East India Company
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

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.

This incredible story of powerful political figures, indigenous populations and individual traders is told through the manuscript records of the period, and upon completion will compile over 2.5 million pages of digitised content.

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.

The manuscript material has had HTR (Handwritten Text Recognition) applied to enable full text searchability.
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, Africa, China, and Japan, and skirmishes with pirates and rival trading companies.

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

By 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.

India Office Records, A-D:
Trade, Governance and Empire, 1600-1947

Consisting of the most important executive papers of the East India Company and later the India Office. It covers 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.

India Office Records, G:
Factory Records for South Asia and Southeast Asia, 1595-1830
Factory Records for China, Japan and the Middle East, 1596-1870

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.

India Office Records, E:
Correspondence: Early Voyages, Formation and Conflict
Correspondence: Domestic Life, Governance and Territorial Expansion

Series E of the India Office Records, comprises correspondence between the East India Company, the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India, the Company's various settlements and Presidencies throughout Asia, British government departments, and European houses of agency, interspersed with petitions, memorials and letters from individuals and lobby groups. These letters and their enclosures cover a diverse range of subjects including:
- The growth of diplomatic and trading relations between Britain, Africa and Asia (including India, China, Japan, the Middle East and the Spice Islands) during the 17th and 18th centuries.
- The East India Company's emergence as a trading and territorial power in India and the growth of its financial, political, military, judicial and other governmental functions.
- British government oversight of the East India Company through the Board of Control.
- Maritime trade and life at sea during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
- The emergence and expansion of European empires in Asia.
- Relations between European powers and the Muslim World.

Early Voyages, Formation and Conflict features correspondence relating to the Company's operations in India, Bengal, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, and the oversight exercised by the Board of Control. Domestic Life, Governance and Territorial Expansion will feature correspondence between the East India Company, British government departments, and the Bombay and Madras Presidencies.
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 1857-1858
- 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
- Detailed contents listings providing comprehensive indexes to select volumes of draft correspondence

Material Types

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

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