Discover the astonishing history of the East India Company, which at its peak controlled over a quarter of the world’s trade and millions of the global populace.

“Having such a vast series of easy to access and clearly digitised East India Company documents, long available only to readers in the British Library in London, generates extraordinary opportunities for the established scholar and beginning student alike.”

Philip Stern, Duke University

Overview

From 16th-century origins as a trading venture to the East Indies, through to its rise as the world’s most powerful company and de facto ruler of India, to its demise amid allegations of greed and corruption, the East India Company was an extraordinary force in global history for three centuries.

This digital resource allows students and researchers to access a vast and remarkable collection of primary source documents from the India Office Records held by the British Library, the single most important archive for the study of the East India Company.

From the Company’s charter in 1600 to Indian independence in 1947, East India Company tells the story of trade with the East, politics, and the rise and fall of the British Empire. It records the challenges of a globalising world and sheds light on many contrasting narratives – from records of powerful political figures, through to the lives of native populations and the individual traders who lived and worked at the edge of Empire.

This incredible story is told through the manuscript records of the period, with over 1.2 million pages of content digitised. This ambitious project transforms the accessibility of these archival documents, with enhanced viewing and browsing tools allowing for easy navigation.

This is simply an essential resource for scholarship of British imperial history, maritime trade, global commerce, and the history of the first great multinational corporation.
About East India Company

Beginning with the Company’s establishment by a charter from Queen Elizabeth I, users of this resource can trace its first voyages east, early attempts to trade in the Spice Islands (Indonesia), India and Japan, and skirmishes with pirates and rival trading companies.

By the mid-18th century, the company had unprecedented powers to raise armies, purchase territories, mint currency and administer criminal justice to citizens of its dominions. It straddled the globe with its domination of international commodity networks, and generated over a quarter of the world’s entire trade.

In the 19th century, the Company had become deeply embroiled in scandals, diplomatic crises, uprisings and wars but had come to dominate the valuable trade in tea and opium with China. The Indian Uprising of 1857 was the death knell for the Company, which was sidelined in 1858 and replaced by direct governance of India by the British Raj, continuing until independence in 1947.

East India Company is organised into three modules:

MODULE I: Trade, Governance and Empire, 1600-1947

Module I consists of the most important executive papers of the East India Company and later the India Office, covering the entire period of British rule in India and the expansion of the British Empire over several centuries. Charters, treaties, minutes and correspondence shed light on the foundation, development and demise of the East India Company and, later, the work of the Council of India in overseeing the British Raj.

This module offers comprehensive digitisation of the following core classes:

• The East India Company’s charters, deeds, statutes and treaties (IOR/A), with related documents, 1600-1947.
• The minutes of the meetings of the East India Company’s Courts of Directors and Proprietors (IOR/B), 1599-1858.
• The minutes and memoranda of the Council of India (IOR/C), 1858-1947.
• The minutes and memoranda of the general committees and offices of the East India Company (IOR/D), 1700-1858.

MODULES II AND III: Factory Records for South Asia, South-East Asia, China, Japan and the Middle East (1595-1870)

The East India Company Factory Records (IOR/G) reveal the role of individual trading posts (‘factories’) and are some of the richest sources in the India Office Records for the study of trade networks, daily life for those living and working in the British Empire, and the interaction between Western traders and Asian societies. The material consists of letters sent and received between the factories and London, official trading diaries, accounts of Company embassies to rulers, proceedings of provincial councils and revenue boards, military documents and account books.

“It accomplished a work such as in the whole history of the human race no other Company ever attempted.”

The Times, 2nd January 1874
Highlights

This digital collection provides online access to the official records of the East India Company (1595-1858), and the India Office (1858-1947), the UK government department responsible for the British Raj in India. Topics covered include:

- Early expeditions to India, the Spice Islands (Indonesia) and Japan
- Wars in India, against Indian states and France
- Expeditions against pirates in the 17th and 18th centuries
- Accusations of corruption against Governor-General Warren Hastings, and his impeachment and acquittal
- Earl Macartney’s embassy to China
- Sir Stamford Raffles and the rise of Singapore
- The Opium Wars between the United Kingdom and China
- The Indian Uprising of 1857-1859
- The transfer of rule from the Company to the Crown
- Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian independence movement
- The Indian National Congress and the Muslim League
- Trade in commodities such as tea, textiles, metals and opium

Additional Features

To aid classroom engagement and research, this collection is enhanced with:

- Split-screen image viewer allowing users to view documents and their indexes simultaneously for enhanced browsing and discoverability
- Interactive map and data visualisation tools, allowing users to analyse data sets on the East India Company’s trade in 13 commodities, with information on ports of origin and destination, import/export prices and quantities
- Government structure chart illustrating the hierarchy and sequence of office-holders in British India, including dates of office and short biographies
- Interactive chronology providing a primary access point into the documents. Users can discover material related to their area and period of interest by searching across events in India and the Asian trading world from 1600 to 1948
- Scholarly essays from leading academics contextualising and exploring the archive material

Material Types

The digitised primary source material includes:

- Minutes of council meetings (Court of Directors, Court of Proprietors and Council of India)
- Memoranda and papers laid before councils
- Council resolutions
- Proceedings of revenue boards
- Charters
- Texts of legislation
- Printed books
- Correspondence
- Lists of administrative, military and ecclesiastical personnel
- Trading diaries
- Patronage books
- Account books and other financial documents

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