

How a TV Drama Saved Weathercock House

The television drama *Kazamidori* (“Weathercock”), set in Kobe’s Kitano Ijinkan-gai district in the early twentieth century, sparked a revival of interest in the area when it aired in the late 1970s. *Kazamidori* was inspired by the former Thomas Residence, built around 1909 and popularly known as “Weathercock House” because of the unique weathercock atop its tower. The story begins in the Taisho era (1912–1926), and centers on a heroine whose German husband operated a bakery in Kobe. Although neither the actual Thomas Residence nor the Thomas family is depicted in the drama, it vividly captured the atmosphere of life in Kobe’s international district.

The popular show was produced by the national TV network NHK and ran in the morning six days a week from October 1977 until April 1978, with over 150 15-minute episodes. It quickly captured the public’s imagination, prompting people to learn more about Kobe’s *ijinkan* (“foreigner houses”) in general and to visit them in person. This noticeable upsurge in interest

and tourism was a major impetus for the city of Kobe's decision, in 1979, to create the Kitano-cho/Yamamoto-dori Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings, and for the subsequent restoration and opening of historical structures there.

In a surprising twist of fate, Else Karbeau (formerly Thomas), who was

then living in Germany but had lived in Weathercock House as a child, heard about *Kazamidori* and the interest in the house and was inspired to help with its preservation. She visited Kobe in 1979, bringing with her many photos and documents of the house in its original condition. These served as invaluable records for the experts overseeing its restoration.

Thanks to *Kazamidori*, the weathercock itself soon became a symbol of Kobe's unique culture and history, appearing on everything from municipal signage to fire hydrants.