

## **Byodoin History and Restoration Chronology**

Restoration work has been carried out frequently throughout the temple's history, with these layers of repair and renovation becoming part of the present form of the temple. Byodoin was founded in 1052 by Fujiwara no Yorimichi (992–1074). The Amida Hall (Phoenix Hall) and the Amida (Sk. Amitabha) Buddha statue within represent together the paradise of the Pure Land (Jodo), and helped to spread the Pure Land faith through Japanese society.

In its early years, the temple precinct was much larger than it is today. In 1336, Kusunoki Masashige (1294–1336), while fighting an army led by Ashikaga Takauji, set fire to the area around Byodoin, and many pagodas and buildings in the vast precincts were burned to the ground. Fortunately, the Phoenix Hall remained unscathed.

During the Meio era (1492–1501), Jodoin Temple was established in order to help restore Byodoin. In 1640, the Rakando Hall was constructed, and in 1654 Saishoin Temple was established. Large-scale restoration of the Phoenix Hall was carried out in 1670, and around that time Byodoin was placed under the joint control of Jodoin Temple, belonging to the Jodo School, and Saishoin Temple, belonging to the Tendai School.

In 1698, the temple was further damaged in the Great Fire of Uji. In the aftermath, graffiti covered the spectacular murals on the walls of the Phoenix Hall. Later, in the Meiji era (1868–1912), repair and maintenance began once again. The figures of “Worshipping Bodhisattvas on Clouds” in the Phoenix Hall were repaired during that time, and a major restoration was carried out during the Showa era (1926–1989). Due to its history of restoration, and with the site being the epicenter of the Buddhist faith in its time, the Phoenix Hall, the sitting statue of Amida Buddha, the temple bell, the worshipping bodhisattva figures, along with the canopy and door and wall paintings in the Phoenix Hall sanctuary were all listed as National Treasures.

During the restoration process, it was discovered that several elaborate techniques were

employed the creation of the decorative items. Another discovery took place during the excavation of the pond in front of Phoenix Hall, where a single seed of a lost variety of lotus was found in a layer of Edo-period (1603–1867) earth. After careful tending, this seed sprouted and visitors can now enjoy the blooms of this unique plant at Byodoin.

In 2001, the Byodoin's Hoshokan Museum opened. In subsequent years, the area around the temple has been battling to preserve its identity against the encroaching urban sprawl. Close attention is still paid to the landscape to ensure that visitors can fully enjoy this physical homage to the Pure Land of enlightenment—when a visitor to the Phoenix Hall approaches from the front, no buildings can be seen in the background to disturb the tranquility of the view. Visitors can, thus, still experience the original beauty of a site as it was understood in the Heian period.