



Shipwrecked English Sailor: Father of the Japanese Navy

It's not much to look at, but I wanted to see this old memorial on top of a mountain overlooking Yokosuka's huge naval base on the Miura Peninsula south of Tokyo. Uraga Road, impossibly narrow and steep, winds its way up there. Japanese and British officials make the trip every April to pay homage to William Adams of Kent, England — dead for nearly 400 years but still remembered in Japan as Miura Anjin, the name given to him by the first Tokugawa *Shogun*. The taller monument represents Anjin-san, as Japanese call him. The smaller monument to the left represents his Japanese wife, mother of his two children. Adams' remains are not actually here. They lie somewhere in Kyushu, where he died in 1620 at age 55, far from his estate on the Miura Peninsula. But this memorial is located appropriately, nevertheless, because it sits on land he once owned, and because it overlooks the mighty Yokosuka shipyards and naval base.

You may not recognize the name of William Adams, but most of you already know his story — from reading James Clavell's "*Shogun*" novel or from watching the TV series based upon it. The novel has been slyly criticized as a classic in cultural and historical misinformation, but it and the television series

certainly called attention to an extraordinary actual figure in Japan's naval history. A shipwrecked sailor named Will Adams washed ashore in 1600, just months before Tokugawa Ieyasu fought the great battle of Sekigahara and made himself *Shogun*, military dictator of all Japan. It was a bad time for a foreigner to crawl onto Japan's sacred shores. People regularly got beheaded for less. Incredibly, however, Adams was befriended by the powerful Ieyasu, and went to work for him, becoming an advisor on matters involving trade, geography, international politics and shipbuilding. In reward, he got a *samurai* title, a Miura estate with 90 retainers, a house in Edo, now Tokyo, and a Japanese name, Miura Anjin — "Miura" as in Miura Peninsula, "Anjin" meaning "pilot" or "navigator." No foreigner before or since ever became a *samurai*, and Adams had direct personal access to the *Shogun*, believe it or not. We must wait more than 300 years, until General Douglas MacArthur showed up in 1945, before we encounter another foreigner who could stride within Japan's ruling circles.

We don't know what Will Adams looked like. His image, if one ever was made, has not survived. Maybe he looked like Richard Chamberlain. What we have today is a 20th century statue in the fishing village of Ito across Sagami Bay from the Miura Peninsula. I took the photo at below left during a visit to Ito two years ago. The plaque on the statue reads "Umi no Otoko," or "Man of the Sea." It was in Ito where Adams, exactly 400 years ago, built a 120-ton sailing vessel, Japan's first truly oceangoing Western-style ship. A large metal sculpture, seen below at the mouth of Ito's Matsukawa River, commemorates his maritime achievement. This small ship was the progenitor of battleships that would someday scare the world.



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