

Lascars East India Company Historical Story



History



Lascars

East India Company

Historical Story



Before the story of the Lascars comes the story of the East India Company.

The East India Company began in 1600, when Queen Elizabeth I was on the throne. Before her reign, England knew little about far-away lands across the sea.

That was about to change. Mainly thanks to someone called Francis Drake.





The adventures of Francis Drake could fill many stories, but here's what concerns the story of the Lascars:

Francis Drake sailed one of the earliest English slaving ships.

Francis Drake sailed across the seas to the Caribbean and captured Spanish treasure.

Francis Drake was sent on a secret mission by Queen Elizabeth I to plunder the Spanish colonies (in 1577).



Francis Drake thought he could then just sail east to go home. Back then, there were no good maps (never mind Google Maps, GPS or Satnav). Of course, he found the entire continent of America in the way.

So instead, he sailed south again until he reached the islands we now know as Indonesia.





Francis Drake eventually sailed back to England bearing captured Spanish treasure and stolen spices.

Queen Elizabeth I gave him a knighthood. That was when he became *Sir* Francis Drake.

The English hailed him as a seafaring hero.

The Spanish and Portuguese called him a pirate.

We have no record of what the poor people in those first slaving ships said about him...

Now that's enough about Sir Francis Drake.

What's important to the story of the Lascars is that the English now knew about the wonderful silks, spices and treasures that lay across the sea.



On Wednesday 22nd Sept 1599, so the story goes, a group of merchants met up. They thought they, too, could sail to the East Indies, get hold of the silks and spices – and make a lot of money. They each put in £30,000 (over £4m in today's money!) to set up a company.

Then they had to ask for Queen Elizabeth I's approval. She kept them waiting, but on New Year's Eve 1600 she eventually granted them a Royal Charter. They named their company, the "Honourable Company of Merchants of London Trading with the East Indies". This became known as the "East India Company".



The Royal Charter meant that the East India Company was the only company allowed to trade in the part of the world that the English called the East Indies.

If anyone else wanted to trade there, they had to get a licence from the East India Company.

If they didn't have a licence, the East India company took their ships and cargo. They gave half the proceeds to the Queen, and they kept the other half.

The founders of the East India Company grew very, very rich.



The East India Company's search for riches took them to the shores of India.

There they met seafarers from places such as Bengal, Gujarat, Malaya and Persia. The Persian word for "army" was "Lashkar".

The English, Spanish and Portuguese came to call all non-European sailors the "Lascars".

The Lascars began to work for the East India Company (as well as for the Spanish and Portuguese).



The rise and fall of the East India Company and the wars with its Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch rivals helped shaped the world we know today.

But all that is another story.

This story is all about how the people we came to call the Lascars met the people from the East India Company, over 400 years ago.