



Study Day The Royal Armouries Leeds

April 1st 2017

The Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds was purpose-built in the 1990s to house the national collection of arms and armour, which until that time had been stored, largely unseen, at the Tower of London. The Armouries collection of Japanese swords was greatly enhanced in 2001 when the family of the highly regarded UK collector Deryk Ingham donated his collection of 57 swords and a number of fittings to the museum. While a number of Deryk's blades are exhibited in the Oriental gallery, many others are not on public display.

The study day offered an opportunity for attendees to study a number of these blades in detail.

The meeting was well attended with members travelling from all over the country to take part. The day began with two brief presentations: the first given by Clive Sinclair, who described his early collecting experiences from when he started in the 1960's. While very entertaining, Clive's talk also outlined and confirmed the importance of hands-on study and meeting people to gain and share knowledge. This was followed by a brief presentation by Paul Bowman, giving an overview of how Deryk Ingham built his collection in the last 30 years of the 20th century.

The bulk of the day was dedicated to the hands-on study of swords. The meeting divided in to two groups the first viewed 20 swords set out in a meeting room while the second toured the oriental gallery to see the blades on display there. The groups swapped over halfway through the day.

As with many other museums, the Armouries have to deal with the ongoing conflict of keeping illumination low enough to ensure light sensitive artefacts are not damaged by light while ensuring viewers can clearly see pieces. Unfortunately, the lighting within the gallery did not allow blades to be studied in great detail. However, within the permanent display there are some excellent works. Three blades are particularly worthy of mention:

- A nagamaki naoshi attributed to Unji (Juyo Token; ex A.Z. Freeman collection)

- A tachi blade signed Sadatsugu and attributed to Sue-Aoe
- A long tachi signed Kanemoto

In a dedicated meeting room, the Royal Armouries had set out 20 blades for examination and everyone had ample opportunity to handle and examine these blades in detail. Personal highlights in this group included:

- A katana by Naotsuna (NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon)
- A naginata by Masatoshi (ex Lillard and Compton collections)
- An o-suriage Katana with kinzogan mei to Muramasa

Many other blades were of considerable interest. In addition, viewing these swords offered a rare insight of how a collection was built in the 20th century and highlighted how it has changed in the intervening years. Despite very little research material and much slower communication, over a 30-year period Deryk Ingham was able to put together an exceptional collection. It is a great tribute to his commitment dedication and scholarship.

Those taking part greatly enjoyed the day and I believe all of us came away having learned from the experience. It only remains to thank the Royal Armouries and in particular Martin Wells, acting Curatorial Manager, and Natasha Bennett, Curator of Eastern Arms, for their incredible efforts in organising the day and making all the swords requested available.

We were also delighted that Mr. Geoff Ingham was able to join us and to see the considerable benefit his family's generosity has given the sword community.

Paul Bowman

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