

## Stone Memorials

The Buddhist stupas and grave markers standing here were assembled from stones found in the walls during the Showa-era restoration (1956–1964) to Himeji Castle. There is no record as to whose graves they marked, from which temple they came, or that they were ever previously assembled in their current forms. What *is* known is that in 1143, Shomyoji Temple occupied the hill that would later become Himeji Castle. Its patrons were prominent local families, and the stones are likely from one of the temple's memorial plots. Today, a monk from Shomyoji (now relocated) visits several times a year to perform memorial rites.

The stone lanterns in front of the stupas were moved to Himeji in 1990 from Tokyo. They came from the cemetery plot of the Sakai family, lords of the castle from 1749 to 1868. The lanterns are dedicated to the memory of Sakai Tadakuni (1854–1879), Himeji's last daimyo lord, who took over the castle while still a teenager after the new Meiji government (1868–1912) ousted his predecessor. Tadakuni returned to Tokyo when domains were abolished and replaced with prefectures in 1871. After attending Keio University, he studied in the United States but fell ill after returning to Japan. He died at the age of 25.

This area was once surrounded by earthen walls to the south and west and a gatehouse to the east. The stone retaining wall above this spot is among the oldest surviving walls at Himeji Castle. It is believed to date from around 1580, when the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) took over and began to expand the existing wooden fortress. Before the Showa-era restoration made other parts of the castle more accessible, it was a popular spot to look out over the city—offering perhaps the best view outside the keep.