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IN SERVICE OF JOHN COMPANY: LIFE IN THE ENGLISH EAST INDIA COMPANY IN ASIA (c1800s)

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By 1800, the English East India Company (EIC) was already a formidable presence in India, with factories stretching throughout Southeast Asia. Trade routes were relatively well known, and so too, the profits that some private trade could yield. What then, was it like to work for the EIC? What could one expect on a voyage out to Asia? How did factory life operate and why were some postings more desired than others? How were factory gossip and reports on the lives of EIC servants important in shaping careers and fortunes?

By asking such questions and examining sources from the EIC, including artefacts from the National Museum of Singapore's *An Old New World* Bicentennial exhibition, Dr Donna Brunero explores a deeper understanding of the EIC and the lure (and sometimes trials and tribulations) of a career in Asia.

TIME (MIN)	
0:00 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)	First of all, I'd like to say thank you so much for joining me this evening and thank you very much to the museum for inviting me to come along and speak. It really is a pleasure. Now, I have to say, I'm sure many of you know a lot about the history of the East India Company. I'm hoping today to bring, maybe, some slightly different dimensions to the fore. So, and I've created, I have a lot of visuals with this PowerPoint. Hopefully there's something that you like in terms of helping to illustrate life in the East India Company. Well, we can start off by just looking at the cover slide, the title slide. The image behind is actually the sales room of the East India Company House. So this is where you have the hive of activity which really dominated a lot of London's economic scene. So I thought it's a good way to sort of set the tone for today's talk. The other thing is, you notice I have noted in my title that it's the English East India Company (EIC). This might seem a little redundant but I had to take a step back because I would quite often just talk about the EIC and I realised actually it's supreme arrogance to just presume there's only one East India Company, right? There

	<p>are many East India companies. The English were one of many to have East India companies. You have the French, the Danes and Swedes; even the Portuguese had a run at having an East India Company. So this is why I specified the English East India Company. All right, so let's start. Now I'm a little all over the place here. When I saw that so many people were coming along, I got really excited and, at the same time, I got very panicky and I said, "Oh, I better have notes." So I look like I'm going to play a violin but, alas, no. So there are some notes here just on the side in case I lose my way. So just bear with me with that.</p>
<p>01:52 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Okay, so what I'm aiming to do, basically, with this paper, is to move away from the political and the economic histories of the East India Company because I think these histories are covered very often and, quite often, people like to focus on – when they look at the East India Company – the territorial acquisitions of the company; the way that it transformed from a commercial entity to a territorial and political power. In many ways, scholars tend to look at the East India Company and they say, "Well, actually, what you have is a company which creates the foundations for Empire – the British Empire." I think these aspects are interesting, but what I want to do with this presentation is actually look at everyday life; try and look at what it would be like working in the East India Company, what you may be able to expect. So again, moving us to a slightly different dimension for thinking about the company. Think this might be better. Now, the history of the East India Company is relatively well known. It was founded in 1600 or 1601. Queen Elizabeth the First, of course, granted a Royal Charter. Scholars often regard the East India Company as the forerunner to the modern corporation. So this is one of the things that you'll often see described. There's a BBC journalist, Amanda Ruggeri, who likened it to a modern multinational. She said it could be like Google or it could be like Amazon but, at the same time, it would hold a monopoly, the right to claim taxes. It had an army at its disposal as well. So just thinking about the scale and scope of this type of organisation. It seems difficult to fathom the company, the East India Company, in this way. But it certainly was an unprecedented entity. At the time, it was a new way of doing business and of establishing monopolies over new markets. As I mentioned previously, the company did not... it wasn't created in isolation. The English East India Company came about at roughly the same time other East India companies were also created. So there was a lot of competition to move into the Asia trade, in particular. Now, at its height, this company was so powerful that it was making loans to the British government, but when it ran into financial difficulties, it almost made the economy collapse as well. So again, thinking about scale and scope of this organisation was really quite staggering. Now, as it was a chartered company, of course, what it also has is the support of the Crown. So this, again, gives you an added dimension. It makes it a joint project of sorts. My colleague, Peter</p>

	<p>Borschberg has looked at this in some detail where he says you look at chartered companies and you realise they're joint projects. You have government, sociopolitical elites and the mercantile class all coming together and this is what you really see when you look at a chartered company. When it's a joint project, it means you're sharing the risks and also the profits. What the charter also meant was... you could call on the support of the Crown, which is quite important. Okay, and this is the crest of the East India Company.</p>
<p>05:28 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Okay, so let's start. These are some of the questions or some of what I would like to address today with you. First of all, I'd like to briefly set a bit of context, just thinking about the East India Company in England. So that's background. This is background, basically. Then, three, sort of key questions: how did you secure a job in the company? So how would you become a company servant like Stamford Raffles, for instance? What impressions can we gain of journeying when we think about journeying to Asia? What was it like to travel on an East Indiaman? So we'll try and have a glimpse of that. And then, what were some of the features of factory life? Because I think these are three quite important questions to ask about the everyday experiences if you are working for the East India Company. So what this does, then, is give us those insights into everyday life.</p>
<p>06:32 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Right, so setting the context...</p>
<p>06:38 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Here we have the East India Company in London. This is the first East India Company House I've put up here. So it was then referred to as the old East India Company House because there was a new one. But basically, the wealth, okay, the East India Company became known for its monopoly over goods, the way that it brought in tea, in particular, luxury goods, ceramics and spices and, of course, it is intimately connected to opium, as we know, the company. So it became known for bringing in goods, bringing in produce. It was the provider of luxury goods but also of necessities. And tea very quickly moved from being a luxury to a necessity; something that Britains drank on a daily basis. Wealth from the company mainly moved into London but elsewhere as well, throughout the UK, partly because of the company's relationships with domestic markets. It had manufacturers that it relied on for goods, for instance, and had links to the wider British economy. The company built a lot of warehouses so, basically, it had a lot of builders. It was constantly auctioning goods, so you have this constant flow of goods and funds. It basically drove the economy, in many ways, from when it was started. The companies served to... so as I was saying, it was a generator of employment. You had a lot of people working for the company, both in London and beyond. And also, what you have with this influx of wealth from the East India Company was a growing emergence of a new</p>

	<p>elite, and these new elite, self-made men who had made their money out of voyages with the company. And this is what we'll look at – how they managed to do this. But with the East India Company, there was always company trade, but company servants were allowed to conduct a certain element of private trade alongside. Now this private trade was always enough that, if you were fortunate, you could really set yourself up very nicely. So what it meant is if you were quite successful in the company, you could set up not just yourself but your family. So what you had, then, is this influx of wealth of self-made men buying properties, buying country estates, for instance, and they became referred to as the nabobs or nawabs, these sort of upstarts who had riches beyond those of regular merchants, for instance. Right, so you have this sort of newly emerging class and these are former East India Company men. So it's just thinking briefly about the impact in London itself.</p>
<p>09:37 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Okay. Now, this is moving a little bit onto shipping because shipping is quite important when you're looking at the East India Company and, of course, with my tendency to want to look at things that are maritime, I can't help myself. So I thought, okay, let's look at the dockyards just briefly, not for too long. This, the scale here, you can just see, gives you an indication of how the East India Company would have stimulated the growth of dockyards and shipbuilding. There are massive numbers of ships being built for the company throughout its history. If we're really looking at its history, 1600 right through to the 1850s. So it's a long time. You needed vessels to carry out trade; these vessels had to be able to carry sometimes bulky and large commodities. So there's a great stimulus to shipbuilding, thanks to the East India Company. You had shipwrights, you had carvers, blacksmiths, sailmakers, instrument makers and then, of course, you need the sailors as well. So you really have this sort of massive pull on the maritime sector. Now, the company had its own shipyards but over time it begins to just hire other companies – shipbuilding companies – to build its ships. Ships get larger; they go from around 700 tonnes up to about 1,500 tonnes in terms of the size of the ship. What's interesting, if you're thinking about shipbuilding, are quite often... from a distance, an East India Company vessel... and we'll look at one up close in a little while... quite often, they looked a bit like a naval frigate or a naval vessel. But there was a difference and this is because East Indiamen, East India Company vessels, tended to be narrower because they didn't have the considerations of cannons and recoil that a naval vessel would. So this is just one difference that scholars like to mention when they're talking about shipbuilding and shipbuilding techniques. One of the other things that I was thinking about... how long, if you're building ships... and you're building quite a large number of ships, from about eight ships a year up to at least 40 ships a year that are being built for the company... what happens to these ships and how long do they last when they're in service, right? So this might be something that I'm curious to know.</p>

	<p>How long do you think an East Indiaman would last, in service? What do you think? To throw it open to you. Ten years? Okay, that's one good answer. Someone else? 20 years. Okay, now that's too far over. That's very optimistic, I'd say. Ten years is actually very close. So anything from about eight years to ten years would be about right. Each East Indiaman would last just a few voyages. By the third voyage, on the return, this is when they would usually undergo a very detailed inspection because, by this point, they knew whether the timbers would hold up for further voyages or not. So usually about four to six voyages maximum. And each voyage takes about two years. So you think about it... and this is as long as the ship doesn't run aground, it doesn't go into a storm, there aren't problems with the timbers, for instance. So yeah, so it's about that period of time. And of course, then you wonder what happens to the ships after they're no longer of use, right? This is again interesting. You would think, oh there is a great market for these ships. And there was a great market in Asia but the company did not want their ships going back to Asia to be employed in private trade. So what they did was they broke the ships up. So again, something that perhaps you don't realise that this is what happened to the East Indiamen. They would be broken up. There were always willing buyers in Asia, but they didn't make it to Asia. Once it's not in service, it's broken apart. So again, thinking about the way the company operated is quite fascinating.</p>
<p>13:41 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Okay, so let's just have a look. Again, this is just setting a bit of background for you... This is a watercolour. This is the new East India Company House which, rather ironically, was built in the late 1700s, which is about the point at which the company goes through a series of major financial crises. Why on earth they would be building this at the same time? I think that's the company. This is why it's also known as "The Honourable Company". Okay. It was rather ironic. So it's in the late 1790s that you begin to have measures being put in place by the government to try and control this company, to try and put in some checks and balances, because it had shown itself to be engaging in wildly speculative trade and unstable financially. But they built this wonderful building right around this period.</p>
<p>14:28 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>And inside the building, now it's not 100 per cent clear, but you can see this was painted inside the dome of a roof, so you're meant to be looking up at it, right? And curved. I would say the artistic quality is not brilliant. But then again, I'm not an art historian. But I think what really we should pay attention to is the classical allusions. It's titled <i>The East Offering its Riches to Britannia</i>. So if that gives you a sense of what the East India Company saw itself as doing and providing, I think that's quite telling itself. What you can see is Britannia at the top. You can see Africa offering riches in a basket. China is actually here... figure of a Chinese woman with porcelain or a jar. There is a box of tea, a chest of tea, and right through the back you can see an East Indiaman. So the key to the East India Company is trade. The ships. Okay, there are a lot of classical</p>

	<p>allusions to commerce, to the oceans, and so forth. So it's quite amazing in terms of... you have to think of the mentality, the way that the companies saw themselves, if this is what they had commissioned in their main office, the head office. So could be inspiration for those of you who are in business, right? Think big, think big.</p>
<p>15:51 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Okay, so let's look really briefly at one of the first voyages just to get a sense of what the company... the way that it first ventured into the Asian market. Again, to give you a bit of background, the first voyages are actually quite tentative on the part of the East India Company. James Lancaster – I've got his image here – he was selected to lead the very first voyage. He had four ships that carried 100 cannons and 500 men. At least 100 men died during this initial voyage. So it gives you a sense of mortality rates. Basically, Lancaster was selected because he already had experience sailing to Asia. So this was really important, with this first voyage. It was a two-year round trip. He returned with spices and, in the process, what he did was set up a trading post in Banten. He didn't do so well with trading, actually. So what Lancaster engaged in was a bit of old fashioned piracy along the way to help himself. So this is where accusations that the company was sometimes nothing better than pirates – they were no better than pirates – it's actually quite true, in some instances, although they'd say, "Oh, it's definitely not us. It must be the Dutch or it must be the French." But quite often, the company would attack other ships, if necessary, to help themselves to whatever goods that they could then trade, for instance.</p>
<p>17:12 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>And this is where they arrived. So this is just thinking about that first voyage. So it just gives you a sense. The first voyages are actually quite tentative. You're arriving at trading centres and Banten is a great example of one of these trading centres. It was a great Asian emporium. There are many different merchant groups present within this trading centre and the British found, it was actually quite difficult to sell their English woolens which they had brought with them. So this is one of the classic problems that the company had initially, it was under charter, they had to carry certain English goods. And woolens just didn't sell in Southeast Asia. So you know when woolens don't sell, what do you do? You rob somebody else, get their spices and then you sell. So this is basically some of the ways that the company operated very early on, and Banten was the first place they tried to set up a base. So again, just thinking about... this is the first foray into a trading venture off the fleet that Lancaster had. Two ships were just laden with pepper and sent back very quickly. The ships made 220 per cent profit on their cargo. So initially... you know when you look at 220 per cent profit, immediately you have a sense of the wealth that this Asia trade could bring to England, right? Not just to the company. And between 1604 and 1613, the company made 11 voyages just for Banten. So you could see that initial interest was really in Southeast Asia, but there was a lot of competition, of course. And we know that the Dutch were extremely strong in</p>

	<p>the region. Now, Lancaster's first voyage, and this is the part that I find quite interesting, he sets off on this voyage. They arrived in Banten, they conduct trade. Then what he does is he leaves behind just three merchants and a few additional men to support them, to set up a factory. Now, I just thought to myself, imagine how those men felt when they saw the ships sailing off, right? Because this is not a time when you can just hop on the phone and call if there's a problem. There's no way to get home quickly. So if you're one of the chosen three, you know you may have two years to wait before you'll see another English vessel, right? So it really was a great act of faith and, in some ways, a certain amount of either courage or just naiveté to think that you would just stay there for a couple of years. And these factors, these very first, early factors found it very difficult... the trading environment was difficult. Of course, the weather, the conditions; they were not used to the cuisine, for instance. And then they kept being mistaken for the Dutch, which was perhaps the worst possible thing. So you have some suggestions where factors are saying, we suggest... perhaps we should wear stockings which will make ourselves distinguishable which, of course, doesn't really work. But you know they have this feeling that they need to be seen as different, right? They need to set themselves apart and there's a lot of suspicion as well with other European traders, right? So there's a lot of animosity, a lot of suspicion and this does boil over in several instances where there are massacres that take place, particularly the Dutch against the British, right? So it's a lot of violence between the two. So this is just thinking about it.</p>
<p>20:32 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>And part of it is captured in this extract. This is a factor in the East Indies. This is from <i>Nathaniel's Nutmeg</i>. I'll just leave you to read it. So what to say, this is a very broken-hearted factor. He really feels that he has been left without any of the grandeur or any of the acclaim that perhaps others are receiving; that he's really in this terrible predicament. So of course, yes, life for the early factors was very uncertain. Many were carried off by illness. Those who actually survived the voyage in the first place then found themselves encountering new illnesses thanks to the tropical environment and the climate. In addition, they had very tumultuous conditions on the ground. As I mentioned, there's a lot of tension with other rival East India companies and other trading communities. There are many reports that come in around this time – these early decades of the East India Company – talking about factors becoming mentally imbalanced; the stresses of the work, illness, very high stress and long isolation. So these were some of the environments in which they operated. Now for many of these factors, the salaries were very modest but their ambitions were high and, quite often, this is what made the difference in terms of conducting private trade, or this is what drove them to continue as company servants.</p>
<p>22:17 (Speaker: Dr</p>	<p>So while Southeast Asia was not so successful for the English East India Company, when they realised that the Dutch were just far too strong, what they</p>

<p>Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>did was they shifted their attention to the South Asian continent, so to India, and they found that this was much more successful for them to first gain a foothold and then to slowly build on this. So I won't go into too much detail, but they established themselves in Madras, in Bombay and they managed to secure a Bengal village of Calcutta, which would go on to become this great port. Surat was where they first had a factory in India. And I thought I'd put up this image. This is often described as the English factory. I put a question mark because in some scholarship it appears as the Dutch factory and it's basically the same picture. So you do wonder, how does that happen? It happens because the company didn't build this. This was originally a mint. They're allowed to lease it. So a wealthy merchant allowed them to lease it and after about three years when they'd made repairs, they were told, "Your lease is up. The Dutch are moving in," right? So this is often what happened. You had to cultivate favour with local merchants, with local rulers, and so the East India Company in this period – the 1600s and into the 1700s – is actually quite uncertain with its position in the Asia trade. It's really trying to carve out a position for itself. But it increasingly focuses its attention on India as the base for its operations.</p>
<p>23:57 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>And this is a wonderful picture that sort of captures something of this earlier period. And this was, again, the provenance of images... I know it's not great, but this is a photograph I took while at the <i>Artist and Empire</i> exhibition. It really caught my eye because here you have an East India Company officer. Look at the way he chooses to have his portrait painted. It really speaks to what the historian Christopher Bayly would call "an age of collaboration", an era in which there is an embracing of cultures. There's almost an idea of the English serving an apprenticeship of sorts; of learning how a trade operates; of learning about networks and commodities. But by the mid-1700s to the 1800s, this all shifts. The company is no longer so much a commercial entity as being a political and a territorial entity in India. So it really capitalises on Mughal decline and what you have is a hardening of views and along racial lines as well. So you don't see this sort of portraiture occurring in the 1800s anywhere near as much as in this earlier period. So I just thought it was really quite an interesting image.</p>
<p>25:15 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>So here we have... now you could see this is around the 1800s. This really gives you a sense of ports. Yeah, I've just pulled this out of a <i>World History</i>. Our library doesn't have a copy. I'm going to put in a request. I couldn't find it in our library so this is a screenshot... desperation... but I think it works. This gives you a sense of just how extensive the networks are for the company, where you have main ports. And the idea that ports are all in hierarchies. You have really key factories, you have subsidiary factories, you have the networks of flows in between them, whereas Singapore is not so much mentioned here. So this is a bit pre-1819. And, at any one time, you only have a few hundred factors operating in the Asia trade. But you have thousands of others, whether they're</p>

	<p>soldiers or sailors or in associated positions, right? So it's only a few hundred that are really representing the company as such.</p>
<p>26:19 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>So let's move on to 1800 and then I'll just delve into the three questions that I had. By 1800, you've got the company as both a territorial and a political power. So this is one way to look at it. It has a vast network – as I just featured – where you have factories and subsidiary territories. You have a very regular route that ships begin to follow. So whereas in the 1600s, and even into the 1700s, voyaging was a bit uncertain. By 1800, you had a pretty good sense of which ports you would stop at. So there is a real routine to where you stop if you're being sent from London to Calcutta, for instance. You have a much better sense of which routes are preferred, which ports are preferred for certain commodities, so it's a much more certain environment. There are still risks, of course, but there's much more certainty. And then what you have is a very extensive staff. So the company has really grown to, I think, perhaps, its largest extent. The EIC numbers really peaked. Scholars start to estimate it and they say, looking at the company, if you're beginning to look at those who are on the sea, those who are at home, those who are connected in domestic trades, and you begin to take some of the armed forces into consideration, you're looking at 90,000, 100,000. Then you have the East India Company army, which is another mass again. So you're really looking at very massive numbers that are, one way or another, connected to the company. So this is Huw Bowen that tries to run out the estimates looking at domestically and beyond.</p>
<p>28:04 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>So... this comes to a good question. Let's take a step back. So I've talked about voyages, I've talked about factors. How did you find work in the company? This would really be the question, right? Who did they employ? How did you get employed? Of course, they have a lot of staff. You have a lot of staff that are hired on a really temporary basis. So if you're guarding a warehouse, for instance, or you're working on the docks, you may be much more on a contract or hired – even on a daily basis – to pack goods, for instance. But those really elite positions? That's something else. If you were to become a writer – which is, of course, when you think about how most would want to start, it would be as a writer – you needed a personal recommendation from one of the company's directors. Now the interesting thing is, of course, directors had a certain number of recommendations they could give every year. This is where, you can imagine, it is open to all sorts of corruption, all sorts of distortion. Parkinson, who wrote a really classic work called Trade in the Eastern Seas, which was published in the 1930s, said that it was really admirably suited for any corrupt purpose. So this was his assessment. Actually, I think he's got something because, basically, directors had a certain number of candidates that they could nominate. And usually, it's the son or the friend of an acquaintance. But there was no real rigour in checking whether they had aptitude or if the candidate who was interviewed was, in fact, the person who started work with the</p>

	<p>company. So can you see how there can be problems there? So I was thinking about that and I thought, oh you might just have someone that interviews really well, and then you just put in your less remarkable son into the position, right? These are some of the things that happened. And some directors were much more blatant. What they would do is simply advertise that they had recommendations that you could then purchase. So again, this whole process... it's not like the present day where you send in your CV and see how you go. You really needed to know somebody and to be recommended. And it's generally the middle classes that were hired. Now one of the other really fascinating aspects was, okay, so if you're hired as a writer, you serve an apprenticeship, how could they guarantee that you actually stayed with the company, particularly if you were sent to Asia? Because it's really tempting to just set out on your own and to really launch into business, for instance. Part of the guarantee was that any new company servant was forced to pay a bond. The bond, at the time, was between 200 pounds and 500 pounds. So this is around the 1800s... estimate's, now, that's around 30,000 pounds. So this is a really massive amount. And usually friends, families and others would have to come together to put together this bond. So basically, the idea was then, it was a great deterrent, right? If you wanted to go off and do something else, you knew that the penalty would be extremely high on the family. So again, this is something to consider because, quite often, there are accounts where someone will start with a career in the company and then once they come into money, they abandon the company very quickly. A good example is James Brooke who becomes the first Rajah, the White Rajah of Sarawak. He started with the East India Company, only lasted a little while, because when his father passed away, he came into a lot of money. So he bought himself a ship and went off and you have the White Rajah of Sarawak as a result. So basically, he could afford to leave the company and have financial independence. So this is something that company servants sometimes looked for. So what made the company an attractive option for work? Because I've just talked about the voyages being a bit uncertain, risks at sea, life... you know, at least some of the dangers of being very isolated in a factory... One of the big attractions was the idea that you could conduct private trade and it really could be quite lucrative. The other aspect was company life often became family life. So a father would be in the company, then his sons would also be in the company, and it would set up the entire family in terms of employment and sustaining the family in terms of wealth.</p>
<p>32:33 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Okay, so let's look at travelling to Asia. This is the voyaging part. So here's one image of an East Indiaman. And if you go through the exhibition, <i>An Old New World</i>, you'll see some wonderful images of East Indiamen and they've even got some cross-sections, so you get a sense of just how they packed goods. I mean, one of the big concerns for East India Company vessels was how many</p>

	<p>cannons could you carry, as opposed to how much cargo. Because you wanted to be able to defend yourself but not too much because you needed to stack in the cargo, right? So there's always this tension. So this is an East Indiaman, just sort of a classic East Indiaman. As I mentioned, it can be used, maybe up to six voyages. Early voyages and actually many voyages could be arduous and quite often precarious. You were faced with storms, you could be becalmed, or you could be attacked by pirates. So these were all possibilities. Ships were battered with high seas and, quite often, supplies would run low. A round trip to the Indies could take up to 18 months – often much longer – just depending on the weather. So for a ship to be travelling around the Indies, and trading and then returning, it could take anywhere from two to five years. So it just depended on the particular voyage. So over its entire history, the company had 4,600 separate sailings. Only 231 of these sailings ended in disaster, where you have vessels being reported wrecked or damaged. You have a number that just disappeared at sea. So about 30 disappeared at sea, most likely falling victim to storms. So you do have an attrition rate. You also have instances of ships catching on fire, and this is something we can relate to, in terms of thinking about Stamford Raffles and his experiences when he was leaving Southeast Asia and the <i>Fame</i> catching on fire. So fires, definitely, were also a concern.</p>
<p>34:53 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Now, how can we trace some of the information related to voyaging? One way to gain insights would be through looking at journals of East India Company staff. And this is an example. This is part of the extracts of the journal. This is Robert Ramsay who was hired as an East India Company cadet. So he was going into military service for the company. His father was in the company and his brother was in the company. When Ramsay – he's quite a young man – he sets out from Gravesend, so from London travelling to Calcutta... The year is 1825 and he very diligently keeps a journal, which is great for me because then I can read it. I'm sure he wasn't keeping it just for me but it sometimes feels like that. So I found this journal at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. Amitav Ghosh, the author and scholar, has written about this journal as well, written about Ramsay's account of voyaging. And it's really quite fascinating because of the level of detail. And this one voyage alone, it's in the 1800s. It's sort of around the period that we're thinking about Singapore having... being created. Gives you a sense of what it would have been like voyaging to Asia. And, in this case, you've got someone who is voyaging for the first time. The other thing I have to point out is the handwriting is so fine, the penmanship. Thinking – seeing – that you're on a ship, this is pretty impressive. I've read exam scripts that don't look anything like that, right? So I usually tell my students, because they do sometimes... I've got some students here, but it's okay. Sometimes students do say in the exam hall, they say, “Oh prof, I'm not used to handwriting”, and I say, “Look, I imagine that it's been written on the</p>

deck of a ship." Get into the spirit, it's okay. But this is actually very nice, in terms of a cursive. It's about 150 pages, the journal, and it really gives you a lot of detail. What you get is a sense of the daily routine on board an East Indiaman. And actually, it's pretty dull. There's not a lot of excitement. It's part and parcel of life at sea. It can be mundane when it's day after day waiting for favourable winds, for instance. Part of Ramsay's big dilemma is how do you find space in your cabin? The cabins are small. He has a chest. He keeps packing it and unpacking it. He finds things go mouldy so he hires one of the fifers to help clean his clothing, for instance. So these are very much the experiences of sailing for long distances. Even the act of keeping a journal becomes really important, keeping the journal. And this is where historian Jeffrey Auerbach talks about it. He has a work called *Imperial Boredom*, which is quite fun to read. So he talks about empire and how empire could be tremendously dull. There's a grandeur aspect, there's adventure and, you know, those aspects of empire, but he says, "Yeah, but at the end of the day, empire could be terribly tedious for people." And I do like that comment because actually journals were sometimes a way of telling – recording – the stories about what you're doing, but also it was a measure of being industrious; of having the discipline to sit and write. Because even though you don't feel you've got much to write, the fact that you are sitting and you are writing shows that... demonstrate that sort of character and resolve. And I think young Ramsay, in some ways, likes to reflect that in his writing. Ramsay talks about all sorts of different things. Unremarkable days, threats at sea where they saw sails that they didn't recognise and they were told to get their weapons ready. But alas, nothing happened. The loss that he felt when a fellow cadet died during the voyage, and this was a young cadet who was also just starting out with the company and had actually boarded the vessel in London unwell. And he said, you know... and that lament that the family should not have encouraged him to go, because he just wasn't [feeling well] as the voyage continued. And then he talked about passengers experiencing severe seasickness and how some of them resolved – and these were paying passengers on an East Indiaman – they would just get off at the Cape and wait for a ship to take them home. They'd already had enough, right? So this was quite interesting. Part of Ramsay's preoccupation was preparing himself for ports of call. So preparing for ports of call. What he would do is look at which port he would be stopping at, and he would try and get hold of things like newspapers – anything he could find from other crew, other members on board the ship. What he would try and do is work out who was based at which port and whether he knew any of these names or whether he recognised them, because then you would have a list of who you should go calling on, who you should say hello to. So who do you make yourself known to, whenever you're stopping? He would try and get hold of newspapers and scour them for details of appointments. Once again, people who may have known his father, or who may know his brother, that he could then also leverage in terms of an

	<p>introduction. So it really shows you, in some ways, just through one journal, how much the company was about personalistic connections. It was very much about who you knew. And that really dictated a lot of your movement within the company. A parallel would be thinking about Stamford Raffles and the way that he writes, very frequently, to a number of influential figures. Quite often, this is the cultivating of contacts who would become patrons and would help your career. So let's just think here.</p>
<p>40:27 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>So again, thinking about this voyage, the Cape of Good Hope was absolutely the highlight of every voyage because this was one of the main ports of call by 1800. Smaller stops were fewer and fewer. Nearly every account that stopped at the Cape of Good Hope would talk about the foods that were available, what you could drink, and how sick it made you. I think this is... maybe Ramsay's journal is tilted a little bit that way because he's a young man. But yeah, there's this excitement about fresh fruit; how much you could eat until you really get stomach pains, whether you should buy a monkey or not. These are important questions that sort of came up. And what would you do with it once you bought it? Could you keep it in your cabin? You know, this is always the question. What do you do? The cadets were so excited when they saw Table Mountain that the captain had to admonish them for a lack of decorum, because they're basically fighting each other to get on board the smaller vessel, a smaller ship to get to shore. So you've got that real excitement to actually set foot on land and go exploring. So, and I've mentioned illness and boredom, so I won't go over that again. Part of the voyaging, as I mentioned, this journal writing you study as well. Partly what Ramsay is doing... and many other young recruits to the company would study languages while they travelled. The idea was it would equip you with some skills once you arrived in your designated port. So this was one of the things you were meant to do. Company men and company ships quite often carry books. And these were intended to be deposited at different factories, with the idea that factories would establish libraries. Now this seems great, that the company has such concern about reading material for its employees, but partly, it's an underlying concern about the moral welfare of company employees that are left alone for too long or left to be influenced by their surroundings. So the idea that you could provide them with adequate materials to occupy their time. Then when they were bored on board a ship, as I'm saying with boredom, what did you do? You staged performances, you had competitions and you engaged in a bit of natural history. They caught sharks and saved the jaw, for instance, saved the teeth. Or they'd haul up a bucketful of jellyfish to examine them and just tip them overboard again once they died. So it didn't make a lot of sense, but it was something that you would do to pass the time, but also to engage in natural history. I think it's in Ramsay's journal that there's mention of penguins being good eating. I haven't read that</p>

	anywhere else. So obviously you engage in a bit of trying, perhaps, things that you had never tried eating before.
43:14 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)	<p>Now, let's think further about some of the challenges. I've alluded to some. Ships... shipboard life is not glamorous at all. <i>Master and Commander</i> makes it look fantastic if you think about Russell Crowe. I'm a huge fan of that film. I watched it many times with my students, but it's not glamorous. The crews were cramped below decks. Cadets – it's not much better. Your diet would worsen as the voyage continued. You were really reliant on the captain to have a good sense of navigation, because sometimes captains would miscalculate. In Ramsay's case, they miscalculated and it cost them another week and a half at sea. So these types of miscalculations... they'd been tracking too far south, I think it was. So you do have this occurring. And really, this meant that your supplies of food and the type of food you received would sort of dwindle. You would only take on fresh fruit and meats, for instance, when you were at a port of call. Let's look at illness a little bit. Some voyages, some vessels, undertook journeys to Asia with relatively few fatalities. However, others were stricken with illness. The “bloody flux” was one particular scourge which, of course, refers to dysentery. And the company – and this is even from the early years – were very concerned about the high attrition rate and the welfare of the company men and of their crew. And this is where they turned to John Woodall who becomes the author of this book called <i>The Surgeon's Mate</i> which becomes really the go-to resource for any surgeons travelling on company ships. And so the company, quite early on, decides to appoint surgeons to ships. You find that the Scottish tend to move into this position, and there's sort of a running joke that the Scots dominate the roles of ship surgeon and assistant. So again, how people carve out a particular path for themselves. This guide was one that was used over many decades for treating diseases, for accidents on board ships as well. And Woodall also oversaw the provisioning of medical supplies. So every East India Company vessel would basically have a medical kit with it. Now this is... basically, you can see that the company is concerned about welfare. But there's the reality as well. If everybody dies, who's going to sail the ship? And there really is that concern that you needed such a constant turnover of crew. So what do you do? You try and keep them healthy at least, and try and keep them well. If you did fall ill, you did have medical backup, medical support.</p>
46:01 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)	<p>This is an example. This was basically one of the medical kits, talks about gentle reader. It gives you the uses of each of these instruments. I leave them to your imagination, but you can see the big amputation saw across the middle. Now this photograph... this image is from an exhibition actually, at the Maritime Museum in Perth... had this on display, and it was a whole exhibition called <i>Tough Medicine</i>. So and I thought that was quite apt. They didn't warn me. I went there after lunch and that was a bit like “ah”. That's something you really need to think through. But yeah. So basically, one of the things, if you fall ill at</p>

	<p>sea, surviving the cure was quite the challenge in itself. I think if you survived the cure, you are well on your way.</p>
<p>46:53 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>And that just points me to thinking about mortality in general. Disease, illness and injury were indeed all possibilities when you were travelling to Asia. When you faced long periods at sea, and relatively unknown and unfamiliar climates. And there are inscriptions in many, many graveyards around the port cities of Asia that speak as a testament to this. It's really a silent reminder when you think about the high mortality rates. And I've highlighted one. This is from Macau, from the Protestant Cemetery in Macau. This is one of Captain William Huddart, and they talk about him suffering from a long illness, a long and painful illness. And he died at the age of 24. So this, again, just gives you a sense of the way that a tribute to his suffering is etched into his gravestone. What it might also make us think about is, how long did it take for you to adjust to life in Asia and in the service? It was believed that it took you five years to acclimatise, but many company servants only lasted two seasons, only survived through two seasons. So you're quite lucky if you lasted two monsoon seasons, actually. It also brings to light the notion of promotion. How did you get promoted? Quite honestly, in some cases, it was just a matter of outlasting your fellow cadets. Really, when you look at it... because, quite often, if you've got this high mortality rate, you had to have, of course, some aptitude, but you didn't have to be brilliant, necessarily. You just had to outlast others around you.</p>
<p>48:32 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>So this is just thinking about some aspects. Let's now turn to factory life because this is the other thing that we're going to look at. Once you're in port, what does factory life entail? What I want to do here is just look briefly at what I would call any port. So it's a bit of a typology. Some factories were very large, as you can imagine, while others had just two or three company men present. They're much smaller operations and this would mean there's a massive difference between your experiences with... if you're in a big factory, or if you're sent upriver, for instance, or to one of the smaller factories, your experiences would be very different. What shaped factory life? This is something we might want to consider. The company directors were, by now, very far removed from you. So how could they really ensure what was going on? How were there any controls in place?</p>
<p>49:24 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>So a factory, basically, is a trading post where you have a number of company servants or factors residing. And basically, ordinarily, office work was light. You would normally work about three hours in the morning. You would have a long lunch. The long lunch was quite important. There were recommendations for the lunch. Usually, you were meant to have a good five glasses of wine with lunch and this was written in as a description of how one conducts oneself. So a good five glasses. I think you obviously needed to recover after that and you</p>

	<p>just come back and you'd work another three in the afternoon. So it's not a really onerous workload or schedule. However, once the ships arrive and you're filling orders, it's extraordinarily busy. So really, I think if you're in a factory, you would soon get a sense of the rhythm of trade, because during the era of sail, it's also dominated by the wind patterns. And so when ships arrive, there would be particular times that you know, at this time of year, it'll be extremely busy. At others, not so and you can really enjoy those five glasses of wine. Factories had a chief factor. He would have assistants then. The factory records would basically be a way of keeping a note of everything that was occurring within the factory.</p>
<p>50:44 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>This is what we'll have a look at. So this is an example of one of the factories at Cossimbazar. This is a smaller factory. It's basically related to... or it would report to Madras. So again, it's just an example of a factory. It's not really huge. Every factory would keep a consultation book. The consultation book was a record of all factory business. And the company has this very long tradition of record keeping. And as a result, there are millions of documents. Now one of the great things is that many of these have now been digitised. They are in a digital collection that you can access. I'm happy to send a link. I don't know if you can access all of it but certainly NUS, their library, has acquired some of the collection, and you can basically look at a factory, select number of years, and begin to look at their letters, the commercial transactions, descriptions of goods that they're trading and the prices that they're being traded at over the particular years. You have a record of some of the private trade of company servants, it's kept. You get a sense of reports of the relationships with other trading communities. And all of this is, basically, the company generating all of this information, because one of your jobs is to record everything, which would then be sent, quite often in duplicate, back to London. Quite often, there was a concern about security with documents as well. So if you're writing, say, a letter and you're providing information about the company, you would maybe make two copies, send one on a company vessel and one on another vessel. And this would be to double-check whether letters were being intercepted by rivals, for instance. But basically, when you're in a factory, life revolves around record keeping and reporting. And you're reporting on your fellow factors... it was also part of what you're doing. Personnel management, any misdemeanours... if someone is particularly drunk, for instance, their salaries would be something that is recorded. Complaints and petitions, particularly to move to other posts, is sometimes also recorded. So factory life was all about keeping records. And, of course, there's a record of sickness and of death as well.</p>
<p>53:04 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Now let's look at part of this account. This is quite a fun extract. This is a book that was published. It's basically written by a civilian and an officer, as you can see. It's written in the 1800s. It's basically a fun piece. It has a series of images – and I'll put up another one in just a minute – but it's basically a series... it's</p>

	<p>poems talking about the adventures of Tom Raw who was a “griffin” so, in other words, a newcomer, someone who really doesn't know much about life in the East India Company. And it's this sort of series of verses about his adventures and misadventures in company life. And there's part of the extract of the poem talking about if writerships are got, they thought a prize... So in other words, being the writer was the most prized position. Talking about cadetships now being what you could really expect, and going on talking about surgeons, that the Scottish, basically, are dominating that. So it gives you a sense of the type of poetry and it's page after page after page accounting Tom Raw's adventures. And you can see this is inside the front cover, but Tom Raw is just relaxing while he's being transported upriver. We'll see another image.</p>
<p>54:14 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Here he is, Tom Raw is presenting his superior with his letters of introduction. So again, it's very important in terms of who you know. But notice the references to class and status, and also to race. So you've got the copywriters also hired. And you've got a dog also featured, which is quite interesting, because in the journal that I was mentioning – the Ramsay journal – one of the things that cadets liked to do was to speculate in terms of investing in different things. When they stopped at the Cape, they would, quite often, buy animals. They would buy dogs because they knew they were in demand in India as pets and for hunting. So they would buy some dogs and hope that they would survive the rest of the voyage so then they could sell them. Surgeons, likewise, would do things like buy leeches because they knew that bloodletting was a popular remedy and they would try and transport barrels of leeches to sell. I think they were just selling a few pieces, just a few individual leeches at different ports. But this whole idea of what you bring with you... But this is just one of the images of Tom Raw.</p>
<p>55:19 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>And then we have two more. So the top one, you can see, with the tiger, is titled something along the lines of “Tom Raw realises that hunting is quite different in India.” And then, once again, he's making introductions and you can see a romantic interest sort of peeping through at the back there. And so, part of the poem is about his romantic adventures and misadventures in terms of who is a suitable match. So again, of course, life in the East India Company had all of these aspects to it as well. But really, it's quite an interesting volume to look at. So finally, the idea that working in the company was attractive because you could make a fortune is something for us to consider because the stories of these nawabs or nabobs really abounded. And it was one of the great criticisms of the East India Company – that you have these fabulously wealthy individuals coming back to England and just buying their way into society.</p>
<p>56:25 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>One example would be Thomas “Diamond” Pitt. He is, perhaps, the most famous example, because he made his fortune out of buying what was known as the Regent Diamond. It was a 400-carat diamond. And basically, this didn't</p>

only set up his generation but two or three generations of his family. So you've got Pitt the Elder and Pitt the Younger. This is the original Pitt that basically established the family as one of the big names in the UK. So he was someone who made his personal fortune out of being based in Madras. And through this trading of diamonds, in particular, but the one Regent diamond. There's another example which I don't have an image of... the cartoon I'll address in a minute. But there's an example of a company man called Richard Wickham who was based in Hirado. So this was a factory in Japan that was only open for a relatively short amount of time. It just wasn't a successful venture. His salary was never more than 50 pounds, annually. And yet, when he died, he left an estate of 1,400 pounds. And this, within the space of just a couple of years. So immediately, the company just tried to impound everything and investigate. And what they discovered was, although Hirado as a factory didn't do particularly well, Wickham was quite astute in business. So he was doing a great private trade even though the factory was not flourishing. So this is where you get the idea that personal fortunes could be made. And the cartoon that I have included here is one of Hastings, Warren Hastings, who was held up as really everything that was wrong with the East India Company and he was impeached. There's a very famous impeachment that takes place in the late 1700s. And they have him on a throne as a nawab and, basically, you have members of parliament and even members of the royal family grovelling around to collect whatever coins or whatever jewels he decides to offer them. So it's a great criticism of these excess of riches and greed that the company was often associated with. Okay, so finally, that's basically the end of my presentation, so I'll say thank you. Basically, what I've tried to do with this presentation is to share some insights into life in the East India Company. As I've been working on this, I've realised the more I get into it, the less I know. I think there is really a case for a book to be written on this and that's something that I'm really hoping to develop further as a project, because the only work that I could find was Parkinson's work which was written in the 1930s. So I'd say it's high time for an update, right, for someone to revisit it. And that's something I'd really like to do. I think journeying on East Indiamen, of course, was risky in the 1600s. By the 1800s, it's not as risky, but it's certainly not comfortable. It is a long voyage still. And what we're fortunate to have is this great tradition of record keeping within the East India Company which has allowed us to have a sense of what life was like in the company; what it was like travelling around the region. And what I think this presentation should help us do is to reflect, perhaps, more on the connections to Singapore. Partly because I've not really mentioned Singapore much, which was deliberate. Because I think we all know Singapore was an early East India Company base. We think about Stamford Raffles. But what does it mean for him to have been a company man? So I'm hoping what I was talking about today and the stories that I've shared might give you a better sense of what it meant to have a job in the company; what you could have

	<p>expected. And yeah, as I was saying, what it means to have been part of the world that was inhabited by Stamford Raffles and other company men. Okay, so I'll finish there. Thank you.</p>
<p>01:00:36 (Speaker: Vidya)</p>	<p>Think we're ready for questions while I get the mics.</p>
<p>01:01:04 (Audience)</p>	<p>In terms of the hierarchy between a factor versus a commander, what is the relationship and who mattered more? And the second question was, why was Thailand never part of the trade on any of these East India companies?</p>
<p>01:01:16 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Okay, these are really great questions and these are things I'm gonna have to think about. So a factor and commander, I think, definitely, there is a hierarchy between the two. The commander, quite often, had an investment in the voyage as well. So if you were the commander of a ship and you had a successful voyage, just one voyage would be enough to set you up for life. So I think the commander of the vessel could definitely dictate in terms of sailing times, turnaround times, what was happening. The factor was much more having to answer to, in some ways, in terms of are goods prepared, are goods ready, the condition of goods, for instance. That's something I think I would have to go into. I'd have to read more to really get a sense of the dynamic but, yeah, I think the commanders definitely could exert a fair amount of control over the sailing of the vessels. And definitely, if you're thinking about the factory, this is why, as I mentioned, factory life had its own routine until ships arrived and then they just scrambled. So this is partly the dynamic of the company wanting that turnaround very quickly and the commanders being the ones who could dictate that. And then you mentioned Thailand. I am not as certain about Thailand, actually, because when I was looking through the company records, you're right, there isn't as much mention of factories, but there were definitely some factories in Thailand, because I know scholars have worked on the Dutch and looked at the gossip within the factories, within places like Ayutthaya. I think, in the case of the English, they're just not as successful in Southeast Asia, full stop. So perhaps that's why I haven't looked at it as much. But certainly, I think it doesn't receive as much attention, partly because if you're looking at the case of Siam, you've got a very powerful ruler as well who could really dictate what happened. And from what I recall, I know there are stories of the Dutch, in particular, appealing to the ruler and basically having to wade out into the river and hold up the petition on a piece of paper like everybody else and just hope that the royal barge would come past and collect it. So really, the hierarchy and the power structures are quite different. But it's something I would definitely want to look into more.</p>

01:03:31 (Audience)	Yeah, I feel like there's a lot of talk about the East India Company having this sort of like – what I imagine is – an extremely large, mercenary army, like J. G. Farrell talks about in <i>The Siege of Krishnapur</i> in sort of a novel form. What I'm curious about is, where did the Royal Navy and the English army end, and this very large military force that was apparently at the beck and call of this private entity began? Like, was there overlap? Like, how did that work?
01:04:05 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)	Another really good question. I think there is overlap. And the overlap, I think, you do have navy vessels accompanying company voyages, for instance, or escorting them, in some instances. You've got some accounts that I was reading, particularly when you begin to have company wives travelling and they're really upset because they've got regular soldiers on board the vessel. So you do have companies of soldiers that are also being sent out. The East India Company, of course, builds its own massive army. But over time, they begin to bring in more English soldiers, right? But all of this, I think, also transitions after the 1850s and you really do have more English troops being brought in. I think that's the best answer I can give for the time being, but once again, something I might need to look into a bit more, because I think even Ramsay talks about the real hierarchy on board the ship – that you have your regular sailors, then you have the lascars – who are the Indian sailors that are hired and working on nearly every East India Company vessel... but then you have naval representatives as well, either some officers or crew, so you do have a bit of a mix between the different forces, I think. And I guess, travelling for different reasons, possibly.
01:05:27 (Audience)	I was reading John Key's <i>The Honourable Company</i> a couple of months ago and he speaks of how the company's operations were financed by multiple rounds of partnerships, which raise capital which was sent to the east and then the profits were repatriated back to Great Britain. But what I couldn't get a sense of was, what kind of dividends or charter payments were made to the Crown?
01:06:00 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)	I think this is where... at the company itself... was different. It's profiting. I would... again, this is something... you're asking really tricky questions. In terms of how much is given to the Crown... I mean, massive loans are given to the crown, definitely. Whether they're ever repaid is another thing. Most likely not.
01:06:19 (Audience)	So they were loans, not some kind of a tax?

01:06:23 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)	No, it was given as a... because it is usually described as the company loaning to the Crown.
01:06:32 (Audience)	Okay, so yet, sovereigns had the highest credit rating. Triple A. Nobody paid their loans.
01:06:38 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)	Yeah.
01:06:53 (Audience)	Thank you. A question on the employees themselves. So I believe Stamford Raffles started work when he was about 14 years old, if I'm correct. So if these young men did not die of disease or died at sea, until how old would they continue work? And would they be posted, like some expats today, to different port of calls or factories? And, in the end, would they end up working at the head office back in London?
01:07:25 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)	This is... great questions in terms of thinking about trajectories of careers. Definitely, you could work for many years within the company. There was one case where they talked about a commander, someone who worked his way up from being a sailor to a commander of a vessel and having quite a long career in the company, being involved in something like ten or 12 voyages. You're looking at 20 years, 24 years. So you could look at quite long stretches. Definitely, very long stretches and you would be able to... you may retire back to the head office, so to speak, or you may have made enough money that you didn't need to do that. And, quite often, you could set yourself up as a country gentleman. And definitely, within the company, you would rotate or you would move to different places, because this is why, I think... and the journals are quite often looking at who you know, because an introduction could mean moving from a small factory to being able to go to one of the really big factories, which would just give you many more opportunities in terms of climbing the ladder. And in terms of the working age, you're right. It's actually quite young. This was very standard at the time, to start as an apprentice around the age of about 14 or so. So actually, quite young and I think Ramsay, when he's travelling, is about 17. So he's already served a bit of time, but yeah, relatively young. You're looking at relatively young men when they're travelling.
01:09:00 (Audience)	Thank you for the very informative talk. I'm really interested in the personal life of the sailors. So, in comparison, maybe with his Royal Navy counterpart, was it a good alternative? Or was it maybe even better to be a company sailor, company cadet, as compared to a warrant navy or army cadet?

<p>01:09:25 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Oh, this I haven't really investigated too much, I have to be very honest. Usually when I'm evaluating this, I'm saying would it be better to be a pirate or to be in the navy? Because I teach a course on piracy. So I go through and break down what their trajectories would be and a pirate's life tends to win out. In this case, the company... I think conditions for sailors are generally quite tough. They're not great. Career progression is not fantastic. This is why it's quite rare instances to go from being a sailor to being a commander. It's quite exceptional. Because you also had to buy your way to a particular posting. So I would say progression in the Navy although the Navy was much harsher in terms of discipline and you could be pressed into service, which is the other aspect. Career progression... at least there was a sense that there was a hierarchy and you could, possibly, progress through the ranks. I don't think it's as clear in the company because when you're looking at the sailors and crew, they're quite replaceable. They are a bit expendable, in some cases, and that's why on board a lot of ships you've got the lascar sailors as well. And the lascar sailors are Indian sailors who are recruited regionally. They're seen as a cheap alternative. They're generally treated very differently from the rest of the crew so that's something I've looked at a little bit more. Generally, they're made to have lights out at eight o'clock. Everybody else can stay up later, I'm not quite sure why, but they would make sure they were all, basically, in whatever cabin area they were assigned to and they were forced to go to sleep early. There is this concern about security and safety. If you have these sailors on board, that they may cause problems, basically. Okay, thanks. You're all giving me good questions of what else I need to work on. As I was saying, the more I read and these questions, obviously, you could have been giving this talk, I think.</p>
<p>01:11:17 (Audience)</p>	<p>Thank you very much for your talk tonight. In the book <i>Nathaniel's Nutmeg</i>, one of Lancaster's sailors, they were pretty naive, but they learn pretty quick the value of the cargo that they were transporting. And in the case of nutmeg, from the nutmeg island in, I think, it's Banda Island in Indonesia, they could just take a pocketful of nutmeg and if they could secure that back to England, they could make a fortune. It was like gold. But somehow that, I believe, originally was a Dutch territory, but then it became an English territory because it was involved in the trade within the New World. The colony of New Amsterdam was traded and that's how New York became British. And I wondered if you knew that story. And you know, what the background of that story was.</p>
<p>01:12:20 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Well, I know part of the story. I've also read some of <i>Nathaniel's Nutmeg</i>, which is a great account, actually, of those early East India Company voyages. Definitely, there's a lot of negotiation that goes on between the different powers, so yeah, I think that story is great in terms of thinking about... the other aspect is the riches that you could make. There are all these sort of fairly apocryphal accounts about checking that company men had their pockets sewn up, so you couldn't actually sneak things into your pockets and therefore go off and sell it.</p>

	<p>Whether this is really true or not, I'm not sure. But you're right. A small amount of some of these commodities could really set you... well, at least give you a nice addition to your income. And definitely, there's this whole idea of securing certain commodities or certain trade routes in exchange for other territories. It's something that the East India companies all engaged in and negotiated. I mean, part of the reason they're chartered companies... they have the ability to negotiate this type of level in terms of most acts of statecraft, when you think about it.</p>
01:13:25 (Audience)	<p>Did the British East India Company or any other East India Company hire any women?</p>
01:13:35 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)	<p>Okay, there isn't much mention actually. There are definitely company wives, so there are women that are travelling because their husbands are in the company. There isn't so much discussion that I have come across to this point of women specifically hired. You may have women acting as washer women perhaps, or preparing food, you know, this type of thing. But in terms of on board ships or things like that, not so much at all. It's only really company wives. And even then, when I've looked at some accounts, I tended to think that company wives and daughters would just travel out on an East Indiaman. In fact, it was quite restrictive – the travel conditions for women – because it was seen as unseemly and inappropriate for them to be up on board the deck too often. So maybe, once every couple of weeks they would come up, and they would usually be chaperoned to walk around on board the deck, just in case they met someone who was unsuitable. So basically, they spent most of the time in their cabin sewing and reading. So I realised that if we thought it was boring for Ramsay, for a woman travelling in the 1800s, it would have been tremendously boring, unless she really liked her embroidery.</p>
01:14:46 (Audience)	<p>Thanks, Donna, for inviting us to the talk. It was very interesting. At the beginning of your talk, you talked about shipbuilding and, you know me, that's probably... I'm very interested in the military aspects of this and one thing I thought about was naval stores. So hemp and pitch and sail, timber, things like that... Did the East India Company, being a corporate body, want to keep its overhead low and then arrange to have special deals with those companies, to say, in the Baltics or later on in the Americas, that provided that kind of naval stores? Did they forward deploy people there to manage the purchase of those, or did they merely piggyback off the Royal Navy for those kinds of things?</p>
01:15:31 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)	<p>I think they tended to piggyback, from what I've looked at. They did try to piggyback because building an East Indiaman was relatively more expensive. When they sort of costed it out, it did cost more. So if they could try and leverage on anything that was going on, they did. They also had their own dockyard which they built in Bombay. So they started to build some dockyards</p>

	elsewhere to attend to ship repairs, for instance, to try and keep the costs down. That's as much as I know. But once again, I think I really need to look at the navy a bit more. I've been dodging it a bit because I'm not so... I'm comfortable with the maritime and the imperial, but once I start talking about naval history and military history, I feel, for me it's another leap I need to make.
01:16:11 (Audience)	It's interesting because you said that over their history was 4,600 voyages or something like that. That's a lot of ships to be built, but it's also a lot of ships to be repaired. And those kinds of repair and building materials aren't available everywhere. They're only in certain geographic locations. And I just wondered if maybe they had special relationships with providers.
01:16:32 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)	Well they certainly had companies that were working for them, so they had preferred companies that were helping with repairs, for instance. So I think there are at least a dozen companies that specialised in East India Company ship repairs. And they could work on up to about five or six ships at any one time. So you did have companies that made their entire livings out of just repairing EIC ships, East Indiamen.
01:17:00 (Audience)	Yeah, you're right. The questions are amazing, aren't they? They are such a knowledgeable audience.
01:17:05 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)	Yes, I think we should have maybe another session so I can answer some of them properly.
01:17:08 (Audience)	Just really a couple of observations and one question. A gentleman there was talking about the East India army. I did read somewhere that, at one time, it was actually larger than the English army. <Dr Brunero> Yes, it was the largest standing army. <Audience> And it was also, I know you're not talking about the military and the economic and political but it was very much seen as a hedge to Russian potential invasion into the stance, and really coming down into India which was always a big concern of the British and there's a number of books written about that. And I do think there was some overlap because, I may be wrong, but I remember that Gordon in the cartoon had actually made his fortune and a name in India. And now whether he was actually in the army... I got a feeling he was actually in the East India army... so there was a crossover there and he was also in China as well, I believe. What I'm actually interested in – and I suggest may be an indication of the tremendous impact of the East India Company and these people becoming nabobs and very wealthy – is Jane Austen, in her novels, talks about, you know, Mr X who's come back and has basically built this gorgeous house and is fabulously wealthy after one trip to the East. And there's a lot of references in Bath and also in places like Edinburgh and you know those very rich towns at the time and the way they were built. I

	<p>know Bath goes back to the regent prince and everything, but there was a lot of money, in certain areas of England, that came from trade to the East, as well as the slave trade and whatever. They were fabulously wealthy to have built and designed what they did. There's an area in Dundee called Broughty Ferry which was basically more millionaires... the wealthiest people in the whole of Britain lived there. And it was all on the jute trade out of Calcutta. Now I don't quite know the connection between the East India Company and that. So I suppose my question is, I hope somebody, at some time, would actually do some investigation into how these riches actually changed the fabric of British society. Because I think we live amongst it and don't understand it. And in many ways, the East India Company and these people have really, almost unexplored the impact that they've had in England.</p>
<p>01:19:46 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>I think this is a great reflection and very good comment, actually. There is one book called <i>The East India Company at Home</i> which looks at the material culture so it looks at some of the grand houses. And I really didn't have time to go into it but maybe one time I could come and actually just give a talk on that. Because company family is not just... company men would commission certain furniture to be made. So ivory, in particular. There were certain tables... so you would have ivory pieces commissioned and displaying those in your home would be a sign of someone that had worked in the company. So they're really sought after and they would be really displayed and handed down from generation to generation. You could commission ceramics, for instance, with a family coat of arms. It was a very common thing to have these massive platters and I think the Asian Civilisations Museum displays some of those here in Singapore. So definitely, you do have... and you do have scholars who are looking at it. And so that book called <i>The East India Company at Home</i> really tries to trace the country homes, the material culture in terms of furnishings, the ivory trade... they look at fabrics and the way that you have this sort of... certain fabrics are identified as being usually preferred by company staff themselves. And then you've got the rest that they were just selling. So they set themselves apart in terms of the types of fabrics and where they were sourced from. But that was already... it was immediately a telltale for a visitor to their home to know that they'd worked in the company. So you do have that material culture aspect. And then, of course, you've got the tea consumption, which has become, you know, synonymous with being British, with all things British... is drinking tea, but the company, of course, is behind a lot of that in terms of tea production and bringing it into England. Sorry, I realise I've held you all here for much longer than was intended. So thank you so much.</p>
<p>01:21:54 (Audience)</p>	<p>If Donna is okay, then one more question. Thank you also for your lecture tonight. Very, very interesting. From a corporate standpoint, you mentioned earlier, part of the attraction – especially in the early days of the East India Company – was the allure of riches and quick wealth; the ability to make money</p>

	<p>very quickly and come back and have a country life. My understanding was that, in the later years, the East India Company kind of clamped down on that a little bit, in terms of being able to control it, both because I think they were losing a lot of profits, but also in terms of some of the local relationships as well. So my question is, as they clamped down on these things, looking at the types of employees that they attracted early on, in terms of the quality of employees... I know that a lot of positions were obviously bought, it was who you knew and so forth... but when the allure of riches maybe wasn't as great as it was when the company first started, did the quality of the employees drop, from a corporate standpoint?</p>
<p>01:23:01 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Again, something I hadn't thought about so much. I could see that, from the company viewpoint, they might feel that it does. But then, perhaps, by the 1800s, you're beginning to see a different type of person attracted to the company. Because if I think of someone like Stamford Raffles, you're beginning to see this sort of dawning of people that see themselves as company men but also as intellectuals, the scholars. So you do begin to have an influx of not just your usual recruits but perhaps those with greater ambitions – not necessarily for personal wealth – but there is definitely ambition in terms of extending a British reach, for instance. So I don't know if that's really answering it, but I can see what you mean. When they tried to clamp down, there is a series of India acts, right, when they clamped down on some of the excesses of the company. And you do have reforms within the company that are taking place to try and restrict private trade. These are hugely unpopular. So of course, company men are still trying to conduct trade because this is the way they were supplementing their income. And this is partly the way that the agency houses... Palmer and Co., for instance, who is considered one of the wealthiest private merchants... [was] operating. They made their money because company men deposit a lot of money with them and let them invest and speculate in the country trade, in the intra-Asian trade. So this is another way that the wealth wasn't necessarily going back to England all the time but circulating in the region. So yeah, that's sort of another aspect to consider, perhaps, that you've not just got the company but these private traders that had inserted themselves into the Asia trade. How that affects the quality of company men, I'm not sure, but I've sort of segwayed off your question a little.</p>
<p>01:24:41 (Audience)</p>	<p>I think the type they attracted may have been different. But also, the quality could have increased.</p>
<p>01:24:46 (Speaker: Dr Donna Brunero)</p>	<p>Yes, possibly. Very much so.</p>

About the Speaker

Dr Donna Brunero is Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at the National University of Singapore. She teaches courses relating to maritime history, imperial history and Singapore history. She is the author of *Britain's Imperial Cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854–1949*. With Brian P. Farrell, she edited *Empire in Asia: A New Global History, Vol 2 The Long Nineteenth Century*, and with Stephanie Villalta Puig, she edited *Life in Treaty Port China and Japan*. Her research explores the intersections between maritime and British imperial history in Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries.