The ‘Anglo-Satsuma War’ of 1863 was a brief but bloody clash between the British government and the Satsuma domain (present-day Kagoshima Prefecture) over the murder of Charles L. Richardson, a Shanghai merchant who had interfered with the train of the daimyo of Satsuma on a country road near Yokohama and suffered a gory death at the hands of the daimyo’s retainers the previous year. The Tokugawa Shogunate, anxious to avoid a confrontation, submitted a formal apology and offered an indemnity of 10,000 pounds. The Satsuma domain, however, refused to either apologise or pay an indemnity, insisting that Richardson had been at fault by failing to pay proper respect. The British rebutted by pointing to the guarantee of extraterritoriality embedded in the Ansei Treaty, which they said exonerated Richardson of any wrongdoing. The suspense rose to a climax in August 1863 when the British despatched seven warships to Kagoshima and submitted a set of demands directly to the leaders of the domain. The Satsuma shore batteries opened fire, and the British warships promptly retaliated, destroying three steamships anchored in the harbour and inflicting damage on the city. The gunfire from the Japanese meanwhile resulted in the death of several British personnel, including the commander of one of the warships.

Satsuma was one of the wealthiest and most powerful domains in Japan, its territories sprawling over a large section of southern Kyūshū and its influence extending to the Ryūkyū Islands (present-day Okinawa Prefecture) to the southwest. Aware of the bitter concessions made by China after the First Opium War, Shimazu Nariakira, daimyo of Satsuma, strengthened coastal defences near the stronghold of Kagoshima and forged a plan to create an industrial complex, called ‘Shūseikan’, near his family villa at Iso. Nariakira died in 1858, the same year as the Ansei Five-Power Treaties, but his successors continued his efforts to bolster, not only military power, but also industrial capacity as a way to meet Britain and other countries on an equal footing. Shimazu Hisamitsu, Nariakira’s brother and father of the last feudal lord Tadayoshi, was duly impressed by the show of British military might during the squabble of 1863 and acknowledged the importance of modernising Japan in cooperation with the countries of the West.
One of the first measures adopted by Shimazu was to seek the assistance of Thomas B. Glover in sending a delegation of Satsuma representatives and students to England to observe business and industry there and to procure equipment for the Shūseikan industrial complex. Glover appointed Ryle Holme to escort the delegation and serve as a guide along the way, and he provided one of his steamships for the voyage. Since travel abroad was still strictly forbidden, the group left Japan under cover in April 1865 and reached Southampton on 21 June unbeknownst to the Tokugawa Shogunate. Among their destinations was the Platt Brothers & Co. plant in Oldham, Lancashire, one of the world’s leading manufacturers and exporters of machinery for the combing, spinning and finishing of cotton textiles. Fortunately for the Satsuma domain, a liberal commercial policy now predominated in Britain, and the secrets of Manchester, once jealously guarded by local guilds, were now accessible to anyone with the means to pay. The Satsuma representatives signed a contract with Platt Brothers & Co. for the purchase of carding and spinning machines and other equipment and arranged for the employment of engineers to supervise the installation work in Kagoshima and train Japanese students. It is probably no coincidence that Edward Z. Holme, the expert in cotton spinning techniques engaged by the Satsuma domain, was Ryle Holme’s brother.

Edward Z. Holme arrived in Kagoshima in November 1866 with three colleagues and began preparations for the establishment of Japan’s first cotton mill. John Tetlow and two other British engineers sailed to Japan on the ship carrying the machinery and reached Kagoshima in January 1867, thus assembling the so-called ‘Manchester Seven’ at Shūseikan. Ernest M. Satow, the future British envoy extraordinary to Japan who had been on one of the British warships during the bombardment of Kagoshima in 1863, visited the site in early 1867 and wrote about Holme in his diary. He also mentions Thomas J. Waters, the architect employed through the offices of Thomas B. Glover to design the cotton mill buildings:

Went on shore and stopped at Shu-zei-kan [sic] at Iso. J. Sutcliff, H. Harrison and N. Shillingford are the names of the three foreigners stopping here, the two former on spec. to pick up what they can, and the latter having a year’s engagement. Waters is the name of the engineer in Liu Kiu [Okinawa] who is engaged in putting up a sugar mill. E. Holme is a cotton spinner and like

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