

Benkei's Mirror Pond

Musashibō Benkei (1155–1189) was a warrior monk who studied at Engyōji in his youth. Renowned for his superhuman strength and great loyalty, Benkei appears as a heroic figure in many traditional folk tales and stage productions, as well as in modern anime and manga. Although he is often presented as a paragon of bravery, Benkei is also known for his short temper and tendency toward violence.

The less flattering sides of his personality have given rise to a number of dramatic stories about Benkei, including one that involves this pond. As the story goes, a young monk named Shinanobō Kaien used a lump of charcoal to write an insult on Benkei's face while he slept. When Benkei awoke to find a group of young monks laughing and jeering at him, he ran to this pond to see his reflection in the water. Enraged at Kaien's graffiti, which compared his face to the bottom of an old sandal, Benkei began violently tearing away large sections of the temple buildings. Although there is no reliable historical evidence to support this story, the incident is said to have caused a great fire that reduced Engyōji's most important structures to ash.