

Discoveries During the Excavation and Restoration of Nagayamon Gate

The Takayama family had lived here since at least the 1400s. They were powerful samurai and governed a small village here in the valley. Nagayamon Gate is the only remaining structure that indicates their samurai past. In 2014, Takayama-sha Sericulture School was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and Nagayamon Gate underwent an extensive restoration. Archaeological investigations carried out at the same time as the repairs revealed many historical details about the building and the family that owned it.

Work on the main gate uncovered some *kitōfuda*, or protective talismans, used to ward against harm. Fourteen *kitōfuda* were found on the left central pillar of Nagayamon Gate, and one was found on the right. The oldest dates back to 1687 and its inscription indicates that it was for good luck on the battlefield. The others have similar inscriptions. These artifacts give us the earliest evidence of the gate's age.

In the rooms on the west side of Nagayamon Gate, archaeologists found graffiti scribbled on one of the wooden pillars behind some wainscoting. It was probably made by teenage students when the building was used as a vocational classroom, between 1887 and 1925.

Traces of burns were found on the earthen floor of one of the rooms on the east side of the gate. These, along with discoloration on the beams above, indicate there was some kind of hearth positioned here. It was most likely used in connection with silk production, perhaps for boiling silk cocoons prior to reeling. In 2018 people working on the restoration discovered evidence that suggests the room was used as a cocoon-drying room.