

The Fan Lawn (Ogi-no-Shiba)

Near the main gate to Byodoin temple is a small, triangular garden known as the Fan Lawn. It marks the location where warrior and poet Minamoto no Yorimasa (1106–1180) performed seppuku, or ritual suicide, in 1180 after being defeated in the Battle of Uji by the rival Taira clan.

In an incident that is recounted in *The Tale of the Heike*, Yorimasa sought refuge in the grounds of Byodoin after his forces had been defeated. Two of his sons reportedly died alongside the 76-year-old Yorimasa as they tried to protect him.

Before killing himself, Yorimasa composed a poem:

*Umoregi no
hana saku koto mo
nakarishi ni
mi no naru hate zo
kanashikarikeru)*

My life that was like
a rotten branch
sinking into the earth,
fated to bear no fruit,
now comes to this sad end.

Yorimasa laid a large fan on the ground facing west, in the direction of the Pure Land (Jodo), and performed ritual suicide. As he lay dying, he chanted “Namu Amida Butsu” (Homage to Amida Buddha), an invocation to that Buddha to guide him and his sons to the Pure Land.

Yorimasa’s death was reportedly the first case of ritual suicide by a samurai in Japan, and he was subsequently honored for demonstrating the virtues of a samurai. Yorimasa’s grave is in the grounds of the temple.

It is not known when the Lawn was first laid out, but it was mentioned as early as the Muromachi period (1336–1573).