

EAST INDIA COMPANY FACTORY RECORDS
Sources from the British Library, London

Part 6: Bombay, 1669-1710

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Publisher's Note

History of Bombay

Bombay is now known as Mumbai and is a thriving cosmopolitan city, the centre of the Indian entertainment industry.

Bombay was originally situated on seven islands separated by swamps which were captured by the Portuguese in the mid sixteenth century. They established a trading centre and called the place Bom Bahia meaning Good Bay which the English pronounced as Bombay. By 1626 they had a large warehouse there together with a friary, fort and ship building yard and a variety of goods were traded such as silk, muslin, chintz, onyx, rice, cotton and tobacco.

Bombay was attacked by the English in 1626 during the war with Portugal but it was not until 1662 that England acquired Bombay as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza who married Charles II of England. In 1668 Charles persuaded the East India Company to rent the islands of Bombay and within a few years the Company had transformed the port with a new quay, warehouses and customs house. Houses were built, causeways created to link the islands, and forts and a castle, a church, hospital and a mint established. In the 1670's there was conflict between the English and local Mughals. Peace negotiations were successful, but only after the deaths of many and the destruction of plantations and houses.

However, by 1675 the population was around 60,000 and in 1687 the Company made Bombay their Indian headquarters. The EIC built up a large fleet of ships called the Bombay Marine (known later as the Indian Navy) which protected the population and brought peace to the west coast of India. Foreign competition, particularly with the French and the Dutch, meant that the EIC set up its own military and administrative departments. The British government began to regulate this more closely by the end of the eighteenth century, starting with the Regulating Act of 1773. The EIC lost its monopoly in 1813.

As a result of these measures the EIC's trade diminished but Bombay continued to grow and became known as "The Gateway to India". Trade increased not only in local goods but also those brought from other parts of India and beyond. Raw cotton was shipped from Bombay to England and in 1854 the first cotton mill was opened in Bombay.

The city's swamps were completely filled in and by 1845 the seven islands had been turned into one large town. In 1853 the first Indian railway was opened stretching from Bombay to Thana. The city continued to grow until by 1991 there were over nine million inhabitants.

In 1995 the city changed its name to Mumbai, after Mumbadevi, the goddess of the deep-sea fishermen who originally lived on the islands before they were driven out by the East India Company.

Factory Records for Bombay, 1669-1710

The Factory Records for Bombay held at the British Library, London cover the early period of the factory's history and the period from 1687 when Bombay replaced Surat as the headquarters of EIC trade in India.

The Bombay factory (trading centre) assumed a supervisory role over the factories around the Persian Gulf and on the Red Sea coast. However during the eighteenth century EIC trade on the west coast of India began to decline and Bombay's importance as a centre of trade decreased as Bengal and Madras increased in importance.

The factory records for Bombay, 1669-1710 are divided into the following types of document.

Consultations, 1670, 1672-1681, 1684-1686, 1696-1700, 1702-1704

These records give day to day details of the discussions and subsequent actions taken by the Council of Factors at Bombay concerning a wide variety of topics. The names of those present at the consultations are listed such as Henry Oxinden, who was Deputy Governor of the Council, Mansell Smith, Francis Day and John Thornigold. Very brief summaries of the topics can be found at the side of the pages together with an index at the beginning of the volumes. Subjects discussed include:

- Details of ships' cargoes unloaded at Bombay including muskets, swords, nails, copper and also goods to be loaded
- Details on the provenance of ships arriving at the port
- Details on goods to be carried by ship to Surat
- Details on goods to be sent to London
- Instructions to captains of journeys to be made, for example a voyage to the Mughal of Janeah with a gift of 200 rupees to encourage him to begin trade with the EIC
- Petitions from local merchants
- Instructions for frigates to be sent out to deal with pirates in the Malabar area
- Wages and expenses to be paid to factors
- Resolution of problems with the local population
- Orders for regulating local goldsmiths
- Details for the establishment of new local factories
- Rents of farmers and taxes
- Customs duties
- Tobacco markets
- Garrison reinforcements
- Instructions regarding meetings with local envoys
- Details on the expenses of the factory
- Appointment of new factors

- Disposal of unsold goods in the warehouses
- Also included are papers relating to disagreements between Deputy Governor Henry Young and his subordinates, 1669 and a diary of events during the siege of Bombay by the Sidi from February 1689-June 1690.

The following is an extract from a consultation for 1675 which shows how the factors attempted to deal with grievances from the local people:

"The President having ordered the Moores to choose among themselves five People of their Owne Cast and Religion to be representatives of the People to make knowne unto the President and Councill any publique grievances and quarrels among themselves and follow and bestowe such order and instructions as shall be given to them and they having this Day brought in the Names of the following five...."

Copies of letters despatched, 1670, 1672-1682, 1694-1704, 1708-1710

These letters were despatched to London and to captains of EIC ships from the factors at Bombay. Letters written from Bombay to Surat are also included. The letters contain details such as:

- Instructions to captains of ships on goods to be carried to London for example diamonds, pepper, raw silk, Persian rugs
- Lists of papers sent with the ships including invoices, bills of lading and records of accounts
- Details on the activities of French and Portuguese ships
- Accounts of attacks on Surat by local chiefs
- Pirate activities
- Trade in the Persian Gulf
- Details on the arrival and departure of EIC ships
- News on the activities of English troops in the area
- Damage to ships caused by monsoons
- Wages and pensions of factors
- Inventories of the stores at the factory
- Details of the goods carried to Surat including pepper, cloth, coffee, Persian rugs and treasure
- Advice on how to bargain with the merchants at Surat for the purchase of goods such as indigo
- Details of negotiations with local Mughals
- Details of damage sustained by goods due to adverse weather
- Licences given to local merchants to sell liquor
- Instructions to search for runaway soldiers
- Accounts of attacks of plague within the Portuguese community
- Details of slaves belonging to native chiefs
- The following extract dated 1699 shows that the factories were in constant threat of attacks by local Mughals:

"The Dutch have six large ships lately arrived Suratt from Batavia with a new commissary...and great things they will doe to the Moores if they did not deliver up...."

Copies of letters received, 1670, 1678-1682, 1694-1700, 1702-1704

The letters were received from London, Surat, EIC captains and Mughals such as Aurangzeb. Names of factors include John Gayer and Stephen Colt. The letters cover subjects such as:

- Details of departure and arrival of EIC ships
- News on the activities and strength of French and Dutch ships
- Problems with pirates
- News on factors such as ill health and deaths
- Details of the goods carried on EIC ships
- News on acts of violence perpetrated by local chiefs for example Canajee Angra
- Details of treasure carried on the ships
- Purchase of goods from local merchants such as pepper
- Details of stores held in the warehouses
- Decisions on which goods should be well stocked due to their popularity
- News from captains regarding voyages
- Wages and allowances of workers in the factories
- Negotiations with local Mughals
- News from the Surat factory

The factory records are an indispensable tool for researchers interested in the early trading networks in South East Asia. The next part in this series covers the factory records of the Cape of Good Hope.

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