Honjō Dam

Honjō Dam is a concrete gravity dam that stores and regulates water from the Nikō River. It was constructed in 1918 by the Imperial Navy in response to the expanding naval base's growing demands for water. Until the dam's completion in 1918, the citizens of Kure depended on low-quality well water, which was vulnerable to exposure to harmful bacteria. After the dam was built, the Navy made part of this new water supply available to Kure's residents, thus providing them with a more reliable water source.

At the time of its construction, Honjō Dam was said to be the largest dam in the East. The dam is 97 meters long, 3.64 meters wide, and 25 meters high. The reservoir behind it holds a maximum volume of 1.96 million cubic meters of water. The exterior of the dam, as well as its large staircase (with 96 steps), are made from cut granite. Honjō Dam has been in continual use since it was first built, yet very little repair work has been necessary. This durability testifies to the relative sophistication of naval architectural technology at the time the dam was built.

At the foot of the dam, a gatehouse regulates the volume of water released by the dam by measuring its flow rate. This water is then sent downstream to the Miyahara Water Purification Plant. A round well next to the gatehouse can be used to draw water directly from the Nikō River when the water level of the reservoir is low. In 2017, a new propeller water circulation system was installed to further improve water quality by inhibiting the growth of algae on the surface of the water. The dam's reservoir is also protected by a small shrine dedicated to a Shinto water deity, which has been erected on an artificial island near the dam.

The Honjō Dam facility was designated a national Important Cultural Property in 1999. It is the first water-supply structure to have received this designation while still in use. In 2005, the Water Resources Environment Center certified the Honjō Dam reservoir as one of the "Selected 100 Dam Lakes" across Japan, in recognition of its scenery, historical significance, and sophisticated architecture. The dam is opened to visitors every spring when the cherry trees bloom along the dam's base.

Former Sawahara Residence

The Sawahara Family

The Sawahara family played a prominent role in Kure's history over many generations.

In 1886, when Kure was chosen as the location for a major naval base, it was Sawahara Shigetarō Tametsuna (1839–1923) who represented Kure as city headman in the negotiations with the Imperial Navy. At this time, the Sawahara Residence guesthouse that had been built 80 years earlier became the temporary home of the naval commander-in-chief. Later, the Sawahara residence was one of the few large-scale structures in Kure to survive the air raids at the end of World War II (1939–1945).

While the Sawahara family successfully negotiated with the Allied occupying forces to keep the main building and the Triple Warehouse, the New Warehouse and a nearby secondary residence were both seized for use by the British Commonwealth Occupying Forces. Both properties were returned to the Sawahara family in 1952, and shortly thereafter the secondary residence was sold off and torn down. The family transferred ownership of the estate to the city of Kure in 2001 but retained the right to reside there. The Former Sawahara Residence was designated a national Important Cultural Property in 2005. It is the only building in Kure not related to the Imperial Navy to be granted this recognition.

The Sawahara Residence

The history of the residence extends back to 1728, when the Sawahara merchant family began living there. A fire in 1740 destroyed most of the complex's original structures, but the family rebuilt. A guesthouse for high-ranking visitors was added to the complex in 1805 in response to news that Asano Ukyō, a young lord from the Hiroshima domain, would be visiting the following year. The Sawahara family had become wealthy through their brewery business, and the task of hosting prestigious visitors naturally fell to them. The Sawahara residence was well suited to hosting such guests: the rooms of the guesthouse were decorated with luxurious furnishings, such as *yakusugi* cedar wood taken from ancient trees on the distant island of Yakushima and carved transom panels (*ranma*) depicting the arched bridge and lanterns of Hiroshima's famed Itsukushima Jinja Shrine.

In 1805, in preparation for Lord Asano's visit, the family also built an *onarimon*, a special entrance exclusively for high-ranking guests. However, when Lord Asano's officials assessed the gate, they determined it to be overly ornate for a merchant's residence and reprimanded the Sawahara family for forgetting their place. The family hastily sawed off the gate's long, decorative crossbars and covered the shortened ends with wooden boxes that remain to this day.

This incident reflects the power shift that occurred between the samurai and merchant classes during the latter half of the Edo period (1603–1867) as the merchant class grew increasingly affluent. Despite their greater wealth, the merchants remained lower in social rank than the samurai, and they were expected to refrain from extravagances that were normally reserved for the houses and lifestyles of the ruling class.

Architectural Features

The residence's Triple Warehouse (Mitsugura) was erected in 1809, and it has since become a symbol of Kure. The street-facing side of this trio of warehouses was used as a backdrop for multiple scenes in the 2016 animated movie *In This Corner of the World*. The Triple Warehouse is noted for its unique "straw raincoat walls" (*minokabe*), which are built by layering plaster and woven straw. The technique is uncommon, and very few historical buildings with *minokabe* still exist.

Although the Triple Warehouse appears from the street to be a single, joined structure, it actually consists of three separate buildings. The buildings on the left and right are nearly identical, but the central warehouse displays some architectural differences. For example, the warehouses on either side have wooden-lattice windows, whereas the windows of the central warehouse have metal lattices and are slightly smaller. The roofs of the warehouses vary as well; while the buildings on the left and right have ordinary tile roofing, the central warehouse has a pantile roof with curved, S-shaped tiles. The New Warehouse (Shingura) that stands nearby was built in 1905 and is the most modern addition to the Sawahara residence.

The Triple Warehouse was once used to store the Sawahara family's extensive collection of historical documents, which chronicle Kure's history and development during the late Edo period. These historical records were designated a Tangible Cultural Property by the city of Kure in 1982, and they are now archived at the Irifuneyama Memorial Museum.

Site of Kamegakubi Test-Firing Range

The Kamegakubi Test-Firing Range sits at the easternmost tip of Kurahashi Island. During Japan's medieval period (1185–1568), the island was a notorious base of piracy, and when the Imperial Navy was looking for a place to establish a proving ground for weapons and artillery in 1895, they presumably chose this location for the same reasons the pirates did: its relative seclusion, dense vegetation, and surrounding mountains all

made it easy to protect and conceal the activities that occurred there.

The testing and development that took place at Kamegakubi was top secret, and certain details, such as who used the facility and when it was built, are still unknown. The first written evidence of military facilities there dates to shortly after the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). It is generally assumed that a testing site for torpedoes, as well as a test-firing range for artillery and other armaments, were added to this facility after the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). It is also documented that Crown Prince (and later Emperor) Hirohito (1901–1989) visited and inspected these installations in 1917.

During the naval arms race between Japan, the United States, and Great Britain in the years leading up to World War II, the Kamegakubi Test-Firing Range rapidly grew in size as numerous new facilities were added. Training exercises for manned torpedoes called *kaiten*, or "heaven shakers," are known to have been conducted there, as well as experiments with poison gas. However, the primary role of the Kamegakubi Test-Firing Range was as a test site for armaments and ammunition produced by the Kure Naval Arsenal.

Kamegakubi is also known as the test site for the main and secondary artillery batteries of the two most powerfully armed battleships ever built, the *Yamato* and its sister ship the *Musashi.* The *Yamato*'s main battery comprised three turrets, each with three 46-centimeter guns, the largest ever mounted on a warship. The Navy transported these guns to Kamegakubi by boat. At the wharf, they were lifted with a 200-ton rail-mounted gantry crane that transported them to the testing site. There, the guns' penetrative power was tested against different thicknesses of steel armor plating, and their accuracy and muzzle velocity were measured by firing them through a pair of electric nets. In order to protect personnel during the testing, three thick concrete blast barriers were needed to contain the shock waves produced by the massive guns.

The testing facility was not a welcome neighbor to the residents of the island. Despite the secrecy surrounding the development of the *Yamato*'s guns, the test firing could not be kept completely secret. The shock waves created by the artillery were reputedly so strong that they rattled the sliding paper doors in the homes of Ōhaku, a village located 1.5 kilometers away. The ongoing testing also placed an economic strain on the local population, who were prohibited from fishing in the waters around the island as a security measure. In 1924, the fishermen organized a petition against the testing site, but they were

unable to reclaim the right to fish.

At the end of World War II's Pacific theater, when it became clear that Japan was going to be defeated, the Imperial Navy removed most of the documents from the Kamegakubi Test-Firing Range. Upon discovering the facility, the Allied Forces searched and ultimately destroyed large parts of it. Afterward, the local population, impoverished by the war, scavenged metal scrap and other remaining materials of value. Over the following decades, the testing site was abandoned and soon became overgrown by dense forest.

Nonetheless, some signs of the former test-firing range still remain on the island. These include the ruins of an exploded mess hall, a double-walled concrete bunker that once contained shock wave measuring equipment, a nearby monitoring facility, and the stone jetty that bore the rail-mounted crane. In 2006, the Kurahashi Tourism Volunteer Association, which currently maintains the site, built an empty tomb as a memorial to the individuals who lost their lives here in test-related explosions. In 2020, the national government designated the Kamegakubi Test-Firing Range a Japan Heritage Site.