

To-Ken Society Meeting Report

19 Feb 2015

The February meeting comprised two parts: the first was dedicated to a documentary about mukansa polisher Sasaki Takushi and the second comprised hands-on study of blades brought by members. As the documentary outlined different polishing techniques and methods, some of the nihonto brought along usefully illustrated the differences between a kesho and sashikomi polish.

David Maynard showcased two of his blades – a Nobufusa katana polished by Mukansa togishi Kenji Mishina (Nagayama sensei student and long-standing friend of the Society) in kesho and a Kuniie blade polished in sashikomi by Tony Norman. The hachidai (8th) Nobufusa (Takahashi Noboru, 1909 – 2000) katana, illustrated in Fig.2, is dai saku in the name of the seventh generation Nobufusa (Takahashi Shohei, 1885 - 1958) and was forged during the early Showa period. It is characterised by mokume hada (masame in the shinogi), numerous thick saka ashi forming a gunome impression, and midarekomi komaru boshi. Overall, it has a strong shape and, unsurprisingly given its age, is in a very good state of preservation.

Yoshinara Katsuichi, working as Kuniie, was another Gendaito smith based in Tokyo. He was a student of Kasama Shigetsugu. He worked in Bizen and Soshu den and also made works resembling Kiyomaro. In 1943 he was appointed chief instructor of the Japanese imperial army at the military arsenal in Akabane.

Clive subsequently talked about one of the blades he had brought – a Hirosuke katana. The Hirosuke lineage (starting in the Tenbun and Tensho eras in Suruga province and working throughout the 16th and 17th centuries) forged swords in Shimada. The shodai was one of the most skilful Shimada smiths and he made wide katana with o-kissaki, dense itame hada and nie-deki hamon in variations of suguha. Clive's blade illustrated the characteristic traits of the school very clearly and was accompanied by leather gunto koshirae. Overall, it was a great blade which demonstrated that sometimes hidden gems could be concealed within military mounts.

Further on, Clive shared with us his Hozon-papered Shinto Kiyomitsu katana, which was once owned by general Kawada Tsuchitaro. This Kiyomitsu family of smiths hailed from Kaga province and was a prolific clan, which belonged to the Fujishima school. They worked between the mid-15th century and the Meiji era across twelve generations. Being based in the Kaga province, they were under the auspices of the Maeda han, who were sympathetic to the Christian religion during the early Tokugawa reign and established quarters for underprivileged residents, some of whom were Kiyomitsu smiths. Some Kiyomitsu blades of the Shinto period that include the title "Harima Daijo" in their mei are considered to have better workmanship. One of the Shinto smiths working around the Enpo period (1661-1681) is known as Ju Ni Gatsu (December) Kiyomitsu as the right-hand part of the character "Kiyō" may be broken down clearly into the 3 separate characters "Ju - Ni - Gatsu". Kaga province produced many swords during the Koto period, eclipsed only by Mino and Bizen and the name Kiyomitsu has been compared to that of Sukesada in Bizen province in terms of productivity. However, the Kiyomitsu of Bizen. Osafune should not be confused with the Kiyomitsu smiths from Kaga. In Koto times the Fujishima Tomoshige school, which was related to the Kiyomitsu school, was also active in sword-making in Kaga.

The present, relatively short Shinto katana, is a well preserved blade but in need of some re-polishing. It has a chusuguha-based hamon and itame hada. Shortened for the diminutive size of general Kawada, it also has bohi, which reduce weight further. Both the omote and ura of the nakago bear tameshigiri inscriptions dating to Kanbun

Thus, both blades showcased by Clive addressed the theme for the evening of gems hidden in not so attractive gunto mounts.

Next, Colin Langton described the Kanemoto katana he had brought along. A mid-16th century Mino blade, it was probably forged by the nidai Kanemoto. The distinct sanbosugi hamon clearly identifies the swordsmith line and the gunome shape points away from the shodai (less symmetric lobes) towards the nidai.

Finally, there was a discussion about in-hand sword study sessions at museums so that members could examine items from the various collections. With regards to the V&A visit, it is likely it will be towards the end of April or beginning of May, on a Friday night at the museum itself. Separately, Chiddingstone Castle have advised that they cannot accommodate our request for a session until late October due to event bookings of the building. We shall keep members apprised as these events take a more concrete shape.

Fig.1 Takahashi Noboru



Fig.2 Gendai-to Nobufusa

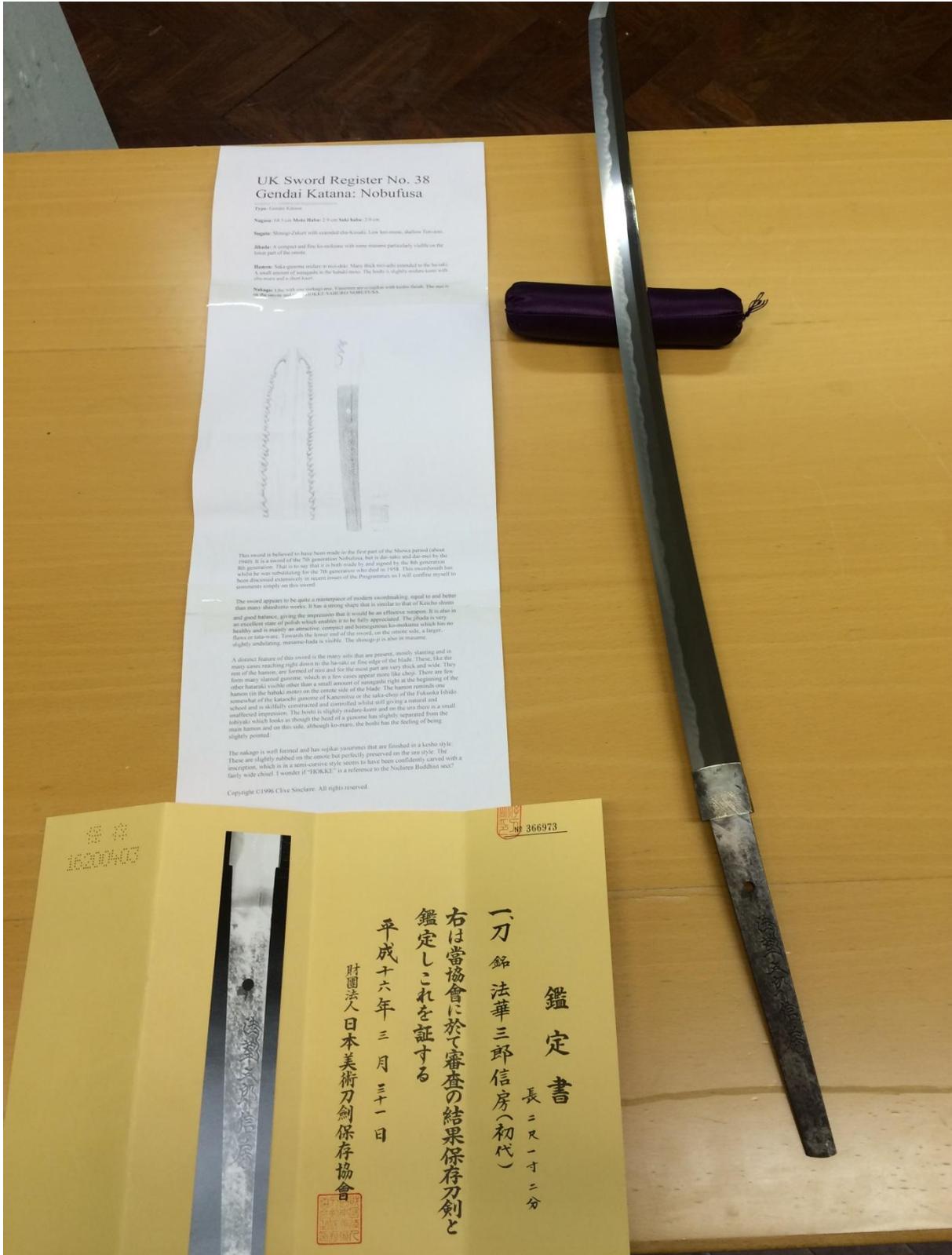


Fig.4 Hirosuke katana



Fig.5 Surrender of Kiyomitsu katana to British forces

This illustration is from "Shōken - Hirohito's Samurai" by Richard Fuller. I suspect that the sword in question is that found here, accompanied by the S.E.A.C. retention slip in favour of L/Cpl R.F. Russell. The blade that was originally in this military mounting is now in Shira-sega and attributed by NBTMK (Hozon) to



Lieutenant-General Kawada Tsuchitaro, 31st Division Commander (33rd Army), surrenders his sword (*shin-guntō* with General Officer's sword knot) to Major-General W. A. Crowther, DSO, 17th Division commander at Thaton, Burma, last week of October 1945. (IWM IND4902) (See p. 129)

Kaga Kiyomitsu, as it is *numei*, but has 2 *saijō*-*mei* or results of *tanegishiri**. I suspect it being Kawada's sword mainly as it has this name written on the leather *sega*-cover but also it is a rather short custom made mount, which might be appropriate for Kawada's diminutive stature, as shown here.

* originally in gold inlay!

C.S. 16/1/15.

Fig. 8 Kanemoto katana

