

Konpirasha Enseiji Temple

Enseiji Temple was originally built in 1254 in Yamaguchi as the main temple of the Ōuchi warlords, who originally ruled this area. The Ōuchi were later ousted by the powerful Mōri family. When the Mōri family moved their capital to Hagi in 1604, they had the temple moved to a site near Hagi Castle. Hagi grew into a bustling castle town under the Mōri, and by the mid-nineteenth century, Enseiji was recorded in a contemporary guidebook to famous sights in Hagi called *Yae hagi meisho zue*.

Although it is a temple of the esoteric Shingon school of Buddhism, Enseiji also has a Shinto deity, Konpira, enshrined within its precincts. Konpira is the guardian deity of seafarers and fishermen. This sharing of sacred spaces was common until the religious reforms of Meiji era (1868–1912), which separated Buddhist and Shinto practices.

The eaves of the Konpira shrine hall feature carvings of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac. The massive *tengu* mask above the shrine hall entrance was created in 1838. According to local tradition, Chōshū samurai Takasugi Shinsaku (1839–1867) was often brought here as a child to teach him to overcome his fear of the mask. Takasugi was one of the samurai leaders who fought against the Tokugawa shogunate in the lead up to the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Next to the shrine building is a wooden statue from 1820 depicting the divine horse (*shinme*) ridden by Konpira. It is said that Takasugi and his friend and collaborator Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909) played on the horse as children.

In 2004, the temple was featured in the NHK historical drama *Shinsengumi!*, which is centered on the heroes who fought to prevent the collapse of the shogunate. It also appears in a two-part episode of the anime series *Case Closed*, also known as *Detective Conan*. In the episode, the unusual design of the shrine's massive stone lantern reveals the answer to the central mystery.