



Japan and Clyde Shipbuilding

From the 1860s onwards, Scottish shipyards had many orders from the Imperial Japanese Navy. In order to facilitate the contracts for these ships, the Japanese initially required the services of British intermediaries. One such intermediary was A R Brown (1839-1913). Brown started his career in merchant shipping, working his way up the ranks. In 1868, whilst he was chief officer with the P&O steamship company he entered the service of the Japanese government and helped to chart the coasts of Japan. Whilst Brown was in Japan he formed a marine bureau. This bureau created business for several British shipyards, the majority on the Clyde, and dealt with negotiations with Japanese clients including the government. The bureau also took charge of regulations and trade matters.

In 1889, Brown founded A R Brown, later A.R. Brown & MacFarlane, a shipping firm that dealt with most of the orders for ships from the UK. Glasgow University Archives holds the surviving records for this firm. Brown received the Order of the Rising Sun from the Japanese Emperor for his services to the Japanese government and nation.

From the 1880s the Japanese Government wanted to transfer the skills, technology and knowledge of the West to the shipbuilding industry in Japan. It was intended that the Imperial Japanese Navy would use these skills and become self sufficient, no longer requiring the advice of the British Royal Navy.

The Japanese government was keen to place apprentices in British industrial enterprises so that they could learn practical skills on the shop floor. There were many examples of this in the shipyards of the Clyde. Most of these apprentices were also studying at the University of Glasgow, taking classes or full degree courses. Many of the Japanese apprentices were highly educated university trained engineers, naval cadets, naval engineering officers and high ranking naval officers.

Meiji Maru

In 1874, Brown returned to Britain with a contract to purchase two merchant steamers for the Mitsubishi company fleet. During this visit he despatched the *Meiji Maru*, a twin-screw steamer, designed for lighthouse work and constructed by Robert Napier & Co, Glasgow. It was built along sailing ship lines with auxiliary steam engines. He was then to engage the crew and contact agents in London for the payment of wages and bills.

This vessel has survived and is now a national treasure in Japan. It can be seen in dry dock at the Tokyo University of Marine Science & Technology, Etchujima Campus. One of its features is a magnificently decorated cabin designed for the sole use of the Emperor. In 1964, Brown & Macfarlane presented Tokyo Maritime University with letters about the maiden voyage of the *Meiji Maru* when they were invited to attend the retiral and restoration of the ship.

Asahi

John Brown & Co, shipbuilders of Clydebank, were awarded the contract for the *Asahi*, a war vessel, from the Japanese government in 1903. They appointed Captain Takayama in the same year as their agent for the sale of war vessels to the Japanese government. This appointment did not last long as the Japanese preferred to work through their own compatriots and a Japanese commercial network was soon available to them in London.

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Battleship Mikasa, commissioned 1902. Now a memorial ship in Yokosuka, Japan.



Launch of the battleship Katori, 1905



Painting of the Meiji Maru, launched in Glasgow in 1873.



The president of the Tokyo University of Marine Science & Technology accepts Hirobumi Ito's letter of instruction to Captain A R Brown to bring back the Meiji Maru, 1964.



Meiji Maru at the Tokyo University of Marine Science & Technology.



Battleship Asahi at the John Brown Shipyard, Clydebank, 1903.

