

## Natsume Soseki and Uchitsuboi House

Natsume Soseki (1867–1916), one of Japan's most celebrated novelists, arrived in Kumamoto in April 1896 to take up an English teaching position at the Fifth Higher School (equivalent to a modern university). He lived in Kumamoto until 1900, when the Ministry of Education dispatched him to London to study English.

This is the fifth of six different houses that Soseki lived in during his time in Kumamoto. The Uchitsuboi house is significant for two reasons. First, it is the only one of his Kumamoto houses that survives more or less unchanged in its original location. Two more survive, but they have been extensively modified. Second, his first child, daughter Fudeko, was born here in 1899. The house has eight rooms and a pleasant garden containing the well that may have provided the water used to wash the newborn Fudeko. The monthly rent was 10 yen, equivalent to around 100,000 yen today.

Soseki was in his early thirties when he lived here, and had yet to write his first novel; he was merely an English teacher who wrote haiku poetry on the side. He wrote some 2,000 haiku in his life, 900 of them while living in Kumamoto. He was undoubtedly influenced by his friend and one-time classmate, Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902), who became a famous haiku poet.

Even though he was not yet writing fiction while in Kumamoto, Soseki was no doubt storing away material for later use. His 1906 novels *Kusamakura* and *The 210th Day* are both set in Kumamoto.

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