

## Shinagawa Historical Museum Commentary Sheet

### Omori Shell Mounds

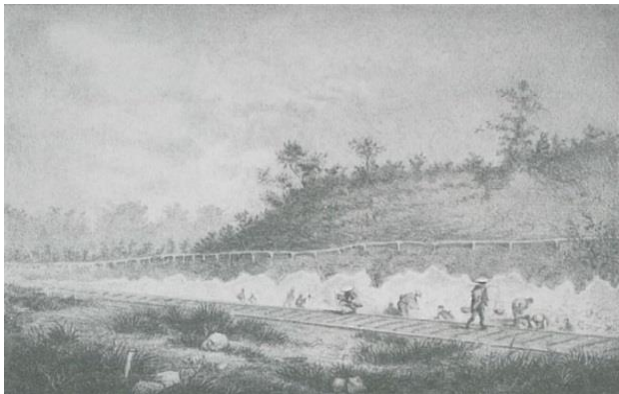
#### Omori Shell Mounds – The Birthplace of Japanese Archeology

The Omori Shell Mounds Garden, located about a five-minute walk from the Shinagawa Historical Museum, is considered the birthplace of Japanese archeology because this is where Japan's first scientific excavation took place in 1877, led by Dr. Edward S. Morse.

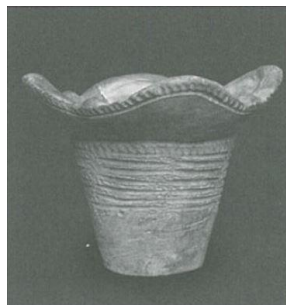
The Omori Shell Mounds represent the remnants of an ancient village community from the latter half to the end of the Jomon period some 2,400 to 3,500 years ago. Excavations of this site have produced a wide range of finds, including not only shells, but also the bones of fish and animals, earthenware, stoneware and also human remains. In 1955, the Omori Shell Mounds were designated as a historical site by the national government as evidence which indicates humans had made a living since ancient periods on the land of Shinagawa where they received the bounty of the sea.

#### Dr. Morse and the Omori Shell Mounds

Dr. Edward S. Morse (1838 - 1929), an archeologist from Portland, Maine, in the United States who discovered the Omori Shell Mounds, worked as a map maker after graduating from junior high school and also delved into the study of shells on the side. After becoming a university student adjunct, university researcher and university professor, Dr. Morse came to Japan in 1877 after being hired as the University of Tokyo's very first zoology professor. On June 10, 1877,



Excavation of Omori Shell Mound



Jomon earthenware

when he was riding a train from Yokohama to Shimbashi, Dr. Morse discovered a sedimentation of shells and knew right away that they were shell mounds. He led two preliminary studies, and just three months after his discovery, a full-scale excavation began at the site starting on October 9, 1877.

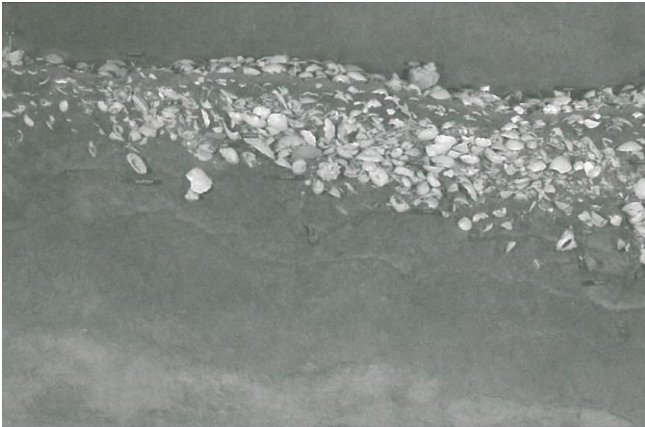
This excavation found a total of 261 items, comprising 214 pieces of earthenware, 6 stone tablets, 23 bone tools, 9 pieces of stoneware, and 9 shell implements. Of these, 165 items would later be designated as important cultural properties by the national government. The reason why the Omori Shell Mounds are considered the birthplace of Japanese archeology is not only because they marked the first-ever scientific excavation in Japan, but also because they were subject of the *Shell Mounds of Omori*, Japan's first excavation report published in 1879, two years after the excavation.

This report contained a wide range of items and attempted to scientifically authenticate the site. Today this report is still considered very advanced for its time. Dr. Morse himself drafted the maps of the site, while Japanese limner Kimura Seizan drew other minute details. The maps contain notes written in pencil by Dr. Morse and are numbered in ink.

#### Later Excavations

Following Dr. Morse's excavation, naturalist Minakata Kumagusu collected earthenware and bones from the Omori Shell Mounds in 1885. Later in 1908, author Emi Suiin performed an unsanctioned excavation to collect pieces and an episode from this experience appears in his book *Secrets Inside the Earth*.

Academic excavations were next carried out in 1941 by a team led by Oyama Kashiwa of Keio University. However, the items and records from this dig were lost to fire during World War II.



### Example of shells removed from Omori Shell Mound

The Omori Shell Mounds were designated as a historical site by the national government in 1955, a decade after the end of World War II, but conditions gradually deteriorated because no one was allowed to enter the site between the mid-1960s until the early 1980s. A group of local citizens, worried about the state of the shell mounds, organized the Omori Shell Mounds Preservation Society, which led growing momentum for the site's preservation.

Later, Shinagawa City carried out excavations on two separate occasions. The 1984 excavation confirmed an extensive range of shell layers, while a large number of additional items were also found, including stone arrowheads and decorative shell pieces, which Dr. Morse had pointed out were still there. The 1993 excavation found six dwellings in addition to the shell layer, which proved to be a major discovery.

### The Two Shell Mound Monuments

There are two monuments in the Omori Shell Mounds to commemorate past excavations. The first is the Omori Shell Mounds Monument found in the Omori Shell Mounds Garden and the second is the Relic of Omori Shell Mounds Statue found on the site of the NTT Data Building. The Omori Shell Mounds Monument was thought up by Motoyama Hikoichi, who was president of the Osaka Mainichi Newspaper as well as an archeologist. The monument was erected in 1929 with the support of a group led by Oyama Kashiwa, including Sasaki Chujiro who was taught by Dr. Morse and Ishikawa Chiyomatsu. Whereas, the Relic of Omori Shell Mounds Statue was constructed in 1930 as part of a University of Tokyo program to honor Dr. Morse,

based on the recollections of Sasaki Chujiro, who had been involved in the excavations with Dr. Morse.

At the time, the site where Dr. Morse excavated was not recorded correctly in the excavation report and the historical vicinity map also did not contain the location. In addition, the changing landscape from later development also made it impossible to distinguish the location.

However, in 1977 a document related to the guarantee money for the excavation concluded between Dr. Morse and the landowner Tonomura Heiemon cited the location as 2960 Azakashimaya, Oi Village (currently, 6-chome, Oi, Shinagawa-ku) and also contained the location in a map. The excavation report also noted that a shell layer and dwellings from the latter half of the Jomon period were discovered near the location where the Omori Shell Mounds Monument rests today. This monument provides one of the exact locations where Dr. Morse and his team excavated.

### The Omori Shell Mounds Today – Omori Shell Mounds Garden

To commemorate the conclusion of the sister city agreement between the City of Portland, Maine, where Dr. Morse was born, and Shinagawa City, the area around the Omori Shell Mounds was redeveloped in 1984 and made into the Omori Shell Mounds Garden in the following year. The garden was expanded to its current size in 1996.

The garden features a learning area and interactive exhibits as well as the Omori Shell Mounds Monument, a bronze statue of Dr. Morse, and a monument commemorating Shinagawa City's sister city agreement with the City of Portland. The garden also has a soil sample of the shell layer on display like the one at the Shinagawa Historical Museum and is often visited by city residents as a place of recreation and the birthplace of Japanese archeology.



Relic of Omori Shell Mound (NTT Data Building)



Omori Shell Mounds Monument (Omori Shell Mounds Garden)