

Surrender notes

THE TO-KEN SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN
for the Study and Preservation of Japanese Swords and Fittings

MATCHLOCK GUNS



HON. PRESIDENT. B.W. ROBINSON, M.A., B.LITT.

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Secretary: Andrew B. Ford, 171 Stanley Park Road, Carshalton
Beeches, Surrey.

PROGRAMME NO. 69

JULY - AUGUST, 1972

NEXT MEETING

Monday, 3rd July, 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.

FOLLOWING MEETING

Monday, 7th August at the Princess Louise, 7.30 p.m.

AND THE NEXT

Monday, 4th September at the Princess Louise, 7.30 p.m.

SUBJECTS

July - John Anderson is giving his chat on the
Museo Stibbert Collection.

August - A Kodzuka evening. Bring examples of fine
Kodzuka. Speaker to be announced.

September - Hamon. A talk on what to see and where to
see it.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by John Anderson

At long last I have finished my study obligations and
with exams behind me, I now look forward to gracing the Chair
so ably warmed by Sidney Divers in my absence, and to taking a
more active part in the Meetings.

Sam Someya informed me a little while ago that Dr. Sato
of the N.B.T.H.K. had shown interest in our Society and so Sam
took with him on his trip home, a letter of greetings from me
on your behalf and details of the Society. It would be a very

fine thing if we could develop a closer relationship between the two Societies. I am now awaiting Sam's return to England to see how it was received. Whilst talking of societies abroad, I should like to mention a recently formed one in France. This society, the CERCLE D'ETUDES FRANCO-JAPONAIS ARTS TRADITIONNELS ET KYUDO has as its President, our esteemed member Bernard le Dauphin. As will be seen from the name it is of much wider scope than ours, taking in as it does, the martial arts as well as art objects. I have been given the privilege of an Honorary Membership and I take this opportunity of saying Thank You and wishing the Society rapid growth and long life.

RECENT MEETINGS

May. A fairly small but international meeting this, with some welcome guests. Syd Sydler with Don Bayney, Bernard le Dauphin and Jean Pierre Bonseur were over from Paris for the sales and Colin Rolland had made a flying visit from bonny Scotland.

Syd Divers was chairing as John Anderson was hard at work on gemology at night school. Syd brought to the notice of the members an article on swords in the newspaper "Weekend". There were some good howlers, not least that the New York Metropolitan Museum had paid £37,780 for that well known sword "Dew on the Grass". Someone had juggled the decimal points a bit. The question as to who wrote the article was unanswered but there was a movement to make the chap a candidate for Tameshigiri.

In view of the success of our auction, another off-the-cuff effort was set into motion to sell off some items which members had brought along. With the absence of many professional buyers, there were some good bargains including a long Muromachi blade well mounted as a katana. However, it was agreed that auctions such as this were not very enjoyable and would not be a regular feature.

The meeting broke up into those friendly groups that denote a gathering of sword fanciers. Colin Rolland was surrounded by the contents of a great bag of swords and people eagerly perusing his latest finds from north of Hadrian's Wall. I've always thought that Nata - the gardeners knives - were of poor quality but he had one in very good mounts and with a well made and polished blade, dated 1912 I believe. There was also a blade of good shape, a wakizashi but a long one signed NIO KIYOHIRA. It was showing signs of tiredness but still looked desirable.

Roy Clarke and Andy Ford have been trying to get their Hideaki swords together for a mutual comparison session.

Whenever one brings his blade the other either forgets or does not turn up. This time Roy couldn't make the meeting. Andy had brought his Hideaki wakizashi blade. It is a remarkable piece of work which has been described a number of times, and is fast becoming a familiar friend. Andy had also brought a good set of Fuchi Kashira in shakudo nanako with a warrior motif. The fuchi was signed Ichiriuken Gunji Tomomitsu.

Malcolm Hutchinson had brought a wakizashi by Hirotaka, a 17th century smith. The hamon was a form of choji which has the shape of horses teeth and this was a particularly clear example of this. The mounts of the sword were silver and the iron guard was signed Takushi.

Len Holtaway had a blade which looked very attractive but had some very severe rust patches and chips. To me, it was doubtful whether the blade could be ever salvaged as the pits went so deep. The blade looked very early with plenty of activity in the hamon. Could it have been Soshu? of the Nambokocho era. There seemed some doubts about this and Shin-Shinto copy was mentioned by more than one, to which I did not subscribe. The O-suriage tang had the remains of a gold attribution by a Honami. The tang has been further shortened to cut right through the inlay and only leave a tantalising few strokes of script which could not easily be guessed. What a pity!

June. - Matchlock Guns by Peter Cottis.

We had some more friends from overseas. Jean Saporto and Bernard Fournier Bourdier being our second series of visitors from Paris in as many months. John Weeks, a new member from Bexley Heath was making an appearance and that very cosmopolitan gentleman, John Harding of the London Gallery, Tokyo, had dropped in.

Syd Divers was Chairman and opened the meeting by bringing to the members' attention that the Kabuki Theatre was playing at the Sadlers Wells. This type of theatre does not have the extreme formalism of the NOH plays and can be more to the Westerners taste. Sydney had met several members of the cast and had dined with Nakamura Utaemon, the twenty-fourth of the Utaemon line and the leading actor of this type of play. The entertainment consists of two plays, the first dear to our hearts - the Chusingura, alas only an episode from this tale and the second a drama of the Sumida river. Syd also announced that Mr. Sayama would be over here for the July sale at Sothebys.

Advance information about this sale is that it is the best for some years, one of the sale highlights being a blade attributed to SA. The rumours are that the Japanese will descend in strength so it is unlikely that much will stay in England. (Cries of shame! from the impecunious collectors).

The Prog. Secretary had been approached by Ian Robertson to find out if it were possible to mount an exhibition at Wellington College. Peter Cottis was willing to help out in this project so we look forward to hearing of further developments. Apparently John Anderson exhibited some armour at the College some years ago, and spoke favourably of the facilities available at the College. The exhibitions are held in the Auchinleck room which has cases for exhibits. John was further impressed at the range of intriguing questions asked by the members of the school.

The subject of the Dallas show came up, not many members are going unfortunately. The dates seem slightly uncertain at the moment but John Harding said that three members of the official Japanese Shinsa team are flying to Europe on a personal visit after the show. These gentlemen are, Mr. Ikeda Suimatsu, the number three expert on swords in Japan; Mr. Sasano Taiko, the tsuba expert who has written some well-known books on the subject and Mr. Shimizu the martial arts expert. The arrival date should be about the 16th November and John suggests that it would be an ideal opportunity to acquire official N.B.T.H.K. papers in England. However, the Club would have to give them a welcome commensurate with their importance in the sword world. This, in fact, is a real hurdle as the club finances do not hold large reserves of cash. Sydney offered to look after the social aspects of the visit but where to hold the Shinsa? Obviously, a lot of thought must be put into this to make the visit a success but the Mandeville Hotel was mentioned as a possible site.

John mentioned that Mr. Shimizu can give tameshigiri and members wondered whether a demonstration was possible. Any volunteers? Syd said that in the recent television film a demonstration of tameshigiri was put on by a first class kendoka and should be seen when the programme is broadcast. A further point emerged - our Japanese visitors do not speak English so there will be a barrier unless a first class interpreter is obtained. Some idea of the response for holding such a shinsa seems to be a very necessary requirement and Syd suggested circularising members when more details are known.

Dave Parker asked John Harding for any news concerning the swords which he was arranging to get polished. John said that about half are polished. Polishers tend to work to their

own whims and so a batch of swords can take quite a time. Because of the import-export documents, those finished swords will have to wait until the remainder are polished and then be returned all in one batch. John thought that at the present rate of progress, they would be ready by Christmas. The subject of Shinsa papers and their value came up again. Syd said that he believed in getting as many papers as he could for a sword, even if the appraisers attributed the sword to different makers. Someone interjected that you were thus enabled to choose what name would attract the most money when you sold the blade, - I think it was Andy Ford. The debate lengthened and encompassed many matters related to the selling of swords, and the best interests of club members.

At last, Peter Cottis got to his talk. It is reported elsewhere.

There were surprisingly few swords at the meeting. Dave Parker had a nice shinto sword in military mounts. The blade was rubbed but desirable and in a few years time, one will be overjoyed to find such a piece. Len Holtaway had brought that O-Suriage blade which appeared at the last meeting. On a completely different note, your Programme Secretary was asking opinions on a blue and white bulbous saki pot which he had recently acquired. Much to his chagrin, his enthusiasm had over-ridden his judgment and the pot turned out to be 1930 export ware. Well, you can't win them all!

JAPANESE MATCHLOCKS by Peter Cottis

Guns almost certainly arrived in Japan with the white man - three Portuguese passengers on a Chinese junk which was blown off course and landed at Tanegashima (off Kyushu) in 1541. (The Mongols may have had crude bombs, but not guns). The Japanese were much more impressed with the guns than the Portuguese' other offering - Christianity - and it is hard for a cynic to avoid the suspicion that some daimo encouraged the latter to get the former. Guns were being made in Tanegashima before the Portuguese left, and their manufacture, importation and use spread rapidly in the time of War. However, they seem at first to have been used as rather superior bows and arrows (as in 'Seven Samurai') and their real impact on tactics did not come till about 1550 with the Ikko leaders and Oda Nobunaga. The magnificent fighting quality of the individual samurai had a very limiting effect on Japanese tactics, which were still at the Homeric stage of 'massed fencing matches' in 1500. However, the Ikko sect, who were mostly enthusiastic but unskilled peasants, and Nobunaga, who was a very unpleasant man and a great soldier, adopted the technique of massing squads of matchlockmen and teaching them to fire volleys. The first result was to be seen at the battle of Nagashino, where Nobunaga

put his matchlockmen behind a pallisade and let Takeda Katsuyori's horsemen charge it, fail to get through, and get shot down. The logical conclusion was reached in the Komaki campaign, (1584) when Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu dug themselves in and challenged each other to come out and fight for an entire season, after which they made peace.

However, the gun lost its importance when the wars ended with the fall of Osaka Castle in 1615. Once the samurai ethic could develop free from any need to win battles, the gun was ignored as no weapon for a gentleman. (The Mamelukes, who were equally skilled warriors, did very much the same. That was why the Turks beat them). Probably as a result, the Japanese never developed a flintlock, though they clearly knew about it, e.g. the famous drawing in the Hokusai Mangwa. When Commodore Perry arrived in 1853, the Japanese were using guns which were rather lower quality versions of what they had been using in 1600. However, as in 1541 one of the aspects of the new technology which was most enthusiastically adopted was an improved technique of killing people, and two peculiarly Japanese varieties of percussion gun appeared before the march of science led them to the adoption of strictly Western type weapons.

All surviving guns before Commodore Perry are snapping matchlocks - that is, the gunpowder is ignited by a piece of burning cord which is driven (very gently) into the pan by a spring. They come in four sizes, which I call muskets, carbines, pistols and wall guns. Muskets are generally about 50 inches long, with a bore of a little over 0.5 in. and a barrel length of about 40 in. They were carried by foot soldiers, and are rarely of any outstanding quality. Carbines are commonly about 40 in. long with a bore of about 0.45 in. and a barrel of about 29 in. Earlier ones seem to have been larger bore, and there is a good deal more variety in size than there is with muskets. They were carried primarily by men on horseback, and as befits the status of a mounted samurai are often of better quality than muskets. Pistols are the same shape as carbines, but small enough to be fired one-handed. The smaller ones were probably carried in the sash - there is one which is mounted like an inro, with the powder-flask as the netsuke - and some of them are of very high quality. Wall guns (which were probably not mounted on walls, though they can hardly have been fired unsupported) are about the same length as carbines, but much heavier, much larger bore, and often rather flashily decorated. There is one in the British Museum for example, which has a calibre of 1.6 in. and can hardly be aimed standing. It may well be that guns like this were kept in a rack at the entrance to great houses and temples - they can hardly have been carried. Three-barrelled revolving carbines also exist. They are generally shorter than ordinary carbines, and seem quite handy and workmanlike weapons.

There are also two types of percussion gun which are peculiarly Japanese. One is the pill-lock, which has a little tablet of fulminate instead of a percussion cap, and the other is the pistol disguised as a short sword. This inevitably has a bar hammer and no sights, but must have been quite a useful weapon at close range. Pill-lock guns are rare, and all different except for the Tokyo Armoury conversions of conventional matchlocks.

All Japanese matchlocks, of whatever size and date, are of substantially the same construction. The lock is made of brass, with a ball trigger and little or no decoration. The spring, also brass and very weak, is either an external U-spring or an internal helix. The design is not mechanically very good. The stock is of Japanese oak, sometimes rather badly lacquered black and decorated with gold 'Chinese grass' scrolls, but more often clear lacquered. The stock often bears a mon, and muskets often have cutout brass decorations, such as lions and peonies. The stock is always designed to be held against the cheek, as opposed to the shoulder. This means that the firer can absorb much less recoil and therefore that the gun is much less powerful than a European gun of similar weight. The best thing about a Japanese gun is the barrel. So far as I know, they are always smooth bored and far stronger than they needed to be. I believe that barrels were normally made by taking a long strip of iron, as for a sword, and then wrapping it spirally round a mandrel and welding it all the way along. As the Spanish gunsmiths later discovered, this is one of the strongest ways of making a barrel. Barrels are usually decorated, at least with a mon, though three-dimensional decoration is usually limited to a moulding at the muzzle. They are often signed, usually by a member of the Kunitomo or Ihei schools or by somebody with a Buddhist name. They usually have sights, though not very good ones. I have no real idea how accurate they were. Tokugawa Ieyasu could hit a heron at a hundred paces, but he used a very special gun, and unrifled guns can never have been as accurate as the best Western weapons. The best archers were probably always more accurate than the best matchlockmen.

Those Japanese cannon I have seen have been no more than overgrown handguns mounted on elegant blocks of wood - rarely more than a foot or so long or with a bore of more than two inches. This may be because the big ones never got exported from Japan, but I doubt that the Japanese techniques of bronze and iron castings were good enough to produce cannon. (The great Japanese bronze statues were cast in sections, and did not have to stand up to the strains imposed on a cannon). Cannon were sometimes used in sieges in the sixteenth century, but these could well have been European made. Certainly, the Japanese authorities in 1632 had no guns big enough to have any effect on the walls of Shimabara, where the revolting Japanese Christians had taken refuge, and had to get help from the Dutch.

Finally, it will be observed that I have said nothing about variations according to school or date. The reason is that I have no firm evidence that there were any. I suspect that older barrels tend to be shorter, larger bore, better decorated, and signed by individuals with Buddhist names rather than by members of the Kunitomo or Ihei, but I cannot prove any of this. (Strictly, the last statement must be wrong, because the earliest of the Kunitomo barrel smiths was Kunitomo Jirosuke, who invented the screw breechplug in 1544, allegedly while watching a cook cutting up a radish). There may be more to be learned from untranslated Japanese books, but the samurai lack of interest in guns may today be justified. Because the Japanese cared about guns so much less than about swords, less has been written, less translated, and less is worth writing about them as artefacts, however fascinating they may be to the student of history and human nature.

THE SURRENDER OF WAR SWORDS

Ron Gregory, our leading exponent of interest in war swords, has sent us some items of interest. As Ron points out, war swords were the last swords made in Japan for actual use and so are worthy of their place in history.

The following details are from documents given at the surrender of swords or Japanese garrisons. They have been compiled to try to show the sentiment and strong feeling shown by the Officers on the surrender of their swords.

To: Officer Allied Land Forces,
Padang, Sumatra.

Japanese Central Contact
Bureau. Padang.

NIPPON-TO The Japanese Samurai Sword.

15th April 1946

The swords we are handing over to you here are ones that formerly belonged to the ablest officers in our 25th Independent Brigade. Most of them were made about 250 to 300 years ago in districts where our famous sword makers lived. They are all precious ones and some of them are those that the great old Japanese feudal lords possessed for themselves and duly deserve to be a national treasure. For example, the MACOROKU, the MUTSU-NO-KANESADA, OSAFUNE-NO-SUKESADA, KUNINORI, BIZEN-NO KUNIMATSU, etc. From the old Japanese Samurai (at present age Japanese soldiers especially characterised in officers) has respected their swords as their spirits, and it was common for them to make promises 'in the name of their swords', which means they will commit Harakiri suicide, and die together with his sword, his spirit if he should break the promise. They love it and respect it most deeply and solemnly, and make it a rule to keep it always within the reach of their hand. We can well imagine how deep their sorrow was when they at last had to part with them which their ancestors went to war, and with which they

themselves had been together all the way through this long war.. But nevertheless, since the sword and its owner is traditionally and spiritually one, even though it may happen to part temporarily, with his master, will safely return to him again in the long run, it is believed. I, as Chief Negotiator with Allied Officer in Central Sumatra Area, representing all the owners of these forty swords expect from the bottom of my heart that these Samurai Swords will always be loved and respected by you, their new masters., on behalf of Japanese Officers, their former owners. It needs to be an expert to appreciate the swords properly, but it is a good thing to try to see the mysterious solemnity, its long history and the authentic and technical meaning it bears in itself. We can well say here that the Nippon To is one of the first and foremost symbol of the Japanese soldiers spirit. In reliance, entrusting everything to your high virtue and gentlemanship.

Yours sincerely,

(Shigemi Ohno, Captain)

Officer Commanding,

Japanese Central Contact Bureau.

Officer Commanding,
Field Security Section,
A.L.F. Padang.

Central Contact Bureau,
Padang, Sumatra.
18th April 1946

Sir,

Being informed that you are going to be promoted to a new and higher position very soon, I hereby have the pleasure to present you this sword of mine in hearty congratulations, and in recognition of our meeting in Padang. This sword I am sending you bears the name GASHU NO JU KANEWAKA which means by Kanewaka of Gashu District. Gashu is the present Ishikawa Prefecture and is in the North West of Central Japan which is a cold district and which is noted from old for producing great sword makers, together with the Central Districts proper. Kanewaka was a famous sword maker, born in this district and later well authorised by historians of Japanese swords. This sword was made approximately 250 years ago, and is classified as an early New Sword (swords made earlier than 350 years ago are classified as old Swords). It was the age of new feudal peace of the Tokugawa era. The shape of the sword (the blade) is rather wide in width and slightly heavier than the ordinary old sword and does not shine too brightly, but it cuts deep and well. The shape of the wave in the blade, tempering is what we call Teiji shape which is neither regular nor irregular zig-zag nor a straight line as seen in most common swords. This sword needs a little polishing by an expert to make it reveal its real beauty, owing to my rather rough use during this war, but you can plainly see the characteristics of the wave in the lamp light very clearly. I hope you would be able to recognise its extreme

severity and at the same time the special gracefulness of the old Japanese Samurai spirit, which is expressed wholly in the sword. I cannot help heaving a deep sigh of sorrow in parting with my most beloved sword, my spirit, with which my ancestors went to war and which my father himself handed over to me when I set out from home for this war, praying for my heroic victory in every action. But now as we are finally going to be obliged to entrust everything to you, it is my great pleasure that this sword can be presented to you with whom I have worked together to this day with interest and respect, and be kept safely in your hands. I, as Commanding Officer, Japanese Central Contact Bureau, Sumatra, wish to send you a word of sincere goodwill, and pray for your safe voyage and your ever good luck.

Yours sincerely,
(Shigemi Ohno, Captain)

This third letter is from a certain Captain B.W. Robinson who might not have realised at that time that the future held a sustained interest in Nippon To.

"Japanese Swordsmiths"
(Rubbings from blades)

From: B.W. Robinson, Capt.
G.S.I. Branch.
H.Q. Malaya Command.

Description of Gen. Itagaki's Sword.
by Col. Sakae Yamada (Copy of translation)

Inscription: Kanemoto. The inscription is genuine, proving that the blade was made by Seki no Magoroku, the second of that name.

Concerning Kanemoto

Kanemoto belongs to the Seki line of the five lines of Japanese swordsmiths, Yamashiro, Yamato (Seki, Bizen Soshu). He is one of the most prominent swordsmiths of the middle of the Old Sword period and is known as one of the makers of the keenest and strongest swords. The blades tempered by the Seki smiths are generally known for their sharpness, and the name of Seki-no-Magoroku Sanbon Sugi represents the whole of this group of swordsmiths. The first of the Seki-no-Magoroku group, belonging to the Seki line, is Kanemoto and the common appellation of Magoroku is derived from the surname of the second Kanemoto. There are several generations of smiths titling themselves Kanemoto; the first inscribed his name. The quality of the blades by those smiths slightly deteriorated from the 3rd generation downward. The blade of Gen. Itagaki was made by the second Kanemoto who lived in the era of the Emperor Go-Kashiwabara (1501-1528) or in the years of Eisei (1504-1521). Contemporary with the famous Muramasa, his equal in fame. These two swordsmiths must have known each other. The blades made by the second Kanemoto have a sober and practical appearance, while Muramasa's blades are bold and rich.

Details of the Blade

1. Shape: upper edge rather thin, while sides of the blade are a little swelling out. The blade is broad and has the characteristics of the Seki blades.
2. Steel: tempered in itame fashion (the figures on the surface resemble those seen on a wooden board). The grains are fine.
3. Point of the blade. Figures on the surface are kaen - flames and turn back in pointed fashion.
4. Tempered edge (yakiba). Figures on the surface are Sanbon Sugi (3 fir trees - strictly Cryptomevia Japonica). The grains are fine.
5. The tang (Chushin). A little polished with two characters inscribed; Kanemoto.
6. In general the blade has the air and appearance peculiar to the finest sort of blades. (A rubbing of the tang and signature is attached to the original).

Dated at Rengan 14th Feb. 1946. (Signed) Yamada Sakae,
Colonel:

3rd Air Force.

Formerly a member of judge committee for
Japanese swords attached to the Military Office.

THE KABUKI THEATRE by Bill Baxter

Kabuki has existed since the 17th century yet the first ever presentation in this country was made at Sadlers Wells Theatre in London during the 2 weeks commencing June 5 where under the auspices of the Japanese Government and the Japan Cultural Society was performed CHUSHINGURA (The 47 Loyal Samurai) and SUMIDAGAWA (The Sumida River).

The theatre had been adapted to give as realistic an approach to true Kabuki as possible by the building of a "Flower Path" stretching straight out from the right hand side of the stage over the stalls to the rear of the auditorium and along which the actors made their entrances and exits - in Japan, gifts of flowers, etc. are made to favourites as they make their slow progression along this walkway, hence its name.

The musicians and singers are seated to one side of the stage and are dressed soberly in black Kamishimo, this dark garb contrasting strongly with the extremely beautiful brocades of the principal actors - particularly with those of the ONNAGATA (female impersonator) for there are no ladies on the traditional Japanese stage; they were banned by the Shogun very early on as being morally undesirable.

Perhaps the most incongruous note for European audiences is provided by the assistants, black garbed and hooded, that crouch as inconspicuously as possible at strategic points amongst the actors for the purpose of adjusting the folds of clothes or placing/removing stools for the principals. It is a convention of the Japanese stage that anyone in black is invisible and we have previously encountered this intriguing peculiarity when the BUNRAKU Puppet Theatre visited this country a few years ago, likewise in the film "Double Suicide" where the hero was quite openly assisted by a group of these macabre figures when preparing his own gibbet.

The story of SUMIDAGAWA concerns the search of a distraught mother for her abducted son and is a showpiece for the 2 principals of the company. The male lead being a gentleman who should be familiar to anyone who frequents Japanese films - GANJIRO NAKAMURA - the star of "Odd Obsession" and a principal in "The Actor's Revenge", "Bonchi", etc. etc.

I feel sure it is unnecessary to outline the story of the 47 Ronin, instead I will comment on various little details that struck me - all the swords carried were unfortunately only stage props, except that, oddly enough, they seemed to have a genuine tsuba - five Kabuto's were on view, here again there was a strange mixture with three being genuine and the others ghastly gilded bits of tinsplate. In the seppuku scene the Lord Asano appears quite correctly garbed in a final snow-white outfit and duly tucks his sleeves under his knees to prevent himself making an undignified fall backwards when the cut is made, likewise the KENSHI or Inspector in charge of the ceremony perfectly correctly was the only one present to wear two swords and dutifully left the scene to the care of his associate after inspecting the corpse - yet with all this attention to detail, as far as I could see, only one layer of white cloth was placed over the tatami instead of the 5 folds called for by tradition. Odd?

In conclusion, one can but remark on the apparent and curious insensitivity of the Japanese when using modern as opposed to traditional materials. The "flower path" or HANAMICHI was beautifully and lovingly fashioned out of plain, untreated wood that was a joy to look at as also was the fisherman's boat, yet the river reeds were garish green strips of plastic!

THAT NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

In the paper "Weekend" on April 26th there appeared an article entitled "Send more convicts - we're testing a new Sword" by Seth Quillan. Who this writer is remains a mystery. In an article which gave much of interest to the uninitiated such as information on the Samurai and cutting tests with a rudimentary historical survey of sword lore, some mistakes and howlers are bound to occur. Apparently once a sword is drawn

it had to kill, which must have exterminated the Japanese nation in a few years, although history doesn't note it. The writer must have more than a passing acquaintance with Nippon To or some knowledgeable informant as he made reference to Dr. Compton's collection and also to that of Field Marshal Sir Francis Festing; incidentally neither of whom are members of our Society. The Society does get a mention as does the fact that swords are big business hence the rather too large figure on the price of "Dew on the Grass". However, it is true that a sword did change hands for over £60,000 in Japan recently. The article was illustrated with a war-time picture of Sir Francis sitting in a jeep, and there were two photos showing sword play. These were stills from films, I imagine, although I couldn't place them. One in particular showed a samurai in chudan position, taken at the end of the stroke. His opponent is above head height either going up or coming down. Very intriguing. One anecdote which amused me was that when the demand exhausted the supply of swords for returning G.I's from the Far East, astute men in the base workshops started forging them from jeep springs and got 50 dollars a time. There's that great American business sense showing! I wondered if the other men in the Field Marshal's jeep were quietly removing his springs!

THE GOOD OLD DAYS - THE YAMANAKA CATALOGUE

I don't know how many members have heard of this company which resided at 127 New Bond Street up until the 1939 war, I believe. Paul Grafton recently lent me his copy of the sales catalogue for the year 1913 - a very rare collectors' item. There is a foreword by Henri Joly which I reproduce here:-

"Amongst the numberless articles of Japanese attire, works of art or mere household objects which the Restoration of 1868 compelled the Japanese to cast upon the market, none has met with such wide fame and yet with such a limited study as the Sword. When in 1877 the Government prohibited the Samurai from wearing any longer the two swords which had been the privilege and distinctive mark of their martial caste, the Imperial wish was obeyed, notwithstanding the feeling that something was snapping in the life of the nation. Blades had been treasured for centuries, handed from father to son, looked upon as the soul of the owner for the sake of which he would refrain from any deed unbecoming a gentleman; some possessed histories going far back into the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the country was at war within itself, around others were entwined romances, and above all, the sword was the faithful friend with which the Samurai might honourably end his life, either in the field, or on the mats. A blade given by a father to his daughter on her wedding day was the emblem of that purity of life which the woman was expected to keep, and it was also the weapon with which she might seek repose in death, should occasion arise. The Restoration breaking up the old

feudal system compelled the Samurai to part with their worldly goods to secure the necessities of life, the rich became poor, the poor lost all support, hence anything which might tempt the foreign buyer went swiftly out of the country; the circumstances had become rather more straitened for the Samurai class when the edict of 1877 compelled them to put aside their swords, and blades followed the lacquer, the paintings, the carvings which eager curio buyers snapped at inadequate prices. Many swords of first quality crossed the waters, besides thousands of poor blades which could be bought in dozens in the stores and bazaars of the old world. Hardly any attempt was made at keeping in the country any blades except those which were, so to speak, entailed heirlooms or those whose owners refused to part with at any price. Later, a few earnest people banded themselves into a Society for the preservation and study of the National weapon: the Sword Society of Tokyo, which has published, during the last twelve years, a mass of information about swords. Collecting swords has become a national propensity, and the modern sword lover may have more blades, carefully kept and oft admired, than his ancestor of a century ago who could only wear two at a time. Magazines have sprung into existence dealing only with the sword and its accessories. Both in Europe and in America articles on the sword have been published, most of which, based upon the paper of Mutterott and nearly all inadequate. It is to be hoped that some more comprehensive work will soon appear to give the Western public a better knowledge of the ancient swords. In Japan, there are hundreds of books dealing with their makers, from ancient books now rare and costly to modern works crammed with information and obtainable for a few pence. What then is there about the Japanese blade which compels admiration? Far back in the Sung Dynasty a Chinese Poet sang its praises, later the Mediaeval European writers spoke in wonderment of the Katana, of its keenness of edge, of its swift stroke, of the respect paid to it; later still, folks were awed by the form of suicide we call seppuku, some saw in it only a barbarous disembowelment, few, perhaps, grasped that other important feature - the test of the truest friendship - that confidence in the bosom friend one entrusted with the cutting of one's head. Romance alone would not have made the blade an object of interest to the positive mind, attracted by the efficiency of the weapon, by its qualities qua sword, by the marvellous skill evinced in its forging, in the shaping of its harmonious curves. Further, the blade presented a characteristic temper; unlike the European swords evenly tempered throughout, it had a mere edge of great hardness backed by enough softer metal to ensure toughness, and to allow bending in preference to snapping when the sword blow met an unexpected resistance. Then it was realised that all those characteristic peculiarities required study, for they presented variations of appearance intimately associated with the various swordsmiths, with the periods, the schools. How

numerous those smiths were may be guessed, but it may come as a surprise to some, that over 11,000 names are recorded in one book alone.

To study a blade and appreciate its points is a matter of considerable interest, the various portions of the blade have their names and their peculiarities; one must pay attention to every part of the body, of its edge, of the handle, etc. and with practice an expert may become able to recognise the technique and style of a smith by the peculiarities of the blade, silent witnesses left in the metal itself. Thus, in Japan, the Honami family of sword experts were professionally engaged for over 350 years in examining and certifying blades.

In feudal days a man's life was at his lord's call, and he might never feel sure that the following day would not be his last, either in fight or by self infliction under orders of the death penalty for some breach, however slight, of the stiff code of Samurai etiquette. Hence his sword was selected and cared for, its edge must be keen enough to cut a man's head at a blow, leaving, if skilfully done, a shred of skin on the throat for the head to hang on the breast.

His sword was tested, sometimes officially by cutting up corpses, and thus we come across blades on the tang of which is inscribed a statement that it cut one or two or even three bodies at a blow. No sword in Europe ever came through such an ordeal; indeed, it is doubtful whether its shape and constitution would have allowed a similar test to be successful. Looked upon as a cutting weapon, the Japanese blade has been pronounced perfect by all experts; that perfection is the result of thorough work undertaken with only one aim in view: to turn out a sword which was not only reliable, but a credit to the maker as well; and, indeed, the names of the smiths are as well known as those of the foremost painters, they rank with the expert calligraphers, with the poets, with the writers and the statesmen, with those who made history, Masamune, Muramasa, are names which have found their way even amongst the novels of the West; not a dozen names of Japanese sculptors can be mentioned, although their works are to be found in any and every temple, but 11,000 names of swordsmiths remain.....Where the carver could repair a faulty chisel stroke the smith has no such resource, a slight flaw in welding his metal, a little dirt remaining between two layers of steel, and where in a smithy can one exclude dirt? Overhaste in heating the metal resulting in a wrong temper, or in spots on the blade, and, lo, a fortnight's patient work was wasted, a patron offended, a reputation marred.

No less important than the smith's skill was that of the polisher grinding away the blade to its final shape, settling the planes and the curves, whose intersections are geometrically true on every side of the blade. A volume rather

than a preface is required to do the scantiest justice to the Japanese blade, but space is limited, and the blades exhibited here speak for themselves."

H.L.J.

The catalogue lists some 54 swords and illustrates twenty of them with an extra series of close-ups. If you have tried to photograph a sword you will realise the difficulties involved. 59 years ago, Messrs. Yamaka employed someone whose skill at showing blade details can hold its own even to-day. The blades are enough to bring the trembles to the greed-buds. I wonder where they are now? One fantastic blade was in the Craig Collection and is illustrated in the "Arts of the Japanese Sword" by B.W. Robinson. Presumably, this sword now resides in the Festing Collection. Yamanaka states that it has a very fine double yakiba, ko gunome midare and hitatsura and is signed Muramasa. The close-up photo shows that this description fits the bill absolutely although the hitatsura does not seem to go over into the shinogi-ji. A remarkable piece of tempering. Just to show that it wasn't unique, Sword No. 11 signed by Soshu Akihiro and dated Teiji 2nd year, has a similar form of hitatsura.

The variety in the hamon was tremendous from a "remarkable kiku-sai" by Setsyo Okamoto Yasumoto to midare by Kaneuji.

Among the great names present were Ippo, Kaneuji, Kōrekazu, Sukenao, Tadatsuna, Daido, Akihiro, Tsunatoshi, Fujuhiko, Kotetsu, Sukemune, Norimitsu. Can you imagine the delights of such a shop? One of my favourites was a blade by Unji although I would be hard put to say which to choose, in the event of such a miracle occurring. Maybe some of our older members could supply some information as to where others of these swords can be seen. Some reminiscences on dealings at the shop might prove interesting.

Reference Books

Unfortunately there is no comprehensive book dealing with swords in the detail that members would wish when they are endeavouring to become more expert. Most books in English just scratch the surface and offer tantalising tit-bits of interest. However, "The Arts of the Japanese Sword" by B.W. Robinson certainly has more expertise to offer than any other book in English. An invaluable addenda to this, although produced first, is Robinson's "Primer of Japanese Sword Blades". The "Arts" is now reissued but whether the "Primer" is available I am not certain. Other books of great interest which generally cover the same ground are "Nippon To" by Inami Hakusui and the "Samurai Sword" by John Yumoto. There are other books in English but their usefulness is debatable. The

Japanese glossy books which Alan Bale often offers for sale are invaluable for seeing examples by great smiths which are as guaranteed as we shall ever get as to authenticity. If you would like the expertise to be of a very high order - say to trace the evolution of the Bizen hamon through the Muromachi period - well there just is nothing available, which is why we have such a tremendously frustrating hobby.

Next we come to Willard Hawley's great contribution to collecting - his three volumes of "Japanese Swordsmiths", giving dates and names of over 13,000 smiths. Undoubtedly a MUST for any collector. In addition, there is Fujishiro's 'Nihon Toko Jiten', Shinto and Koto volumes with illustrations of signatures of smiths which are noted in Hawley's books. This is useful in assessing the genuineness of signatures. Armed with these books, you are as well equipped as any other collector. As to where to buy these books, Kegan Paul of 43 Great Russell Street, London W.C.1 are very reliable as is Alan Bale at 498D, Chiswick High Road, London W.4. Also, of course, we try to keep members informed of new publications as and when they appear.

The problem that new members face is that they could have just missed the relevant article and it is difficult to know when a useful article should be repeated without boring more advanced members.

SWORD JUDGING by Bon Dale

So much nonsense is talked nowadays about Japanese swords, sword appraisal and "papers", and general expertise is dispensed by the gallon on every side, that I feel a few sobering words should be spoke or writ! viz. I have been collecting and associated with the Japanese sword for over twenty-two years, first sword bought January 1950, during the last few years I have gradually but firmly reached the opinion that I haven't a clue. The more swords I see, the less I know, and I've been seeing an awful lot of swords lately. The only other resident "expert" I know whose opinion I respect is our Honourable President. I'm writing this off the cuff and I haven't consulted him on the above statement, but I rather suspect that he would agree. And you can read that which way round you wish, that I haven't a clue, or that we both haven't.

Another man whose opinion I respect who is resident in Japan and sees far more real swords than any of us, recently told me the more he sees the less he knows.

To anyone with an atom of sensitivity the recent film shown on B.B.C. Television (World About Us, "Spirit of the Samurai") would have brought home the truth of this awareness of lack of real knowledge, amongst Westerners. Those who saw this film must have been impressed by the fantastic dedication and utter concentration of the Japanese exponents of the various

martial arts shown in the film. This transcends the degree of attainment which any Western practitioner can ever hope to achieve. In a word, much mis-used, it was and is, pure Zen.

Transpose that Japanese dedication of mind into sword appraisal and the same conclusion is reached, we will never make it. If a man, surrounded by knowledge and ability of this order in Japan, admits that by comparison he knows nothing. I would like to add this thought, that if he, with his opportunities to study real swords in Japan, knows nothing - what do we know here in this small island? There are a very few good swords in this country, most of you have never seen them - I think I've seen three. I'm not going to upset anyone by saying what they are and who owns them, I'm probably wrong anyway. I ask you to pause, and if you think you are an expert, to reconsider. Do you really know what makes a good Japanese sword? It is of course all a question of degree. It must be realized that the general level of swords we see here is abysmal, so we all may feel we are fairly bright at judging low quality swords. The question was, do I, you, we, know what a good sword looks like? Well, we might if we saw one, but there is a far more important question. Do you know what a bad sword looks like? This is the real crux of the matter. Can you see a bad sword, or do you spend your time sifting through bad swords trying to decide which of them is good? This is what we are all doing most of the time, and if you think you are different, read the following article.

I'm sincere about what I've written above but it is intended also as a sit-up-and-take-notice introduction to the article below by Albert Yamanaka.

This is from a back issue of the Nihon To Newsletter, for which we publish a plug each month. Once again, if you don't subscribe to this excellent Newsletter, you should. You won't even start to learn anything about Japanese blades until you do. The cost is less, far less these days, than that next bad sword you buy under the misapprehension that it's good. A final word before I conclude this knock at every To Ken member, on which I hope somebody will write a rude letter to the Programme Secretary. The Honami were at it for around 600 years, and present day Japanese appraisers do not always agree with their judgments. But, although these men may disagree on the maker of a blade, the one thing on which they never disagree is whether a blade is good or bad. The bad one never even gets started on the road to appraisal, and we haven't started yet either.

The Honami and Sword Appraisal - Albert Yamanaka

Whenever one looks, even superficially, into the field of the Japanese Sword, inevitably one is confronted with the name of Honami. The name Honami has been synonymous with Japanese Swords since about the 14th century. Who are the

Honami? What did they do?

These questions have been asked many times, but a detailed explanation has never been properly given.

Prior to the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the judging of swords was restricted to the 12 Honami families by the Tokugawa hierarchy, who licensed the Honami as the Official Appraisers of Swords.

An orikami (certificate of authenticity) has always been an integral part of sword collecting and sword transactions. Many old blades have such accompanying orikami. For this reason, one who studies the Japanese Sword should have some knowledge of this family of official sword appraisers. The very first Honami was named Myohon, and is said to have been a son of a nobleman, Sugawata Gojo Takanga.

Myohon was born in 1252, and lived to be one hundred, dying in the 2nd year of Bunna (1352). He served Ashikaga Takauji (1304-1358) as "administrator of swords" and thereafter his descendants engaged in the art of polishing and judging swords. There are three Honami still active in these fields. During the time of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the 8th Honami, Kosatsu was ordered by Hideyoshi to establish an "official judging house" and also received from him a copper seal with the character of the name Honami, "HON". From that time until the end of the Tokugawa period, the head family of the 12 Honami had the distinct and exclusive franchise to issue Orikami and it was their custom to authenticate the Orikami with the very seal which the 8th Honami, Kosatsu, received from Hideyoshi. This seal is stamped on the back of the Orikami directly on the reverse side of the paper from the Kakihan or Oka (kakihan or - Oka are used interchangeably and mean the same thing, a handwritten personal cypher or mark) below the signature.

This seal is presently in the possession of Honami Sokei, who is engaged in sword polishing. Sokei's family branches from the 2nd son of Kosatsu. There are no Orikami issued by Kosatsu in existence. Some feel that Orikami were not issued at that time. The most common ones are from about the time of the 11th Honami, Koon, the 12th Honami, Kojo and the 13th Honami, Kochu.

Those by Kochu are said to be the most trustworthy, for this man's sword appraising ability was the most outstanding of all the Honami in the Tokugawa period. It is said that whenever Kochu saw an earlier Orikami issued by his predecessor which did not meet his approval, he always destroyed the old one and reissued a new one.

For this reason, his Orikami are very much appreciated by collectors. It is also for this very reason that Orikami prior to Kochu are not often seen. Whenever a later Honami

reissued an Orikami of an earlier appraiser, the old Orikami was always destroyed.

During the time of the 9th Honami, Kotoku, the charge for issuing an Orikami was 10% of the appraisal value given on the Orikami. If a blade was set at 1,000 Mai (one Mai was one gold Oban; an Oban was worth 10 Ryo. An Oban measures about 5" x 3" and the older ones from the early Tokugawa or pre-Tokugawa periods are very much sought by collectors) as was the case of the famous Wakasa Masamune, the Honami appraisers received 100 Mai of Oban. In issuing Orikami, all members of the 12 Honami met once a month on the 3rd day, everyone bringing for appraisal swords that had been left to have Orikami issued. The meeting was held by the family head, who served as judge. After everyone had given their opinion, the judge made the final decision. One will note (if one has seen some of these old Honami Orikami) that the date is always written as the 3rd of the month. Some of the Orikami have the value of the sword stated as so many Mai, while on others it may be written as so many Kan (20 Kan equalled 1 Mai or 10 Ryo). There appears to be no reason for this however, since 20 Kan equalled 1 Mai. It seems that whenever the appraisal value of the blade on the Orikami was of a small value in Mai, the Kan value was used, though this is not always the case.

As mentioned previously, 20 Kan equalled 1 Mai, which has been the generally accepted version, however, the Japan Economic Digest quotes that in the 9th year of Keicho (1604), 10 Kan equalled 1 Mai. Probably both of these versions are correct, for the value of gold fluctuated, so that in the 9th Year of Keicho, 1 Mai may have equalled 10 Kan, but later the value may very well have changed. From the Keicho Era until the end of the Tokugawa Period, a record was kept of all Orikami issued by the Honami. This record showed who owned the blade, who made the blade, the length of the blade, and the date when the Orikami was issued, with a notation of the details of the blade.

This voluminous record numbering 390 volumes went up in flames during the Kanto Earthquake of 1923. Honami Koson Sensei (1879-1955) relates an interesting story concerning this record. The record had been kept in the head family from the time of Kotoku. However, with the Meiji Restoration, the Honami lost their position when the Shogunate fell. Some of the Honami even became ragpickers. For some unknown reason, the head family seems to have sold this record, for it turned up at a book dealer where Honami Ringa's wife, at the time still single, saw it. She somehow scraped together 300 Yen, no small sum in the early Meiji Era, and bought it. When she married Honami Ringa she took it with her as her dowry. Honami Ringa was Honami Koson Sensei's teacher. Amiya or Ogura Soemon (1878-1953), long before the Kanto Earthquake, made a copy of this record. He copied only the swordsmith's name, sword lengths and the appraisal dated. Amiya willed it to Koson Sensei and it is presently owned

by Honami Kohaku.

Beside the Orikami there is the Soejo. (The Soejo is a paper accompanying the Orikami which tells more about the blade in detail). The Orikami only states whether the blade is genuine or not and its value. Some misunderstand the Soejo and believe it to be another form of Orikami. This is not so, the Soejo has nothing to do with Orikami. In most cases it accompanies an Orikami, but sometimes the Soejo is found alone.

The Soejo could be issued by any of the Honamis, whereas the Orikami was issued only by the head family so that handwriting or brushstrokes style of the Soejo is different from that of the Orikami in most cases.

Other forms of appraisal and information papers are:

The Zoganmei (inlay or damascene work signature), the Shumei (red lacquer signature) and the Kinpunmei (same as Shumei, that is lacquer, only in this case gold lacquer is used).

The Zoganmei is made only on Suriage or shortened blades, where there are no remains of the signature. There are no other conditions under which the Zoganmei is made.

If a blade has been shortened so much that no traces of signature or date remain, only then is the Zoganmei issued. It is done by inscribing the name of the swordsmith on the new Nakago (tang) and filling the name in with gold. On the other side the appraiser will sign the first two characters of Honami, HON-A and under it, will inscribe his Kakihan or Kao. By this Kakihan one can tell which of the Honami made the appraisal. (The Kakihan or Kao will be covered in future issue). This Hon-A and the Kakihan inscription is also filled with gold. The Shumei is done in red lacquer. It is only done on a blade which is Ubu (a blade which had not been shortened), be the blade with or without signature. In most cases it will be on Mumei (no signature) blades. If it is written on a signed blade, it means the appraiser considers the signature to be genuine. The Kinpunmei is done in gold lacquer. It was started by the Honami after the Meiji period and has the same purpose as the Shumei. The Shumei lacquer often peels with age, but the appearance of the Kinpunmei seems to hold up better than Shumei. The purpose of the above three, Zoganmei, Shumei and Kinpunmei is that they cannot be separated from the blade, unlike the Orikami. Quite often an unscrupulous dealer will take an old Orikami from its blade and sell another blade with this Orikami at a fantastic profit. However, in the case of the Zoganmei and the others this cannot be done without scraping off the appraisal. From time to time, one will come across blades which have Zoganmei, Shumei or Kinpunmei of the swordsmith only without the signature of the appraiser. Such blades are not to be trusted,

as far as the appraisal goes, for if the appraiser had any confidence in himself he would have signed his name. This practice apparently was done by people other than the Honami.

At times one also comes across the very odd situation of an Ubu blade with Zoganmei, or a shortened blade with Shumei attribution. These were made by people who had no knowledge of the intricate and strict workings of the Honami when they judged swords. There is still another form of appraisal, the Sayagaki (written appraisal on white wooden scabbard). On a shirasaya (white wooden scabbard) the appraiser will write such information as whether the blade is Mumei or not, the maker of the blade, it's length, who owned it, it's value, etc. In some cases an entire history of the blade is written down in very minute characters.

Of course, the one make makes the appraisal will not forget to sign the Shirasaya, though unsigned Sayagaki are seen at times. This writing on the Shirasaya is relatively new as far as the Honamis are concerned. It was started by them about the end of the Tokugawa period. Prior to this, all Shirasaya writing was done by a Daimyo's secretary in charge of the weaponry or by the owner.

When he wrote anything it was only the name of the swordsmith. Later when Shirasaya writing became more popular, it became a kind of second Orikami. Today, anyone and everyone seems to write Shirasaya appraisals. Even people who are not qualified as sword appraisers are writing such Shirasaya appraisals, a practice of course, frowned upon by serious collectors. Sometimes such collectors even refuse to touch a Shirasaya written by such a person. Some collectors will have these questionable appraisals removed immediately. Shirasaya appraisals by the Honami were done under the strict ruling that the spacing had to be done just so. Often a collector or a dealer insisted on having a Shirasaya appraisal written, though the blade was not worthy of it. If the person was too persistent, the Honami would write it reluctantly and would make small variation or deviations so slight as to be unnoticeable. Someone with the correct background, however, can catch these deviations and know that they were done with full knowledge and intent. There is still another form of appraisal called the Sagefuda, Kofuda or Kosatsu.

(The Sagefuda, Kofuda or Kosatsu is a simpler version or Orikami for blades which do not warrant an Orikami. It is a small strip of rice paper with the name of the swordsmith and the appraisal value of the sword. It was issued only for blades whose value was under 5 Mai).

As mentioned earlier, it was the custom of the Honami to destroy all old Orikami when new ones were issued. Occasionally, one comes across a blade which has two, and

sometimes more Orikami, all with different dates and different values. These are Orikami which the owner, when he took the blades to the Honami for evaluation knowing that the old Orikami would not be returned, left them at home. In looking at these one will notice that the very old Orikami state a lesser value for the blade than the newer ones. One reason for this is the custom of presenting swords on various occasions such as weddings, the coming of age ceremony, birth, important visits and deaths.

In presenting a sword, since the blade would have the Orikami with it stating its authenticity as well as its value, a Daimyo say, of high standing could not very well give a blade with a stated low value since it would obviously be rather embarrassing. Thus, if an old Orikami had low value, it went to the Honami for re-evaluation. Since the Honami received 10% of the value of the blade stated in the Orikami as a service fee, it was not a bad trade for them.

Looking at some old texts like the Kyoho Meibutsu Cho, and seeing the same blades mentioned in that text, one wonders if the blades were actually worth the Orikami value. There are people like the 13th Honami, Kochu, who took pride and responsibility in what they did. On the other hand there are the later Honami who issued Orikami as just another worthless piece of paper.

Though the 9th Honami, Kotoku, is supposed to have written Orikami, there are none of his to be found. However, there is supposed to be a Kosatsu by him which is said to be authentic. Quite recently an Orikami with Kotoku's signature turned up, but it seems to be a forgery.

It was mentioned that the later Honami Orikami were worthless papers. This is seen in the 14th Honami Koyu and the 15th Honami, Kojun, who issued the so-called Tanuma Orikami, ordered by the Chief Chamberlain Tanuma of the Tokugawa Government.

The Tanuma influence lasted from about 1750 until about 1810. The Tanuma for two generations, father and son, controlled the Tokugawas. Two Honamis are still active in appraising. One is Honami Nisshu Takeo, who was adopted by Honami Ringa. This branch of the Honami family stems from the 7th Honami, Koshin's 3rd son KOI. Nisshu is engaged in appraising as well as polishing. He is the son of Hirai Chiba, one of the better polishers of the late Meiji and Taisho Eras, the other being Honami Ringa. Since Ringa did not have an heir, Nisshu was adopted to carry on the Koshin line.

The other Honami is Honami Kohaku, the son of Honami Koson. Koson was one of the students of the aforementioned Ringa. He is connected with the Mito Honami or the branch Honami family which stemmed from the Koomi line. Koomi was the younger

brother of the 9th Honami, Kotoku. Ten generations after Koni was Tadamasa, whose younger brother Koga went to serve the Mito Tokugawa. Koson Sensei's father, Kawaguchi Kinmei, was one of Koga's students and Koson was adopted into the Koga house to carry on the family line.

Kohaku unlike his father does not polish though his eye for appraisal is as good as his fathers. The writer is a student of Koson Sensei.

THE SALE ROOMS by "Underbidder"

The Japanese during the past month established the fact that they are the people with the money and the ability to spend it. I was viewing the Christies sword sale when one of the porters said "They're selling it off now!" I popped into the main hall in time to hear the new world high for a work of art other than a painting. It was a 14th century Chinese pot which had been in use as an umbrella stand. It went to Tokyo at 210,000 guineas. This item was the last lot in the sale of Oriental ceramics and the number of Japanese attending was considerable. I was fairly bowled over by those leaving the sale. Well, I thought, the prices for the next days sale would be at very respectable figures indeed. Someone's collection was being sold off. There were twenty to thirty blades in new shirasaya with brand new polishes. I was interested in the polish as I thought it was above average. On the whole I thought the blades not exceptional except one shinto blade with an intricate Ichimonji type hamon took my fancy. In the event it was knocked down at about £700, and these prices were the order of the day. One blade went up to £1,400 and a bunch of five hopeless military swords went for about £70. The piece in the sale was the fantastic aikuchi. The mounts in silver with gold touches, were of enormous pheasants, or peacocks. The lacquer was of inro quality nashiji and the overall effect was a tremendous tour de force. The artist was Ishiguro Masayoshi and such was his skill that the narrow dividing line between great flamboyant art and overdone bad taste was just avoided. A sword which I thought would go to join those other beauties in the Bowden collection. The blade by the way, was very attractive but overwhelmed by the mounts.

A hitatsura Soshu blade would have been more worthy. This dirk went for the staggering figure of £3,800 and went back home. Evidently the owner was in the sale room and he just couldn't believe it! I'm afraid that the average club member is in for a very thin time at the auctions since the influx of Japanese dealers is only just being felt. O'k if you're selling though.

Doing the rounds, I chanced into an arms and armour auction, again seeing the last lot being knocked down. It was a tachi described as in relic condition by the catalogue. From a

distance it looked attractive being smothered in moss but the nashiji had discoloured and that always looks grim. It was knocked down at £85 and afterwards I had a closer look. The rice bales on the tsuko were missing but it certainly had been nice. But the blade - the kissaki had been broken completely off and the blade was worthless. The optimistic owner told me that he had a blade which would fit exactly. I left wondering where it will all end.

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.

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For overseas members wishing to have their Programmes sent air mail, the subscription rates are increased as follows:

Europe.....	£3.50.
U.S.A. and elsewhere.....	\$10.00

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, 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.

NEW MEMBERS

The Society has much pleasure in welcoming the following new members:-

Jean-Pierre Ponsoye,
35, Rue Saint-Jean,
95-Pontoise,
France.

C.F. Seidler,
Antique Supermarket,
Barrett Street,
London S.W.1.

C.H. Bartlem,
Pen-y-Craig Bach,
Tremeirchion,
St. Asaph,
Flintshire.

Robert M. Valera,
USA M.P. Det.,
APO San Francisco,
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