



East India Company ships at Deptford

Source type: painting
Date made: around 1660

The Company helped make London an important shipbuilding centre. By 1618, the East India Company was one of the largest employers of civilian labour in London.

Ships built at Deptford helped the Company expand and strengthen its trade in Asia.

A profitable venture

In 1620 the Company purchased 250,000 pounds (113,000 kg) of pepper with a value of £26,041 in the East Indies. It was sold in London for £208,041.

And 150,000 pounds (68,000 kg) of cloves worth £5,126 had a selling price in London of £45,000.

Chinese porcelain

Source type: porcelain mug

Date made: around 1780

The fabulous items British traders brought back from China and Asia inspired English craftsmen, artists and designers – who were influenced by Chinese materials and patterns.



Trading opium to buy tea

To obtain the silver it needed to trade for tea with China, the East India Company smuggled opium from India.

Opium was illegal in China, but nevertheless in demand.

By 1839, East India Company's sale of opium to China paid for the entire tea trade.

Numbers of opium smokers in China:

- **1836** – 12.5 million smokers
- **1880s** – 40 million smokers (10% of the population)

Opium addiction was socially problematic and also blamed for falling birth rates after 1850.

The Company becomes a regional power in India

In 1757, as regional rivals fought for power, the East India Company used its army and effectively took control of Bengal.

The Company became responsible for 20 million inhabitants.

“[It] had risen from very slender beginnings, to a state of the highest importance; their concerns, simple at first, are grown extremely complex, and are immensely extended.

They are no longer mere traders, and confined in their privileges; they are sovereigns over fertile and populous territories.”

-- anonymous writer, Monthly Review
(1772)

The famine of 1769-73 in Bengal

An estimated 10 million died in the famine, a natural disaster made worse by the actions of the East India Company.

As more land came under the Company's control it increased taxes, forcing many local people to stop growing food to support themselves, and instead grow 'cash crops', which could be sold to raise cash for taxes.

This was often opium, which the East India Company traded for Chinese tea.

The Money Brothers

Source type: painting

Date made: 1788-92

Private trading activity around the Indian Ocean could be very profitable.

Fabulously wealthy company servants returning from East Asia often had their riches condemned by the British public.



Jamsetjee Bomanjee Wadia

Source type: painting

Date made: around 1830

Wadia was a skilled and respected shipbuilder in the Bombay dockyards around 1800.

The Wadia family made ships for both the East India Company and Royal Navy.

The Company used Wadia's ships to take goods from India to sell to China to pay for tea, that would be taken back to Britain.



Tipu Sultan battles the East India Company

Mysore was an area of southern India.

It took nearly 40 years and several wars for the East India Company to defeat Tipu Sultan and bring Mysore under their control.

Tipu's resistance was an inspiration to many who resented the East India Company's presence in India.

*“In this world I would rather
live two days like a tiger, than
two hundred years like a
sheep.”*

-- Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore

Figurehead from HMS Seringapatam

Source type: ship figurehead

Date made: 1819

Wadia was a skilled and respected shipbuilder in the Bombay dockyards around 1800.

The Wadia family made ships for both the East India Company and Royal Navy.

The Company used Wadia's ships to take goods from India to sell to China to pay for tea, that would be taken back to Britain.

The figurehead possibly shows Tipu Sultan.

