

# Celebrating 400 years of Anglo-Japanese link

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Four hundred years ago today a British ship sailed for Japanese waters to establish the first contact between the two nations and start a mutually beneficial relationship which prospers to this day.

In 1613 the arrival of the East India Company vessel the *Clove* helped to spark the beginning of Japan's emergence as a modern nation; knowledge-thirsty Japanese later stowed away on ships returning to glean all Britain had to offer.

Today influence is arguably greater in the opposite direction, with no British household bereft of the benefits of Japanese technology, and with Japanese carmakers based in the UK leading the export charge. Anime, Japanese animation films and manga cartoons are vibrant art forms that have seeped into our consciousness, while many work practices and even the notion of removing dirty shoes at the front door we owe to Japan.

"Every British household is influenced by Japan and Japanese culture," said Professor Timon Screech, head of the School of Arts, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, who is behind the year-long celebrations of *Japan400* and is writing a book on the period.

It is hard to appreciate the courage of the crewmen of the *Clove* who sailed into the unknown en route to the land ruled by the Tokugawa Shoguns or military rulers. British people then knew more about the Indies and Africa than they knew about Japan, and the welcome awaiting the captain of the *Clove*, John Saris and

his men was uncertain. In the event they were well-received and Tokugawa Ieyasu subsequently gave permission for the English to establish a permanent presence and trade. The shogun's seal confirming the arrangement can be seen today in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, but the valuable Japanese screens given to the visitors — and highly appreciated by King James — no longer exist. For their part the visitors handed over the first telescope seen in Asia as a gift, in an early example of technology transfer. Goods shipped back to Britain on the *Clove* were subsequently disposed of in the first art auction in this country, on December 20, 1614.

In a letter to King James I the shogun wrote: "Send your subjects to any part or port of my dominions. They shall be most welcome. Though separated by ten thousand leagues of clouds and waves, our territories are as it were close to each other."

The East Indiaman and its crew were unwittingly the first instruments in a process that we now recognise as globalisation and the East India Company (EIC) is today enjoying a new lease of life under Sanjiv Mehta, an Indian of British nationality. It was the world's first multinational company and in Calcutta its tax office eventually assumed that role for the whole of the British Empire. But the EIC's secret was that it was very much a local company from the start.

The EIC, the only British company with the right to mint its own coins, is planning a range of new products to mark the 400th anniversary of its arrival in the Land of the Rising Sun, a market which is second only to Britain for its teas and spices.

The celebrations



The shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu, above, gave a suit of Japanese armour, left, King James I after the first visit by an East India Company vessel in 1613

of this remarkable relationship between East and West begin with the play *Anjin: The Shogun and the English Samurai*, which opens at Sadler's Wells on January 31, and continue with a year-long series of events featuring

Japanese art, film and dance, highlight of which is likely to be the largest exhibition of Japanese art decade, at the British Museum in autumn.

Further details: [www.japan400.com](http://www.japan400.com)

