, and the prints masquerade as straight historical or legendary illustrations (see my Kuniyoshi 1961 pp.13, 15 and 16). Several of these stories, as will be seen, were popular enough to be illustrated in all three series. All prints are by Kuniyoshi unless otherwise noted. The stories illustrated are as follows:-

(i) Kuzonoha the Fox-woman. Genji, ch.2. Hahakigi; 100 Poets, No.27, Chunagon Kanesuke (by Hiroshige); Kisokaidō, No.43 (station 42), Tsumago.

She was the wife of Abe no Yasuna (10th century) and mother of the astrologer Seimei (d.1005). She was really a fox in human shape, and in due course vanished, leaving her husband and child desolate.

(ii) O-Iwa and Tamiya Iyemon. Genji, ch.25, Hotaru; 100 Poets, No.49, Onakatomi Yoshinobu Ason; Kisokaidō, No.21 (station 20), Oiwake, and No.65 (station 64), Takamiya.

This horrific story from the Tokugawa period was the subject of a very popular play, Yotsuya Kwaidan ("The ghost story of Yotsuya" - a quarter of Yedo) and has been retold in English by James de Benneville. O-Iwa was married to Iyemon (called Kamiya Niyemon in the stage version), but he tired of her and gave her poison which deformed her hideously and finally killed her. Her ghost, of repellent aspect, haunted Iyemon and his new wife, appearing in a lantern or floating in the river, and the heartless husband came to a bad end.

(iii) Seigen and Sakura-hime. Genji, ch.3 (Supplement), Sakurabito; 100 Poets, No.39, Sangi Hitoshi (by Hiroshige - a

parallel story of Sōgen and Orikoto-hime); Kisokaido, No.16 (station 15), Annaka.

The monk Seigen, of the Kiyomidzu Temple in Kyoto, fell desperately in love with the lady Sakura-hime, and went mad when she repelled his advances. He starved himself to death, gazing at her picture, from which he attempted to conjure her forth, and his ghost afterwards haunted her, finally driving her to death.

(iv) Yayegaki-hime and Takeda Katsuyori. Genji, ch.17. Ye-awase; 100 Poets, No.72, Yushi-naishinno-ke Kii (by Hiroshige); Kisokaidō, No.30 (station 29), Shimo no Suwa.

Katsuyori was the third son of the redoubtable warrior-monk Takeda Shingen (Harunobu); he was born in 1546 and died in 1582. Yayegaki-hime was the daughter of one of his enemies and deeply in love with him. When Katsuyori was finally defeated by Iyeyasu and performed seppuku, Yayegaki-hime was heartbroken and spent hours burning incense before his portrait in an attempt to bring him back. In the end she resorted to witchcraft, and in the Kisokaidō print is shown dancing among ghost-foxes with the famous helmet of Takeda Shingen held above her head.

(v) Tamamo-no-maye. 100 Poets, No.37, Fumiya Tomoyasu.

She was the Japanese incarnation of the terrible nine-tailed fox, who had previously bewitched the sovereigns of China and India. In Japan she seduced the Emperor Toba, but was finally exposed by the astrologer Seimei (see Kuzunoha, above: there is a chronological inconsistency in this story) and hunted in her fox form over Nasu Moor. To escape her pursuers she turned herself into the Death-Stone, which long stood on the moor as an object of terror, till her malignant spirit was at last exorcised by the priest Genno. Kuniyoshi here represents her as stately and splendidly attired court lady with an aureole of nine ghostly fox tails.

(vi) Iga no Tsubone. 100 Poets, No.40, Taira no Kanemori.

She was a woman of mighty strength, the daughter of Shinodzuka Iga no Kami (d.1348), a favourite retainer of Nitta Yoshisada. She is here shown encountering a ghostly tengu-like apparition by an ancient pine-tree. This may be a version of the story of her exorcism of the ghost of Sasaki Kiyotaka, the opponent of Kusunoki Masahige, by whose advice the latter was sent to his death at the battle of the Minato-gawa.

(vii) Sogoro. Kisokaidō, No.49 (station 48), Hosokute.

Members of the Token Society will not, I hope, need to be reminded that this tale of feudal oppression and ghostly revenge is splendidly told in Mitford's immortal "Tales of Old Japan". The present illustration, showing the multiple haunting of the villainous daimyo, is based on a stage production of 1851, Sakura-zoshi, which had an almost unprecedented run of 104 performances at the Nakamura Theatre. The leading part of Asakura Togo (the theatrical name of Sakura Sogoro), and subsequently of his ghost, was taken with enormous success by Ichikawa Kodanji.

This is only a very small selection of the bakemono prints available; the stories are gripping and dramatic, and the illustrations of them strikingly effective. They may help to explain my passion for Kuniyoshi!

### MURAMASA BLADES

We have pleasure in publishing this talk by Yazu Kizu; it is the earliest talk by this great authority published several years ago by the Southern Californian To Ken, but now published for the first time to our members:

#### MURAMASA BLADES by Yasu Kizu

Gengo Muramasa the first smith in the Muramasa line worked in mid-Muromachi times and signed with two characters. Later he was given a temple name Nyudo Myodai but never signed his blades this way.

No.2 was his son, also called Sengo Muramasa and also signed with two characters.

No.3 the grandson signed Seishu Kuwanaju Muramasa.

The blades of all three have the following characteristics:

1. They are the general shape of Mino blades except for longer points.
2. The surface grain is itami (wood grain) mixed with masame (straight) grain, that is, itami along the temper line giving way to masame along the shinogi line.
3. Surface colour is clear dark blue with small niye all over the hada.
4. Temper line patterns (hamon) are gunome, or medium straight (chusuguha), or notare wave with hakko box shape mixed, many having koshiba or enlargement toward the hilt. In the gunome or notare types the base of the line extends almost down to the edge sometimes with ashi touching the edge. Niye line very strong

and deep.

5. Yakiba colour is clear crystalline white with a bluish tint.
6. Nakago - Tanago-bara or tanago fish belly shape.
7. Carvings are not frequent, grooves occur more often.
8. Blades are rather wide and thin with high shinogi.
9. Blades are mostly katana, wakizashi, and tanto with some tachi and a few yari.

Most old books give Muramasa No.1 as the greatest because he was believed to be a student of Masamune. Later books say that the characteristics of Muramasa blades are more like Mino than Masamune's Soshuden. Actually they combine the two. Honnomi Koson says that the existing blades of Muramasa No.2 show the greatest excellence.

Mino blades at that time were medium curved koshizori with very good balance but many Muramasa blades are torii-zori with rather shallow curve. In surface colour Mino blades have a cloudy whitish surface with blackish-sub-surface while Muramasa blades have a clear dark blue hada surface with yakiba colour much clearer than Mino.

Due to the Tokugawa prohibition against Muramasa blades, testers would not record tests and origami were refused or certified as Heianjo Nagayoshi from whose blades only experts could distinguish the fine points.

#### Superstitions surrounding Muramasa Blades

As you all have heard, swords made by the Muramasa group of smiths have been considered unlucky and even evil by many persons especially the Tokugawa family.

The claim that swords of the Muramasas are second only to Masamune can be disputed but certainly they come in the first ten following him in quality. Those made by Muramasa of Ise Prov. are so sharp that they can be compared to those in the classification called "Supreme Sharpness" by the official tester Yamada Asaemon. In fact, Kubata Sugane, a kendo teacher of the late Tokugawa era wrote that a Muramasa blade was sharper than a sword made by the famous Bizen Kanemitsu. Many Lords and Samurai chose Muramasa blades of "Supreme Sharpness" for their own use.

Among them were Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Maeda Toshiie, Fukushima Masanori, and Sanada Yukimura, and there is no record of any unfortunate happening to these owners. However, Muramasa swords repeatedly brought evil happenings to the Tokugawa family.

The first such incident happened to Matsudaira Kiyoyasu, grandfather of Tokugawa Iyeyasu who was the first Tokugawa Shogun. On Dec.5 1535 Kiyoyasu lead his army to Moriyama, Owari Province to attack Oda Nobuhide, father of Oda Nobunaga. Kiyoyasu had a very brave and strong officer named Abe Daizo Sadayoshi who distinguished himself with many examples of fanatic bravery but somehow bad gossip about him started spreading. Sadayoshi became aware of the gossip and was afraid something might happen to him and told his young son Yahichiro about it. Early next morning Kiyoyasu's horse got loose and he shouted "Catch him, Catch him". Young Yahichiro thought that his father was about to be killed. He jumped up, grabbed his Muramasa sword almost 3 feet long, ran up to the Lord and in a flash cut him from his right shoulder down to the left side. At this moment a Samurai named Uyemura Shinrokuro came on the scene and killed Yahichiro. So, Iyeyasu's grandfather Kiyoyasu was killed by a Muramasa blade entirely due to a misunderstanding.

The second incident happened to Iyeyasu's father Hirotada. Hirotada had a gallant vassal named Iwamatsu Hachiya who had lost one eye, hence was known as "One Eye Hachiya". He was such a strong warrior that even his enemies were so afraid of him that they called out "Here comes One Eye Hachiya - watch out!!" whenever he appeared.

One day he got very drunk and went up to the castle. He found Lord Hirotada taking a nap. Suddenly he drew his Muramasa wakizashi and stabbed at Hirotada but missed his aim and only cut the Lord's thigh. He ran out to escape but Hirotada got up and chased him to the gate but was unable to catch him. One Eye Hachiro was killed by the Samurai Uyemura Shinpachiro just outside the gate. It is argued as to whether Hachiya was just drunk or was secretly employed by a neighbouring enemy Lord. This happened March 20th, 1545.

The third incident happened to Iyeyasu's eldest son Nobuyasu. Nobuyasu's mother was a very self-indulgent woman and was trying for the third time to marry Takeda Katsuyori the powerful Lord of Kai Province who was then the enemy of Oda Nobunaga. As one of Nobunaga's daughters was the wife of Nobuyasu, the information reached Nobunaga and made him believe that Nobuyasu and the mother Tsukiyama were taking sides with his enemy Takeda. He promptly sent a protest to Iyeyasu who immediately ordered the mother killed and ordered Nobuyasu to commit harakiri. He appointed Amakata Yamashiro-no-kami Michioki and another man as the official seconds for his

son's suicide. Michiaki's sword with which he did the grim job was a Muramasa.

Besides these three incidents, Iyeyasu himself had cut his hand with a Muramasa tanto when he was a young boy. All these ill-fated happenings relating to Muramasa blades caused the superstitious Iyeyasu much worry and he decided to destroy all the Muramasa blades in his family.

That Muramasa blades were evil to the Tokugawa Shogunate had become known to Lords and Samurai all over the country and many of them had disposed of the ones in their possession; however, some still kept them secretly because they were such fine blades. Later in Kanei times (1625) an ordinance prohibiting possession of Muramasa blades was issued and anyone caught disobeying it were heavily punished. As an example, Takenaka Shigeyoshi, Lord of Funai in Bungo Province, who was serving as Judge of Nagasaki City was given the death penalty after it was found that he was keeping not one or two, but 24 Muramasa swords! So the owners of Muramasa blades hastily disposed of them by selling, donating to shrines or altering signatures, to make the blades appear to be by someone else.

To exploit the sensational evil reputation of Muramasa swords, the writers of Kabuki plays used various themes during the late Tokugawa period.

The most frightful of these plays was called "Sato-kotoba Awase Kagami" which is commonly known as "Yoshiwara Hyaku-ningin" which means "Killing a Hundred Persons in the Yoshiwara" (entertainment district). In this play the killer, a rich silk merchant named Sano Jirozaemon ran amock with a Muramasa sword.

In another play, titled "Hachimon Matsuri Yomiya-no Nigiwai" a crepe cloth merchant named Chijimiya Shinsuke killed four persons after getting almost hypnotised by the evil spirit of his Muramasa blade.

By means of these plays the evil reputation of Muramasa swords became known to people in every walk of life. But on the other hand, there were many persons who did not believe the old superstitions and in later times hardly anybody considered Muramasa blades to be evil or even unlucky. In fact, toward the end of the Tokugawa period and on, most Samurai were desirous of obtaining one on account of their reputation for sharpness and great strength.

By the way, the Kabuki plays mentioned above are still being put on occasionally in Japan and visitors might have a chance

to see one.

In conclusion a short poem by Nakajima Hisatane -

"Evil or not evil, that I do not know  
but in existence, the Muramasa swords are rare,  
That I know".

NOTES ON KOGARASU MARU by Bryan Bateman

Included in the collection of Japanese swords presented to the Liverpool Museum by the late R.J.Hibberd is a copy of the famous blade Kogarasu-maru made by a Shin-Shinto swordsmith called Ma a-Aki in the year 1866.

The original is reputed to have been forged by Amakuni in 700 A.D. but the exact date appears to be obscure. The story runs that this sword was stolen by a crow and from this was named Kogarasu-maru which means little or baby, crow.

To quote Junji Homma on this subject "Whether Amakuni did or did not forge the original sword is not known as the tang is unsigned, nor is there any other sword in existence bearing the signature of this Amakuni. The point is, however, that Kogarasu-maru is an excellent sword. In its shape it is akin to the Sho-soin specimens, point double edged, blade of exceedingly delicate skin with suguha blade pattern ending near the shoulder, but its beauty is far superior to the Sho-soin specimens. Why? It is the bewitching hue of the surface or skin of the blade which is extremely serene and deep. It is easy to recognise the beauty of gold or silver but herein is manifested and entirely different form of beauty of an extremely subtle nature....

Only the highly developed skill of the Japanese whetters can attain this peculiar beauty. The process is very complicated and requires years of training. The interesting thing is that the process has nothing to do with the sword as a weapon and herein, we think, is suggested the attitude of our ancestors towards their swords."

So much for the original, we now come to the copy. This is signed tachi-mei as follows:

By special request Jokeishi Masa-Aki forged this (sword). Tested on stags horns and poles. On the other side it is dated - Keio Two Hinoya-Tora (3rd year of cycle) Spring, second month, a day - = Feb/Apr.1866.

The sword is in shirasaya which is inscribed on both sides in a rather peculiar order which is best described by giving the gist of the matter as below: "In the second month of the year 1866 I Jokeishi Masa-Aki was ordered by special command of the Lord Sakai to forge two imitations of the excellent treasure sword Kogarasu-maru by using my own processes and carrying out this work in the old traditions in some place in the ancient castle of Shonai. One sword was retained by the Lord and the other handed to me. Because of this strange connection I recorded this." (There is also a valuation on the scabbard of 35 mai. 1 mai=£14. 35 mai=£490 in 1866!)

Note: The Sakai family possessed Shonai castle in Dewa Province, from 1622 to 1868.

From the foregoing it would be assumed that the Lord Sakai either had Kogarasu-maru in his possession in 1866 or sent Masa Aki somewhere to have a look at it. Homma states the original had long been treasured in the repository of the Heike family before it came into the present Imperial collection. B.W.Robinson states in "Arts of the Japanese Sword" that it was in the possession of the Taira family.

Are Sakai and Heike both members of the Taira clan?

My thanks are due to Mr.B.W.Robinson for the translation on the scabbard and for the information re Shonai castle.

Description of the Masa-Aki copy is:

Overall length	36 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
Length of blade	27 $\frac{7}{8}$ "
Width at shoulder	1.3/16"
Thickness at shoulder	9/32"
Shape	Shinogi but double edged at point.

Normal shinogi with rounded back for a length of 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ " from mune machi. Shinogi Ji is 7/16" wide. A groove is formed in the shinogi Ii on both sides 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ " long x 9/32" wide. Where the rounded back ends the blade becomes double edged but is not sharpened until 2" or so from the point. The line of the shinogi extends from shoulder to point and the two sharpened edges curve to meet it at the point.

Curve - The curve is koshi-sori and is 23/32" deep.

Jihada - Fine grain

Yakiba -  $\frac{3}{8}$ " to  $\frac{1}{2}$ " deep with small undulations.

Boshi - Long turnback same 12"/13" long with small circle and true narrow suguha pattern.

Tang end - rounded

Yasurime - deep, angled

Signed: Tachi mei. By special request Jokeishi Masa-Aki forged this. Tested on stags horns and poles.

Dated: Spring of 1866

EDITOR'S NOTE: I have also seen a copy of this sword. In my case the sword had tachi mounts but the tsuba and tsuka were of iron and forged completely to the blade. The blade and tsuba etc. were of very fine quality, the blade being of the shape described by Bryan and the patina of the tsuba and hilt being black. Maybe some member has more information on this unusual copy.

CHAIRMAN'S NOTE: The sword described in the following sales report by Sa Yukehide was also a copy of the Kogarasu maru and a very excellent blade it was. I have also possessed a copy at one time and have seen two others, one in military mounts; it would seem 19th century Kogarasu Maru's are not too scarce.

SALESROOM REPORT by Bon Dale

It is a long time since I wrote on current sword prices for the benefit of members who are not able to attend auction sales in London very often or at all. As I gave advance news in the last issue of the Sotheby sale of December 4th 1969, it would seem appropriate to give a report of that sale.

The sale started with a Sukesada wakizashi, early Shinto perhaps, condition reasonable, the boshi a bit rubbed, price £50. Lot 3 was a nicely mounted katana with a blade of kata-shinogi form, signed on the blade Ashu Kaibu Ujijoshi, the blade not in excellent condition but a good buy at £80. Lot 5 was a finely mounted tanto in silver, the blade by Bizen Shigemitsu dated 1479. The mounts were excellent, the blade a little tired, the price was £240. Lot 6 was a fine daisho, the mounts were not in good condition but were repairable. The katana blade was signed Sa Yukihide, a rare swordsmith in the salesrooms; a fine blade which might have been genuine. The wakizashi was by HIRAMA Teruhiro, an excellent tightly forged blade and certainly genuine. The price reflected the signatures,

£700 to Douglas Wright.

The next Lot 7 was the first of the two Ichimonji in the sale, the Bizen Ichimonji Norimune. The bidding for this was fierce and ended at a round £2,000 which now stands as the record price for a sword blade in this country. The following lot, the second of the Ichimonji, the Muneyoshi, went for a surprisingly low price of £400 to Sir Frank Bowden.

Lot 9 a very fine but very small ken blade  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length made £350 - nearly £40 per inch. Other reasonable swords averaged reasonable prices from £30 to £75. This sale also contained a wealth of sword furniture; it is impossible to give details of all lots; good fuchikashira averaged about £35, the top price was £70 for a pair signed Omori Teruhide, decorated with dragon flies.

The kodzuka were good, some excellent, average price about £20. The top price was £75 for a rare iron kodzuka inlaid in Hirata enamel. There were many excellent tsuba, in iron the top price was £210, but there were many good tsuba at far less - an average price of about £30 to £40. In soft metal there were several highly decorative pieces which fetched £220 for a Masayuki, £360 for an Ishiguro Masayoshi, a beautiful Aoi shibuichi tsuba decorated with maple leaves. £460 for a Hamono Noriyuki and £350 for a Horai Masayoshi. It is probably true to say that good soft metal tsuba are the most highly priced objects connected with Japanese swords, including the complete sword. Many a very good complete sword can be bought for far less than the prices quoted above for single tsuba. This was a good sale of the type not often seen these days.

Of other sales since I last wrote I can only repeat what I have said before about prices of swords in sales rooms. Because a sword fetches several hundred pounds in a sale it does not necessarily follow that it was a good sword, however much one would innocently like to believe this to be otherwise. There were some remarkably high prices paid for some remarkably bad swords in 1969. In the brave new 1970 Sotheby's are to hold a follow-up sale from the above one, I believe in March, in which even better sword furniture is promised and there are some good swords too. I am told that Christies are to have some very special swords to be auctioned in a sale, I think also in March.

SWORD REPOLISHING

The second batch of swords will have departed for Japan by the time this Programme is published. This consists of nineteen blades owned by various members, mostly in and around London. With luck we will see these again in about six months, and if the first batch is anything to judge by we will find our tarnished and chipped lumps of steel have been transformed into beautiful gleaming Nihon-To. I have said "Members in and around London" but this does not mean that this service is the privilege of local members only. Members anywhere are urged to join the next batch of swords to go, which starts to be formed now and will go as soon as there are another dozen or so together. It will not await the return of the second batch. All YOU have to do is to get your blade or blades, no limit, to David Parker, address below. He and the Society will do the rest. As announced last Programme, we have had to adopt a deposit system, this is for a long sword £25, for a short sword £15. Deposit with sword please. Final cost cannot be estimated exactly but is likely to be somewhat less than twice the deposit, depending on what services you require. These are: Repolish, shirasaya, wooden habaki, tsunagi (wooden blade for mounts), shinsa (certification of blade by NBTHK panel of experts).

Each blade must have a label attached giving name and address of owner, swordsmith if signed, services required, -repolish, shirasaya, etc. etc.

There is nothing like a mint condition blade in shirasaya, send your candidate to K.D.PARKER, 17 Strickland Row, Wandsworth, London S.W.18. Incidentally, I don't think it has yet been stated, the approximate prices quoted include air transport, customs clearance charges, etc. which are divided between members in a batch of swords. The Society makes no charge or profit whatsoever.

Chairman.

ADVERTISES - Rates 5/- for 10 lines. Box No. 1/- extra

For sale about 120 copies of To Ken Bijutsu, illustrated monthly magazine published by the N.B.T.H.K. Illustrations of blades, tangs and fittings. Mostly in mint condition £7.10.0. Purchaser pays postage. Contact Bon Dale, 16 Brightwells, Clancarty Road, Fulham S.W.6.

WANTED URGENTLY all types of late pattern Japanese military swords with either leather covered or steel scabbards. Even N.C.Os. swords with cast aluminium hilts £8 - £12 offered. More for better examples. J.B.Marsh, The Armourers Shop, 15 Holly Avenue, Walkden, Manchester.

WANTED to complete sets - Fuchi, Shakudo Nanako with gold butterfly and/or Dragonfly and Kashira, Shakudo Nanako with multiple gold kiri mon. In exchange for either of the above, Advertiser can offer a very small pair of menuki in the form of Tsuba's (these are in mint condition and quite unusual but appear to be of late manufacture). Apply Box No.5.

WANTED Japanese military swords with silver mon on kabuto-gane. Also chain or leather sword hangers. Apply Box.No.6.

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 Fred Stride, Preston Cottage, North Road, Preston Park, Brighton BN1 6SP, Sussex, he will check it for them and send them all available information he has 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 Yamanaka 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

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

SECRETARY'S NOTE - The Nihon To Newsletter subscriptions are now due for the current year. Dues run from January to January irrespective of when you join. Please send £8.14.0 to Ci Dale, 16 The Brightwells, Clancarty Road, Fulham S.W.6 who will transfer all subscriptions to Japan. Please continue to support this excellent publication.

AIR MAIL POSTAGE - For overseas members wishing to have their Programmes sent air mail, the subscriptions rates are increased as follows:

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

JAPANESE SWORD BOOKS

Japanese Swordsmiths - list 17,500 smiths - Vol.1 \$15.00; Vol.2 \$10.00. Japanese Swords - A nomenclature chart 17" x 22" .50. 27" x 35" \$1.00. Los Angeles County Museum, Arms & Armour Hall Catalogue, Colour plates \$5.00. Arms & Armour of Ancient Japan - Exhibition Catalogue 1964 \$3.00. Nihon To Koza, 10 vol. revision of pre-war edition. Well illus., \$25.00. Nihon To Zenshu, 9 vols. A modern scientific approach. Well illus. \$76.50. Juyo Token nado Zufu, Record of Juyo certification. Vols.13 to 16 available. Nihon Toko Jiten - Koto vol. \$17.50; Shinto vol. \$16.00. Tangs of 1000 smiths. Write for list of 50 or more titles in Japanese or English. Postage extra. We automatically get every new sword book from Japan. Tsuba boxes \$1.00. From: W.M.Hawley, 8200 Gould Avenue, Hollywood, California 90046. U.S.A.

NEW MEMBERS: We have much pleasure in welcoming the following new members:

Dick Mecone Esq,  
702 North 30th Street,  
Phoenix, Arizona 85008  
U.S.A.

Dr. Daniel P. McNair,  
1433 Price Drive,  
Cape Girardeau, Missouri 63701  
U.S.A.

Alain Floquet,  
5 Rue Jeanne D'Arc,  
Paris 13. 75.  
France.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Dr. G. Curtis,  
"Ashlea"  
Cane Lane,  
Grove, Wantage,  
Berks.

Wilf Dodds Esq,  
3 Redhills Terrace,  
Durham,  
Co. Durham

SWORD POLISHING - The Society will arrange for the repolishing of swords in Japan. This will normally take about six months from despatch by our Shippers in London to return here from Japan. The cost cannot be estimated exactly, depending on the length and condition of the blade and the services required. Very approximately it will be £40-£50 for a long sword, £25-£30 for a short sword at maximum. The services available are: Repolish; Shirasaya; Wooden Habaki; Tsunagi (wooden blade for mounts); Shinsa (certification of authenticity by N.B.T.H.K. panel of sword experts in Japan). A deposit of £25 is needed for a long sword, £15 for a short sword.

There is no limit on the number of blades which can be sent at one time by one member. Each blade must have attached a label giving name and address of owner; swordsmith if signed; services required; repolish, shirasaya, etc. The estimated prices above include transport and customs clearance charges etc. which are divided between all members included in a batch of swords. The Society makes no charge or profit. Blades for repolish and deposits payable to the Society should be sent to K.D.Parker, 17 Strickland Row, Wandsworth, London S.W.18.

