



0. EAST INDIA COMPANY - Story Preface

1. NAPOLEONIC WARS

2. NAPOLEON ABDICATES

3. WATERLOO OVERVIEW

4. WATERLOO ILLUSTRATED

5. WATERLOO HIGHLIGHTS

6. A CLOSED SOCIETY

7. BECKY SHARP

8. ILLUSTRATIONS in VANITY FAIR

9. EAST INDIA COMPANY

10. BRITAIN AND INDIA

Representatives of the East India Company found the Koh-i-Noor diamond in India. Thereafter, it has been a part of the British Crown Jewels. In this image, we see the famous diamond as part of the British crown. Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

Thackeray, like so many other 19th century British citizens, was born in India. What connected these two disparate countries?

How could Queen Victoria, living in London (after becoming Queen of Britain at a young age) and ruling from a relatively small island (until her death in 1901), also be known as the Empress of India? Turns out, it was all about commerce.

Near the end of her reign, Queen Elizabeth I issued a Royal Charter for a business officially known as the British East India Company (popularly known as "John Company"). For nearly 250 years (from December 31, 1600 to 1858), it was one of the most powerful enterprises in the world.

The business began its long life trying to wrest control of the Spice Islands (a group of islands in eastern Indonesia between Celebes and New Guinea) from the Dutch. When that failed, the company (whose main office was on Leadenhall Street in London) focused its attentions on India.

Around 1670, Charles II granted the British East India Company even more sweeping powers. He allowed its representatives to purchase territories, mint money, raise and command troops, form alliances, make war and peace, and be in charge of civil and criminal law in the acquired lands.

If that weren't enough, in the 1680s—using indigenous people—the company raised its own army. It had, effectively, become its own country on the Indian mainland, administering Bengal, Madras and Bombay.

Reaching even further into Asia, the company founded Singapore (as a trading post) and Hong Kong. Its representatives established tea cultivation in India and employed Captain Kidd to fight against piracy. Elihu Yale (after whom Yale University is named) made a fortune from his interests in the company and, in the 19th century, its representatives held Napoleon captive on Saint Helena.

The scope of the company's influence was breathtaking. So was its economic clout. Its representatives found the 106-carat Koh-i-Noor diamond (one of the world's largest) in India, and for 150 years it has been part of the British Crown Jewels. In fact, until its independence in 1947, India was the most valuable country in the British sphere of influence and was often referred to as "The Jewel in the Crown."

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/EAST-INDIA-COMPANY-Vanity-Fair>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/EAST-INDIA-COMPANY-Vanity-Fair>



Portrait of Queen Victoria

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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A Portrait of Elizabeth I of England

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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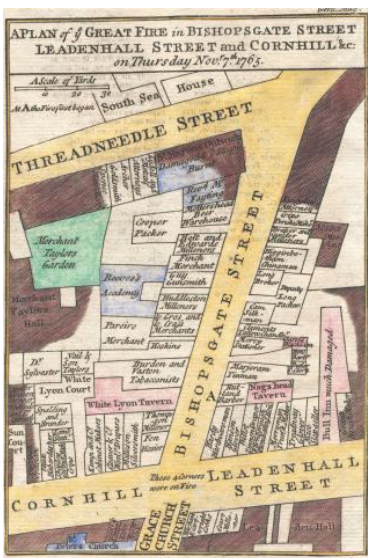


Map of Southeast Asia

Image online, courtesy the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

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London Street Map - East India Company

Image online, courtesy [London Ancestor](http://www.londonancestor.com) website.

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Map of Singapore

Image online, courtesy the University of Texas at Austin.

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Depiction of Captain Kidd

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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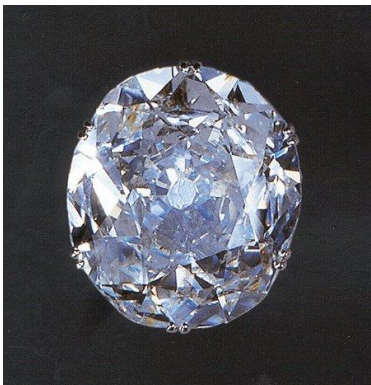


Elihu Yale - Portrait

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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India's Koh-i-Noor Diamond

Image online, courtesy the [Famous Diamonds](#) website.

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Koh-i-Noor Diamond - Part of the British Crown

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Victoria Becomes Queen at Age 18

Clip from *Kings and Queens - Victoria, 1837 - 1901* (2002). Online, courtesy BBC and YouTube. Copyright, 2 Entertain Video, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the series.



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