

# 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 82

SEPT. - OCT. 1974

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21 Elthiron Road,  
Fulham, S.W.6.

### NEXT MEETING

Monday 4th November, 7.30 p.m. at the Princess Louise, High Holborn. To get there: underground to Holborn, turn west, cross Kingsway and the P.L. is 50 yards on the left hand side.

### SUBJECT:

"Modern Military Swords" by Bill Gray of the Northern Branch. This promises to be an interesting meeting for the majority of swords that we see are either modern blades in military mounts or if we are lucky, old blades in these mounts. We often tend to pass over all modern blades as being "arsenal rubbish" but this is not always the case. Anyway, let's see a good turn out of modern blades of one kind or another.

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As you will have seen in the Newsletter recently circulated, I have been given the task of editing the Programme for the coming year.

The past two Editors, i.e. Fred Stride and Tony Chapman have, I think, done an exceptionally fine job during their terms of office. My task is therefore a difficult one for I have to live up to the high standard already set by them. All I can say is that I shall try to do my best and if I make any errors, as I am sure I shall, I apologise beforehand. I shall welcome any constructive criticism from members and of course any additions to the Programme by members in the form of articles and/or letters will be very welcome.

I appreciate that many members cannot come to our meetings as often as they may wish, and so in order to keep them informed of our goings on, I shall do my best to have some sort of Programme circulated each month. I shall be glad to hear from any of our members living abroad, especially as regards the

situation of collecting and study in their own countries. It may also be interesting to hear whether our foreign members have any comments on the way in which we hold our meetings in England, and we, I am sure, would be interested to hear what they get up to in their own countries.

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OCTOBER MEETING

Subject: "Interesting Items"

The title for a meeting which can go two ways for if none or few "interesting items" turn up then there is nothing to talk about - result a very uninteresting meeting.

However, we were fortunate in so far as a large number of items were brought along which aroused great interest and a certain amount of intelligent conversation which resulted in some of us learning a lot and everybody learning something.

The items in question were laid out on the exhibition table and were discussed in turn.

We looked at two swords brought along by Malcolm Hutchinson. The first was a Katana mounted in a same nuri saya with a Nambam type Tsuba. The menuki were shi shi of the Omano school. The blade was Koto of the Kaga school but details were obscured. The second, another Katana (Malcolm as far as I can see, seems to specialise in bringing two different Katana to each meeting. I wonder how many he has in fact got tucked away). This was mounted in a black laquer saya with again a Nambam type Tsuba. The blade was signed Suke Sada but this had been added we were told. The menuki were early Edo period Goto style. John Harding thought that the blade had at some time been re-tempered. When asked why he thought this he referred to the very unnatural curve of the blade. This immediately began a discussion on how to tell a re-tempered blade from a non re-tempered blade. John said that he had had this point explained to him but it is difficult to understand. The answer lies I suppose in experience, for after looking at many hundreds of swords intelligently a person may begin to get a "feeling" for blades and be able to voice an educated opinion. In this case a pointer seemed to be the very unnatural curve of the blade in question which is explicable by re-heating during a possible re-temper. We then went on to discuss the reasons for re-tempering a blade for example the Boshi may have been broken or the original tempering may have been poor. Many famous old blades have been re-tempered for one reason or another and they still remain as beautiful works of art. Other blades, however, were re-tempered to make them saleable.

The next item or items brought along was a Daisho owned by Mr. Grafton. An attractive pair of swords mounted in black laquer saya with pre Meiji silver Handachi mounts.

The Katana blade was Shinto and of good quality and well tempered. It was inscribed Kotetsu but although the Hamon was in his style the signature was not correct. John Harding thought that the signature on the Katana and in fact on the Wakizashi were carved by a man known as "KAJI HEI" who was a pupil of Naotane. "KAJI HEI" apparently spent a lot of time and I dare say lucrative time, carving false signatures on blades.

Anyway John was quite certain that the two swords were not made by Kotetsu and the swords were in fact made by different smiths.

These two swords raised a very interesting point i.e. if a sword bears the signature of a top quality smith how do we tell whether it is a forgery or an original?

There is of course no easy answer. In certain cases a blade bearing a top signature stands out as obviously not being of sufficient quality to be forged by the smith in question. When, however, faced with a forgery by a good smith the problem is difficult. Here again, experience and knowledge is the answer. Experts will often disagree as to the authenticity of a blade, then I suppose it depends upon which expert one wishes to believe. The final answer is, I suppose, to find out for oneself, but in England with such a lot of conflicting information and mystique floating around, the task is made more difficult. John did ask for other opinions on the blades in question, unfortunately I cannot remember hearing any!! Perhaps if we were more inclined to voice our opinions, and we must each of us have them, then we may at least learn from our mistakes as opposed to continuing on under the same mistaken ideas.

Mr. Cottis brought along a number of items including a Kwaiken, the blade of which was originally mounted as a Yari. He also brought along a sword breaker or Jittei. It was suggested that the blade may have been damaged and at one time was an armour piercer. John Anderson was asked what he thought and he jokingly said that he was not really interested in anything used for damaging armour. John Harding mentioned that as a matter of interest Jittei were often presented to village officials as a sign of authority.

Another of Mr. Cottis' swords was basically a Ken mounting with one suspension ring containing a blade which was, we decided  $\frac{1}{3}$  Ken,  $\frac{1}{3}$  Yari and  $\frac{1}{3}$  Naginata - decision a kind of Ken; anyway a very interesting piece.

Another sword, recently re-polished in Japan was a short blade of uncertain original form signed Naga Mitsu in Shira Saya. This again brought up the subject of re-polishing blades and whether it is worth waiting some years for a blade to return.

A number of opinions were voiced, some would argue that to send a bad blade to Japan is a waste of time and effort, for when returned the value of the blade has not been greatly increased, in fact the bad points show up more clearly and that it would be better to have bought a better blade with the money spent on the polishing. This is very true, we agreed, but quite often a man does not know that his blade is bad, although in the years to come he may learn more and on receipt of his blade realise his mistake. The other opinion was that if a man likes his blade and is not concerned as to its value, it does not matter. I have yet, however, to meet a collector who is not concerned with the value of his swords!

It was suggested that a panel should be set up to "vet" potential blades. However, the question was quite rightly asked as to who should say yea or nay.

With the ever increasing cost and time lag of sending blades back to Japan for re-polishing, it is becoming quite clear that re-polishing will very shortly be completely out of the question for the average collector, as perhaps it is even today. There are, I have found, a number of collectors seriously practising polishing in the traditional way. I wish them the very best of luck for after having spoken to them I can see that the task is a long and arduous one, but in the long run rewarding. I asked John Harding whether he knew of any good traditional polishers outside of Japan, e.g. in America. He answered that there were some but they all seem to turn into dealers and therefore have little time for polishing - watch out sword polishers!!

Colin Nunn brought along what he jokingly described as a "Japanese fishing seat" and it did bear a resemblance in basic design to a folding fishing seat. However, there the resemblance ended. I have only seen one other such seat and that is in the Bethnal Green annexe of the Victoria & Albert Museum, seated on which is a dummy of a Samurai in full armour - a very unusual item.

Colin also brought along an item which he described as a "rare dangler" which was a circular cut out piece of metal similar to a key ring. It was used in connection with a pole arm for attaching by way of a chain, the saya to the haft of the weapon. Colin then produced a short sword Wakizashi which had a strange undulating line on the blade. He wondered if this was a kind of Utsuri. John Harding thought that this was not so, but that it was a type of Nijuba or double Yakiba, but

had not seen this sort of thing before. The blade was well tempered and it was suggested that it was of the Masa Hide school, an attempt to revive the effect of Utsuri. The blade was of late Shinto or Shin Shinto period and was inscribed Toshi Hide. (See Arms Fair report by Clive Wheeler).

Another Wakizashi was produced signed Kanesada with shape of the Muromachi period about 1550 but had lost its original shape and no details of the blade were visible.

David Parker brought along an interesting laquer dirk complete with Wari Bashi or split Kogai but it was a "dummy" Dirk for there was no way to take the dirk to pieces and in fact no blade to draw. But a beautiful piece of laquer work.

John Anderson produced a pair of presentation Same - Chohan Kake which are uncommon in England and as John Harding said very rare in Japan. Apparently Same of good quality was bound in this special way and given as presents on important occasions. The recipient could then use the Same for a new sword mounting.

We also saw a very high quality Chin defence Hambo of 16th Cent. Kaga work made of heavy iron with a combed laquer surface - a very impressive and no doubt efficient piece of armour. One of the many beautiful pieces in our Chairman's collection which I had the privilege to view some weeks ago. I must say a "mind blowing" collection of armour.

I myself took along a mask Mempo which turned out to be made in the middle of the 18th cent. of no particular style and part of a retainers armour. The fact that it is not a National Treasure does not bother me as it was purchased very recently by my girlfriend in a South London Antique Shop for only £24.00. They thought it was an Aztec war mask and in no way connected with Japan. So keep looking folks, there's a lot still left just waiting to be discovered!!

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### STOLEN SWORDS

Three swords were recently stolen in Hampshire - any information regarding them to:-

Det. Sg. Suter (Antique Squad)  
Hants Constabulary,  
Police H.Q.  
Winchester. Tel: 0962 68133

1. Military sword with a history of the sword on an attached card. "3rd generation Tomishugi Fujishima Kaga prior 1400?"
2. A Katana without a Tsuba the Tsuka having new white "string" binding.
3. A Wakezashi with a leather mounted Saya and two rings possibly naval.

### AUCTION REPORT

Collectors in and around London know the various London auction rooms well and I am sure often buy swords and fittings there. However, I am sure that there must be many members who cannot go to these auctions due to distance and business commitments etc., so I have taken it upon myself to include a short report on the sale held at Sothebys recently (9th October 1974). I hope that it may prove of interest and not be too discouraging.

Firstly the most expensive sword in the sale made £3,600. This was a Naga Nobu and was described in the catalogue as follows:-

Naganobu (Tsunatoshi School). A very good Shin Shinto Katana:- Blade 82 C.M. broad Koshi zori, shinogi tsukuri, a broad and narrow hi on each side, chu kissaki, ko-choji hamon of nioi, itame jihadam jutsu nakago, haagari jiri, sujikai yasurime, two mekugi and katana mei Oite Edo Yonebanamachi(?) Anshuhan Takahashi Shuji(?) Fujiwara Naganobu Saku Tsukuru and dated Genji 6th year (1869) 3rd month.

Koshirae:- saya is Roiro, all other mounts are poor quality Yanagane, the saya bearing Tokugawa Mon.

Another blade I think the most unusual in the sale and probably the most unusual that I personally have seen was a Katana with a carved dragon Horimono on the blade, the unusual thing being that the carving went right through the blade, an absolute "tour de force". The description was:-

"Masamune style - a very attractive Katana possibly by a member of the Gassan family. Blade 67 C.M., broad koshi zori, hira tsukuri, pierced with a dragon rising from waves in pursuit of a tama, also carved on each side with bonji characters; broad midare hamon with some suguha of nie and nioi, kaen boshi, jihada is fine large mokume, jutsu nakago, sujikai yasurime, two mekugi - and signed Sagami(no) Kuni Kamakura Ju Nin Masamune and dated Kentoku 2nd year (1331) 10th month Horimono Do Saku.

Koshirae:- Saya is plain wood, Tsuba and Fuchi-Kashira are silver carved with swirling clouds, signed on the fuchi Hiravama Kanteiro.

A very impressive blade with really fantastic carving - not surprisingly it made £1,700.

There were many other swords which made hundreds and thousands of pounds; however I counted 20 or so lots of swords which went for less than £100. There were many Wakizashi selling for under £50 which I think were well worth having.

There was also a fair quantity of armour with one beautiful suit making £9,000. Also there were kodzuka and a good assortment of Fuchi-Kashira, some at under £20 a pair. There were many Tsuba at varying prices from £20 or so upwards.

As usual almost all of the high priced swords were bought either by or on commission for foreign collectors and dealers with most of them returning to Japan. Unfortunately by the time that our Arts Council and so on wake up to the fact that swords and fittings are "objects d'art" there will be few left to save for public display. On the other hand, perhaps Japan is the best place for them - at least they will be looked after as they should be and not allowed to rot as so many seem to have done in England.

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### CHRISTMAS MEAL

After last year's successful evening at the Tokyo Restaurant, we have decided to repeat the event. The meal has been negotiated by Colin Nunn at £3.29 including V.A.T. which is pretty good. The date - Friday 6th December, 8 o'clock, Tokyo Restaurant, Swallow Street, W.1. (off Piccadilly). Try to come along for the food is very good and the atmosphere great (real Geisha girls!).

### CUMBERLAND HOTEL ARMS FAIR (Report by Clive Wheeler)

The Token Society's stand at the Cumberland Hotel Arms Fair on September 27th and 28th was a quiet unsensational success. In our normal position in the foyer we found ourselves in close proximity to a very expensive bar on one hand, and some very expensive Japanese swords in the main dealer's room, on the other hand.

Our stand, covered with the Society's 'Mon-bearing cloth' centred round that old battle tested show case that comes out twice every year. It is beginning to show signs of wear and there is considerable doubt as to whether it will last for much longer. As usual, most of the display was made up of the Alan Bale collection with three magnificent swords and a host of first class tsuba. The three swords (a Katana and two Wakizashi) were of exceptional beauty and all in the height of

good taste, shown off very well on Alan's unusual Katana - Kake. The swords were as follows:-

- 1) A Katana signed Kanemune with a Ko-Midare hamon of the Mino school.
- 2) A Wakizashi signed Michiasa of Owari, dated Tempo (mid 19th cent) with suguha hamon and masame-hada. Koshirae of the Mino-Goto school, probably also 19th cent. Ichijo.
- 3) A Wakizashi signed Sadamune, maybe Gi-Mei, tsuba by 1st Soten master, mounts by Goto Renjo, 10th Master of main Goto school.

In addition to the above Alan had his usual display of about twenty mind blowing tsuba. Dave Parker contributed one of his excellent naginata blades with quite a reasonable modern polish on it, and a su-yari blade of no mean quality. I also noticed that Fred Stride slipped a small Yari blade into the show case that he had polished himself and made a pretty good job of. No amount of persuading would get him to "practice" on one of the writers unworthy blades, however, as he not only has most of the Japanese polisher's technique off pat, but it would appear, some of their temperament. Nice one Fred?

I am afraid the superlatives are not yet finished. John Anderson lent the stand one of his helmets which excited much comment from passers-by and Richard Marriott-Smith lent a magnificently mounted Ito-Maki-no-Tachi for the display, the blade of which was attributed to Masahide. The tachi was on a very pleasantly laquered tachi stand but I am afraid I do not know the owner's name; thanks for the loan anyway.

Last but by no means least, one of the best matchlock pistols that I, at any rate, have ever seen, kindly lent by John Weakes.

Many more society members this year came to pay their respects at the stand which was gratifying and there were several enquiries about membership. I was impressed by the degree of interest from "ordinary people" and there seemed to be a genuine interest and quest for knowledge about Japanese swords and allied arts. How much of this interest is a direct result of the astronomical prices being realised, I feel unqualified to judge, which leads me nicely into the rest of the Arms Fair.

Several of our members had stands of their own, but apart from them I think between forty and fifty per cent of the stands had some kind of Japanese sword on it at one time or another. Peter Yorke had several "pretty" looking swords on his stand but I cannot remember anything of exceptional note, other than a



rather flamboyant silver mounted aikuchi and a couple of tachi. Richard Marriott-Smith had literally dozens of swords at his stand, and it would have taken hours to look through them all in any detail. A couple of very good daisho immediately spring to mind and an armour piercing dirk of enormous proportions by Kunishige quite turned me on.

Amongst all the reproduction and Nazi gear on his stand Colin Nunn had a couple of nice swords a-hiding. One that really took my fancy was a han-dachi katana, the Koshirae of which was entirely of black leather (a kinky samurai perhaps), the blade of which, with a modern polish, was by Sukenage.

A couple of amusing stories came out of the Arms Fair which may be of interest, the first of which concerned Alan Bale and his three swords previously described. On the first night Alan was without transport and asked the writer if he would mind taking the three swords home for safe keeping. I jumped at the opportunity of being able to study them in the privacy of my own home and at once accepted, agreeing to bring them back bright and early for the next day. Apparently Alan, suffering from some kind of amnesia, completely forgot who had them and in a state of abject panic was seen rushing around the Portobello Market asking everyone if they had seen his precious swords, and making sure that they had not appeared for sale anywhere. Really Alan, next time I may be tempted not to reappear!

The second story concerns Colin Nunn who had come up with quite a reasonable Wakizashi by Yagizawa Toshihide, the reverse side of the tang having an inscription saying words to the effect that when you draw this sword, either kill somebody with it, kill yourself, or do not draw it at all (some choice!)

Colin, wishing to obtain an opinion on it, showed it to the Japanese who were being chaperoned by Sidney Divers. Colin was of the opinion that Utsuri was visible on the blade. "No" said the eminent Japanese "Not Utsuri, that's Hitatsura". "But", retorted Colin, "that's all-over tempering and this isn't like that". "Ah so", came the reply, "that actually is Tobiyaki on your sword". "Tobiyaki", said Colin, "is detached parts of tempering and this is more like a reflection of the hamon." "Hum", said the Japanese, "maybe this is actually a Bizen double yakiba". "Isn't a Bizen double Yakiba the same as Utsuri?" asked Colin innocently. Check-mate to Colin.

Altogether a well supported public appearance of the society. The next Arms Fair at the Cumberland Hotel will be in April and it would be a good idea to have something different. Any ideas from anybody?

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As seen in this issue of the Programme, certain technical points have cropped up more than once. I refer to "Utsuri", and "Nijuba". There seems to be some confusion regarding these points. Perhaps these points could form the basis of a lecture at a future time with examples of each to be looked at by members at the meeting. Anyway, as far as I can see from my references the definitions of the above would be:-

- 1) NIJUBA - This is a double Yakiba the pattern being caused by the blade having gone through the process of tempering twice. The second tempering is more of an annealing process, whereby the strains of the first tempering are relieved. The smiths successfully applying this principle were Masamune (c.1296) and Kiomaru (c.1820).
- 2) UTSURI - This appears on the very best blades. It looks like very faint irregular Yakiba and is located along the Shinogi extending towards the Yakiba about 1/3rd the width of the Jihada. It is described as a reflection of the true Yakiba hence the name Utsuri (reflection of a moon on water).

It may help members if we could have a little correspondence on these points.

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### OSHIGATA

A reminder to members who may have difficulties in reading tang inscriptions due to inadequate references; if they care to send a rubbing (oshigata) of the tang addressed to Alan Bale, 46 West Close, Woodthorpe Road, Ashford, Middlesex; he will check it for them and send them all available information he has on the smith or inscription. Please remember to make a careful rubbing of the whole tang, both sides, not just the inscription.

### NEW MEMBERS:

H. Ohta, 28A Llanvanor Road, London, NW2 2AP.  
J.R.Gibb, 90 Pelham Road, Wimbledon, SW19 1PA.  
D.H. Hawkes, Edo Galleries, 36 New Street, Barbican, Plymouth.  
G.L. Waddams, 88 St. Mary's Street, Stratford-on-Avon, Warwicks.  
Dr. L.A.Sylvester, 144 Derwen Fawr Road, Sketty, Swansea, S.Wales.  
D. Lawton, 20 Meadow Close, Stoney Stanton, Leicestershire.