

6 Dec 2017 events: BM visit To-Ken Society AGM

The day comprised two distinct parts: a visit to the British Museum, where we studied in hand a number of swords ranging from Koto to ShinShinto, followed by a more formal part, the annual general meeting in Senate House, University of London.

1. British Museum visit

Some of the swords viewed by a group of around 15 Society members are included below.

- Taikai Naotane (Nambokucho copy)

Wide and thick blade with narrow shinogi, koshisori, plus sakisori, funbari, chu-kissaki. Tight itame with some whirlpool hada near the machi. Created in Soshu/Soden fashion.

- Attributed to Gassan

This katana is long, but suriage. Long and lacking sori in the upper half, makes it a relatively rare Gassan. The blade is thick, heavy, the ayasugi hada is very prominent and somewhat contrived and conspicuous. All of that points to a late Gassan.

- Attributed to Yamato Norinaga

This blade is suriage. First-generation Shikake Norinaga worked in the Nambokucho period and was followed by others. Relatively classic itame masame Shikake hada. Note that late work is loose and whiteish. Narrow suguha, crowded with ko-gonome-midare, lots of nie features e.g. ni-juba, uchinoke, tiny kinsuji and inazuma.

- Attributed to Etchu Tametsugu

Tametsugu is the product of training with Go and Norishige: early work should show their characteristics; later work shows Mino influence. Hada usually shows Norishige influence, open itame with chikei and the dark colour expected of Northern steel; hamon will have shallow midare, broken with nijuba, sunagashi and reminiscent of typical Soshu. The current blade had few of those traits but not most of the Soshu tendencies one would expect.

- Bizen Osafune Moro[kage]

This is not ubu: the signature does not include a date. Omiya work started at the peak of the Nambokucho period and lacked refinement. Current sword is better than average Omiya work. Typical features: Omiya hada is a visible itame, sometimes mixed with o-hada, jifu and pale utsuri. Early Omiya hamon follows the influence of Kanemitsu and Motoshige; later work is influenced by Osafune Yasumitsu and Morimitsu, even though it lacks their quality.

- Bisho Osafune Norimitsu

This blade is dated 1449. Judged by the position of the typical horimono, this seems to be ubu and typifies early Muromachi wakizashi shape. Hada and hamon are influenced by Osafune Yasumitsu and Morimitsu. Hada becomes tighter as the Oei period progresses and togari starts to feature. Regular spacing of hamon elements reminiscent of Soden Bizen.

- Yoshioka Ichimonji

This Yoshioka Ichimonji blade is o-suriage. The original funbari was lost when the machi was moved up well above the end of the hi. The Yoshioka nioi-based hamon is often narrower than Fukuoka choji (i.e not such high choji) with smaller choji-gonome, with pointed features (togari) and saka-ashi. Typical midare utsuri is present as well. The hada is high-quality mokume/itame.

- Sukeyoshi

Beautiful Fukuoka Ichimonji katana with exuberant, highly typical choji hamon. Unfortunately the state of polish could not display properly the utsuri, though patches of it were visible. The smith descends from the Fukuoka-Ichimonji school, and according to tradition is the son of Sukefusa and the son-in-law of Sukenori. Some historic texts see him as ancestor of the Yoshioka-Ichimonji school. His blades typically have itame, suguha, ōbusa-chōji, also a suguha hamon mixed with ko-midare, ko-midare or suguha with ashi. He is rated as a jōjō-saku smith by Fujishiro.

2. AGM

There were twenty two meeting attendees. A number of topics and resolutions were discussed and endorsed as follows.

A) Resolutions

- Paul was re-elected chairman, Ian – webmaster, Michael was re-elected as treasurer and Igor Hochmayer was elected secretary.
- The Society will endeavor to organise two regional visits per annum, in addition to the five London meetings.
- The Society will donate £500 to the Samurai Art Expo-hosted educational programme organised by the NBTHK Europe and To-Ken Society of GB.
- In view of members' enquiries, the Society committee (Paul, Ian, Igor, Clive, Michael) will find ways to include a directory or listing of nihonto-related craftsmen and restorers on the Society's website, including a relevant disclaimer about non-endorsement and non-recommendation of those.

B) Updates and information disclosure

- Michael and Ian provided updates about the Society membership and engagement with the public. Our Facebook account has over a thousand followers and the website has attracted over 20,000 visitors.
- Paul and Eddy talked about the June 2018 Samurai Arts Expo in Amsterdam. The 3-day commercial event will host over 10 dealers and an NBTHK/ToKen GB educational programme with various lectures, among which most of the below (subject to change):
 - The Tatara: The old way of steel production for swords in Japan; Dieter Kraft
 - The Bizen Tradition: Characteristics in the workmanship and its influence in the history of sword making in Japan; Dieter Kraft
 - From Ko- to Ji-Sukashi: Changes in tsuba designs from the Kamakura to Muromachi period and thereafter; Eckhard Kremers
 - From Tensho- to Higo-koshirae: The development of shapes and styles of koshirae from the Muromachi to the late Edo period; Eckhard Kremers & Mark Radburn
 - The new NBTHK Sword Museum and its facilities
 - Sword Kantei: 2 to 3 Kantei sessions will be held. Swords from different periods will be judged and explained with their features and characteristics; held under the guidance of Hans Eschbaum
 - Presentations concerning the exhibited swords and kodogu from private collections
 - Materials and Techniques; Ford Hallam
 - Signatures, Kinko, Iye-bori and Mach-bori artists
- There was some discussion about the possibility of a member-only discussion forum but no concrete action was voted on. At the moment, we are only at feasibility assessment / exploratory stage, as substantial forum oversight and mediation would be necessary.
- Further museum visits and events are being planned by the committee.

The formal part of the meeting was followed by the hands-on study of various tanto blades brought by some of the members.

Appendix

BM visit







AGM

