

Miike Prison Remains

In 1883, the Japanese government built Miike Prison to house prisoners who were to sentenced to labor at the state-run Miike Coal Mine. It was the first prison of its kind in Japan. The prison had a maximum capacity of 2,000 inmates; at its peak in 1897, the prison housed 2,166 men. Most inmates were long-term felons and had no coal-mining experience. Miike Prison was closed in 1931.

After the prison closed, Mitsui Group bought the land to use as the new location of its technical school. The prison buildings were demolished as unwelcome reminders of the site's grim past. All that remains is a 600-meter-long section of the original brick-and-stone wall on one side of the school's sports field. The wall has been designated a Tangible Cultural Property by Fukuoka Prefecture. The school became the Fukuoka Prefectural Miike Technical High School in 1950.

During new building construction in the 1990s, workers uncovered part of the foundation of one of the prison buildings. Subsequent excavation and research revealed more brick foundations, lavatories, various artifacts, and a series of stone slabs buried vertically underneath the wall to prevent prisoners from tunneling out.