
ANJIN-The Life & Times of Samurai William Adams, 1564-1620

by Hiromi T. Rogers

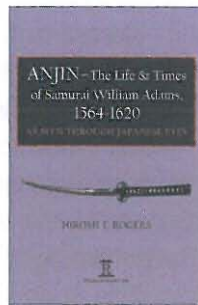
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Review by Nicolas Maclean

(Honorary Chairman of the Miura

Anjinkai and Joint Chairman of Japan400)



In late August 1619 William Adams, now aged 55, returns to Hirado after a successful trading voyage to Indochina and finds that the British and Dutch are at war. News reaches him that English and Welsh sailors are being beaten and shackled as prisoners on board the Dutch ship 'The Angell', anchored in the middle of Hirado Bay. Richard Cocks, Head of the English Trading House, feels powerless to attempt a rescue, but though frail, with hollow eyes and cheeks, and hair and beard turned grey after a severe tropical disease, that night Adams boards 'The Angell' and with bluff and his

fluency in Dutch saves William Gourden and Michael Payne. The next night with extraordinary courage and chutzpah, he goes back and rescues the last captive, Hugh Williams.

It is unlikely that more than a handful of scholars will have known this story, reported only partially in Richard Cocks's Diary (1615-22), and it is an example of the many fascinating nuggets of information about the English pilot of the Dutch ship 'De Liefde', who made landfall in Usuki Bay in April 1600 and went on to achieve fame and fortune as Adviser to Tokugawa Ieyasu with an estate as a *hatamoto* or senior Samurai. The fans of the book, film and television series *Shogun* enjoyed the excitement of Anjin's story, focussed only on his first seven months in Japan, though the 2013 play *Anjin* took the story further. However, in *ANJIN-The Life & Times of Samurai William Adams, 1564-1620* Hiromi T. Rogers reveals a far more detailed and complex picture of Adams as a man and of the turbulent times he lived in. As well as the crucial interface between Adams and the Japanese, the book

provides many insights into both cooperation and competition, and even conflict between the British, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch.

This book is for the general public in Britain and Japan, as well as for experts. It is highly readable and can be strongly recommended. There are, however, a few caveats. The author's special angle on Adams is that she is a Japanese PhD married to a former British diplomat, and is therefore very sensitive to cross-cultural issues. She also states in the Foreword that she has been able to gain access to the private archives of Daimyo and other important families, as well as studying official sources in both countries. However, the author states from the outset that she is attempting to combine fact and fiction, mainly alerting the reader to 'informed imagining' when she switches the narrative to the present tense.

Nevertheless, it is sometimes frustrating not to find all sources clearly referenced, though many are, and inconsistencies in the spelling of names in various parts of the book are unhelpful. So are the inadequacies of the index, which often leaves out altogether people who are referred to in the main text. This militates against ease of cross-referencing for those who are attempting to research more deeply into this fascinating period of history. A few examples should suffice: Gisbert de Coning appears in the index once, compared to three times in the text, similarly for Toyotomi Hideyori, Melchior van Santvoort twice in the index rather than 19 times in the text, and Jan Joosten van Lodensteyn, after whom the Yaesu entrance to Tokyo Station is named, only three times in the index rather than 27 times in the text. Moreover, it can be confusing that the order of Japanese given and surnames can vary between Western and Japanese order, even in the same paragraph.

In addition, the author sometimes omits significant points, such as on page 80 where she leaves out the fact that the great warlord Oda Nobunaga, (whom she unusually refers to as Lord Oda), encouraged the spread of Christianity as a counterbalance to the excessive power of groups of militant, armed Buddhists. Sometimes she makes unsubstantiated statements, such as on page 147 when she fails to provide a source for the important quote after Adams has met Dutch emissaries: 'he promised to do so, as "a friend of the Netherlands and to regard it as his fatherland."' Elsewhere she writes about the conflict between Spanish and Portuguese Jesuits, without also examining rivalries between Dominicans and Franciscans, or mentioning the Iberian Union between 1580 and 1640 and the

impact a united Spanish and Portuguese crown might have had on policies and people.

One of the interesting illustrations in the book is of the statue of Erasmus, which is thought to have stood on the poop deck of 'De Liefde' - rather than fixed to the stern, as the author claims. She writes that this important art historical object is to be found in the Ryuko-In temple in Tochigi Prefecture, but it has also been displayed among the late medieval Buddhist carvings of the Tokyo National Museum in Ueno Park, Tokyo. She goes a bit adrift on Erasmus himself, whom she describes as 'the Dutch scholar who established some principles of Protestantism, a hundred years before Adams was born'. In fact, though born 98 years before Adams, Erasmus naturally only came into his prime as a thinker quite a while later.

The author claims on page 71 that there is no official record of samurai using cannons or muskets until the late seventeenth century, although muskets played a decisive role at the Battle of Nagashino in 1575 and she herself describes the use of cannon at Sekigahara. Perhaps she means "use" in a personal sense rather than use by generals in deploying their forces. Her fascinating and detailed account of the complicated Sekigahara campaign would have been enhanced by a map, though the book does provide several useful maps in its early pages. On page 87 she visualizes Adams having considered presenting a telescope to congratulate Ieyasu on his appointment as Shogun in 1603, whereas the telescope was not invented until 1608.

Surprisingly on page 190 the author does not mention the role played by King James's Chief Minister, Lord Salisbury, in organizing the voyage of the East India Company's 'The Clove', though in 1613 Adams was to provide the crucial input to ensure the success of this first official British Mission to Japan. The author rightly highlights the very bad relationship between Adams and the Mission leader John Saris, but since Saris is a relatively unusual surname, the reader is left wondering if the Mary Hyn Mabel, whom Adams marries on page 6, 'daughter of Master Saris, a wealthy London merchant', is in some way related to John Saris. Later in the book, there is mention of interest in the North-West Passage but not also of the North-East Passage. Once Saris and Adams are engaged on their journey around Japan to conduct the British Mission's official business, there is no mention of stones being thrown at them in Osaka, a striking incident in Saris's logbook, or Adams going inside the great Buddha at Kamakura. Writing about Shogun Hidetada's official gifts for King James, she states on page 209: 'It is

widely believed that one of those suits of armour can still be seen on display in the Tower of London today'. In fact, that suit of armour, originally worn by the loser at Nagashino, is in the Tower with its provenance clearly labelled. The second is in the Royal Armoury's collection in Leeds.

Finally, the next edition of the book would be enhanced by more precision on dates. For instance, on page 266 the author writes about the ending of Japan's *sakoku* or closure period, 'until in fact 1868 when it was another Englishman, Sir Harry Parkes, who helped the American admiral Matthew Perry to open Japan up again to a very different world'. There is no mention of the key date 1853 when Perry arrived in Japan with his flotilla and delivered his ultimatum to the Tokugawa authorities to end the *sakoku* policy. Parkes, of course, deserves credit for later modernization, but the young diplomat Ernest Satow played an earlier and more innovative role, closer to the culturally sensitive model set by Adams.

On the other hand, these blemishes in the book do not diminish its readability, nor its important contribution to achieving a deeper understanding of the crucial period, which preceded just over two centuries of *sakoku*. Persecution of Christians had already begun in Japan during Adams's time there, and the book shows how the intense rivalry between the different Westerners was a factor in leading the Shogun to decide on the closure of Japan to all but the small Dutch and Chinese communities of traders, restricted to closely watched areas of Nagasaki. The colonization of the islands, renamed the Philippines in 1952, was naturally also a factor influencing official Japanese thinking -not mentioned in the book.

The author concludes her book with an interesting Epilogue and Afterword, though it is a pity that she does not mention attempts in the United Kingdom to redress the imbalance of knowledge about Adams in Britain

compared with Japan. For instance, the first sister city links between Britain and Japan date from 1982 and consist appropriately of links between Yokosuka and Ito which both hold annual Anjinsai festivals to celebrate their Adams connections and his birthplace, Gillingham in Kent, where former Mayor Susan Haydock also organizes an annual festival in his honour.

The Japan Society banquet in the magnificent Painted Hall of the former Royal Naval College, Greenwich, arranged by Captain Robert Guy LVO, RN on the 400th anniversary year of Adams's arrival in Japan, is another example of commemoration, and more recently numerous events were organized by Japan400, linking direct descendants of King James I and VI and his Chief Minister Lord Salisbury with the direct descendant of the Matsura Daimyo in Hirado with whom Adams cooperated and of Tokugawa Ieyasu and Tokugawa Hidetada. Adams might not have relished the attention also paid by Japan400 to British memorials to the East India Company's Sir Thomas Smythe, John Saris and Richard Cocks, but he would undoubtedly have enjoyed the samurai tea ceremonies led by Matsura Akira and his society of loyal helpers in the Banqueting House, Whitehall, under the benevolent gaze of King James from the Rubens ceiling, and in the church of St. Mary Magdalene in Gillingham where Adams was christened. Key backers of Japan400 such as Robin Maynard have since formed the William Adams Club in Tokyo to promote UK-Japanese relations and the memory of Adams, and work is already under way in both countries to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Adams's death on 16th May 1620. Miura Anjin would welcome the coincidence of this important Olympic year for Japan following Britain's Olympics, with only Brazil's in between.

All in all, having set the record straight, *ANJIN* is nevertheless a most entertainingly written book and a rattling good yarn, not to be missed. 