

# ●Shinagawa Historical Museum Explanatory Sheet

## Japan's First Western Glass Factory

### The Beginnings of Modern Glass Manufacturing

In 1873, Niwa Masatsune founded the Kogyo Company, Japan's first western-style glass factory, along the Meguro River in the grounds of Tokai-ji Temple (Kita-Shinagawa 4-11, Shinagawa City, Tokyo).

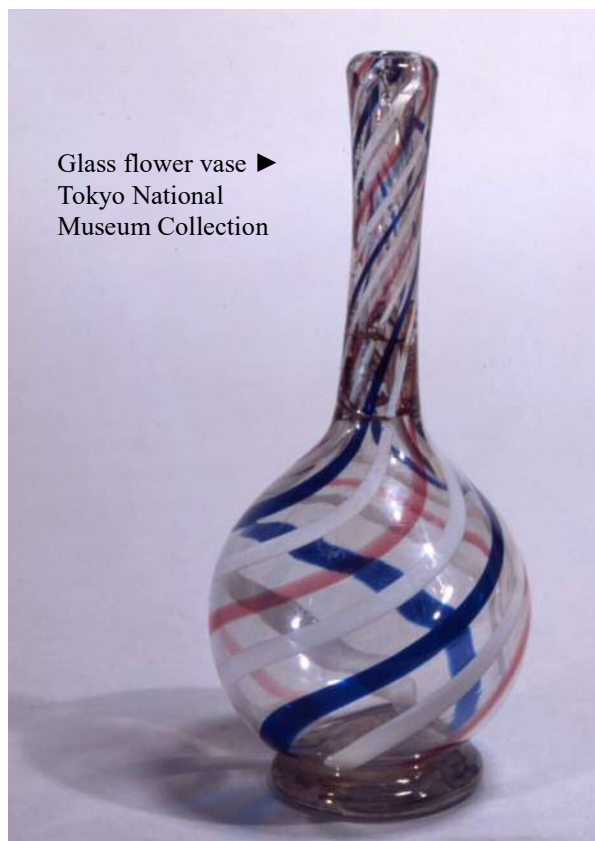
The Kogyo Company invited the British engineer Thomas Walton, and introduced British machinery and manufacturing techniques. The factory attempted to make glass plates by inserting a cut into a hot glass rod 30–50 centimeters across and 1.2–1.8 meters long and then rolling it out into a sheet, but the experiment ended in failure.

### The Publicly Managed Shinagawa Glass Works

Kogyo Company was purchased by the Meiji Government in 1876 as one aspect of its industrial vitalization policies, and became the publicly managed Shinagawa Glass Works. This purchase was made to meet the growing demand for plate glass required for Western-style buildings, and navigation lights for ships. Fujiyama Tanehiro from the Saga Domain (the present-day area around Saga City, Saga Prefecture), who studied at a glass factory in Vienna, succeeded in producing navigation lights, and in 1879, Fujiyama went on to start producing western glass cutlery under the direction of the British engineer James Speed.



▲ The Shinagawa Glass Works building rebuilt in the Museum Meiji-mura in Inuyama City, Aichi Prefecture



Glass flower vase ▶  
Tokyo National  
Museum Collection

### The Privately Managed Shinagawa Glass Works

While the Shinagawa Glass Works succeeded in manufacturing glass, domestic demand was low and sales revenue was a constant struggle. Adding to this, the failure to produce plate glass led to a loss of confidence in the management, which resulted in the factory being liquidated to the public in 1884. In May 1885, Nishimura Katsuzo purchased the Shinagawa Glass Works, and the factory once more resumed business under private management. Nishimura, who achieved success in domestically producing fireproof bricks, took control of the factory's management, and dispatched his engineers to Germany to learn about the latest techniques and machinery, all leading to increased production volumes.

In 1888, Shinagawa Glass Works was relaunched as Shinagawa Glass Limited Liability Company to support the expansion of the business. The company went on to succeed in manufacturing Japan's first mass-produced beer bottles, along with products such as medicinal glass



▲ Nishimura Katsuzo  
(1836–1907)



▲ Oshige Chuzaemon  
(1857–1891)  
Shinagawa Historical Museum  
Collection



▲ A red-gold colored flower vase  
decorated with a *sakura* pattern, said to be  
the work of Oshige Chuzaemon  
Shinagawa Historical Museum Collection  
(Shinagawa City Designated Cultural Property)

bottles and pressed-glass plates. Due to sluggish business, however, the company's debt grew to the point where it collapsed in November 1892.

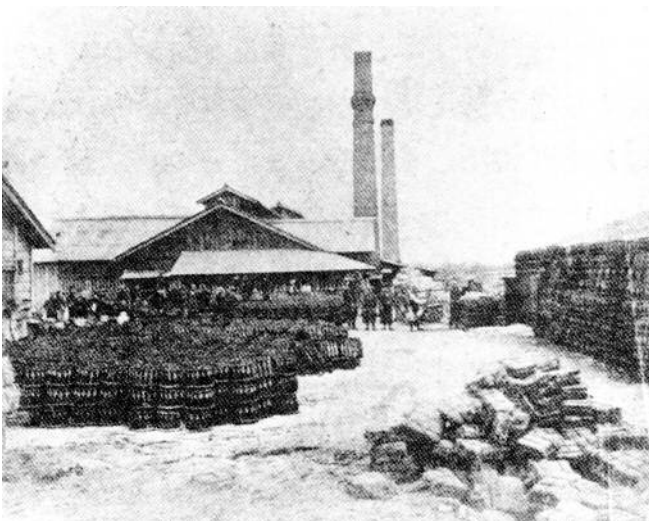
#### Products Produced by the Glass Factory

Since Shinagawa Glass Works was founded in 1873, and continuously produced glass products for approximately 20 years with many transformations. Despite its eventual collapse, the factory fostered the introduction of new technologies and the growth of many engineers and made a great contribution to later generations.

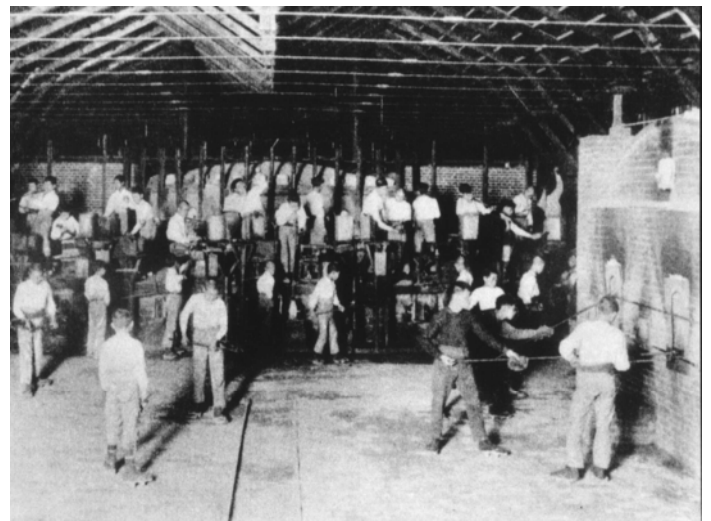
Many famous Japanese glass craftsmen, such as Iwaki Takijiro, who first succeeded in producing stained glass in Japan and founded the Iwaki Glass Factory, and

Oshige Chuzaemon, the cofounder of Oyama-sha Company, achieved independent success based on their experience at the factory. Even the production of plate glass, which failed at Shinagawa Glass Works, was eventually achieved by Shimada Magoichi, the founder of Shimada Glass who originally studied at Shinagawa Glass Works. He put quality plate glass on the market in 1902.

A portion of Shinagawa Glass Works' building was relocated to the Museum Meiji-Mura in Aichi Prefecture in 1968, and is prized as an important example of architecture from the Meiji Period. Beer bottles made at the factory, excavated from the kiln, are also on display.



▲ A shipment of beer bottles



▲ A scene of work at the factory