

Kami-no-Kuchiya Guardhouse

The Kami-no-Kuchiya Guardhouse was located next to the Ōicho, a large ginkgo tree registered as a National Natural Monument and believed to be about 1,000 years old. Porcelain was the most valuable asset of the Nabeshima family, who ruled Saga domain from their castle in the city of Saga. The Nabeshima daimyo had the guardhouse built during the early Edo period (1603–1867) to control traffic in and out of the Uchiyama district of Arita. The structure originally straddled the only road in and out of the district—perpendicular, rather than parallel, to its current location. The domain official stationed here monitored the flow of goods and people in and out of the district. This guardhouse was one of five that controlled every entry and exit to Arita.

It was not only the finished products that the Nabeshima wanted to protect; resources essential to porcelain production, including the pottery stone from nearby Izumiyama and the knowledge possessed by local artisans, were all carefully guarded domain secrets. Security was so important that it is said that the people who lived inside the area enclosed by the guardhouses were allowed to marry only people who were also from inside the boundaries.