

**THE ORIGIN AND EARLY  
HISTORY OF THE RUSSIA  
OR MUSCOVY COMPANY**

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The origin and early history of the Russia or Muscovy company by Hakluyt Purchas

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**HAKLUYT PURCHAS**

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*With Mr Garrys compliments*  
THE

©  
ORIGIN

AND

EARLY HISTORY

OF THE

Russia or Muscovy Company.

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THE  
ORIGIN AND EARLY HISTORY  
OF THE  
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THE names of Cabot or Cabota are so interwoven with the Origin and History of the Russia Company, that a reference to the services and merits of these celebrated navigators, as connected with British discovery, and the opening of a trade between Great Britain and Russia, becomes a subject of curiosity and great interest. In the reign of Henry the Seventh, John Cabot, a Venetian, settled at Bristol, offered his services to this monarch, who commissioned him and his sons—Lewis, Sebastian, and Sanches, to discover unknown lands. In the year 1497, they discovered Newfoundland, and afterwards the Continent of America. Henry the Eighth succeeded his father, Henry the Seventh, but he so little encouraged such enterprises that, Sebastian Cabot, finding his services disregarded, offered them to

1497.

the Court of Spain, where they were joyfully accepted; and so successful were they, that he discovered the River de la Plata and made several fortunate voyages for that Government.

1553. On the succession of Edward the Sixth, Sebastian Cabot returned into the service of England, and in 1553, waited on the young king with a plan for attempting a N.E. passage to China and the East Indies. Sebastian Cabot was, at this period, so advanced in years, being about seventy-six, that he could not himself undertake the voyage, but he made the plan, drew the outline, and prepared the instructions for the expedition, which was undertaken at the expense and risk of a society of merchants who called themselves "The Mystery and Company of Merchant Adventurers for the Discovery of Regions, Dominions, Islands and places unknown."

The capital of this Company was £6000, divided into shares of £25 each, which entitled the subscriber to be a member of the Company. Sebastian Cabot, having been the prime mover in the undertaking, was chosen to be the Governor. The expedition consisted of three vessels:—

The Bona Esperanza	..120 tons..	Sir Hugh Willoughby.
The Edward Bonaventura	160 ,,	..Richard Chancellor.
The Bona Confidentia	.. 90 ,,	..Cor. Darforth.

Edward the Sixth patronized the undertaking



in every possible way, and gave a letter, written in different languages, recommending the expedition to the sovereigns of the countries they might discover or touch at.

On the 10th of May, the expedition sailed from Gravesend, and when off the North Cape a storm separated the vessels. Sir Hugh Willoughby, with two of the three ships, put into a harbour in Lapland, where himself and party were frozen to death. Richard Chancellor, in the *Edward Bonaventura*, pursued his voyage, and, having entered a large bay, discovered a fishing boat, the people of which came on board and informed Chancellor that the Bay was called *St. Nicholas*, belonging to a country called *Russia*, or *Muscovy*. Chancellor proceeded overland to *Moscow*, and, on presenting the letter of *Edward* to the *Czar*, or *Emperor Iwan Basiliewich*, was well received, and it must, in justice to Chancellor, be acknowledged that he first discovered the way to *Archangel*, and established that amicable intercourse and profitable commerce which has continued for so many years. 1553.

The *Emperor* received Chancellor with great distinction, inviting him to his court; and, on his leaving, gave him a letter of recommendation, addressed to the *King of England*. Chancellor, on his return to *England*, finding that *Edward* was dead, delivered the *Emperor's* letter to *Philip* and *Mary*, who, on his return, on a second voyage, 1554.

furnished him with a letter to the Czar, requesting for the Company privileges, liberties, and powers of trading. To this Company Philip and Mary granted a charter to the Marquis of Winchester, Earl of Arundel, and the different officers of state—to different gentlemen and merchants, &c. by the name of “ Merchant Adventurers for the Discovery of Lands, Territories, Isles, Seigniories unknown ;”—and in consideration that Sebastian Cabot had been the chiefest setter forth of the voyage, he was appointed, for life, the Governor ; and four Consuls and twenty-eight Assistants were further appointed, but whose election was to take place every year.

The Russia Company, not possessing any documents relative to these early discoveries, it is probable they were destroyed at the fire of London,—copies, however, and all particulars are fortunately to be found in “ Richard Hakluyt’s Collections of Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries,” first published in 1599. In his preface to the reader, he writes of the Russia or Muscovy Company. “ Next under the Title of the North and Northwestern Voyages, you will find the old Northern Navigators of our British Kings, &c. ; and, next to them in consequence, the discoveries of the Bay of St. Nicholas, the Colmogro, the Pechora, the Isles of Waigats, of Nova Zembla, and of the Sea, eastward, towards the River Ob ; after that, the

“ opening, by Sea, of the Great Dukedom and  
 “ Empire of Russia, with the notable and  
 “ strange journey of Master Jenkinson to Boghar,  
 “ in Bactria, whereunto you may add six voyages,  
 “ eleven hundred wersts up against the stream  
 “ of the Dwina to Vologda, then 180 wersts by  
 “ land to Yaroslaw, on the mighty Volga ; then  
 “ hence 2500 wersts down the stream to the  
 “ ancient Mart Town of Astrachan, and so to the  
 “ manifold Mouths of the Volga ; and thence by  
 “ ship over the Caspian Sea into Medea ; and  
 “ further thence, also, with camels, into Georgia,  
 “ Armenia, Hyrcania, Gallas, and the chief  
 “ towns of Persia, whereunto the Company of  
 “ Muscovy Merchants, to the perpetual honour  
 “ of the City and Company, have performed  
 “ more than any one, yea, than all the nations of  
 “ Europe besides.”

Hakluyt's collection of voyages only went to the end of the fifteenth century ; but had he continued them some years later, in noticing the services rendered to the state by the Russia Company, he would have added, that most important service and advantage to Great Britain, the establishing the whale-fishery to Greenland, by the Company, which was effected in the year 1610.

In noticing the great and important services rendered to the state, by the Russia Company, it is due to the originator and first Governor of the