

[Home](#) > [Gallery](#) > [Case Study](#) > Background[Search this exhibition](#) [Print](#)

## CASE STUDY 3 BACKGROUND: THE RISE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN INDIA

- [The rise of the British empire in India](#)
- [Links](#)

### ⚙ **The rise of the British empire in India**

India, a densely populated place with long established civilisations, had a long history of contact with Europe. The main contact between Britain and India was in trade. This really began to develop during the 1600s, when the East India Company was created, a private company owned by wealthy and important figures in Britain. The Company had a monopoly of trade between Britain and Asia. The main goods traded were cotton, silk and tea. However, spices and gems were also important commodities.

#### **Image 1**



Extract from 1857 showing the lands that Britain controlled in India by that time  
(PRO ref: FO 925/2575 pt2)



The officials of the Company were almost like the rulers of a country. The Company had its own armed forces and could negotiate treaties. They worked closely with some Indian rulers, often helping them in their arguments or wars with other rulers. Throughout the 1600s and 1700s they took control of more and more Indian lands. In 1639 the British established control of Madras. In 1661 they gained control of Bombay - a very important port and trading centre. In the 1690s the Company established and developed the port of Calcutta. From there British influence and control spread into the rich territories of Bengal.

As in North America, they had to fight with the French for power and influence there. The rivalry between Britain and France reached its peak in the 1750s in the Seven Years War. This was a complicated war as the French and British fought with each other, but they also allied with local Indian princes who fought each other as well. In 1756 Britain briefly lost control of Calcutta to the local Nawab (ruler) of Bengal but General Robert Clive recovered it in 1757. The decisive battle between the British and the French was at Wandiwash in 1760. The British victory at Wandiwash cleared the way for Britain to become the main European power in India.

#### **Image 2**



General Clive of the British East India Company gaining the right to collect taxes in Bengal in 1765  
([The British Library](#): Foster 29)

The British took full advantage of this. By the 1780s they had a lot of influence over all of the rulers of the southeast coast of India. They also ruled Bengal. Bengal's large population and wealthy princes offered tremendous opportunities for the British East India Company and they built up their wealth and their military power there. By the 1780s the Company employed 15,000 British troops and over 70,000 Indian troops.

There is a lot of debate about how the British were able to gain the power and influence they did, because many of the Indian states were extremely well organised and powerful. Britain simply did not have the resources to invade India and conquer it by force. However, British leaders were very effective in choosing which princes they allied with, and which ones they fought.

#### ⚙ **Links**

Spartacus Web site

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/LONeast.htm>

Useful information and a few sources on the East India Company

Internet History Sourcebooks

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/index.html>

This website has an Indian Sourcebook with a very difficult but interesting collection of documents on the history of India from ancient times to the present



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# BRITISH EMPIRE

## The rise of the British empire – India



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### Background source one

Extract from 1857 showing the lands that Britain controlled in India by that time  
(PRO ref: FO 925/2575 pt2)

**CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE**

OF THE

VARIOUS ACQUISITIONS MADE TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

**IN INDIA.**

*Compiled from Parliamentary Returns, and other Official sources,  
and from documentary evidence and other Official sources.*

	Date of Treaty	TERRITORY.	Acquired from.
Acquired by Lord Clive.	1	1661	Bombay ... .. Portuguese.
	2	1756	Bankote, &c. ... .. The Peishwah.
	3	1757	Twenty-four Pergunnahs, &c. ... .. Nabob of Bengal.
	4	1759	Masulipatam, &c. ... .. The Nizam.
	5	1760	Burdwan, Midnapoor, and Chittagong ... .. Nabob of Bengal.
	6	1765	Bengal, Bahar, &c. ... .. The Mogul.
	7	1765	Chingleput... .. Nabob of Arcot.
	8	1766	Northern Circars ... .. The Nizam.
	9	1775	Zemindary of Benares ... .. Vizier of Oude.
	10	1775	Island of Salsette ... .. The Mahrattas.
	11	1778	Nagore ... .. Rajah of Tanjore.
	12	1778	Guntoor Circar ... .. The Nizam.
	13	1786	Pulo Pinang (Prince of Wales' Island) ... .. King of Queda.
	14	1792	Malabar, Dindigul, Salem, Baramahl, &c. ... .. Tippoo Sultan of Mysore.

[Top of page](#) | [Print](#) | [Close](#)

# BRITISH EMPIRE

## The rise of the British empire – India



[Print](#) | [Close](#)

### Background source two

General Clive of the British East India Company gaining the right to collect taxes in Bengal in 1765

([The British Library](#): Foster 29)



[Top of page](#) | [Print](#) | [Close](#)