

Holme, Ringer & Company

Holme, Ringer & Co., Ltd. was the preeminent British trading firm in the foreign settlement of Nagasaki during the Meiji era (1868–1912). It was founded in 1868 by the Norwich-born entrepreneur Frederick Ringer (1838–1907). At the time, it was still illegal to conduct trade under a foreign name outside certain designated ports, so Ringer did business in Moji and Shimonoseki as a subsidiary of Uryū Shōkai, a firm he established together with a former Kobe customs agent named Uryū Hajime (1842–1913). Their business quickly became the de facto representative of British interests in the Kanmon Strait, and in due course, it came to handle the international coal exports of not one but two major financial conglomerates: Mitsui and Mitsubishi.

Ringer's company was involved in shipping, the commodities trade, insurance, trawl fishing, Norwegian-style whaling, and hotel management. It also introduced the latest technology from the West, including waterworks, telecommunications, and large kerosene storage tanks.

In 1907, Frederick Ringer died while on a trip home to England, and the company was later taken over by his second son, Sydney (1891–1967). Holme, Ringer & Co. remained in family hands until it was forced to close in October 1940 at the outbreak of World War II.

In 1952, Sydney returned to Shimonoseki to inspect the company buildings that had been confiscated during the war. When a group of former Uryū Shōkai employees met him and asked permission to revive the company, he happily agreed. Holme, Ringer & Co., Ltd. was reopened in Moji that same year. The company continues to operate as a shipping agent and port agent, now from a modest but distinctive pink building topped with a large “Holme Ringer” sign that faces the strait.