

Public Service Announcement

Due to the ongoing situation in Ukraine and Russia, Japanese post has stopped accepting EMS and Airmail parcels to various countries including most of Europe. EMS and airmail to the USA is still ok for the time being but subject to delays.

Additionally, passenger flights will possibly have to fly avoiding Russian airspace and take up to an extra three to four hours per journey (and probably increase airfares).

MARCH 2022

THE JAPANESE SWORD

Dedicated to the Preservation and Promotion of Japanese Swords, Swordsmiths, and Related Crafts

Newsletter

**'The Yakuza' Movie
Revisited:
48-years on**

*Victor Harris: Gone,
but not forgotten*

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Newsletter March 2022

Welcome to the Japanese sword monthly newsletter,

Although this is the March newsletter, we are essentially writing about what has taken place in February. In short, not a lot actually. Due to the Omicron spike taking place, travel and socializing was restricted, and prudence is exercised in interactions with people of age groups older than



one's self. February is notoriously a month to feel the winter blues, and worry about the years finances while waiting in anticipation for spring to come and bring about a certain feeling of freedom in not having to wrap up before leaving the house.

In Japan every year, there is a ritual that takes place in homes and other places around the country called, Setsubun.. The ritual of Setsubun is to purchase packets of dried soy beans from the local convenience store, that also has a paper demon (Oni) mask attached. Parents then wear the masks while being chased around the home being pelted with said soy beans by the children (and wives), while the phrase, "Oni wa (written ha) soto, Fuku wa uchi: Demons get out! Come in good fortune!" is chanted. Also, depending on the household, there is another ritual associated with Setsubun where members of the family eat as many of the soy beans as equates to their age.



Setsubun is literally means change in seasons, and Setsubun is officially regarded as the first day of spring. However, I'm afraid that I beg to differ. To me it is still only February, and still much too cold to incorporate any notions of spring.

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As mentioned above, the winter's coldest peak in combination brings about a time for reflection. Also, with a lot of 'not going out' and nostalgic slew of watching old movies. Which brings about articles on two of my favorite people: my teacher, Victor Harris, and another man who had a great influence on me, Takakura Ken, with a retrospective on his western breakthrough movie, The Yakuza (1974 Dir. Sidney Pollack).

We also have a small article introducing the Certificates of Authenticity for modern made Japanese swords issued by the Society for the Promotion of Japanese Sword Culture (NBSK). Historically, many swordsmiths have been faked in their own lifetime. I expect it can be taken as a measure of their fame. The problem still continues today. Additionally, the NBTHK does not issue papers for living smiths, and with restrictions on weapons, and the lack of knowledge of various customs officers in various countries of determining a real Japanese sword from an expensive replica, it would be helpful when importing and exporting newly made swords helpful to have some kind authenticating documents. The NBSK (Nihonto Bunka Shinko Kyokai- the Society for the Promotion of Japanese Sword Culture) is trying to bridge this gap.

Victor Harris: Line Manager, Mentor, Dear, Dear Friend

This month I would like to write about my teacher, Victor Harris. He was not only my Japanese sword mentor, but also my swordsmanship sensei, my line manager, and my dear, dear friend. He passed away after a short illness on the 13th of June, 2017 at the age of seventy-four.



Terrence Victor Harris was born in Brixton, South London in 1943. He grew up in a working-class family in post-war London. He was a very bright child and in 1952 he won a scholarship sponsored by Drapers' Company that would take him out of central London and into . Bancroft's public school, Woodford Green, where he lost his London accent and acquired his soft and very eloquent speaking manner. He completed his schooling in 1959, and went on to study Mechanical Engineering at Birmingham University where he attained his BSc, in engineering. Somewhere along the line, he chose to drop the name Terrence, and go by the first name of Victor.

Around the early to mid-sixties, Victor took an interest in Judo, and attended classes at the Budokwai in South west London. It was also around this time that he took an interest in Japanese fencing (Kendo). In 1968, Victor moved to Japan to further his training while teaching at Komazawa University, Tokyo. It was while here that he met with some of the Kendo greats of Japan. He also studied Ono Ha Itto-ryu under Sasamori Junzo, Ono Jussei, then his son Ono Terao, as well as some Muto-ryu. Victor was attracted to the spiritual

aspects and the various stories of enlightenment via swordsmanship. He was influenced by the stories of the likes of Yamaoka Tesshu, Yagyu Munenori, and Miyamoto Musashi, going on to become the first person to translate Miyamoto Musashi's, *The Book of Five Rings*, in 1974.



Master Polisher Yanagawa Seiji

Victor returned to the UK in 1971, and began working as a s-employed, Japanese Engineering Translation and Consultancy, and travelling back and forth to Japan maintaining his relationships with both the kendo and sword worlds. In 1974, Victor married Yanagawa Kazuko, a cousin of the master sword polisher, Yanagawa Seiji. Victor joined the British Museum in 1978 as Research Assistant in the Department of Oriental Antiquities (Japan). In 1987 he became the Assistant Keeper of the Department of Japanese Antiquities eventually becoming Keeper. He retired in 2003, but remained in contact as Keeper Emeritus carrying out the Cutting Edge/ Peter Moores sponsored exhibition.

As well as studying martial arts and their philosophies, Victor became a direct student of Dr. Kanzan Sato, one of the founders of the Society for the Preservation of Japanese Art Swords (NBTHK) and the Japanese Sword Museum. Victor became a leading light of sword studies in the west, with a greater understanding than anyone who had gone before, raising the academic understanding of Japanese swords by producing not only ground-breaking exhibitions on swords, but great collaborations with the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan on exhibitions giving the west greater understanding of Shinto and other aspects of Japanese culture.

His contributions did not stop there. As well as being a former head of the British Kendo Federation, he was also a former vice-president of the World Kendo Federation, and helped to spread the philosophy of the sword around the world. Victor is survived by his wife, Kazuko, and his daughter, Satsuki.

Ten Thousand Cuts Daily!

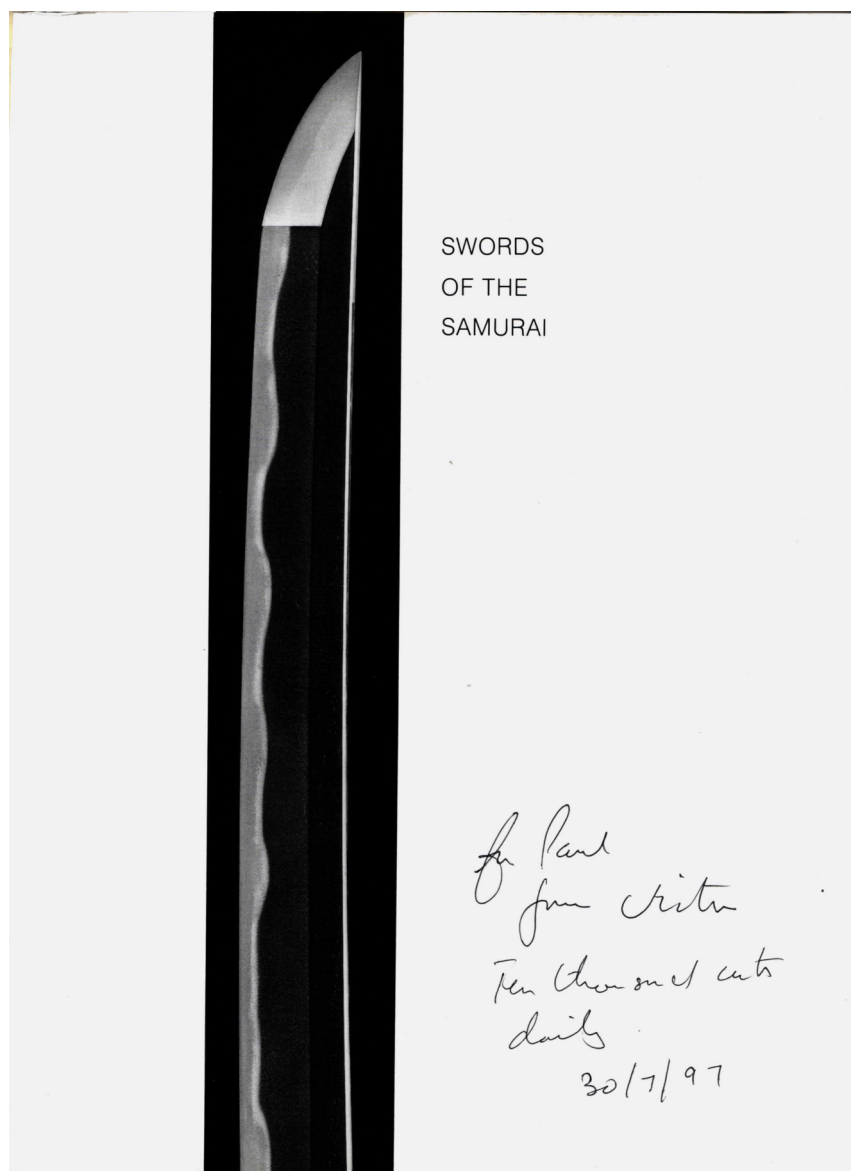


When I began working at the British Museum in London in 1993. Similar to Victor, I came from a very working-class background. Prior to joining the British Museum, I had worked in various professions from shop work, to building sites, to becoming an electrician who was eventually thwarted by a national recession. By chance, I was in the west-end of London wandering around with my friend who wanted to just stop by the British Museum to speak with his father, who was a gallery supervisor there. His father asked what I was doing for work, to which I told him that I had none, and he informed me that the British Museum was recruiting shift warders (four different shifts per month). I jumped at the chance of regular money. It was close to being employed as a civil servant, but as the museum is owned by the Queen and run by a group of appointed trustees, technically we were not.

I applied for a position, and was successful. Within the first few days of joining the Museum, I wandered into the Japanese gallery and there before my eyes, within touching distance but blocked by plate glass of the showcases, were real antique Japanese swords and koshirae with

excellent explanations. Until that time, I had only seen them in movies and books. It was like a dream come true. It was at that time, that I became aware of Victor.

The warder in the gallery said, "The man in charge of the Japanese Department is a Japanese Sword Specialist. He lived in Japan for several years". To which my wide-eyed response was, "You can do that for a job?!!" My eyes were opened in an instant. It had never occurred to me that there were people in the world whose occupation it was to study and care for swords. I had seen Yoshindo Yoshihara on TV in a documentary series called, *The Way of the Warrior*, so I knew they were still made, but had not thought of there being connoisseurs and major collectors outside of Japan. I think I may have realized my life's dream in that instant.



Eventually, because of my martial arts connection and interest in things Japanese, I was soon introduced to Victor Harris as he was passing through a manned security gate entrance within the museum. Victor was very gracious, as I am sure he was introduced to hundreds of people with a mild interest in Japan all the time, or people who had practiced martial arts. Little did we both know at that first encounter that five years later I would become his assistant and direct student.

I purchased his books, *Swords of the Samurai*, and the translation of, *the Book of Five Rings*. He signed the *Swords of the Samurai* Book, To Paul, From Victor, Ten Thousand Cuts Daily! The copy of the *Book of Five Rings* he signed with a Musashi quote, To Paul, By knowing things that exist, you can know that which does not exist. Victor.

I spent the next 11 months as a shift warder, before being promoted to a security supervisor. I spent about five years in total in the security department, all the while, my colleagues telling me that I should try

to get a position in the Japanese department. However, my working-class mentality found it very difficult to entertain the notion. Having said that, it had not stopped me from periodically bothering Victor with questions about swords and Japan, and using my enthusiasm and tenacity badgering Human Resources Department at every opportunity, talking them into sending me to night-school to learn the Japanese language, "for the benefit of the museum". 😊

After around 4 and a half years working at the museum, to my amazement, an assistant in the Japanese department quit. I think my friends and colleagues were just as excited as I was, goading me to apply for the position. By this time, I was well known around the museum as a Japanophile. In my first five years at the museum, I had retired from my competition karate career, taken up Kendo, began studying swords in earnest from Victor and his contemporary's books, joined the Token Society of Great Britain, and become generally known widely throughout the museum as someone rather persistent.

The announcement was made in the Museum internal mail. I had waited in anticipation, and when the announcement officially came out... I was ineligible to apply... Due to the British Museum's antiquated system at the time, employees were divided by pay bands. The pay band to apply for the position was only half a pay band above my own. Not to be discouraged, within moments of the mail being issued/received I marched directly up to Human Resources and met with the Head of the Department, Barbara Hughes. Barbara knew of me well already, but she listened to my story and dilemma.

Then, she said, "Paul, if you got this job, it would change your life wouldn't it?" My head was now racing as I wanted to say a million things, but ending up speechless I just nodded. Barbara said, "Ok, we are going to change the rules, so that you can apply, the rest is up to you." I was ecstatic. I had no guarantee of getting the job, and the competition was stiff, but now at least I had a chance.

In retrospect, from that day on to the day of the interviews (and beyond), all the prospective candidates began canvassing. We generally schmoozing and trying to make a good impression of ourselves. Candidates were given a tour of the department, and taking to an area that was floor to ceiling with draws. My future colleague pulled open a draw that was full of fabulous Japanese swords and koshirae. My heart raced, it was just unbelievable to me at that time. I was walking in another world. Another room had cabinets just full of tsuba and other fittings. Even if I didn't get the job, I had seen some fantastic things.

The day of the interviews came. I felt like my interview went well, but I was also told by a member of the interview panel (who had a history of being rather annoying), "You do realize, that if you get this job, this is as far as you go. There are no future prospects for promotion. You will never become a curator." As annoying as he was, it was true. In the history of the museum, no one had ever even transferred directly from support staff, such as security, directly to an academic position. Additionally, there was a saying that, "If you want to move up in the museum, you have to leave and come back!" With this knowledge, I acknowledged his warning, but at that point in my life, I was happy to work as an assistant in the Japanese department for life (maybe even for free). 😊



The results were in, sort of. There was a tie. I had tied with someone who was already working in that position, but who had wanted to transfer across from the Oriental Department. I couldn't believe it, I was in a tie, but just that result alone felt like I had won. I was the underdog after all.

For the tie-breaker, Human Resources went to the line managers of each department. I felt a glimmer of hope, Victor knows that I like swords and do kendo, it must go in my favor... Wrong! In typical Victor fashion, he was completely by the book. Victor, responded by telling them that it wasn't his job, and that they were Human Resources, so it was up to them to choose. So, they went to my opponent's line manager, who to my surprise is supposed to have said something along the lines of, "Paul is genuinely interested in Japan, and he came from behind to get into a tie, so technically he has won. My member of staff has already changed departments in the past, and likely to in the future. If you decide to give the position to my member of staff, Paul can have his position in my department without an interview". And there it was decided, probably that moving two people

around was troublesome for Human Resources, so they just gave me the position in the Japanese department. Now Victor Harris was my line manager. I had done it, I had broken the glass ceiling. Since that time, many other gallery warders had made the jump from security to academic positions.

大英博物館収蔵の刀剣・刀装具の修理が完了

このたび大英博物館が収蔵する日本刀および拵の日本における修理作業が完了したので、これまでの経緯をここに報告いたします。

昨年、平成十一年初めに世界の二大博物館の一つ、大英博物館から刀剣・刀装具の保存修理の依頼が文化庁を通じて当協会にありました。それを引き受けることとなり、同年五月十八日の早朝、当協会の榎山学芸員と中村学芸員が文化庁の斎藤文化財調査官、佐藤指

導係長とともに成田空港に赴き、品物とそれに随行する大英博物館日本部部長のヒクター・ハリス氏、およびこの修理にかかわる全費用を負担するスポンサー二人を出迎えました。入国管理局では千葉警察の新東京空港警察の理解・ご協力をあつて、刀剣の通関手続きが順調に終わり、その日の夜には、刀剣博物館収蔵庫に無事格納することができました。

五月二十四日には、異例の出張登録

という形で、刀剣登録を当博物館四階講堂において実施していただきました。この配慮によるもので、計一〇三点の登録が無事に終了いたしました。

これらの刀剣は拵に入っているものがほとんどで、百年以上の歳月を経ていたため刀身と拵の状態は良好とは言えず、後日、鈴木専務理事、田野辺事業部長、榎山学芸員を中心に、ハリス氏と交換して一点、刀剣の拵や刀

装の破損の状態を入念に調査し、最終的には研磨を必要とするもの八九点、刀装の修理を必要とするもの四〇点と決めましたが、刀装は細かな修理を含めると残りの中にも手を加えるものが若干ありました。

これらの修理作業をどのように進めて行くかについては、美術刀剣研磨技術保存会・外装技術保存会の両団体に、ご協力を願ひ、それに所属する全国の職人の方々三十二名に引き受けていただきました。折しも、その時期は赤羽刀の修理作業が重なり、多忙な状況下ではありましたが、皆さん、快くお引き受けくださり感謝にたえません。特に精の津通りではその専門の職人の方々に大変ご苦労をおかけしました。

多くの技術者のお力添えによって、平成十二年二月までに全ての修理が、つづがなく完了いたしました。五月十五日、大英博物館より日本部長ハリス氏と同館職員ポール・マーティン氏が引き取りのため来館されました。引き渡しの前に、修理のなった品々を一点ずつチェックしていただきましたが、その出来映えの素晴らしさに両氏とも感嘆の声をあげて満足され、協会および修理に携わった職人の方々に對して深い感謝の意を表され、全品無事に引き渡しを完了いたしました。

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Within a year, I got to tick another item off the bucket list, as I got to courier items from the collection to Japan. I had never been able to entertain the idea of travelling to Japan by myself. In the meantime, Victor taught me how to care for the collection and I was given charge of it as well as putting the items of display, updating databases under Victor's direction. Within a year, we began preparations for what would eventually become the Cutting Edge catalogue and exhibition, and we sent a hundred and three swords to Japan for various blade and koshirae restorations coordinated by the Japanese Sword Museum (NBTHK). When it came to collecting the swords, Victor gave up his business class seat in exchange for two economy ones, so that I could go along with him. We were included in an article of the NBTHK's magazine, Token Bijutsu, inspecting and checking the swords before I brought them back alone and Victor stayed on for other business. Victor had already introduced me to an expat, and former Head of the British Kendo Federation, John Clarke, on my first trip to Japan, who took and introduced me to Noma Dojo (where I am still a member in laido today).



This time we went together, he also took me to his sensei's dojo in Setagaya, and I got to practice Kendo and Ono-ha Itto-ryu with Ono Torao sensei, and many many other Kendo and sword related people and places. It was an incredibly busy week.

Victor had already been teaching me Ono-ha Itto-Ryu within the grounds of the museum. I also was his Ono-ha assistant at a sword symposium at the Victoria & Albert Museum. The exhibitions in the Japanese Gallery at the BM used to rotate every three months, so the Gallery was closed periodically, so we would practice Ono-ha in the gallery at these times, and to the amusement of

other museum staff, in the basements, and basically any space we could find. It was also common to go to the pub after work.

So, I got to spend a lot of time with Victor outside of work, socializing and kendo, etc. He was always kind, caring and kind of carefree, but serious about swords, swordsmanship and enlightenment. He had wonderful stories, not all of which I can repeat, except maybe one, or two. I am recalling them from memory, so there may be some small factual mistakes, but facts should never get in the way of a good story anyway . 😊

When Victor was the Vice-Chairman of the World Kendo Federation, the world championships were being held in Korea. On the day he was due to fly, he realized that his passport had run out. He had a connecting flight in France, so at that time, you were still able to buy a one-year passport over the counter at the post office. So, he managed to get to France using his one-year passport. For his connecting flight, he waited until the last possible moment after they had been calling his name, and he ran up to the gate waving his old passport, and they hurriedly let him on the plane.

When it came to passport control in Korea, it was discovered that his passport had expired, and he was held in custody. They put him in a cold dim cell, with no furniture and only a single light-bulb. All he had was the business card of the Chief of Japanese police, who was also part of the Japanese delegation at the championships. The customs officers went off to contact him. A few moments later, they came back and wheeled in an armchair for Victor to sit in until his colleagues from the Kendo federation came to collect him.

When Victor was living in Japan, it was not so long after the war. The student riots were going on, and he was practicing kendo with many of the old generals and service men from the war. As was still the practice, pre-Covid, much drinking and socializing goes on after practice at certain groups. When they would run out of drinks, Victor was sent to go and wake up the off-license owner and get him to open up and sell them more drinks. He also said that, when he was first learning kendo, his Japanese wasn't so good, so they would put him with the children because the children would speak with to him with no inhibition. When you first get your kendo keikogi and hakama, there is usually an excess of indigo dye, so they would take the clothing to the well, saturate them and then walk on them until the dye stopped running out.

Victor was in Japan when one of his sensei were about to pass away. Just before he died, Victor asked him, "Sensei, how should I face my opponent in mortal combat?" The sensei replied, "You should treat him like an honored guest". The sensei later sent for his son, to show him how to die. Once he arrived, the sensei sat himself in the formal seiza posture placed his hands in the meditating position, and just like Yamaoka Tesshu, passed away peacefully as if he was meditating.



At the British Museum 2002

As luck would have it, I moved to Japan in 2004, and Victor became a Visiting Professor Meiji University, Tokyo, in 2005. I would still see him when he came to Japan from time to time, we would hang out and go to practice at various dojo. Also in 2005, I had my first exhibition as an independent guest curator at the Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena. I had given instructions that white silk was required to cover all the sword stands. When I arrived, a member of staff had taken it upon themselves to order polyester instead. I told them it had to be replaced, only to be faced with obstinacy, and an excuse that a conservator (not a sword specialist) had said that it was

OK, and would not damage the swords. In my exasperation, I called my teacher. Victor's response was, "That's just silly!", and within a few days, a couriered parcel arrived from the British Museum containing a huge wad of white silk.

O' Captain, my Captain!

It is common knowledge in my circles in Japan that I am ex-British Museum, so when I was at a lecture in Tokyo at Japan in 2017, one of the other members arrived, and brought in a newspaper to show and inform me that Victor had died. I hadn't spoken to him for a while. Victor was one of those good friends where it didn't matter how much time passed, that when you saw again, it was like no time had passed since your last meeting. However, I hadn't even known that he had been unwell, and the realization that he was no longer there in the background took a while to sink in. The lecture had started and I sat through it as a hazy backdrop to my speeding thoughts. Reality was sinking in fast and I found myself going into a kind of shock. It was like I was having a 'Dead Poets Society' moment, my teacher was no more and I wanted to stand on my desk and shout out after him, "O' Captain, my Captain!". As it was also a Saturday, I had to wait the whole weekend before receiving a reply from our mutual colleagues at the British Museum.

They too were pretty much in the dark over the whole situation, but had been informed that Victor did not want a funeral, or a gravestone, no flowers. This was so Victor, but at the same time very frustrating to have no place or way to pay my respects or waylay any of my grief. I contacted Victor's family, and gave them my sympathies, and was informed of the same information as relayed by the British Museum. With the exception, that "we should all just carry Victor in our hearts and minds".

There are many stories, I hope that I haven't overstepped any boundaries telling those ones, but I think that these ones are mostly common knowledge. There are other stories of Sato Kanzan, and his time studying that I may pass on before I die to keep Victor's legend alive and record of how things used to be.



A YouTube video of Victor and myself at the British Museum in 2000:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIm_0Z8AXc8

I end this essay with the original poem by Walt Whitman that was written on the death of Abraham Lincoln. I still miss Victor, but he still lives on in my heart, thoughts and decisions.

O Captain! My Captain! our fearful trip is done;
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:
But O heart! heart! heart!
 O the bleeding drops of red,[a]
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! My Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills;
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding;
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here captain! dear father!
 This arm beneath your head;[b]
 It is some dream that on the deck,
 You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
 My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
 The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
 From fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won;
 Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
 But I, with mournful tread,
 Walk the deck my captain lies,[c]
 Fallen cold and dead.

Walt Whitman

(Terence) Victor Harris

3rd August 1942 – 13th June 2017



Here is a short list of some of Victor's other achievements,

President , Tokenkai of GB.

President , European Kendo Federation.

Vice President, International Kendo Federation.

Predident, Nenriki Kendo Club, London.

1980 – 2003 Special Constable with the Metropolitan Police.

Trustee in 2002 for Chiddingstone Castle in Kent.

2005 Victor became the Consultant to Christie's Japanese Department.

2006, appointed Hon. Librarian to the Japan Society.

2006 appointed Hon. Curator to the Khalili Collection of Japanese Art.

2008 Victor was awarded the Japanese Foreign Minister's commendation
2012 that was followed by the Queens Jubilee Medal.

Publications include

A Book of Five Rings, 1974

Swords of the Samurai, 1990

Kamakura: the renaissance of Japanese sculpture, (with Matsushima Ken) 1991

Japanese Imperial Craftsmen, 1994

Netsuke: The Hull Grundy collection, 1987

Masterpieces of Japanese Art, 1991, jointly with Timothy Clark and Lawrence Smith.

Shinto: the sacred art of ancient Japan, 2001.

William Gowland: the father of Japanese archaeology (Japanese/English), 2002 edited by Victor Harris and Kazuo Goto.

Cutting Edge: Japanese swords in the British Museum collection, 2004

Art of the Samurai, New York Metropolitan Museum, translated by Victor Harris, 2009.

Revisiting: The Yakuza (Warner Bros 1974, Dir. Sydney Pollack)

Editor's note: I won't give too many spoilers away, and I will give links to where the film can be purchased viewed at the end of the segment, but if you haven't seen this film, it is a must see! recommendation. Eleven out of Ten!

日本人の読者様へ (For our Japanese readers)、

普通は日本刀とやくざの事は話題にしません、海外にこの映画がとても有名な映画です。黒澤明監督と同じくらい有名さかもしれません。この映画は任侠映画のオマージュするつもりでしたが、ポラック監督は自分の味を付けて、ネオノワールジャンルのカルトクラシック映画になりました、そして高倉健さんが世界に紹介されました。さらに他の日本の文化も発信されました。例えば、鴨長明の「方丈記」と鈴木大節の「禅と日本文化」など。勿論、テーマは義理と人情ですが、外国人でもこういう事が感じられ示していました。映画の中に暴力団などはヒーローとして出ません。元敵でも友情や尊敬を発見出来るのストーリーです。健さんは任侠映画に出る事が後悔されましたそうですが、彼の演によって、私と沢山他の外国人が日本と日本刀に興味深くになりました。私の場合はそんな影響があったので、現在に私の仕事は世界に日本刀と日本文化の情報が発信市営ます。健さんなくなりました前、彼の演と人間としてロールモデルになる事に関する、私の感謝の気持ちが伝えたかったです。



When I was a young child, my father began practicing karate. It wasn't long before I joined him in the training hall at the age of seven. In retrospect, I am not even sure that I knew that karate was a Japanese art at first, but as I progressed I would hear things like, "Samurai Spirit", or "Bushido". At the time these words meant that I was to try harder and not give up. However, this was my introduction to Japanese culture (and indirectly swords); wearing Japanese style uniforms, bowing, and hearing Japanese words. Through this I was introduced to Japanese movies. Of course, around that era the most common Japanese movies were the ones made by the most famous samurai movie director at the time, Akira Kurosawa.

His colorful movies that even sometimes took Shakespeare and molded the plays into epic movies with heroic samurai in colorful armor and very cool swords attached to their hips. This was my first introduction to an image of samurai and their swords.

However, when I was about 15 or 16 years old, I watched a movie that was directed by Sidney Pollack and starred the Hollywood movie star, Robert Mitchum, and a Japanese actor that, at that time, I had never seen before called, Ken Takakura.



The movie was called, *The Yakuza* (Dir. Sydney Pollack, Warner Bros. 1974). Even today in Japan, it is rather difficult to explain my deep interest in swords is rooted in this movie as the title is somewhat of a taboo word in Japan. The Yakuza are the various groups of organized crime syndicate in Japan. In 1960's Japan, there was a boom in Yakuza movies under the genre of, Ninkyo Eiga. At the time, this genre of movie was popular with Japanese Salarymen, and regarded as modern samurai, or the Japanese equivalent of the USA's cowboy/western movies. Ken Takakura became a major star through several series of Ninkyo Eiga. However, later in his life, Ken turned his back on these and seemed to regret doing them because of what they represented.

The *Yakuza* movie was based on a book by Leonard Schrader that he wrote while living in Japan and the screenplay was written by his brother, Paul Schrader, who also went on to direct other Japanese themed movies like, *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters*. 'The Yakuza' was supposed to be a homage to the Japanese Ninkyo Eiga. However, the making of the movie wasn't without a rift, as Pollack began to stray from Schrader's vision of strict Ninkyo Eiga rules, and also brought in Robert Townsend of *Chinatown* fame to rewrite parts of the script.



Regardless, the movie ended up becoming a cult classic that is seen as a neo-noir film that focused on the common ground of duty and honor between men (former enemies during the war) of two contrasting cultures on the backdrop of the Japanese underworld. This aside, the film gained a cult following and has become an underground classic. Before the event of video recorders, cable TV and internet, it would sometimes air on the UK's BBC 2 late at night, and watching it was something of a wonderful event.

Just as in the Japanese Ninkyo Eiga, the story is very even paced until the climatic sword fight scene at the end where justice and honor prevails (much like the western cowboy movie counterparts). Little did I know at the time, that Ken Takakura was one of Japan's greatest actors. However, his performance as a 1970's swordsman in *The Yakuza* still moves me profoundly to this day.

The movie is also somewhat like an onion, discovering new layer after layer of new Japanese cultural surprises and information on every viewing. The degree of understanding of Japan by the Schrader brothers is remarkable.

The movie includes quotes about swords from, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, by Suzuki Daisetsu. Also, Ken's horimono (full back tattoo) in the movie is a depiction of the Buddhist deity Fudo-myō-ō. However, Fudo-myō-ō is the patron deity of Japanese swordsmen. He holds a rope in his left hand and a double-edged sword (called a Ken) in his right hand. The rope is to bind the enemies of enlightenment, while the sword is to cut through the illusory world to the ultimate reality.



Fudo means to be unmovable, or in the sense of swordsmen fighting in a life or death situation, to be indomitable. To know what is real and be able to read your opponent's every move or thought. To not consider life or death, but focus on the moment.

The story is set in the early seventies, not that long after the Second World War. Harry Kilmer (Mitchum), and his friends, had been part of the military police during the allied occupation. Tanaka Eiko (Kishi Keiko) had been a black-market runner in order to provide medicine for her daughter, Hanako.



Kilmer was aware of Eiko's activities, but happened to save her during a skirmish. The two began a relationship. Five years after the war ended, Eiko's brother, Tanaka Ken, came back from the dead. He was thought to have been killed in the war, but returned from the jungles of the Philippines. A triangle of shame and misunderstanding begins. Ken, a man of duty and obligation (giri to ninjo) has not only suffered the dishonored of defeat, but also on his return, his sister is in a relationship with his enemy. He tells Eiko that he can no longer talk to her as she has placed him debt to his enemy, and by his own sense of honor is beholden to Kilmer with, 'a debt that he can never repay', for saving his sister and niece's lives. Ken disowns, Eiko, and joins the yakuza, but continues to look out for her daughter Hanako. Eiko also feels ashamed, and suddenly shuts Kilmer out of her life. Kilmer still loves Eiko, but can see that their relationship is doomed. He buys her a small bar (Kilmer House) as a Sayonara gift, and leaves Japan.

Fast forward twenty years, Kilmer is living in California when he gets a call from his old friend, Tanner (Brian Keith). Tanner is also a former occupational soldier who maintained his contacts and became a successful businessman in Japan. Tanner tells Kilmer that his daughter has been kidnapped by a Yakuza boss called Tono. Kilmer exclaims, "What can I do?" Tanner replies, "You can ask Tanaka Ken...". Ken has become famous as a swordsman among the yakuza. Kilmer eventually goes to Japan to rescue his



(Me mostly in Tanaka Ken cosplay at the Miyairi forge for NHK's Japan Easy)

friend's daughter, along with Tanner's bodyguard, Dusty (Richard Jordan). Kilmer arrives in Japan and tracks down Tanaka Ken who now lives in Kyoto where he is a Kendo teacher. Kilmer tells him the situation and asks him for help. However, Ken informs him that he has retired from the Yakuza. Kilmer tries to retract the request,. Ken says, "It's too late, you have already asked, and I owe you a debt that I can never repay..."The movie is full of twists and surprises with a fantastic showdown at the end. Just before the final showdown, Ken quotes

another classic of Japanese literature as a kind of pre-emptive death poem that reflects on the impermanence, or the ephemerality of life.

Yuku kawa no nagare ha taezu shite, Shikamo... (moto no mizu ni arazu)

The river constantly flows, but... (the water is always changing)

(From the Hojoki-My Ten Foot Square Hut, by Kamo no Chomei)

Promises to Keep

I also recommend watching the making of which is called, Promises to Keep. The title is taken from the Robert Frost poem, Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening. The mini documentary is viewable on Youtube and shows how astute Sidney Pollack was, and how he could see the complexities of Japan and understand the differences with the west. He must have also made an impression on Takakura Ken, because Ken gave him a gift of a sword after filming was complete.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2w13aNeo0I&t=58s>

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

By Robert Frost

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.



In some ways Tokyo, even Japan, is very small. Just by chance, on my first visit to Japan I stumbled into one of the locations for one of the scenes of the movie. It is kind of uncanny that I live close to and work in the same area as some of the locations of one of the movies that has had the biggest impact of my life as it is about 5,000 miles away from where I grew up and watched that movie. I often find myself tripping

over other places where Ken san had frequented, and get to sit in his favorite seats, try his favorite foods or discovering that some of my friends were acquaintances with Ken san, or that the director of a documentary on him, frequents one of the same bars that I do.

An Icon of Cool in a Kimono

Takakura Ken is like the Japanese Steve McQueen. His acting style was similar too; less dialogue and more acting. I have a personal theory that he was a fan of McQueen. He is affectionately referred to in Japan as Ken-san. Ken-san's birth name was Oda Koichi. He was born in Kyushu February 16th, 1931. He appeared in over 200 movies. He appeared in several western movies, Too Late the Hero (1970), The Yakuza (1974), Black Rain (1989) and Mr. Baseball (1992).

When Ken passed away from lymphoma in 2014, he left his treasured Norishige blade to the NBSK. It was another one of my bucket-list highlights to take this blade in my own hands and be able to view it in the knowledge that I was repeating something that Ken himself had done many times. The rest of his collection are under the care of his friend and master swordsmith, Miyairi Kei (Kozaemon Yukihiro,

son of Living National Treasure Shohei/Akihira), and kept if the safety of the Museum of Tetsu, Sakaki-Machi, Nagano prefecture, close to the Miyairi forge. I have seen the collection several times when periodically on display.



The Sakaki-Machi Museum of Tetsu Introduction to the 2015 Special Exhibition: Gifts from Takakura Ken San.



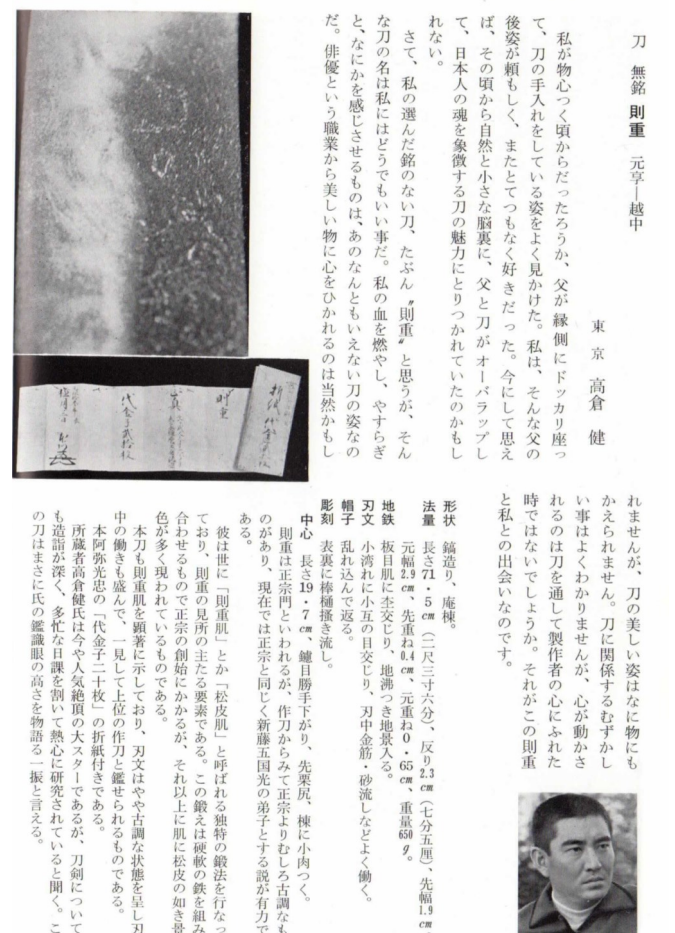
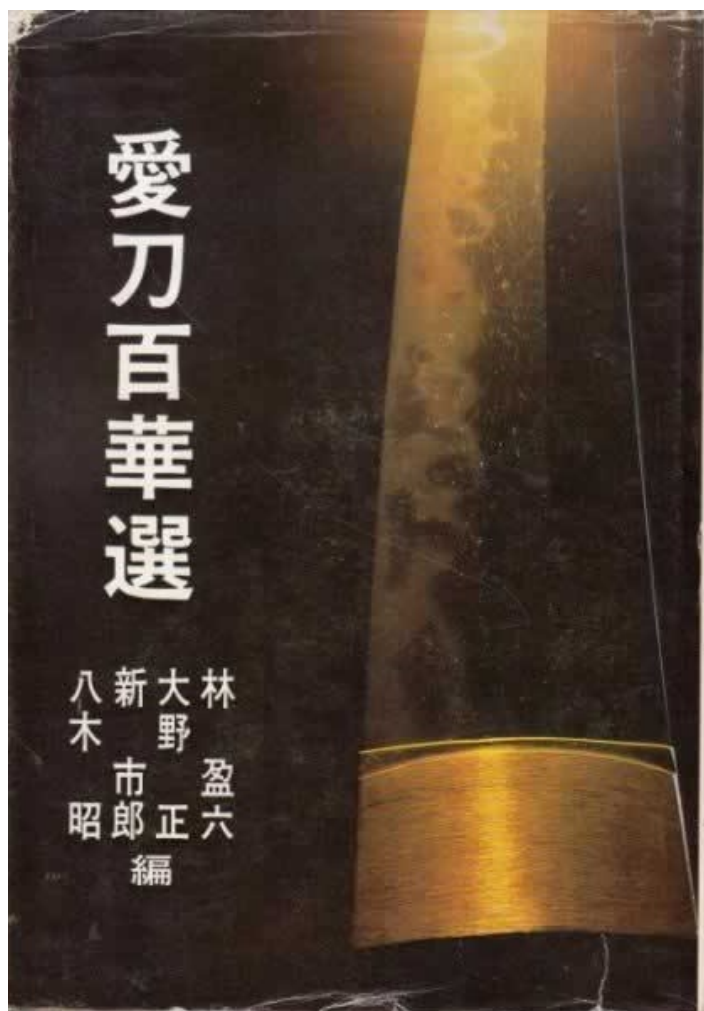
Last year, the great Japanese actor, Takakura Ken (The Yakuza, Black Rain, Mr. Baseball), died leaving us his sword and sword book collections. They were donated to us by Oda Taka san. Takakura san and Sakikaki-Machi's own Intangible Cultural Property, master swordsmith Miyairi Kozaemon Yukihiro had developed a deep friendship over the years. Due to this friendship, Oda san was familiar with the Sakaki-Machi Museum of Tetsu (Metals) and through the help of Miyairi sensei the swords were donated to this museum.

The gift includes swords by the Azuchi-Momoyama period smith, Horikawa Kunihiro, a tanto by Miyairi sensei himself, and so forth. It features eight precious swords from Takakura Ken's personal collection, a sword stand, and books. Please visit and see the wonderful swords from the collection of the sword enthusiast Takakura Ken san.

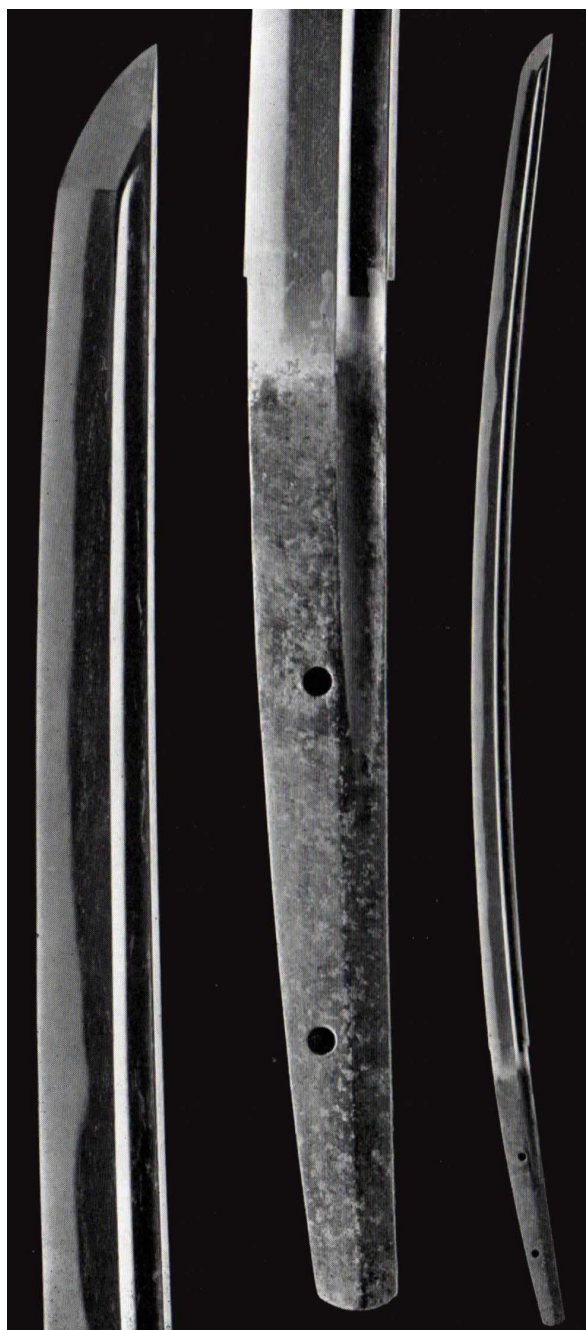
Exhibits

- ① Katana: Mumei, Norishige. Kamakura period
- ② Wakizashi: Horikawa Kunihiro. Early-Edo period
- ③ Wakizashi: Yamato Daijo Fujiwara Sadayuki (with black lacquer wakizashi koshirae). Early-Edo period
- ④ Daisho: Yokoyama Kaga no suke Fujiwara Sukenaga. Tenpo 14 (1843). With nishiki-maki saya uchigatana koshirae
- ⑤ Tanto: Kurihara Chikuzen no Kami Nobuhide. Bakumatsu period
- ⑥ Yajiri Motonao late-Edo period
- ⑦ Yari: Miyairi Kozaemon Yukihiro, Heisei era
- ⑧ Tanto: Miyairi Kozaemon Yukihiro, Vermillion aikuchi koshirae, Heisei era.
- ⑨ Mother of pearl inlaid katana stand.

Ken san's Norishige was also included in a book called: **A Selection of 100 Treasured Swords**



Ken san wrote,



I wonder if it was a moment of realization for me. I often would see my father sitting in the porch caring for and maintaining his sword. If I think about it now, from that time onwards it has always been in the back of my mind that swords and my father overlap, and I became captivated by the sword that is a symbol of the Japanese people.

Well, the unsigned sword that I have chosen is probably by Norishige, but it doesn't matter to me who the maker is. I cannot put into words the feelings of tranquility and excitement that the shape of the blade gives me. It is probably as an actor that I am naturally attracted to things of beauty, but I find the gorgeous shape of a sword incomparable. I don't really understand the complexities of swords, but I feel that that when you are moved by a sword, that you are somehow being touched by the heart of its creator. That is what attracted me to this Norishige sword.

Katana

Mumei: Attributed to Norishige

Cutting-edge length: 71.5cm Curvature: 2.3cm

Kamakura Period

Nihonto Bunka Shinko Kyokai

The blade is shinogi-zukuri, with a bo-hi on both sides ending in kaki-nagashi. It has an itame-mokume hada with jifu, and chikei. The hamon is ko-notare with ko-gunome, and abundant kinsuji and sunagashi. The boshi is midare-komi with kaeri. The nakago appears to be suriage. It has katte-sagari filemarks, two mekugi-ana and ends in kuri-jiri. It is accompanied with an origami by Hon'ami Kochu.

The Yakuza (1974) is available for purchase on Youtube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osiEbX2huVg>

Amazon.com

https://www.amazon.com/s?k=The+Yakuza+1974&crd=2G9TY3ONZTPX0&srefix=the+yakuza+1974%2Caps%2C258&ref=nb_sb_noss_1

Amazon.co.uk

https://www.amazon.co.uk/s?k=The+Yakuza+1974&crd=5O731K5RF9Y7&srefix=the+yakuza+1974%2Caps%2C430&ref=nb_sb_noss

or lots of copies on ebay.

Images from my pilgrimages to some of the locations used in “The Yakuza”



The Butokuden, Kyoto



Chiyoda Inari Jinja Shrine, Shibuya



The Butokuden, Kyoto

The Milano, Shinjuku.
(since been demolished)

Certificates of Authenticity for Newly Made Japanese Swords

(taken with permission from the NBSK website).

One of the current activities of the NBSK public foundation is the issuance of Certificates of Authenticity for newly made Japanese Swords (Tachi, Katana, Wakizashi and Tanto).

Sword Certification History

The various appraisal circles of the antique world, many fakes have been uncovered since ancient times. It is no different in the Japanese sword world.

Long ago, the Hon'ami family issued authenticating certificates called 'origami' that became the standard for appraisal. However, those origami were mainly used for distribution between shoguns and daimyo family members, and are generally irrelevant today.

After the war, many swords (including old masterpieces) were released from the collections of daimyo and other famous families. These swords came into the ownership of general public, and the number of sword enthusiasts increased rapidly. Subsequently, various sword organizations began issuing appraisal or certification certificates that quickly became a standard for enthusiasts and the general public to increase the worth of their swords. It can be said, that this recognition of swords as art was unique to Japan.



Unfortunately, it is a well-known fact that the number of fakes of the work of currently active famous swordsmiths has increased. Until now, there has never been an appraisal/authenticating certificate from a public organization that verifies the work of modern swordsmiths. However, from June 2021, NBSK started issuing 'Newly Made Japanese Sword Certificate's to maintain the value, and trust in the sword industry of

modern swordsmiths' works. Additionally, this certificate is produced bilingually (Japanese/English) for the benefit of overseas sword enthusiasts.

Since the Second World War, modern swordsmiths have steadily improved upon their skills and artistic quality. Due to their unremitting efforts, they have been producing excellent works. So far in modern Japanese sword history, six swordsmiths have been designated with the title of Living National Treasure. With such a backdrop, the work of modern swordsmiths in particular surely requires authentication. With this in mind, these certificates will soon become increasingly valuable data for modern swords.

Therefore, we call upon all sword enthusiasts, traders and craftsmen alike to order New Made Japanese Sword Certificates. We would be extremely happy that if through these certificates a new standard is created to increase the reliability and value of Japanese swords for everyone.

Overview of the issuing process of a certificate

① Modern swordsmiths interested in using our certificates register with our association and we then issue certificates for their swords on a per sword request basis. By registering their works with us, the data will be recorded and accumulated by our association for future reference. Please note, that there are some swordsmiths who do not wish to list their names on the website. If you would like to confirm, please contact the NBSK head office by E-mail.

② If you wish to order a certificate (for example, if you already own a modern sword by a modern swordsmith), please contact the NBSK head office for information on the monthly schedule and reception place. After that, we will carry out an appraisal of the work and if it meets the requirements, issue a 'Newly Made Japanese Sword Certificate' in a special presentation case.

* Certificate issuance fee: 30,000 jpy (+ 10% consumption tax) per blade.

③ If you purchase a sword that has one of our certificates, but you have some doubts if it is the same sword as in the certificate, please send the sword and certificate to us. We will confirm if it is correct or not by referring to other data that is not displayed on the certificate.

* Inquiry fee: 20,000 yen (+ 10% consumption tax) per blade.



☞ For further details, please see the homepage or contact the head office via email.

The Society for the Promotion of Japanese Sword Culture (N.B.S.K.)
301 Takasho Heights, 2-4-7 Akabane Minami, Kita-ku, Tokyo 115-0044, Japan.
<http://www.nbsk-jp.org/>
Tel: 81(0)3(5249)4440
Fax: 81(0)3(5249)0065
E-mail: tbk@nbsk-jp.org

While you are here... (Update)

We have successfully raised the money for the first sword of the Heisei group of the Shin-Gobankaji Project. Now onto the next sword(s).

We still need your help. The Shin-Gobankaji Project is one of the most audacious projects in recent sword making history. The craft has gone through ebbs and flows in its long history, and currently we are in rather fragile downtrend. Japanese sword making is not only made up of swordsmiths. It is a team of different crafts that depend on one and other. If one of the crafts disappears, or a set of skills, the whole chain becomes perilous. This is not a void that can be filled by amateur craftsmen from abroad or domestically. There are traditions and canon to be followed and passed down from teacher to student. Reverse engineering and rebooting crafts from books are not going to fix the situation unless you have a solid background already in those traditional crafts.

The loss of any of these skills is also going to affect the stability of old swords too. For example, there is currently quite a severe lack of habaki and scabbard makers. These items are also very important for the preservation of swords of antiquity. The problem simply does not lay in changing the law to allow sword makers to produce more swords. The situation is much more complex than that. Even if it was changed, making three or four swords per month while maintaining the artistic integrity and quality control of blades would be quite challenging for most smiths. In my opinion the biggest problem is that nobody seems to be aware of the plight of the craft. I am sure that no one would want to see it in trouble, and by raising awareness the situation may begin to take steps to resolve the current problems.

We need your help. We have created English language pages to allow crowd funding for the Shin-Gobankaji Project internationally. Funds raised will establish the important data of representative works from each successive imperial era onwards, that will possibly become the standard for appraisal of works from the Showa period onwards in the future. As well as, information boards on important sword related sites (starting with Emperor Gotoba) in English for visitors to Japan. As many of you are aware, we are merely the custodians of swords for our generation, and pass them onto the next generation in the best condition possible to try and successfully preserve them as far into the future as possible.

The same applies to the support of the traditional crafts. As individuals, we may not be able to afford to purchase a single sword by a Japanese swordsmith, but we can come together as a collective to make a difference. As the current generation, we naturally bear the responsibility to try to support these crafts so that they can be passed successfully on to future generations. If any of the sword making crafts was to disappear under our watch, it would be a great shame. Your donation counts and will make a difference. If you cannot afford to make a donation, then please help by spreading awareness by sharing the flyers, posts, and this newsletter to interested parties.

Thank you very much for your consideration. You can make a donation for return gifts here:

<https://shingobankaji.hp.peraichi.com>

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of Japanese Sword Culture**



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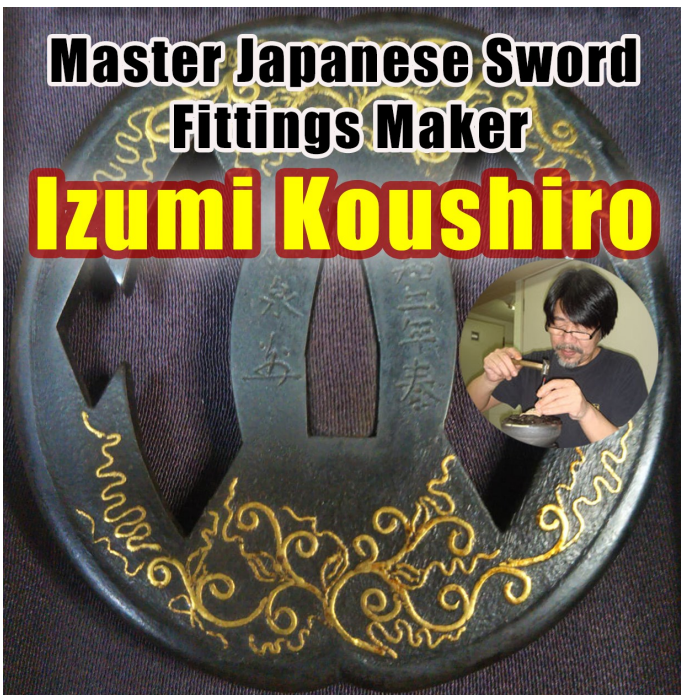
Enquiries: Please contact us through our website

<https://nbsk-jp.org/english/contact/>

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Sword Exhibitions Currently on in Japan



企画展
松代藩士の刀剣

会期：令和4年1月19日(水)～4月11日(月)

開館時間：令和4年1月19日(水)～年3月31日(木)
9:00～16:30(入館は16:00まで)
令和4年4月1日(金)～4月11日(月)
9:00～17:00(入館は16:30まで)

休館日：毎週火曜日

入館料：一般600円(20人以上団体500円)
小中学生100円(20人以上団体50円)
(真田邸・文武学校などとの共通券あり)
※毎週土曜日は小中学生無料

関連行事
ギャラリートーク
令和4年1月19日(水)、1月29日(土)
いずれも10:00～10:50、11:00～11:50
無料(ただし、入館料がかかります)

刀のつばの紋切あそび
令和4年3月26日(土) 10:00～12:00(最終受付11:00)
場所：真田宝物館 真田わくわくルーム
体験無料(ただし、高校生以上は入館料がかかります)
※混雑時にはお待ちいただくことがあります。

新型コロナウイルスの影響により、会期中でも休館となる場合があります。展覧会、イベント開催の有無は必ず当館ホームページをご確認ください。
HP <https://www.sanadahoumotsukan.com>



日本刀 多彩なる造形展



令和4年2月26日(土) — 5月22日(日)

開館時間 / 9:30~17:00 (入館は16:30まで)

休館日 / 月曜日※月曜が祝日の場合開館、翌日休館

入館料 / 大人 1000円 会員・団体 700円 高校・大学・専門学校生 500円
中学生以下無料 (大人20名以上の団体は会員価格)

Date / February 26 (SAT) - May 22 (SUN), 2022

Hours / 9:30 - 17:00 (Last admission at 16:30)

Closed / Mondays (The museum opens on Mondays that fall on national holidays, in which case the museum is closed on following day)

Admission Fee / Adults 1000yen, Members・Group 700yen, Students 500yen, Children under 15 Free



刀剣博物館
The Japanese Sword Museum

<https://www.touken.or.jp/museum/>



Japanese Swords x Ukiyo-e from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

刀剣×浮世絵 一武者たちの物語

※ 日本経済新聞社、ポスティング新聞、ポスターセンター



27. B. 2001-2002, 2004-2006; William Henry Rouse Johnson
28. D. 2001-2002, 2004-2006; William Henry Rouse Johnson
29. A. 2001-2002, 2004-2006; William Henry Rouse Johnson

1. 關於「臺灣省」的行政區劃分，下列何者正確？

<https://heroes.exlin.jp>