

THE TO-KEN SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

for the Study and Preservation of Japanese Swords and Fittings



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PROGRAMME 92

JUNE - AUGUST 1976

Programme Editor

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FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

- September - Bring anything interesting.
- October - Annual General Meeting.
- November - "Katana Kaji". A film of the sword smith Miyariri Shohei at work.
- Autumn Arms Fair
24/25 September - By the curtesy of Arms Fairs Ltd. the Society has been given a stand at the Autumn Arms Fair.

We will provide an exhibit and information. The Fair is at the Royal Lancaster Hotel in Lancaster Terrace, Bayswater Road, W.2. and is open from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. on the 24th and from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday 25th.

EDITORIAL

June Meeting

This was the long awaited visit of Mr Iida and his party. There were about 35 Japanese gentlemen present and approximately the same number of members. In fact it was a very well attended meeting in terms of both numbers of people and items to see. This would seem to lend credence to the hypothesis that interesting and informative subjects, lead to larger and more enthusiastic attendance at meetings. Apart from Mr Iida himself there were several distinguished guests including a Mr Takahashi who was, would you believe it, a swordsmith, Mr Wakayama a member of the judging committee of Jyjo Kodugce and several others specialising in both swords and fittings. Mr Iida also brought along slides of numerous national treasures and important cultural objects, which were largely unseen by most of the Japanese as well as ourselves. The whole evening was a fine example of cultural exchange and showed how the Japanese sword, apart from being a weapon of deadly efficiency and an object of great beauty, welds people from different walks of life and cultures in a common interest and in brotherhood.

The entire meeting was well documented with cameras popping every few seconds, and the next edition of the To Ken Shunju Press carried several photographs, including a half page group shot on the front page.

July Meeting

This was to be on wakizashi but unfortunately, due to the hot weather, holidays etc., (I'm good at making excuses) the meeting was very poorly attended. There was one particular piece, however, that interested me, brought along by Mr Cottis. It was an example of the work of one of the Yasutsugu's, the third according to the owner. Coincidentally, I had just been investigating this school for one of our members and for those not familiar, here are a few notes on it:

The Aoi Shimosaka School The school was founded by the first Yasutsugu under the patronage of Tokugawa Heyasu although it had it's roots right back in the 12th century. He was born the son of Hironaga of Omi province who was a descendant of the Senju-in school. This Yasutsugu originally signed Echizen No Kuni Shimosaka or Higo No Daijo Fujiwara No Yasutsugu adding the Aoi mon. He was accredited with being the first smith to use Namban-tetsu (foreign iron). I sometimes wonder whether Tokugawa Iyeyasu had a fascination with foreign styles, remembering his famous armour and the foregoing.

After he died in 1621 Yasutsugu was followed by eleven others of the same name but only the next four were of any note. They all made long swords of both shinogi-tsukuri and hira-tsukuri form and similar wakizashi. Grain was usually mokume with hamon of Sugu-Kuichigai ('nibbled' straight) suguha, notare and midare. Some blades may be engraved with a ken, a dragon and the divine Fudo.

August Meeting

Several sukashi-tsuba turned up but once again the attendance was poor. A friendly chat ensued and those present enjoyed themselves, if nothing else.

I have been contacted by Mr Knutsen who has brought out another series of limited edition prints similar to those circulated to you a few months ago. The following is part of the blurb and quite interesting in itself.

In these drawings the warriors, the flowering of the emerging bushi class, wear the splendid armours of the late Heian and Kamakura periods, covering here specifically the time from the bloody Heiji War in 1160 to the Gempei War 1180-85 between the Taira and the Minamoto. This was the heroic age of the Japanese Bushi. It was a time of fierce warfare with little mercy shown to the defeated, but it produced many great figures endowed with martial virtues. Although these prints are in line only, the textures and fine colours of these wonderful yoroi, or armours, are well known. Wearing such brightly laced and richly embellished harness the great warriors sought to symbolise pureness of heart and displayed unparalleled bravery and faithfulness unto death. The glory and panache of their wars are captured in several famous scroll printings.

The equipment

The battlefields of the period were dominated by the powerful war bows carried by almost every warrior of rank. Their retainers often used the formidable shobuzukuri-naginata with its long curved blade that was much larger and longer than the shorter naginata favoured in later centuries. But it should be realised that even bushi of high rank did not scorn the spear and there are many records of famous warriors who wielded the naginata with equal skill to the bow or the sword; the mighty Saito Musashi-bo Benkei (d. 1185), the great black armoured retainer of Minamoto Yoshitsune, for example. These naginata are to be seen in several of these drawings. In the hands of skilful warrior this naginata and later the yari were weapons capable of wreaking terrible execution and some experts of classical bujutsu hold that they may have been more effective than the long sword. But it needed a very strong man to ply the spear through a long pitched battle and the sword was more suited to Japanese physique.

In the three new drawings of the 16th century Age of War the yari in various forms is much more in evidence especially the longer and heavier bladed oni-yari. Bows were still commonly in use although by the second half of the century the handgun was widely in use as an infantry weapon. At the battle of Nagashino in 1575 the old style cavalry of the Takeda army was decimated by matchlock fire (and arrows) from prepared positions occupied by Oda Nobunaga and his allies. Loss of life in this battle was heavy on both sides, though.

One particularly interesting piece of equipment is the Horagai, or war horn, made from large conch shells and carried by many bushi. There were several systems of communication studied by the samurai that came under the general heading of Heijutsu, or tactics. The horn was of great importance on the field of battle and one school (ryu) for its study still survives; the Takeda-ryu from Soma, near Sendai, in northern Japan.

About the prints

There are genuine limited editions restricted to 200 prints from each of the 10 drawings. They are carefully and faithfully printed in litho from the

originals and each print has been inspected and passed by the artist and signed by him individually, not on the plate but in pencil on the print. After printing all the plates have been 'struck' to ensure no further reproduction.

The illustrations are printed on high quality cartridge paper. The print is within a standard drawn frame measuring approximately 9" x 5½" but printed on a sheet cut generously oversize to allow you to suitably frame your print or sets.

No more than the stated number will be produced and allocation will be made strictly according to the date your application is received.

For further information please write to:-

RMK Studios, 29 Egremont Place, Brighton, BN2 2GA, Sussex, England.

I must apologise to all those who have written with requests for David Pepper's glossary and not received it yet, also to those who have sent oshigata etc. and have not heard from me yet. I am afraid pressure of work, holidays etc. have put me well behind, but I hope to clear everything within the next couple of weeks, so please be patient.

STOP PRESS: The Compton Catalogue, described in detail in the last programme is now available from Mr Alan Bale, hard cover £24, soft cover £10.50, post 70p.

Alan Bale, 46 West Close, Woodthorpe Road, Ashford, Middlesex.

The following charming little ditty was sent by member Richard Wilson:-

TSUBA

Chiseld stream with carp in reed
Ants attaching centipede
Snail, crawling up bamboo stalk
Peaceful doves, with evil hawk
Moon is peeping around fine cut clouds
Demons peering from blackend shrouds
Benkei, blade drawn, again is fighting
Raider's there among the lightening
Cicada hovering over flower
Omori waves, so full of power
Spider's web is nearly spun
Soten battle almost won
Sukahsi silhouette of tree
Fish nets drying by the sea.

Shi-shi prancing over rocks
Lanterns light the way for fox
Shakudo bats on Mokko form
Gilt dragon swirling in the storm
Boldly signed by Nobuiye -
- A large myochin dragonfly
Masterpiece of sword and fan
Kiku blooms with kakihan
Laughing sages playing go
Battle-field of musashi-no
Fudo aflame with vajra sword.
Impressed pattern, cut out gourd
Nara school, with waterfall
"Goto", Ah yes! Most worked of all

THE HARTMAN COLLECTION

On June 30 and July 1st, Christie's attempted to sell the Hartman collection of Japanese metalwork. They produced a very impressive hard-bound catalogue, which at £12 a time, was all that many people were going to be able to buy, but which, to give it its due was well worth the money, and will certainly form an important part of a collector's library.

The sale was held at Quaglino's Ballroom and Christie's obviously invested heavily in order to attract the expected flood of buyers, seating for about 500 being available. On the first morning the turn out would have been easily accommodated in the first two rows, with about 100 people turning up, of which about one third were Japanese buyers, one third English and Continental buyers and the other third, of which I was one, were 'only here for the beer'. Instead of the normal practice of having the lots shown, all were on slides which I thought was a very good idea.

Lots 1-350 were auctioned on the first day and according to the following day's Daily Telegraph £280,000 was realised. Of this I estimated that about one third went unsold. The second day (Lots 350-676) realised a similar figure with an estimated 50% unsold.

Of the 676 lots only 14 were swords, the vast majority being tsuba. They may have been small in number but they made up for it in quality. I can do no better than quote the catalogue description of the most notable:-

An Aickuchi Tanto with persimmon wood saya and gold ishime-ji Kojiri, Koiguchi and Kodzuka with Takabori persimmons and pines and shakudo takazogan monkeys with copper faces, the Kodzuka signed - Riu Hogen Kiyonaga (mid 19th century, probably a pupil of Goto Shojo and Kono Haruaki); the gold Kurikata formed as a persimmon and the gold kashira a monkey in takabori, the menuki, shakudo monkeys - signed Tsuneyo (Yabu, first half of 19th century); the blade, hira-zukuri, musori and mitsu-mune with large itame-mokume hada and komidare hamon of nie and sunegashi, ubu nakago with several mekugi-ana, 24.6 cm long, signed Norishige, 14th century.

An Aikuchi Tanto with red lacquer saya decorated with chrysanthemums in black and gold togidashi, the fittings of silver with massed chrysanthemums in nikubori including wari-kogai and kodzuka, hilt and scabbard bands and kojiri extending along the scabbard edges to the koiguchi, - unsigned 19th century; the blade, hira-zukuri and almost musari with Bishamon and Benten horimono, itame-masame hada and midare hamon with ko-nie, sunagashi and tobiyaki, ubu nakago with three mekugi-ana. 26.8 cm long, signed Kanesada (of Mino province, 16th century, the horimono later).

A tachi blade mounted as a katana, the scabbard of gold nashiji with a central band of stylised waves, the fittings of shakudo in han-dachi style, with gold giobu hirazogan, shakudo borders and dragons in gold takazogan, the gold menuki formed as dragons entwining vajra - hilted ken - signed Sonobe Yoshitsugu (Taraka 1779 - 1842 founder of the Sonobe line, a pupil of Tanaka Yoshiaki and metal worker to the Daimio of Yanagawa, Chikugo); the fuchi - signed Seiju Hogen Kirsaku Kore, "respectfully made this" (Tanaka Kiyonaga mid 19th century pupil of Goto Shijo and Kono Haraki Hogen), and inscribed "made to the order of Hord Lida"; the blade, ko-midare hamon of ko-nie, togari Boshi, one Kirikoni halfway along the blade and o-suriage nakago with two mekugi-ana - 63.4 cm long, with inlaid (gaku) tachi-mei, Hasabe, 14th century. (I personally really rated this sword as being the best in the sale, but then I have a thing about han-dachi Katana.)

A Daisho with samegawa-nuri scabbards and iron migaki-ji fittings decorated with Buddhist divinities in gold takazogan, including Fudo Mio-o, Aizen Mio-o, Monju, Fugen, Riujin, Emma-Ten, Daikoku-Ten, the kogai and kodzuka with gold frames, the gold saya-kanemono carved as Inu and the gold menuki carved as Shi-Tenno, Zocho, Komoku, Bishamon and Jikoku; the tsuba otafuku-mokko iron migaki-ji decorated in gold, copper and shakudo takazogan with the Ni-o, Kongo and Missaku, the reverse with Daijin and Sadaijin in Katakiri-Bori, each signed "71 years old Miboku" with Kirzogan seal Masanobu (Hamano Masanobu of Edo, pupil of Nobuyuki and fourth Hamano master, first third of 19th century); the Kogai, kodzuka and fuchi similarly signed, the kurikata and kojiri - signed Miboku; the blades, a matching pair, honzukururi and torizori with ko-itame hada and choji-midare hamon of nie and sunagashi, nioi and ashi, with togari Goshi and ubu nakago - 71.2 cm and 48.5 cm, each signed Munetsugu (of Musashi, Kao school, second quarter 19th century); each ura nakago inscribed "Namu Mio-ho Renge Kyo" (from the Lotus sutra).

Other swords included an itomaki - no-tachi with a blade by Sakakura Gonnoshin Terukane, dated 1682 and with the metal mounts being made by Satsuma Kanko Sanechika (chief metal worker to the Daimio of Satsuma); a Ho-o-no-tachi (bird's head) the blade by Bishu Osafune Kanemitsu and dated 1358; a tanto by the first Hizen Tadayoshi and another Bishu Osafune Kanemitsu, this time a gold mounted tanto.

It is difficult to know where to start with the tsuba. There were so many. Mostly they were soft metal (Mr Hartman seems to have a pre-occupation with gold, lucky man!) Out of the total of 676 lots 380 were tsuba (including daisho). All but a handful were illustrated with several full colour plates but space does not really allow for any detailed descriptions, although I will endeavour to do so in a future programme.

The remainder of the lots were predominantly kodzuka and fuchi-kashira, but there were also examples of ojime, tobacco pouches, netsuke, vases, boxes, bronzes and an incredible articulated figure of Musashi-no Benkei with the Bell of Miidera. As the preface of the catalogue says, large collections of Japanese metalwork such as this are scarce outside Japan, and the catalogue is therefore a good record of some outstanding craftsmanship. Notwithstanding this, I feel there was simply too much for one sale and the prices expected had little or no chance of being met in many cases. My estimates of unsold lots may be (and I hope for Christie's sake they are) pessimistic.

The next article was sent by David Pepper from Canada. It was he, you will remember from the last programme, who supplied the glossary that many of you have asked for (and some have actually received) and it was on this trip that he obtained it. Thanks very much David.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE SAPPORO CONFERENCE

Introduction

It must be difficult for a Japanese collector to understand the feelings of foreign sword-lovers the first time they experience an event such as the Sapporo Conference. In giving my own impressions as a Canadian collector, I am sure that I share many of the opinions of other non-Japanese students of Nihon-To.

Until very recently, in my own country and in various parts of the United States there was no opportunity to see the best quality of swords, kodogu and koshirae. Until about five years ago, there was very little communication among collectors, and not much information published in English. Many of us had never really seen an excellent blade. Others had potential Juyo-Token in their own collections, and did not realize. Many of us did not know that it was possible to restore rusty or damaged swords. Others did not know how to properly care for our possessions, and because of lack of knowledge we may have severely damaged valuable swords. In the past many collectors did not treat their swords, or other people's swords, with the proper respect. However, this is changing.

New sword societies have been established in Europe and America. Gatherings like the various Shinsa-Kai held in the U.S.A. have brought together collectors from all over the world to share their experiences and to learn from experts. Museums are now taking a new look at their collections of Nippon-To and are realizing the true importance of these works of art. More books are being translated from Japanese so that this knowledge can be shared with the people of other nations. We have begun the journey, but there is still a long way to travel.

It is a fact that it is extremely difficult to learn about Nihon-To without seeing good examples of genuine work by the great masters. To know what is the best, one must see the best, but this is not easy in the Western world. There are many good blades and a few excellent ones in North America,

but the best and most famous swords remain in Japan. It was for this reason that in 1975, Mr John Yumoto organized a special "Samurai Sword Tour of Japan."

The Sword Tour of Japan:

The main purpose of this tour was to enable a group of Nihon-To enthusiasts from North America to pursue their interests during a three-week study tour of Japan. The entire trip was planned with the idea of seeing Nihon-To in their most appropriate setting - the historical background of Japan itself. For several of the fifteen tour members, it was the first time to visit your country, so every experience was a new adventure.

At least one special event was planned for each day of the tour. Among the many highlights of our trip was a visit to the Tokyo National Museum, where under the guidance of Mr Kashima we were privileged to be able to examine in our own hands sixteen famous blades including the National Treasure Nozoki-Ryu by Kagemitsu. It is wonderful to think that this sword had once been held in the hands of Kusunoki Masashige and the Emperor Meiji.

Through the kindness and assistance of the many staff members of the Bijutsu Token Hakubutsukan we spent most of one day in the sword museum at Yoyogi, where we heard specially prepared lectures and were able to examine twenty magnificent swords selected for our viewing. Dr. Homma took time from his busy schedule to greet us personally.

Later in the trip we visited the Yoshihara brothers' forge in Tokyo's Edogawa district, and the force of Sumitani Masamine at Matsuto near Kanazawa. All of these craftsmen made special efforts to welcome us and to demonstrate their art. For most of our group it was the first time to see some of the processes of making a blade. I know that this experience helped us to understand the traditions of craftsmanship which have produced the finest steel swords in the world.

The tour would not have been complete, of course, without visits to museums where we could see not only swords and armour but also many examples of all the fine arts from Japan's rich cultural heritage. Among these were the Toshogu museum at Nikko, The Homma Bijutsu-kan in Sakata, The Chido museum at Tsuruoka-Shi, and the famous treasure-houses of Oyamatsumi-Jinja at Omishima in the Seto Nai Kai. These visits, in fact every event of our tour, gave our little group new knowledge and appreciation of Japan and the Japanese-people.

The Conference in Sapporo:

From the beginning the sword study tour was arranged so that we could attend the 24th annual N.B.T.H.K. conference at Sapporo. This was to be a major highlight of the trip and was for most of us including myself, the first time to visit Hokkaido.

We arrived the day before the conference opened, and were taken on a bus tour of many of the familiar Sapporo sights. My first thoughts even as we rode on the bus from Chitose Airport were of the strong similarity between the Hokkaido countryside and certain parts of Canada. I did not feel like a stranger then, nor at any time during my stay. Sapporo is in many ways a modern, progressive city, and yet for me it has a feeling of tradition - of

continuity, as if the pioneers of early Meiji times had brought with them the best qualities of Old Japan and preserved them in Hokkaido.

Sapporo is a clean city, a quiet city, a comfortable city. I liked it from the moment I arrived and was sorry to leave. Much of my free time was spent in exploring, walking up and down small streets and visiting interesting shops. The people of Sapporo are very kind to strangers, willing to help and talk with them. Walking from our hotel to the Conference took only about 25 minutes, so many of us took this opportunity to see interesting parts of the city along the way.

On the morning of registration we arrived at the hotel in an excited mood, and were welcomed by the smiling faces of many former acquaintances - N.B.T.H.K. members we had met at the two Shinsa-Kai in America, and others we had seen a week earlier in Tokyo. We were greeted by many new faces of members from all over Japan as well. The Sapporo members made every effort to welcome us and to make us feel like old friends. I understand that it was through their special arrangement that a charming interpreter was provided to assist us. The Conference atmosphere was that of a family gathering, because all of us, Japanese and foreigner together, were meeting to share a mutual interest.

All of us who were at the conference must share the same happy memories of the delicious foods served at the banquets. I myself will never forget the flavours of some of the delicacies we enjoyed, in particular the superb Hokkaido salmon. As a lover of Japanese folk music I greatly enjoyed the entertainment provided on the last evening, especially the group's performance of Esashi Oiwake, one of my favourite songs.

The gifts and mementoes of the conference were a pleasant surprise, and will keep our memories fresh for many years. I am truly delighted by the high quality of the publications, with their excellent photographic illustrations. It seems to me that there must have been many months of preparation required to prepare these books. I wish that we in North America could produce such good material to commemorate our own exhibitions.

Since the exhibit-rooms were a most important aspect of the conference, I have reserved my appreciation of them to the last. My first reaction to the exhibits was one of great amazement. It was like a dream to me, to walk into a room and see rows of tables covered with beautiful blades. Before then, I could not have imagined seeing such a sight. There were in that room examples of blades whose makers we only read about in books - Hisakuni, Rai Kunimitsu, Norishige, Sadamune, Akihiro, Yasutsuna, Chogi. And there in that room we could not only see them, but hold them in our hands. To me this is both a great privilege and a deeply personal experience.

There is a unique feeling in holding a Japanese sword - this comes from the graceful shape, the beauty of the steel itself, the balance - and something more. A good sword has a spirit of its own - it feels like a living thing in my hands. It has a life of its own, and yet it becomes a part of me as I hold it. Perhaps those men of ancient times - the craftsman who made the sword and the many generations of samurai who have in turn owned and admired it - have each left a part of themselves with the blade. When we hold such swords our hands and hearts make contact with the many generations who have gone before us.

I have the greatest respect for the owners of these swords, and I am grateful for their complete trust in fellow collectors. In my country I would not dare to leave a bare blade out for strangers to look at. Some people here, even those who should know the proper way to handle a sword, become careless and disrespectful with others' property. Therefore, I am especially grateful to those who shared their precious treasures with us.

For several years I have had a strong interest in the Horii family and their work, but I had great difficulty in finding information about them. Naturally the display of their swords in the exhibit was of special value to me. It is a truly educational experience to see examples of several generations of swords made by one family, to observe how the skills are passed on down the line. I was delighted to have the opportunity to meet the two Horii brothers, Nobuhide and Tanetsugu. Before I left Hokkaido, I was taken to visit Horii Nobuhide at his home in Date-Shi. I shall long remember his hospitality, and the kindness of my host Mr. Watanabe.

In the exhibits of kodogu, tsuba and koshirae there were many fine examples of things I had only seen before in book illustrations. In fact some of these seemed like old friends, for I had seen their photographs in Japanese publications many times. The koshirae greatly interested me because it is extremely difficult to find undamaged original koshirae in my country. Complete examples from Muromachi, Momoyama and early Edo periods are almost impossible to see in North America. Of the many fine koshirae I saw one in particular stands out in my memory - a simple, graceful and elegant black-coloured tachi. I understand that this was a replica of an early sword called the Shishi O Tachi. In my own opinion this had a truly ideal beauty.

In the matter of tsuba and kodogu, once again we were able to see at first hand examples of the finest workmanship, to appreciate the type of workmanship that appeals to Japanese collectors. For most of us, it was a rare chance to see genuine works by Matashichi, Yasuchika, Iwamoto Konkan, Miyamoto Musashi and so many others, as well as fine early iron sukashi-tsuba and kinko work.

In concluding, I must express thanks on behalf of all those who were in our group, to everyone connected with the Sapporo Conference. Your hospitality, and indeed the kindness of people all over Japan helped to make every stage of our journey both pleasant and inspiring. I sincerely hope that the spirit of friendship which we experienced will continue to grow.

Within the circle of Nihon-To study, many diverse elements are brought together. People of every type of occupation and background, people of different nations and cultures meet together in spite of language barriers. We all share a common interest in the appreciation of the art-swords of Japan. Understanding on one level expands to understanding on many levels, therefore it is my wish that through the sharing of knowledge and interests the people of the world will grow closer together. I hope that in the future collectors and sword lovers will continue to meet in different countries to share the valuable heritage of Japan's culture.

LUCKY SWORDS?

Several years ago, whilst eagerly buying books on swords, I came across a limited edition (about 200 copies were printed for private circulation) purporting to explain about fortune telling with Japanese swords. It explained certain interpretations to be placed on flaws etc in blades and how they could effect the fortunes of the owner. It seemed to be a good way of passing off defective blades by unscrupulous dealers and I took no further interest in it, until I read of similar things in Joly's "Sword and Sane". For those who may find this obscure subject in relation to swords of interest, read on.

The very name of Muramasa has a cold ring about it. This sinister figure comes down through the ages as a half mad, sinister genius, whose swords had a thirst for blood that seemed insatiable, and that the sword would drive the owner to acts of evil. The stories were added impetus to at Sekigahara. Tokugawa Iyeyasu, so the tale goes, wished to see the blade that cut through Toda Shigemasa's helmet. The owner, a certain Nagataka, handed Iyeyasu the sword which promptly cut his hand. From then on, Muramasa's blades were considered particularly unlucky for the Tokugawa family.

The very length of the sword had to be lucky. The proportionate length of the total blade and the tang had to be a number to which a lucky significance could be attributed in the scale of divination. If in the making of the sword, this ratio came to an unauspicious figure, the swordsmith would alter the length. Certain superstitions were attached to markings as well as the shape of blades, horimono and inscriptions.

Figure 1 shows how a blade is divided into five parts. These parts refer to specific areas of one's life and the shape of flaws, marks etc within these areas, point to how these broad classifications will develop. The five classifications are:-

- 1) SAN Means to disperse or scatter, either good or evil.
- 2) SHU Means an accumulation of things, either good or bad, in regard to fortune.
- 3) KUKU Means either good or bad luck.
- 4) MEI Refers to either a long or short life.
- 5) UN Is the part of the sword which tells of destiny.

A multitude of flaws, cracks, dots etc. are supposed to be able to tell those who know where to look, everything from when he will die to if his wife will leave him. A "spider" crack is sometimes interpreted as resembling a dragon and if it faces one way in one of the five parts it is good, and the other way bad, yet vice versa in another part of the blade. It is very bad luck to have flaws in the SAN portion of the blade (understandably so) and you will be killed in battle if you have a sword like this (maybe something to do with the weapon breaking in two?).

How about this one, for all you who have swords with KAEN - (flame) boshi, and think it's great. I quote:-

"To have marks of an imitation of fire on the cap (point) of the sword is looked upon as extremely bad luck, and if those marks are on both sides of the blade it shows that your house will some day be burnt down, but if

Kaen-boshi is on one side only, it tends to show that one of your friends' house will be destroyed by fire. It also represents a fiery temper, an excitable temperament, and too prone to find fault in trivial matters." So take heart it may only be the next door neighbour's house.

Figure 2 has a few interesting points in it. The mekugi-ana at the end of the nakago should not be there. According to my little book, it ought to be filled as it shows a low social position, an unsettled home and if it belonged to any great General (with a low social position?) it would mean misfortunes, defeats and misery. The hamon, going too far into the nakago; I am afraid means woman trouble. And if you think all that is bad there's worse to come, as the wavy lines on the jiri mean almost certain death by drowning! If you have a sword with this little lot on it you are probably a miserable peasant General, who is about to drown in a sea battle, just as his divorce is coming through.

There may be some justification for the accusation that I have been over flippant with this subject. In old Japan, however, I believe many of these points may have been taken very seriously, as in the aforementioned Muramasa example. There are many other little points that are all perported to have meanings of their own. I cannot, being the cynic that I am, help feeling that many of these "lucky flaws" were invented by unscrupulous pre-Meiji dealers, in order to unload damaged or bad blades onto a superstitious and gullable clientele. After all, nothing really changes, does it?

NEW MEMBERS

Mr G. Vincent 144 Melton Road, Stanton on the Wolds, Notts.

Mr R.G. Pollard Estcourt, Ambered Lane, Staplehay, Taunton, Somerset

Mr G.M. Thomas 1 Radinden Manor Road, Hove, Sussex.

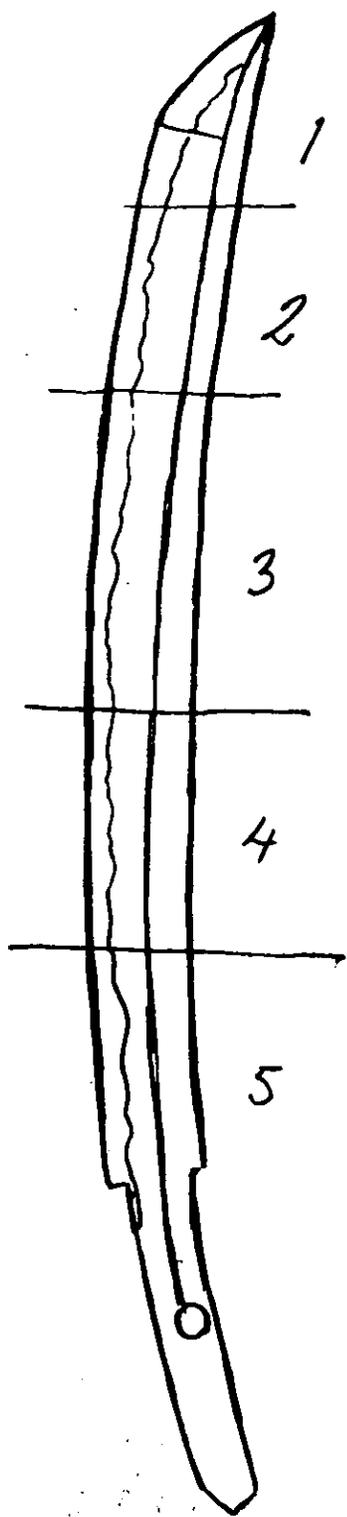


FIGURE 1

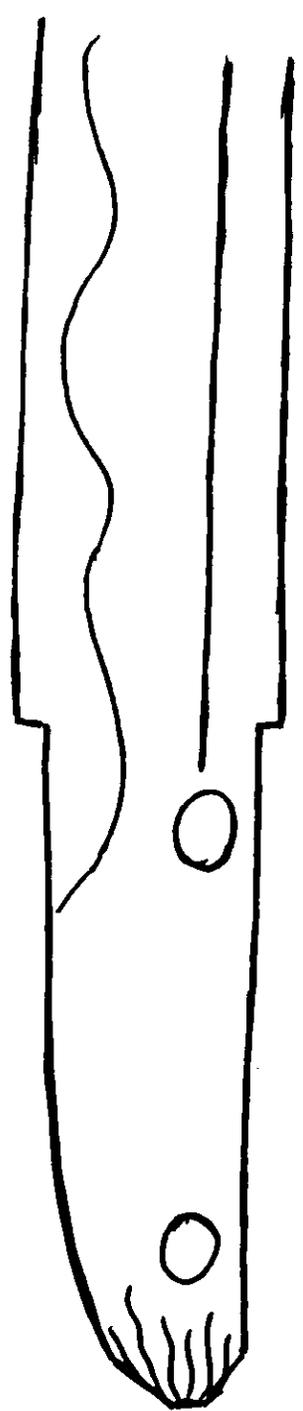


FIGURE 2.