Matsudaira Tsuneo was the longest-serving Japanese Ambassador to the Court of St James's. He presided over the London Embassy from 13 February 1929 to the end of May 1935. This was a total of six-and-a-half years and slightly exceeds the period spent by Ambassador Hayashi (1900-06). Matsudaira gave continuity to Anglo-Japanese relations during a time of political instability in Japan: he was ambassador under eight prime ministers. Moreover, relations with Britain were always tense; and he had to make the best of a deteriorating situation. The Manchurian and Shanghai crises of 1931-33 destroyed many British illusions about Japan; and it was the task of the ambassador to present his country's case in Britain and in the wider forum of the League of Nations in liberal terms in order to forge a *modus vivendi* with European statesmen. When he left London in 1935, he took up an appointment close to the emperor and from this obscure position was still engaged in the exercise of damage limitation. His exploits did not prevent war but they were one strand in the complex tapestry which was being woven in the years before 1941.

Matsudaira Tsuneo (1877-1949) who was related to Matsudaira Sadanobu, a leading Tokugawa statesman, was educated at Gakushuin and Tokyo Imperial University where he studied law and politics. He entered the Foreign Ministry by examination in 1902 and was sent to London for training in the following year. The tension with Russia and the war which followed strained the legation staff of six. He married in 1906 the daughter of Marquis Nabeshima of the Saga clan. They left London with their two children in June 1911 after a happy period. Matsudaira was posted to the treaty revision section and rose steadily in the ranks of the Gaimushō. After a period in China, he became head of its Europe-American section (Ô-Bei Kyokuchô), in which capacity he served on the Japanese delegation to the all-important Washington Conference (1921-22) where he made valuable international contacts. When the Yamamoto
cabinet took over in 1923 with Ijuin Hikokichi as foreign minister, he became vice-minister, a post he retained under the short-lived Kiyoura cabinet in 1924.2

On 18 December 1924, Matsudaira was deservedly promoted to the key post of ambassador to Washington. Relations had deteriorated because of the anti-Japanese immigration legislation introduced in 1923; and it was to be his role to continue the task which had already absorbed him as vice-minister to work for improved relations with the United States. He was warmly welcomed by the Japan Society in San Francisco and in Washington. Among the diplomatic issues taken up during his tenure in Washington, the most significant were the arrangements for the Geneva Naval Conference of 1927 and the treaty for the Renunciation of War, sometimes referred to as the Kellogg-Briand pact. The first initiative came to nothing, while the second came to maturity after Matsudaira’s return to Tokyo on leave in June 1928.3

A month after he reached home, it was announced that he would succeed Baron Matsui Keishiro as ambassador to Britain. This was followed in September by the marriage between his daughter Setsuko and Prince Chichibu, the younger brother of the Showa Emperor. After the long sea journey, Matsudaira reached London in February of the following year. In the climate of the twenties London was not just a centre for sorting out bilateral issues but also a focal point for sorting out multi-national issues. The ambassadors at London and Paris were expected to represent Japan at the international conferences of the day. Matsudaira was immediately engaged on behalf of the Tanaka government in working out the preliminary details of the London Naval Conference which eventually began early in 1930. The purpose was to control and limit the extent of naval armament. Matsudaira was plenipotentiary along with Wakatsuki Reijirō, and Admiral Takarabe Takeshi, the vice-minister of the navy who travelled from Japan with Admiral Baron Abō Kiyokazu, vice-chief of the naval general staff (kaigun gunrei bu jichō). It was a triangular conference, taking in Japan, Britain and the United States.

When the conference opened on 21 January, the Japanese delegates announced that they did not wish to accept the Washington ratio of 60 per cent overall applied in the case of cruisers, as the American plenipotentiaries wanted. But, by reason of Matsudaira’s frankness and patient diplomacy, cordial discussions took place on this fraught issue. Compromise was difficult because Admiral Takarabe was confronted by opposition from his accompanying technical staff whom he was unable to win over. In order to prevent deadlock, Matsudaira met for a long series of sessions with Senator David Reed, one of the American delegates. Eventually, on 13 March, a formula was reached whereby Japan should have 69.75 per cent in overall tonnage and 60.02 per cent in respect of heavy cruisers. This ‘Reed-Matsudaira compromise’ preserved the Washington formula of 10-10-6 while allowing Japan in practice a ratio of 10-10-7.

The navalists argued that Matsudaira had not pressed the case as he should.4 Wakatsuki, the head of the delegation, defended him and urged his government to accept the formula in order to avoid causing the breakdown of the talks. But the naval objections in London were as nothing compared to those raised in Tokyo. Nonetheless, the government, acting through the vice-minister for the navy, agreed to go ahead with the treaty on 10 April and instructions were sent to London accordingly. But Admiral Katō Kanji, chief of the naval general staff, sought an interview with the emperor and announced his resignation. Though the treaty was signed on 22 April, there was a lengthy ratification process; but