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## **Mastering the worst of trades : England's early Africa companies and their traders, 1618-1672**

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# Mastering the Worst of Trades:

England's early Africa companies and their traders, 1618-1672.

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Tusen takk.

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## SUMMARY

Despite the great and growing interest for the study of empire-building, cross-cultural interaction, and early modern overseas trade, little research tackling the emergence of England's early Africa companies exist. There were two of them, the Guinea Company and the Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa, and neither have attracted much scholarly attention since the first half of the twentieth century. This is surprising as the Guinea Company was in operation for near forty years, from 1618 to 1657 and tackled firsthand the effect of the changes taking place in the world of seventeenth-century overseas trade, while the Royal Adventurers appeared in 1660 as England's first official slave trading corporation in the Atlantic. Despite these and other ample reasons for warranting attention, most scholarly works have instead oriented themselves towards the two companies' far larger successor, the Royal African Company, launched in 1672. It is the aim of this thesis to help fill that lacuna.

The lack of attention given to England's two early Africa companies can be explained partly by difficult early source material and partly by established divides in the narrative of English overseas trade which saw the early African companies falling between two historiographical chairs. The source material directly linked to the companies' daily management is sparse, especially in the case of the Guinea Company. Therefore, this book opts for an alternative approach in the hopes of overcoming these challenges and offers a reassessment of the current historiographical narrative. Instead of focusing solely on the two corporations themselves, this book expands its scope to include its leaders, considering their private interests and motivations brought by their personal trading portfolios when managing company operations. The consecutive line of company leaders managing the Guinea Company from 1618 to 1657 all had extensive backgrounds in overseas trade and introduced the company into to their operations, as well as their personal business into the company. With the launch of the Royal Adventurers in 1660, overlaps in membership ensured the continued influence of certain Atlantic traders on company direction. By considering their motives and backgrounds, our understanding of the development of the companies as the result of a symbiotic relationship between the private and the corporate sphere can be expanded. This again allows for a reconsideration of the companies' decisions, intentions, success and position in the process of early modern expansion.

Established scholarship on the history of the early modern trading companies has resulted in certain historiographical divides in relation to company membership, *modus operandi*, and format. This divide can be seen exemplified in earlier scholarly work relating to London's early modern overseas companies and mercantile communities, but also in the continued production of research along

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separate company and oceanic lines. To this divide, however, the history of the early Africa companies presents a challenge. In the traditional narrative the Indian Ocean sphere became the preferred arena of the East India Company, which like its predecessor - the Levant Company, focused on bi- or multilateral luxury exchange through a chartered joint-stock company model with the support of a national monopoly. The Atlantic, by comparison, became centered around a credit-based informal economy of European supplies and enforced labour in exchange for colonial products. This freer and less institutionally protected environment did not appeal to the members of the large eastern trading companies who had grown accustomed to strong market control and exclusivity. Instead the Atlantic was preferred either by small-scale traders, smugglers, and interlopers, many of which had little hopes of accessing the larger companies, or by corporations aimed at proprietary settlement. The Africa companies were not aimed at colonial settlement, appearing instead with a format liking to that of the EIC, if more modestly sized. By the Restoration the company of Royal Adventurers was equipped with perhaps the most extensive monopoly ever extended to any English company – that of colonial labour supply. Despite fitting poorly with the characteristics, the Africa companies still appeared as *Atlantic* companies in this narrative, and though both the Royal Adventurers and the Royal African Company were both Atlantic in their operation, it has resulted in a problematic backward projection onto their predecessor. The influential role that England's later Africa companies came to play in the Atlantic, was all but evident at the launch of the first. From the launch of its first company England's Africa trade made a transition from being based on bi-lateral luxury exchange to engrossing all legal labour supply to the English colonies and juggling three distinctly different markets in Africa, the Americas, and in London. A chronological investigation into why such a change in company orientation came about is therefore warranted.

As alluded to above, the Guinea Company operated - though on a smaller scale, along lines similar to those of the East India Company. It was, like the EIC, focused on bilateral luxury exchange between Europe and foreign markets, mainly trading in gold, as well as ivory, dyewoods, pepper, wax and other commodities. As the book will show, the growing activity in England's western Atlantic took up comparably little of the company's attention until the middle decades of the century. In fact, the company's activities on the West African coast appealed so strongly to the East India Company that it requested to lease the Guinea Company's patent for trade in 1657. This represented the first time a European trading conglomerate held the rights to trade on behalf of its nation in both the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic. It is therefore noteworthy that when the Guinea Company's patent passes to its successor in 1660, the Royal Adventurers appears solely Atlantic in focus, involving itself heavily in the slave trade supply to the English Caribbean. The emergence of the Royal Adventurers was followed by a considerable overlap in membership with

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not only the Guinea Company, but also with the East India Company. This thesis questions this “push into the Atlantic”, suggesting that only through considering individual backgrounds of company leaders can such a change in the trade be fully understood.

The study of company personnel to better understand the overseas trading corporations as institutions has been undertaken previously though the attention has mainly been directed at the larger trading consortiums such as the East India Company. These studies fit into a larger, and still ongoing debate regarding the role of institutions in the processes of empire-building. A dichotomy between institutions such as the trading companies, and the agency of private traders and interlopers, is now increasingly being challenged by works arguing for an entangled approach that sees these forces as interlinked and mutually influential. This thesis thus represents a contribution to this recent turn in the debate. Studies of the historical representatives of the Africa companies, mainly focused towards the Royal Africa Company, have centered around the fundamental question that has always followed the study of the trade: why was it's companies not more successful? Much emphasis has been placed on the faulty principal-agent dynamics within the RAC - between the London-based management and the companies' representatives abroad. Though the Royal African Company's issues with its agents were undoubtedly real, the same cannot automatically be said for the corporations which operated before it. Therefore, this book does not focus on the dynamic between the company and their employees “on-the-spot”. Instead it follows the London-based company leaders, who all shared extensive on-the-spot experience built through the course of their careers. Seven company members are granted attention and form a consecutive line from the launch of the company in 1618 to the eventual end of the Royal Adventurers in 1672. These actors share certain common features, such as similar trade portfolios, vast international networks, a background of interloping within the company sphere, and multiple company memberships. Through considering their entangled roles as private traders and company leaders a more complete image of England's early African companies emerge.

The great interest in the slave trade, though very much warranted, has meant the development of a strong parallel between the English Africa trade more generally and transatlantic slave trade. The role of the later African companies, especially the Royal African Company, in the supply of slaves to the English colonies is undeniable. However, as this book emphasizes, the official introduction of slave trade into company operation only took place with the granting of sole access to the trade to the Royal Adventurers in the early 1660s. Seeing England's commercial exchange with Africa as near solely centered around slave trade has not only simplified the cross-cultural exchange that took place between England and the west coast of Africa, an exchange which brought both the company and the region into contact with a far

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more complex web of commodity chains, but also meant the process surrounding the actual decision to place the colonial labour supply under patent in 1660 disappeared into the historiographical background. This book considers this change, taking into account the vast personal portfolios of influential company members which in many cases included slave trade and the importing of indentured servants. As the demand, activity level, and competition rose in the Atlantic the company format presented an opportunity for sheltering formerly personal activity within the company structure, supported by favorable contextual changes in English colonial management and royal endorsement. It is further implied that the decision to move the English Africa trade decidedly into the Atlantic, with its credit-based system of exchange, was not unequivocally helpful to its companies, as they quickly came to struggle with liquidity, heavy borrowing, debt defaults, and later bankruptcy. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to contribute to the debate surrounding formal and informal empire-building by offering alternative genealogies to the decisions that shaped the England's seventeenth century trade with the African continent and its role in the growing Atlantic world.

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## SAMENVATTING

Ondanks de grote en toenemende aandacht voor de bestudering van *empire-building*, interculturele interacties en vroegmoderne overzeese handel, is er nog maar weinig onderzoek geweest naar de opkomst van de vroege Afrika compagnieën van Engeland. Er waren er twee: de *Guinea Company* en de *Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa*. Beide hebben sinds de eerste helft van de twintigste eeuw maar weinig wetenschappelijke aandacht gekregen. Dit is verrassend omdat de *Guinea Company* gedurende haar bijna veertig jaar durende bestaan (van 1618 tot 1657) direct te maken had met de effecten van veranderingen in de wereld van de zeventiende-eeuwse overzeese handel, en de *Royal Adventurers* in 1660 opkwam als Engeland's eerste officiële onderneming die zich binnen het gebied rondom de Atlantische Oceaan bezig hield met de handel in slaven. Ondanks deze en vele andere redenen om deze compagnieën wél te bestuderen, hebben de meeste academische werken zich gericht op hun veel grotere opvolger, de in 1672 opgerichte *Royal African Company*. Het doel van deze dissertatie is om dit hiaat te vullen.

Het gebrek aan aandacht voor de vroege Britse Afrika compagnieën kan gedeeltelijk verklaard worden door de schaarste aan vroeg bronnenmateriaal en deels door de gevestigde scheidingslijnen binnen het discours van de Engelse overzeese handel, waarbinnen de vroege Afrika compagnieën tussen tussen historiografisch wal en schip vielen. Het bronnenmateriaal dat direct handelt over het dagelijks bestuur van de compagnieën is schaars, vooral in het geval van de *Guinea Company*. Om deze moeilijkheden te boven te komen heeft dit boek daarom voor een andere aanpak gekozen. In plaats van zich alleen te concentreren op de twee compagnieën als organisaties, vergroot dit boek het blikveld door ook de bestuurders van deze compagnieën te bestuderen. Hierbij wordt nadrukkelijk hun persoonlijke belangen en motivaties gerelateerd aan hun particuliere handelsportfolio's in acht genomen. De opeenvolgende bestuurders van de *Guinea Company* van 1618 tot 1657 hadden allen een achtergrond in de overzeese handel en vervlochten hun functie binnen de compagnie met hun particuliere activiteiten en, omgekeerd, hun particuliere zaken met de compagnie. Met de oprichting van de *Royal Adventurers* in 1660 garandeerde de overlap in lidmaatschap de voortdurende invloed van bepaalde Atlantische handelaren op het beleid van de compagnie. De symbiotische relatie tussen particuliere en zakelijke sferen zorgt ervoor dat het bestuderen van de motieven en achtergronden van de bestuurders onze kennis over de ontwikkeling van compagnieën vergroot. Dit leidt er weer toe dat de beslissingen, intenties, de positie en het succes van de compagnieën in het proces van vroegmoderne expansie heroverwogen kan worden.

De gevestigde literatuur over de geschiedenis van vroegmoderne handelscompagnieën heeft geleid tot een historiografische verdeeldheid met

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betrekking tot lidmaatschap, modus operandi en opzet. Vroeg wetenschappelijk werk over Londen's vroegmoderne overzeese compagnieën en handelsgemeenschappen vertegenwoordigt deze verdeeldheid bij uitstek, maar deze blijkt ook het feit dat onderzoek nog steeds grotendeels plaatsvindt langs de lijnen van individuele compagnieën en afzonderlijke Oceanen. De geschiedenis van de vroege Afrikaanse compagnieën stelt een dergelijk onderscheid aan de kaak. Volgens het traditionele verhaal ontpopte de Indische Oceaan zich tot het voorkeursgebied voor de Britse Oost-Indische Compagnie, die zich net zoals haar voorganger – de *Levant Company* – concentreerde op bi- en multilaterale uitwisseling van luxeproducten via een *chartered joint-stock company model* met steun van een nationale monopolie. De Atlantische Oceaan was daarentegen voornamelijk gericht op een op kredietgebaseerde informele economie van Europees aanbod en gedwongen arbeid in ruil voor koloniale producten. Deze vrijere en minder institutioneel-beschermde omgeving was niet zo aantrekkelijk voor de leden van de grote Oosterse handelscompagnieën die gewend waren aan sterke marktcontrole en exclusiviteit. Zij die wel voorkeur gaven aan de Atlantische Oceaan waren met name kleinere handelaren en smokkelaars, die in het algemeen weinig kans hadden om toe te treden tot de grotere compagnieën, en ondernemingen die gericht waren op het stichten van nederzettingen. De Afrika compagnieën richtten zich niet op zulke koloniale nederzettingen, maar hadden in plaats daarvan een model dat leek op (een qua grootte wat bescheidenere versie van) dat van de Britse Oost-Indische Compagnie. Tegen de tijd van de Restauratie bezat de *Royal Adventurers* compagnie één van de meest uitgebreide monopolies die ooit verleend was aan een Engelse compagnie – die op koloniale arbeidskrachten. In de geschiedschrijving staan de Afrika compagnieën te boek staan als Atlantisch. Hoewel zowel de *Royal Adventurers* als de *Royal African Company* inderdaad binnen dit gebied opereerden, is dit een problematische karakterisering. De invloedrijke rol die de latere Afrika compagnieën zouden spelen binnen de Atlantische Oceaan was alles behalve evident ten tijde van de oprichting van de eerste. Vanaf het begin van de eerste compagnie transformeerde de Britse handel op Afrika van een bilaterale uitwisseling van luxeproducten naar een monopolie op het leveren van arbeidskrachten aan de Britse kolonies en het balanceren van drie verschillende markten in Afrika, de Amerika's en in Londen. Een chronologisch onderzoek naar waarom zo'n verandering plaatsvond is daarom op zijn plaats.

Zoals hierboven al gesuggereerd is opereerde de *Guinea Company* – weliswaar op een kleinere schaal – op een gelijksoortige manier als de Britse Oost-Indische Compagnie. Het concentreerde zich, net als de EIC, op de bilaterale uitwisseling van luxeproducten tussen Europa en buitenlandse markten, voornamelijk handelend in goud maar ook in ivoor, verfhout, peper, was en andere handelsartikelen. Dit boek laat zien dat de Britse activiteiten in het westen van de Atlantische Oceaan tot het midden van de zeventiende eeuw relatief weinig aandacht kregen van de compagnie. Sterker

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nog, de activiteiten van de compagnie aan de West-Afrikaanse kust spraken de Britse Oost-Indische Compagnie dusdanig sterk aan dat het de *Guinea Company* in 1657 verzocht om diens patent op handel te huren. Dit was de eerste keer dat de rechten om uit naam van de natie te handelen in zowel de Indische als de Atlantische Oceaan verenigd waren in de handen van één Europees handelsconglomeraat. Het is daarom belangrijk om op te merken dat tegen de tijd dat het patent van de *Guinea Company* overging naar diens opvolger in 1660, de *Royal Adventurers* met hun slavenhandel op de Britse Caraïben louter een Atlantische focus leken te hebben. De komst van de *Royal Adventurers* werd gevolgd door een aanzienlijke overlap van leden met niet alleen de *Guinea Company* maar ook met de Britse Oost-Indische Compagnie. Deze dissertatie suggereert dat zo'n handelsverschuiving alleen goed begrepen kan worden door te kijken naar de individuele achtergronden van de bestuurders van de compagnie.

Aandacht voor de bestudering van het compagniepersoneel om overzeese handelscorporaties als instituties beter te begrijpen is niet nieuw, maar is wel grotendeels gericht geweest op de grotere handelsconsortia zoals de Britse Oost-Indische Compagnie. Deze studies passen in een breder, voortdurend debat over de rol van instituties binnen het proces van *empire-building*. Het bestaan van een dichotomie tussen instituties zoals handelscompagnieën en de *agency* van particuliere handelaren en smokkelaars is toenemend betwist. In plaats daarvan bepleitten onderzoekers een meer verstrengelde aanpak waarin deze krachten als onderling verbonden en elkaar wederzijds beïnvloedend worden gezien. Door hierbij aan te sluiten biedt deze dissertatie een bijdrage aan deze recente wending in het debat. Onderzoek naar de historische individuen achter de Afrika compagnieën, bovenal gericht op de *Royal African Company*, hebben zich bezig gehouden met de fundamentele vraag in de studie naar handel: waarom waren de compagnieën niet succesvoller? Er is veel nadruk geplaatst op de dynamiek van de ondeugdelijke *principal-agent* binnen de *Royal African Company* – tussen het management van de compagnieën in Londen en diens vertegenwoordigers in het buitenland. Uit deze problemen van de *Royal Africa Company* met hun vertegenwoordigers kunnen echter geen conclusies worden getrokken voor de eerdere compagnieën die voorgingen. Daarom concentreert dit boek zich niet op de dynamiek tussen de compagnie en haar medewerkers 'ter plaatse', maar op de bestuurders van de compagnie die allen gedurende hun carrière ter plaatse significante ervaring hadden opgebouwd. De aandacht in deze dissertatie gaat uit naar zeven bestuurders die opeenvolgend hebben gediend vanaf de oprichting van de compagnie in 1618 tot het einde van de *Royal Adventurers* in 1672. Deze actoren hebben bepaalde kenmerken gemeen zoals overeenkomstige handelsportfolio's, uitgebreide netwerken, een achtergrond van quasi-smokkel binnen compagniesfeer en lidmaatschap van meerdere compagnieën. Door de verstrengelde rollen als particuliere handelaren en bestuurders te bestuderen komt een veel genuanceerder en

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completer beeld van de vroege Afrika compagnieën van Engeland tevoorschijn.

De grote interesse voor de handel in slaven – hoewel terecht – heeft een sterke parallel tussen de Brits-Afrikaanse handel in het algemeen en de Trans-Atlantische slavenhandel doen ontstaan. De rol van de latere Afrika compagnieën, met name de *Royal African Company*, in de aanvoer van slaven aan de Britse koloniën is onbetwistbaar. Echter, zoals dit boek benadrukt, werd de slavenhandel officieel pas een onderdeel van de compagnieactiviteiten ten tijde van het toekennen van de exclusieve toegang tot de handel aan de *Royal Adventurers* in de vroege jaren '60 van de zeventiende eeuw. Het karakteriseren van de commerciële uitwisseling van Engeland met Afrika als haast exclusieve slavenhandel doet tekort aan de cross-culturele uitwisseling die plaatsvond tussen Engeland en de westkust van Afrika – een uitwisseling die zowel de compagnie als de regio in contact bracht met een veel complexer web van productketens. Ook het proces van de eigenlijke besluitvorming rondom het patenteren van de aanvoer van arbeid naar de koloniën in 1660 verdwijnt door zo'n karakterisering naar de historische achtergrond. Dit boek onderzoekt deze verandering en bestudeert de rol van de uitgebreide particuliere handelsportfolio's van invloedrijke compagnieleden die zich in veel gevallen bezighielden met slavenhandel en het importeren van contractarbeiders. Toen de vraag, activiteit en concurrentie in het Atlantische Oceaan gebied toenam bood de compagnie-opzet de mogelijkheid om voormalig particuliere activiteiten binnen de onder te brengen binnen de compagniestructuur, een proces dat ondersteund werd door gunstige contextuele veranderingen in het Britse koloniale management en koninklijke goedkeuring. Het wordt verder geïmpliceerd dat de beslissing om de Brits-Afrikaanse handel te verschuiven naar de Atlantische Oceaan, met zijn op krediet-gebaseerde systeem van uitwisseling, de compagnieën niet per se ten gunste kwam aangezien zij al snel te maken kregen met liquiditeit, het moeten lenen van geld, het niet betalen van schulden en later faillissement. Het doel van deze dissertatie is dus om bij te dragen aan het debat rondom formele en informele *empire-building* door een ander perspectief te bieden op de achtergronden van beslissingen die de zowel de Britse zeventiende-eeuwse handel met het Afrikaanse continent als de rol van het Britse rijk binnen de groeiende Atlantische wereld zouden vormen.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BHO	British History Online
BL	British Library, London, UK
BRRAM	British Records Relating to America in Microform, previously held by British Museum, now at the British Library.
Cal. SP. Col./Dom.	Calendar of State Papers Colonial/Domestic
GC	Guinea Company
HCA	High Court of Admiralty
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationary Office
HPO	History of Parliament Online
IHR	Institute for Historical Research, London, UK
IOR	India Office Records, British Library,
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
PC	Acts of the Privy Council
PR	Patent Rolls, The National Archives
PRO	Public Records Office, now The National Archives/ Proclamations
RA	Royal Adventureres into Africa
RAC	Royal African Company
SP	State Papers Colonial/Domestic
TNA	The National Archives, London, UK

# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Research aim and question

In 2018 it will be 400 years since the English Guinea Company received its patent as the first English joint-stock company aimed at trade with Africa. Despite having a palpable impact not only on the history of England and its empire – but on social and economic developments in and around the Atlantic basin up to today, little is known of the English Africa companies and their trade from this early period. This thesis seeks to remedy that. It aims to nuance and contextualize the role of England's early Africa trade as part of the process of early modern expansion, and by better embedding it in this narrative, emphasize the unique position the traders and their companies held. Few companies enjoyed as much privilege and support, and did as much humanitarian damage, as the Africa companies. Throughout this thesis I aim to present the story of the early English Africa companies, showing how the merchants of the official English Africa trade, the men that were leading its companies, combined the privileges bestowed upon them with their diverse experiences to secure their position, and expand their operation. By combining their private experiences and trade activities with the shelter supplied by an officially supported company, they aimed to protect their established positions and activities from the rapidly increasing competition of the seventeenth century Atlantic, develop new sectors, connect markets and mitigate risk.<sup>1</sup> By considering both the personal experiences of prominent members and the history of the companies they constructed around them from a *longue durée* perspective, I hope to challenge perceived categories, divisions and seemingly inevitable outcomes in the process of developing England's first empire.

This thesis presents the development of the early companies, the Guinea Company (GC) and the Royal Adventurers into Africa (RA) by piecing together the continuous story from the granting of the first official company patent in 1618 up to the emergence of the third and largest corporation involved in the trade, the Royal African Company (RAC) in 1672. Unlike previous work on the Africa trade which has focused mainly on the RAC and its large-scale slave trading operation, this thesis looks to the corporations, traders and events that preceded it. With this comes a reconsideration of several of the topics that has colored the existing historiography surrounding the Africa companies. These include the involvement of the companies

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to my colleague Kaarle Wirta for bringing forth the concept of institutional sheltering which he presents it in further detail in his forthcoming article: Wirta, Kaarle, "If Opportunity doesn't Knock, Build a Door: Entrepreneurial Opportunities on the Gold Coast and Institutional Sheltering in Europe by Mid-Seventeenth Century", and in his forthcoming dissertation titled *Dark Horses of Business, Overseas Entrepreneurship in Seventeenth-Century Nordic Trade in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans*.

in the slave trade; the evaluation of company activity, success and outcome; and the favorable position that secured the RA monopolistic rights to supply slave labour to the growing English colonies. By considering the genealogy of such decisions from a longer perspective they appear, not necessarily as the result of state plans, bad business decisions, ideological changes or as hostile take-overs, but as part and parcel of protecting, maintaining and strengthening the interests of influential company leaders.

Thus, this in-depth look at the early companies allows for a more general reconsideration of the interaction between the corporate and the private as, unlike the traditional perception of private interest as something that should be suppressed by the corporation, the early Africa companies show themselves as both heavily reliant on and the easy victims of private interests within their own upper ranks. As an emerging corporation, the GC, and later the RA, faced a succession of strong London merchants in its leadership who on several occasions throughout the seventeenth century used their private influence to rescue and aid the company, but also did not hesitate to sacrifice it in order to secure their own interests. The GC appears as a highly malleable structure, representing only one piece in the far larger puzzle that is the career of its prominent members. Unlike the more traditional view of an antagonistic relationship between the corporation and private interests, manifested most often in the principal-agent dynamic, this thesis shows the symbiotic relationship of a weaker structure and strong private initiative.

By directing focus towards the early companies that faced the rapid early seventeenth century development of the Atlantic basin paired with much political turmoil and an array of new challenges, I investigate the changes the company underwent as its activities grew from bilateral luxury trade between Africa and England - into a credit-based slave trade that spanned three continents. It is implied in this thesis that the strong focus on the RAC (which appeared only in 1672) and on the transatlantic slave trade, though rightly justified, has resulted in a somewhat anachronistic view of the Africa companies as inherently Atlantic in focus. The early sources reveal not only that this was not the case, suggesting instead that a decision to push the company towards the Atlantic – and into the transatlantic slave trade - was motivated partly by the need for established Atlantic traders turned company members to protect their existing interests. The decision to redirect company focus towards the Atlantic, clearly manifested with the launch of the Royal Adventurers into Africa in 1660, meant heavy involvement in the Atlantic credit exchange cycles which became in the end a major contributor to both the RA's and the RAC's downfall.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>J.W. Blake, "The Farm of the Guinea Trade in 1631," in *Essays in British and Irish History: In Honour of James Eadie Todd*, ed. Henry Alfred Cronne, T. W. Moody, and D. B. Quinn (London: F. Muller, 1949); George Frederick Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa* (Cornell University:

Thus, the thesis emphasizes the relationship between the early companies as structures and their members, a relationship both symbiotic and encumbering depending on context, as well as – to an increasing degree – between company members and representatives of state power. It thus contributes not only to the historiography of the English African companies themselves, but to that of formal and informal empire building, and its relations with the history of merchant networks and agency. It offers examples of developing corporations that rely heavily on the personal connections and abilities of their members for tackling an increasingly competitive and highly challenging environment. By emphasizing the personal effect that a changing Atlantic economy had on individual Atlantic traders turned company members, I aim to show that the individual needs of prolific members both trumped, mixed with, and yielded to the needs of the organization. The successful maintaining of this relationship, though coming to an end with the deregulation of the trade at the turn to the eighteenth century, ensured the survival of the African companies for nearly 80 consecutive years.

## 2. Historiography of the African companies

England's trade with the West Coast of Africa has not gone unnoticed. England's participation in the transatlantic slave trade, first included in royal patent in 1663, gradually increasing towards the end of the seventeenth century, before booming with the deregulation of the trade in 1712, had received – and continued to receive – much attention from scholars. This has resulted in an array of excellent studies, much data collection and open sources databases, all assisting in the efforts to grasp and understand the largest forced migration in human history.<sup>3</sup> The continued interest in

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Lancaster, Pa., Press of the New Era Printing Co., 1919); K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); David W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America* (Cambridge University Press, 1986); Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery, Atlantic Trade and the British Economy, 1660-1800*, New Studies in Economic and Social History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); William A. Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1672-1752* (UNC Press Books, 2013); L. H. Roper, *Advancing Empire: English Interests and Overseas Expansion, 1613-1688* (Cambridge University Press, 2017); Ann M. Carlos and Jamie Brown Kruse, "The Decline of the Royal African Company: Fringe Firms and the Role of the Charter," *The Economic History Review* 49, no. 2 (May 1, 1996): 291-313.

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, vol. Vol. I, 1441-1700 (Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1930); David Eltis and David Richardson, *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database / Edited by David Eltis and David Richardson*. (New Haven, Conn. ; London: Yale University Press, 2008); David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas / David Eltis*. (Cambridge University Press, 2000); David Eltis, ed., *Coerced and Free Migration: Global Perspectives* (Stanford University Press, 2002); Eugene D. Genovese and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *Race and slavery in the western hemisphere: quantitative studies. Edited by Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese, etc.* (Princeton University Press, 1974).

the slave trade has, however, resulted in an uneven distribution of scholarly attention, as the vast majority of English slave trade took place under the last of the Africa corporations to receive a royal patent, the Royal African Company (1672).<sup>4</sup>

The emphasis on the RAC has resulted in a tendency to see the format of England's *official* Africa trade, understood as trade done under royal charter by the Africa companies, as emerging only at the end of the century, with granting of the RAC's patent in 1672. The same lack of a long *durée* perspective on the trade has resulted in the rather famous demise of the RAC as appearing equally dis-attached from its preceding history. As a quote from J.W. Blake, the producer of one of the few existing studies of the first of the Africa companies, the Guinea Company, so amply put it: "*If it be true that Tudor experience was the basis of later developments in the African trade, it is no less true that the difficulties of transition from the fitful, groping – and all-too-often semi-piratical – ventures of the Elizabethans to the peaceful and regular Guinea trade of the restoration companies were successfully surmounted by the resourceful merchants who carried on the trade between 1600 and 1660*".<sup>5</sup> It is these resourceful merchants and their role in the Africa trade that form the basis of this thesis.

Furthermore, the tendency in past historiography to divide up overseas activities between east and west, the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic, in long-distance commodity and luxury exchange and proprietary settlement activities, has meant that the early Africa companies have fallen between different historiographical chairs.<sup>6</sup> Despite the justified focus on the transatlantic slave trade, it is argued here that the decision to connect the Africa company trade to the markets in the Americas was but one out of several possible outcomes. In fact, as the thesis will show, there were both strong arguments and evidence to instead support an eastern connection, between the West African coast and the Indian Ocean trade. This came naturally to a trade that, much like that of the East Indies, was based around bilateral luxury exchange, the basis for the activities of the Guinea Company through most of its existence. The trade of the Guinea Company centered around gold, ivory, redwood, wax, gum and pepper grains, far more in tune with the operations of the EIC than is often presented. The undeniable change in company operations around the middle of the century, which in the thesis is referred to as the "push into the Atlantic", only occurred towards the end of the Guinea Company's near forty years existence and represented a change few other companies of the period experienced.

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<sup>4</sup>See fn 1.

<sup>5</sup>Blake, "The Farm of the Guinea Trade in 1631," 87.

<sup>6</sup>The important work of Robert Brenner is a good example. Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (Princeton University Press, 1993).

With the push into the Atlantic came the right to supply labour to the growing English colonies, a task that was – despite its inherent disregard for human life – contemporarily perceived as a privilege. That perception has inherently remained until our own time, where the exclusive rights to the supply of labour is often pushed forward as a paradox when the Africa companies' struggles are discussed.<sup>7</sup> This is, I argue, a view worth nuancing. The shift made official with the patent granted to the Royal Adventurers in 1663, though building up over the preceding decade or so, connected the Africa trade to the Atlantic circle of exchange where the reliance on credit was great and the turn-over slow. It is argued here that the decision to place slave trade under patent was impacted by the opportunity to participate in the supply of the Spanish Americas through the Asiento contract which presented itself at the same time, and when that agreement fell through the company had little hope over surviving. The RA was quickly dissolved and the RAC launched, but despite a gradually more professionalized and structured format to company trade, the inherent grinding of debt and lack of liquidity symptomatic of Atlantic trade could not be escaped and the trade was eventually deregulated. Despite this eventual demise of the Africa companies and of official trade under patent, the thesis aims to underline the adaptability and longevity of organized Africa trade, an adaptability that was largely unmatched by any of the other trading companies of the century.

### 3. African companies in England's seventeenth century expansion

The early modern period brought with it widespread European expansion. Growing transoceanic and cross-cultural trade spurred the development of new products and production processes, increased migration - both forced and voluntary, transfer and disbursal of capital, and increased reliance on colonial imports and exports. Networks of traders developed, crossing vast oceans, aimed at supplying old markets with new products and new markets with established European necessities. As the world grew more connected, chains of commodities encircled the globe in intricate networks resting on complex credit systems and ever developing business techniques. After slowly establishing early trade throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth century, the century that followed saw a sharp increase in goods traded, settlements established, production and migration. These processes, taking place more or less simultaneously among different European states has been described as the establishment of the *first* empire, an empire of commerce, which readied the ground for the largescale imperialism of the nineteenth century – the *second* empire, and the industrial revolution.

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<sup>7</sup>An example is Carlos and Kruse, "The Decline of the Royal African Company."

In this process merchants played an integral part, as suppliers of the new colonial settlements, as settlers themselves, as discoverers, and as participants in the process of developing the imperial economy. Mercantile activity had relied on familial links and networks of trust as tools in the battle against risks and uncertainty, but as Europe's commercial reach increased, so did risks, uncertainty and the number of people involved. The result of this was an increased reliance on credit and reputation when building and maintaining commercial contact.<sup>8</sup> Some of Europe's mercantile communities responded to the challenge of mitigating risks and ensuring trustworthiness in overseas trade by joining together in partnerships. These groups took on various forms, experimented with a variety of formats, and increased in number throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century. In England, the focal point of this thesis, the seventeenth century came to be known as the incorporated century, and the joint-stock company came to represent one of two company archetypes.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the joint-stock structure, there was the regulated trading company which, despite appearing on and off throughout the seventeenth century, had its heyday in the latter part of sixteenth century. The regulated company consisted of traders who together controlled the access to a trade, but who, unlike their joint-stock counterparts, traded on separate accounts – meaning they did not pool capital, nor organize their ventures in unison. The format has been likened to the merchant guilds, where only guild members were permitted to conduct a specific trade, and together lower risk, and control market supply as well as prices.<sup>10</sup>

The early Africa companies operated, though at times loosely, along the lines of a joint-stock structure - where members pooled their capital together to further their commercial efforts; and enjoyed limited liability – where each member was only liable for the sum he (or she) invested, keeping their personal finances separate from the outcome of company-organized ventures. The joint-stock companies also observed rules for capital lock-in – where the investments made by individual members of the corporation was out of reach from creditors making claims against the same members privately; and the concept of the corporate body – where a corporate entity was awarded personhood. The latter of these was especially important as it allowed the company perpetual succession, continuing its existence beyond the life or involvement of its initial members, and allowed it to both sue and be sued,

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<sup>8</sup>Peter Mathias, "Risk, Credit and Kinship in Early Modern Enterprise," in *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 15–35.

<sup>9</sup>Aske Laursen Brock, "The Company Director: Commerce, State and Society" (University of Kent, 2017); Joyce Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton ; Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1978); Phil Withington, "Public Discourse, Corporate Citizenship, and State Formation in Early Modern England," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007): 1016–38.

<sup>10</sup>Sheilagh C. Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000-1800*, Cambridge Studies in Economic History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

own land and hold capital.<sup>11</sup> As the merchants of specific trades banded together in companies, and rulers started to realize the potential and importance of long-distance trade and colonial settlement, international competition was inevitable. A general contemporary understanding of the economy as a zero-sum game, where one nation's growth came at another's cost, meant that each nation saw it as vital to support their respective overseas sectors. Simultaneously, most early modern rulers were in no economic position to organize the expansion process directly<sup>12</sup>Rulers used their powers to issue patents and privileges in order to assist the companies in their trade, such as letters of privilege, proprietary grants and trade monopolies, extended through letters patent, of which the latter is the most important for the focus of this thesis.

England had three official Africa companies through the seventeenth century. That is companies that held a patent of exclusivity and privilege extended by the English rulers. Smaller companies and patent holding partnerships had traded to Africa in the sixteenth century, a brief account of which will be given below, but only in the second decade of the seventeenth came the first patent that gave the Guinea Company exclusive access to the West African coast on behalf of England. The Guinea Company (GC) traded as a tightly-linked and modestly sized company, with perpetual succession and rolling membership, meaning that regardless of the changes to its membership the company remained intact as a corporate body. The GC focused on trade to the African coast, centered around gold and African commodities, though some slave trading to the Americas took place before the patent rights passed to a new company in 1660. The Guinea Company's successor, the Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa (RA), was the first company to focus their attention on trade to the English colonies. The company was protected and assisted by increased colonial control and the exclusive right to supply the large-scale plantation economies with labour, as well as Acts of Navigation hindering non-English merchants from participating legally in the supply. The RA went further still, securing a sub-contract with the holders of the Spanish Asiento contract, the monopoly on supplying slave labour to the Spanish Empire. This was a highly attractive task as the Spanish markets were both large and fueled by bullion, as opposed to credit – the preferred choice in other colonial exchange. Still, the RA had a tough time, largely explained by the Second Anglo-Dutch war, as well as growing debts and animosity from the English planters.

The letters patents that were granted by the English rulers to the companies of the Africa trade, assured them geographical control over specific regions and their markets on behalf of England. Though changing somewhat in scope and

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<sup>11</sup>Giuseppe Dari-Mattiacci et al., "The Emergence of the Corporate Form," *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 33, no. 2 (January 5, 2017): 193–236; Davies, *The Royal African Company*.

<sup>12</sup>Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 16–18.

reach throughout the century, the main region of company interest remained the west coast of Africa, stretching from the Senegal and Gambia rivers, often referred to as Senegambia, towards the Sierra Leone region and on to the Gold Coast in modern day Ghana. As the century progressed the activity along the coast expanded, reaching southward towards the Bight of Benin and on towards Nigeria, to what was historically referred to as the coast of Calabar, continuing as far south as modern day Kongo . The constitutional and representative rights included in the patent gave the companies the ability to enter into trade agreements with different rulers in the name of the English king; to seize the goods of Englishmen who interloped within the geographical sphere covered by the patent, and the right to stop private trade that breached with it. Whether the company was in a position to command these rights was, however, another matter.

In their discussions regarding the seventeenth-century corporation the contributors to the workshop paper “*The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History*”, edited by Dr. William Pettigrew, identify five qualities that help describe a distinctively corporate sociology.<sup>13</sup> Firstly, the corporation appeared as subordinate to state authority both domestically and abroad. In England, the African companies relied on the ruler’s support through the extension of patents and privileges, and on the coast of Africa, they were rarely in any position to impose themselves on the local states. Instead, they were equipped with the ability to enter into treaties and trade agreements on behalf of the English rulers in order to facilitate their access to desirable markets. The company thus played an important role by facilitating English subordination to the local authority for the sake of trade on behalf of its own rulers. Secondly, and despite the subordinate character of the corporation domestically, it appeared autonomous from its domicile state in its operations abroad. This is exemplified by the rights the African companies held, through their letters patent, to pursue other Englishmen who challenged their privileges, seizing goods and challenging them in court. The right to seize property was reserved for the ruler in England, yet abroad those rights could be extended to commercial entities such as the Africa companies. It should be said, however, that these rights gradually expanded over the course of the century, and although they may have been included in the letters patent it did not necessarily follow that the companies were in any position to enforce them. Thirdly, a corporation’s existence represented a constant process of negotiation, as the company juggled challenging interlopers, foreign traders and rival states. This feature is especially prominent in the GC which did

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<sup>13</sup>William A. Pettigrew, ed., “The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History” (Workshop: Transoceanic Constitutions: The Corporation as Protagonist in Global History, Lincoln College, Oxford, 2017), 5–15; William A. Pettigrew, “Corporate Constitutionalism and the Dialogue between the Global and Local in Seventeenth-Century English History,” *Itinerario* 39, no. 3 (December 2015): 487–501.

most of its negotiating within its own ranks, as merchants who entered merged their own agendas with that of the company. These three features all applied to the GC and the RA to varying degrees. The RA, as a larger structure with a stricter format of corporate management, shareholding and operation, fits more easily than the Guinea Company with the fourth feature, it was more integrative. As the trading companies grew in importance and expended their scale of operation abroad, they became integrative points of connection between their domestic societies and global realities. The RA, and its successor even more so, featured in the public discussions regarding colonial management, issues of labour supply and the role of monopolies. The same cannot be said for the GC, which appears as a smaller and more closed structure, concerning itself mainly with bilateral trade in luxuries, less in the supply of colonial labour – a key element in the productivity of England's Atlantic colonies. The last feature identified by the contributors to *"The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History"* as descriptive of the seventeenth-century corporation relates to the corporation's constitutional nature. The letters patent as early examples of constitutions allowed for the "mobilization of capital at home and facilitated commercial relations overseas."<sup>14</sup> In addition to settling on constitutional practices for their operation at home, such as the rights and expectations of members, they adapted and experimented with alternative constitutional techniques abroad. Though this description fits well with the larger trading companies such as the East India and Levant Companies, it is difficult to identify clear tendencies for integrating constitutional practice in the case of the early Africa companies. Where the EIC held control over "corporate spaces" that included a multitude of nationalities and traditions which continuously impacted each other, the GC only controlled a few small footholds dotted along the African coast, and though there undoubtedly was mutual impact, the sources reveal frustratingly little about transnational interactions between local structures and the GC at this early stage. As for the RA, although its operations were larger, their control on the African coast was never strong and though the English colonial sphere was undergoing much change during its existence it remained inherently English in its constitutional practice. The early companies fit well into the description of a typical seventeenth century corporation in most ways, fulfilling the obligations of their patent and treaties of trade with varying but overall success, though they do not share the size or impact of the larger Levant and East India Companies neither domestically, nor in their meeting with the local states on the African coast.

The Africa companies never enjoyed strong market control. They operated in three distinctly different economic landscapes which were all more or less volatile,

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<sup>14</sup>Pettigrew, "The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History," 11.

a challenge few other trading companies had to tackle. Companies such as the East India or Levant Company did deal with variety of different markets within the eastern or Mediterranean sphere but was spared the three-way juggling act across the Atlantic facing the Africa companies. The same was true for their proprietary counterparts, such as the Bermuda and Virginia Companies, aimed at facilitating colonial settlement. The GC and RA, as well as the RAC, held little to no control over the African markets from the start, living on the terms of the local African societies, where demand changed rapidly, and trade was easily spoilt by rivals glutting the markets.

Illustration 1:  
The Coast of West Africa



Source: ClipArt, 2018

Across the Atlantic the African companies increased their presence and involvement in the slave trade as the labour demands of the newly established colonial societies in the English Caribbean grew. By 1663 the English slave trade was placed in the hands of the RA. In order to secure the necessary labour the colonial planters had to work either from a long-term perspective, gradually increasing the number

of workers by painstakingly saving all surplus funds, or hope for the extension of credit from their labour suppliers.<sup>15</sup> By making use of credit, usually extended – in the case of England - by established merchants in London, it became possible to acquire the necessary labour immediately and thus speed up both the repayment process and the generating of profit. Credit brought the necessary dynamism needed for the difficult process of establishing colonial production and reaping its reward. The increasing reliance of credit exchange came to color the Atlantic throughout the early modern period. In order to understand the full meaning and effect of this, Jacob Price recommended we “*Let go of the idea that credit and debt is something associated with the less fortunate*”.<sup>16</sup> Credit in the Atlantic context, rather than giving small-scale colonial producers a chance to establish themselves, was most readily extended to the most successful planters who managed to reach economies of scale in colonial production. From the perspective of a creditor these were the candidates with the highest likelihood to repay their debts. The importance of credit thus further favored the large-scale planters and the larger production units and contributed to the phasing out of the reliance on English indentured servants, as it sped up the gathering of land on fewer hands in larger plantations. The result was an increasing reliance on the trafficking of laborers from Africa's western coast. Though slavery, as a new form of labour organization, gradually took over from the reliance on European indentured servants, the mode of financing the labor supply changed little.

Richard Sheridan referred to colonial financing in the seventeenth century as a “*merchant-system of finance*” where metropolitan merchants, and later the company, traded on their personal accounts, either through travelling the Atlantic themselves, or by making use of a network of factors and supercargoes.<sup>17</sup> This meant most of the risk for both extending capital and trading in colonial goods fell on the merchants, and later the company. The lack of liquidity that plagued the English colonial markets, meant that a reliance on the future sale of colonial commodities drove all exchange. However, any return on colonial products took a long time to materialize and fluctuated greatly as markets for different commodities reached saturation. Therefore, the extension of credit to planters often involved waiting on repayment for long periods of time. In the case of the Africa companies this transferred the problem of liquidity onto the company, and quickly resulted in the need for the companies to seek credit of their own.

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<sup>15</sup>Joseph C. Miller, “Credit, Captives, Collateral and Currencies: Debt, Slavery and the Financing of the Atlantic World,” in *Debt and Slavery in the Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds*, ed. Gwyn Campbell and Alessandro Stanziani (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 105–22.

<sup>16</sup>Jacob M. Price, “Credit in the Slave Trade and Plantation Economies,” in *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 293–94.

<sup>17</sup>Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Canoe Press, 1974), 262.

From 1663 the Royal Adventurers held the monopoly on labor supply in the West Indies but could not hinder competition from private trade and experienced severe difficulties with getting planters to repay their ever-increasing debts. In London they supposedly held the sole right to distribute African products, but also here the integrity of their monopoly was hard pressed. Managing this balancing act was difficult and relied on experienced and established merchants that could step-in with their personal credit when the company could hope for no more. The necessity of private, personal credit remained until the very end of the RA's existence, and underlined the companies continued dependency on their members private personas and reputations as trustworthy lenders.

#### **4. Connecting histories**

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to our existing knowledge of the Africa companies as institutions, as well as their trade and returns as manifestations of their changing success, by placing a continuing line of influential company members center stage. This thesis therefore compliment works that emphasize the importance of informal networks at the base of all major institutions. In order to counterbalance a strong focus on the institution as an integral part of the move towards modernity and increasingly intricate economic methods of organization, which inherently results in a ranking of an institution's output, I try to connect the personal experiences of historical actors to the development of the institution. As the majority of this thesis focuses on the first of the English Africa companies, the Guinea Company, where limited sources remain, a holistic approach which includes individual actors and their endeavors both before and during their time as company members, can throw new light on company and trade development.

A sharp divide between the corporate and the private world has developed, and the two are often seen as distinct and on collision course with each other. In the case of the Africa companies the tendency to focus on the animosity and conflict that existed between corporate and private interest has been exacerbated by the overweight of judicial and political sources surrounding the meeting of patent, privilege and exclusion, and private, inherently illegal activity. However, little attention has been given to the potential of such sources for telling us about the company itself and its members. I therefore turn my attention both to the internal history of the company itself, as simultaneously a unit and a group of individuals. The individuals in question formed part of a rather small and tightly-linked group of company men with diverse experience from long-distance trade in the Atlantic, as well as the Indian Ocean. I suggest an approach that aims at connecting the two, the private and the company, as it manifests itself in the *longue durée* of the seventeenth century. I argue

that the private interests of company members not only preceded the company, but continuously impacted its development in both positive and negative ways. At times it assisted, at other times hindered or took precedence over the company as a greater structure. By investigating the private interests of central company members, I argue that they were integral to the company, intimately connected to its history and to its fate. I attempt to connect, rather than juxtapose and compare private activities as separate and parallel to company life, disconnected from and inherently damaging to the company structure.

The emergence of the concept of entangled history was a response to the limitation presented by the widespread application of the comparative approach especially to the history of empire and expansion that followed the global turn. Where comparative history juxtaposed historical trends, national histories, cultures and periods, and perhaps especially geographical regions, the devotees of entangled history as a concept looked for ways of acknowledging two distinct historical entities that were simultaneously intermixed and mutually impacting each other.<sup>18</sup> A conceptual framework that acknowledged two entities as both separate and conjoined, with both distinct and shared histories. The traditional purpose of both comparative and entangled historical studies have been to help in the traversing of real and imagined borders of nationality, time and culture, emphasizing noteworthy commonalities or differences and understanding interdependence, rather than dividing history into monolithic and disconnected pieces of an overarching narrative. This thesis does not cross national or temporal borders. It does not speak of distinctly different groups. Instead, it takes a long *durée* perspective on the entangled histories of two subsequent corporations and the private individuals that built and engaged with them. In a response to the tendency of emphasizing the monolithic, monopolistic, patent-holding companies as countering private and dynamic mercantile initiative, I seek to show that the spheres of private and company activity, in the case of the early Africa companies, were created, maintained, and sustained in unison, through a dialectic relationship that mutually depended on and amplified by each other.

As has been alluded to above, in English historiography a separation has developed between the private and the corporate in overseas trade, especially with the important and influential work of Robert Brenner in the 1990s.<sup>19</sup> His arguments have had its equivalent in other historiographies as well, most notably through the focus on private and illegal trade, and the undermining of company privilege by private individuals in Europe and throughout empire. Partly a response to Immanuel

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<sup>18</sup>Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (July 1997): 735–62; Jürgen Kocka, "Comparison and Beyond," *History and Theory* 42, no. 1 (February 1, 2003): 39–44.

<sup>19</sup>Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*.

Wallerstein's world system with its presentation of a core-periphery relationship that favored the metropole, this approach instead emphasized the lack of metropolitan control (often represented by the "weak" overseas company), a micro-approach that captured the reality "on-the-spot", and the reliance on illegal activity among the developing territories - especially in the Americas.<sup>20</sup> Brenner does not claim that the relationship between company and private was necessarily hostile, but that the two spheres appealed to different social groups, and thus enforced a division between wealthy, well-established company merchants who preferred monopolistic domestic market dominance and bilateral luxury exchange in the Indian Ocean, in juxtaposition to an entrepreneurially free Atlantic where myriad trades and diverse commercial activities enticed small-scale merchants and shipowners who were willing to accept the insecurity, and long-term investment that the settlement societies in the Americas offered and demanded. However, as will be shown, this divide leaves little room for the African companies which fit neither here nor there, crossing, as the century progresses, from one oceanic sphere to the next, from luxury trade to plantation supply, and from gold trade to planter debt.

This parallel is part and parcel of a recent turn away from the strong focus on the role of institutions in generating economic growth, and a top-down approach to the process of empire, in which the commercial companies were accredited much importance as an extension of government control. Instead several historians' interests turned towards the impact of the individual, of individual agency, and of dynamic entrepreneurship in spite of rigid regulation and control from above.<sup>21</sup> Important historical works, such as Sheilagh Ogilvie's *Institutions and European Trade* and Francesca Trivellato's, *The Familiarity of Strangers* represented a growing trend that both questioned the efficiency of institutions and offered alternative ways

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<sup>20</sup>Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System.*, Studies in Social Discontinuity (Academic, 1974). Karwan Fatah-Black, *White Lies and Black Markets: Evading Metropolitan Authority in Colonial Suriname, 1650-1800* (BRILL, 2015); Fatah-Black; Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt*; Bram Hoonhout, "Smuggling for Survival: Self-Organized, Cross-Imperial Colony Building in Essequibo and Demerara, 1746-1796," in *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800* (2016, n.d.); Bram Hoonhout, "The West Indian Web : Improvising Colonial Survival in Essequibo and Demerara, 1750-1800" (Thesis, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.2870/329011>; Carlos and Kruse, "The Decline of the Royal African Company."

<sup>21</sup>Douglass C. North and Barry R. Weingast, "Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England," *The Journal of Economic History* 49, no. 4 (December 1989): 803-32; Stephen H. Haber, Douglass Cecil North, and Barry R. Weingast, *Political Institutions and Financial Development* (Stanford University Press, 2008); Douglas W. Allen, *The Institutional Revolution: Measurement and the Economic Emergence of the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 2011); Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Avner Greif, "Contract Enforceability and Economic Institutions in Early Trade: The Maghribi Traders' Coalition," *The American Economic Review* 83, no. 3 (1993): 525-48; Avner Greif, "Cultural Beliefs and the Organization of Society: A Historical and Theoretical Reflection on Collectivist and Individualist Societies," *Journal of Political Economy* 102, no. 5 (October 1, 1994): 912-50.

of explaining the organization and profits of empire.<sup>22</sup>

The historiographical presentation above is admittedly somewhat simplified, as works that underline the interdependence of the two has appeared in increasing degree in recent decades. These works argue for the importance of the individual as intrinsic to the success of official institutions such as the trading companies, and show us how reality often differs greatly from the theoretical, also in the daily running of even the most rigid institutions.<sup>23</sup> The principal-agent dynamic has been both the scourge and the savior of institutions, by drawing in incapable and qualified personnel in equal measure, both enticed by the opportunities of enrichment from supplementary private activities. In the case of the companies presented here, they form part of a tradition where much blame has been placed on the principal-agent issue as part of the explanation of their perceived failures. In this the main attention has again been directed towards the latter decades of the seventeenth century Africa companies, the RAC.<sup>24</sup> However, the problem of dishonest agents, though it does appear sporadically in early records pertaining to the company, did not preoccupy the leaders of the earlier companies to nearly the same degree as it did the management of the RAC. Unlike the sizable format of the RAC, and to some degree the RA, several of the prominent GC members had a past in overseas trade and had been present on the African coast, either in a private capacity or as company representatives. They were therefore less removed from its reality, less likely to fall victims to biased representations of the reality on the coast by cheating agents on the spot, and as a result the principal-agent issues are not the focus of this work. Instead of looking at the company employees on the West African coast, it focusses on the changing core of company management and leadership in the metropole as it developed through the century.

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<sup>22</sup>Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade*; Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (Yale University Press, 2014); Cátia Antunes and Filipa Ribeiro Da Silva, "Cross-Cultural Entrepreneurship in the Atlantic: Africans, Dutch and Sephardic Jews in Western Africa, 1580-1674," *Itinerario* 35, no. 1 (April 2011): 49–76; Xabier Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World: Spanish Merchants and Their Overseas Networks* (Boydell Press, 2013).

<sup>23</sup>Søren Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work: Madras and the City of London 1660-1740 / Søren Mentz*. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2005); Chris Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company: The Dutch East India Company and Its Servants in the Period of Its Decline (1740-1796)* (BRILL, 2012); Regina Grafe, "On the Spatial Nature of Institutions and the Institutional Nature of Personal Networks in the Spanish Atlantic," *Culture & History Digital Journal* 3, no. 1 (June 30, 2014); Ann M. Carlos and Stephen Nicholas, "Managing the Manager: An Application of the Principal Agent Model to the Hudson's Bay Company," *Oxford Economic Papers* 45, no. 2 (1993): 243–56.

<sup>24</sup>Ann M. Carlos and Stephen Nicholas, "Theory and History: Seventeenth-Century Joint-Stock Chartered Trading Companies," *The Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 4 (1996): 916–24; S. R. H. Jones and Simon P. Ville, "Efficient Transactors or Rent-Seeking Monopolists? The Rationale for Early Chartered Trading Companies," *The Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 4 (1996): 898–915; S. R. H. Jones and Simon P. Ville, "Theory and Evidence: Understanding Chartered Trading Companies," *The Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 4 (December 1996): 925–26.

The scholarly focus has not only been attentive of the challenges but also the importance and benefit of private activity by company employees for the large-scale trading companies. Examples of great recent studies that acknowledge the companies' dependency on private entrepreneurial activity are the works by Søren Mentz, Chris Nierstrasz and Emily Ericsson who acknowledges how the dynamism of private activity, conducted overseas, benefitted the company structure.<sup>25</sup> Though this thesis also focusses on the importance of the private individual in the process of developing the Anglo-Africa trade, it sees the company, less as an obstacle to overcome for private traders, instead underlining the appeal of company trade to those outside of the company structure. Instead of considering the entry into a company structure a dismissal or a suppression of the newly joined members' private activity, the Guinea Company with its patent, offered the chance to amplify activity that had before been private. The members of the small, though shifting leadership, of the Guinea Company decided at different times to place their established commercial operations within a company format that adopted and assisted its continual growth, strengthened by the, at least nominal, protection from competition that the company patent provided.

Thus, instead of focusing on the animosity between a dynamic but suppressed private sphere and the inefficient, privileged and undermined company, I aim to show the entanglement of the two as they appear in the relationship between the Guinea Company, the Royal Adventurers, and its leaders.

## 5. Focus and factors of analysis

I argue that in the protection of private interests the company played an instrumental part. Instead of seeing the companies as structures that diverse actors moved in and out of, we should instead see the early companies as being built around private practices. This was of course how companies emerged, but more importantly it was also how they endured. Indeed, as the century progresses, the image of a company with more or less anonymous shareholders emerge, but for the majority of the period covered in this thesis we must speak of a very tight-knit, exclusive group of traders, that replaced each other gradually with age, and who introduced their own solutions and goals into the company sphere. This was a necessity for the company to survive in markets that were extremely volatile, easily overcrowded, and under continuous pressure from geopolitical changes. These are not, in first instance,

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<sup>25</sup>Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company, 1600–1757* (Princeton University Press, 2014); Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*; Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*.

men who joined the companies because it was their only option for legal trade, for that the companies were too feeble and their geographical scope too wide. Instead they all operated privately and in breach of the company charter, until they deemed it the right time from the perspective of their personal careers to opt for company membership. By including the perspective of the members as private merchants with experience, and who's goal it was to maintain the income their trade generated, it becomes possible to see the developments of the company and the official trade in a new light, better embedded into contemporary realities.

There is ample indication in these early years of the trade, that company struggle did not represent private struggle. Two clear cases appear right out of the gate, in chapter one, where private traders John Davies and Humphrey Slaney utilized their superior experience and connections to hollow out the company patent, so as to secure themselves the fruits of the trade, at the cost of the company's other, more aristocratic – but less experienced, members. As the company returns dropped, the two merchants secured themselves the trade and large profits. As the company argues over the payment of a debt under £1000, Slaney privately sent out ships worth £20,000 or more. It is important to note that the weight of the patent, and the privileges it offered, was not inherently connected to the numbers on the company's bottom line, and the numbers are therefore not enough to go by when we attempt to assess the success of company's trade and activity, or the appeal of company membership. The patent secured the same nominal rights for its members, regardless of whether the company was wealthy or poor.

Different merchants display what appears as differing motives for joining the companies when they do. No records exist that can tell us with certainty in what way organized trade appealed to each individual, but their actions allow some hypotheses to form. For some, such as long-term, and well established private trader, Samuel Vassall, it may have been as simple as considerate private losses over a short period of time. In addition, his attempts at getting the state apparatus involved in removing the company or alternatively to extend the patent to himself also fell within that same year. Company membership may therefore, in his instance, have appealed in a “conventional” fashion, by offering lowered risk, limited liability, pooled capital and better access to credit. For another, Maurice Thomson, the idea of combining eastern and western trade activity, where the hope was for English activity on the West African coast to play an integral part in a globally connected trade, appears as the main motivation. As he attempted to persuade the East India Company to include West African trade in their activities, he desired a collaboration between the Guinea Company and the East India Company. In order to achieve this he desired the latter took over the former's patent, and he deemed membership in the Guinea Company as necessary to achieve his goal. As his private discussions with the East India Company turned towards the introduction of African trade to eastern commerce, Thomson

leaves his practice of interloping in areas covered by the Guinea Company patent – where he had been active for nearly twenty years up to that point. By considering the past and private dealings of company members it becomes clear how the world of private and corporate were closely enmeshed. If one acknowledges that company experiences had its impact on the reality of individual members, it is not unreasonable to assumed that such an impact flowed both ways.

Private experience and interests often benefitted the company, as was the case with Thomson, but private interests also came at a cost. The interests of company members were widespread, and as the sphere of overseas trade grew, the merchants in question used the company structure to shelter their activity from competition. But in their attempts to shield their interests, they pushed the company to the forefront of their endeavors to continue to exert pressure on their competitors. I identify the protection from competition was one of the greatest motives for company membership. But, as will be seen, towards the middle of the century this resulted in the company being pulled, along with the African coast, increasingly into the Atlantic. With the introduction of the slave trade into official company trade the company entangled itself into an impossible web of responsibilities and debt. The securing of a patent of excessive privilege, the patent presented to the Royal Adventurers in 1663 which included the sole right to import enslaved labour into the growing Atlantic colonies, appeared to secure the company's future. However, the entry of the company into the transatlantic slave trade was instead the beginning of the end of regulated English Africa trade. The task proved too great, and the Atlantic economy of debt meant the expectations of profit failed. The monopoly was unpopular and drove a wedge between the company and its customer base, the Atlantic planters.

The men that will be presented in more detail here all were company members at various points. They all traded privately in the Atlantic, several of them also in the Indian ocean. They were all English, and in focusing attention on their impact on the company, as its leaders, this study remains adherently English, European, and metropolitan in its nature. The main focus is therefore not on the company's employees on the spot, or of cross-cultural meetings in Africa or the Caribbean. Detailed and enlightened work continues to be produced on these subjects however and have been drawn on throughout the research.<sup>26</sup> This is also not a thesis that seeks to assess the transatlantic slave trade. The trade featured as an integral part of both the companies' and the actors' private activity, and is presented as such, but the focus remains on the company leadership. This choice of focus is not meant to

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<sup>26</sup>Kwame Yeboa Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720: Study of the African Reaction to European Trade*. (London: Clarendon Press, 1970); Robert Porter, "European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667" (University of South Africa, 1974); Colleen E. Kriger, *Making Money: Life, Death, and Early Modern Trade on Africa's Guinea Coast* (Ohio University Press, 2017).

denigrate or undermine the inherent inhumanity and immorality of one of history's darkest chapters. The slave trade and its relation to England and its companies has produced, and continues to produce, great scholarly research, which again has been drawn upon in the writing of this thesis. However, the understandably strong parallel that has been drawn between the companies and their slave trade, in the attempts at understanding and remembering the importance and impact of that period in human history, has partly clouded the fact that the African companies' trade in enslaved humans only commenced after several decades of company activity, gradually, and in combination with bilateral commodity exchange. I attempt to approach the trade in slaves both from the company and the private trader perspective, and thus question the effects it had on the company and the future of official Africa trade under patent.

The historical actors given attention here share other common features. They were all private traders, based in London, who opted for company membership. Once members of the company they took on leading roles as managers of the Guinea Company, or took central roles in its successor, the Royal Adventurers into Africa, which saw the membership expand. They all operated in a wider set of trades than that to Africa alone, and their interests in the company trade complimented their other activities. They had interests in the Atlantic provisioning trades, as labour or credit providers, or in offering European necessities to the growing Atlantic settlements and commenced their activities early in the century when the Atlantic was comparably calm. Their involvement in overseas activity, as well as their involvement in supporting trades, such as ship ownership and plantation development, meant that they possessed extensive private experience from the African coast or the overseas territories. Several of them included trade to the east as part of their commercial portfolios, in the form of involvement with the EIC. This was especially prevalent when the EIC leased the Guinea Company charter near the middle of the century. Several of them also drew on connections to political elites, and at various times involved themselves in the management of the Atlantic colonies.

Following chronological lines this thesis commences with the actors who first requested and operated under the company patent, John Davies and Humphrey Slaney. Davies was instrumental in acquiring the patent in 1618, while Slaney, joining the company shortly after, introducing both his trade and his associates to the company over the course of the 1620s. By the end of the decade Slaney, accompanied by his partners Nicholas Crispe, William Cloberry and John Wood, requested a new patent better suited to their interests and mode of trade. These four ran the company much like a partnership until they were gradually replaced either through old age, or problematic political associations by the early 1640s. The only remaining partner was John Wood, who was joined by Samuel Crispe (Nicholas Crispe's brother), Rowland Wilson, and soon after Maurice Thomson and Samuel Vassall. The latter two had, at the point of acquiring their membership, operated for many years as interlopers

in areas covered by the company patent. The introduction of the EIC to the African coast brought with it the increased interest of merchants-politicians Martin Noell and Thomas Povey, but eventually put an end to the Guinea Company with the return of the Stuart monarchy. Noell and Povey together used their experience, reputation and political connections to influence the ongoing development of colonial management in ways that favored both their private trade the company. After contributing to secure the Royal Adventurers a favorable patent in 1663, which for the first time included the sole right to provide enslaved labour to English colonial markets, they drew on private connections and their capacity as private traders to secure the company a sub-contract to the Spanish Asiento. However, the slave trade monopoly and its accompanying debts, combined with the second Anglo-Dutch war and the growing unpopularity of the company among its main customer (and debtor) base, eventually left it with no other option but to declare bankruptcy and hand their patent over to the Royal African Company in 1672.

Defining aspects of company activity was introduced from, or relied upon, the private sphere, where it had first been tested and tried. That included some of the most defining features, such as the slave trade format, the modes of trade on the African coast, the Asiento, and the colonial control that brought both benefits and damage. The development of the company was a direct result of the attempts by established traders to protect the position of privilege that they enjoyed as a result of being among the early Atlantic traders.

## **6. Sources**

The sources for the early African companies are almost all institutional in nature. For the first of the companies, the Guinea Company, no company sources remain. Unlike the later companies, the RAC and to some degree the RA, the GC has left no minute books, no overview of shareholders and little company correspondence remains. It does, however, appear frequently in the sources of the High Court of Admiralty in connection to interloping and disputes over losses and debt responsibilities. The same is the case for Court of Chancery, which records give us insight into the company structure as a result of several internal conflicts between members that ended in litigation. The most enlightening in this regard are the records produced in an internal debt dispute at the end of the 1620s, in an inheritance dispute involving the company from the late 1630s and an investigation by a committee of the Customs Office from the mid-1640s. Together they paint a picture of a company structure that is changing and developing as a result of growing experience, but frustratingly little light is thrown on the size of the investor groups, the size of its membership or the full extent of its profits. What the cases do tell us, however, is that the returns on

successful company voyages were often large – upwards of £20-30,000 in some cases, and because successful voyages that were wound up without conflict did not appear in the courtroom, we must entertain the possibility that the returns went beyond what can be gleaned from the records that have remained.

In addition to the court records, all the relevant patents have been preserved and consulted, either in published form through the use of C.T. Carr's influential publications for the Selden Society, or in patent rolls and state papers held by the national archive. Carr's publication, *Select Charters of Trading Companies, AD 1530-1707*, includes the 1618 patents of the Guinea Company, the two patents granted to the RA in 1660 and 1663, and the RAC patent of 1672. For the second Guinea Company patent, granted in 1631, and the outcome of a charter renegotiation in 1651, I have relied on the state papers, including the patent rolls, kept at the National Archives.<sup>27</sup>

The collection of state papers also provides valuable insight through the many petitions that have remained from the company members. The continuing pressure from interlopers, as well as certain substantial losses, has produced much material regarding the company's experience. These records are spread among different departments, such as the Privy Council, the Council of State (the equivalent of the former during the Commonwealth period), the colonial and the domestic state papers. Among the state papers can be found the aforementioned investigation by the Committee of Customs from 1643-1644 which includes much information regarding the company shipping, assets, employees and debts, giving a rare snapshot of the state of company affairs in a turbulent time. The papers report of growing activities in the West Indies, as well as growing planter debt, and shows that the company had already started its turn toward the Atlantic. The state papers have been supplemented by relevant reports from the Historical Manuscripts Commission.

Before the Guinea Company lost its patent for good, with the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy, the patent was leased out to the East India Company. Therefore, both secondary scholarly works and EIC records have been consulted. The period of RA activity left more company material which was amply researched by G.F. Zook already at the start of the former century, and has been included here. However, the focus on the Asiento trade, of which the company sources say little, I have supplemented the chapter of RA activity with company petitions and discussions in the state papers, and quantitative trading estimates.

As for the merchants themselves, they have left little. Their ledgers and

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<sup>27</sup>Carr's publication includes the 1618 patents of the Guinea Company, the two patents granted to the RA in 1660 and 1663, and the RAC patent of 1672. For the second Guinea Company patent, granted in 1631, and the outcome of a charter renegotiation in 1651, I have relied on the state papers. TNA: C 66/2573, SP 25/65. C.T. Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies, AD 1530-1707*, vol. XXVIII (London: Selden Society, 1913), 99–106, 172–77, 177–82.

business correspondence were likely a well-kept secret when they were alive, and little has surfaced since. The court records and petitions assist in forming an image and are when possible supplemented by other sources related to their other activity, such as records from the early Virginia settlement, and relevant secondary works. The only exception is the papers of Thomas Povey, who's private and public role became blurred enough for his records to be saved for posterity, and later included in the collections of the British Library, filed under the title Egerton MS 1295 and Add MS 11411. These records detail the plans and suggestions of Povey and his close collaborative partner Martin Noell - from the Commonwealth and Restoration period - for better metropolitan control over the colonies, a control that also benefitted the company.

The Guinea Company produced contemporary published sources as well, such as Richard Jobson's *The Golden Trade*, written when he, as Guinea Company representative, travelled up the Gambia river in 1621. Along with other travel writings gathered by Hakluyt and Purchas, the diaries of shipwright Peter Pett, from the 1610-1620s; Pieter van den Broecke - a Dutch Africa trader active in the first decades of the century; and the publication of an anonymous Dutch manuscript from the middle of the century instructing the reader of the workings of Africa trade, has been consulted. The published diaries of Samuel Pepys and statesman Bulstrode Whitelock have also been consulted for their anecdotal evidence on the activities of merchants and company.

To compliment the qualitative sources, I have at times consulted the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database in an attempt to gauge trade levels and directions, but the focus on such an early period of the trade results in scarce sources also here.

## 7. Chapter plan

Running along chronological lines, this thesis, after giving some preparatory context, commences with the launch of the Guinea Company in 1618. It represented the first joint-stock company granted exclusive access to the coast of Africa on behalf of England and consisted of men from diverse elites. Both courtiers and naval men featured prominently, but they quickly fell victim to overseas traders with experience and connections far superior. This resulted in several court cases and internal struggles, where the merchants continuously appear at the center of events. The lack of profit, and the constant infighting saw the vast majority of the members leave the company. This gave more space to the merchants to pursue their trade and prepare for a relaunching of the company along lines better suited to their need.

Chapter two investigates what that meant, by using court records to understand how the company was organized under the new charter it received in

1631. A small group of merchants remain as the core of the company and shared the trade and the organization among themselves through high levels of mutual trust and dynamism. The structure undergoes change however, as personal problems spill into the company in the early 1640s. Private obligations become company problems as an in-depth investigation is launched to determine whether the state is entitled to part of the company's holdings. This put pressure on remaining traders, who rely on personal credit, but resolves itself as the investigation reveals that the company is not financially responsible for the missing funds. The investigation offers a snapshot into the condition of the company and reveals its gradual involvement in plantation production and slave trade.

Chapter three considers the Guinea Company in the 1650 with increasing pressure from interlopers and non-company traders, resulting in a patent renegotiation in 1651. The result of the patent negotiation are limitations and divisions to the company's trade, and partly increased the desire to lease out their charter to the East India Company from 1657. By considering overlapping membership and multipronged trading interests the chapter shows the private initiative behind the ground-breaking decision.

Chapter four considers the mid-century changes to colonial management and its impact on trade in the Atlantic, by putting them in a longer context that considers the changes the period brought to the merchants in question. By comparing past practices to the development of new modes of trade, the chapter aims to show a continuity that crosses some of the most turbulent decades of English history.

Lastly, chapter five considers the fate of the RA as a sub-contractor to the Spanish Asiento. It considers to what extent the prospect of participation in the Spanish slave trade, drove certain merchants to join the company, and how they played a vital role in securing the deal. However, war and planter frustration grew to unsurmountable obstacles and the company was left unable to pay its creditors. The Royal Adventurers was therefore dissolved, and quickly replaced by the RAC. The willingness by the new company to accept the debts of its predecessor, suggests however, an overlap in membership, as most of the debts owed by the RA was to its own members.

## 8. Englishmen and Africa before the company

When considering the early English activity on the West African coast, it must be acknowledged that the Guinea Company was not the first manifestation of trade activity between England and the African states on the western coast of the continent, although the patentees claimed so during the negotiations over the patent in 1618. The contestations caused by this claim of first discovery would follow the company for decades as frustrated private traders argued that this initial lie undermined the

foundations of the patent from the very start.<sup>28</sup> Some of the members of the company certainly had traded to Africa individually before 1618. One influential company member, John Davies, had already attempted to obtain a personal patent in 1614, and the claim of being the first Englishmen to trade to the coast was indeed false, a fact the company was aware of when they made the it. Statements given later in the century, suggests that a trading factory was erected in the Gambia River by later Guinea Company governor William St. John and associates already in 1615, but the validity of the claim is hard to determine with certainty.<sup>29</sup> Regardless of a potential early factory, it does not alter the fact that early English activity in Africa, in the employment of the Portuguese and increasingly also among the Dutch, went as far back as the fifteenth century.<sup>30</sup> In England, like in in France and the Low Countries, the second half of the sixteenth century saw several voyages of exploration and trade to the African coast, with some being organized by smaller, looser partnerships, others through more organized activity.<sup>31</sup> For England, the most notable among them were the voyages by William Towerson, John Lok, and Sir John and Sir William Hawkins - father and uncle of Richard Hawkins, a later member of the Guinea Company.<sup>32</sup> These early voyages based themselves on coastal trade with African settlements in the region stretching from Cape Verde down to the River Sestos in modern day Liberia, although at times reaching as far as Castelo da Mina, the center for Portuguese – and later Dutch – activity, on the Ghana coast. Much like the Portuguese and the Dutch, the English would soon also be drawn to the Gold Coast, where European competition quickly became rampant.

In Richard Hakluyt's publication of William Towerson's third voyage to Guinea, in 1577, we get an insight into what the early English traders brought to the

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<sup>28</sup>The National Archives (TNA): CO 1/11, no.29. SP Dom., James I, Acts of the Privy Council of England, Vol. 38, 30 April 1623, p.681-682

<sup>29</sup>TNA: CO 1/11, no.15

<sup>30</sup>Heather Dalton, "Into Spey to Selle for Slavys': English, Spanish, and Genoese Merchant Networks and Their Involvement with the 'Cost of Gwynea' Trade before 1550," in *Brokers of Change: Atlantic Commerce and Cultures in Pre-Colonial Western Africa*, ed. Toby Green (Oxford University Press, 2012). Larry Gragg, "'To Procure Negroes': The English Slave Trade to Barbados, 1627–60," *Slavery & Abolition* 16, no. 1 (April 1, 1995): 65–84.

<sup>31</sup>Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, ed. Edmund Goldsmid, vol. XI. Africa (Edinburgh : E. & G. Goldsmid, 1889), 73–189. Most references to voyages list the names of merchants involved, with some exceptions such as John Lok's letters to the Merchants Adventurers to Guinie(sic.) (1561), see *Ibid*, p.164-165. W.R. Scott gives a more detailed presentation of the Merchant Adventurers to Guinie in his William Robert Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720: Companies for Foreign Trade, Colonization, Fishing and Mining*, vol. 2 (Cambridge : The University Press, 1910), 3–10.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid*. William Towerson: p.102-146; John Lok: p.84-102, 164-165; Sir John Hawkins: p.171-173; William Rutter: p.167; George Fenner: p.173-195.

coast.<sup>33</sup> A list, written by Towerson, of desired goods on the coast “*betwixt Sierra Leone and the furthest place of the Mine[Elmina]*” included metal – especially iron bars and “*manils*”<sup>34</sup> of brass and lead, used as currency on large parts of the coast, as well as knives, axe heads, swords, daggers, and basins in brass, tin, and pewter. Kettles, chests, and packing sheets were also desirable. As for specific fabrics, linen was the principal merchandize, but also “*kersie*”<sup>35</sup> is mentioned. So is “*red cloth of low price*”, as well as gowns, cloaks, hats, red caps, Spanish blankets, leather bags, blue corral, and horse tails. The fashion tastes of the African markets were famously volatile and especially the cargoes of cloth proved difficult as an increasing number of fabrics, colors and patterns became available. Still, the trade from Europe largely remained in commodities such as cloth, metal ware, tools, and weapons throughout the seventeenth century, though accompanied by an increasing trade in firearms, as well as alcohol, which formed a vital part of ceremonious gift-giving on the coast.<sup>36</sup> In exchange for their goods the English acquired gold dust, ivory, and malaguetta pepper grains, as well as redwood – known locally as *tacola/takula/taccolla*, used in the dying of cloth and for cosmetic and ceremonial use among several of the Africa societies along the littoral as far south as modern-day Kongo and Gabon.<sup>37</sup> These commodities, along with wax and gum would remain the most important African commodities for the *direct* exchange between West Africa and Europe throughout the century and the next. However, as the seventeenth century progressed a parallel trade in slaves to the Spanish Americas, as well as to the growing European settlements in the Americas, increased in importance.

According to calculations made by W.R. Scott, the early trade in gold, exchanged for brass, copper and tin, generated profits, so much so that merchants could hope for returns ten times the size of the capital risked.<sup>38</sup> This ensured a continued interest, often in combination with other trades; such as that to Spain, the

<sup>33</sup>Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation : Made by Sea or over-Land to the Remote and Farthest Distant Quarters of the Earth at Any Time within the Compasse of These 1600 Yeeres*, vol. VI (Glasgow : James MacLehose and Sons, 1903), 252. Discussed also in Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 105–6.

<sup>34</sup>Bracelets made from different metals. Reference to Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*, 105.

<sup>35</sup>Kersey, a coarse, woven woolen cloth.

<sup>36</sup>Christina Brauner, “Connecting Things: Trading Companies and Diplomatic Gift-Giving on the Gold and Slave Coasts in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 20, no. 4 (July 5, 2016): 422.

<sup>37</sup>Pieter van den Broecke and J. D. La Fleur, *Pieter van Den Broecke’s Journal of Voyages to Cape Verde, Guinea and Angola (1605-1612)*, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society, no. 5 (London: Hakluyt Society, 2000), 73, 79–80, 87–88, 97, 102. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*, 105. Pieter De Marees, A. Van Dantzig, and Adam Jones, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)* (British Academy, 1987), 239.

<sup>38</sup>Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 2:p.4-5.

Mediterranean, or to Morocco – known contemporaneously as the Barbary coast. However, the volatility that gold brought into the exchange was likely prevalent from the very early days of contact. Thus, despite Scott’s promising calculations, it was notoriously difficult to predict returns and outcomes. This remained an unpleasant fact also in the century to come. The trade was far from risk-free, and in addition to typical force majeure risks such as accidents at sea and death from disease, the early English traders were constantly on the alert for hostilities from the Portuguese attempting to maintain their exclusive position in the trade, or from the African states who had established trade relations with them. Often, in contemporaneous renditions of their experiences, merchants spoke of trade that was broken off by the sudden arrival of Portuguese armed forces or their allies, forcing the English to flee back to their ships for a hasty departure.<sup>39</sup> At other times the English traders were met with hostility as a result of the actions of Englishmen who came before them. An example of which can be seen in the accounts of William Towerson from his first voyage to the coast of Guinea in 1555, where he endeavored to convince the African traders of the town of Don John near Elmina, that he, unlike some of his countrymen who had visited the coast before him, had no intentions of running away with people against their will or forcing anyone into slavery.<sup>40</sup>

The thoughtless actions of some of the English traders contributed to a gradual push towards structuring the trade more firmly. It was not beneficial that ventures representing the same state followed such “*inconsistent methods*”, to use the words of Scott.<sup>41</sup> While Lok and Towerson largely focused on pursuing trade relations and establishing trust between them and the African states, the Hawkins brothers, John and William, instead opted for capturing Africans along the coast. They were enslaved, brought across the Atlantic, and offered up for sale to the Spanish in the West Indies and on the American mainland.<sup>42</sup> The voyages by the Hawkins brothers in the early 1560s were perhaps the best-known example of this practice, but the topic is referred to by both African and English traders throughout the second half of the sixteenth- and the first decades of the seventeenth century in ways that suggests they were not the only, nor the first, to have made use of such methods. Their son and nephew Richard Hawkins, a member of the GC for some years before his death in 1622, also made a note of promises of the slave trade during a voyage to the Americas in 1593: ‘*It is a trade of great profit, and much used, for that the Negroes*

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<sup>39</sup>Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, XI. Africa:123–24.

<sup>40</sup>Hakluyt, XI. Africa:121.

<sup>41</sup>Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 2:9.

<sup>42</sup>Scott, 2:8–9. Ronald Pollitt, “John Hawkins’s Troublesome Voyages: Merchants, Bureaucrats, and the Origin of the Slave Trade,” *Journal of British Studies* 12, no. 2 (May 1973): 26–40.

*are carried at the head of the River Plate, to Potosi, to labour in the Mines.*<sup>43</sup>

But the abduction of Africans into slavery while sailing under English flag was naturally not combinable with efforts to establish trust and trade connections with African towns and communities. Intra-European rivalry made the situation more challenging still, as many of the potential regions of trade were already under threat and pressure from the Portuguese. Therefore, in addition to the need for a shared approach that encouraged trust and stability, it was vital to present the English presence on the coast as a viable alternative that of the Portuguese. The same challenge was faced by the Dutch, who in 1593 permanently settled on the coast as a serious contender to the Portuguese hegemony. It was clear, the key was a permanent presence. Without any permanent presence on the coast, the English could not offer the stability necessary for large-scale exchange, nor the potentially vital protection of those who ran the risk of stirring Portuguese anger by trading with a rival state. As mentioned, the Dutch achieved this with their settlement first of Fort Nassau (1612) and in later decades the taking over of former Portuguese stronghold Fort Elmina (1637), a process the Portuguese were unable to halt.<sup>44</sup> The emphasis on permanent settlement on the African coast by the various European states came to define the Africa trade for two centuries to come. In the case of England, even when the trade was deemed unprofitable and the monopoly and the company gone, the small fortified settlements were still considered of such strategic importance that the English state for a long time covered their upkeep.

It was not an option for neither the European or the African states of the sixteenth and seventeenth century to attempt to conduct overseas trade without the assistance of private initiative. The vast distances, the high-risk levels and a lack of in-depth knowledge and experience made such an endeavor too expensive and troublesome. The volatility of the geo-political situation in the early modern world, paired with a lack of regulated currency and an international system of banking made the process of empire building vastly different to the situation of international trade today. Instead states hoped at best to control markets and siphon off some of the revenue they generated. This was true both in Europe and in Africa, certainly as the grip of the Portuguese loosened in the early Seventeenth century. Most African heads of state dealt with by English traders maintained their right to govern the trade that took place within their spheres of control and used European competition to maximize the outcome. European trade in Africa was carefully controlled through the granting of trading rights, usually commencing with the European merchants paying various

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<sup>43</sup>Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes : Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and Others.* (1625), vol. 17 (Glasgow: J. MacLehose and sons, 1906), 99.

<sup>44</sup>A. van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana* (Sedco Publishing, 1980).

forms of customs and taxes; granting gift on behalf of themselves, their rulers and the companies they represented; and requesting favorable trading rights. Promises given by the English traders in such instances were, as we shall see, not always possible to uphold, and in those instances African rulers would look elsewhere. The intense, and growing, European competition on the coast meant that African rulers were in a position to choose, and often preferred allowing rival states shared access to their markets for the benefit of lowering prices. Such control of European presence helped generate revenue. The practicalities of trade on a day-to-day basis took place between European and African merchants, and as relations of trust were built and partnerships established it was no easy thing for the European companies to simply rid themselves of their factors at will. To replace a trading partner over many years with a new factor appointed by the company in Europe was not guaranteed to be accepted. Knowledge, expertise and networks on the coast was therefore of vital importance.<sup>45</sup>

The final decades of the sixteenth century saw increased crown interest in the budding Anglo-Africa trade in the form of investments in voyages and lending of ships. Such shared ventures, in the shape of charter-parties ratified under the Great Seal of England, often relied on Queen Elizabeth to supply the necessary crew, masters, and gunners, as well as providing ships and necessary provisions, while London merchants provided the tradeable goods. Scott provides us with an example from 1561, where the queen lent ships to the value of £500 in return for one third of any profits. The £5000 in tradable-goods were provided by London merchants.<sup>46</sup> Budding crown interest in such ventures remained ad-hoc and exploratory, without the structure and the merging of official state and commercial objectives that would come to characterize the company patents of the following century. But the patent of a more extensive partnership formed in 1588, known as the Senegal Adventurers, included features similar to those granted to incorporated joint-stock companies in the next century. As the name suggests they focused exclusively on the region including and between the Senegal- and the Gambia rivers, and their patent assured them exclusive access. In addition, the patent secured the adventurers the right to enjoy this exclusivity for 10 years, differing from the previous grants which were given for individual voyages. The venture consisted of eight merchants from Devon and London, and the company was based in Exeter. The initiative came however, according to Hakluyt's transcripts of the patent text, from a group of Portuguese nationals based in England.<sup>47</sup> Too little is known about the Senegal Adventurers to say for certain how important the

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<sup>46</sup>Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 2:p.5-6.

<sup>47</sup>Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, XI. Africa:306–12.

Portuguese faction was, but it is likely that the group drew on their experiences and connections in the region when setting up their trade. From the contemporaneous publications of Dutch trader Pieter van den Broecke, it is evident that the bonds made between European and African merchants and their rulers were both personal and long-lasting, and to include established traders therefore contributed greatly to the commencement of trade for a new venture.<sup>48</sup> The process was made easier with a ten year long patent that allowed for the development of a trade strategy, and ensured the ability to plan further into the future than had hitherto been possible.

The Senegal Adventurers were not incorporated however, and likely based themselves on a practice established by the 1560s of having a small group of traders nominally in charge of the business while each represented larger clusters of investors.<sup>49</sup> As highlighted in the work of Scott, this helped solve issues of liability caused when shares were sold from one person to another, and when entering into contracts – as without incorporation each merchant had to put his name on any and every contract connected to the venture. Instead, the representatives of each cluster of investors managed the group’s affairs internally and represented its interest when the company directors made necessary decisions. Thus, although only a small number of names appeared on company contracts - a potentially far bigger group internally shared costs, liability, and profits. Trade was organized on a voyage-by-voyage basis, a method that was applied in numerous overseas trading companies and continued well into the seventeenth century. This method of organization had the added bonus of bringing in capital without causing too much confusion when winding up a venture, and the final settlements were organized among each cluster of investors. Although this may have made life easier for the Senegal Adventurers, it does make it difficult to know, based on their meagre records, who- and how many- were behind any given investment, as the numbers may have been far greater than they appear. With the patent granted to the Guinea Company a clearer strategy for tackling the question of liability and incorporation emerged though, as will be seen below, even then these matters were far from straightforward. Serious issues regarding liability, capital lock-in and commitment haunted the company well into the middle of the century. The challenge of unravelling this form of representative investment continues, in some cases, through the duration of the seventeenth century. In instances with little or lacking source material it proves challenging to fully map and understand the nature of such investments through representatives.

Thus, as the sixteenth century drew to a close, the slave trade increasingly appeared as an antithesis to the more peaceful, stable, and lucrative commodity trade. The comparatively late development of plantation production demanding slave

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<sup>48</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, *Pieter van Den Broecke's Journal of Voyages*.

<sup>49</sup>Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 2:p.7.

labour in both the Dutch and English expansion processes also meant a delayed rise in the demand for human cargo. As seen in the case of Towerson above, attacks did great damage to the chances of establishing relations, and the effects were often long lasting. When considering the contemporaneous official view on slave trade it is worth noting that no patent seems to have been extended for slave trading specifically in the way some traders requested for redwood, though discovery, exploration, and privateering patents may have opened for such activities. Nor were there any official debates about the slave trade's possible potential through involvement with Spanish silver extraction in the Americas. Contemporaneous publications such as those of Hakluyt, Samuel Purchas or Richard Jobson, or in the Dutch Republic by Pieter de Marees or Pieter van den Broecke, suggests that the more peaceful commodity trade was the preferred practice and far more common throughout the sixteenth century, and understandably so, considering the potential it held for trade in gold.<sup>50</sup> In addition to the perspective of the African states on the coast, any official sanctioning of English slave trade with the Spanish territories would be perceived as an affront to the Spanish authorities attempting to enforce protectionist policies within its territories. As a result, there was a gradual increase in the granting of more detailed and restrictive patents causing a de-facto, if not openly intentional, separation between the English official trade in commodities, including gold, and the taking of slaves to trade for profit. The two appeared mutually exclusive and the transition favored the former. The best way to achieve necessary stability and security around the trade was a discontinuation of abductions along the coast in combination with the establishment of trading centers on plots granted by interested African states along the coast. This became the method favored by all the European actors present, most notably Portugal and the Dutch Republic, but later also by the traders of Sweden, France, Denmark-Norway and Brandenburg. Gradually the coastal trade was replaced by permanent trading factories and in some select places, forts. In their wake came the establishment of long-term, stable, contact.

Despite this general trend towards an established commodity trade via permanent or semi-permanent settlements under African control, this did not mean that the interest in slaves disappeared completely among European traders, as is well-known. Despite a lack of English records from this early establishment process, there exists evidence of activity elsewhere. The German supercargo Pieter van den Broecke chronicled his voyages to the West African coast, in Dutch service, in travel journals.<sup>51</sup> Van den Broecke made three voyages, stretching from 1605 to 1612, first to Cape Verde and the Senegambia region, and later to the kingdom of Loango, on to the coast of modern day Gabon and Kongo. He later went on to serve the Dutch

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<sup>50</sup>Marees, Dantzig, and Jones, *The Gold Kingdom of Guinea* (1602).

<sup>51</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, *Pieter van Den Broecke's Journal of Voyages*.

East India Company (VOC) in the East Indies. On the first of his African journeys, he tells of French ships threatening his expedition while he was trading at Portudal, on the coast of Senegal. On May 1, 1606, van den Broecke writes, “A French ship arrived (...) and they let it be known that they wanted to seize all of the English and Dutch ships that were on the coast.”<sup>52</sup> The situation remained tense for nearly a week while van den Broecke waited for his ship, sent elsewhere to trade, to return to Portudal. On May 5 Broecke noted in his journal, “Our ship came, (...), and so as to not be taken immediately by the Frenchmen by surprise, it [their ship] was joined by four English ships, which offered us total support.”<sup>53</sup> Together the Dutch and English ships proved too great a challenge for the French, who escaped from a near-altercation. The English ships, mastered by a Johan Hillis<sup>54</sup>, sailed together with van den Broecke to Goreé, northwest of Portudal. There they were met by yet another English ship, who reported seeing a Lübeck vessel loaded with sugar at the nearby port of Joal, south of Portudal. Together the Dutch and English agreed to attempt to seize it. The Lübeck ship surrendered on June 27, 1606 and turned out to be chartered by Portuguese traders in Lisbon. As had been reported by the arriving English ship at Goreé, the cargo of the prize consisted of slaves and sugar, as well as cotton and ivory. Van den Broecke noted “They had been underway for five months and had suffered much hunger and distress.”<sup>55</sup> Included in the cargo for the Dutch and English to divide among them were “at least ninety slave men and women, who were so skinny that it was astonishing”.<sup>56</sup> A few days after the seizure, on June 8, he wrote “Our chief factor rewarded the Englishmen, who had alerted us, with all of the black men and women...”<sup>57</sup>

A similar indication of continued English interest in slave trade can be found among the papers left by Sir Robert Cecil, the Lord Privy Seal of England and the queen’s close confidant. The papers of Cecil reveal evidence of English involvement in the trade in the first decades of the seventeenth century, around the same time as the journal entries of van den Broecke, and they usually appear when trade became as source of conflict. Cecil’s papers underline the continued connection between the Spanish- and early Africa trades among English merchants. In 1608 England’s ambassador to Spain wrote to Cecil of English slave traders frustrating the Spanish authorities: “Of late they have imprisoned in Malaga the factor of Mr Kellett of his Majesty’s Wardrobe<sup>58</sup>, whither he came laden with negroes and hides from the river

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<sup>52</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, 30.

<sup>53</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, 30–31.

<sup>54</sup>Possibly a Dutch spelling of the name John Hills/Hill.

<sup>55</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, *Pieter van Den Broecke’s Journal of Voyages*, 33.

<sup>56</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, 33.

<sup>57</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, 34.

<sup>58</sup>Likely William Kellett, working for the Master of the Wardrobe who managed the king’s household.

*of Senega [Senegal] and Puerto Dalia [Portugal] not far from Capo Verde,..”*<sup>59</sup>

These incidents, in addition to showing us that several Englishmen were in operation on the Senegambian coast, as well as possibly elsewhere, give us an indication that the English traders, like other Europeans present, were both willing and able to profit from slave trade also in the decades separating the period of kidnappings by the Hawkins’ brothers and the industry scale transatlantic trade that would start to develop a few decades later.

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<sup>59</sup>“Cecil Papers: April 1607, 16-30,” in *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House: Volume 19, 1607*, ed. M S Giuseppi and D McN. Lockie (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1965), 96-114. *British History Online*, accessed October 24, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-cecil-papers/vol19/pp96-114>.

# CHAPTER 1

## ENGLAND AND THE TRADE TO AFRICA, LAUNCHING THE GUINEA COMPANY, 1618- 1630

### 1. Introduction

*The Governor and Company of Adventurers of London trading into the Parts of Africa* received their letter patent from James I & IV on November 11, 1618.<sup>60</sup> The Guinea Company(GC) became the first English Africa company operating on a joint-stock with complete and exclusive access to the West Africa coast on behalf of England. Its membership was well connected to both court and Parliament, but as this chapter will show they became easy prey to experienced merchants who considered the company a favorable cover from where they could better challenge their merchant competitors. It will be shown here that connections and financial strength, true for at least for some of the members, mattered little if experience and a network within the trade was lacking. The company came to suffer financially at the hands of established Africa traders turned company members, but it would also be them that recognized the potential the company offered and thus saw to its survival.

The company's new patent declared that the company was granted the right to "*have use and enjoy the whole entire and only trade (...) with and from the parts of Africa (...) into and from all and singular regions, countries, dominions, territories, continents, coasts and places (...) called or known by the name of Gynney and Bynney.*"<sup>61</sup> Further, it established the company as one body, corporate and politic, holding perpetual succession and thus the ability to include new members as the company "*shall think convenient*".<sup>62</sup> At the date of ratification the patent lists thirty-six names. An eclectic group of men, some of them well-known and others anonymous, counting sixteen knights – included company governor Sir William St. John, fifteen esquires, and five merchants.<sup>63</sup> Several of the members had notable

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<sup>60</sup>TNA: Patent Rolls, 16 Jac I. pt. vi, printed in Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, XXVIII:99–106.

<sup>61</sup>Carr, XXVIII:103.

<sup>62</sup>Carr, XXVIII:100.

<sup>63</sup>See Appendix 1 for a full list of the patentees.

careers in the Navy, such as vice-admirals Robert Mansell, Richard Hawkins, and Thomas Button, as well as Sir Allen Apesley who held one half of the patent for naval victualling. Others were closely connected with the court, such as the Earl of Warwick and Sir Giles Mompesson, of which the latter was infamous for his nepotistic and corrupt practices. Of the five merchants: John Davies, John Watkins, Michall[sic.] Best, Richard Salford and William Awdely not much is known; though it is John Davies that stand out most clearly from the sources. He was the merchant behind the request for the company patent and appears to have been the most established and experienced in the Africa trade among the original group, having especially focused on the trade in redwood.

The GC differed from earlier partnerships and companies, such as the Senegal Adventurers, in its approach to sharing liability and risk and in the monopoly, they were awarded. The Senegal Adventurers only held a monopoly of trade on a specific part of the coast, and other groups continued to venture to other regions as trade remained free and unregulated. Only with the GC patent from 1618 was access to the West African coast, the area referred to as *Gynny and Bynney* - understood as Upper and Lower Guinea and Benin, granted to a single incorporated group based on perpetual succession. Thus, although John Davies and his fellow company members may not have been the first discoverers of the trade as they claimed, they did represent the first corporate body in England to be granted a patent for sole access to the West African coast at the cost of all other traders.

The patent presented the GC as an incorporated joint-stock company with the right to own land; to present itself a separate legal entity in court both as plaintiff and defendant; and holding a common seal.<sup>64</sup> As seen, it granted the company “*the whole, entire and only trade*” and exclusive access to the region in question, and the ability to send there as many ships as they deemed necessary. The privileged access that the company was granted did, of course, in real terms, grant the GC a monopoly on the Anglo-Africa trade even if not stated in such terms, and a trade monopoly in one form or another was to remain in effect, at least nominally, until deregulation put an end to the RAC’s privileges in 1696. The company held the ability to assemble courts; make, and execute law, and issue fines. This they could use in order to control access to the coast and punish any unwanted activity that took place in breach of their patent. The only limitation being that their proposed laws were not at odds with the laws of the English realm.

The GC was to be managed by a governor, a deputy governor, and a committee of twelve assistants. Considering the number of patentees, such a management structure would suggest nearly half the names of appearing on the patent were active

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<sup>64</sup>I rely on the transcriptions of the 1618 charter as presented in C.T Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, XXVIII:99–106. The patent original can be found in TNA: Patent Rolls, 16 Jac I. pt. vi

in the decision-making at any given time. This management group was responsible for the practical arrangements of trade, from the preparation and fitting out of ships to the acquisition of tradable goods; as well as the management of the sale of the African commodities that were imported. The company was rarely governed in such a way, however, as several of the members were active in early Jacobean politics at the time, some held high-ranking offices, and some had interests in other ventures. This was most notable in the Spanish trade and to some degree in the ventures of the developing Atlantic. Instead, certain members, such as John Davies, took care of much of the practical planning. The GC that emerged in the early 1620s, despite being governed by the somewhat anonymous William St. John, was strongly influenced by Davies – as one of the five merchants appearing on the patent, and Davies were soon joined by fellow overseas merchant Humphrey Slaney. In the mounting criticism directed at the company from excluded traders, much aggression was directed towards Davies and his personal control over the trade, and this matter will be given more attention below. The patent text was clear, the company was meant to base its trade on a joint-stock, not a regulatory system of individually organized trade among the members. The members themselves clearly stated in the patent that they had ‘*joined together and resolved to run one uniform course in setting up and prosecuting a trade of merchandise into those parts*’. But the ‘*uniform course*’ proved challenging for to maintain. The members did indeed share a joint stock, but mechanisms such as limited liability and capital lock-in was not fully established or utilized, and even when it was, it was rarely applied as intended. This contributed to a general sense of insecurity and lack of commitment among several of the members and did not help in the company’s attempts to manage its financial obligations.

The patent did not only offer privileges, it also gave the company obligations to the Crown as the King claimed to be “*credibly informed that the setting on foot and prosecuting of voyages thereof and the due establishing of an orderly traffic and trade of merchandise (...) will not only be beneficial to our said Realms and Dominions but also profitable to Us in advancement of our customs.*”<sup>65</sup> The hopes were high for the income of gold, and remained high throughout the first decade of the company’s existence. It is challenging to assess gold returns from the existing sources, but the income from the trade in gold cannot have been entirely unsatisfactory in the first decade or so, as the renegotiated charter of 1631, which will be returned to in the following chapter, maintained the hope of substantial yearly customs income from imports of gold. The motivation of customs income was combined with an expressed hope of more English explorations as result of the grant, “*whereby they (the GC members) may be encouraged not only to proceed in a present trade, but to adventure*

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<sup>65</sup>Carr, XXVIII:99, 104.

*their money and labour for a further discovery (...) which they presume by God's assistance will turn to the great benefit of Us and our Realms*".<sup>66</sup> By "discoveries" was mainly meant the locating of the source of the gold trade, but despite several different schemes and attempts throughout the century and the next not much headway was made. The failure to discover the source of the gold trade, in addition to the false claims of first discovery, was indeed actively used against the company by disgruntled outsiders that no longer enjoyed legal access to the trade.

The patent leaves no doubt of this exclusive access, as it was clearly stated that the region in question "*shall not be visited frequented or traded unto by any other of our subjects or the subjects of Us (...). And therefore we do hereby (...) command prohibit and forbid all subjects (...) of what degree or quality soever they be, that none of them presume to visit frequent trade or adventure to traffic into or from the said (...) lands*".<sup>67</sup> Only if the company consented to the issuing of a license could the coast be accessed. This license had to be acquired in writing and ratified with the company seal. Any independent English trader stopped on the coast without such a license risked the "*pain of our indignation imprisonment of their bodies (...) and the forfeiture and loss both of their ships and goods (...)*".<sup>68</sup> In addition to this stern warning, the company - that is its member and employed factors on the coast - attained the authority to arrest, take, or seize all ships or goods that were brought either to or from the coast in contrition to the patent. In such cases the value of any prize-ship was to be split equally between company and king.<sup>69</sup>

## 2. The establishment of a company profile - members of the early Guinea Company

The patent that was ratified on the November 16, 1618, includes thirty-six names, and together they contributed to a company with a diverse social composition. Some of the members were, and have remained, well-known while others are more anonymous. This is not an in-depth presentation of each of the thirty-six members as several of them never appears to have engaged themselves in the business of the company or have proved impossible to trace, instead what follows is a presentation of the persons that appear most prominently in the early development. Among the most well-known characters we find men with commercial experience and a past in overseas trade. Some of the funders and investors of expansion projects and companies, such as Sir Ferdinando Gorges and Sir Robert Rich, later Earl of Warwick,

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<sup>66</sup>Carr, XXVIII:p.100.

<sup>67</sup>Carr, XXVIII:104.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, XXVIII:104.

wanted a part in the launching of an Africa company. Several representatives of the Royal Navy were also present, such as Sir Robert Mansell, who after a long, though controversial career in the Navy saw potential in trade to Africa. How many of them had been to the coast of Africa is difficult to know with any surety, though beyond the traders the number is unlikely to have been high. Still, it is certain that despite the eclectic background of its membership, there was a strong presence of persons with personal experience of life at sea. Furthermore, when investigating the background of some of the more prominent names of the patent, in some cases it is enough to simply scratch the surface, a reputation for questionable financial dealings appear. There is a clear tendency of stacking up much debt, of accusations of corruption, and of taking advantage of various offices for personal benefit or for the benefit of extended networks. These were the prominent members and must have contributed much to the company's image and presence. In addition to Warwick, Gorges, and Mansell, we find governor William St. John, along with former discoverers-turned-naval commanders Sir Richard Hawkins and Sir Thomas Button, and corrupt courtier-administrators such as Sir Giles Mompesson and Sir Allen Apsley.

## 2.2 Discoverers and naval men

The wealthy and influential Sir Robert Rich, soon to be second earl of Warwick, named first among the patentees, was involved in an array of overseas projects, especially aimed at exploration and colonization in the Americas.<sup>70</sup> Among his activities was the financing of settlement developments on the North American mainland, and he played an active part in the Massachusetts Bay- and Virginia Companies, as well as the Somers Islands- and the Providence Island Companies. Warwick's involvement with the Africa trade formed a part of his interest for overseas exploration, trade, and settlement.<sup>71</sup> This was true also of Sir Ferdinando Gorges, who appears frequently in all matter relating to the English expansion projects on the American continent. Gorges started out with a military career, a background he shared with several of his fellow GC members, but went on to become heavily involved with the founding of the province of Maine in the first decade of the seventeenth century.<sup>72</sup> They are worth mentioning here as they likely contributed to the presentation of the

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<sup>70</sup>Warwick appears frequently in Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*.

<sup>71</sup>Sean Kelsey, "Rich, Robert, 2nd Earl of Warwick," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed May 6, 2017. Accessed: 04.11.2015

<sup>72</sup>Charles E. Clark, "Gorges, Sir Ferdinando (1568–1647)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed May 6, 2017; "Gorges, Sir Ferdinando (c.1568-1647), of Plymouth, Devon; Later of Ashton Phillips, Som. | History of Parliament Online," n.d., accessed April 11, 2015.

GC as a viable investment option in a similar way as their other Atlantic projects, but beyond appearing first in the patent text they engaged themselves little in the running of the company.

Sir Richard Hawkins (1562-1622) had, by the time the GC was launched, already behind him a long career at sea, both in the company of his uncle William and later on his own, sailing to the West Indies, South America, and the Pacific.<sup>73</sup> Thus, the Hawkins name was already strongly linked to exploration with a long line of infamous maritime discoverers.<sup>74</sup> Hawkins' father Sir John, was, as seen in the introduction, among the early traders on the coast of Africa in the reign of queen Elizabeth. There he caused much chaos for English traders, ruining their reputation with his practice of seizing Africans along the coast and selling them as slaves on Spanish Hispaniola.<sup>75</sup> Richard Hawkins followed in the family tradition, sailing to South America, where raiding Spanish settlements resulted in his capture and eight years of imprisonment. An autobiographical account of his experiences was posthumously published in 1622.<sup>76</sup> He was elected mayor of his hometown of Plymouth in 1603 and served as a member of Parliament for Devon. Hawkins also had familial links to fellow explorer-turned-politician Sir Francis Drake. In addition to his mayoral career he served as both a captain and a vice-admiral for the Navy, a position in which he was heavily criticized for corruptive practices. He was closely connected with another GC company member, Sir Robert Mansell, who despite past troubles trusted his abilities, referring to him as "*a very grave, religious and experienced gentleman*".<sup>77</sup> During the years as a member of the Guinea Company he was again appointed a vice-admiral under Mansell, a position he held until his death in 1622. Hawkins' time in the GC was therefore brief, although also he undoubtedly helped profile the company among contemporaries.

Considering not only the mercantile sphere but also that of the Navy, the questionable dealings of some of the GC's members have, in certain historians' eyes, made them the perfect examples of early Stuart decadence, characteristic for its poor management, corruption, greed, and decay. And none more so than Sir Robert Mansell. In his important contribution to our understanding of the history of the early modern English navy Michael Oppenheim was ruthless in his comparisons

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<sup>73</sup>David Loades, "Hawkins, Sir Richard (c. 1560–1622)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed June 5, 2017.

<sup>74</sup>Other influential explorers of the late Elizabethan era were Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, and Sir Martin Frobisher to mention some.

<sup>75</sup>Basil Morgan, "Hawkins, Sir John (1532-1595)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed June 5, 2017.

<sup>76</sup>Richard Hawkins, *The Observations of Sir Richard Hawkins, Knt in His Voyage into the South Sea in the Year 1593*, ed. Charles Ramsey Drinkwater Bethune (London : Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1847).

<sup>77</sup>John H. Ferris and Paul Hunnyball, "Hawkins, Sir Richard (c.1560-1622), of Plymouth, Devon; Later of Slapton, Devon | History of Parliament Online," n.d., accessed May 6, 2017.

between the Tudor and Stuarts monarchs and of the men they surrounded themselves with. Oppenheim proclaims, “*On March 1603 the weapon forged by Henry VIII, and wielded by Elizabeth, fell into the feeble hands of James Stewart*”.<sup>78</sup> According to Oppenheim, the king chose “*the most unfit men to manage it [the Royal Navy] at home and command it abroad (...). The naval records of his reign are but a sorry collection of relations of frauds, embezzlements, commissions of inquiry, and feeble palliatives.*”<sup>79</sup> It is worth noting therefore, when assessing the foundation of the first official English Africa company, that some James I’s most prominent, and “*unfit*”, naval men formed a substantial group of founding members of the company.

Robert Mansell (1570-1652) (at times referred to as Mansfield or Mansfelt), in addition to a long career in the Navy resulting in posts as both Treasurer and Vice-Admiral, can be found as investor both in the initiatives in Virginia and New England, as well as in the Guinea Company. His career at sea started at the end of the sixteenth century, when he took the post of captain on a privateering vessel sent to the West Indies by Lord Thomas Howard. In addition to his career in the Navy, he also held the exclusive patent for glassmaking and the malcontent this caused among other manufacturers led to petitions and meetings in Parliament. Thus, Mansell had some experience in holding patents that caused frustration.<sup>80</sup>

From the published diary of shipwright for the Navy, Phineas Pett, which he kept in the years before the GC received its patent, we get an idea of Mansell as the two worked closely together. Throughout his career Mansell was repeatedly embroiled in controversies and corruption allegations, which in 1608 resulted in the launch of a “*Commission for Inquiring into the Abuses of the Navy*”. To both the commission, and to Oppenheim, the root of the problem was clear: “*... the appointment in 1604 of Sir Robert Mansell was most unfortunate. Mansell, who was an indifferent seaman and an incapable and dishonest administrator and who’s only claim to the place was his relationship to, and favour with, the Earl of Nottingham*<sup>81</sup>, *remained in office until 1618, and the greater portion of this section is practically a record of his unfitness for his important charge*”.<sup>82</sup>

The accusations against Mansell were diverse and included lavish travel expenses, handing out of positions to friends and members of his network, as well as

<sup>78</sup>M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of Merchant Shipping in Relation to the Navy from 1509 to 1660, with an Introduction by K.R. Andrews Treating of the Preceding Period* (Temple Smith, 1988), 184.

<sup>79</sup>Oppenheim, 184–85.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid. Andrew Thrush, “Mansell, Sir Robert (1570/71–1652),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed May 23, 2017. SP, State Papers, Domestic, James I, vol. 124, p.227r-229r (no.110-112) regarding his patent on glassmaking.

<sup>81</sup>Charles Howard, 1st Earl of Nottingham, 2nd Baron Howard of Effingham (1536 – 14 December 1624) was Lord High Admiral from 1585 to 1619.

<sup>82</sup>Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 184–85.

fraud. In a year where only seven naval ships were in operation, as many as six positions of admiral, divided up in sections of north, south, east, west, the Narrow Sea and Ireland, were all receiving liberal pay. Dilapidated ships that had been taken out of circulation were re-commissioned to provide appointments for the group around Mansell.<sup>83</sup> This group included future GC members Richard Hawkins and Thomas Button, and possibly also future company governor William St. John, who appears to have been operating as captain for the Navy in the early decades of the century. Furthermore, Mansell had provided the Navy with wood for shipbuilding on which payment had been made several times over. Along with the Surveyor of the Navy, Sir John Trevor, Mansell secured for himself the provision of all requisite stores and made – in direct opposition to the rules, substantial gains selling provisions to the king. Again, timber was ordered and paid for several times over though used for the same purpose. From the diary of Pett we know that in 1617 fellow GC member-to-be and notorious fraudster, Sir Giles Mompesson, also involved himself in naval timber supply, much to Pett's frustration, and though it is not possible to verify with certainty, it is possible Mansell and Mompesson made contact with each other through the trade in timber for the Navy.<sup>84</sup> According to Oppenheim, Mansell was accused of making £5000 over the course of four years by fraudulent timber trade. A further £7000 was gained together with Trevor, through the selling of pitch, tar, masts, and other ship-building necessities to the crown at elevated prices, with the two pocketing the difference. The accusations of illegal activity went as far as to include the building of a private vessel all from Naval supplies, meant for use in personal merchant shipping, though hired out to the king for the passage of the Earl of Nottingham to Spain as ambassador in 1605. Despite being caught red-handed, Mansell was furious over the investigations into his corruption, so much so that it landed him in Marshalsea Prison in 1613 after being accused of behaving in a contemptuous and disloyal manner.<sup>85</sup> This was not the first time Mansell was in trouble, known for being a notorious hot-head, he had gotten into trouble already in 1600 when a quarrel between Mansell and a neighbor resulted in a duel where the neighbor lost his hand.<sup>86</sup> Despite the embarrassment, all the accusations against him, a stint in prison, and dismissal from office in 1618, Mansell did not lose favour at court. Perhaps he had, as suggested by Oppenheim, secured himself an illegal fortune of such a size that he could buy himself out of the worst of it.<sup>87</sup> The decay of the Navy was, however, noticed by the king's favorite, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, who took a new and firmer grip on the operations as Lord High Admiral in 1619. Despite being

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<sup>83</sup>Oppenheim, 191.

<sup>84</sup>Phineas Pett, *The Autobiography of Phineas Pett*, ed. William Gordon Perrin (London : Printed for the Navy records society, 1918), 88, 118.

<sup>85</sup>Pett, 111.

<sup>86</sup>The mummified hand of Sir Christopher Haydon, Mansell's neighbor, can still be seen in Norwich Castle Museum today.

<sup>87</sup>Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 191–92.

dismissed from office at the time, the increased control by Buckingham never sat well with Mansell, and in the mid-1620 he again made angry outbursts. This time his criticism was directed against the Buckingham's naval decision-making. Accusations against the king's known favorite did not go un-noticed, bringing him in front of the king's privy council as a result. Luckily for Mansell several of the council's members shared a hostile view of Buckingham and he was treated with leniency.<sup>88</sup> In Mansell's defense, the problem of dishonesty in the Navy was not invented with his appointment in 1604. Already the year before a contemporary commentator exclaimed "*To say the truth the whole body is so corrupted as there is no sound part almost from the head to the foot; the great ones feed on the less and enforce them to steal both for themselves and their commanders*".<sup>89</sup>

Mansell was indeed dismissed in 1618, when he instead took part in the launch of the GC. Yet, only two years previous, well after the investigation into naval corruption had pointed to him as a main culprit, he had received a monetary gift of £16,000 from the king on the occasion of his wedding. Just two years later he received a new appointment as commander of an expedition to Algiers in which he also secured a place for fellow GC-members Richard Hawkins and Thomas Button/Dutton. Mansell therefore represented a key connection between the company and the crown, between the company and the Navy and also contributed to its public appearance. Mansell was popular despite his corruption and outburst and commanded much respect. This was further confirmed when Mansell, despite bad words about the king's favorite, imprisonment, and commotion, managed to keep his post. Though he was popular his practices did not go unnoticed forever, and when in 1618 he was appointed vice-admiral, leaving the position of Treasurer behind, it was believed not to have been a promotion but instead a way of getting his hands off the Navy Treasury.<sup>90</sup>

In conclusion to his chapter on the Navy in the reign of James I, Oppenheim points out how fortunate it was that the services of the Royal Navy were not needed in earnest during the reign of king James. That is, of course, only true if we ignore the rampant piracy on merchant shipping both in the Channel and from the North African states in the Mediterranean, and the loss of valuable market shares to the Dutch as they expanded their reach. Oppenheim goes on to point out the mismanagement under GC company member Mansell, evident in the gradual decrease of seaworthy ships during his time as Treasurer which was, inexplicably, paired with ever increasing costs. The long-term effects of Mansell's rule were devastating: "*Ships might be replaced and open speculation checked, but the deeper wounds on spirit and discipline caused by fourteen years of license among the higher officials, and fourteen years of heartless chicanery*

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<sup>88</sup>See footnote 71

<sup>89</sup>Thomas Norreys to Sir John Coke quoted in Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 192–93.

<sup>90</sup>Thrush, "Mansell, Sir Robert (1570/71–1652)."

suffered by those more lowly placed were not so readily healed, and bore their fruits for long afterwards in the habitual dishonesty of officials and workmen, in the disloyalty and half-heartedness of the seamen, and later, in the shameless knaveries that disgraced the Navy office at the close of the century, many of which had their origins under Mansell's rule."<sup>91</sup> Oppenheim did not only place blame on Mansell, however, as his assessment of the king himself was no more lenient: "Had not Lord Buckingham desired to be Lord Admiral, we have no reason to suppose that James I would have seen any cause for interference merely on behalf of seamen who were starved or robbed, or of the English people whose chief defense was being destroyed, and whose money went to enrich a gang of thieves."<sup>92</sup>

As mentioned, Mansell was just one among several significant company members embroiled in corruption scandals. In fact, for many contemporaries he was not the worst one. Richard Hawkins had siphoned away money from seized shipping in the West Country, while Mansell managed the Treasury and was accused of taking his share of the Navy's funds. The accusations, against Mansell in 1608, also included fellow GC-member-to-be, Sir Thomas Button (?-1634) who operated as a naval captain at the time.<sup>93</sup> Button, who has often been wrongfully identified as Dutton, had a long career at sea as a discoverer and explorer. His marriage to Elizabeth Mansell in 1595 made him Sir Robert Mansell's nephew-in-law. As a result, Button was given the command of one of Mansell's privateering vessels and returned from the West Indies with a substantial profit.

#### Illustration 2:

Sir Richard Hawkins, Sir Robert Mansell and Sir Thomas Button



Late 16<sup>th</sup> century Artist unknown,  
Source: National Maritime  
Museum Greenwich, UK.



Date and Artist unknown,  
Source: National Museums and  
Galleries of Wales via Oxford  
Dictionary of National Biography,  
Wales, UK.



Date and Artist unknown,  
Source: After an original in  
possession of G. M. Traheren,  
Glamorganshire, Wales, UK.

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<sup>91</sup>Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy*, 215.

<sup>92</sup>Oppenheim, 215.

<sup>93</sup>Pett, *The Autobiography of Phineas Pett*, 33–34.

Later, in 1612, he embarked upon a lengthy voyage of discovery of the North-West Passage which nearly cost him his life, but also resulted in the naming of an island after his patron and uncle-in-law, Mansel Island in the Canadian Arctic. He, like Hawkins, relied on Mansell's influence and patronage in the Navy and both men were appointed to accompany Mansell in an expedition to Algiers shortly after the GC received its patent. After recovering from the voyage to Canada, and – like Mansell – having avoided punishment in the corruption inquiries of 1608, Button too built a reputation for being greedy, siphoning away funds that were meant for wages and victuals for his crews. However, as the 1620s progressed, evidence suggests a moderation of the harsh judgement against him as it became clear that Button only received a fraction of the money he was entitled to for his services to the crown and had paid out of his own pocket for victuals and provisions for his crews when the necessary funds had not been received. His personal finances likely suffered as a result.<sup>94</sup>

### 2.3 Court connections and financial trouble

In addition to – and in connection with – accusations of corruption, another shared feat between the high-ranking GC members is worthy of attention as it undoubtedly had an impact on the company's early development: the experience of financial trouble while being a company investor. Button, Hawkins, governor St. John, and Sir Allen Apesley all struggled personally with their financial situation during their time in the company. However, it is unlikely any one of them struggled more than Sir Giles Mompesson, (1584-c.1651). Mompesson was so infamous for his corruptive tendencies that he was made immortal in play-form by Phillip Massinger, who in the 1625 play “*A New Way to Pay Old Debts*” based the villainous and corrupt anti-hero *Sir Giles Overreach* on Mompesson. Mompesson was influential at court in the late 1610s, relying on a familial link to the Duke of Buckingham, a distant relation through Mompesson's wife. Mompesson married Katherine St. John, a marriage that made him brother-in-law to Buckingham's half-brother Edward Villiers. Edward had married Katherine's sister, Barbara. The influence granted Sir Robert Mansell's through his work for the Navy – which saw to the advancement of company naval officers such as Button, Hawkins, and possibly St. John – was thus paralleled by the influence of the Duke of Buckingham which catered to a different faction of the company members. And, as the harsh feeling of Mansell against Buckingham has already been

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<sup>94</sup>Andrew Thrush, “Button, Sir Thomas (c. 1575–1634),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed May 23, 2017. TNA: SP 15/36, p. 23r (25 March 1604). See also Cal. S.P. Dom. Jam. I, Vol. 36, p.441. Cal. S.P. Dom, Char I., Vol. 1, p.3

pointed out, tensions between these structures of influence and patronage may have contributed to the company's problematic decision-making processes in its first years.

The link between Mompesson and Buckingham may appear untenable, but with Buckingham's power nearly unchecked in the late 1610s and early 1620s it was enough to secure Mompesson, and other distant in-laws with him, considerable influence. The St. John sisters was a point of connection also for Sir Allen Apesley (1582-1630, written both Appesley, Apsley) who married a third St. John sister, Lucy. Apsley, like the others, held posts in the Navy, and from 1612 to 1630 he was Survey of Marine Victuals. There he, like the others, encountered Pett and likely also Mansell through various naval business.<sup>95</sup> In addition, he had interests in overseas expansion, and two years after the launch of the GC he joined the New England Company. He, like Mompesson, was making good use of his connection to the Villiers family, and his appointment by the king in 1617 to the post of Lieutenant for the Tower of London was seemingly gotten through the influence of Buckingham. His connection with the Villiers, increasingly known for their nepotistic practices, meant that he spent parts of the 1620s defending himself from the contestations of Parliament over the many patents and monopolies he enjoyed. Despite this he held on to the post as Navy Victualler also after the eventual assassination of Buckingham in 1628, maintaining his position until his death in 1630.<sup>96</sup> Despite sporadic criticism, Apesley did not get into as much trouble as Mompesson, who in 1621 was forced to flee the country over corruption accusations. Buckingham and his brother Edward had secured Mompesson the post for monitoring inns and taverns, and his behavior in this regard made him widely unpopular. Especially one incident linked to this post came to represent the beginning of the end of his privileged status and is worth retelling here for the outrage it sparked. Shortly after receiving his position as monitor of inns and alehouses in 1617, Mompesson sent one of his trusted men, a Mr. Ferret, to an alehouse incognito, where posing as a traveler he spent the evening in drink and general merriment. As the tavern was closing Ferret begged the owner of the alehouse to let him stay the night, as he had nowhere to go. The alehouse-keeper took pity on the man and allowed him to stay. The next morning Mr. Ferret informed him that he was being prosecuted for operating as an *inn* when he was only licensed for running an *alehouse*. Unsurprisingly such tactics did not generate popularity. During his time in office Mompesson practices led to the prosecution of as many as 3329 innkeepers, and few missed him when he fled the country in 1621, leaving his wife and her family to sort out the financial chaos he left behind.

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<sup>95</sup>J.C. Sainty, "Surveyor of Marine Victuals 1550-c. 1679 | Institute of Historical Research," accessed May 23, 2017, <http://www.history.ac.uk/publications/office/navymarine>.

<sup>96</sup>J.H. Round, "Apsley, Sir Allen (1566/7–1630)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed May 23, 2017.

## Illustration 3:

“*The Description of Giles Mompesson late Knight censured by Parliament, 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1620*”



Engraving, artist unknown. London, 1621.

As may have been noticed, two of the company members mentioned, Mompesson and Apesley married women named St. John. Yet, the question of whether the family they married into was familiarly linked to their namesakes in the company, William the governor and the more anonymous Oliver St. John, has proven surprisingly difficult to answer. Though seemingly originating as one family, the St. John's were split into two main branches as far back as the year 1400. The family divided into the St. Johns of Bletsoe and the St. Johns of Lydiard Tregoze. Among them company governor William has proven especially difficult to place. The name St. John itself is challenging to research as several prominent St. Johns appear in the early seventeenth century, and of them at least four were named Oliver, none of them William. Out of the four prominent Oliver St. Johns we find one viscount and lord deputy of Ireland, one baron, one earl and baron, and one prominent lawyer.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>97</sup>Oliver St. John of Lydiard Tregoze, Viscount Grandison of Limerick, Lord Deputy of Ireland (1562-1630); Sir Oliver St. John 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Bolingbroke and 4<sup>th</sup> Baron Bletsoe (1583-1646); Sir Oliver St. John 5<sup>th</sup> Baron Bletsoe (1603-1642); and Oliver St. John, descendant of the 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Bletsoe, influential politician

Neither are likely to be the Oliver St. John who appears in the patent, either because the timelines of their lives are not combinable with the launch of the company, or because unlike the Oliver St. John in the patent, they would likely have appeared with their titles. None of them reveal particularly strong links to overseas trade, though some of them were involved in the colonizing projects in Ireland and the Atlantic.<sup>98</sup> Few William St. John's appear in the family history and taking the 1618 date of the patent into consideration, along with the fact that he was offered the governor post, leaves only one probable option. If there was a familial link between governor William and his namesake in the company Oliver, they likely both belonged to the St. John's of Lydiard Tregoze. The sisters St. John, who married Mompesson, Apesley and Edward Villiers, had a brother named Oliver (born ca. 1584), and there is a high probability that this Oliver, who was 34 years old in 1618 and apparently untitled, is the man behind the name on the company's patent. Assuming he is the same man, there is a familial link between him and the man that could have been the company governor. Oliver's grandfather, Sir Nicholas St. John had a half-brother named William St. John (1538-1576), and this half-brother had a son that was also named William.<sup>99</sup> William St. John the younger (1574-?), we know little about, but will have been the cousin of Oliver's father, and 44 years old in 1618. It is difficult to establish without doubt the link between the two, and between the governor and Mompesson and Apesley for that matter, but if there was indeed a familial link within the St. John family it was here, making the St. John family the glue of the GC – at least for members from outside the mercantile sphere. It is worth noting that Oliver's uncle, and William's cousin, was Sir Oliver St. John, Viscount Grandison of Limerick, Lord Deputy of Ireland. His first action, upon being appointed to the office in 1616, was to knight Captain of the Navy, Thomas Button.<sup>100</sup>

## 2.4 John Davies

Lastly, John Davies (? -1626) seems to have been prime mover behind the choice to ask for the patent and was one of only five merchants appearing on the patent. The other four were John Watkins, Michall [sic] Best, Richard Salford and William Awdely and none of them emerge clearly from company sources. The work of Robert Brenner has revealed one John Watkins appearing as member and trader

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and lawmaker (1562/3-1626).

<sup>98</sup>Ute Lotz-Heuman, "St John, Oliver," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed February 6, 2017.

<sup>99</sup>Harding Alan, "St. John, William (1538-1609), of Farley Chamberlayne, Hants. | History of Parliament Online," History of Parliament Online, n.d., accessed June 2, 2017.

<sup>100</sup>Calendar of State Papers relating to Ireland, James I, Vol. 5 (1615-1625), p.134, no.286

in the Levant Company in the late 1630s and early 1640s, but there is no way to be sure whether the two were one and the same.<sup>101</sup> As for John Davies, J.W. Blake described him in his young years as a ‘*typical Elizabethan, fitting out privateers and preying upon the Spaniards and dabbling in the slave trade*’, but it is not clear from where this information is drawn.<sup>102</sup> Inquiries are complicated by his relatively generic name, and a number of famous contemporaries by the name of John Davis or Davies. Two of which were involved in early voyages either for the EIC or for the purpose of discovery. However, the dates of their escapades suggest that neither of them were the merchant John Davies of the GC.<sup>103</sup> If Blake’s assessment of him as a pirate was correct, Davies later abandoned the pirate approach, quieting down in his later years, and instead focused on establishing the redwood trade on a firm footing. Early sources show how he first attempted to request a patent on his own, in the autumn of 1614, with exclusive rights to the trade in redwood.<sup>104</sup> In a letter from the privy council to the Warden of the Dyers, the livery company representing the dyers of London, the council relate Davies’ claims and request. Davies claimed to have involved himself in the redwood trade for over seven years, meaning, if true, that his background in the Africa trade stretched back to 1607 at least. Davies explained in his petition that he had experimented with different types of wood from the African coast with the hopes of finding one suitable for dyeing and had now landed on redwood for its “*perfectnes of coulor as for lasting and continuance of the same*”. To attest to its qualities as a dye Davies had requested testimony and certification from numerous clothiers and dyers. The Privy Council still required an independent opinion on the matter and asked for the Company of Dyers to give their expert opinion as to the usage and quality of the dye. In compensation for the cost of establishing the trade Davies requested the exclusive right of import for the coming twenty-one years. Davies’ request was unsuccessful and the 1618 patent was likely, as was suggested by Blake, a new attempt for Davies to gain control over the redwood by launching a company

<sup>101</sup>Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 374-375n.

<sup>102</sup>Blake, p.87

<sup>103</sup>John Davis of Sandridge, arctic explorer died in 1605 according to his biography: John Davis, *The Voyages and Works of John Davis, The Navigator*, ed. Albert Hastings Markham (London : Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1880). In the introduction A.H. Markham goes some way in trying to clear up the confusion caused by the different Davies, though he does not mention the Africa trade, the GC patent, nor the merchant who’s name appears in it. Michael Hicks, “Davis, John (1550-1605),” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed May 24, 2017. John Davies, EIC sailor, was on a voyage to the East Indies from 1616 to 1619 and was away from England again from 1620-1621 when he died. This would mean that he could not have been present during the patent negotiations, nor the first years of trade, which contradicts other sources. The year of death (1621) differs from 1627 as given in the work of Blake. Anita McConnell, “Davis, John (d.1621),” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed May 24, 2017.

<sup>104</sup>State Papers, Acts of the Privy Council, Vol. 33 (1613-1614), p.633, no. 899. Listen in Blake, “The Farm of the Guinea Trade in 1631,” 93n.

that requested exclusive geographical access to the coast. This would help to explain Davies' actions as a company member through the first half of the 1620s, which, as it became evident that Davies was not the only merchant interested in the redwood trade, quickly became a cause of conflict and competition.

After this look at some of the more influential members of the company, certain features stand out. Though from what we know of their political leanings they move across the scale, there is a tangible link to the Duke of Buckingham. Several of the courtiers nursed tight links to the king's favorite through their marriages to his half-brother's sisters-in-law. However, Sir Robert Mansell, appearing as an outspoken critic of the Duke, carried much weight in the Navy despite his numerous accusations of corruption and scandal. Scandal and financial trouble connects them all, regardless of affiliation, and limay have extended to members we know less about. As will be discussed below, attention directed at company scandals came to hurt its reputation in the 1620s as a viable investment option, but it is equally likely that all the scandals that haunted the pasts of members also damaged the company profile, attracting a certain type of investors more likely to play fast and loose with their word and reputation. Furthermore, the company's membership does not squarely fit into traditional historical categories, such as 'mere merchants' or 'new merchant establishment', as pioneered by Robert Brenner.<sup>105</sup> Several of them had background and interest from exploration and colonization endeavors in the Americas, while others focused on court and domestic politics. Davies, the main instigator, seems for instance not to have involved himself in any of the Atlantic projects. Neither is their social status easy to discern, as some of them were from, or connected to, high status families, while others, such as the remaining four merchants, have proven difficult to find. It should also be remembered that despite financial troubles, and no evidence of particular experience in trade with the African continent beyond John Davies, several of them still had behind them extensive careers at sea. Either way, neither naval men nor politicians or courtiers contributed nearly as much in the way of building a profitable venture on the African coast, as did John Davies and later members with mercantile backgrounds. The merchants were a small group by comparison to the naval men and courtiers, counting only five in 1618, but it was the merchants who quickly secured control of the company's trade and, despite some internal conflict through the 1620's, settled the trade on a stable footing allowing it to expand throughout the following decades.

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<sup>105</sup>Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*.

### 3. The two merchants of the Guinea Company and its first expeditions

Despite several influential company members within both court and navy, the surviving sources leave little doubt about who were running the Guinea company in the 1620s, and who made a profit. Two merchants, John Davies and Humphrey Slaney, ruthlessly ran and split the trade between them, to the exclusion of other members. The two merchants, sometimes working in unison – at other times engaging in bitter rivalry, used the company as little more than a tool to exclude competition. At times they manipulated company affairs to their mutual benefit, at other times they were playing their fellow members against one another. Davies was, as seen above, a founding member with long experience in the trade from the coast, especially in redwood. Slaney, who joined the company shortly after it received its charter, had been a competitor of Davies for several years. Now that the trade in Africa was meant to be managed and conducted by the GC only, he chose to take an active part. Together the remaining members, with courtly connections and influential positions, but very little - if any - experience from the coast of Africa, had little choice but to rely on their expertise. Upon receiving his membership Slaney swore, like Davies had, to leave his private trade behind, operating instead only in unison with the others, and he was active in organizing several company voyages, helped to secure capital, fitted out and victualled ships, and organized the goods to be brought to Africa for sale. Like Davies he had the connections and experience necessary, and undoubtedly benefitted the company greatly. However, he, like Davies, did not leave his private operation behind him, instead he looked for ways in which his newly gained membership could serve him also there.

Already from the very start it proved troublesome for the company to generate a profit, though this did not stem from lack of trying. In 1621, they presented the king with an overview of the accounts from the first voyages, and it quickly becomes clear that trade had proved challenging financially. When we pair this source with published accounts from Richard Jobson, it is clear there were extraordinary challenges that went merely simple bad investments. Jobson was sent out by the company, under the directorship of governor St. John; sub-governor Apesley and deputy governor Button, at the end of October 1621. After his return in 1623, his travels up the Gambia River were published in book-form under the title *The Golden Trade or a Discovery of the River Gambia (Gambia) and the Golden Trade of the Aethiopians*, and it has become an important source for early seventeenth century trade on the west African coast.<sup>106</sup> According to these documents, the accounts and Jobson's book, the company initially had three ships in circulation between England and the African

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<sup>106</sup>Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade or a Discovery of the River Gambia and the Golden Trade of the Aethiopians*, 1623. (Reprinted by Dawson of Pall Mall, London, 1968)

coast – the *Katherine*, the *St. John* and the *Syon*. Whether these ships were owned by the company or freighted either externally or by and from company members, as the name *St. John* may suggest, is not known. A total of four voyages had been conducted between 1618 and 1621 and signals high activity, with the mixed motive of establishing relations and trade with the markets in the Gambia River estuary, as well as conducting further explorations upriver with the aim of connecting to the trading circuits in the continent's interior. The trade from Gambia was the company's focus throughout the 1620s, largely spurred on by the established trading links in the region, possibly stemming from Davies' earlier activities there, and the trade in redwood based in the region. There is evidence that Davies traded privately from the area around the Sierra Leone River, while Slaney focused on the river Sherboro. According to Blake, though it has not been possible to confirm from the sources, he there employed his two apprentices and soon-to-be company directors, William Cloberry and John Wood.<sup>107</sup> This meant other parts of the coast were not visited with any high degree of frequency by the company, and must largely have remained open for private, now de facto illegal, initiatives.

In addition to trade in African commodities, the hope for the expedition was to better understand the gold trade, and if possible to locate its source. We do not know in what way the company organized its starting capital, nor if the practice from the Senegal Adventurers of clustering investors behind representatives, was continued. In the decade following the launch of the company, another thirty or so members and their capital entered the company and left without leaving much trace.<sup>108</sup> Wherever the capital was sourced from it was clearly unfortunate that the investment for fitting out the 120-ton vessel named *Katherine*, just after receiving the patent in 1618, was immediately lost when the *Katherine* did not return. Her master, George Thompson, had been instructed to sail the ship up the Gambia river, as far he could safely get her, and then continue exploring up river by use of pinnaces. According to the writings of Jobson, Thompson did as he was instructed but once the majority of the crew had commenced their journey upriver, leaving the *Katherine* behind, the ship was attacked by a group of “*Portingals and Mulatos*”.<sup>109</sup> Those who had remained aboard the *Katherine* were all killed. News of the attack eventually traveled up river to Thompson, who decided to send some of his men down to the coast in the hopes of gaining passage back to England to relay the bad news and ask for assistance, and in this they succeeded. In the company accounts the *Katherine* is simply listed as “*taken, and most of the men slayne*”, and subsequently no return on

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<sup>107</sup>TNA: C 2/ChasI/S94/34, Blake, “The Farm of the Guinea Trade in 1631,” 95.

<sup>108</sup>Blake, 95–98.

<sup>109</sup>Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade, or, A Discovery of the River Gambia, and the Golden Trade of the Ethiopians* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1623), 6–11.

investment was recorded. This was a devastating start for the company, and things were not getting better. In response to the plea for help from Thomson, the company prepared to send out another vessel. The following year, in 1620, a 50-ton pinnace named *St. John* was fitted out to the total sum of £1989. The total profit recorded from that voyage, in hides and gold, was only £80, which can hardly have appeared as a successful return on investment. The only uplifting news brought by the *St. John* was that Thompson, believing himself now well established up the Gambia river, had declined the offer to return with the ship - asking instead for the company to send more goods for trade. Thompson, along with eight of his men, remained in the Gambia to continue the explorations and reported enthusiastically to the company directors that “*they should in no wayes doubt of a hopeful discovery, where the Moores of Barbary traded, and a valewable returne for their losses sustained...*”<sup>110</sup>

Therefore, in late October 1621 the *St. John* was again fitted and sent out for another attempt, sailing this time together with the substantially larger vessel *Syon* of 200 tons. Humphrey Slaney was charged with the organization of the voyage.<sup>111</sup> Richard Jobson partook in the expedition, witnessing and documenting all events and publishing his accounts upon his return to England. The two ships were, according to the company accounts, fitted out to the total cost of £1921 – a smaller sum than the voyage before when considering the tonnage for the two vessels combined was substantially larger, a sign that the initial high hopes may have cooled down somewhat. The accounts do not tell us what the ships were stocked with, though the list of returns were slightly more promising. The ships brought back hides, wax, and ivory to the total value of £1387. The voyage still ended in loss though, and worse still - the two ships returned with unfortunate news regarding the project of establishing trade in the interior. While the ships had been away, Thompson – along with two of his fellow explorers – had left the larger party and headed further inland. There they had been in search of a trader named Buckor Sano based at the town of Tinda.<sup>112</sup> Sano was thought to be an important link to the interior trade, but unfortunately, they learned upon their arrival that Sano was away on one of his business travels. According to Jobson’s accounts, while waiting for Sano’s return and carefully studying the trading that was taking place, a fight over Thompson leadership had broken out among the Englishmen. The outcome proved deadly for Thompson, as “*one of his Company slew him, to the utter losse of what he [Thompson] had attained*”. To make matters worse, Jobson explained, Thompson had “*committed nothing to paper, so as all his endeavors and labors were lost with him*”.<sup>113</sup> Of the knowledge gathered from over

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<sup>110</sup>Jobson, 7.

<sup>111</sup>Blake, “The Farm of the Guinea Trade in 1631,” 95.

<sup>112</sup>Also written *Tenda*. Jobson, *The Golden Trade*, xiii.

<sup>113</sup>Jobson, 8.

three years of exploration of the Gambia inlands, none of it made it back to the company in London. Furthermore, despite the positive developments in returns with the voyage of *St. John* and the *Syon*, when the time came to close the accounts a further £1301 of the company's funds went towards the cost of freight and crew. Thus, by 1621 the company had spent £5766 on fitting out vessels - and another £1301 in freight charges and wages for those that had returned - bringing the total expenditure to £7067. Despite the return of £1466 from the two last voyages, the company was out of pocket £5600, and firmly in the red. On top of this came the tragedy of losing one of the company ships with crew, the loss of Thompson, and with him all his gathered knowledge.<sup>114</sup>

### 3.2. Conflict arises

The first years thus did not live up to the expectations, and measures had to be taken for trade to continue. The company had lost money and there was need for more funds, and the tough first years must have left their mark, for capital had to be sourced from outside company ranks. In November 1621, after the return of the *Syon* and the *St. John*, the company borrowed £1000 from Lady Elizabeth Craven, the widow of former Mayor of London, Sir William Craven.<sup>115</sup> The loan may have helped short term, but its aftermath would cause far more trouble than had been foreseen. The decision to request the loan, as well as the organization of all things practical, was done by Humphrey Slaney, Sir Giles Mompesson, Sir Allen Apesley, as well as fellow company members Sir Francis Blundell, George Dunscombe and Phillip Jones. The money supposedly went towards fitting out another company voyage to the river Gambia, but in the court cases that followed when the debt remained unpaid, doubts were cast on whether the funds had gone to that end, or even to the company at all. Accusations were later made in court by Apesley that Slaney had not only been conducting copious private trade to the damage of the company, but also simply pretended that the funds would go towards fitting out a new voyage to the Gambia, instead pocketing the money for himself. John Davies had also benefitted privately from the loan, and according to Apesley the two merchants were equally responsible for repayment, unlike himself.

If Slaney and Davies both benefitted from the loan and applied it to their

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<sup>114</sup>SP Dom., James I, Vol. 124, no. 115.

Blake, J.W., 'The English Guinea Company, 1618-1660: An early example of the chartered company in colonial development', proceedings and report of the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society. Talk given on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 1946., p.19 Transcript from: [https://archive.org/stream/proceedingsrepor23194546b/proceedingsrepor23194546b\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/proceedingsrepor23194546b/proceedingsrepor23194546b_djvu.txt) Accessed 11.09.15.

<sup>115</sup>TNA: C 2/ChasI/S85/4.

own personal operations, it does not appear it was the result of active cooperation between them. On the contrary, shortly after the loan had been received, Davies played to the company's concern for its own financial difficulties and offered to personally take on parts of the repayment responsibility. He requested, however, certain benefits in return. Davies had at this point, perhaps disheartened by the lacking success from the voyages, decided to return to his former wish for control of the redwood trade. The events of 1620-1 had left nothing in terms of furthering the company's ability to pay the loan to Lady Craven, and now Davies offered to take on the repayment of the loan in exchange for sole access to the redwood trade. The company, tempted by the offer, accepted and thus eight years later Davies held control of England's legal trade in redwood.<sup>116</sup> Davies' grip on the redwood trade was not good for company business. Redwood, or *taccola*, was a reasonably priced dye wood and enjoyed growing popularity in Europe at the beginning of the seventeenth century. From Pieter van den Broecke's journal we know that he too was bringing redwood into Amsterdam for his employers around the same period.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, in England Davies had himself been active in trying it out, requesting the London Company of Dyers to experiment with its quality.<sup>118</sup> In addition to its qualities as a dye, redwood was used by several of the African states along the West African coast, and thus held value as an article of re-export. The Portuguese had long since acknowledge redwoods potential as a re-export article, used by nobles along the coast as a dye to be painted on the skin. Broecke wrote, "[The Portuguese] buy *taccola* in abundance and transport it along the entire coast, where it brings great profits."<sup>119</sup> It was a commodity that brought in steady profits, and once it was directed into Davies' hands, it hastened the company's downward spiral. Slaney, who was also operating privately on the coast and too held a stake in the redwood trade, watched the process with much frustration and contention. From his actions following the deal between Davies and the company, it is evident that it had either taken place behind his back, or against his will. Ignoring the agreement, Slaney continued his trade until he and Davies came to blows.<sup>120</sup> From then on, the two men engaged in a personal conflict, where the company, and several individual members became collateral damage. Blatantly ignoring the deal between Davies and the company, Slaney sent his ships to the coast and continued trading in redwood. Not long after, Davies' factors on the coast seized a ship belonging

<sup>116</sup>TNA: C 2/ChasI/S94/34, HCA 13/106, p.25v-27r, Blake, "The Farm of the Guinea Trade in 1631," 94n.

<sup>117</sup>Broecke writes of bringing 1,800 pieces of redwood to Amsterdam in late July 1611, "*which we had brought to do a test to see if it could be used by the dyers.*" Another 800 pieces was brought in a similar voyage in the fall of 1612. Broecke and La Fleur, *Pieter van Den Broecke's Journal of Voyages*, 70-80, 92.

<sup>118</sup>TNA: PC 2/31, f.681-682, State Papers James I. Acts of the Privy Council of England: A.D. 1542-[June 1631]. Vol. 38: 1621-1623.

<sup>119</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, *Pieter van Den Broecke's Journal of Voyages*, 73, 79-80, 87-88, 97, 102.

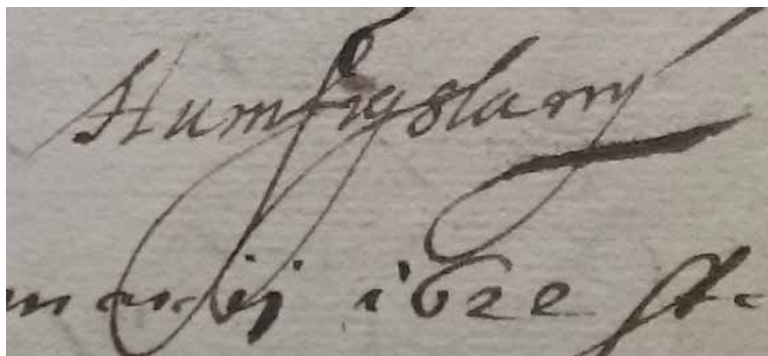
<sup>120</sup>TNA: HCA 13/106, 25v-27r

to Slaney. Davies got the company to serve Slaney a fine £500 for trading against company regulation. In response to this, Slaney took the conflict public, delivering a damning complaint to the king's privy council in April, 1623.

In early historiographical work on the company, such as that of W.R. Scott, C.T. Carr, and E. Donnan, Humphrey Slaney has been presented as a company challenger who had a past as a trader on the African coast and who felt the squeeze of the patent, before eventually taking over the trade with the new Guinea patent granted by Charles in 1631.<sup>121</sup> Blake challenged this view, showing that Slaney had been a company member for more than a decade by 1631, only gradually introducing the group of supporters that came to run the Anglo-Africa trade in the 1630s and 1640s. I argue here that not only does the records of his complaint to the Privy Council show that Slaney was indeed a member of the company, and was therefore not challenging the company as a private trader, but he was in fact not challenging the company at all. From the state papers it is evident that Slaney challenged John Davies personally. This he did from inside the company as a fellow member who hung the company's dirty laundry out to dry. Slaney was willing to risk the future of the company as a viable investment option, in order to maintain his private trade.

#### Illustration 4

#### Signature of Humphrey Slaney



Source: Detail from HCA 13/106, 27r, The National Archive, Kew, UK.

Before presenting Slaney's complaints it must be acknowledged that there was frustration with the company coming from the outside as well. The criticisms had started as soon as the patent was granted, and in 1622 members of the Eastland Company took the opportunity to point to the GC as an example of a company that

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<sup>121</sup>Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 2:13; Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, XXVIII:99-106; Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, Vol. I, 1441-1700:79.

was not making use of the extensive patent it was holding, nor allowing anyone else access to the trade in its absence.<sup>122</sup> The same was claimed by a Nicholas Ferrar in a petition to the House of Commons from 1622, who argued that the claim of “first discovery” was a falsehood, and the low level of activity in combination with the seizing of interlopers, was bringing the prices on African commodities to unacceptable levels.<sup>123</sup> We know now that the reason for this was Davies monopolizing of the trade at the expense of all other activity. The combination of lacking activity and denied access also formed the core of Slaney’s frustrations, and the source of the problem was the grip that Davies held over the company through taking over the debt to Lady Craven. The company had become indebted to Davies, in addition to losing its redwood trade. On top of claiming his agreement was legal and entered into freely by the company, Davies still insisted that the clause in the patent in which the company agreed to trade on a “*unison course*” was still strictly upheld, which denied all other members from conducting private trade. According to the patent of the company, members who wanted to trade had to do it through the company, and this did not change just because Davies took on some of the company’s financial burden. But this was no easy thing to do when the company was close to bankruptcy. New capital was hard to come by for a company which was indebted, embroiled in conflict, and had lost some of its most secure trade to private hands. These restrictions had their desired effect, and by closing off all access to the trade John Davies had, by 1622/3, “*the sole trading to the saide places of Guinea and Binney, excluding all those of the same company from trading to those partes*”.<sup>124</sup>

This was the backdrop in April 1623, when Slaney stepped in front of the Privy Council with a forceful complaint about the practice of his company, and of one of his fellow company members. In his appeal to the council, Slaney freely admitted that he had not accepted the demands of Davies, and that he had conducted private trade as the company engaged in none, which as a result meant he had been operating in breach of the patent.<sup>125</sup> Slaney had sent three of his own ships to the African coast aiming to trade, but – according to his statement - also to explore regions where the English had not yet settled, ‘*for the enlargement of trade, employment of many maryners and encrease of his Majestie’s Customes*’. His justification, an expressed wish to discover the African coast for England, gained him support with the council. In fact, he went as far as to claim that the three ships he had sent had traded for

<sup>122</sup>SP. Dom., James I, Vol. 130, p. 387, May 5, 1622. (Entry made on May 8th, written in a document dated May 5th, 1622)

<sup>123</sup>Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 2:13.

<sup>124</sup>TNA: PC 2/31, f.681-682, State Papers James I. Acts of the Privy Council of England: A.D. 1542-[June 1631], Vol. 38: 1621-1623.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*

more than company itself. It is impossible to establish the actual size of either Davies or Slaney's private activities in the redwood trade, but it is clear that the trade was profitable enough for neither of them to willingly lose it to the other. Davies appeared uninterested in sharing the coast with anyone, and upon being informed of Slaney's activities, had made efficient use of the patent and presented Slaney with the abovementioned fine of £500 for trading privately on the coast. Slaney claimed he was more than willing to contribute to the company clearing its debt with Davies and Craven, but the transferal of the redwood trade was going too far, resulting in the '*transaction of privilege to one sole hande, though it be with the consent of the company*'.<sup>126</sup>

The privy council was furious upon hearing Slaney's case, and sided with him on the matter. In very clear terms it was decided that Davies behavior was "*unfit to be suffered and his Majestie being informed hereof doth utterly dislyke that his gracious favour intended for a generall good shoulde be charged into the nature of a monopoli for the private turne of one man, both to the prejudice of the saide Humphrey Slaney and the discouragement of others from undertaking lyke adventures; it is therefore thought fit and ordered according to his Majestie's pleasure signified in that behalfe, that the arrests and sutes of molestacion against the saide Humphrey Slaney be stayed and that hereafter the saide Slaney be not molested or troubled or his goods arrested upon any such pretence by the saide Davis.*"<sup>127</sup> Slaney had won the right to trade on the coast, and Davies was strongly reprimanded. The decision did not, however, address the core of the issue – Davies seemingly maintained his prominent position in redwood trade until his death in 1626/7, and the company's financial issues continued.

#### 4. The Company in court

During the on-going court conflict between Slaney and Davies, trouble was arising elsewhere in the company as well. In 1624 it was decided that the company would attempt to organize yet another voyage in the Gambia with Richard Jobson in charge. The company governor, William St. John, took it upon himself to organize the purchase of a vessel for the purpose, and eventually found a Spanish ship that he thought suitable. However, the cost of the ship, £1250, was higher than the company's current joint-stock – proving that even though private merchants like Davies and Slaney might be profiting, this did not spill over into company coffers. An agreement was reached when St. John along with a group of members offered to buy the ship privately, relying again on private credit, and then rent it out to the company for £60

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<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*

per month.<sup>128</sup> This the company agreed to, and the ship was purchased and fitted out for its voyage. It left the Thames only to immediately seek harbor at Dover as it “*proved rotten and so ominous to their proceeding, hazarding the lives of us all that were ingaged in her*”.<sup>129</sup> Because of leaks and need for repair it was evident that the ship could not embark on a voyage to Africa, as “*many of us resolve the stoppe of this last voyage was God’s blessed hinderance*”.<sup>130</sup> The whole project had to be cancelled. The rest of the company members were furious, demanding a return of the money they had already put in for hiring the ship and acquiring its cargo. We do not know much of how the group that had purchased the ship reacted to these requests in detail, but a case between governor St. John and the executors of the will of Sir George Digby who was one of the members who offered to take part in the purchase, shows that Digby had put complete trust in St. John when it came to the choice of ship.<sup>131</sup> St. John was in no position to offer any refunds, and as the expected rent from ship was not coming in he quickly began to struggle with the debt he still owed the ship’s original owners. When no solution presented itself, the governor took a page out of fellow-company member Giles Mompesson’s book and ran away.

The company’s financial issues were not helped when it appeared, after Davies’ death in 1626, that after all the problems his deal with the company had generated, he had not in fact paid down the loan to Elizabeth Craven. The loan would in the end, perhaps paradoxically and justifiably, become Slaney’s problem. From the records of a judicial complaint filed by Slaney in 1627 the case of the debt unravels. Due to Davies lacking payments, the creditors were now turning on Slaney, as the only viable option for restitution among the members who requested the loan in 1621. They were, in addition to Slaney, Sir Giles Mompesson, Sir Allen Apesley, Sir Francis Blundell, George Dunscombe and Phillip Jones. By 1627, Craven was deceased, and the recovery of the debt had passed to her brothers George and William Whytmore, the executors to her will. Slaney, refusing to take responsibility for the entire sum in arrears, complained of slander and plotting against his reputation. This was fervently denied and dismissed by the Whytmores. The executors did acknowledge that they were indeed coming after the arrears left from the debt owed to Craven by the company, £400 in total, and though they acknowledge that the debt had been taken up by a group within the company, and then had been handed over to Davies for repayment, those payments had never been received. The loan had, as

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<sup>128</sup>Blake, “The Farm of the Guinea Trade in 1631,” 95; J. M. Gray, *A History of the Gambia* (Cambridge University Press, 1940), 27.

<sup>129</sup>Richard Jobson, “The Discovery of the Cuntry of Kinge Solomon His Rich Trade and Trafique within Twenty Daies Sail of England” (1625), Royal MS. 18A, LVIII, British Library.

<sup>130</sup>Jobson.

<sup>131</sup>TNA: C 2/ChasI/S44/26, 2/ChasI/S87/25

far as the executors understood, gone towards the company's intended voyage to the Gambia. However, at the time the loan had been granted Lady Craven did not know, nor ask, what the money was intended for, "*But that the said one thousand pounds was borrowed or employed for the said companie the said Lady Craven to the knowledge of these defendants knowe not, nor doe these defendants at all know any thinge for whome or what use it was borrowed, neither doe these defendants know what was the complainants employment or adventure for the said companie, nor what (...) returns they made (..) neither what care the said company tooke to satisfie the said Lady Craven.*"<sup>132</sup>

Illustration 5:

George Whytmore (d.1654) brother of  
Lady Elizabeth Craven and executor to her will.



British (English) School, ca. 1650, artist unknown.

Source: Dudmaston, Shropshire, Midlands, National Trust, UK.

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<sup>132</sup>TNA: C 2/ChasI/S85/4

Thus, the executors claimed, to Craven it appeared to be a loan granted to the men who had requested it, and it was these men she viewed as her debtors. Furthermore, Craven had not had any knowledge of the agreement between the company and Davies for the latter to take over the loan, only after some of the repayments had been made had she been informed of this. According to the executors, Davies role in the repayment changed nothing of the original agreement, and in addition Davies had evidently not taken his responsibility seriously and allowed the debt to go unpaid. Before her death, lady Craven had seen no other option but to seek a judicial verdict against the original debtors, and this she had achieved through the court of the King's Bench. The list of debtors had thinned since 1621. Sir Francis Blundell was dead and left little behind. The same was true of Dunscombe and Jones. Apesley was still alive but was struggling financially and could not repay. Mompesson ran away already in 1622 and had "*lived for manie yeares obscure*".<sup>133</sup> Their questionable financial dealings have already been discussed above. As for pursuing the company which, after all, was a legal entity with limited liability, the executors exclaimed: "*and against the said company or the Administrators of the said John Davies' estate these defendants have neither cause of suite or hope of relief.*"<sup>134</sup> The deal had, according to their testimony, never really been with Davies, or with the company, but with the aforementioned group around Apesley and Mompesson. If Slaney was unhappy with shouldering the responsibility alone, the executor dryly suggested he took his complaint to his fellow debtors.

The practice of taking up loans for a company on the personal credit of select members, often the directors, was not unusual, as has been shown by Oscar Gelderblom, Abe de Jong and Joost Jonker in the case of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) from the same period.<sup>135</sup> The executors of Lady Craven's testament did not see the arrangement for the loan as being between her and the company, but instead between her and the persons that had specifically requested it. The decision to leave it to certain company members to take up the loan had become established practice, and, as will be discussed below, caused problems for other company members as well, not just Slaney. It cannot be determined whether Craven was truly unaware that the company was responsible for the repayment, and by extension, whether the company's credit was too bad to procure capital at that point. It is not unlikely, the statement from the executors suggests they did not see it as viable to go after the company, and felt their chances improved by going after company members. Yet, the VOC, a far larger organization than the GC, had established limited liability for its

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<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup>Oscar Gelderblom, Abe de Jong, and Joost Jonker, "The Formative Years of the Modern Corporation: The Dutch East India Company VOC, 1602–1623," *The Journal of Economic History* 73, no. 4 (December 2013): 1050–76.

members, both shareholders and directors, only in 1623, and the English equivalent - the East India Company (EIC), only introduced the practice by the middle of the century.<sup>136</sup> The content of the case was therefore not unique for the GC, nor an unequivocal sign of financial weakness, and it will be shown below that the GC maintained the practice until the middle of the century, before passing it on to its successor, the Royal Adventurers into Africa, after the Restoration.

## 5. Internal strife and changes in membership

According to the executors, it was not their concern how Slaney handled the matter from then on so long as they received their money. Beyond that, Slaney was free to then pursue the other debtors for compensation in his own legal process if he so wished. They knew nothing of how the company had organized such matters originally, nor do they appear particularly interested. The records do not reveal the outcome of the case, although it appears the matter ended in the Whytmores' favour, with Slaney being forced to repay the missing money. This is suggested by the fact that one year later the matter was again brought up in court. This time Slaney went after the only person left to share the financial responsibility of the loan, Sir Allen Apesley.

In his response to Slaney's complaint, written down in June 1628, Apesley made his thoughts of both Slaney and Davies known, and his testimony is a rare insight into how the internal relationship between the GC members had both deteriorated and polarized. Apesley, claimed, he "*knoweth not (...) of any good the said complainant [Slaney] hath done to the said company. The Complainant hath much hurt and damnified the said company*".<sup>137</sup> He admitted to having had a role in the loan, but stated in no uncertain terms "*that hee for his parte had nor parte or parcel of the said sume of one thousand pounds secured by the said bond nor any benefit at all of it*".<sup>138</sup> He went on to give Slaney full responsibility for the decision, as he "*undertook to manage a voyage to the River of Gambra & [this] was the meanes for the taking upp (as hee pretendeth) of the sume (...) which he promised to employ for the general good*".<sup>139</sup> Slaney had been responsible for acquiring the necessary ships, crews, victuals and goods, as well as where to position diverse factors, but Apesley claimed he "*[did not] know howe it was employed nor had he (...) any dealing therein but the said complainant who procured the said money was left to receive the same*

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<sup>136</sup>Gelderblom, Jong, and Jonker, 3.

<sup>137</sup>TNA: C 2/ChasI/S94/34

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*

∫ howe much hee received or disposed thereof [he, Apesley] knoweth not, But the said complt. (who was trusted by the said company therewith) undertook to receive ∫ employed the said whole sume...”<sup>140</sup>

The company had trusted Slaney to manage the matter, trusting his experience in the trade, but Apesley clearly questioned whether Slaney had been true to the company in his dealings and stated he had never seen any accounts from the voyage. He went on saying that he “*hath heard ∫ doth believe it to be true that the said complainant contrary to (...) the expressed orders of the said company did undertake ∫ sett forth other ships to Gynney and Bynney for his own proper account without lysence of the said company and that hee made unto himself a greate profit thereby*”.<sup>141</sup> Apesley explained that he had indeed been present when the company made the agreement with Davies, for “*his sole entire trade ∫ traffique of the River of Cerelion*”<sup>142</sup> in return for taking over the payments on the loan, and he knew that Davies had made a payment of £400 to Craven. From the testimony of the Whytmores, it is clear that miscellaneous sums had been given also by the others, and now £400 remained.<sup>143</sup> Regarding this remaining sum, Apesley said, he had “*presumed that the said debt had been long since wholly satisfied*”.<sup>144</sup> And interestingly, he saw no problem in asking the two merchants to pay up, as he felt certain they both had funds owed to them in the company coffers, “*And if any part thereof be yet behind ∫ unpaid then ought the said [Slaney] or the said John Davies or one of them to pay the same they having (as this defendant hath heard) sufficient means of the said company as yet unaccounted for to satisfy and discharge the said debt*”.<sup>145</sup> To him this was Davies and Slaney’s problem, stemming from their own illegal dealings and should neither be left to Apesley or the company to solve. Not only claimed Apesley to have contributed sufficiently into the company’s dealings, “*But the said complaynant. ∫ John Davies (as this defendant believeth) had the whole managing of the said money and goods of ∫ belonging to the [company] and the whole benefit of the trade aforesaid to their owne great advantage ∫ enrichment ∫ the losse ∫ damage of the said company.*”<sup>146</sup>

The verdict of the case is not known, but Apesley was known for his financial trouble, and appear from his testimony to be not only unwilling to pay anything towards the debt, but resentful towards both Slaney and Davies. Slaney had organized the loan, he had managed how it was spent, the company had trusted

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<sup>140</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid. Cerelion - Sierra Leone.*

<sup>143</sup>TNA: C 2/ChasI/S85/4

<sup>144</sup>TNA: C 2/ChasI/S94/34

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*

him, and instead he had secured his own private trade at the company's expense. Not only had he damaged the company financially but - if Apesley's accusations were true, probably also its credit and reputation. The continuous court cases did not help matters. Davies had not been much better, having promised to take the debt of the company's hands in return for a valuable privilege he enjoyed for nearly five years at the cost of the company's profits, but had in fact not done as promised. Now Davies was dead, and Apesley appear happy to leave Slaney to tidy up his own mess.

The accusations of Apesley against Humphrey Slaney did indeed come from a man who had every interest in painting Humphrey Slaney in a bad light, and they must be seen in that context. However, Apesley's claims are not grotesque. Slaney openly admitted to private trading in front of the Privy Council, and was responsible for the organization of voyages, of which the *Syon's* voyage to the Gambia in 1621 was a not-too-successful example. He had also proven to be willing to go far to ensure his private access to the coast when it was under threat by Davies. Furthermore, his long track record for trade on the coast, combined with the accusations that he made "*unto himself a greate profit*" by breaking the rules laid down in the patent, makes it not unlikely that he was personally enriched by his trade even if the company was withering.

Whether Slaney's presence in the company was for good or bad, he undoubtedly left his mark and ensured its continued existence after the courtiers and naval officers were out of the picture. By the second half of the 1620s changes to the company dynamic were evident. Slaney was responsible for introducing several new traders as members, all experienced in overseas trade, stemming from his own, close, personal network. This group included his own son-in-law, William Cloberry - a London merchant who invested in both overseas trade and colonial ventures; the brothers Nicholas and Samuel Crispe, also wealthy London merchants with interest in both the Spanish and East India trade, though for Nicholas the Africa trade soon become the main focus; and the more anonymous John Wood, who had served as Slaney's apprentice.<sup>147</sup> These men all had their impact on the company's trading activities in the decades to come, and most prominent were Nicholas Crispe and John Wood who both came to take on the position of governor in the decades to come. These traders brought new vigor and much needed funds to the company, as well as a pool of experience from overseas trade. The experience would help them as they first had to tackle the effects of poor financial dealings, and the distinct lack of trust among members that had been developed, largely as a result of Slaney and Davies

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<sup>147</sup>Henry St George, *The Visitation of London: Anno Domini 1633, 1634, and 1635. Made by Sr. Henry St. George, Kt., Richmond Herald, and Deputy and Marshal to Sr. Richard St. George, Kt., Clarencieux King of Armes* (The Harleian Society, 1880), 173. William Cloberry, of Billingsgate, marriage to Dorothy Slaney. Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*; Robert Porter, "The Crispe Family and the African Trade in the Seventeenth Century," *The Journal of African History* 9, no. 1 (1968): 57-77.

exploitation of company privilege to better facilitate their private trade and protect it from competition.

But before the new members had time to make much of a mark, the company turned on itself again. Beyond the court cases over the Craven loan, which added to the existing problems of William St. John's failed expedition, there were other signs of the eroding long-term effects of the first few years. With St. John's departure, the company needed a new governor and the task was for a short while assigned to the elderly, wealthy George Digby, who had participated in the purchase of St. John's fateful ship and governed the company for the last year of his life, passing away in the same year as John Davies, 1626. The job then passed to his relative, Kenelm Digby, a well-respected courtier and diplomat, who by 1627 showed an increasing interest in privateering and overseas trade. Digby remained in the position until 1631, when the new patent was granted. Neither of the men in the group surrounding Slaney appears to have taken the governor chair before the new patent was granted, though Nicholas Crispe served as deputy governor for some of this time. Slaney was still caught in conflict over the debt to Craven, and with internal disagreements splitting the company it may have been impossible for Slaney, or his closest group, to receive the necessary acceptance to take on the role of governor. In addition, Digby was well-known and connected at the court of king Charles I, who had recently inherited the throne at the death of his father on the March 27, 1625. Compared to his sons, Charles I did not prove to be the most interested in the Anglo-Africa trade, though he invested in a company venture to the Gold Coast, lent the company one of his naval ships for protection, and granted generous privileges with the new patent in 1631.<sup>148</sup> The new king did, however, appreciate the many wonders that were brought home from the discoveries and explorations done by the company's men. Already in the summer of 1625, the privy council made a note of *'things desired from Guinea'* by the new king. The list included "*an elephant's head with the teeth very large; a river horse's head; strange sorts of fowls; birds and fishes' skins; great flying and sucking fishes; all sorts of serpents, dried fruits, shining stones*".<sup>149</sup> Despite the changes in governorship the privy council did not turn to the new head of the company, instead the note was addressed to the "*merchants of the Guinea Company and the Gold Coast, Humph. Slaney, Capt. Crispe, and [Wil.] Cloberry, and John Wood, Cape merchant*". St. John

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<sup>148</sup>Gray, *A History of the Gambia*, 27–28. BHO: "America and West Indies: October 1626," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 82. *British History Online*, accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/p82a>.

<sup>149</sup>"America and West Indies: July 1625," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 74–75. *British History Online*, accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/pp74-75>.

and the Digby's may have held the position of governor, but the group around Slaney seems still to have been seen as the face of the company.<sup>150</sup>

Illustration 6:

Sir Kenelm Digby and King Charles I



Source: Studio of Anthony van Dyck, ca 1630, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK.



Source: Studio of Anthony van Dyck, ca. 1630, Sewerby Hall, Yorkshire, UK.

## 6. The end of the first patent

It is possible that this was a source of contention, at least it seems evident the Humphrey Slaney found a new adversary in Kenelm Digby. The attempt to set out a new shared voyage to the Gambia river in 1628 brought the Guinea traders into the court room yet again, and this time the issue centered on missing payments on subscriptions.<sup>151</sup> Despite an agreement to send ships to the Gambia, followed by a

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<sup>150</sup> "America and West Indies: July 1625," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 74-75. *British History Online*, accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/pp74-75>.

<sup>151</sup>TNA: C 2/ChasI/C129/94

round of subscriptions of investments for this purpose, a group of fifteen members defaulted when the time came to pay up. Led by governor Digby himself, the defaulters denied all requests to honor their commitments. Money had already been paid out and goods delivered in preparation of the voyage, and now, as the project was put on hold, there were again creditors pressuring the company for their money. Nicholas Crispe had extended his credit on the company's behalf and was especially eager to force the defaulters to make good on their promise. Digby had, according to the court documents subscribed £200 in the venture, but this, he claimed, had only been for show - in an attempt to draw in more investments, proving that the status of certain company members was indeed used actively to draw in capital. The same was true for other members, such as Joseph Ward and Lewis Powell. They had subscribed in order to create investment hype, but never intended to follow through on their subscriptions. Therefore, Digby said, as the voyage did not go to plan, he and his friends would refuse to pay, seemingly unwilling to acknowledge that his own actions had led to the venture's failure from the start. Instead he deflected all guilt, stating that he refused to pay as long as Humphrey Slaney was permitted to interlope on company trade. A fellow member, Sir John Brooks, confirmed this. Digby apparently also publicly proclaimed that he would adventure nothing in the company while it was giving out licenses to Slaney and others. He placed the blame for the lacking success of the voyage on Crispe, Slaney, and their partners - on their lack of skill, and how they focused on personal gain. The conflict quickly hardened, splitting the members into two groups, those who had paid and those who defaulted. The members who had paid rallied around Slaney and Nicholas Crispe - who, after honoring their subscriptions, denied any responsibility for the debts that arose when others defaulted. The others gathered around governor Digby - who, on behalf of the defaulters, blamed the private trade of Slaney and his partners.

The court of wards ruled in favor of the company's creditors on three separate occasions, ordering the company to pay their debts, but still the members could not agree, and no money was transferred. The matter of the missing subscriptions lingered on into the 1630s, and a threat of being ruled in contempt of court was necessary to get the company members to agree to a meeting on the matter. The meeting, held in the spring of 1631 and led by Richard Young and Nicholas Crispe, was attended mainly by members who were actively trading, and who therefore had paid their subscriptions. They, unsurprisingly, decided the only fair thing to do was for the defaulters to pay the creditors. The defaulter, on their side, reached the conclusion that they should not. The matter remained at a stand-still until 1637, ten years after the initial subscriptions were made, when governmental forces intervened, deciding the debt was to be covered through the collection of an import duty on the redwood

Illustration 7:

Overview of debt accumulated and missing subscriptions for the Guinea Company's attempted Gambia venture

82 II

Debts to be paid by the several Services of  
this honorable Court.

£ 153

To Edward Curlew	100	00	00
For charges of suite	020	00	00
To William Cudde	040	00	00
For damage and charges	010	00	00
To John Harvey & John Whitcombe	097	18	08
For rest of suite & damage	020	00	00
To Thomas Andrews	110	07	01
For rest of suite & damage	020	00	00
<b>The debt directed</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>09</b>

A particular of the debt for w<sup>ch</sup> some of the members  
of the Company, are now directed in this honorable Court.

Thomas Osborne demands for wages	100	00	00
Edward Shethen for wages	040	00	00
Thomas Hanson for money lent	100	00	00
John Good here for wages	022	10	00
For goods brought home of his owne	014	07	06
For money disbursed in w <sup>ch</sup> charge	001	16	11
Henry Gunder for wages	072	18	09
Timothy Stuberius for wages	040	10	00
Henry Groat for wages	024	11	06
Edmond Curlew & Eric Flemming	100	16	10
Samuel Hewes for wages			
<b>The debt due for</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>The total of the debt directed &amp; due for</b>	<b>945</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>03</b>

The names of those of the Company that have underwritten  
but not paid in their adventures and who in equitie ought  
to paye the said debt.

John Hurte	050	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	039	08	04
William Crisley	050	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	039	08	04
Harold Wade	050	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	039	08	04
Henry Powell	050	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	039	08	04
George Forster	050	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	039	08	04
S <sup>r</sup> John Crane	050	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	039	08	04
Joseph Wood	200	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	157	13	04
S <sup>r</sup> Adam Clarke	050	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	039	08	04
S <sup>r</sup> Thomas Button	100	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	078	16	08
S <sup>r</sup> Randle Rigby	200	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	157	13	04
Walter Clarke	050	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	039	08	04
Marquardt Bell	100	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	078	16	08
Robert Sampson	050	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	039	08	04
S <sup>r</sup> Tho. Clarke	050	00	00	his p <sup>te</sup>	039	08	04
Frauncis Kumbie	100	00	00		078	16	08
	<b>1200</b>	<b>00</b>	<b>00</b>		<b>946</b>	<b>00</b>	<b>00</b>

Source: TNA SP 16/540/1, f.153, May 26, 1631, The National Archive, Kew, UK.

and ivory brought into London.<sup>152</sup>

These were Slaney's preferred commodities of import, and perhaps it was that which made the suggestion seem acceptable to the defaulters. Either way the matter was finally solved, if ten years late. Estimates from the trade suggested that in this way the £900 debt that remained would be covered within three years.

Despite their private trade splitting the company down the middle, Slaney, Crispe, and their trading partners showed no intention of slowing their private trade down. In the month of January 1628, Slaney, Crispe and others, sent the 300 tons vessel the *Benediction* to the Senegal River to conduct "*their accustomed trade*". The war between France and England which had been ongoing since 1627 had recently ended, making voyages to the African coast less risky. Or so the merchants thought. The *Benediction* was laden with merchandize and arrived safely. There the ship was "*surprised and taken*" in the month of June 1629 by a captain Bontemps and his "*Frenchman of Warr*" from Dieppe in Normandy. The *Benediction* had been busy in trade with the French and "*because of the league of amity then lately concluded [the petitioners] showed all the respect & curtesie that they could, little suspecting that they would have used any hostilitie against them.*" The cargo of the ship, which was taken to Dieppe after the ship's seizure, was "*worth as upon oath it will be proved more than twentie thousand pounds*". One half of that cargo reportedly belonged to Slaney and Crispe. The two merchants had tried to get their goods and ship back, but despite their best efforts both ship and cargo went up for sale in Dieppe. The two therefore had little hope of restitution and asked that the privy council intervened to have the sale stopped, "*this greate losse being almost the undoing of them, their wives & children.*"<sup>153</sup> The losses were not only affecting the merchants, to which the petition from the "*diverse poore widdowes with a great number of fatherless children*" can testify.<sup>154</sup> They were now, according to the petition, "*in greate wante and misery by reason of the losse of their husbands and goods, burned by fire and taken by the French in Guinney (...) long after the war was concluded.*"<sup>155</sup> The merchants had reportedly paid out some money for their survival, but also they were dependent on the return of their goods and the ship on order to compensate the widows. The desperation is evident as the widows describe themselves as "*at the point to perish and be put out*

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<sup>152</sup>£3 pr. ton of all redwood, and 4s. pr. cwt of all ivory. "America and West Indies: November 1636," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 241. BHO, accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/p241a>.

<sup>153</sup>TNA: SP 16/155, no. 29

<sup>154</sup>TNA: SP 16/181, f.186, no. 122

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*

of our houses, the times being so harde and we (...) not able to paye our debts.”<sup>156</sup> A conclusion to the matter lingered on for another two years, until the *Benediction* was so derelict that the ship-owners, which did not include Slaney or Crispe - had lost any hope of retrieving it. Instead they requested the king’s permission to sell it, offering it to any Englishman that might be interested and who would bring the ship back to England, for the sum of £150. Their request was granted only in November 1633, almost four years after the ship left London. Whether the families of the crew ever received any restitution is not known.<sup>157</sup>

The fate of the *Benediction*, alongside a smaller vessel fittingly called the *Humphrey*, which reportedly carried £600 worth of redwood, had consequences not only for Slaney and Crispe but for the future of the GC. Shortly after these losses were known, peace was restored with governor Digby. Indeed, the matter of the missing subscriptions from the Gambia voyage of 1628 lingered on for many years still, but when the request for a new patent was sent to Charles I, Kenelm Digby’s name appears alongside Slaney’s and Crisp’s as one of only six members. The additional members were Canada discoverer Sir George Kirke, Sir Richard Young, and William Cloberry. A likely reason for their burying of the hatchet was the need, brought on partly by the loss of the *Benediction*, for financially strong partners in the company, which appeared in 1631 with a new and extended patent.

## 7. Conclusion

The first decade of the Guinea Company’s existence was a tough one. Bad luck haunted the company’s expeditions and choices, and financial trouble soon ensued. A membership with an overall lacking knowledge of the African coast and markets, loss of experienced personnel and ships, and rising European competition all contributed to making the first years difficult. The death of George Thompson; the catastrophic purchase of bad ships; refusal to honor subscriptions; and the loss of ships to European competitors, did not help the company’s situation.

However, as has been shown above, not everyone was equally concerned with solving the company’s problems. None other would control and use the company to

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<sup>156</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup>TNA: SP 16/247, f.162, no.80, “Charles I - volume 236: April 1-15, 1633,” in *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1633-4*, ed. John Bruce (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1863), 1-21. *British History Online*, accessed November 6, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/chas1/1633-4/pp1-21>. “Charles I - volume 251: November 20-30, 1633,” in *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1633-4*, ed. John Bruce (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1863), 293-312. *British History Online*, accessed November 6, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/chas1/1633-4/pp293-312>.

the same degree as John Davies and Humphrey Slaney, who together and individually turned the company structure into a shelter for their own personal ventures. Within months of the company's launch Davies turned the fragile financial state of the company to his favor, holding it hostage through extending - or at least promising to extend, much needed capital, denying other traders access to the coast as a result. The GC, despite being a more extensive operation than both Slaney and Davies' smaller personal ventures had been in the past, mainly included members that had little experience with the conditions of the coast of Africa, little mercantile expertise, and were – in some situations rather famously, bad at managing their finances. They were quickly brought to the experienced merchants' heel when the financial pressures from the first unlucky voyages started appearing.

As shown, the only real threat to Davies' initial control came from other merchants in the company, most notably from Slaney and later also his collaborators. Slaney; soon joined by Nicholas Crispe, William Cloberry and John Wood, were, unlike most of the other members, personally affected to a far higher degree by Davies dominance of company affairs. There is little evidence to suggest that this group, Davies included, felt any sense of responsibility for the company's well-being at this early stage, beyond what it could offer them in terms of protection from the competition of other private traders. In fact, a patent-holding company with little ability to pursue trade offered them the ideal environment for their own operations. The continued trade on private account by both Slaney and Davies; the reported profits they were making while the company struggled; and the internal strife their actions caused, indicate their perception of the company as little more than a means through which they could to organize their private operations. At times the two traders did this side-by-side, without problems, at other times they stepped on each other's toes and sparks flew. The conflicts that arose, firstly between Slaney and Davies; later between Slaney and the other debtors to the loan form Elizabeth Craven; and lastly the issues of the missing subscriptions, were all caused or connected to the accusations of private trade. These conflicts divided the company, sowed mistrust, and problematized the company's trade. Furthermore, the members of the company were not able to resolve these situations internally, having in the end to turn to various state institutions for assistance and mediation. Conflicts that involved the privy council; the court of ward and chancery; and the court of king's bench, all took time and money, and brought unwanted attention to the company's issues.

How well known this internal conflict was among contemporaries is difficult to assess, though some indication can be gleaned from the fact that the GC was pulled forth as a seemingly well-known example of a mal-functioning patent in parliamentary debates over the extension of trade monopolies. The observations of internal strife and its effects included in the writings of Richard Jobson; the

declaration of the GC patent as a grievance in 1624; the risk of being found in contempt of court from being unable to agree on financial issues; and, in the end, the need to instill a duty on company imports in order to ensure the repayment of company debts, are further examples. The City was a tight knit community and the internal struggles of the company must have become known among merchants that were in search of investment opportunities, and it was unlikely to make investment in the company tempting. To free the company from its reputation was, undoubtedly, part of the motivation behind the request for a new patent by the group surrounding Slaney in 1631.

Thus, the main problems of the early GC stemmed, not from its inexperienced courtiers as has been believed, but instead from its most experienced merchants. Their loyalty had never been to the company, but to their own personal affairs. Davies focus had always been the redwood trade, and though his personal request was initially denied, it only delayed his take-over of the trade by a few years. As for Slaney, his mercantile activities on the African coast were already established when the company was launched, and he had little choice but to adapt his operation to fit within the company structure. This he managed with success as both traders found it was possible to operate privately from within the company structure, especially once the rest of the company members had begun to rely on their expertise, trusting them with the arrangement of voyages to the coast, with the negotiation of necessary loans, and eventually the repayments of the same. Operating privately within the company had added benefits of course, offering protection against outside competition through the patent privilege of exclusive access, and legitimacy when establishing new trading relations on the coast. These privileges were enough to instill in Slaney, and his group of traders, the need to maintain the company structure after tailoring it to their need. The altered parameters in the patent of 1631, securing a wider geographical scope and favorable privileges for tackling private traders, along with reduced and altered membership, meant that the GC the emerged in 1631 was tailored for the needs of this group. What had been private trade, soon became company trade.

## CHAPTER 2:

# FIT FOR PURPOSE: THE GUINEA COMPANY IN THE 1630S AND 1640S.

### 1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, the first decade of the first chartered joint-stock company trading to Africa was presented. From its launch in 1618 to the end of the 1620s the Guinea Company, despite making several attempts at establishing its trade on a stable footing, was distracted by disputes over private trade, limited liability, and company debt management. Private traders were exploiting the company for their own personal gain, while the remaining membership grew increasingly resentful. After the handling of internal conflicts throughout most of the 1620s the GC altered its operations in the 1630s and 1640s, starting in 1631 when the company entered into new patent negotiation with king Charles I.<sup>158</sup> John Davies was gone by 1626, along with many of the original members, and financial difficulties led company governor William St. John to abandon his post to new governors from the wealthy Digby family after his catastrophic ship purchase. Financial problems and internal struggle continued to follow the company until the end of that decade and beyond. But by the beginning of the 1630s a new patent was secured and, as will be shown, a new management structure based on high levels of trust and strong connections between the company management ensured the company's ability to better serve its now predominantly mercantile leadership. Despite a general lack of surviving company material, this chapter will present a "snap shot" of company activity as it stood in the early 1640s. This reveals that, despite a general perception of the company as struggling and unsuccessful, the extreme fluctuations of the trade give cause for a reconsideration. By the 1640s the company had established a trade connection with the Caribbean; it was attracting the attention of major Atlantic traders; it had acquired land in Barbados; and employed a substantial number of staff on the West African coast.

Out of the original 30 or so members of the 1620s, only eight remained after 1631, forming the core of the company. And as will be seen, this core now organized trade dynamically around their small circle, putting together ventures in

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<sup>158</sup>TNA: Patent rolls, 7 Chas. I, no.14.

agreement, and keeping risks low. The new patent they were equipped with had wider geographical boundaries than the former, stretching from Cabo Blanco at 20°N, on the border of today's Mauritania and Western Sahara, to the Cape of Good Hope at 34°S. No Englishman could legally trade within those boundaries without company permission, and none other than the company's members could legally bring any African merchandise into England unless otherwise agreed with the company itself. The charter was to last for 31 years, and in return the company pledged to contribute to English coffers through gold import, customs- and excise payments.<sup>159</sup> The intention was also for the company to expand its operations by attaining an English foothold and presence on the Gold Coast in modern day Ghana, a task that was managed by Humphrey Slaney's partner, and fellow company member, Nicholas Crispe. The company's expansion of its activities to include the Gold Coast did not represent the first presence of Englishmen in those parts. Traders realized, already in the reign of Elizabeth, the potential of the stretch of coast reaching from Cape Three Points, on Ghana's west coast towards the River Volta in the east. But, decades had passed since then, and in order to ensure all competitors were made aware of the change, the company asked the king to make a proclamation of its newly gotten privilege: "forbidding any one to trade to Guinea, Binney, and Angola, except Sir Rich. Young, Sir Ken. Digby, Geo. Kirke, Hump. Slaney, Nich. Crispe, and Wil. Clobery, to whom the King has granted letters patent for the sole privilege of trading to those parts for thirty-one years, having annulled their former letters patent granted by King James."<sup>160</sup>

The patent process consolidated the power Crispe had built up within the company structure, resulting in a strong, lasting association between him and the trade, among contemporaries, as well as in modern scholarship.<sup>161</sup> Not only had Crispe championed changes in the way the company conducted its business, by 1628 he had also invested (according to himself) £50,000, becoming the majority shareholder with over 50% of the company's stock, and for a further £1600 he secured himself the ownership of the properties the company were currently holding on the coast.<sup>162</sup> The European competition on the Gold Coast was fierce in the early 1630s as the Dutch, represented by their West India Company (WIC), was putting pressure of the long-established Portuguese. To Crispe, along with his other companions, the

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<sup>159</sup>Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 2:15.

<sup>160</sup>"America and West Indies: November 1631-1638," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 135-136. *British History Online*, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/pp135-136>. TNA: Proclamations of Charles I, PRO 31/8/63/4, no. 148

<sup>161</sup>Porter, "The Crispe Family and the African Trade in the Seventeenth Century."

<sup>162</sup>BL: *To the Right Honourable the Commons of England assembled in Parliament. The humble petition of Sir Nicholas Crisp Knight* (1660). Porter, "European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667," 118.

escalating conflict formed an ideal backdrop for a settlement attempt by the small English company, while the two rivals were fully occupied with each other. With a new charter in hand the company believed itself ready to tackle the challenges that lay before it: the search for gold and a growing number of interlopers and challengers within the English sphere - as well as European competitors without it.

The core leadership, circling the older and experienced long-distance trader Humphrey Slaney, remained. Slaney's son-in-law, William Cloberry, followed into the new company along with Crispe. Despite the central role played by Sir Kenelm Digby in the conflict over the company's debts at the end of the previous decade, Slaney and Digby maintained collaboration for a short while under the new patent. Slaney had the experience of trade on the coast, while Digby's wealth helped the company's financial footing. Though not long after the patent was granted Digby disappears from company records.

Illustration 8:  
*“Sir Nicholas Crisp, first baronet”*



by Cornelius Johnson, date unknown.

Source: Private collection, via Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

As for the two remaining patentees, George Kirke and Sir Richard Young, they appear intermittently, Young served as governor for a short while assisted by Crispe as deputy. But beyond that first post, neither appear to have taken on any role comparable to that of Slaney and Crispe. Slaney, along with Cloberry and Crispe, were soon joined by Slaney's apprentice, John Wood, and Crispe's brother Samuel. Together they came to make up the core of the company, controlling it until the 1640s and beyond.<sup>163</sup>

## 2. The Guinea Company's format of trade

Very few records from the daily running of company business remain, and as was the case for the company's 1620s activities, judicial records remain a key source. Several of these records originated in the later 1640s and 1650s, though they discuss former practices in retrospect. One such example is the records generated by a legal case that arose after the death of Cloberry in 1640.<sup>164</sup> Cloberry was not only a fellow Africa trader, participating in the request of the new patent in 1631, he was, as mentioned, Humphrey Slaney's son-in-law, and the conflict surrounded the management of the Cloberry children's inheritance, of which the shares in the GC made up a substantial part. The records reveal that the GC of the 1630s ran as an "*indenture quadripartite*". This meant that ownership of the company was divided into four parts, represented by four merchants, possibly with more investors standing behind each of the four. In the case of the GC, one fourth-part was owned by Nicholas Crispe, another by William Cloberry – now being passed on to his heirs, one-fourth by Humphrey Slaney – who by 1640 had left the company, selling his part to Samuel Crispe, brother of Nicholas.<sup>165</sup> Since the company's launch, also Slaney's former apprentice, John Wood had become a part owner in the venture, making up the fourth part.

The group was tightly linked, both through family and business ties, with several years of experience working together. Each of the four core partners contributed £20 per year towards the company, in addition to further funding for each voyage the company organized. The funding of single ventures was adopted after the large-scale subscription default in 1627/8 of which both Slaney and Crispe, but likely also Cloberry, were personal victims. When the format of trade was agreed upon in 1631 the conflict over this debt was still ongoing, with no likely end in sight, and the need for more control must have appeared essential. In the exchanges

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<sup>163</sup>George, *The Visitation of London*, 173..

<sup>164</sup>TNA: C 2/ChasI/C52/38, f. 1-4

<sup>165</sup>Porter, "The Crispe Family and the African Trade in the Seventeenth Century," 59.

regarding the company's running, the records refer to these four merchants as the four main participants in the trade. Others from outside the group involved themselves in company ventures at the partners invitation. Such persons are only indirectly referred to in company documents, rarely appearing more than once, and little can be learnt about the nature of their involvement. Though not much can be gleaned of the composition or size of any potential investment groups standing behind these main four, the infrequency of names, and the tendency to wind up each venture and settle accounts, suggests involvement by others took place on a voyage-by-voyage basis only.

Despite former issues of default, the *indenture quadripartite* of the GC was one of extensive trust, indicating a conscious choice of who was to participate, as well as a close bond between them. Though we do not know how Crispe and Slaney started doing business together at the beginning of the century, they had collaborated for years, soon accompanied by Cloberry who was now a member of the Slaney family, and John Wood – long term apprentice of Slaney. For at least ten years England's official Africa trade was run by this group, only replacing Slaney with Crispe's brother Samuel towards the end of the decade. Participation and subscription to the GC voyages was not mandatory for any of the parties, though the payment of £20 per year was. A venture was planned when three or more of them agreed to it, though additional funds could be added to company coffers as the individual members saw fit. This opened for outside participation. If one of the members wished but were not financially able to participate at any given time, the other members stepped in on their behalf, making up what was missing. After the venture was complete, any postponed or missing payments were deducted from the profits. Such a format gave room for flexible activity, a considerable benefit in a very volatile trade, where a merchant's fortune could fluctuate over time. It relied on a close partnership where at least some of the members were financially strong at any given moment, and the records suggest Crispe certainly was, though, as will be discussed, also Slaney was dealing in ventures of substantial cost. According to himself, also Crispe invested large amounts of his fortune in the trade, enough to warrant himself and posterity to see him as the founder of the trade, and for the company to be referred to colloquially as "*Nicholas Crispe's Company*".<sup>166</sup> The members were familiar with each other and acquainted with each other's affairs, knowing the causes of a potential default or postponed payment, and were able to assess the likelihood of retrieving any money paid out on another's behalf. If a repetition of the 1620s occurred, where one participant was not able to make good on a subscription he had made, the rest covered the sum, and the defaulter paid it back either from potential profits or through a down-payment plan of an

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<sup>166</sup>Porter, "European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667," 123.

additional £20 per year until the missing subscription was covered. Any losses were also shared equally among the participants, even if one or more had relied on another to help them make up the initial subscription. Thus, any venture should, despite the flexibility of the agreement between them, not be entered into lightly as any losses would apply as equally as any potential profits. After a voyage was complete, a true written account was drawn up and agreed upon amongst them. Potential returns were calculated, and any outstanding debts and duties settled, before one fourth of the remaining, this included any gold, redwood, ivory or other sundry commodities, went to each party.

The GC ran its business according to this agreement from the 1630s, and the records indicate no major changes in the decades leading up to the Restoration. The members, however, changed substantially, and by 1640 both Slaney and Cloberry had left the venture. In the early 1640s Nicholas Crispe followed at the behest of the parliamentarians who had by that point challenged the Stuart monarchy and taken charge of Parliament. John Wood remained, possibly still accompanied by Crispe's brother Samuel, though he never features prominently in the surviving documents and his actual activity level is therefore difficult to assess.

The reorganizing of company activity, and the expansion of official company operation into the Dutch- and Portuguese- dominated Gold Coast was planned with the help of two former employees of the Dutch WIC, Arendt de Groot and Jeremias

Illustration 9:

The early English settlements on the Gold Coast underlined



Source: Detail from 1869 map of the Gold Coast in the Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection. Originally published in the *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Volume XII, 1896.

Nuyts.<sup>167</sup> Crispe started planning for an expedition to the Gold Coast by the remodeled company as soon as the patent was granted by Charles I in June 1631. In this expedition, de Groot took on the role of commander and head-factor, assisted by Nuyts. The expedition consisted of two larger ships, where the flagship was fittingly named the *Crispina*, accompanied by two smaller yachts and left England on 1 May 1632. The total cost of the expedition was said to have reached £30,000.<sup>168</sup> An astronomical sum, considering the recent loss of the aforementioned ship *Benediction* to the French at Dieppe, and the on-going conflict over a company debt worth £946.<sup>169</sup> The expedition reached the area around Kommenda, on the Gold Coast, just over three months later. There an agreement was reached with king of Kommenda to set up a trading lodge. While there de Groot received word that also the leader of the Fante, known as the *Braffo* was interested in reaching a deal with the newly arrived English. De Groot sailed to Kormantine and met with the Fante king, where it was agreed that another settlement would be built. The trading station that was settled after that agreement, was to become the company's head quarter on the Gold Coast and known as Fort Kormantin. Just two months after their arrival de Groot could send a yacht back to England with initial good news and the first quantities of gold he had managed to acquire. In less than a year the same yacht was on its return voyage to the coast with more cargo. The geographical scope of the trade was expanded, and so also was the company's operations. To an increasing degree the mobile mode of trading from ships along the coast came to an end, as the gold trade was better facilitated and protected by permanently settled trading factories staffed by company representatives.

The agreement with the Fante king included the right to set up lodges and forts in the coastal areas under his rule and the company soon set up posts at Anamabo<sup>170</sup> and Egya as well. The grant from the king included an agreement of trade and exchange between the Fante and the English. According to de Groot himself this was publicly proclaimed and ratified by the raising, with the help of the Fante, of the English flag over Fort Kormantin.<sup>171</sup> The trade out of Kormantin was further supplemented by vessels returning with cargoes of sugar from the islands of São Tomé, as well as smaller yachts trading westward into the Bight of Benin, returning with ivory, pepper and cloth.<sup>172</sup> Another large vessel arrived from England in the summer of 1633, loaded with cargo. The trading lodge at Kommenda was still being expanded, and by 1633 a factor was stationed also there. Despite the initially

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<sup>167</sup>Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720*, 15, 61.

<sup>168</sup>Porter, "European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667," 123.

<sup>169</sup>Blake, "The Farm of the Guinea Trade in 1631," 100.

<sup>170</sup>Also written Anomabu

<sup>171</sup>Porter, "European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667," chap. 3, p.129.

<sup>172</sup>Porter, 131.

positive relationship between local powers and the English factors at Kommenda, obstacles and hinderances occurred. Rifts had to be overcome as, later that same year, the company factor was expelled from the area after claims emerged that English vessels had sailed past Kommenda without engaging in trade. The ousting was the result of what was considered dishonest behavior in breach of the agreement.<sup>173</sup> It underlined to the English their reliance of local collaboration, and a need to play by the rules laid down by local authorities. While the company representatives worked to patch up the relationship at Kommenda the importance of the lodge at Kormantin steadily grew.

Illustration 10:

“Fort Hollandois de Cormantine Nommé Amsterdam, tire de Barbot.”

Fort Kormantine, renamed Fort Amsterdam in 1665 after being taken over by the Dutch Republic during the second Anglo-Dutch War, 1665-1667. The English gained Cape Coast Castle in the same conflict.



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<sup>173</sup>Porter, 132.

Source: Engraving, artist unknown. Published by Pierre d' Hondt, 1757.

The trade in gold was expanding, a matter of great importance to the company for obvious reasons, including the expectations by the English king for a return on the exclusive privileges he had granted. Still, the company spent some time completing its post there and two years after de Groot's arrival work was still ongoing. De Groot had hoped for exclusive trading rights off the harbour of Kormantin, of preference for the English over their Dutch rivals, but despite the exclaimed support of the local trading community, there was little doubt that it was beneficial to the Fante to allow the Dutch to remain for intra-European competition and potential underselling.<sup>174</sup>

The next company post to be developed was Wiampa<sup>175</sup>, which per an answer from the company dated 25 May 1650, was commenced 17 years previous, in 1633/4, after a plot of land was purchased from the ruler of Agona. According to the same petition the son of the ruler learnt English, and assumed the role of a local liaison for the help of the company, an important step forward in the company's process of cementing and strengthening their local ties in the area.<sup>176</sup> In 1634, as the lodges at Wiampa and Kormantin were being completed, and sugar, cloth, pepper and ivory was coming from the Bight of Benin and the Guinea gulf, the *Crispina* and Arendt de Groot left the Guinea coast for England.<sup>177</sup> In London all attempts at retrieving the *Benediction* and her cargo from the French admiralty had failed, but the company's establishment on the Gold Coast had been a relative success. A new vessel with cargo from England was expected to arrive on the coast presently, and good relations, except for the initial rifts with the rulers of Kommenda, had been established with the African states and merchants the company had been in contact with.

But despite this overall promising situation problems were occurring, first in the form of overstretched funds and Dutch competition, later through English political turmoil and competing English traders. The Dutch activity was at this point in time, according to the work of Robert Porter, double that of the English – with the Dutch having at least twelve trading vessels in operation, while the English may have had as many as five.<sup>178</sup> It did not take long before their African partners saw the English struggling to make good on their promises of goods, trade and payments. As a result, many African merchants decided to turn towards the Dutch again. It must be considered that for some of the African rulers and merchants the positive side

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<sup>174</sup>Porter, 129,133.

<sup>175</sup>Also referred to as Wiamba, Biemba and Winneba.

<sup>176</sup>“America and West Indies: May 1650,” in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 339-340. *British History Online*, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/pp339-340>.

<sup>177</sup>Porter, “European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667,” 135.

<sup>178</sup>Porter, 137.

effect of increased competition and offers of better trading conditions from the Dutch was the main motive when they accepted the small English newcomer within their realms. Between the Dutch and the English, trade competition often took the shape of underselling, where one party would drop the prices on left-over commodities often at the moment a ship departed the coast for Europe. From the journal of Pieter van den Broecke we learn of how he joined his cargo with a fellow Dutchman he met when visiting the coast at the beginning of the seventeenth century: “*we entered into a contract (...) and combined together our tradegoods and cargoes so as to not spoil the market*”.<sup>179</sup> Van den Broecke’s agreement even saw his short-term partner, who had already spent some time on the coast at the time of de Broecke’s arrival, departing the coast with their earnings, leaving van den Broecke to manage the sale of the remaining shared goods. How prevalent such practices were for English traders in the time before the patent is not known, but it complicates the already intricate collaborations that accompanied long-distance trade, as even after a vessel had left Europe its ownership could change. Underselling was especially prevalent as a strategy in the first decade of English establishment on the Gold Coast, until the two companies entered a mutually beneficial spoken agreement of similar price levels in an attempt to avoid such practices, damaging as they were to both sides.<sup>180</sup> At this early stage, however, no such agreement had been reached, and the WIC was in a far better position to handle underselling and price drops on the coast than its English equivalent. They had more trading stations – many of which were in more fruitful areas of gold trade, a stronger military presence, and more ships with goods in circulation. Their mobility in trade allowed profits from one region to make up for potential losses from underselling elsewhere. The English were not yet able to attempt anything similar. Such competition was taking place around Kormantin in the decades that followed the English settlement there, where both violence and attempts at market hegemony was instigated not only by English and Dutch traders, but later also by Swedes, Danes and Brandenburgers.<sup>181</sup>

### 3. John Wood and the Guinea Company of the 1640s

John Wood, starting out as an apprentice to Humphrey Slaney in the 1620s became a constant in the Anglo-Africa trade of the mid-century. Though very little is known about him personally, enough material exists to conclude that he was among the most experienced Africa traders of his day, who ferried the company through some

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<sup>179</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, *Pieter van Den Broecke’s Journal of Voyages*, 29.

<sup>180</sup>Porter, “European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667,” 420, 423.

<sup>181</sup>Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720*, 15.

of its biggest challenges and innovations. During his role as governor and treasurer of the company, a number of strong competitors, interlopers in the growing trade on the coast, entered the company as members. He also represented the company in an in-depth parliamentary investigation which followed the departure of primus motor Nicholas Crispe, while maintaining a string of company ventures of - typical of the trade, fluctuating success.

In the years that followed de Groot's departure from the Gold Coast, the company was represented by Wood as head factor of Kormantine, and the company benefitted from Wood's in-depth experience from the coast and its trade in the decades to come. Few sources from the life of the Englishmen on the coast exists for this period, but trade in gold, combined with a relatively prosperous trade in São Tomé sugar and Benin merchandize, occasional slave trading, and the reliably lucrative redwood and ivory trades, allowed the company to keep up the operations de Groot had started. Jeremias Nyuts was still operative, charged with managing the yachts going to the Bight of Benin.<sup>182</sup> The fruits of their activity were harvested in autumn of 1636, five years after their arrival on the Gold Coast, when a ship arriving from the coast was valued at £30,000<sup>183</sup>. After reaching the coast, Wood entered into a new, favorable trade deal with the Fante authorities that resulted in a more permanent construction being raised at Kormantin in 1638. This was no small feat, as the Fante were unimpressed with their part in the outcome of the English activity in their ports. De Groot had made promises of high numbers of goods and vessels in return for near sole access to the Fante market.<sup>184</sup> The results were not quite as overwhelming as the Fante had hoped.

John Wood remained on the coast until Arendt de Groot's return in 1639, and witnessed the Dutch take-over of Elmina, the long-standing Portuguese head-quarter on the coast. This was the beginning of increased tension between the Dutch and the English as the Portuguese were gradually expelled from the coast. In or around 1638 Humphrey Slaney exited the company, and was replaced by Samuel Crispe, though at the death of William Cloberry he briefly returned to manage Cloberry's share on behalf of his grandchildren. The norm, according to the court documents appears to have been for Cloberry's wife, Slaney's daughter, to manage her late husband's share, but she is dismissed as "*non compos mentis*", not of sound mind, and her father stepped in instead. These matters may have been why in 1639 it was decided that Arendt de Groot should return to the coast, and John Wood to return and assist with

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<sup>182</sup>Porter, "European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667," 131.

<sup>183</sup>"Charles I - volume 336: November 18-30, 1636," in *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1636-7*, ed. John Bruce (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1867), 199-217. *British History Online*, accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/chas1/1636-7/pp199-217>.

<sup>184</sup>Porter, "European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667," 132-33.

company business in London. Not only was there a need to decide what to do with Cloberry's share, but Nicholas Crispe was beginning to become preoccupied with difficulties between himself and the increasingly powerful Parliament.<sup>185</sup> Increased competition was also appearing in 1638-39, as the company had to intervene in the departure of two known interloping vessels in the last years of the decade.<sup>186</sup>

To answer how the company fared in the 1640s and 1650s is not easy, as this period was exceedingly tumultuous both at home and abroad. From the early 1640s the company's men on the coast was in near constant struggle with the Dutch and the Scandinavians for their trading stations along the coast, which in the early 1650s escalated further with the outbreak of the 1<sup>st</sup> Anglo-Dutch War (1652-1654). This war proved far less damaging for the GC compared to that which followed it, as the second Anglo-Dutch war (1665-1667) made survival near impossible for the GC's successor, the Royal Adventurers into Africa (RA).<sup>187</sup> Throughout the 1640s and 50s African rulers changed European favorites frequently, leaving the Englishmen, Scandinavians and Dutchmen on the coast in perpetual insecurity. In this environment the English were attempting to settle and improve their positions at their main trading post, Fort Kormantine, but progress was exceedingly slow. This lack of progress was again making the African leaders increasingly impatient.<sup>188</sup>

From the records that remain it becomes clear just how difficult the early 1640s proved to be, not just for the organization but for certain individual members as well. From discussions of the company's situation in 1642-1644 it appears Nicholas Crispe owed, in the eyes of the Commonwealth, a significant amount for money. It was claimed that in his position as farmer of the customs, to which he was appointed by the king in 1639, he had siphoned away £16,000 owed to the state. Now that the conflict between the king and his Parliament was turning in the latter's favour, Parliament wanted the money returned. It was decided that the sum should come out of the Crispe estate, which was sequestered by Parliament in a process completed in 1644.<sup>189</sup> Crispe's estate included, as already seen, a substantial part of the company, its settlements, and its goods. Already in 1642, the first claim, for £5000, was made by

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<sup>185</sup>British Library, Thomason / 669.f.14[17]: *To the Right Honourable the Commons assembled in Parliament. The humble petition of Sir Paul Pyndar, Sir John Jacob, Sir Job Harby, Sir Thomas Dawes, Executor to Sir Abraham Dawes, late deceased, Sir Nicholas Crispe, Sir John Nulls, and Sir John.* April 12.1649. British Library - 669.f.26.[40.]: *To the Right Honourable the Commons of England assembled in Parliament. The humble petition of Sir Nicholas Crisp Knight.* 1660. Porter, "The Crispe Family and the African Trade in the Seventeenth Century."

<sup>186</sup>Porter, 66.

<sup>187</sup>Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa*, 1919.

<sup>188</sup>Blake, "The Farm of the Guinea Trade in 1631"; Hilary Jenkinson, "The Records of the English African Companies," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1912): 185-220; Porter, "The Crispe Family and the African Trade in the Seventeenth Century."

<sup>189</sup>TNA: SP 16/540

the Navy.<sup>190</sup> Crispe himself was at that point serving on the king's side in the growing conflict, but it had come to the attention of the House of Commons that Crispe had a substantial part of his estate tied up in the GC. The House had been informed that Crispe owned 50% of the venture, suggesting he may have eventually taken over the share left by Cloberry, and maintained much of his goods on the coast of Guinea. Conveniently the company ship the *Star* had recently returned from Guinea carrying gold to the value of £10,000, and it was suggested that one half of that gold should be paid out of Crispe's share immediately, leaving it to the company to retrieve their money through the sale of Crispe's goods still stored on the coast. John Wood, on behalf of the company, tried to protest the decision. He claimed the goods belonged not only to Crispe, but to the joint-stock and to other members of the company as well. Upon hearing this claim, the House decided that if that was the case, John Wood and his partners should still advance £5000 for the goods, but they should then prepare the company's accounts and hand them over for examination by the Treasury, the Customs Committee, and the Navy. It would be left to the committee to decide whether the goods did indeed belong to Crispe, or other members - 'partners' as they are simply and anonymously referred to in the documents. If sufficient evidence was given for alternative ownership, the company was to be reimbursed the sum with an interest of 8% from the Custom of London. Though the demand from the Commonwealth administration undoubtedly caused stress for the company and John Wood personally, who appeared in capacity of governor, the claim commenced a documented discussion on the company's situation. Accounts, appraisals, stock takes, and wage lists had to be handed over to a Committee of Accounts and was thus spared in an addendum of state papers connected to the Interregnum regime. In these scattered documents from the 1640s the contours of the company's situation emerge in more detail.<sup>191</sup>

#### 4. The Guinea company: a 1640s snapshot

John Wood did as he was asked by the Commons and extended £5000 to the Commonwealth, but the matter of reimbursement was going to be a drawn-out battle. Wood was forced to petition, in the spring of 1644, for the company to get the sum reimbursed. According to that petition, several orders had been sent out from the House of Commons and the Treasury to pay the company, but the money was not forthcoming. Wood complained that because he was forced into "*the disbursement*

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<sup>190</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no.365

<sup>191</sup>All the following records can be found in SP 16/540, no. 365-400. I have rounded sums up to nearest pound for clarity.

of the said sum (it) altogether disfurnished [him] of money to cleere away the debt of the said company's joint-stock for which he had with much importunity entreated the several creditors forebearance."<sup>192</sup> This was the first of two petitions by John Wood, and though the other is undated, it shows that the situation was becoming increasingly difficult for the company and for Wood personally. In his second petition the £5000, to which £1912 paid to the Navy was added, had still not been returned. Wood disclosed that he had indebted himself, for the benefit of the company, by borrowing £8000 personally before the return of the *Star*. He was of course under the assumption that he would be able to pay back the loan with the £10,000 in gold coming from the coast. Therefore, the sudden demand for the £5000 had put him in debt personally, and he was now fearing for his reputation. The company had continued their practice from the 1620s of relying on the personal credit of certain company members when borrowing funds. And much like this had caused problems for Governor St. John in 1625, and for Crispe and Slaney with the default in 1627/8, it was now becoming problematic for Wood. Paradoxically Wood referred in his petition to the company's limited liability, or more precisely, its entity-shielding.<sup>193</sup> Without using such a term, he argued that Crispe's personal financial responsibilities should not be spilling over into company affairs. Before seizing any assets Crispe may hold, the debts of the company should first be cleared away, so as to not damage its reputation with its creditors. Wood pointed to the agreement he had made together with Crispe and his fellow partners, not to engage in personal trade without the consent of the others and seeing as such consent was difficult to retrieve now with Crispe gone, he was hindered from selling goods on the Guinea coast to make up for the debt he now personally owed his creditors. Bound by the agreement, Wood could not adventure to Guinea in his own capacity to make up his losses. The company's practices regarding private trade under the patent never appear clearly in this period, and it is possible Wood overestimated his strong stand against private trade— though the difficulty of the situation was likely no exaggeration. In conclusion to his petition, Wood explained that this was a matter of some urgency, not only to himself but to England. Only when he was paid and a separation of Crispe's stock from the rest had been completed, could the company continue to "*prosecute the said trade which will bring great benefit of this kingdome, otherwise the whole trade is like to fall into the hands of the Dutch*".<sup>194</sup>

A report into the company accounts, prepared by the Treasury's Committee of Examination, was completed in early May 1644, and it confirmed that Crispe was not hiding a fortune in the coffers of the company. Upon reviewing the accounts,

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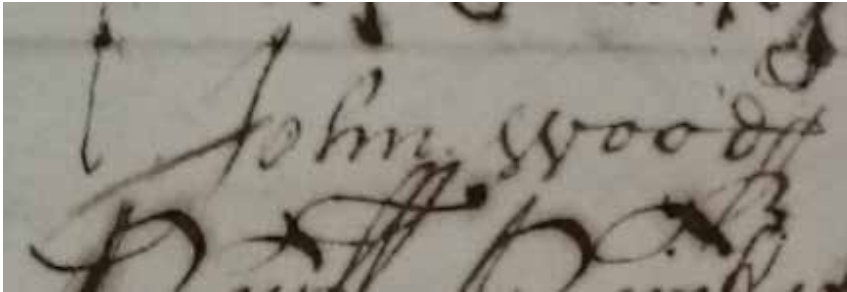
<sup>192</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no. 366

<sup>193</sup>Dari-Mattiacci et al., "The Emergence of the Corporate Form," 199.

<sup>194</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no. 374

given to be true under oath from Wood himself along with GC treasurer, John Ballow, the committee members “*doe find that the said Joynt-Stock is indebted unto severall persons to the sume of tenn thousand four hundred eighty and one pounds fifteen shilling and four pence(...). And in good debts owing by sundry persons four hundred and five pounds and fifteen shilling and four pence, and from the Committee of the Navy five thousand pounds (...)*”.<sup>195</sup> Lastly, the short report declared that the ownership of the premises connected to the company, understood to mainly refer to the forts on the Guinea coast, was as follows: one half belonged to Nicholas Crispe, while the remaining half was split equally between John Wood and Nicholas’ brother, Samuel Crispe. The company was indeed in the red by over £10,000. Yet, this is not as bad as one would perhaps assume – considering the negative portrayal the company has so often received. The trade of the 1640s was still one of great fluxes, and a successful voyage could bring in sums many times that of the debt, as the 1638 return of the company’s ship the *Star* suggests.

Illustration 11:  
Signature of John Wood



Source: detail from TNA CO 1/11, p.62

The preliminary conclusions in the report were deemed not to be detailed enough, and before the committees would consider repaying the company it was decided that the accounts needed further examination. A more thorough “*referreed appraisal*” was handed in by the middle of June 1644. The Appraisal Committee had gone through all stock connected to the company, spanning from ships and crews, to factories and warehouses.<sup>196</sup> The company had five ships in circulation, and two

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<sup>195</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no. 368, 369. John Ballow had been an old associate of William Cloberry, who likely brought him in to contact with the company – which granted also him the position of company factor in Barbados, see Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 165, fn.181.

<sup>196</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no.370

of them, the *Star* and the *James*, were currently away from England. The *Star* was “employed in the service of Rowland Wilson, jr. and sr”, and signifies the entry of two new large-scale overseas traders among the company members. Rowland Wilson senior (? -1654) and junior (1613-1650) involved themselves in the company trade in the 1640s and remained active in company management through the 1650s, bringing in large gold cargos - but also experiencing some painful losses. Despite appearing to have had little to do with the coast of Guinea before appearing in the company records, their previous connection to the Guinea Company was not non-existent, a familial link between the Wilsons and the Crispes existed as Rowland Wilson senior’s daughter Mary had married another of Nicholas and Samuel’s brothers, Tobias.<sup>197</sup> Ships operating in the service of specific persons may suggest a practice of accepting private trade, despite Wood’s previous claims, but it is hard to conclude upon the matter without knowing the full arrangement. There are several examples of John Wood having voyages organized in “his service” at this time, but such a definition did not necessarily exclude them being organized on behalf of the company.<sup>198</sup>

Returning to the ongoing appraisal, out of the company’s five ships, only the *Star* and the *James* got good merits. Upon their return from their voyages the *James* was appraised to be worth £943 and the *Star* £760.<sup>199</sup> The remaining three ships; the *Goodhope*, the *Flowerdeluz* and the *Reformation*, were all deemed old and in need of repair. Their collective value was set at £2200, and the total value of the company’s ships thus reached £3900.<sup>200</sup> The report does not include potential freighting of other ships however. It is possible that several of the company members freighted out their own ships for the company’s service. Slaney was certainly a shipowner, realizing the benefit of combining long-distance trade with ship ownership at an early stage.<sup>201</sup> The content of the company’s warehouses was also valued, and included 177 tons of redwood (the *James* returned with 150 tons) valued at £2720, estimated to be bought at £16 per ton on the coast, and sold at £30 in London, a markup of nearly 90%.<sup>202</sup> 3¾ ounces of gold worth £11 (estimated to be sold at £3 per ounce) was also included. The remainder of the stock consisted of different kinds of wax, copper, and iron (“very rusty”). This put the total worth of the company’s shipping and goods at £6818.<sup>203</sup> In addition, the appraisers noted sums related to the company

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<sup>197</sup>Porter, “The Crispe Family and the African Trade in the Seventeenth Century,” 68.

<sup>198</sup>For some examples see HCA 24/109, no 342, 190, 195, 283, 201.

<sup>199</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no.382, 383

<sup>200</sup>For a more detailed break-down of the appraisal of the *Goodhope*, see TNA: SP 16/540, no.371, *Reformation*: no. 372, *Flowerdeluz*: no.373.

<sup>201</sup>Kenneth R. Andrews, *Ships, Money and Politics: Seafaring and Naval Enterprise in the Reign of Charles I* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>202</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no. 397

<sup>203</sup>Because the *James* and the *Star* only returned in the fall of 1644, their evaluations were done slightly later. The complete sum does therefore not appear in the documents and have been calculated by me.

business which they refrained from including in the final calculations. Included in those sums were freight charges for previous voyages in the *Goodhope*, the *James*, and the *Reformation* totaling near £2700, and unsold goods kept at the company factory at Sierra Leone for which the company hoped to fetch £4000. In addition to coral and ivory on the Gold Coast came three trumpets “*battered and left*” by the current chief factor on the Gold Coast, Nicholas Davis, which could potential fetch 3 shillings for their brass.<sup>204</sup>

The part of the appraisal pertaining to wages concluded that the company owed their various employees overseas, sailors and factors, £1164 in outstanding wages.<sup>205</sup> The temporal terms of employment differ, but some of the men had served the company continuously from the late 1630s until the accounts were reviewed in the summer of 1644. It is worth noting that Robert Porter claimed the English activity had reached such low levels by the middle of the 1640s that the company came close to being eradicated from the coast during the years 1643-1644. But those claims fit poorly with these accounts, showing shipping activity, and several employees working for the company both on the Gold Coast and further north in the Senegambia region during the period in question.<sup>206</sup>

Most of the wages owed, £1009, was to employees connected to ‘*Sirra Leon & Cerbero*’. The remaining £155 were owed to employees on the Gold Coast. This is perhaps surprising, as it would suggest that the company’s operation was far more extensive, at least in 1644, in the Sierra Leone/Sherboro region. Indeed, the company employed twenty people in their trading centers in Sierra Leone and the Sherboro River, as opposed to six on the Gold Coast. The average wage at the Gold Coast was slightly higher than in the trading centers to the north, differing from an average of £30,5 per month on the Gold Coast to £25,45 per month in Sierra Leone and Sherboro. The post of chief factor, based on the Gold Coast at Fort Kormantine, fetched the highest salary: £50 per month, and was held by Nicholas Davies. The equivalent position further north, held by James Prosore(?), fetched £40 per month. The factories employed among them three men categorized as ‘black’: Thomas Wood and Anthony in Sierra Leone/Sherboro, who were paid £15 per month each; and James Kingson, paid £20 per month for his work for the company on the Gold Coast.<sup>207</sup> The more detailed investigation turned up further debts owed by the company, and several of them proved to be owed to the personal accounts of former company employees.<sup>208</sup> As an example, Arendt de Groot, who returned for a brief

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<sup>204</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no. 397

<sup>205</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no. 377

<sup>206</sup>Robert Porter, “English Chief Factors on the Gold Coast, 1632-1753,” *African Historical Studies* 1, no. 2 (1968): 203–4; Porter, “European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667,” 230–31. 1

<sup>207</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no. 377, 380

<sup>208</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no. 380

stint as factor on the coast after Wood's departure, was owed £73 pounds awarded him by "the Arbitrators", suggesting his employment for the company may have ended in financial conflict, though the document reveals no details on the matter.

The GC also had sundry debts owed by and to them from employees and others in the Atlantic, including in Virginia and Barbados, confirming company ventures in the Americas already at this early stage.<sup>209</sup> It becomes clear from a breakdown of these overseas debts that the company held 225 acres of land at Barbados, not an insignificant amount, and received debt payments in both tobacco and cotton from a number of Barbadian and Virginian planters. According to the appraisal committee the total debt owed the company in the Atlantic stood at £117, as payment of 56232*lb* of cotton and tobacco. However, their calculation deserved investigation as it appears exceedingly low, considering recent research into prices of colonial products from the period. Frustratingly no distinction has been made between the amounts owed in cotton and those in tobacco for the debts in Barbados, rendering a true valuation of the debts troublesome. The general tendency for using cotton for colonial transactions also fluctuates strongly in the years covered in the committee's appraisal. From 1642 cotton went from being used in 72% of Barbados transactions to only 26% in 1644. Tobacco rose correspondingly from 28% to 43%.<sup>210</sup> Also the company plantation was geared towards cotton production, with an expected annual yield of ca.50,000*lb*, amounting to just over £104 according to the appraisal committee's calculations.<sup>211</sup> The outstanding debts owed to the company from planters in Barbados stood at 42,000*lb* (tobacco and/or cotton) and from this 2208*lb* had to be deducted for payment to George Reid, the company's representative at Barbados. The company owned or was owed over 89,500*lb* in "the cost and charges of the Plantation & debt at Barbados". From Virginia the company was owed 16,619*lb* in tobacco *only*, which gives us a chance to calculate the amounts into pound sterling, thus reconsidering the numbers produced by the appraisal committee. By making use of the calculations of Russel Menard for farm-gate prices of Chesapeake tobacco, published in his book *Sweet Negotiations*, we can estimate the value of tobacco in the year 1642<sup>212</sup> to be 57*lb* pr. £1. Meaning the company's debt in Virginia amounted to £291,5.<sup>213</sup> Interestingly, the appraisal committee, by contrast valued the same far

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<sup>209</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no. 389, 394

<sup>210</sup>Russell R. Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (University of Virginia Press, 2006), 18, table 1.

<sup>211</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no. 394

<sup>212</sup>The appraisal, though conducted in 1644, was looking at the last few years of company activity.

<sup>213</sup>Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados*. In his table 2, p.20 Menard gives estimates for the price in pence per pound of tobacco, 1640: 2,50*d.*, 1641: 2,00*s.*, 1642: 4,20*s.*, 1643: 1,80*s.*, 1644: 2,30*s.* I have relied on the prices for 1642, as the appraisal looks back in time. I add here for information that £1 consists of 20 shillings, and one shilling 12 pence.

My calculation has then been as follows:

lower - only about £35. This of a total debt of only £177. Whether this means that vastly different prices were in operation in the same year, or whether there were unknown factors impacting the low estimate of the committee, can be speculation only.

The eventual outcome of the 1644 investigations into the company's account the House of Commons concluded, in the late summer of 1644, that it owed £3040 to John Wood and company, once the money belonging to Crispe, £2125, had been deducted.<sup>214</sup> Whether Wood received his money at the end of the investigation is not known, but his continued activity in the company suggests his reputation survived.

### 5. Early English slave trade –formal and informal.

The account gives us little information on the interaction with the debtors beyond the thirteen names and the amounts owed, but one must assume that these debts accumulated from sales on credit to planters.<sup>215</sup> The highest amount was owed by the governor of Barbados, Phillip Bell: 19,850*lb*, under who's leadership Barbados made the change from indentured to slave labour.<sup>216</sup> Whether these debts arose from the sale of African slaves is difficult to know with certainty as it is not clear what these debts stemmed from, nor in what manner they were paid and repaid. However, unless the company operated purely as a colonial creditor - of which there is no indication, or was selling cotton to other planters, it is hard to imagine any other African commodities being vented at noteworthy levels in the developing colony. Menard's work further suggests this, as he makes references to one plantation owner that also appears as a debtor in the records of the GC, Jonathan Hawtayne. He owed the company 1343*lb* of tobacco, and owned, according Menard, 100 acres of land worked by eight slaves in 1643.<sup>217</sup> The amounts owed by different planters to the company, regardless of the nature of the loans, suggests that the company's role and position in overseas trade was changing. It now included extending colonial credit.

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1642: 1*lb* tobacco valued at 4,20 pence (*d.*) x 2,85 = 11,97*d.* ≈ 12*d.* = 1*s.* 2,85*lb* of tobacco worth 1 shilling.

2,85*lb* tobacco = 1 *s.* x 20 = 57*lb* = £1. 57*lb* of tobacco worth £1

16,619*lb* owed in Virginia /57 = £291,5 owed in Virginia. Calculating with the prices of 1643: £127, and for 1644: £160.

<sup>214</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no. 397

<sup>215</sup>See Appendix 2 for a list of the company's colonial debtors in 1643-1644

<sup>216</sup>Bell was governor of Barbados from 1640-1650, before that he had been governor of Providence Island, the company of earlier GC member Richard Rich, the Earl of Warwick. Slaves had been shipped to Providence Island as early as 1619.

<sup>217</sup>John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan, *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), Ch. 9, 157.

Simultaneously it must be mentioned, that the reference to Africans, either as slaves or as employees, are limited in the account documents, though some smaller indications of slave trade do appear. In a summary from the appraisal committee of matters in need of clarification we find a reference to “*what Goods & Debts and negroes att Cormantyne at the tyme of this account*”. This included twenty-one slaves kept at Sierra Leone in 1642, valued at £40 each.<sup>218</sup> Considering the committee’s appraisal above, this makes their low estimate even more remarkable, as the combined debt owed from Virginia, divided between nine different debtors, would, according to their calculations, not be enough to cover the cost of one African laborer. Lastly, we find in the inventory from the warehouse at Sierra Leone, among “*rotten carpets*” and copper rings, an entry for £2 worth of “*old Iron Shackells*”. These scattered entries confirm previous knowledge of the company’s dealing in slaves. The 1640s saw the beginning of a regular trade in enslaved African laborers to the English territories in the Caribbean, and the company increasingly took part. Though the trade was only brought under patent in 1663, Barbados went from reportedly only having a few hundred Africans among its inhabitants in 1640 to 13,000 by 1650. By 1660 the numbers had reached 27,000.<sup>219</sup> The company’s continuous involvement in the slave trade is evident from additional court records, dated in 1649, though the events discussed took place a few years previous. These records suggest that the company was willing put a fair amount of money towards further establishing itself in land ownership and plantation production. Thought the outcome was, as is with most ventures appearing in the court records, unsuccessful.

John Wood had organized a venture along with Rowland Wilson, sr. and jr. - and for the first time, the large-scale overseas trader Maurice Thomson accompanied them. Thomson (1601-1676) had already operated as an interloper in company territory since the 1620s, focusing mainly on slave trade, and the change in company activity may have one of the motivations for now joining the company. Thomson’s involvement in the Guinea Company came to impact it greatly, as will be seen in later chapters.<sup>220</sup> Together with “*other members of that company*” the three men freighted the *Jonathan* for a voyage via Guinea to “*St. Cruzo*”, in order to bring over 41 hired English servants. “*St. Cruzo*” is in this instance understood to be St. Croix, which at the time was held, though only temporarily, by England. It would later form a key part of the Caribbean colonies controlled by Denmark-Norway. The plan was for the voyage to include slave trading as well, and from the records a clear distinction is drawn between the two groups. This indicates that, not only was the

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<sup>218</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no. 399

<sup>219</sup>John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 151.

<sup>220</sup>TNA: HCA 24/111, no. 27

company involved in developing plantations on a relatively large scale, holding land both in Barbados and St. Croix, but they, in keeping with the general norm at the time, initially made use of indentured European servants, in combination with slave labour. The voyage represents an example of how the practice of indentured servitude overlapped with an increasing reliance on slave labor. The voyage got off to a bad start when the captain, Robert Harding, deviated from the company's instruction by allowing extra passengers to accompany the ship. This, in combination with what the company saw as avoidable delays, resulted in the death of 25-30 of the hired servants, likely from lack of sufficient victuals. Though some of these deaths likely also stemmed from disease, the records suggest a perception of negligence on behalf of the captain. The captain had apparently needlessly missed his chance to cross the Atlantic, delaying his departure to help other English ships belonging to interlopers and bartering away valuable victuals on his private account, in return for ivory. The *Jonathan* picked up 180 slaves at Guinea, but Harding was accused of selling several of them privately instead of handing them over the company factor Francis Soame, at Barbados. Francis Soame was John Wood's nephew and served the company in Barbados for much of the 1640s and early 1650s. The total losses to the company was allegedly £5000, to which was added any land or goods they may have held at St. Croix when the English were expelled from the island by the Spanish in 1650.

By 1638, as work was commencing in earnest on the company trading fort at Kormantin, increasing reports of interlopers trading in African commodities, and to an increasing degree in slaves, were being recorded. Among the private traders who shaped the English interloper trade on the coast in this developing phase were two soon-to-be company directors, Maurice Thomson and Samuel Vassall (1586-1667).

The GC monopoly legally restricted this private activity, but it was still growing as the plantation production in the Americas expanded. The company members spent much energy keeping track of, and stopping, private ventures. The work of John C. Appleby on private slave trade in this period has, in addition to giving us valuable insight, shown how word travelled quickly in the London mercantile community regarding upcoming ventures.<sup>221</sup> This resulted in a private trade shrouded in secrecy, and problematizes the work of trying to assess its size. Still, several English slave traders had already operated for a substantial amount of time by the 1640s and 50s, and there is no reason to believe they had not built up the same amount of knowledge and experience in the trade as the Dutch, who only by the 1650s had fully established their slave trading hub at Curacao. Piet Emmer and Ernst van den Boogaart went further still, commenting that the contract that was agreed upon between the English company of Royal Adventurers into Africa, the GC's successor launched in 1660,

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<sup>221</sup>John C. Appleby, "'A Business of Much Difficulty': A London Slaving Venture 1651-1654," *The Mariner's Mirror* 81, no. 1 (February 1995): 3-14.

and the Genoese firm of Grillo and Lomellino - holders of the Spanish slave trading contract (the Asiento) - would never had been agreed to if the English did not have some form of established experience in the slave trade already.<sup>222</sup> The Asiento trade will be returned to in later chapters.

Illustration 12:

A topographical Description and Admeasurement of the Yland of Barbados in the West Indyaes



By Richard Ligon, 1657,  
First published in "A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados" written by Ligon and published by Humphrey Moseley in 1657. Held at the British Library, London, UK

From the granting of the first GC patent in 1618, the number of traders realizing the potential of West African slave trade increased throughout the 1620s

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<sup>222</sup>Pieter Emmer and Ernst van den Boogaart, "The Dutch Participation in the Atlantic Slave Trade," in *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, ed. Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn (Academic Press, 1979), 374–75.

and 1630s, leading to a growing number of interlopers setting out for the coast.<sup>223</sup> Robert Brenner lists, in his work, at least five private syndicates setting out for the coast in the 1630s and 1650s.<sup>224</sup> Of the names appearing behind the ventures can be find several soon-to-be GC members. Some of the private ventures were stopped by the admiralty and the privy council upon the request of the company before even commencing, several others managed to complete their journeys. One example, from the work of Appleby, follows the preparations and voyage of a private slave trading partnership in the years 1651-1654, and shows how despite the company hearing of the illegal venture, and the matter being addressed by the high court of admiralty, the vessel was still allowed to set out for the coast of Africa. Appleby points to a pervious incident, from 1638, where the GC went as far as to pay £500 to have a vessel stopped.<sup>225</sup> The company's patent, despite being an obstacle for the private traders, was evidently not unsurmountable even though we do not know the reasoning behind the courts verdict. The case also shows how the organizer of the venture attempted to keep it under the radar of the company, though this failed when a disagreement with the captain of the freighted ship used the company's patent as an excuse to cancel his agreement with the private traders, forcing the matter in front of the courts and to the company's attention.

As, alluded to above, among the recorded cases of interloping in the period, merchants who were soon to join the company feature prominently. Already in 1626 came the first reports of Maurice Thomson breaking into the company monopoly for the first time.<sup>226</sup> There would be several others. Thomson's first voyage, which was planned with partner and planter Thomas Combes, consisted of three vessels that sailed to the African coast in search of slaves. As a result, 60 slaves were taken across the Atlantic and sold at St. Kitts. The buyer was large-scale planter and colonial settler Thomas Warner, who was active in establishing tobacco production. The return cargo from St. Kitts consisted of 20,000 pounds of tobacco. This was one of the earliest examples of English Atlantic "triangle" trade. The year after, Thomson

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<sup>223</sup>Emmer and van den Boogaart, 361.

<sup>224</sup>Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 163–66. Brenner actually lists six syndicates but counts among them the company. In addition to the GC he lists the following:

- Samuel Vassall carried out at least one voyage to Guinea coast between 1642-1645.
- Michael Cawton and syndicate, 1642-1645
- William Pennoyer and Richard Hill, series of voyages, 1645-1647
- William Pennoyer and syndicate including brother Samuel, apprentices Michael Davidson and John Terringham, Robert Thomson, Elias Roberts (former's brother-in-law), William Fletcher.
- Samuell Vassall and syndicate including Peter Andrews (brother-in-law), Jeremy Blackman, Richard Cranley.

<sup>225</sup>Appleby, "A Business of Much Difficulty," 5.

<sup>226</sup>J. E. Farnell, "The Navigation Act of 1651, the First Dutch War, and the London Merchant Community," *The Economic History Review* 16, no. 3 (1964): 439–54; Paul G. E. Clemens, "The World of Maurice Thomson," *Reviews in American History* 21, no. 4 (1993): 575–83; Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*.

joined in the St. Kitts plantation activity, developing land for tobacco production together with Combes. In the end the two partners fell out, but not before shipping back tobacco worth £40,000 by 1634<sup>227</sup> Thomson's interloping and privateering continued however, through a partnership between himself and William Pennoyer, a fellow interloper and privateer especially active in the Levant. Pennoyer was also to move from interloping in the GC's charter area to joining the company.<sup>228</sup> By 1631 Thomson's interloping was getting him into serious trouble, leading to him spending time in London's Marshalsea prison for his involvement in interloping within the charter area of the Company of Adventurers to Canada.<sup>229</sup> In 1637 Thomson was involved with another ship intending to conduct a voyage to Guinea with the hopes of participating in the early English slave trade. His partner in the voyage was a John Crispe, a likely relation of the GC director. The *Talbot* intended to 'trade "nigers," and carry them to foreign parts' but the directors of the company found out and requested the Privy Council to have the involved parties arrested.<sup>230</sup> Then, in May 1638, just as Wood was cementing the trading relations with the Fante at Kormantin, Thomson, now out of prison, planned another interloping journey to the coast of Guinea. This time he partnered up with GC member William Cloberry's estranged brother Oliver among others, to send the ship the *Star* from London. Nicholas Crispe and his associates had been informed of the voyage however and brought the matter in front of the privy council. There the company requested that the ship was stayed. The request was granted and, a warrant was sent out to the Admiralty to stop the *Star* from leaving for 'Guinea and Binney contrary to the patent granted to the Company', and to apprehend the owners.<sup>231</sup>

As the 1640s commenced the interloping within the GC charter area appear more frequently in the records. A Michael Cawton and Robert Shapden were causing trouble by sending their ships, the *Tryal* and the *George*, to trade slaves on the

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<sup>227</sup>TNA: C 2/ChasI/T24/64

<sup>228</sup>Richard Pares, *Merchants and Planters*, Economic History Review, Supplement 4 (Cambridge University Press, 1960), 30.

<sup>229</sup>William Lawson Grant et al., eds., *Acts of the Privy Council of England | British History Online*, vol. I, 1613–1680 (Hereford, Printed for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Anthony Brothers, 1908), 178–85.

<sup>230</sup>TNA: HCA 24/109, no. 343. "America and West Indies: November 1637," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 259-260. *British History Online*, accessed November 13, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/pp259-260>.

<sup>231</sup>"America and West Indies: May 1638," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 273-275. *British History Online*, accessed November 13, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/pp273-275>. "Charles I - volume 389: May 1-7, 1638," in *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1637-8*, ed. John Bruce (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1869), 392-421. *British History Online*, accessed November 13, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/chas1/1637-8/pp392-421>.

Guinean coast. The slaves they received were subsequently shipped to Barbados.<sup>232</sup> In 1645 Maurice Thomson's partner William Pennoyer, along with a Michael Davidson, sent another ship, the *Phillip*, to trade in breach of the GC's patent. Their cargo of slaves was also intended for Barbados.<sup>233</sup> Pennoyer was stepping up his slave trading activity towards the end of the decade, in 1646-1647, becoming part of a bigger syndicate of interloping and slave trading partners.<sup>234</sup> Between 1642-1645 another large-sale overseas trader, Samuel Vassall, decided to send ships to Guinea and on to the West Indies. What they carried is not known, but Vassall had been involved in provisioning trade to Virginia, Massachusetts Bay and the West Indian colonies since the 1620s and it is not impossible he too had realized the potential of trade in enslaved labour.<sup>235</sup> Much like Thomson Vassall traded to St. Kitts, and taking into consideration that the shared proprietor of the colony, Thomas Warner, was making use of African slaves in his tobacco production, a market clearly existed.<sup>236</sup> Thomson and Vassall had collaborated privately, the first documented voyage took place in 1639, and was indeed aimed at the tobacco and provisioning trade to St. Kitts.<sup>237</sup> Vassall had, on top of this, reserved himself a place on the Committee of Appraisal and was thus part of reviewing the company's financial situation. This meant the interloper had in-depth knowledge of the company's financial situation, its trade and its plans. As the next chapter will show, he made good use of his knowledge when challenging, and later joining, the company.

## 6. Conclusion

The general impression of a company and a trade in crisis has followed the Guinea Company in the scholarship from the late nineteenth century through to the twentieth. The company suffered from both increased transnational competition and domestic private traders, the spilling over of the ongoing civil war conflict at home, and the ousting Nicholas Crispe - its primus motor, and the following sequestering of his company shares. These factors, paired with the loss of valuable profit, must be

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<sup>232</sup>TNA: HCA 24/108, p.7-8, Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, TSTD: [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org). Voyage ID (George) 26259, (Tryal) 26260. Accessed 15.05.2017.

<sup>233</sup>TNA: HCA 24/108, p.165

<sup>234</sup>TNA: HCA 24/109, no. 362

<sup>235</sup>Gragg, "To Procure Negroes": The English Slave Trade to Barbados, 1627-60," 71; Andrews, *Ships, Money and Politics: Seafaring and Naval Enterprise in the Reign of Charles I*, 60.

<sup>236</sup>Farnell, "The Navigation Act of 1651, the First Dutch War, and the London Merchant Community"; Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 168-81.

<sup>237</sup>"America and West Indies: December 1639," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 304-306. *British History Online*, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/pp304-306>.

acknowledged. However, as this chapter has shown, the picture of the company that emerges in the 1630s and 1640s is undeniably a complex one. Indeed, in one instance the company loses valuable funds due to a captain's negligence, but in the another a ship arrives in the Thames with gold to the value of several thousand pounds. The company was indebted above £10,000 in 1643/44, but in the five years between 1638 and 1643 four times that sum was brought back from the African coast. The company employed several factors on the African coast and were owed money in both the Caribbean and Virginia. Though the context surrounding the debt accumulation is not discussed in the source material, parts of the debts may have stemmed from the sale of enslaved Africans, as the company offered little other of interest to colonial planters attempting to set up their plantations. In addition to slaves, the freighting of colonial goods for the planters likely added to the colonial debts of the company. It appears highly unlikely for the company to have operated with empty cargo holds on the return leg from the Caribbean. The company's payments in cash crops had to be brought to London for sale, and the potential as a colonial freighter must have quickly become evident. Assuming that the company did not operate with empty ships, the task of planning and organizing the freighting of colonial commodities brought opportunities for both factors and captains who were charged with the managing of the ever-changing practicalities on the spot. Allowing for agency on the ground in organizing the freighting exposed the company to potential dishonest servants, but by leaving the task with the company captains it also opened for the benefits of using their personal colonial networks. A self-organized and inexpensive form of management on the spot based on interpersonal connections between the colonial community and the revisiting captains, which underlines the importance of interchanging agency and experience also between company men further down the organization's food chain.<sup>238</sup>

It is evident that any attempts at making projections for the trade was highly challenging for those involved. This volatility naturally favored the experienced and established over newcomers and outsiders, and the flexible and trusting agreement between the traders involved helped the company weather the lows and share the highs. Changes to market desires, timing, and personal connections to African traders and suppliers were important factors which could make or break a venture, as was the choice of a competent captain – as the case of the *Jonathan* shows. The Guinea Company of the 1630s and 1640s had the experience and personnel needed for successful trade, and the return of valuable cargos proved this. By the end of the 1640s they had in John Wood a director with personal experience from the African coast, and several of the company's most powerful competitors had or were about to

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<sup>238</sup>Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy 1660-1700* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 160–61.

join the company ranks. This influx of new experience from the Americas, personified by Maurice Thomson, the Wilsons and later Samuel Vassall, helped facilitate the company's expanding operation in the colonies.

In addition to experience, luck was needed, as *force majeure* in the form of ship wrecks, attacks from foreign privateers, death and disease impacted company and interloper alike. This problematized the search for reliable investors, appealing in a higher degree to impulsive risk-takers looking for quick profits, and often resulted in the reliance on the personal credit of members. This was seen in the petitions of John Wood from the early 1640s, but it happened also in the early 1620s, demonstrated by the conflict arising over the responsibility for the debt to Elizabeth Craven. It also led to extended ship ownership for added income and diversification of risk, a tendency, as emphasized by Appleby, prevalent among Guinea traders.<sup>239</sup>

Furthermore, it is challenging to determine if and when a venture was done by the company proper, and when it was a private initiative. Records from the high court of admiralty showed activity on behalf of the company, but the level of private investment and take of the profit must often have been high. With such a tight knit group emerging from the documents little separated company- and private trade. Thus, though the company may have struggled with its profits on paper, it did not necessarily follow that company members were not profiting. The tendency to use the company patent, not with the aim of developing England's overseas trade, but instead to shelter the traders' activity from competition, had appeared as soon as the first patent was granted in 1618. The practice was not discontinued when the new patent was granted in 1631, instead the exclusion of most of the non-active members of the 1620s, left space for traders who had an established personal connection to the African coast that could now be placed under the protection of the patent. The core group who made up the company's "*indenture quadripartite*" - Slaney, Cloberry, the Crispe brothers and Wood, developed and benefitted from a company purpose-built for their needs. As has already emerged and will be discussed further in chapter that follows, they were gradually joined and replaced by former interlopers who opted to join the company – bringing their capital, trade and experience with them.

The volatility of the trade also led to diversification of activity evident in the company's attempts to further its growing activity in the colonies, including plantation ownership, stationing of company representatives in the colonies, extension of credit to planters, the attempted introduction of indentured servants, and trade in slaves. The English slave trade at this point, despite still being in its establishing phase, was already attracting an increasing number of private merchants and partnerships, which contributed to the hardening competition both in the area covered by the

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<sup>239</sup>Appleby, "A Business of Much Difficulty," 4.

company's patent and in the Atlantic more generally. For established Atlantic traders such as Maurice Thomson, William Pennoyer, Samuel Vassall, and - as will be seen in the coming chapters - Martin Noell, who had operated since the first colonial settlements took place, the Atlantic was becoming crowded. Company membership offered a degree of protection from competition, at least nominally, and this may have been among the motives behind membership. Once members of the company, they came to have a defining impact on its direction, its goals, and its format of trade.

Maurice Thomson, and the new men of the company, will be pushed forward in coming chapters, as I argue that their experiences and methods from the colonial supply trade, and involvement in early slave trade, came to set the direction for the official Anglo-African trade until its final deregulation in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Thomson and his associates might not have been the first to realize the potential of neither the colonial provisioning trade, nor the trade in slaves from West Africa, but they certainly were involved in the shaping and building up of the relationship between organized Africa trade and the English colonies, and consequently impacted the shape it took.

## CHAPTER 3:

# The Honourable Guinea and East India Company, 1640-1663.

### 1. Introduction

The activity on the coast of Africa is mostly remembered and studied because of its role in- and effect on the Atlantic. In the traditional narrative the story of the English East India Company presence on the African coast is therefore often forgotten. This chapter considers the role of the company members in this change in the trade, which took place in the middle decades of the century. The chapter asks why it was decided to move the trade operations over to the EIC at this point in time, and who was behind the decision. In doing that the focus will remain on the GC, but even more so on the East India Company(EIC), and the decision-making process for leasing the GC charter. This decision and transition took place in the Christmas months of 1657/8, but it will be argued here that a far longer process impacted by numerous interests and events preceded it. The merchants that were active in making this decision were among the most prominent of their day, and some of them have already been introduced in the preceding chapters. They had a past of collaboration privately, and by the 1640s-1650s their multiple interests opened for using companies as vessels for improving competitive edge. In this regard Maurice Thomson and John Wood stand out as central characters, both in their capacities as leading actors in the EIC and in the GC, alongside private trader Samuel Vassall, who through outspoken criticism of the GC contributed to an alteration in its charter, before joining the company himself. It will be argued that this alteration in the company's charter contributed heavily to the decision to lease it out to the EIC.

The chapter will show that the final decision by the EIC to realize the plan of combining the two trades, came from men who were members and closely connected to both the EIC directorship, and the GC. These men were traders who had originally stood outside of both structures, operating as interlopers, before gaining membership to both companies. The same merchants had private interests on the coast of Africa, in the Caribbean, and in the Indian Ocean, with a wish to integrate the three markets. Some of them were established in the growing slave trade – such as Maurice Thomson; most of them were provisioning traders to the colonies – such as Samuel Vassall and Martin Noell, along with Thomson, and in plantation ownership – such as John

Wood, Noell, and again alongside Maurice Thomson. Both Thomson and Vassall had a past in the trade to the East, Vassall as a member of the EIC, and Thomson in the rivalling Assada Adventurers. The two had also collaborated in the 1630s on interloping ventures to the coast of Guinea, as discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>240</sup> The leasing of the GC charter offered exceptional benefits to these merchants, as their interests converged and their commodities were included in a far larger system of exchange covered by favorable patents.

Firstly, in order to understand with what negotiating powers the two companies met to make the decision we must grant attention also to the different standpoint of the East India Company and its challengers. The chapter shows that the decision to lease the patent had been a long time coming and was linked to conflicts and negotiation both within the EIC internally, and with rivalling trading initiatives manifested by a merchant group known as the Courteen Initiative - later changing its name to the Assada Adventurers. To further complicate things, it will be shown that there existed an overlap in the membership between the different companies. Both between the EIC and their rivals, and between the EIC and the GC. Therefore, when a patent such as that of the GC changed hands, it is necessary to consider what that meant for members in actual terms. The chapter moves on to consider the events surrounding the renegotiation of the GC's patent in and around the year 1651. As alluded to above, it will be argued that the alteration in the company privileges not only added to the motivations to hand the patent over to another company, but in fact had ramifications for the way the Africa trade was viewed by the merchants in question. The decision of the EIC to not involve itself in the slave trade is considered in order to understand the motivations of the different traders involved. It is perhaps not a given that the EIC would deal in slaves when on the coast, but such a decision went against the expertise and business practices of several of the actors in charge of the company at that time. It also went against the advice given to the company directors by the company factors on the African coast. Lastly, it ran counter to the economic trends of the time, as the development of large-scale sugar and tobacco production was well on its way, and the markets for slave labour was growing accordingly. What will be suggested here is that the final decision to lease the Guinea charter was spurred on by events taking place in 1650s which heightened the desire

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<sup>240</sup>Regarding the *Talbot*: "America and West Indies: November 1637," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 259-260. *British History Online*, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/pp259-260>.

Regarding the *Star*: "America and West Indies: May 1638," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 273-275. *British History Online*, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/pp273-275>.

of specific actors to place the Africa patent in the hands of the EIC, such as the aforementioned patent negotiations between the Guinea Company and the Cromwell administration in 1651. The resulting changes to the patent had consequences for both official and private trade. This fact, in combination with changes made in the Americas - especially the annexation of Jamaica in 1655-57, altered the dynamics of trade for the actors involved, and they reacted accordingly. However, as the final section will show, the predictions for trade in both the Atlantic and on the coast, did not include the effects of the Restoration and the ensuing discontinuation the GC's patent. Some attention is therefore granted to the EIC's loss of the patent rights with the return of the Stuart monarchy in 1660. Though this specific change has not raised great interest in the historiography of the EIC; nor in the work on the Atlantic expansion; and there exists perhaps an underlying assumption that the more successful EIC would not be interested in a volatile and unprofitable trade such as that on the coast of Africa; it will be shown that the EIC went far in attempting to keep the patent. When the RA was formed by the king's brother and cousin in 1660, the African coast had become an integral part of the EIC cycle of trade. However, several rounds of negotiations, and attempts for co-existence between the EIC and RA came to naught, and by the spring of 1663 the EIC had lost their rights on the coast.

The company records of the GC are, as discussed in the previous chapters, to a large extent lost to us though a rare snapshot of the company from 1643/44 was discussed in chapter 2. The general lack of material remains a challenge into the company's final decade. Thus, the history of the GC continues to give a relatively equal representation to both its most prominent defenders and accusers, as the remaining records relating to the GC continue to consist mainly of state papers, court cases and petitions either stemming from the company itself, or from disgruntled and frustrated private traders.

Among the petitioning private traders appear successful men who eventually become members of the company themselves and rise to the upper echelons of its management. This was especially true for large-scale traders such as Maurice Thomson and Samuel Vassall who were introduced briefly above. Vassall established a private consortium which challenged company activity, though the end of the 1640s resulted in big losses which challenged his survival. In 1649 he sent an extended suggestion for discovering the source of the gold trade to the Council of State, which after the civil war had replaced the Privy Council.<sup>241</sup> In his complaint, which played an important role in the 1651 patent renegotiation, Vassall like many before him, criticized the company for not making full use of its patent. Yet, not long after, Vassall

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<sup>241</sup>TNA: CO 1/11, no. 29

joined the GC taking a position at the very top of the company's management. This pattern of approach resembles what was discussed in chapter one, with the entry of Humphrey Slaney et al in the 1620s. As we shall see, Maurice Thomson, after challenging the GC for many years before joining the company in or around 1647, repeated the maneuver in relation to the EIC, moving from representing a challenging trading consortium to becoming an EIC member.

While the activities of the GC need to be pieced together from lack of company sources, much of the East India Company records from their time on the African coast still survive. They were neatly chronicled by scribes and secretaries, and later thoroughly presented in detail in Margaret Makepeace's work on the archives from the EIC's time on the West African Coast, published in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>242</sup> Beyond Makepeace important contribution, the East India Company's trade to Africa has gotten little attention from scholars. The works of famous historians on early Anglo-African relations, such as Elizabeth Donnan, K.G. Davies, Robin Law and George F. Zook, either does not engage with the material or gives it but a brief mention in passing, their studies being predominantly directed towards the Atlantic and the west, especially in relation to the slave trade. Exceptions are J. W. Blake's work on the from the first half of the twentieth century, and intra-European studies such as Robert Porter's detailed PhD thesis from 1975, both of which were introduced in chapter 1 and 2. Studies conducted on the early years of Guinea Company activity, grants attention to the activity of the EIC in Africa mainly in relation to the effect its arrival and trade had on intra-European-, and Euro-African relations.<sup>243</sup> For English company historians more specifically, of which can be counted K.G. Davies, G.F. Zook and W. Pettigrew, the EIC's Africa endeavors are mentioned in passing, but focus is directed towards the events of the latter half of the century – from the Restoration onwards.<sup>244</sup> The most detailed studies and prosopography surveys done on the merchant community of London can, as mentioned, be found in Robert Brenner's book *Merchants and Revolutions* from the early 1990s, and many of the men that will be presented below have gotten their due attention in the biographical approach

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<sup>242</sup>Margaret Makepeace, "English Traders on the Guinea Coast, 1657–1668: An Analysis of the East India Company Archive," *History in Africa* 16 (January 1989): 237–84. Margaret Makepeace, *Trade on the Guinea Coast, 1657-1666: The Correspondence of the English East India Company* (African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1991).

<sup>243</sup>Blake, "The Farm of the Guinea Trade in 1631." J.W. Blake, "The English Guinea Company, 1618-1660: An Early Example of the Chartered Company in Colonial Development" (n.d.), 14–27, accessed November 9, 2015. Porter, "European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667." Porter, "The Crispe Family and the African Trade in the Seventeenth Century." Jenkinson, "The Records of the English African Companies." Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*.

<sup>244</sup>Davies, *The Royal African Company*; Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt*; Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa*, 1919. Robin Law, ed., *The English in West Africa: The Local Correspondence of the Royal African Company of England 1681-1699*, 3 vols. (British Academy, Oxford University press, 1997-, 2006).

of Brenner's work. This includes Vassall, Thomson, and his associate Samuel Moyer; GC member Rowland Wilson (father and son); as well as EIC turned RA members Andrew Riccard and Martin Noell. All of them were at different times connected to the EIC and the Africa trade of the late 1650s and early 1660s, though Vassall and Thomson are granted the most attention here. Brenner's research, though concluding in 1653, continue to be important in trying to piece together the impact that this very turbulent period of British history had on the Anglo-African trade.<sup>245</sup> I attempt in this chapter to build on former research, and question the motivations and interlinking between the various actors and companies involved.

## 2. Why the coast of Guinea?

When the EIC took over the patent of the GC, it was the first time a European trading company held the patents for trade in both East and West. An attempt was made by the Dutch WIC to orchestrate a merger with the bigger and more financially stable VOC. The VOC rejected taking over the debts of its Atlantic counterpart, offering instead a one-time subsidy of several million guilders.<sup>246</sup> The EIC/GC merger lasted for the roughly seven years (1657-1663/4) and during that time EIC activity was significant on the Coast of Africa. The decision to combine the two trades made a great deal of economic and logistical sense. The large East Indiamen of the company needed to stop for provisioning on the long journey east and had already experimented with a practice of calling at the coast of Guinea. Furthermore, the EIC, along with everyone else at the time, desired bullion for their dealings in Asia. Europe offered little of interest in the wide-ranging exchange cycle of the Indian Ocean and relied on transporting of precious metals there to trade. This had been solved by the export of bullion to Asia from Europe, as well as through internal country trade in the Indian Ocean basin. The export of bullion was unpopular however, and considered poor economic policy, as a result the practice was heavily taxed. From the extensive diaries of Sir Bulstrode Whitelocke, who was present at the discussions of the Council of State towards the end of the 1640s, we learn that the export of bullion was seen as a matter in need of addressing. In 1649-1650 an Act against the export of bullion abroad was read several times, and in 1654 the council was asked "*to consider how the statutes against transportation of gold and silver may strictly be put in execution, and how the melting of coin here, and selling of silver for beyond the seas may be*

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<sup>245</sup>Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*.

<sup>246</sup>Henk den. Heijer, "Plannen Voor Samenvoeging van VOC En WIC," *Tijdschrift Voor Zeegechiedenis* 13 (1994): 115-30.

prevented".<sup>247</sup> If the EIC could purchase gold directly from the African states on the coast of Guinea, they could add to the supply needed for their factories in India, all while avoiding the duties on bullion export. According to the calculations made by Makepeace, the EIC exported a total of £113,500 in gold from the coast during their time there.<sup>248</sup> This was not a revolutionary amount, a stock of sufficient size for the India trade was agreed upon by different merchants interested in the trade, as having to reach at least £300,000.<sup>249</sup> Yet, the final return could not be foreseen at the time of the lease agreement, and any supplement to the company's bullion export must have been a welcome one in a landscape of increasing opposition to exportation. Furthermore, the trade on the Guinea coast was partly driven by products imported from the markets surrounding the Indian Ocean, via Europe, before making their way to the African coast. The EIC, unlike its competitors, thus had the unique opportunity to vertically integrate large parts of the necessary exchange process.

### 3. The United East India and Guinea Company and the idea of Africa.

In December 1657, the Court of Directors of the English East India Company agreed that negotiations were to be commenced with the Guinea Company with the aim of taking over their patent. Upon paying a lump sum (£1,300) per annum, the EIC maintained the right to trade and control all English activity within the areas covered in the patent until the patent was up for re-negotiation at the end of the patent-period, in 1665. The deciding court of directors in the EIC at the time consisted of several of London's most experienced and established overseas traders, including Governor Maurice Thomson, Deputy Governor and Samuel Vassall's brother-in-law Thomas Andrewes, Alderman William Thomson- Maurice's brother, Samuel Moyer, James Drax, Martin Noell and Andrew Riccard. Together these men had a part to play in most of London's commercial ventures overseas, as well as wide interests domestically. Some examples of such activities were presented in chapter 2 and others will be discussed in more detail as part of chapter 4. They included everything from colonial provisioning trade to England's overseas territories, plantation development and slave trade in Barbados; tobacco import and export; fur trade in Canada; and

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<sup>247</sup>Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affairs from the Beginning of the Reign of Charles the First to the Happy Restoration of King Charles the Second*, vol. III, 1682 (Oxford : University Press, 1853), 14–15, 172, 185.

<sup>248</sup>Makepeace, "English Traders on the Guinea Coast, 1657–1668: An Analysis of the East India Company Archive," Introduction, 238.

<sup>249</sup>Ethel Bruce Sainsbury and William Foster, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc. of the East India Company, 1644-1649* (Oxford, The Clarendon press, 1912), 374.

interloping trade in the Levant and the East.<sup>250</sup> It is worth noting that the company leadership group had behind them only one day as company directors before reaching the decision to start negotiations with the Guinea Company on December 18. They were all elected during the General Court of Election that adjourned the previous day. This suggests the patent of the Guinea Company was high on the agenda of the men that were now in charge of company management.<sup>251</sup>

Internal leadership quarrels had been ongoing in the EIC leading up to the General Assembly and the election of the new leadership. Division and disagreements between merchant groupings over the right to operate in contested areas covered by the EIC's patent had led to mediations in front of the Council of State. The Council of State was at this point assisting the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, in governing the realm. The issues that were being aired in front of the Council of State in the autumn of 1657 were not new. In fact, they surfaced for the first time nearly ten years previous, almost simultaneously with the investigation of the GC accounts discussed above. In 1645-6 a separate trading consortium were accused by the EIC - mainly longtime members and company directors, of breaking into the company's charter areas in the East. The accused group consisted of a number of established traders; among which Thomson, Andrewes and Moyer can be counted. Thus, when these allegations were first made the men that stood accused had not yet become EIC members. The group was operating in violation of the patent, the EIC claimed, as all eastern trade on behalf of England should be managed by them only, and anyone operating without the company's permission was doing so illegally.

All allegations of illegal trade were refused by the accused group who pointed to a permission to trade granted to large-scale overseas merchant Sir William Courteen and his son by Charles I back in 1635. The patent gave Courteen the right to settle in all places not taken up by the EIC in the East.<sup>252</sup> Sir William Courteen himself, a Huguenot coming from the Low Countries, and his son bearing the same name, had early on realized the benefit of a linked trade between the Indian Ocean, the Americas and the coast of Guinea, but had withdrawn from the trade by the early 1640s due to financial troubles. Instead their patent had been managed by other merchants, several of which had a background in the colonial trades of the Atlantic who looked to expand to the East. Thomson and others, equipped with Courteen's patent, attempted to apply their experience from the Americas on the eastern side of the Cape of Good Hope. Their desire was to settle colonies with production along the

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<sup>250</sup>Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*.

<sup>251</sup>Ethel Bruce Sainsbury and William Foster, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc., of the East India Company, 1655-1659* (Oxford, The Clarendon press, 1916), 197-99. See also Introduction.

<sup>252</sup>Ethel Bruce Sainsbury and William Foster, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc. of the East India Company, 1635-1639* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1907), xiv-xix, xxii-xxiii. Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 168-81.

same lines as was seen in the Americas. They aimed for the island of Pulo Run in the Java sea, and first and foremost, the island of Assada (Nosy-Bé) near Madagascar. As a result, they broke with the Courteen name, renaming themselves the Assada Adventurers (AA).<sup>253</sup>

Settlement at Assada had been unsuccessfully attempted on and off in the past, and the island had played a minor role as a provisioning stop for the ships headed to the East. Still, the EIC directors' interest had never stretched to attempting any form of permanent settlement in the name of the company. Despite the lacking success of previous settlement ventures, the AA members were convinced of the islands potential, for plantation development and production; as a future market for African slaves; and as a strategic position in a new trading circuit that combined both the eastern and western coast of Africa with their trade in the Indian Ocean and the Americas.<sup>254</sup> The trade and activity of the AA was, according to the EIC directors, having a negative effect on EIC profits. The company therefore lobbied hard in Parliament through 1646-1647, hoping to rid themselves of the unwanted competition, demanding the upholding of their exclusive right to trade from the Cape of Good Hope to Japan. The directors did make some headway with their request in Parliament. An ordinance confirming the company's rights to the eastern trade was passed on from the House of Commons to the House of Lord's asking for their concurrence on December 5, 1646.<sup>255</sup> The company's exclusive rights were to be upheld and the Courteen traders were given three years to withdraw all ships and goods from the east and leave the trade. The company was ordered to assist them in this endeavor and maintain open access to invest in its ventures for everyone paying £5 for the privilege. The Lords initially agreed to this, suggesting an Act of Parliament to finish the matter once and for all, but in the end the Act was not ratified. William Courteen the younger, despite having left the trade personally, petitioned intensively for the rights that he and his father had been granted, and at a hearing on the matter on March 16, 1647, the Lords hesitated and rejected the Act.<sup>256</sup> The trade to the east

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<sup>253</sup>Sainsbury and Foster, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc. of the East India Company, 1644-1649*, xi.

<sup>254</sup>Andrews, *Ships, Money and Politics: Seafaring and Naval Enterprise in the Reign of Charles I*, 51-52. Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 159, 170-81. Nicolas Canny, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume I: The Origins of Empire British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 276-77. Sainsbury and Foster, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc. of the East India Company, 1644-1649*, Introduction. W. Foster, "An English Settlement in Madagascar in 1645-6," *The English Historical Review* 27, no. 106 (1912): 239-50. Edmond Smith, "'Canaanising Madagascar': Africa in English Imperial Imagination, 1635-1650," *Itinerario* 39, no. 2 (2015): 277-98.

<sup>255</sup>"House of Commons Journal Volume 5: 5 December 1646," in *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 5, 1646-1648*, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1802), 1-2. *British History Online*, accessed December 4, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/commons-jrnl/vol5/pp1-2>.

<sup>256</sup>"House of Lords Journal Volume 9: 16 March 1647," in *Journal of the House of Lords: Volume 9, 1646*, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1767-1830), 81. *British History Online*, accessed December 2,

remained unsettled into the summer of 1647.

Despite waiting on such an important decision for its trade, the EIC started preparing for new voyages to the East. A venture, referred to simply as the “*Second General Voyage*”<sup>257</sup>, was launched in early July 1647 with open subscriptions. And despite the conflict between the EIC and the Assada Adventurers standing at a stalemate, several of the Assada Company traders, such as Thomson and his associates Samuel Moyer and Thomas Andrewes, decided to become prominent subscribers to this new EIC venture.<sup>258</sup>

Although Thomson, Moyer and Andrewes decided in 1647 to subscribe to the “*Second General Voyage*”, this only served as a temporary solution to their problem of access to the Eastern trade. When the Second Voyage ended in the late summer of 1649, the AA resurfaced with their plans for trade and settlement, and along with the plans came the old conflict and claims from both sides. As a result, the Council of State suggested that the two groups focused on a shared venture. The AA therefore handed over a list of their objections to the current running of the eastern trade, and their demands for considering a new venture with the EIC. In these demands, presented on November 10, 1649 – almost a decade before any official agreement was reached - the first signs of a conjoined, organized trade under patent between the Indian Ocean, Africa - including both the eastern and western coast, and the Atlantic can be seen for the first time.<sup>259</sup>

We find earlier indications of the African trade gradually being baked into the operations of the Assada Group at this time in the work by Robert Porter. Porter refers to a ship headed for the East Indies which arrived on the African coast in late March 1645. The ship, named the *Lioness*, departed for the Indian Ocean in mid-May after selling goods on the coast, and obtaining gold for use in the Indian trade. Crossing over to the minutes of the EIC we learn that the *Lioness* is known by the company as an interloping vessel owned by Maurice Thomson.<sup>260</sup> The voyage of the

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2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/lords-jrnl/vol9/p81>. Sainsbury and Foster, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc. of the East India Company, 1644-1649*, xiii.

<sup>257</sup>Sainsbury and Foster, iv. The terms ‘stock’ and ‘voyage’ was used to separate the different types of investments in company activity. The ‘stock’ was the ordinary method of trading, running over many years with additional capital being raised if the majority wished it. ‘Voyages’ were subscription projects with a definite sum of investment, and dividend of the voyages were paid out as soon as the voyages was completed. The ‘voyage’ format appealed to those who did not wish high, long term investments. It was also the preferred method when there was little interest in big investments for a new ‘stock’. To add to the confusion, it was not uncommon for the different ‘voyages’ to freight ships belonging to the ‘general stock’.

<sup>258</sup>Sainsbury and Foster, X, 342.

<sup>259</sup>Sainsbury and Foster, xxii–xxv, 369–73. Fully reprinted in the work of Sainsbury and Forster, the original document from the Assada Adventurers can be found in TNA: CO 77/7, no.6,7 (two near identical versions).

<sup>260</sup>*Lioness*, Master John Brookhaven. Porter, “European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667,” 232; Sainsbury and Foster, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc. of the East India Company, 1644-1649*, VIII,

*Lioness* coincides with and may have sparked the conflict between the AA and the EIC. That the *Lioness's* reappears in EIC sources in August 1646, then reportedly homeward bound at Assada, is further indication. This journey took place four years before any agreement was signed between the EIC and the AA, and it is likely that the increased interest for the Guinea Company among Thomson and the AA was linked to the developments of a potential agreement between them and the EIC. The augmentation of the activities of Thomson and his associates on the Guinea coast around this time may have happened in tune with those negotiations.

This includes Thomson's decision, made around 1647, to join the Guinea Company as an active trader himself. After challenging the company for nearly two decades, he was now operating legally under the Africa patent together with Wood, the Wilson's, and other members. The circumstances surrounding the negotiations with the EIC is a potential motivation for his decision to obtain membership. Depending on the day-to-day development of the AA/EIC negotiations, the chance of incorporating the African trade with the trade to the East can have appeared to become increasingly likely. Thomson may therefore have assured himself a part in the GC for a stronger bargaining position later. Or alternatively, even if the merger between the AA and EIC seemed likely, the acceptance of the Guinea trade as part of their joint future activity may have appeared less so, thus sparking Thomson's decision to actively join the Guinea Company to secure a position in that trade for the benefit of his personal trade. If the EIC would not do anything with the potential of the African trade, the individual traders may have been prepared to do so themselves. A Guinea Company membership would have undoubtedly helped Thomson, like it later helped the EIC, to combine trade across the two oceans. It appears he convinced his fellow company member for when the AA decided to invest in the EIC's *Second General Voyage*, so too did John Wood.<sup>261</sup>

Before considering a merger with the EIC, the Assada merchants demanded the following: first and foremost, they were of the opinion that a trade that went to Guinea and Assada, and from then onwards to India, would be far more profitable than one large India stock organized in a voyage ever five years. The Assada Group wanted nothing less than a complete overhaul of the whole dynamic of the eastern trade, in essence by including the Atlantic. As part of this change the traders wanted the inclusion of the trade on the Guinea coast into the eastern operations, and to realize their plans of settlements at island of Assada, as well as at Pulo Run, a small island belonging to the Moluccas in the Banda Sea. The group believed the two islands possessed everything necessary to develop into flourishing colonial markets

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184; Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 161–68.

<sup>261</sup>Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 175.

similar to those the group were familiar with from the Atlantic. It seems these far-reaching changes were not thought to be possible with the sitting EIC directors, and the Assada Group therefore requested a change in the EIC directorship before considering joining their rivals. If the trade was not to be opened for everyone they certainly desired the right for Assada Company members to trade freely in the East; as well as compensation for goods that had been left in India during the Second Voyage – to which several Assada traders had subscribed. Lastly, the group asked that any proposals for voyages to China, Japan, etc. where the EIC declined involvement, were to be opened to other Englishmen.<sup>262</sup> The requests emphasized a marked break with the tradition of the African continent as a split of two oceanic spaces and systems of exchange.

The EIC directorship claimed in response that it had every desire to meet the requests from the Assada Group.<sup>263</sup> The company saw no real problem in accepting the request for the settlements, so long as it was left to the management of those in the Assada Group that found it of interest. Indeed, the directors believed it to be a pointless endeavor, and anticipated its inclusion would cause more damage than good in the hunt for future subscriptions, but they did not oppose it. They were also willing to accept the shipping of potential settlers and of provisions, slaves, and whatever else the settlements might need. In reference to the inclusion of the Guinea trade, the directors claimed to be “*strangers to the trade of Guinney*”, as well as “*somewhat shy to become ingaged in the purchase of an unknowne trade*”, but they were not negative to the idea of merging the two so long as any benefit was extended to all parties involved. Regarding the requests for changes in management, the company claimed to be willing to accept any new government that could bring forth the necessary subscriptions to carry on the trade. A hint of frustration can be detected in the directors’ tone, as the company finished their response by sharing their concerns for what a settlement project at Assada might do to the interest for a potential new stock, but they were prepared to accept what the Council of State demanded for continuing the trade and the patent.

An agreement between the two was reached on November 21, 1649. It allowed the Assada traders their settlements and their trading rights, while changes in management was left to future shareholders to decide. Company members were able to organize ventures that had been abandoned by the company, on the condition that a security was given for the company’s interests in the east not to be harmed. The Guinea trade was pushed to the background and would as we know, only fully resurface at the end of the following decade, though the intentions of the Assada

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<sup>262</sup>Sainsbury and Foster, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc. of the East India Company, 1644-1649*, XXIII.

<sup>263</sup>Sainsbury and Foster, 374–76.

members were well known when Maurice Thomson signed the agreement on behalf of the AA on December 5, 1649.<sup>264</sup>

#### 4. Patent renegotiations: the Guinea Company of the 1650s

While the early negotiations between the Assada Adventurer and the EIC were taking place, the Guinea Company, still under John Wood's leadership – though now joined by Rowland Wilson Sr. and Jr., first had to settle the commotion that followed Crispe's forced departure from the company. The Wilson's remained active though and contributed to the continued trade in gold. Despite the political turmoil going on around them, the 1640s and 1650s do not appear to have been all that different from what the company experienced in the late 1620s and 1630s, where luck and circumstance was often the only thing separating huge profits and bankruptcy.

However, the increased trade in slaves was starting to change the dynamic on the coast for the company. As discussed above, several private partnerships were known to have set forth ships to the Guinea coast during the 1640s. Their cargoes consisting increasingly of slaves. Both Maurice Thomson and Samuel Vassall were, as previously discussed, organizing such voyages. Thomson's first recorded slaving voyage within the parameters of the patent, took place already in 1626, and in the 1630s the company had stopped at least two more of his ships - the *Talbot* and the *Star* from venturing out, through court proceedings. Paradoxically, the *Star* was now operating in the service of Thomson, the Rowland Wilsons, John Wood, and the rest of the GC, setting out for the Guinea coast in the first joint venture in 1647.<sup>265</sup>

By 1649, Thomson was getting a taste of his own medicine when he, along with Wood and the Wilsons had to tackle challenges and accusations brought by a private trading group. Thomson's old business partner, Samuel Vassall, appeared as the group's leader, handing in an extensive complaint to the Council of State, along with his own suggestions for the future of the trade. Considering that Thomson was already embroiled in one debate over patents at this point, albeit with a reversal of his role – representing a private trading group, he was building up diverse experience in the challenges of competition and access in organized overseas trade.

##### 4.1. Samuel Vassal's suggestions and changes in to the patent

In his lengthy claim, presented to the Council of State in December 1649,

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<sup>264</sup>Sainsbury and Foster, 381–82.

<sup>265</sup>Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, Vol. I, 1441-1700:127–28.

Vassall explained his ambitious plans for making the English the “sole masters of the gold trade in that part of Africa”.<sup>266</sup> The former patent holders, he exclaimed, had not upheld their promise to search for the origin of the gold that came down to Africa’s western coast. “Since which Grant they have never yet fought into the land for the discovery of the mines, or the places aforesaid, but yearly make their private benefit by wood, elephants teeth and hides, and such small quantity of gold”. To Vassall it was clear that to find the source of the gold, which he understood to be found in Tombatu (Timbuktu), three possible options could be considered. The English could do like the “tawny moores” of Marocco and the Barbary coast and risk a journey inland through the desert. However, Vassall stated, “theire dangers in travel are very greate, for many time whole caravans have beene swallowed up by violent whirlings of the sands in the desserts of Sarra (Sahara), and other deserts of Numidia.” The second option was “by the way the Blackmoores use, that bring the gold from Tombatu to the Southward”. If such an attempt was to be made, the English needed two or more men who were willing to travel with them as close to Tombatu as they were able to get. Though such an overland journey would be very challenging, “and possibly our English bodies are not fitted to endure such travel.” The final option, and the one Vassall strongly endorsed himself, was to follow in the footsteps of the discoverers from the early decades of the century, such as George Thompson and Richard Jobson, up the “River Gambra”.<sup>267</sup> The former explorers had reached far into the continent before unforeseen circumstances destroyed their efforts. If such a project was to be attempted again, Vassall wanted the State to fully endorse it. The current patent of the GC was due to expire within three years, and Vassall recommended the State not to renew it, but instead “take the sole managing of that Trade into their honorable care.” Instead of a patent, a commission “consisting of experienced men five in number should be given control of the trade” for the benefit of the state. And the main objective “should be to discover the certaine places from whence the gold is brought”. With such a format the trade would not pass through so many hands, and the drain on profits would be far less. Furthermore, it would solve the problem of shipping bulky commodities which returned only minor amounts of gold. It seems Vassall assumed that the English, upon finding the source, would be able to take control of it, and thus end the need for exchanging goods for gold completely.

Once such management of the trade had been established, the hunt for the source of the gold could be fully initiated. The Gambia river ran, according to Vassall’s calculations, 150 leagues into the continental interior.<sup>268</sup> As seen in Chapter 1, during

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<sup>266</sup>TNA: CO 1/11, no.13.

<sup>267</sup>See Chapter 1.

<sup>268</sup>150 leagues would mean ca. 830 km by today’s calculations, we know now that the length of the

his voyage up the river George Thompson had reached as far as Tenda, the town where the gold arrived from the interior, and Vassall suggested to aim for the same place. In the Gambia River the expedition needed to find an interpreter who spoke Arabic, “*which passeth current through the land*”, to accompany them. Then two ships, a pinnace and a barge, should ferry four hundred men inland. The expedition would travel by river as far as was possible, before erecting a fort. The settlement needed fortification and access to a spring, as the rainy season made the river water undrinkable. From there the expedition should continue, by sail or by canoe, to the kingdom of Setico, where gifts should be presented to the king for his good will and his permission to plant another smaller factory. However, Vassall warned, “*be always left two hundred men at the fort for feare of the stragglng Portugals who are, and trade upon that coast.*”

Once settled at Setico, twenty of the men could then venture another 50 miles into the interior before settling yet another plant, and “*so to go up further every yeare.*” A chain of forts, reaching ever closer to Tombatu, could thus be established. Vassall claimed that with this format “*being held constant for three or four yeares at least and after six yeares I hope six hundred thousand pounds a yeare or more.*” Such an astronomical sum must have appeared tempting, but it was probably balanced by the suggestion from Vassall of supplementing the existing four hundred men by another four hundred the following year. The state, despite being tempted by the idea of gold flowing into the country, was not willing to take on the responsibility of sending hundreds of men up the Gambia for the ensuing six years. Instead they took the same approach as they had done in the conflict between the EIC and the Assada group. The rivalling factions in the trade should merge and pool their capital in a new attempt towards finding gold. To help matters along the discussions for a new charter commenced. The outcome of these negotiations had consequences not only for the GC and the private traders represented by Vassall, but also for the EIC’s time on the Africa coast.

The responsibilities for the negotiations and deliberations were handed over to the Council of Trade, who met at Whitehall on April 9, 1651, to deliver their verdict. The council made it clear that it was their opinion, after considering the arguments of both the company and the private traders, that the current patent was causing “*disfavor*” between the company and the “*other traders*”.<sup>269</sup> This was due to different factors operating too closely to each other on the coast. The council identified the problem as follows, “*the trade of Guinny vonting or requiring soo little a stock (...). It is soone overlayd and the market glutted and spoyled if men doe*

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Gambia River is in fact 1130km and therefore exceeds Vassall’s calculation by quite some margin.

<sup>269</sup>TNA: SP 25/65, p.247-251

*presse to one and the same port or to such places as are at a short distance from it*". This crowding of Englishmen, company representatives and privateers, clearly had a harmful effect on the trade, and had "*already produced an under – valuing and bringing downe the prices of our manufacture [and] a lesser quantity of gold to bee imported them otherwise*". The council all agreed that this was "*a harme to the trade as ought for the future be avoided.*"

It was clear to the council that such a delicate trade balance meant that a different approach should be pursued. However, this was easier said than done, for there was also a shared consensus for the need to support and protect the trade by building and maintaining fortifications. The continuously hostile geopolitical environment meant the forts were considered more important than ever. Even though Crispe had lost ownership of the building mass and plots, the shares held by Wood and Crispe's brother Samuel were still upheld, though now possibly also shared with Rowland Wilson and son, and Maurice Thomson. The forts were supported and financed through company-centered activity, which would suffer if the area was open to all English traders. Therefore, to withdraw and annul the patents completely was never seriously entertained. Furthermore, England's enemies on the coast, especially the Dutch and the Portuguese, were all based '*very neare to our factories*' the company claimed. This was indeed true, between the GC's main trading region – with their base at Fort Kormantin - with Egya and Anamabo forts nearby, and their westerly based factory at Kommenda, was the main headquarters of the Dutch at Elmina. Not far beyond Kommenda was the Dutch Fort San Sebastian. Both Elmina and Fort San Sebastian had been taken from the Portuguese less than ten years previous, as a part of the Dutch aggressively establishing and consolidating their presence on the coast. If the English were to have any chance of acquiring any African commodities, and most of all gold, they would have to be able to protect their trade. The council did recognize that this was costly, and that the cost had been carried by the Guinea Company for many years already. The company was ready to present the sum to the council, to emphasize their case: "*As it hath beene alsoe made appear(ent?) to this councell, the charge of the said company or adventurers in the first settling, and afterwards in the prosecuting and preserving that trade to the interest of this nation, hath amounted to neere a hundred thousand pounds sterling more than it hath returned to them*". Whether this statement was in fact true is doubtful, and as with most statements of costs and profits possibly inflated or deflated depending on the desired outcome, but their message was noted by the council. It was not cheap to build up foreign trade. But, as the council pointed out in their report, the adventurers had enjoyed the privileges brought by the patent as well.

The ideal solution and the suggestion which the council and passed on from Parliament was a combination of the patent and open trade. The regions that were under most pressure from the Dutch, regions which the company had invested money

in settling, was to remain under patent. The stock there was to be managed by company members who could sell on their part in the trade to whom they wished. The hope was that this would maintain the trade-balance in the company's areas on the coast, as no new traders could legally get involved unless someone decided to sell out. However, to accommodate the many private interests the patent was geographically limited. If Parliament agreed, the boundaries of the patent would shrink to twenty leagues on either side of the main two trading centers of the company, Fort Kormantine and the Sherbro river in the Sierra Leone region.<sup>270</sup> Within those limits the company could trade, 'With exclusion of all others to trade within the said limits for the tearme of fourteene yeaere'. Any further discoveries that the company did would be covered by the patent in the same fashion, but 'all the rest of the coast of Guinny on that part of Affrica to the Southward shall be left free and open to all traders.' The decision was ratified by Parliament and a new patent issued not long after.<sup>271</sup>

Thus, the Guinea Company's exclusive access to the African coast in its entirety came to an end after 33 years. Despite seeing limitations being put on their patent, from which the company would have preferred to be spared, the geographical limitations did not change the status quo for the company. Twenty leagues on either side of Fort Kormantin was ample distance to cover the known company forts and factories on the coast, stretching westerly past Kommenda as far the town of Takoradi, and eastwards past Wiamba to the moder-day capital of Accra. Further north the company held the exclusive right to the Sherbro river, though the Senegambia region fell outside of the patent limits. The content of the patent negotiations suggest that the Council of Trade expected the coast south of the Gold Coast to be the main region of interest for private traders, but the decision meant that any attempt of Vassall to reach the continental interior via the Gambia River was not supported by the state and would be subject to competition from others. Shortly after the announcement of the new charter, Vassall, like Thomson, ended his career as an interloper, and became instead a member of the GC, the two groups merging as the Council of State had suggested. What motivations did Vassall have for joining company ranks just as Parliament sanctioned the private trade he and his partners had both asked for and evidentially been a part of?

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<sup>270</sup>20 leagues = 100-110 km, within necessary distance to cover all the settled forts belonging to the company on the coast.

<sup>271</sup>"America and West Indies: August 1650," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 341-342. *British History Online*, accessed December 4, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/pp341-342>. "America and West Indies: April 1651," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 354-355. *British History Online*, accessed November 14, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/pp354-355>.

For Vassall the realization that a suggested Gambia expedition would receive no assistance nor shielding against competition may have impacted his decision to join. As will be discussed below, a voyage up the Gambia river was indeed organized shortly after his inclusion in the GC. But a look through the records of the High Court of Admiralty for the period leading up his inclusion in the company showed that bad luck had followed Vassall's ventures for a while. Vassall's many court cases underline the important fact that the fortunes of the Africa trade were unbiased in their disbursement, and bad luck was not reserved only for the trading companies. In 1649 alone, Vassall – along with partners – claimed to suffered losses of near £50,000, as a result of two failed voyages to Spanish America and Brazil. The former of included a shipment of between 250-300 slaves. Considering the enormous sums, financial insecurity may have pushed Vassall to company membership as it offered stability, cheaper trade, potentially lower personal liability, as well as risk mitigation. For private traders, including those operating on a large-scale like Vassall, the company could offer a safer – though perhaps at times less profitable – trading environment. This was ideal for periods when competition could not as easily be withstood, or when one's personal credit was deemed to be low. We know, from the work of Appleby on private slave traders in this period, that words trickled out of both court rooms and council chambers, onto the streets of the City. Losses the size experienced by Vassall, in such a short time-span, were therefore likely to be known, possibly affecting his personal credit. Lastly, it is not unlikely that seasoned interlopers like Vassall acknowledged that the new geographical limitations of the company patent would increase the competition among private traders along the African coast. From being visited by the most ardent interlopers, many of which were likely his current or former partners, the coast was now opened to everyone who could organize a voyage. As a result, the company may no longer have represented the biggest “commercial” threat on the coast, not counting the obvious physical threat from other European powers present, instead the company-controlled regions now offered a zone of potential shelter from heightened private activity and competition outside the patent parameters. These factors, paired with the knock-on effect of experienced partners, such as Thomson, deciding to join, made company membership tempting. By 1651, the company directorship - garnished with a new though somewhat limited patent - included Maurice Thomson, Rowland Wilson Jr. and Sr., John Wood, and Samuel Vassall.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>272</sup>Vassall: Andrews, *Ships, Money and Politics: Seafaring and Naval Enterprise in the Reign of Charles I*, 59–61. Andrews considered 1648 one of the last years of seeing Vassall, but from what can be seen in the sources related to the Guinea Company he was active in trade past that year.

#### 4.2. An unfortunate Gambian Adventure

As the 1650s commenced, with an end to the Civil War, a new patent and new members in the company directorship, the GC prepared a voyage to the Gambia River and Barbados in the early autumn of 1651. The expedition consisted of two ships named the *Friendship* and the *Supply*, and the pinnacle *John*. Captain John Blake was leading the venture, supported by company supercargo James Pope. The three vessels reached the Gambia in mid-November that year, and from surviving letters written by Blake we know details of the voyage outcome. As the plans for the onwards journey would suggest, the company hope to trade slaves and directed the expedition to “*buy as many lusty negroes as possible*” in their correspondence. The directors, well aware that Islam was the dominant religion in the Gambia region, asked the party to acquire “*books of the Mahomitants religion, and send us them if cheape*”.<sup>273</sup> Letter were also sent out to the company representative at Barbados, John Wood’s nephew, Francis Soane, consigning to him any slaves that were brought. Additional correspondence between Wood and his nephew relating supplies for the building of sugar barrels, indicates a shift or an expansion from the cotton trade of the early 1640s to sugar.<sup>274</sup>

The vessels spent Christmas in the River Gambia, but a month into the new year bad news arrived at the company head-quarters. Several of the company’s employees on the coast had died. From the coast Blake had sent a group inland, to look for those who remained at the company’s base at Oranto, far up-river, near the eastern border to Senegal. Once there the group leader, a Mr. Bowles, mistaking the content of a chest in the warehouse filled with gun powder for one filled gold, leant down with his pipe in his mouth and accidentally blew up the chest. With it he blew up most of himself, the warehouse, the new goods he had brought with him, and much of the surrounding village. According to Blake’s letters “*No one was hurt but himself, who was very much hurt*”.<sup>275</sup> The goods Bowles has brought with him were damaged, along with whatever goods had been stored in the warehouse. Bowles was, surprisingly, still alive after the explosion and was brought down river and aboard the ships on the coast, where he lived for two more days before he “*died a most miserable creature being almost eaten up with maggots*”.<sup>276</sup>

The moral was low enough even before the accident according to Blake, who writes “*Since our coming into the river we have been afflicted with so much sickness*

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<sup>273</sup>Historical Manuscripts Commission, *The Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Portland Preserved at Welbeck Abbey*, vol. II, Thirteenth Report, Appendix, Part II (London, 1893), 29; Gray, *A History of the Gambia*, 32.

<sup>274</sup>Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Thirteenth Report*, Vol. II, II:29.

<sup>275</sup>Historical Manuscripts Commission, II:31.

<sup>276</sup>Historical Manuscripts Commission, II:31; Gray, *A History of the Gambia*, 33.

that we have buried twenty-three men. My chief and second mate and boatswain and both my gunners mates and boatswain mate are dead.<sup>277</sup> In an enclosed letter to his wife, Blake spoke of how another of his men, a Mr. Bourton was also dead. Bourton had awoken in the night, and in the darkness reaching for a bottle of water, he instead grabbed and emptied a bottle of ink, poisoning himself. “*This is a bad place*”, Blake told his wife.<sup>278</sup>

The bad luck of the expedition was far from over, however, as not long after ships under the command of the exiled Charles II’s cousin, Prince Rupert, arrived in the river looking for English vessels. Blake and his party soon found themselves under attack.<sup>279</sup> The crew was at that point so strained by disease and death that they were unable to put up much of a fight and quickly surrendered. Supercargo James Pope was ashore at the time, and upon his return strongly reprimanded the others for surrendering. Pope’s indignation was so strong that Prince Rupert and his party offered to release and re-attack the GC vessels, giving them a chance to resist, but Blake’s crew refused the offer and ignored Pope’s complaints.<sup>280</sup> In the end some members of the crew managed to escape, however, bringing the bad news back to London, to the despair of the company directors.<sup>281</sup> This was not the first attack on the company shipping by the Cavalier fleet, as Bulstrode reported in his diary already in 1648, of the attack on company ships by the first admiral of the royalist fleet, Lord Willoughby of Parham.<sup>282</sup> The attack by Willoughby, who also held the post as governor to Barbados, cost company its cargo, valued to £20,000 belonging mainly to the Wilsons. The company now had to add to their losses.<sup>283</sup>

In addition to the prizes he took in the Gambia in 1651, Prince Rupert also picked up rumors of gold coming down the river. This gold was supposedly coming from a gold mine, “*a rock of firm gold of greate bignes*”, far up-river.<sup>284</sup> He sent out a group of men with the order of stopping any gold shipments coming down, but they met no one. The seasons were changing and Rupert, planning to cross the Atlantic, ordered departure. He did not forget the promises of gold however, initiating a return to the coast after the Restoration, with the help of his two royal cousins – King

<sup>277</sup>Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Thirteenth Report, Vol. II*, II:31.

<sup>278</sup>Historical Manuscripts Commission, II:31.

<sup>279</sup>TNA: HCA 24/111, no. 90, 155

<sup>280</sup>Gray, *A History of the Gambia*, 33–35.

<sup>281</sup>TNA: SP 18/24/1, no 60

<sup>282</sup>Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affairs from the Beginning of the Reign of Charles the First to the Happy Restoration of King Charles the Second*, vol. II, 1682 (Oxford : University Press, 1853), 375.

<sup>283</sup>“America and West Indies: June 1652,” in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1860), 379-384. *British History Online*, accessed November 16, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/pp379-384>.

<sup>284</sup>Quote taken from Gray, *A History of the Gambia*, 35.

Charles II and his brother, James the Duke of York. Attacks such as these, combined with the sequestration of the property of the outspoken Royalist Nicholas Crispe, and the involvement of Rowland Wilson junior in the war on the side of Cromwell, has led to an image of the GC as a puritan company.<sup>285</sup> Indeed Rowland Wilson Junior was famously offered one of the posts as judge in the trial against king Charles I, though he refrained from participating. However, if it was the case that the GC membership found themselves on the puritan side in the civil war conflict, it was a truth with modifications, as the remaining records instead show that the Guinea Company opted to lend £500 in support of the exiled Prince Charles in the same year as the Willoughby attack, as well as the company ships *Cromitant* and *Love*.<sup>286</sup>

### 4.3. Gold mining

Though Vassall's elaborate plans for a gradual English conquering of the gold trade never came to pass, there are indications that the company's search for gold on the coast may have been more extensive than has so far been believed. The new additions to company ranks brought innovation, which manifested itself in another attempt at mining for gold. From Whitelocke's memoirs we learn that by 1651 the company needed labour on the coast, and instead of making use of African labour, either hired or enslaved, they attempted to have it shipped from home. '*Upon the desire of the Guinea merchants, fifteen hundred of the Scots prisoners were granted to them, and sent shipboard to be transported to Guinea, to work in the mines there*', wrote Whitelocke.<sup>287</sup> His account goes on to explain how the Scottish prisoners, recently captured in battles between parliamentary and royalist forces, were loaded onto company ships and that skirmishes following their forced departure resulted in two of the prisoners going overboard and drowning. Beyond such short snippets we know little of substance about the company's mining attempts, and even less of their somewhat unorthodox choice to ship Scots to the African coast to take on the task. The Scots were possibly granted to the company free of charge which may have been the reason behind the decision, yet the shipment of rather a high number of seemingly very unwilling prisoners, with war experience no less, ill-suited for the conditions in question, cannot have been cost-free. This decision will therefore be given some attention.

It is possible that the prospective areas in question were those that had been

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<sup>285</sup>Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*; Porter, "European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667."

<sup>286</sup>Historical Manuscript Commission and E. K. (Edward Kelly) Purnell, *Report on the Pepys Manuscripts Preserved at Magdalene College, Cambridge* (London : H.M.S.O., 1911), 285.

<sup>287</sup>Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affairs from the Beginning of the Reign of Charles the First to the Happy Restoration of King Charles the Second*, 1853, III, 1682:353-54.

rumored about when Prince Rupert attacked the Gambia region in 1650/1. Ten years later, in the spring of 1660/1, company representative Colonel Vermuyden, upon direction of Rupert and the newly established company of Royal Adventurers, also returned from an expedition up the Gambia with promising tales of gold. He claimed to have gone far beyond the city of Tenda, the end point of George Thomson and Richard Jobson's expeditions in the early 1620s, believing that "*never any boat, nor any Christians, have been so high in that river, as we*".<sup>288</sup> Once there, his discoveries were so great that he exclaimed he would not disclose "*wholly and fully the vast proportions of gold I discovered there, being so much, not fit to be communicated to paper, as not knowing to whose eyes or to whose hands this may come. I shall only tell you, I was more troubled to obscure its abundance, from my fellows than to bring down what I got.*"<sup>289</sup> Vermuyden does not allude to any previous attempts at mining, nor the use of Europeans in any such project, and the truthfulness of his claims were questioned already in the early eighteenth century when expeditions based on Vermuyden's maps and diary were attempted.<sup>290</sup> Still it is possible that these were the same mines that were receiving attention in 1655. Certainly, in no other regions were the talk of gold mines so prevalent.

Such reports as that of Vermuyden, though lofty, from the regions around Tenda are interesting. Sources from Jobson's and Thomson's expeditions indicate that early GC representatives established friendly relations with the African groups they came into contact with around the Barra Kunda Falls, including in the areas around Gassan, Oranto and in Tenda.<sup>291</sup> Trade to the region had been maintained up until the time of the shipment of the Scots. If friendly relations had been maintained however, why did the company not opt for the use of local African labour for excavation and extraction? It may have been unpopular or impossible to acquire local labour to take on the task. This may have especially been the case in the difficult developing phase, regardless of whether the potential resources required surface mining or more labour intensive sub-surface extraction. It is therefore possible that no African workers were interested in taking on the task, and that the company was, for one reason or another, unable to find slave labour to undertake the work. The only alternative available

<sup>288</sup>Quote collected from Gray, *A History of the Gambia*, 72–73.

<sup>289</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>290</sup>Francis Moore, Bartholomew Stibbs, and Africanus Leo, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa: Containing a Description of the Several Nations for the Space of Six Hundred Miles up the River Gambia; Their Trade, Habits, Customs, Language, Manners, Religion and Government; the Power, Disposition and Characters of Some Negro Princes; with a Particular Account of Job Ben Solomon. To Which Is Added, Capt. Stibbs's Voyage up the Gambia in the Year 1723, to Make Discoveries; with an Accurate Map of That River Taken on the Spot: And Many Other Copper Plates. Also Extracts from the Nubian's Geography, Leo the African, and Other Authors Antient and Modern, Concerning the Niger, Nile, or Gambia, and Observations Thereon* (London, 1738), 284.

<sup>291</sup>See chapter 1

to the company was the costly project of shipping what appears from Whitelock's accounts to have been very unwilling prisoners from England to the African coast, and potentially organizing the difficult and dangerous task of bringing them further inland. An alternative explanation may be found in the need to maintain secrecy, a key factor as pointed out in Vermuyden's report, which may have been more easily achieved with the use of newly introduced Scots, men without networks and with a low likelihood of escaping or ever returning home to tell their tales. This does not however fully explain why the company did not simply decide to purchase or acquire labour elsewhere on the coast and introducing it into the region. Lastly, it cannot be excluded that the Scots in question had mining experience, though Whitelock makes no mention any such background among the prisoners. It appears that the attempt was not something to be replicated, and hindsight tells us the company's future would not be in gold mining, unless its members did an exceptional job of hiding such projects and profits. Furthermore, we know little about the outcome of the project for the Scots in question, though the lack of success the company experienced can most likely be extended to include their fates as well.

Illustration 13:  
Bulstrode Whitelocke (1605-1675)



By William Hutchinson, ca. 1650.

Source: WoA 2726, Palace of Westminster Collection, London, UK

The mines brought no lasting success, and by 1656 the company was having trouble with the growing slave trade. The new amalgamated company, despite being controlled by former interlopers, seemed unable to do much about the issue. The only solution that had ever really been effective in quelling competition up to that point had been merges with competing groups and the inclusion of strong competitors into the company fold. That approach would not help the company this time with its limited charter, as the trade outside the geographical boundaries was legal and free. Instead the company opted for a new solution: to hand the charter over to another company.

Returning to the minutes from the meeting of the First Court of Committees of the East India Company for the New General Stock, held on the eighteenth of December 1657, it was told that the Governor “...reports that he has treated with the Guinea Company for the interest in that trade and the Fort Kormantine, and has induced them to assign their charter and trade to this Company for 1,300l. for the rest of their time, which is about seven and a half years, with their interest in the said fort.”<sup>292</sup> What the exact role of Thomson was in the GC at that point is unclear. Samuel Vassall was given the governor title shortly after the merger in 1651, but Thomson was still a company member and likely in a strategic position with his strong ties to the company leadership. He had been increasing his influence in the EIC throughout the 1650s as well, and upon being elected governor of the company in 1657, he was the ideal man to take on the negotiation of a smooth transition of the Africa patent into EIC management. His double role, in combination with the inclusion of GC members such as John Wood in the EIC’s activities, may go some way in providing the explanation for why the charter and trade, which had been invested in so extensively by Nicholas Crispe and other traders in the preceding decades, was handed over for the relatively small sum of £1,300 per year.<sup>293</sup>

### 5. 1657 to 1663/4 The United East India and Guinea Company on the Coast of Africa.

In the correspondence between the EIC directors and the Guinea coast in this period we see the appearance of several of London’s most notable traders, such as William Williams, Andrew Riccard, Samuel Moyer, William Pennoyer and Martin Noell.<sup>294</sup> In the early correspondence, Samuel Vassall signs of alongside governor

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<sup>292</sup>Sainsbury and Foster, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc., of the East India Company, 1655-1659*, 199.

<sup>293</sup>Porter, “European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667,” 271-77, 320-22, 352-56.

<sup>294</sup>Makepeace, “English Traders on the Guinea Coast, 1657-1668: An Analysis of the East India Company Archive.”

Thomson and deputy governor Thomas Andrewes, but as the company gets closer to reaching an agreement Vassall's name disappears from the records.

In the end, the plans for settlement of Assada amounted to little. Despite the drawn-out negotiations, the plan was scrapped after unsuccessful attempts at settlement, and once the commodity trade via the Africa coast got under way attention was instead focused there. In the years spent by the EIC on the coast, from January 1658 to December 1663 a total of 15 vessels carried gold worth ca. £133,500 from the company's trading posts at Fort Kormantine, Cape Coast and Winneba, to the company's factories in India and Bantam.<sup>295</sup> This allowed for the avoidance of the expensive and unpopular tradition of exporting the bullion necessary in the trade for cargo shipped from the East. In addition to gold the company also shipped ivory.<sup>296</sup> The trade in ivory did remain of lesser importance however, but the negotiations with the Royal Adventurers in the fall of 1662 included the continued trade in ivory for the company's factories in India. The third commodity exported by the EIC from Guinea was slaves, a point that will be further discussed below.<sup>297</sup>

In return for these commodities the company offered a variety of manufactured goods, both from within and outside the domestic market. Textiles were, unsurprisingly, the main commodity, both Indian and European. In addition, came Indian cowry shells, used as currency; and brandy, used both in gift giving and for customs payments. In addition to English cloth, linens - traded by company agents from Germany via Hamburg, represented a large part of the European textiles. The Indian textiles traded by the company were shipped via England, where they were re-exported, and totaled about 1/3 of the manufactured goods shipped to Guinea. The benefit of shipping straight to the Guinean coast, considering the popularity of Indian textiles at the company's trading post at Kormantine, was pointed out by chief factor James Congett. A voyage could easily be arranged from Kormantine to St. Helena and back, thus circumventing England and the duties charged. The idea was not adopted by the company in the end and it instead continued shipping via England.<sup>298</sup>

A final trade, which caused issues between Kormantine and London, was that of weapons. To the factors, as well as to some of the local African leaders on the coast, the trade in guns was risky, causing further instability in already volatile intra-African relations. Congett voiced his concerns on the topic to his superiors,

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<sup>295</sup>Makepeace, 238; Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720*, 23.

<sup>296</sup>According to Makepeace the trade in Guinean ivory was second to that of Mozambique and Achin, as it was considered to be drier and more brittle.

<sup>297</sup>Makepeace, "English Traders on the Guinea Coast, 1657-1668: An Analysis of the East India Company Archive," pt. introduction, p.238; Porter, "European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667," chap. VII, part VI.

<sup>298</sup>Makepeace, "English Traders on the Guinea Coast, 1657-1668: An Analysis of the East India Company Archive," 240.

but was ignored, as they considered the trade in guns to be thriving regardless, due to the lacking ability of the company factors to sufficiently quell illegal trade. This was not an incorrect observation. The trade in guns, if we are to believe Robert Porter, had started with illegal traders looking for commodities that could compete with that of the company. The problem of illegal traders was discussed throughout the correspondence between London and Kormantine, and the company directors were adamant in keeping the trade to themselves. The main problem brought by the interlopers was underselling, the painful tactic discussed in chapter 1, and used by both the Dutch and the English against one another since the early days of European establishment on the coast. The only solution was to decrease prices to competitive levels in a race to the bottom. It should be mentioned however that the arrival of the EIC on the coast, during the less hostile inter-war period of Anglo-Dutch relations, had annoyed the Dutch WIC traders for the very same reason, as the monsoon cycle meant sudden departures of the East Indiamen for the Indies, thus forcing them to dump their goods and ruining the agreed upon price balance upheld by Europeans on the coast for their mutual benefit.<sup>299</sup>

However, the trade in slaves remained miniscule. The company had plans of shipping slaves to their factories but, according to Makepeace's estimates, only a total of 35 was ever shipped: 10 were sent for St Helena, 10 for Pulo Run, and 15 for Bantam. No factor was allowed to participate or involve the company in shipping slaves for the West Indies. In a letter dated the fourteenth of September 1660, the factor, Roger Chappell, was instructed by the directors as follows: "*And we doe also forbid you, and all English with you, to forebear the buying & selling of any Negroes, as hath been formerly practiced, by some of our Factors (- in private) to our greate prejudize, And in all things to study the Glory of God, and the service of this company.*"<sup>300</sup>

Among the signatures we find Maurice Thomson, but also governor Andrew Riccard, Thomas Kendall and George Smith, all of whom were men with interests in the West Indies, either as Atlantic traders and plantation owners, or as Africa company investors. Thomson owned plantations on Barbados and traded his first slaves there in 1626.<sup>301</sup> Riccard and Kendall were active petitioners on matters pertaining to Barbados in Parliament.<sup>302</sup> George Smith went on to join the Royal Adventurers into

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<sup>299</sup>Porter, "European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667," 420, 423.

<sup>300</sup>British Library: IOR - E.3.85, Letter to Roger Chappell, 14.09.1660, p.330

<sup>301</sup>Farnell, "The Navigation Act of 1651, the First Dutch War, and the London Merchant Community," 443.

<sup>302</sup> "America and West Indies: March 1661," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 5, 1661-1668*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1880), 14-21. *British History Online*, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol5/pp14-21>. "America and West Indies: December 1666," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 5, 1661-1668*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London:

Africa, the first large-scale English slave trading corporation, only three years after this, alongside Riccard.<sup>303</sup> Why were these men so against getting the EIC involved with any slave trading to the West Indies? Previous historical research does not present answers. Makepeace makes no major point out of it, stating it as a fact in passing, and Porter claims it was a question of moral. That appears unlikely at best, considering that the men managing both the EIC and the GC had been, and remained, involved in slave trading on a large scale.<sup>304</sup> It has been argued by Elizabeth Donnan, that the West Indies was not the EIC's primary target.<sup>305</sup> Yet, for a company led by so many men with multipronged interests in maritime trade, especially after the 1657 merger, this seems to be an inadequate explanation. For the company directorship, headed as it was by ship owning men who had been active interlopers usurping the Guinea Company charter for years before acquiring it for themselves, and some of which had extensive, even familial, interests in the Caribbean, in addition to having pioneered some of the very first English slaving voyages as much as 30 years before, it seems uncharacteristic of the to be passing up such ventures. It therefore more likely that these men continued investing in the slave trade through other channels, though this forces the question of why they were so adamant not to do it under the EIC banner.

I suggest that two events which took place in the 1650s strongly impacted the decisions of the EIC to lease the Guinea Company patent but to steer clear of the trade in slaves. The first of these was the renegotiations in 1651. The outcome of the negotiations between the Guinea Company management, at the time fronted by the Wilsons, Wood and Thomson, resulted in a gross diminishing of the patent's geographical scope. This meant a change in the trade of Englishmen in the region. The post-1651 charter divided up the coast, as seen above, between stretches close to the company's trading centers at Fort Kormantine and around the Sherboro River. A stretch of near 100 km on either side of each hub was reserved for trade under company patent. The remainder of the coast was open to everyone wishing to trade. As had been pointed out in the past and would be argued again in the debates of deregulation – the trade on the African coast was simply not large enough to allow for too many traders at once. As was stated during the negotiations: the trade to Guinea was “*soone overlayd and the market glutted and spoyled if men doe presse to*

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Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1880), 428-437. *British History Online*, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol5/pp428-437>.

303 Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, XXVIII:177-81.

304 Farnell, “The Navigation Act of 1651, the First Dutch War, and the London Merchant Community,” 443; John C. Appleby, “Vassall, Samuel,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed May 31, 2017. Porter, “European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667,” 432; Makepeace, “English Traders on the Guinea Coast, 1657-1668: An Analysis of the East India Company Archive,” 239.

305 Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, Vol. I, 1441-1700:83.

one and the same port...”<sup>306</sup> I argue, however, that not only did such a geographical divide mean a far more difficult trade for the GC, it meant a de-facto division of the coast according to commodity. The slave trade, which increasingly (though not exclusively) took place in regions further east, south and north - in the Bight of Biafra and in the Senegambia river, now fell outside the region covered by the patent and was as a result open to all English traders. Gold, ivory, redwood, wax, hides and gum – although accessible on other stretches of coast, was traded actively within the geographical limits of the company patent. Indeed, the trade in redwood and ivory had made the Sierra Leone region the first choice for John Davies in the 1620’s and from Dutch sources we know that the company had remained active in the area.<sup>307</sup> This divide is exemplified in an Admiralty Court case heard shortly after the patent was issued, in which the owners of a private English vessel sent for the coast of Guinea for slave trade “*where the trade in negroes is fittest*”, took the captain and crew to court for having sailed to the Gold Coast to trade for gold and ivory on their own account instead.<sup>308</sup> As seen in Table 1, the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, though not providing complete numbers of this very early trade - for one it has no English voyages recorded at all between 1600 and 1640 - does suggest a general trend of English slave trading east of the company settlements on the Gold Coast, referred to in the dataset as “Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea Islands”. Though we do not know the origin or destination of the voyages referred to as “Other Africa”, little known activity is recorded in the company’s areas of influence – Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast.

Table 1  
Destination of early recorded English slave trading voyages

Region and year	Senegambia and offshore Atlantic	Sierra Leone	Gold Coast	Bight of Benin	Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea Islands	Other Africa	Total
1641-1650	6	1	2	0	31	7	47
1651-1660	2	0	0	1	11	14	30
<b>Total</b>	8	1	2	1	42	21	77

Source: Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, <http://slavevoyages.org>. Accessed: 30.08.2017.

<sup>306</sup>TNA: SP 25/65, p.247

<sup>307</sup>Adam Jones, ed., *West Africa in the Mid-Seventeenth Century: An Anonymous Dutch Manuscript*, African Historical Sources ; No. 10 066870577 (Atlanta: African Studies Association Press, 1995), 6, 21.

<sup>308</sup>TNA: HCA 24/111, no. 118

I suggest that the EIC/GC members who pushed for the EIC to take over the GC charter, was motivated by hopes of mitigating the competition they faced. They saw the leasing of the charter as a good opportunity to protect their African *commodity* trade from increased competition and a more challenging market reality that would inevitably follow the patent restriction. The EIC was a strong competitor against the smaller private consortiums now frequenting the coast. It was a large organization, with highly developed administration for managing large-scale logistics and frequent voyages; with the GC patent it took over favorably located trading hubs; and already had experience in carrying several of the most favored commodities by the African states on the coast. The EIC was a greater challenger to, not only, English interlopers, but to European rivals as well. Though the membership between the two overlapped, the GC had recently suffered extensive losses at the hands of Prince Rupert and Lord Willoughby and was still saddled with debt which the commonwealth administration claimed to be owed by Nicholas Crispe.<sup>309</sup> Thus, trade done by the EIC would have a higher chance of success and profit than a trade organized by the same men in their capacity as members of the GC. Where the EIC was a major importer of many of the commodities needed, the GC had to acquire the same products on the European market before shipping their cargo down to the African coast. Furthermore, the EIC had well-developed networks throughout Europe for acquiring any additional goods desired, such as European textiles, weapons and iron.<sup>310</sup> The demand for Indian textiles and products on the African Coast, and the desire in India for African gold and ivory, allowed for the EIC to vertically integrate large parts of their transaction costs in ways the GC could not.

While the EIC traded in African commodities, staying conspicuously away from any trade in slaves, it is highly likely that individual members with a past in the Atlantic and the slave trade continued to carry on their trade privately. I argue that the second event triggering the EIC take-over of the GC patent was the annexation of the island of Jamaica after the long and drawn-out military campaign against Spanish settlers stretching from 1655-1657. Considering the Atlantic experience shared between men such as Thomson, Wood and Vassall, and partners like Thomas Andrewes, Samuel Moyer and Martin Noell, it is unlikely that they had not registered the imminent rise in the demand for labour. Martin Noell, among others, was actively involved in governmental plans for planting the new colony, as we shall see in the next chapter. Jamaica was over twenty-five times larger than Barbados, and once the process of settling the islands got underway, the need for labour would be pressing.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>309</sup>TNA: SP 16/540, no. 365

<sup>310</sup>The EIC correspondence books are full of directions to their European representatives for acquiring the desired goods. Much of the correspondence was directed at company agents based in Hamburg and Amsterdam.

<sup>311</sup>Jamaica: 10,991 km<sup>2</sup>, Barbados: 431 km<sup>2</sup>.

Adding to this, the shipping of indentured servants from Europe was dropping.<sup>312</sup> This was certainly felt by Noell, a known trader in indentured servants, who now increasingly turned to slave trade.

The combination of these factors, the new patent boundaries, and the 1655 annexation of Jamaica, needs to be paired with the temporal projections of the 1651 patent. It was to be valid for a total of fourteen years, coming up for renegotiation only in 1665, and this spelled poor timing for the GC. Considering their circumstances, John Wood must have seen that the odds were stacked against the company ever regaining the same level of control on the coast. If the slave trade to the existing colonial territories continued to grow, supplemented by the demand that was sure to arise in Jamaica, it would be well established as an open trade by the time the GC could, in theory, try to negotiate any further privileges or a return to the patent of the past. That was of course dependent on the company's continued existence, struggling as it was after Rupert's attack and the contraction of their area of privilege – and the resulting increase in competition. If a free and flourishing slave trade had been established by 1665, which must have appeared a strong possibility, it was highly unlikely for any government to again grant exclusivity to the GC, or any company, in a manner similar to what they had enjoyed in the past. In 1657 it must have appeared very unlikely for GC to return to the favorable status it had enjoyed up to that point. Not only had the parameters of the English Africa trade been shifted, the Atlantic itself was changing.

However, no one foresaw what was soon to come as by the end of 1659 it was increasingly clear that the Guinea charter would become a topic of debate once more. This time it was not private traders, European competition or underselling that was causing problems, it was the returning royal family.

## 6. Out of Africa: The loss of the trade

The year 1660 was a watershed in English history, as well as in the history of the East India Company and its endeavors on the coast of Guinea. Neither Makepeace, nor Porter, make much of a point of the eventual eviction of the EIC from the coast, although they do mention it in passing. Still, the sources suggest the EIC worked hard to find a solution that would allow them to stay on the coast.

With the return of the Stuarts to power, any concession or decision made by

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<sup>312</sup>David W. Galenson, "The Rise and Fall of Indentured Servitude in the Americas: An Economic Analysis," *The Journal of Economic History* 44, no. 1 (1984): 1–26; Abigail L. Swingen, "Chapter 4: Labor, Empire and the State: The English Imperial Experience in the Seventeenth Century," in *The World of Colonial America: An Atlantic Handbook*, ed. Ignacio Gallup-Díaz (New York: Routledge, 2017).

Oliver Cromwell became uncertain, and this included the decisions made in 1651 of extending the Guinea charter by 14 years. The historiography differs on the effects of the changes brought by the Restoration to the Guinea trade, but the essence of the EIC's problem was that the Guinea patent had always remained separate and outside of the limits of their own eastern patent. They had leased it, but the two patents had never truly merged, and as a result they followed different timelines. The patent granted to the GC by the Commonwealth, stretching for fourteen years – or up to 1665, was now considered null and void. Instead the Restoration authorities considered the timeline of the former charter, that which had been granted in 1631 for 31 years, to still be valid. This shift meant a shorter patent period, to 1662 only, and a moving up of the renewal process, decreasing the time the EIC could remain on the coast from seven years to four. It also meant that Sir Nicholas Crispe, who had received the original 1631 patent, now had a claim to the trade again according to what was, in the eyes of the Stuart king, the only valid agreement. The chances of the Court granting Guinea trading rights to the EIC over the faithful and ill-treated royalist Crispe, were slim at best.<sup>313</sup>

Whatever were the exact perceptions of the charter-rights, this was not popular news in the EIC Court of Directors in 1660, led at that point by Andrew Riccard.<sup>314</sup> Discussions of what should be done followed. One possibility was to attempt to get the Guinea trade fully included and absorbed into the EIC patent which was due to be up for renegotiation and renewal already by 1661. The outcome of which the company men felt more certain. It quickly became clear, however, that the king's brother James, the Duke of York, had also set his sights on the trade to Africa, gold and slaves were his main motives. After learning of the re-legitimization of Crispe's claim, this was worse news still. Despite the poor odds the company made an attempt, and handed in a suggestion for a new Eastern charter in October 1660, where the Guinea trade remained included. In a petition from the EIC to the King dated in October 1660<sup>315</sup>, under the sub-title "*Of additional powers and privileges desired by the company*" the company asks, "*That the limits of the Company's trade, formerly confined 'to all parts from beyond the Cape Bone Sperance (i.e. Cape of Good Hope) to the Straights of Magellan' may be extended 'from Cape de Tres Puntas (i.e. Cape Three Points, Ghana) to Accara on the coast of Affrica'*".<sup>316</sup>

The exact date for this petition is not clear but can be limited to the very

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<sup>313</sup>Ethel Bruce Sainsbury and William Foster, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc., of the East India Company, 1660-1663* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1922), VIII.

<sup>314</sup>Riccard had been and would remain an active trader in the Atlantic, signing petitions as a planter and trader of Barbados, as noted above.

<sup>315</sup>TNA: CO 77/8, no.78. Sainsbury and Foster, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc., of the East India Company, 1660-1663*, 30, 199.

<sup>316</sup>TNA: CO 77/8, no. 80. Sainsbury and Foster, 38. Letter signed by governor Andrew Riccard,

beginning of the month of October 1660, and by the 8<sup>th</sup> of the same month the company's court minutes reveal that others had been in front of the king also enquiring for the rights to trade to Guinea, and the company "*may expect some opposition*". Nicholas Crispe was mentioned by name. The company had little other choice than to attempt to find ways of accommodating the desires of Crispe and others interested, in ways that were as favorable to the company as possible. They hoped again for a merger.<sup>317</sup>

By November still nothing had been decided, but the Court of Directors commented that "*The Court (is) understanding that some are applying to the King for a patent 'to include all of Africa', which if granted would be of great disadvantage to the company,...*".<sup>318</sup> Over Christmas nothing was settled, yet some of the members of the old Guinea Company still made a claim for the annual amount of £1,300 for the rights to their charter, though the company held off on paying until the dispute for trading rights had been solved. The answer came on the February 3, 1660/1, in a report made by Sir Geoffrey Palmer. The short report gives a simple answer: "*Power to enlarge the limits of their trade from Cape de Tres Puntas to Accara in Africa cannot be granted because of the late patent to the Royal African Adventurers, which includes those bounds*".<sup>319</sup> The king had granted his brother rights of trade, again including the entire West African coast and soon also the slave trade, and any chance of including the trade to Guinea into the boundary of their own charter was effectively gone. The next possible solution was to contact the Duke of York and his Royal Adventurers hoping to find a means of cooperation.<sup>320</sup>

On the April 3, 1661 the EIC were granted a renewal of their eastern patent by the king, although without any rights to the Guinea trade. Sir Andrew Riccard was the first Governor after the renewal, and among his 24 "committees" we still find some of the same traders, including Maurice Thomson, and his close associates and long-term trading partners James Drax, Thomas Kendall and Samuel Moyer, as well as his brother Sir William Thomson.<sup>321</sup> For more than a year the EIC kept sending ships to the coast of Guinea in an overlapping and somewhat confusing attempt at co-existence with the Royal Adventurers. This, unsurprisingly, caused problems, one example was an incident where, in October 1661, the EIC was blamed for attacks on the Gambian coast, forcing the company to proclaim their innocence. The guilty culprit was in fact Captain Robert Holmes and his fleet, sent out by the

<sup>317</sup>Sainsbury and Foster, 42.

<sup>318</sup>Sainsbury and Foster, 49.

<sup>319</sup>TNA: CO 77/8, no. 109, no. 79 (copy). Sainsbury and Foster, 88.

<sup>320</sup>Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, XXVIII:172–76. Patent was granted on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1660.

<sup>321</sup>Sainsbury and Foster, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc., of the East India Company, 1660-1663*, 104–7.

Royal Adventurers.<sup>322</sup> But, by September 3, 1662, the company sent over proposals to the Duke of York and his Royal Adventurers that dealt directly with Fort Kormantine and the trade from there. The company asked to be allowed to stay on the coast for the remainder of their time, just over two more years, under the royal protection of the Duke. If allowed this, they retained the responsibility for wages for staff and settlements they had been running (Kormantine, Cape Coast Castle near Accra, and Winneba) since they took over the charter, and thus maintaining them as centers for their trade. The company was also willing to supply the Royal Adventurers with goods to help facilitate their trade there, in exchange for bills of exchange. In the document several arguments were made for a splitting up of the African trade into slaves for the Royal Adventurers and gold and ivory for the EIC, following the same lines as after the 1651 patent negotiation. The ideal solution, according to the EIC, would be if the EIC purchased any gold the Royal Adventurers procured from their trading posts, and the Royal Adventurers' factors refrained from involving themselves in the gold trade at EIC hubs Kormantine, Cape Coast or Winneba. In addition, the EIC would purchase about 15-20 tons of ivory yearly from the Royal Adventurers, for export to the east, claiming the English market could only absorb about half that amount without a significant price drop. It was a badly disguised attempt at marrying the two trades, leaving to the RA what the private traders had previously enjoyed, while upholding status quo for the EIC. Perhaps they hoped that a two-year trial would prove enough for the Royal Adventurers to accept the division on a permanent basis. At the end of the proposal the company asked that, in the event these proposals not be to the liking of the Duke, that they be allowed until next the midsummer, 1663, to dispose of their commodities and send off their servants. At that point they would be ready to surrender the forts to whomever the Duke or Nicholas Crispe chose to appoint. Lastly, to prevent any suspicion of ulterior motives EIC directors "*assure the Duke that, if it were not for his service and the good of the nation, the continuance or relinquishing of the said trade is a matter of indifference to them.*"<sup>323</sup>

The response from the Royal Adventurers was read and discussed in the Court of Directors during the month of October. Initially the Royal Adventurers were not opposed to a division of trades, and was willing to allow the EIC their trade in Guinea until the December 25, 1664, if the terms could be agreed upon. But in the opinion of the EIC they asked too much, and the result is clear from the court minutes: "*Meanwhile, after serious debate, it is resolved by vote to withdraw all the Company's remaining estate from Guinea by the 25<sup>th</sup> of March next and send no more there...*" Some of the committee members are given the responsibility of

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<sup>322</sup>Sainsbury and Foster, 139; Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa*, 1919, 10,30.

<sup>323</sup>Sainsbury and Foster, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc., of the East India Company, 1660-1663*, 250-51. 1

informing the Royal Adventurers of the decision. Without knowing the full content of the reply to from the Duke and his company it is hard to do much more than speculate about the proposal, but what is clear is that the midsummer departure the company had asked for initially, was instead set for March 25.<sup>324</sup>

On October 16, 1662, an official agreement was drawn up for the exit of the EIC from the coast. The EIC was to have the time until the 25<sup>th</sup> of March next to dispose of as much of their goods as possible before leaving the coast. They would also be permitted to keep two factors on the coast for one more year charged with selling any leftover goods at a charge of 10% to the Royal Adventurers. Further, “*all English soldiers on that Coast belonging to the East India Company and in their pay are, from the said 25<sup>th</sup> of March, to enter the pay and services of the Royal Company, (...)*”.<sup>325</sup>

The plans for keeping the Guinea trade in the hands of the EIC had failed. Yet, a closer look at the two patents granted to the Royal Adventurers into Africa in December 1660 and in January 1663 shows an interesting development. The membership from one patent to the next undergoes a shift from being typically aristocratic-, to having a far more mercantile character. The number of people receiving the patent doubles from 33 to 66 members, and among the new names appearing we find several of the EIC men involved in the negotiations in the fall of 1662. This includes Martin Noell (and along with three family members), George Smith, William Ryder, John Bence, James Congett, Richard Ford, John Wolstenholme, Edward Backwell, John Jacob, John Harrison as well as EIC Governor Andrew Riccard. The patent conjoining the two spheres of trade had come to an end, and instead the commodity chains were maintained by the merchants in their private capacity, much in the same way it had been before.<sup>326</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

The potential of trade between Guinea and the East was seen 10 years before the initial steps were taken to combine the two regions, and this only took place when the right persons were in positions of control. The initiative came from traders who were experienced in both spheres, and who were, at that point, sufficiently influential within both companies to push the lease through. The change in the two companies' operations largely stemmed from groups outside the companies, who held substantial private interests in both the Indies and the Atlantic, and who still

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324 Sainsbury and Foster, 259. 9

325 Sainsbury and Foster, 338–39. The final agreement was signed Sept 17th, 1663.

326 Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, XXVIII:172–81.

managed to reach positions that gave them the necessary decision-making power to achieve their goals. This can be seen in the overlap in membership among the most influential traders covering all three trading organizations.

The motivation was partly to merge the two trades, but also to make the most out of the results of the charter negotiations of 1651. With the EIC holding the GC charter the traders, members of both, were in a far stronger position to compete with the increasing presence of private traders on the coast than they would have been trading as the GC. The GC, in addition to struggling after attacks and failed mining attempts, did not have the same privileged access to desired Indian goods, and the company was in an overall far weaker state than the EIC.

The decision, from the perspective of the EIC, made logistical sense, especially in combination with the growing hostility towards exporting bullion. Administrative plans to minimize such practices were also being discussed. By the time the EIC lost the Guinea patent the trade had been well established and the EIC was not indifferent to the loss.

The slave trade was not included in company operations. This fits poorly with the evident record of several of the prominent traders for involvement in slave trade to the Atlantic. Therefore, it is timely to ask why slave trading EIC members did not want that trade to become included in the company's activity. It is of course possible that involvement in the trade was not tempting from a company perspective, but the men in charge had already established trade in slaves, and the links to the West Indies would suggest a desire to continue to do so. It is therefore suggested here that the geographical limitations to the GC charter in 1651 acted as a nominal division between slaves and African commodities, where the commodity trade took place in the old GC trading hubs (though not exclusively) now under EIC control, while the slave trade grew further east and south along the West African coast.

The renegotiated patent was limited to fourteen years, but this was still plenty of time for the already rapidly growing slave trade to establish itself as an open trade. It must have appeared highly unlikely that the slave trade would ever be placed under patent after this. The chances of this must have seemed smaller still with the annexation of Jamaica in 1655-57, and it is possible that the granting of the GC patent for the EIC was an acknowledgement of this fact and a step towards cornering the African *commodity* market, protecting it from becoming collateral damage in the free slave trade, in which they continued their involvement in privately. The slave trade could handle higher level of activity, than could the African commodity trade, as it spread itself further along the coast, and returned silver profits from the Spanish Americas.

It was not, however, foreseen that the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy would lead to the granting of such an extensive patent to a new royal company. When the slave trade was officially placed under charter, and the simultaneous ousting of

the EIC from the coast was complete, several of the top EIC members opt for joining the RA from 1663 when the slave trade was officially included, indicating that they were privately trading in slaves and wish to continue their practice as members of the RA. As a result, the RA underwent a shift from a more aristocratic venture in 1660 to a mercantile operation after the new patent, including slave trade, was granted in 1663.

## CHAPTER 4:

# THE OFFICIAL PUSH TO THE WEST: HOW TO CONTROL THE ATLANTIC?

### 1. Introduction

The middle of the century marked the beginning of a fundamental shift in the Anglo-Africa trade. After leasing its charter to the EIC, the Guinea Company's rights to the coast came to an end with the Restoration. The inclusion of the West African coast into EIC operation had for a time allowed a connected trade between Guinea and the Indian Ocean, but despite the EIC's attempts at maintaining their presence on the African coast, the Restoration put an end to their time there. The Restoration also put an end to the private trade that had been allowed on the coast after the Guinea Company's charter renegotiations in 1651, and the rising private slave trade that followed. By the early 1660s English trade on the African coast was directed out into the Atlantic and becoming officially linked to the English colonial possessions in the West Indies. The growth of private slave trade went back several decades and has been discussed above, but only in 1663 did the English state take control of the slave trade, placing it under patent. The right to trade slaves to English colonies was granted to one company alone, the Guinea Company's successor, the Royal Adventurers into Africa.

This chapter will explore to what extent certain Africa company members impacted the shifting approach to imperial management and control that developed in the middle of the seventeenth century, and to what extent and in what way they themselves, along with the company, were impacted by these changes. Certain merchants who had already established a multifaceted business in the Atlantic (some, as we have seen, also extending their activity into the Indian Ocean), and became important members of the Africa Company, started exerting strong influence on the developing state management of the English overseas territories that commenced in the middle of the century.<sup>327</sup> Such a change in the state's involvement in colonial control

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<sup>327</sup> Abigail L. Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Charles McLean Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1908); Ian Kenneth

inevitably changed the reality also for the African companies. The rapid growth of Atlantic trade from then on, especially the inhumane and gruesome trade in enslaved humans as labour, often obscures the fact that the format of the Atlantic exchange was a long-term development, which – as with so many of the Africa company practices, had been developed and attempted privately before being introduced to a company format. Official trade in slaves under patent was not an inevitable outcome of this development, in fact it was a challenging maneuver where control and suppression of an already flourishing private slave trade was needed. The official inclusion of slave trade in the company patent only took place in 1663, but by looking at some of the main instigators and their Atlantic backgrounds and motivations, I suggest that several of the factors emerged already during the Interregnum and before.

I identify four main driving factors behind the push of official Anglo-Africa trade into the Atlantic. Firstly, a favorable position of the Africa trade after the return of the Stuart family in 1660, due to the royal family's personal interest and involvement, made the trade a high priority and the company enjoyed much support. Secondly, the middle of the century presented a drop in the availability of indentured labour (despite a temporary increase due to the prisoners produced by the war settlement in 1649).<sup>328</sup> This drop in the availability of contractual labour occurred simultaneously with the two final factors: an increase in territories controlled by England – most notably with the annexation of Jamaica, and the potential for participation in the labour supply of the largest and most desirable market for labour in the Atlantic – that of the Spanish Empire.

Like the merchants that have been introduced in the previous chapters, the trio that is brought to the forefront here contributed in their own way to a favorable development of the trade for its companies. Maurice Thomson has been introduced already and this chapter will devote attention to Thomson's past business ventures in the Atlantic, comparing them with the format of the slave trade following its inclusion in the RA's company patent. In addition to Thomson, his associate, fellow company member, and influential administrator Martin Noell, also featured at the center of events in the middle of the century. Noell appears alongside his close friend, partner and collaborator Thomas Povey. Together the two exerted much influence on the way England came to manage its colonies and their markets, and later, as members of metropolitan boards of colonial management, they took part in the appointment of a number of colonial governors that were sent from London with the task of making sure the new colonial policies were adhered to. Among these colonial policies were

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Steele, *Politics of Colonial Policy: The Board of Trade in Colonial Administration 1696-1720* (Clarendon Press, 1968); Farnell, "The Navigation Act of 1651, the First Dutch War, and the London Merchant Community."

<sup>328</sup>Galenson, "The Rise and Fall of Indentured Servitude in the Americas"; David W. Galenson, "White Servitude and the Growth of Black Slavery in Colonial America," *The Journal of Economic History* 41, no. 1 (1981): 39–47.

the inclusion of slave trade under patent only, bans of trade with foreign states and their representatives, and the repayment of colonial debts. The problematic colonial debtor/metropolitan creditor relationship was especially relevant for the RA and the RAC in relation to their responsibilities in the slave trade. Not only did the slave trade monopoly require careful monitoring and support on the spot to be upheld, the slave trade to the English colonies was fueled almost entirely by the extension of credit, and the Africa companies quickly experienced problems with the collection of money owed by planters. The problem was not new, planters had relied, and suffered from their reliance, on merchant-credit extended by Atlantic traders since the first settling in the colonies.<sup>329</sup>

These merchants had in common an extensive commercial experience from the colonies and the West African coast, a diverse portfolio of largely overseas –but also domestic commercial ventures, and for several of them – a familial presence in the colonies and plantation ownership. In addition, they nursed close links to state officials, developing and serving on advisory boards and assisting in the development of colonial and trade policy. They are familiar in the context of English Atlantic history, though less so for their impact on the Anglo-Africa trade.<sup>330</sup> In addition to Noell, Povey and Thomson other influential men can also be counted as part of this process, although not as much attention will be paid to them here, such as Andrew Riccard, John Colleton, and post-1660 - a re-appearing Nicholas Crispe. In 1663, as the Company of Royal Adventurers into Africa was granted the exclusive right to trade slaves in the English Atlantic, all but Thomson opted for company membership. Noell and Povey maintained influence through both the Interregnum and the Restoration period, thus contributing to a continuation of imperial policy trends through the political transitions in 1660. It is argued here that the combination of gradually stricter and more direct administrative control over the colonies and diminishing foreign competition as a result of the Navigation Acts - launched during the Interregnum and continued during the Restoration, and the decision in 1663 to place the entire English slave trade in the hands of the RA meant that these men, as members of the company, could enjoy a position which in practice was similar in shape to the Atlantic trade they had privately prospered from in the earlier decades of the century. Due to the contributions of these men the previously open slave trade

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<sup>329</sup>Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775*, 272–81.

<sup>330</sup>Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*; Edward Hughes, *Studies in Administration and Finance 1558-1825: With Special Reference to the History of Salt Taxation in England* (Manchester University Press, 1932); Steele, *Politics of Colonial Policy*; Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire*; Gertrude Ann Jacobsen, *William Blathwayt: A Late Seventeenth Century English Administrator* (Yale University Press, 1932). H. V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, and John G. Reid, eds., *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c.1550–1850* (Cambridge University Press, 2012). David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

was converted into both a monopoly and a monopsony at a time when the need for slave labour was reaching new heights in the colonies, all while the colonial environment became far better controlled by the metropole.

Historical tradition has seen this period of English history, the 1650s to the 1660s, as a time of unrest and great change, and this is indeed true in several fundamental ways. However, I claim that by taking the perspective of this group of Atlantic traders, in reality a group of merchant-politicians, this period also represented continuity. For as this chapter will show: despite the many changes in the state's vision and approach to empire, the reality for this group of well-established Atlantic actors was fundamentally maintained. To men like Thomson and Noell the early part of the century represented a period where their experience and networks put them in a unique position to profit from the growing colonial empire. But the Atlantic region grew fast, and as a commercial sector it was becoming ever more connected and competitive. The growing importance of the Atlantic resulted in calls for increased state control, to harness the economic potential for the benefit of England and the English state. In the following process of developing a clear imperial policy, the input of the very same group of long-time established Atlantic traders was highly valued. The imperial policies that emerged as a result in the 1660s, in addition to giving the state better control and understanding of the Atlantic reality, re-established in multiple ways these Atlantic merchants in roles of privilege and exclusivity. The extended privileges given to the members of the Royal Adventurers in 1660 and 1663, including the complete control over England's legal trade in slaves, carried on the tendency of the Africa companies as functioning shelters against ever harsher competition, into the post-Restoration era. These merchant-politicians participated in the construction of a new imperial system which brought notable change from the perspective of the state, while simultaneously representing, for the actors themselves, a beneficial continuity.

It is the hope for this chapter that it will better position and contextualize the mid-century Anglo-Africa trade in the historiographical landscape of overseas expansion. This is necessary, because the story of English commercial activity on the West African coast fits poorly with the partitions of the relevant historical research. As a result, the rather unique position and experiences of the African companies has been largely overlooked. Was the trade to Africa a part of the typical Atlantic system of exchange? If so, from when? The focus on commodity trade in the early half of the century gives it resemblance of the luxury exchange distinctive of the Indian Ocean and of the activities of the EIC. So much so in fact, that the EIC extended its activities to the coast. Still, there was an early realization of the potential for tying the commercial activities on the West African coast to the new English territories, and the vast demands of Spanish America with its insatiable need for enslaved labour – paid for in silver. This potential became ever more real

as the English colonies grew and changed their production system to large-scale sugar production.<sup>331</sup> Yet, we know little about how England's official Africa trade was eventually and decisively pulled into the Atlantic. The historiographical traditions in the relevant fields of Africa company history, the history of the seventeenth century English Atlantic and the history of English state-building have not intercepted with each other on this topic, nor problematized this change. Though I claim that this period in several ways represented continuity for the merchant-politicians with their far-reaching activities, it was a seismic shift in the official trade itself.

For all intents and purposes, the slave trade into the Atlantic and the trade in African luxury commodities was separated as a result of the renegotiations of the Guinea Company patent in 1651. This was discussed in chapter 3, with the commodity trade being left in the hands of the East India Company from 1657. However, this decision was overturned with the extensions of the RA patents.<sup>332</sup> They represented a fundamental transformation in overseas trade, and an entirely different mandate for an Africa company to fulfill. The interest for this transition has overall been low, though some notable new pieces of scholarly work has recently been published.<sup>333</sup> As a rule, the company historians such as G.F. Zook and K.G. Davies, along with recent work on the companies, commence with the Restoration or with the granting of the RAC's patent in 1672. The few studies that exist for the first half of the century concludes with the Interregnum and the leasing out for the GC charter to the EIC. The GC was gradually less active in the 1650s and from 1657 its activities seized completely with the arrival of the EIC, and therefore the 1650s have seemed, from a company-history perspective, even more barren than the decades before. The slave trade understandably draws attention, but as there was no official slave trade until the Restoration, the period before the EIC presence on the coast has not been seen as particularly connected to the that which followed. The important and extensive work of Elizabeth Donnan falls into this category, as she follows the sources of the slave trade itself, though the long-term political backstory for granting the patent remains largely outside her area of interest.<sup>334</sup> The uneven availability of sources has perpetuated this tendency, as the open privately organized slave trade left little trace. Yet, it should be considered that the decision to grant the sole control over

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<sup>331</sup>Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados*; Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire*; Swingen, "Chapter 4: Labor, Empire and the State: The English Imperial Experience in the Seventeenth Century"; Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*.

<sup>332</sup>Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, XXVIII:172–81.

<sup>333</sup>Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire*; Roper, *Advancing Empire*.

<sup>334</sup>Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*; Galenson, *Traders, Planters and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America*; Eltis and Richardson, *Extending the Frontiers*.

all supply of slave labour to a single company – instead of leaving it open like most other trades in the English Atlantic – did not appear out of thin air. And when the RA was granted this privilege in 1663, several of the new members that decided to join the company had an established role as advisors in trade and colonial matters - with a past as colonial suppliers and slave traders, as well as in the gradually veining trade in indentured servants. These were strong incentives for wanting a closed company slave trade, and strong positions to help see it through. Also, from the perspective of the history of the Africa trade itself it is necessary to problematize this shift in the aim of the trade. Because, despite traditions for historical focus and periodization, the combination of the Africa commodity trade and the supply of labour to the colonies was not contemporaneously self-evident.

In addition to the important studies focused on companies, the slave trade, the developing English Atlantic, and the ideological shifts in approaches to empire, great studies have taken a more practical approach to the topic of colonial management and trade.<sup>335</sup> They have furthered our understanding of the practical running of the empire through committees such as the Council of Trade and Plantations; the Committee for Trade; the Council for Jamaica; The Lords of Trade; and the Board of Trade; but important connections between them and the Africa companies and their trade are largely surpassed in silence. This is at times surprising, because the need for labour either in the form of imported forced labour from Africa, or in the form of indentured English servants - was a major cause for concern in a period of exponential colonial growth.<sup>336</sup>

This chapter therefore aims to amalgamate differing lines of historical tradition – the Africa company tradition, the history of the English slave trade, and the development of empire management and managers in a growing Atlantic system. This chapter will draw on all three traditions and the hope is that in bringing them together, they will help our understanding of the changes that took place in both the Africa trade and the English expansion project more generally, as well as furthering our understanding of the situation for the Africa trade in the build-up to the Revolution of 1688 and thus contextualize the trade in a longer and more continuous seventeenth century.

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<sup>335</sup>Good examples of in-depth studies are the works of Charles M. Andrews and I.K. Steele

<sup>336</sup>BL: Egerton MS 2395, p. 277-278, “*Certain Propositions for the better accommodating Foreign Plantations with Servants reported from the Committee to the Council of Foreign Plantations*”, p.283-286, “*Considerations about the Peopling & Settling the Island of Jamaica*”. Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire*, 7, 15–16; Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy 1660-1700*, 240–41.

## **2. Practices of the past, the case of Virginia**

By the middle of the seventeenth century the relationship between the English state and the English settlements in the Atlantic was undergoing tumultuous change. The involvement of the English state in the ongoing expansion projects had up to that point extended to the granting of patent and privileges, some investment of capital and offers of naval assistance, but not much further. The patents, granted for a variety of overseas activities, from trade and territorial settlement to exploration and privateering, were granted in return for customs income- and other financial benefits, as well as the expansion of an English presence overseas alongside other European states. The initiative to venture out and to establish colonies and reciprocal relationships of trade across cultures and oceans, remained privately organized. The trade- and proprietary focused companies relied on private capital and were expected and entitled to manage their respective projects as they saw fit, so long as nothing was done in conflict with English law. Trade to the newly settled English colonies in the Atlantic was open to those who had the connections, financial capability and networks to pursue it, and a community of merchants established a flourishing trade in labour, provisions and colonial products. By the middle of the century however, this dynamic between private initiative and the state, in relation to overseas expansion, was changing.

The middle of the seventeenth century was a time for change not only in the sector of overseas trade, but also in Europe and in England itself. The Thirty Years War came to an end in 1648, and with it came a rearrangement of the European power structures. The Dutch Republic was recognized, standing as a protestant power in opposition to catholic France; Habsburg power in central Europe diminished, and the personal union of Crowns between Portugal and Spain came to an end with the rise of the Portuguese house of Braganza. In England, as well as in Europe, the role of the ruler was being redefined. This process, in the case of England, turned gradually violent with the eruption of civil wars (1642-1646, 1648-1649), fought between supporters of the Stuart monarchy represented by king Charles I together with his sons and heirs Charles and James, and proponents of parliamentary rule led by military leaders supported by the New Model Army –general Oliver Cromwell soon becoming the most notable among them. The defeat of the monarchy in 1649 ushered in the period known as the Interregnum, which lasted just over a decade, before the monarchy was reinstated in 1660. The conflict between king and parliament resulted in a redefinition of the role and rights of the head of state which had implications also for the Anglo-Africa trade, the position of the Africa companies, the influence of its merchants, and the management of the growing English empire. Despite being a civil war, England's growing colonial settlements pulled the conflict into the Atlantic.

The favored position enjoyed by the RA from 1663, which included exclusive access to the West African Coast on behalf of England, and the sole right to provide slaves to the colonies, may have only appeared in 1663. However, men like Maurice Thomson, Martin Noell and Thomas Povey, and many more with them, who gradually entered the Guinea Company and Africa trade over the course of the 1630s, 40s and 50s had long been controlling their own Atlantic supply trade. Upon entry to the company they took their experience, methods, and connections with them. Maurice Thomson, William Cloberry, and later also Samuel Vassall and Martin Noell had all collaborated and been active in the provisioning trade to the colonies to a varying degree since the first decades of the century. Their activities and operations stretched throughout the English Atlantic, from Newfoundland and Maine in the north to Panama and Guyana in the south. They involved themselves to a varying degree in everything from privateering and exploration to fur trade and fisheries. Thomson's first involvement in slave trade dated as far back as 1626, Vassall – despite suffering several set-backs at the end of the 1640s, had for long been operating on a large scale, while Martin Noell established an important trade in indentured servants and was by the 1640s collaborating with Thomson. Vassall also collaborated privately with Thomson, and shared membership in the GC by the 1650s – as seen in the previous chapter. Their careers were extensive, but the activity presented here constituted some of their most established commercial operations: that of supplying the growing settlements in Virginia and in the Caribbean with labour, capital and European merchandize.<sup>337</sup> Through playing an active part in the increasingly important tobacco trade, as well as in supplying the growing demand for labour that accompanied it, they all built up fortunes, experience and connections to each other. Their successful combination of activities such as privateering, slave trade and exploration – centered around ship ownership and maritime experience, opened and connected markets and regions throughout the English Atlantic.

Why did they, by the 1640s, 50s and 60s, opt for monopolized trade within a formal company structure? In the section below, I will suggest how these merchants built up and protected their trades through the active use of monopolies, privileges, and protectionist strategies. As an extension of this point follows that despite traditionally receiving an 'anti-establishment' label, they had few problems with monopoly and privilege, so long as they were the beneficiaries.

Already upon their discovery and first settlement, the potential offered by the Atlantic colonies was unique, allowing as they did for the building of an entirely

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<sup>337</sup> Good examples of works that cover other aspects of their careers are Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*; Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire*; Roper, *Advancing Empire*; Andrews, *Ships, Money and Politics: Seafaring and Naval Enterprise in the Reign of Charles I*.

new market, as well as a close relationship of dependence between colonists and the growing community of overseas merchants that supplied it. This bond, which started as one of collaboration and necessity, first present in the tobacco trade of the Northern colonies, soon developed into a chokehold of debt, monopoly and monopsony which caused endless frustration for planters and colonists. It is a mirroring of this dependence that is seen in the unique position of the African companies in the English colonial expansion. The companies continued to benefit from the method of forcing what was in essence an artificial dependence on their services, though first attempted by colonial merchants, it was institutionalized in the African company charter in 1663.

The arrival of English settlers in the Chesapeake Bay in 1607 presented huge opportunities for those willing to relocate and build a new existence on the other side of the Atlantic. Initially this task was to be managed by the Virginia Company – a joint stock venture chartered in 1606 by James I. But it soon became clear that the amount of investment and management necessary for success would reach unsurmountable levels.<sup>338</sup> The same came to be true for most of the other, proprietary companies.<sup>339</sup> Instead the early colonizing process would continue without company management, through private partnerships, most often between colonial merchants and tobacco planters.<sup>340</sup> In fact, Brenner, taking the colony of Virginia in its first decades as an example and relying on the estimates of W.R. Scott, points out that out of a total sum of investments of £90,000, only about £10,000 was supplied by the Virginia Company, the rest came from private entrepreneurs.<sup>341</sup> As the companies struggled to supply their colonists, several of them – including the Virginia Company, started the practice of organizing a *Magazine* trade based on a separate joint-stock. These Magazine ships were to an increasing degree in the hands of new constellations of London merchants of whom some were subscribers of the company and others were not. While the Virginia Company struggled, the separate Magazine trade grew, and through it merchants realized the potential of colonial provision trade.<sup>342</sup> Although the practice slowly faded out, the system of colonial provisioning by London merchants in partnership with both fellow merchants and/or large-scale colonial

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<sup>338</sup>George Louis Beer, *The Origins of the British Colonial System, 1578-1660* (New York, The Macmillan company, 1908); Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*; Andrews, *Ships, Money and Politics: Seafaring and Naval Enterprise in the Reign of Charles I*; Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, chap. III.

<sup>339</sup>It is mandatory here to mention the one exception, the Somers Island Company, also known as the Bermuda Company – but the company did not continue in its role as colonizer for very long, instead focusing on so-called Magazine trade, the provisioning of the colonial settlers.

<sup>340</sup>Pares, *Merchants and Planters*.

<sup>341</sup>Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 95. Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 2:286. Scott has made use of the Manchester Papers, No.362 – “Draft of an Answer to a Declaration of the Present State of Virginia”. Undated.

<sup>342</sup>Pares, *Merchants and Planters*, 13.

planters, continued.

The setting up of plantations demanded both time, hard labour, and capital, out of which the colonists had the two former though usually lacking the latter, while the merchants possessed the latter but no practical way of providing the two former.<sup>343</sup> A merchant-planter collaboration then looked to be a perfect match. The colonist was assisted with capital, tools, and basic supplies from England all while being able to fully focus on the setting up of the plantations. In addition, he was secured a buyer, and shipping to Europe, once he had a finished product. The merchants, on the other hand, had secured their access to the finished product, and could bring it back to England for sale domestically or for re-export. In addition, the collaboration saved the merchant from the principal-agent problem as, at least initially, the planter had an active interest in the prosperity of the shared venture. This was contemporaneously referred to as a merchant-planter *Mateship*.<sup>344</sup> Among the most important and desired 'commodities' provided by the merchants were indentured servants. The need for labour in the growing colony was high from the very first years of settlement, and as a result the Virginia Company developed a system of indenture. With an indenture contract a worker could pay for the voyage across the Atlantic with the promise of her/his future labour. After a few years these contracts became tradable, creating a market for the sale of indenture contracts which drew in both the colonial traders and the tobacco planters.<sup>345</sup> The second implementation to raise the import of labour, also originally a Virginia Company policy, was to grant land in return for the introduction of workers. This was known as the "Headright" system, where acres of land were granted to anyone who financed the voyage of a colonist whether it was his own or someone else's.<sup>346</sup> Even though the company was dissolved by 1624 these practices remained and became important motives for the colonial merchants to develop themselves into professional labour providers. The colonial merchant who financed numerous voyages for new colonial workers were building up substantial landholdings. This process took place outside Virginia as well, as Martin Noell built his career around the supply of indentured servants to Barbados, and quickly

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<sup>343</sup>Beer suggests a cost of £6 for transportation from England to Virginia in 1619, and another £14 for the initial goods, tools and provisions needed. Beer, *The Origins of the British Colonial System, 1578-1660*, 49.

<sup>344</sup>Pares, *Merchants and Planters*. In appendix II of this work Pares offers some examples of contracts that merchants and planters entered. The selection is particularly interesting because they are dated quite early in the century, mainly the 1640s and 1650s. Further, contracts No. 2 and 3, shows the emphasis placed on the merchant's supply of labour. Lastly, contract No. 8, dated 22 April 1649, is a contract between Martin Noell's brothers Steven and Thomas, both based in Barbados, and Francis Coast for the shared production of sugar.

<sup>345</sup>Beer, *The Origins of the British Colonial System, 1578-1660*, 46–52; Galenson, *Traders, Planters and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America*, chap. I.

<sup>346</sup>Charles McLean Andrews, *The Colonial Period* (New York & London: H. Holt and Company, 1912), 71–73. 3

established himself as an absentee planter, employing his brothers as overseers.<sup>347</sup>

After the dissolving of the Virginia Company, colonial trade and more specifically- colonial *provisioning* trade, in the English Atlantic sphere was mostly in private hands. However, as the colonies grew and with it the profitability of the provisioning trade, shifts were taking place. The collaborative relationship between the colonial planters and merchants gradually favored the latter and started to take the shape of a chokehold. The privileged position of being the sole provider of staple goods from Europe - goods such as work tools, food stuffs, clothes, and labour - became too tempting not to exploit and prices started rising. The situation for the planters was worsened still by the merchants holding a monopsonists grip on the tobacco trade. The lack of competition for the finished tobacco products, in combination with a gradually saturated market, caused prices to plummet, all while necessary-, though imported, goods were sold at exorbitant prices. In a natural response to this development planters doubled production. Nowhere was this unfortunate spiral more evident and debated than in Virginia.<sup>348</sup> Maurice Thomson, together with partners and collaborators stood out as one of the largest provision traders of the pre-civil war era, becoming both wealthy and unpopular through a firm grip on the colony's trade.

The conflict that developed between planters and merchants in Virginia and in other developing colonies centered around a few basic questions of trade. Now that the colonial merchants were building their wealth rapidly by trading necessities to the planters, the planters in turn wanted modifications to the trade in ways that would also favor them. A commission under Edward Sackville, the earl of Dorset, was responsible for considering matters pertaining to the colony, and it was to them the disgruntled planters now turned. In a petition sent to the commission in early March 1631/2, the planters complain of how "*Wee the poore planters of this Collony have a longe tyme groaned under the cruel dealings of unconscionable merchants who have by needlesse and unprofitable commodities always preingaged the Inhabitants in debts of tobacco to the value almost of their ensuinge Cropps, whereby wee have necessarily beene tyed to plantinge of the bad Comoditie, from which otherwise we had willinglie declined*".<sup>349</sup> If the focus of production was to be tobacco, as the merchants desired, over food stuffs, then the planters demanded the setting of a minimum price on tobacco. They suggested a price level that allowed them to pay for the goods they received, while still being able to open for some form

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<sup>347</sup>Bernard Bailyn, "Communications and Trade: The Atlantic in the Seventeenth Century," *The Journal of Economic History* 13, no. 4 (October 1953): 381.

<sup>348</sup>The early CO 1/ series held at the TNA includes numerous records debating these early issues of the Virginia colony. Beer, *The Origins of the British Colonial System, 1578-1660*, 249.

<sup>349</sup>Robert C. Johnson, "Virginia in 1632," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 65, no. 4 (1957): 461.

of crop diversification. If not, they exclaimed, “*we had rather want, then labour as slaves to other mens purses.*” Further, the planters desired free trade, “*to those parts and markets where such Comodities, as wee by our Industry shall rayse, will be best vented*”. This included trade with non-English merchants. A petition of a similar nature sent shortly after underlines the issues further. It states that a minimum price on tobacco may seem strange, but pleads that the commission do not doubt its necessity, or “*any sinister information or projects suggested unto you by unexperienced men, ledd often times with private respects.*”<sup>350</sup> Regarding the question of free trade the petitioners asked that the commission did not prevent them from going where their commodities would fetch the best price: “*Wee have thought good to permit some to goe to the Dutch Plantation to furnish ourselves especially with horses, asinicoes, sheepe, & above all English graine (...).*”<sup>351</sup> Being tied to one buyer who controlled both price and supply, as well as the purchase of a colonies product, was a problem also the sugar producing colonies struggled with once the need for slave labour was established and managed under company privilege only a few decades later.

These attempts from the colonial assembly, representing the planters, to cap tobacco production, direct attention towards the production of basic foodstuffs to free themselves from dependence on the merchants’ imports, and establish sustainable prices, was countered by the colonial council and the provision traders. The Virginia Council, which managed the colony along with its governor, was in close collaboration with – or included provisioning merchants as many of them had, as previously mentioned, developed into great landowners through the “*Headright*” system. Their response came a few months later, and it was the exact opposite of what the planters desired. Not only was the idea of a minimum price not desired, the council as the governing body of the colony suggested granting a monopoly of the tobacco trade to a three-person partnership consisting of Maurice Thomson, and his partners Thomas Stone and William Tucker. In a letter on behalf of the council, to the Commission for Virginia in London, Governor John Harvey asked that the commission granted the trade to the trio for three years, “*these men having the greatest trade of all others*”.<sup>352</sup> Further he left it to the planters “*themselves agreeing with your honours upon the quantitie to be planted, with your lordships command not to have any more exported any where from hence upon most severe penaltie*”. But Harvey’s letter is conflicting in its wording, and while he dutifully endorses the council’s decisions he simultaneously implored the Virginia Commission to carefully consider what was taking place,

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<sup>350</sup>Johnson, 464.

<sup>351</sup>Johnson, 466.

<sup>352</sup>TNA: CO 1/6, no.54, p. 135. “America and West Indies: May 1632,” in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1860), 146-151. *British History Online*, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol1/pp146-151>

including some slighting remarks about the merchants in question. He explains that the colony had recently been in desperate need of shoes and one of the monopolists - William Tucker, despite having a warehouse full of them, refused to offer them at anything but excessive prices. Further Harvey exclaims: “*and I beseech your pound of Tobacco when our Intruding neighbours the Dutch doe allow for eighteene pence pr. pound in the same commodity.*”<sup>353</sup>

Despite the adverse points in Harvey’s letter the syndicate was offered the sole right to the entire tobacco crop for the coming three years.<sup>354</sup> Harvey’s letter did underline an important issue for the merchants though, the competition presented by foreign traders. Already the planters had desired the right to trade freely in their own commodities. Trying to eradicate foreign trade was therefore becoming an important goal for the colonial merchants and came to affect not just Virginia but also the Caribbean colonies.

By mid-1633 the Virginia planters managed to convince the Privy Council to revoke the monopoly. Accompanying the revocation, however, was a detailed plan from the Virginia Commission, based on suggestions made by Thomas Stone, William Tucker and others, of how to curtail Dutch trade in the colony. There had been a general understanding, up to that point, that the colonial commodities should be shipped directly to England, but there was no explicit rule. The early colonial companies had been legally allowed to ship their produce directly to foreign markets. In fact the Virginia Company had decided, in 1621, that it was advisable to establish a direct commercial link between Virginia and the Dutch markets.<sup>355</sup> As the provisioning merchants sought to regain control over Virginia’s trade however, they pointed to how the trade was harmful to English shipping and “*predjudiciall to his Majestie in his Customes & Imports to the Plantations.*”<sup>356</sup> Upon the loss of their monopoly, the partners joined a growing group of colonial merchants that were arguing for a revival of a Virginia Company. The company would have the sole trading rights with the colonies, thus saving the planters from being the victims of exploitation by the greedy Dutch. The suggestions made by Tucker and Stone, which included a request for the revival of the company charter, although sent in 1633, was in essence the Acts of Navigation which were launched eighteen years later. The merchants argued that “*the Trade should be carryed wholly by the English, and the retournes to be made wholly into England only*”. If this was done, the king’s customs and duties were retrieved, and sailors employed. England’s “navigation” would be encouraged, all while the planters were sufficiently supplied, as opposed to the situation as it stood,

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<sup>353</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>354</sup>Beer, *The Origins of the British Colonial System, 1578-1660*, 232–33.

<sup>355</sup>Beer, 189.

<sup>356</sup>TNA: CO 1/6, no. 80, p. 207 and no. 81, p. 209

“the benefitts to his Majesties kingdome, and people, are wholly loste if Strangers be permitted to trade and transporte the Comodities of that Plantation into fforaigne places as they now do”.<sup>357</sup>

The Dutch traders organized shipping of colonial products to Europe on more favorable terms than Thomson and his fellow English traders. They also offered goods at prices far below the English and were willing to pay more in return, as pointed out by governor Harvey in the 1630s, and soon after by Barbados’ governor Lord Willoughby, in the 1650s.<sup>358</sup>

### 3. The context of the English Civil War

Within England the ascension of Charles I to the throne in 1626 had only exacerbated an already existing tension between Parliament and the crown, and this was further spurred on by provocative royal decisions such as forced loans to the crown and the introduction of taxes without the necessary approval from Parliament. Charles I relied on the Royal Prerogative to secure him the income necessary to rule without having to write out more taxes. This he managed by making use of his constitutional rights to extend different forms of patents and privileges in exchange for payments. The imported gold promised by Crispe and the Guinea Company upon receiving the patent in 1631 was such an example. Parliament, on the other hand, saw Charles’ actions as a way for the king to circumvent the laws of realm, and avoiding the counterbalancing control of Parliament. In 1642 war between the two broke out.

The English Civil Wars were exceptionally gruesome, with fighting happening on and off for nearly a decade (1642-1651), and a total death toll estimated to have reached near 200.000. Of this total, a high number of civilian deaths were recorded, especially from brutal altercations in Ireland and Scotland. In the end the Cavaliers – Royalists loyal to the cause of Charles I - had to see themselves beaten by Parliamentary forces.<sup>359</sup> By the end of the 1640s the king was imprisoned. After continuous attempts at finding a solution to the constitutional crisis, combined with a notoriously untrustworthy behavior exhibited by the king throughout the attempted peace negotiations, the Parliamentarians saw no other option than to try the king for

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<sup>357</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 80, p.207

<sup>358</sup>“America and West Indies: Addenda 1652,” in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 9, 1675-1676 and Addenda 1574-1674*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1893), 85-87. *British History Online*, accessed November 21, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol9/pp85-87>.

<sup>359</sup>R.H. Parry, *The English Civil War and after, 1642–1658* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1970); Ben Coates, *The Impact of the English Civil War on the Economy of London, 1642–50* (Routledge, 2004); Maurice Ashley, *The English Civil War* (Leicester, England: Budding Books, 1997).

treason against the realm. Rowland Wilson the younger was, as mentioned, offered a seat at the judges table, but refused to speak against the king. Still, the trial ended in the king's death sentence, and his execution in January 1649, ushered in the period known as the Interregnum (1649-1660).

The Interregnum can be divided into two parts, the period of the Commonwealth (1649-1653), and of the Protectorate (1653-1660). The Commonwealth was led by what came to be known as the Rump Parliament – named so because it consisted only of the members that were considered loyal enough to keep their position by the puritan military leaders referred to as the *Grandees*, orbiting Sir Thomas Fairfax, Henry Ireton and Oliver Cromwell.<sup>360</sup> Its first motions included the official abolition of the monarchy as well as of the House of Lords, and the replacement of the privy council – the council closest to the king and effectively the executive arm of government – with a council of state, led by secretary John Thurloe, Martin Noell's brother-in-law. On May 19<sup>th</sup> England was declared a “*Commonwealth and a free state*”, with the House of Commons now being the supreme authority in the land.<sup>361</sup> The execution of Charles I, in January 1649, put an end to civil war in England, but that did not necessarily extend to the English colonies. The governor of Barbados, Lord Willoughby of Parham was clear in his support for the Stuart monarchy, and the sovereignty of the late king's son, Charles II. After the king's execution, when parliamentary victory in England was a fact, a notice was sent out to inform the colonies of the changes in English administration requesting their continued obedience.<sup>362</sup> It became increasingly clear however, that the colonies, and the Caribbean especially, were not readily prepared to accept the new forces in power.

The importance of the English colonies to England's market and economy grew increasingly stronger towards the middle of the century. Tobacco had been the first crop of importance coming from thence, both from North America and the Caribbean. Tobacco experienced a price boom in the 1630s, leading to a growing number of people relocating, often starting out as indentured servants and gradually developing their own lands and production as their contracts came to an end. However, as a result of the increased activity, partly spurred on by the grip of purchasing merchants on the colonial market, the tobacco market experienced increasing saturation by the early 1640's.<sup>363</sup> In the Caribbean the substitution of tobacco with sugar presented a

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<sup>360</sup>W.A. Speck, *Profiles in Power: James II* (Pearson, 1992), 12.

<sup>361</sup>“May 1649: An Act Declaring and Constituting the People of England to be a Commonwealth and Free-State.,” in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, ed. C H Firth and R S Rait (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1911), 122. *British History Online*, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/p122>.

<sup>362</sup>“America and West Indies: July 1649,” in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 329-330.

<sup>363</sup>Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados*, 16, 19–21.

possible solution. By the 1640s and 1650s the potential of sugar and other colonial products was being realized by an increasing number of political administrators, partly on the encouragement of merchants turned politicians such as Noell and Povey. The conflict between the colonies and the new administration in power after the civil war, was therefore further spurred on by a growing sentiment in the metropole of the need for stricter colonial management. The existence of the colonies was mainly for the benefit of the mother-country, and their output had to be guarded.<sup>364</sup> During the summer in 1650 it was clear that the Caribbean colonies were not willing to accept Parliamentary rule, or a subservient role in the English economy. The discussion over how to ensure the submission of the rebellious colonies was managed by the Council of State, and the Admiralty. In these discussions, the opinion and advice of established Atlantic merchants were often requested, and if they were not they were made known through petitions.<sup>365</sup>

For Barbados, the policy discussions resulted in a ban on all trade to the colony, enacted in September 1650. And as the negotiations continued the idea of banning all trade was increasingly intermixed with the idea to ban foreign trade specifically. Maurice Thomson stood out as a central character in this process, actively petitioning to stop the ban on trade, though asking to maintain legislation which excluded foreign merchants. In 1651 the Navigation Act, which banned all trade with non-English merchants, was a fact. In the state paper for the Atlantic from this period it is evident that the council relied much on the opinions of Atlantic merchants, either as individuals or as members of advisory councils.<sup>366</sup> That the Navigation Act, with its ban on contact with foreign traders, was a big problem to the colonists was evident and England's largest colonial economy, Barbados, continued to refuse to surrender to the will of the Commonwealth. Governor Willoughby led the Barbadian colonists in an effort of resistance, emphasizing the trouble the island was in after it had been denied the ability to trade with the Dutch. The situation was not ameliorated by the first Anglo-Dutch war, which made trade even more difficult. The conflict across the Atlantic escalated until Cromwell dispatched General at Sea, George Ayescue to force the colony into submission.<sup>367</sup> Upon his arrival Ayescue seized around a dozen Dutch vessels anchored in Carlisle Bay. When this was not enough to force the colonists into submission the whole island was placed under blockade. Ayescue and Cromwell

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<sup>364</sup>Armitage and Braddick, *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, 53; Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy 1660-1700* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Nuala Zahedieh, "Making Mercantilism Work: London Merchants and Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 9 (December 1999): 143-58, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3679396>.

<sup>365</sup>TNA: CO 1/11

<sup>366</sup>TNA: CO 1/11, CO 1/12, see also Farnell, "The Navigation Act of 1651, the First Dutch War, and the London Merchant Community."

<sup>367</sup>TNA: CO 1/11

maintained the blockade until the island was forced to surrender in January 1652.

Governor Willoughby included in his correspondence with London, before his removal as governor, his conditions for the islands surrender, especially underlining that if the island was to be denied trade with foreign merchants and be forced to rely on English merchant shipping, then the colonists requested: *'To have as great freedom of trade as ever, no companies to be placed over them, and no commodities engrossed into private men's hands'*.<sup>368</sup> The colonists attempted to guard themselves against merchant privileges and the risks of ending up in a relationship of dependency. Though the Navigation Acts denied colonist trade with foreign merchants, they did not in themselves imply dependency, maintaining English competition in the colonial market – in the slave trade as in all else. The specification regarding monopolies and privileges either for commodities, or through grants to specific people, aimed at maintaining the level of competition. The colonies attempted, with their request, to avoid the situation that Virginia had been in under the tobacco monopoly. The alternative, a trade restricted to English merchants only, was not ideal for the colonists, but still better than a monopoly granted to specific groups or individuals, or over specific commodities. A good rapport and relationship of exchange existed between the colonists and the Dutch traders, but from the conditions of their surrender it seems that the fear of powerful colonial merchants was an equally strong motivation to resist the new legislation. The Caribbean colonist's fears were justified. The Acts of Navigation, in combination with privilege granted to the Royal Adventurers in 1663, would indeed make them, like the planters in Virginia, dependent on the men of the metropole for both labour and the accompanying extension of credit.

#### 4. A new approach to colonial management

After the rebellion in Barbados had been brought under control, management of the colonies was now organized largely by the state, which had by 1653 been declared a Protectorate under the rule of the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell. Furthermore, the large island of Jamaica had been added to the Caribbean colonies controlled by England, and as the established Stuart practice of extending patents of territorial control to supporters and royal favorites came to an end, there was need to develop a new format to colonial management. The colonies were now controlled from London, through the sending out of state representatives answering to executive

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<sup>368</sup>“America and West Indies: Addenda 1652,” in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 9, 1675-1676 and Addenda 1574-1674*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1893), 85-87. *British History Online*, accessed November 21, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol9/pp85-87>.

metropolitan committees. Thomas Povey and Martin Noell were active in the process of defining the role, shape and power of these committees, as well as assuring that the men on the spot, colonial governors now appointed in England, had their best interests at heart.

Martin Noell's (1615-1665) relation to official Africa trade commenced in the Interregnum, when he became a member of the EIC as the company got involved in the Guinea trade. He had extensive experience with the needs of the Caribbean labour market, and some practice in shipping human cargo, as a long-time supplier of indentured labour. Noell was among the EIC members who, upon losing access to the Guinea Coast opted for RA membership. He appears as an RA company member in the mercantile influx that took place around the time the RA was granted its second patent, in 1663. Like Maurice Thomson, whom he at times collaborated with in the Atlantic provision- and tobacco trade, Noell owned land in the Caribbean. Together with his brothers Steven and Thomas, as well as friend and partner, Thomas Povey, he managed properties in both Barbados and Jamaica, also with the help of Povey's brothers Richard and William.<sup>369</sup> Together they were partaking in the shift towards large-scale sugar production that was picking up speed in the 1640s. This shift included an increased reliance on slave labour as the style of production changed. The rise of sugar plantations, as a large-scale production unit for a cultivation style which was labour intensive, saw land gathering on fewer and fewer hands. With the annexation of Jamaica in 1655-1657, Noell invested in the new venture by securing himself around 20,000 acres of land in the newly added colony. As will be remembered the GC owned only 225 acres in Barbados when the committee of appraisal investigated its situation ten years previous.

Despite benefitting from the development of large-scale sugar production as a plantation owner, his other strand of colonial business – that of supplying indentured servants from England, was suffering and growing increasingly obsolete. Noell was, however, well connected with Spanish circuits of slave trade, and moved his attention and business activity in the direction of supplying the Spanish Americas with slaves. The awarding of the important Asiento contract to the RA, which will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, was largely Noell's doing along with his partners.

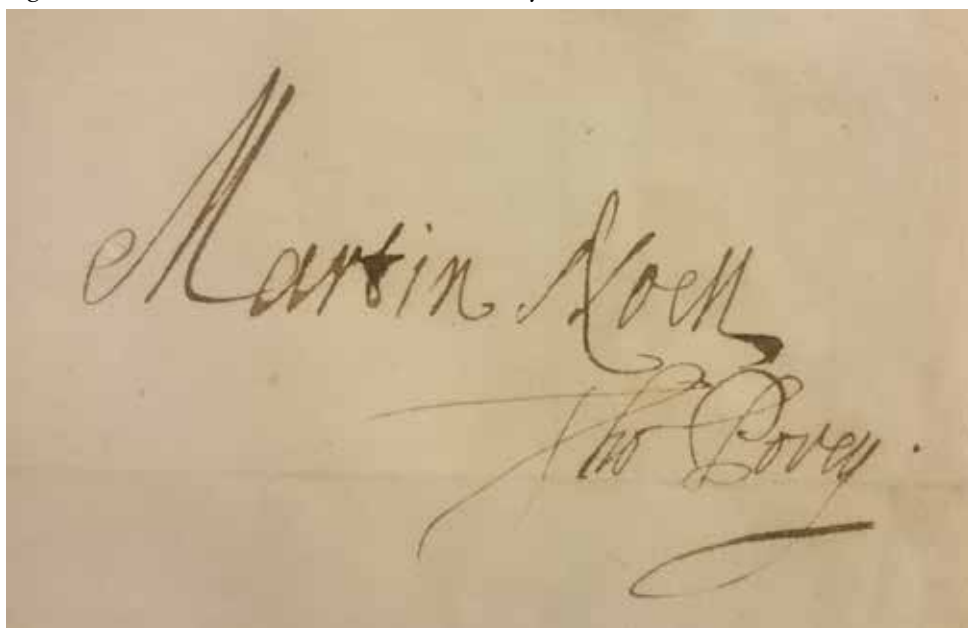
The earliest sources we have of Noell's mercantile endeavors sees him trading to the islands Nevis and Montserrat in 1650, though it appears he at that point had operated for some time already. As the GC patent was under negotiation and the Navigation Acts were brought forward in 1651, Noell became an Alderman of the City of London, indicating an established presence and trade. In the following years, he extended his mercantile activities to include markets in the other Caribbean

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<sup>369</sup>See footnote 338 above. Bailyn, "Communications and Trade," 381.

Islands, as well as in New England, Virginia, and the Mediterranean. Noell was well connected in Interregnum England, being personally close with Oliver Cromwell, and extending on one occasion a personal loan to the Lord Protector of £8000.<sup>370</sup> His close contact with Cromwell was supplemented by the important political link to Sir John Thurloe, his brother in law and secretary to the council of state. From 1655 Noell appeared as a member of the Trade Committee, and from 1656 on the Council for Jamaica, where he made use of his capacity as an established colonial trader and planter even more efficiently. His intimate connection to the Council of State and to Lord Protector Cromwell resulted in him frequently extending advice regarding the colonies and overseas trade. The combination of experience, connections, positions and wealth meant that his recommendations and suggestions for appointments of colonial offices carried weight.<sup>371</sup>

Illustration 14:  
Signatures of Martin Noell and Thomas Povey



Detail from draft version of “*Overtures touching a Councell to be erected concerning the Plantations*”.

Source: Egerton MSS. 2395, p. 271, British Library, London, UK.

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<sup>370</sup>Historical Manuscript Commission, *Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, 7th Report*. (London : [H.M.S.O.], 1870), 133.

<sup>371</sup>Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 50–51.

Thomas Povey (1615-1701), although he came to be very active in trade and mercantile activities, only did so later in his life, initially being trained as a lawyer. It is possible Povey developed his interest in the Caribbean through the work of his father who was appointed commissioner for the Leeward Islands in 1637. In 1647, he was elected member of Parliament, but in the ongoing political turmoil, with the heightened levels of suspicion and tumult characterizing the Interregnum Parliament, his career in the House of Commons was put on hold until the monarchy was Restored.<sup>372</sup> By 1654 he had commenced a partnership with Martin Noell, which continued for years to come as the two remained close during the remainder of the Interregnum, the Restoration, through the membership in the RA, and on various boards and committees. In 1657 Povey took up a seat as a member of the Committee for America, formerly known as the Council for Jamaica. From then on, and well into the 1660s he remained a conspicuous and influential actor in the development of colonial management. Though he only joined his first committee in 1657, he had, already co-authored several suggestions for colonial and trade management together with Noell.<sup>373</sup>

Povey and Noell presented numerous ‘*overtures*’ and prepositions for colonial management in the second half of the 1650s, the first of which appeared as early as 1654, focusing especially on Jamaica. Due to the nature and convictions that accompanied the English Civil War there was a general aversion to autocratic power and privilege for the few at the cost of the many, therefore a preference emerged for councils and committees which included a high number of members. This made decision-making and efficient work challenging, and the first recommendation by Noell and Povey was to limit membership of any committee to a select few. Povey was especially clear that he had no patience for large councils. In his suggestions for boards responsible for colonial management, membership was limited to between seven and ten persons. In Povey and Noell’s words, this limited the chance of losing sight of all the different tasks at hand and ease the priority of pressing matters. In addition, secrecy was much more attainable in smaller groups. As a result, the selection of members was crucial. Certain qualities should be represented by the board through the experience of its members, especially a commercial and overseas experience. In a suggestion for a seven-member council managing the West Indies, the membership should, according to Povey, ideally be represented by: “(1.) *One to be a Merchant that hath been in those Indias [West Indies] or trading that waie.* (2.) *One also to bee*

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<sup>372</sup>R.S. Dunn, *Papers Relating to the English Colonies in America and the West Indies, 1627-1699, in the British Museum (Egerton Manuscripts 2395)*, British Records Relating to America in Microform (BRRAM) R96902 (British Museum, 1974). Records now kept by the British Library.

<sup>373</sup>BL: Egerton MSS 2395, examples of which were p.96r-97v “*Considerations for the more convenient supplying of his Highnesse affairs in the West Indias*”, and p.110r-111r “*A Preposition for the Improvement of the English Interest in the West Indias*”.

*a Merchant but not related to that trade, and who rather retires from than pursues in profession. (3.) One well experienced Seaman, not or but little trading att present. (4.) One Gentlemen that hath travailed ; that hath language and something of the civill Lawe. (5.) One citizen of a general capacitie and conversation. (6.) One that understands well our municipall Lawes and the general Constitutions of England. (7.) One to be a Secretarie to his Highness in all Affairs in the West Indias, and relating thereunto, who is solely to give himself up to this Employment.”*<sup>374</sup> Several of Povey and Noell’s closest partners and collaborators would, alongside the two men themselves, fit perfectly in to the requested roles. The proposed council would ideally be influential, answering only to the council of state, and its aims were those of unification of the government; managing legislation, distribution of justice, advising, as well as gathering information about all ports, their condition, their wants, their trade, and their proceeds. That included keeping up constant correspondence with all the main ports both in England and in the colonies. Each year a summary of this information for each colony was to be presented to the Lord Protector and his council. To anyone with interests in colonial business, a position on such a council meant a position at the center of the Atlantic web.

The council should, furthermore: “*Contrive all possible encouragement and advantages for the Adventurer, Planter, and English Merchant, in order also to the shutting out of all Straingers from that Trade*<sup>375</sup>, *by making them not necessary to it, ...*”<sup>376</sup> The extensive powers of such a relatively small board was extended by its close contact with the colonies. Not only was the suggested council at the forefront in the battle against foreign traders, but the colonies were expected to keep “*a constant correspondence*” with the board members, who were also responsible for the presentation of the state of the colonies to the Protector and his council. It is unnecessary to point out that whatever the board members chose to emphasize in their reports would naturally appear at the forefront. This bottleneck in the information exchange between colonists, and their Protector and council was unlikely to be lost on the colonists.<sup>377</sup> Merchants serving on such a board, would have intimate access to all details about the colonies on all matters from policy to market demands, as well as a direct influence over their presentation in front of the Lord Protector. Povey’s suggestions remained a suggestion for the time being but reappeared shortly after the

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<sup>374</sup>BL: Egerton MSS 2395, p.87-113

<sup>375</sup>The supply trade of the English colonies.

<sup>376</sup>Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 57.

<sup>377</sup>Examples of the establishment of such a practice can be observed later in the century, as colonists consistently appealing to select colonial administrators in strategic positions. These in turn use their position to cultivate grate personal wealth. See the contemporary publication by Christopher Jeaffreson, *A Young Squire of the Seventeenth Century : From the Papers (A.D. 1676-1686) of Christopher Jeaffreson of Dullingham House Cambridgeshire*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London : Hurst and Blackett, 1878).

Restoration when they were reproduced nearly word for word in the instructions of what was to be, again by the impact of Povey and Noell, the Council of Foreign Plantations - first appearing in 1660.<sup>378</sup>

In 1654, however, they brought no immediate success. Instead a trade committee of over seventy members was launched, and rather than a fixed gaze on the plantations and the accompanying exchange, their focus was far wider, aimed at expanding all commonwealth trade domestic and external. Noell held a seat among the seventy as farmer of the customs, and so did Maurice Thomson's brother George who at the time was customs commissioner. Bulstrode Whitelock also served the board along with Secretary Thurloe until the committee was discontinued in 1657.<sup>379</sup> By 1656, Povey and Noell had presented the Lord Protector with new suggestions, titled "*Queries concerning his Highness Interest in the West Indies*". The content of which appears to have greatly impacted the creation later that same year of "*The Committee for Jamaica*". The body changed its name soon after to the "*Committee for his Highness Affairs in America*". The constitution of the "*Committee for America*" greatly resembled suggestions that originated with Noell and Povey, and both men went on to serve as members of the board.<sup>380</sup>

The duo prepared a further two propositions specifically aimed at the West Indies, known as the "*Propositions concerning the West India Council*" (1656), and "*Overtures touching the West Indies*" (1657). In these propositions the argument for a separate committee set aside solely for the management of the colonies continued to be underlined and enforced. How could the colonies successfully be managed when the system relied on a Council of State that had so many pressing matters to deal with within England itself? Proper attention could not be given to the situation of the colonists, yet the expectations of loyalty from the metropole were high. When explaining the need for a council set aside specially for the management of colonies, Povey claimed that: "*..by this conduct and method those many rich places and severall Governments and Adventurers will have all due and continuall care and Inspection taken of them, without diversion to the nearest Affairs of this Nation, which being of so much of a greater and a closer consequence, the Superior Council can seldome be at leisure to descend any further than to briefe and imperfect considerations and provisions, which is the sad Estate of fforeigne Dominions, and distant Colonies and Expeditions from whence usually the most strict, or servile duty and obedience is exacted, but very seldome any Indulgenzie or paternall care is allowed to them*".<sup>381</sup>

<sup>378</sup>BL: Egerton MSS 2395, p.268r-269v "*Instructions for the Council of Trade*", 270r-275v "*Draft of Overtures touching a council to be erected for the Foreign Plantation*". Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 69; Steele, *Politics of Colonial Policy*, 4.

<sup>379</sup>Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 40.

<sup>380</sup>BL: Egerton MSS 2395, p.86r-86v "*Certaine queries concerning his highness' interest in the west Indies*".

<sup>381</sup>BL: Add. MSS. 11411, folio 11v-12v

The state was busy, and therefore the colonies and its inhabitants were better left to men who understood their situation, and had vested interests in their organized management.

Illustration 15:

“A new & accurate map of the island of Jamaica”



By Emanuel Bowen, 1747, London, published by William Innys [et al.].

Source: David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, Stanford University Gallery.

And further, by continuing this practice of appointing separate committees to handle different minor colonial matters there could be no consistency in policy. The colonies were trapped in a state of either aggressive control from a government which demanded but gave little in return; or in ‘ad hoc’ - where government was split between numerous councils and committees, all with differing agendas, tackling problems separately but missing the bigger picture, all while often lacking any long-term follow-through. To Povey and Noell it would be preferable if, according to their suggestion, a group of men with knowledge of the colonies and of trade was appointed to manage the entire affair.<sup>382</sup> The different queries and overtures had their desired effect, both were appointed seats on the *Committee of America*, built on their own suggestions.<sup>383</sup> The committee was granted power to correspond with the colonies

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<sup>382</sup>BL: Egerton MSS 2395, *Overtures touching the West Indies*. Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 59; Steele, *Politics of Colonial Policy*, 4.

<sup>383</sup>Formerly known as the Committee for Jamaica.

and request all information they deemed vital be provided, all addresses from colonial subjects were to go via the board – again assuring members complete information control, and in addition the committee should prepare advice and answers to colonial questions and challenges. As the first name suggested the committee was initially focused on the settling of Jamaica, but gradually their business included most of the colonies, and it was renamed the committee of America. Its work included reports on everything from colonial constitutions and governing powers, fortifications, revenue, the appointment of governors and intra-colonial conflicts.<sup>384</sup> Povey went on to become both secretary and chairman, and, as seen, Noell invested £16,000 in the annexation of Jamaica, securing himself 20,000 acres of land there. He also made sure to regain his seat on the equivalent committee after the monarchy's return in 1660.<sup>385</sup>

Their instructions authorized them to maintain a correspondence with the colonies, obtaining such information and advice as seemed essential; to receive all addresses relating thereunto, whether from persons in America or elsewhere; to consider and consult thereof and prepare such advice and answers thereupon as they judged to be to the advantage of the community. As members of the committee for America, along with several fellow merchants such as captains John Limbrey, Thomas Aldherne, John Thomson and Stephen Winthrop, as well as Richard Sydenham and Robert Bowes, Noel and Povey developed and maintained close relationships and correspondence with the different representatives of government in the colonies. Noell was especially close to Daniel Searle - governor of Barbados from the dismissal of Lord Willoughby until the restoration of the monarchy; while Povey corresponded with governor Edward D'Oyley at Jamaica; Colonel Roger Osborn in Montserrat, Governor Thomas Temple of Nova Scotia, governor James Russell at Nevis; Major William Byam in Surinam, General William Brayne – the commander of one of the Jamaica expeditions, as well as governor Edward Digges in Virginia.<sup>386</sup> The list also included Lord Willoughby of Parham – who had both attacked Guinea Company cargoes during the civil war, and led resistance to government control after the end of the civil war. Noell and Povey developed a close friendship with Parham during his second stint as governor of Barbados from 1663 to 1667. During this time Povey exerted, according to Charles Andrews, considerable power over Parham colonial policies.<sup>387</sup> As part of the developing colonial management, the merchants in the

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<sup>384</sup> Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 46–47.

<sup>385</sup> Andrews, 50–51.

<sup>386</sup> Andrews, 52–53.

<sup>387</sup> Michael A. LaCombe, “Willoughby, Francis, Fifth Baron Willoughby of Parham (Bap. 1614, d. 1666),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed February 13, 2018; Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 53–55.

commission was given much control of the appointment of governors to colonies now placed under committee's management. They appointed Governors Russel and Osborn, who continued to look to them for support. Recommended Edward Digges for governor in Virginia, and Captain William Watts for Jamaica. Their control over the appointment of governors, the representative of state control and enforcers of law in the colony, was a part of securing their hold over the colonies and their markets.<sup>388</sup> Povey also secured positions for his two brothers, Richard became Commissioner General for Provisions in Jamaica, while William received the post of Provost-General at Barbados. Both increased the reach of the merchants into colonial management and affairs, while looking after the growing family interests.<sup>389</sup>

Illustration 16:

Thomas Povey and Sir Francis, 5. Lord Willoughby of Parham



By John Michael Wright, undated  
Source: National Trust, Dyrham Park, UK



published by Edward Harding after  
unknown artist, date unknown.  
Source: National Portrait Gallery, London, UK.

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<sup>388</sup> «Overtures» from 1657, found in British Library, Egerton MSS. 2395, folio 99 “*That every Governour shall have his Commission reviewed, and that all be reviewed in one form, with such clauses and provisions as shall be held necessary for the promotion of his Highness other public affairs, and that as soon as order can be conveniently taken therein the several Governours to be paid their allowances from hence (though upon their own accounts), that their dependencie bee immediately and altogether from his Highness.*” Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 55, 59.

<sup>389</sup>Bailyn, “Communications and Trade.”

## 5. The Restoration

1660 marked the return of the monarchy, and with Charles II on the throne England now had a king that paid much attention to the overseas possessions. The Conventionist Parliament, called immediately after Charles' return and quickly replaced by the Cavalier Parliament, assigned Charles a large sum for his private purse. The sum was to be gathered from the colonial customs. The matter of colonial management, and a profitable empire was therefore of great interest to the king almost immediately after his return. The last years of the Protectorate, after the death of Cromwell in 1658, had seen a decline in English colonial trade. Not enough had been done to bring inhabitants to newly established Jamaica, secure the trade with the English planter population, nor with the Spanish traders that frequented the island. The king, along with the merchant community was eager to exploit the colonies potential more fully.<sup>390</sup>

As soon as the king had restored his privy council, petitions from London's merchants started arriving regarding matters of colonial trade, and the council continued much the same approach to colonial management as was seen during the Interregnum.<sup>391</sup> The "*Committee for Trade and Plantation*" was launched in the summer of 1660 and included some of Charles' closest advisors. The wishes of the merchant community were conveyed to them in the form of petitions and advice, and both Povey and Noell became ardent petitioners, exploring the reaches of their former influence. Despite not serving on the newly established boards, they remained active in colonial management, quickly re-establishing themselves after the political shift.

Despite their services to the Protectorate administration, Noell and Povey, quickly became popular at the Restoration court. When the 1650s came to an end, Noell initially remained loyal to the house of Cromwell, which made his smooth navigation of the changes caused by the returning Stuart monarchy all the more surprising.<sup>392</sup> But it was indeed smooth, resulting in a knighthood in September 1662, which prompted diarist and navy board member Samuel Pepys to remark in his diary upon hearing the news: "*I this day heard that Mr. Martin Noell is knighted by the King, which I much wonder at; but yet he is certainly a very useful man.*"<sup>393</sup> Povey became treasurer to the king's brother, the newly appointed director of the Royal Adventurers into Africa, and future king James II, already in 1660. He also joined the

<sup>390</sup>Swingen, "Chapter 4: Labor, Empire and the State: The English Imperial Experience in the Seventeenth Century."

<sup>391</sup>Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 61. 1

<sup>392</sup>Andrews, 49–51; Hughes, *Studies in Administration and Finance 1558-1825: With Special Reference to the History of Salt Taxation in England*, 132–35.

<sup>393</sup>Diary of Samuel Pepys, September 6, 1662.

company himself in 1663 and continued his involvement by investing in the RAC after 1672. He was appointed Treasurer to Tangier in 1663, but the office had to be relinquish to navy board member and diarist Pepys a year later, as the affairs were not sufficiently kept in order.<sup>394</sup> Pepys characterization of Povey's persona and skills was initially rather less flattering than that of Noell. He was all but impressed after their first meeting, writing in his diary in April 1664: "*The simple Povey, of all the most ridiculous fools that I ever knew to do business*".<sup>395</sup> Povey proved not to be a great accountant, but still established himself as a *dominus factotum* in all matters pertaining to the colonies.

Not long after launching the Committee for Trade and Plantations by the returned restoration government, alterations to its format was enacted. It was decided that trade and colonial matters should be divided, with trade left in the hands of a "Council of Trade", and the "Council of Foreign Plantations" dealing with colonial government. The process of selecting members for the two boards was a slow and careful one, and the London merchants were active in giving their opinion on appointments of the members that were to serve on them. Both boards likely appeared too crowded for Povey's liking with the Council of Trade counting over sixty members, and the Council for Foreign Plantations counting nearly fifty, but both men were granted seats. The instructions given to the Council of Foreign Plantation included most of the suggestions from the "Overtures" presented by Noell and Povey from the 1650s, regarding information control, control over appointments and legislation, and collection of information.

By 1663, eight members of the RA served on both the Council of Trade and on the Committee of Foreign Plantations simultaneously, as well as three more company members sitting on the Council of Trade specifically. The eight members who served on both council were Sir Nicholas Crispe, Sir Andrew Riccard, Thomas Povey, Martin Noell, John Colleton, Sir George Carteret, John Lord Berkley, and Sir John Shaw.<sup>396</sup> The remaining membership consisted of men with knowledge and experience from the Atlantic. Noell and Povey, along with Andrew Riccard, were among the most active members in the councils. These two councils were relatively active and efficient. The Council for Foreign Plantations heard, reviewed and reported on matters from the colonies and appointed, evicted and reinstated governors, while the Council of Trade focused on the strengthening of the Navigation Acts. The two boards assisted as the slave trade was brought under patent, supporting the RA by instilling the colonial governors to enforce the new legislation. However, towards the middle of the decade, when unforeseen circumstances crated difficulties also for the RA, the board struggled to continue. In 1665 a plague outbreak killed 100.000 of the city's 400.000 inhabitants, including Martin

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<sup>394</sup>Tristan Stein, "Tangier in the Restoration Empire," *The Historical Journal* 54, no. 4 (2011): 985–1011.

<sup>395</sup>Diary of Samuel Pepys, April 16, 1664.

<sup>396</sup>Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 67–68.

Noell. The epidemic was quickly followed by the Great Fire of London, which left 70,000-80,000 inhabitants homeless. Lastly, came the break-out of war between England and the Dutch Republic (1665-1667), largely caused by the Navigation Acts, as well as the aggression directed by the Royal Adventurers against the Dutch on the African coast.

Towards the end of the 1660's the politics of colonial and trade management passed into new hands, yet the value of combining colonial management for merchants in the Africa trade was not lost sight of. As will be shown in the next chapter, the RA was admittedly severely struggling by that point, but the members were confident the end of the war would turn things around. After all the challenging events that took place at the middle of the decade, the King's privy council again took direct charge of the management of the colonies from 1668. They would handle colonial matters until a new plan was proposed for a council in 1670. That proposal was endorsed by Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper, who had long showed interest in the overseas empire and foreign trade, and drafted together with his physician-philosopher John Locke.<sup>397</sup> The ideas endorsed by Povey and Noell since the mid-1650s, of a small board experienced in colonial matters; collecting information on all aspects of colonial life and society; as well as maintaining close contact and correspondence in the royal colonies; was again used as the foundation.<sup>398</sup> The board initially dealt only with colonial affairs, but by 1672 Ashley and Locke brought forth the suggestion of adding trade to the its responsibilities. The new commission for both trade and plantations was to be headed by Lord Ashley, who by now had become the Earl of Shaftesbury, with Locke being appointed secretary shortly after. The proposal for joining colonial management in the Atlantic with that of overseas trade, in the hands of a small council under Lord Ashley's leadership, was commissioned by writ of the Privy Seal on the September 27, 1672.<sup>399</sup> Interestingly this was the same day that the patent was granted to the Royal African Company, where both Shaftesbury and Locke stood as investors.<sup>400</sup>

<sup>397</sup>Tim Harris, "Cooper, Anthony Ashley, First Earl of Shaftesbury (1621–1683)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed February 13, 2018; J.R. Milton, "Locke, John (1632–1704)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed February 13, 2018.

<sup>398</sup>Steele, *Politics of Colonial Policy*, 5; Peter Laslett, "John Locke, the Great Recoinage, and the Origins of the Board of Trade: 1695-1698," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (July 1957): 370–402. C. Robbins, "The Life and Thought of William Popple, 1638-1708," *William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series* 24, no. 2 (April 1967): 190–223; Maurice Ashley, *The Glorious Revolution*, (London, 1966), chap. VIII.

<sup>399</sup>W. Root, "The Lords of Plantations, 1675-1695," *American Historical Review* 23, no. 1 (October 1917): 20–41; Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 106.

<sup>400</sup>Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, XXVIII:187. Lord Ashely is listed as no. 2 in the patent only surpassed by James. Thomas Povey is also listed as investor. As is three of the Crispe family: Sir Nicholas (presumably junior), Samuel and John. Charles Modyford, Thomas Modyford's brother, and Col. John Searle, former governor and Povey's old friend, is also mentioned.

## **6. Conclusion**

The shifts ushered in by the interregnum allowed Atlantic traders to impact state-decisions and the development of colonial management like never before. Through impacting the launch of metropole measures of control, mainly in the form of colonial management boards such as the committee for Jamaica, the committee for America, the committee for trade and plantations, and later the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Atlantic merchants and Africa company investors secured their continued position of privilege. In the early decades of the century merchants providing the newly settled colonies with labour, capital and necessary European goods turned the needs of the planters against them, enforcing both a monopoly and monopsony on their colonial products. Exemplified here by the business practices of Maurice Thomson and his associate Martin Noell, this early community of provision traders held a naturally favorable position. But as the Atlantic trade grew, their position of favor – largely maintained by the lack of competition, came under threat. Through the slave trade monopoly, and their seats on executive boards with extensive control over colonial policy, their favorable situation could in part be re-created. I argue therefore, that the Interregnum – a period of deep-seated change, paradoxically represented continuation from the perspective of large-scale Atlantic traders who had increasingly to contend with rising competition.

Not only the format- but also the timing of this increased colonial control was favorable for the Atlantic traders in question, as it coincided with a dip in the indentured servant import which was gradually replaced by slave trade, all the while foreign competition was staved off through the Navigation Acts. The annexation of Jamaica ensured a long-term increase in demand, as well as a potential for Spanish trade, the latter of which will be given more attention in the following chapter. The return of the monarchy in 1660 meant a heightened interest in both the trade to Africa and in colonial control as a large part of the royal income was to be made up by colonial revenue. The ability to appoint colonial representatives, through the executive councils ensured “friendly” governors, of which some were company factors, and made the monitoring of the monopoly and the hold on colonial debtors more efficient.

The relationship that emerged between the English Africa companies after 1660 and the colonial planters caused the same animosity, frustration and debts on behalf of the planters as had the personal trade of the same merchants in the past. This frustration gathered strength and led to the forming and conjoining of strong lobbies of planters and disgruntled independent traders. Further, it may be argued that the Virginian planters had a tougher time when, in the 1630s they attempted to free themselves from what was essentially an artificial dependency on the services of the colonial supply traders. Virginian planters faced the collaborative efforts

of numerous private individuals operating in de-facto unison to corner, through monopoly and monopsony, the colonial import and export market. By the latter decades of the century when colonial production had come to rely on enslaved labour, the import of which was solely controlled (at least legally and nominally) by the RA and later the Royal African Company through their patents in combination with the Navigation Acts' hampering effect on foreign trade, an increasing level of organized resistance and opposition to the company developed. I suggest that this method of trade by dependency was optimal for smaller-scale private operations, but upon adopting a similar method as a company both the RA and the RAC became far larger targets for opposition. The colonial planter lobby banded together with private traders suffering from the company's exclusive monopoly, and through organized and public opposition the two groups contributed greatly to bringing the company monopoly down.

Furthermore, the chapter underlines the argument that it was not the institutional structure that initially impacted the actor and his activities. In the case of the England's Africa trade, relevant actors, such as Maurice Thomson, built a structure of exchange based on their needs, abilities, and experiences which benefitted their personal activities. It did not, as we have seen for the planters of Virginia and later for the planters of the Caribbean, necessarily follow that this structure would be beneficial to anyone other than the merchants themselves. The goal was the hinderance of competitors, be they English or foreign traders, and as part and parcel – to exclusively supply goods that were vital to a colony's survival. As the activity levels of the Atlantic were rising, the shelter offered by a company patent became ever more desirable.

Maurice Thomson, along with men like Martin Noell, William Cloberry, Samuel Vassall and John Wood, represented the group of long-distance traders and financiers responsible for this method of expansion. Through market control, privilege, metropolitan support, and monopoly these merchants grew rich in the early colonization process. This wealth was funneled back into exploring new trades and further hinderance of competition, a result of which was the shape of the early formal slave trade. Through their experience with plantation development, labour supplying, and provisioning, these merchants laid a foundation on which the companies of the second half of the century would stand, and eventually crumble. Through use of political connections, and manipulation of the colonial systems of governance, the ratification of the Navigation Acts spared these traders the loss of profit brought by competition with first foreign and later domestic traders.

The privilege held by the Royal Adventurers into Africa from 1663 onwards was therefore unique as it was a placement, at least on paper if not always in reality, of the responsibility for the survival of England's increasingly profitable Caribbean societies in the hands of a single company. No other English company had by that

time enjoyed such a responsibility, or opportunity for theoretical profit. The label the trade has carried, as aristocratic, privileged, or failing, deserves more nuance. If we consider the powerful legacy of these new members, labelled by Brenner as ‘ship-owners’ and ‘shop-keepers’, in the shaping of the Anglo-Africa trade, I argue that the impact of aristocrats, kings and protectors, not to say states, was dwarfed by comparison.

## CHAPTER 5:

# THE COMPANY OF ROYAL ADVENTURERS TRADING INTO AFRICA AND THE SPANISH ASIENTO

### 1. Introduction

The year 1660 marks a watershed not only in English history domestically, but also for England's trade with Africa and the Atlantic. With the return of Charles II, a new era was ushered in politically, culturally and economically. The return of the Stuart monarchy impacted the entire sphere of English overseas trade – and thanks in part to a close personal association with the royal family, the newly launched company of Royal Adventurers into Africa was no exception. As was discussed in previous chapters, the Restoration put an end to the presence of the East India Company on the Guinea coast, though the reality for established Atlantic merchants with interests in the trade changed little, as many opted for membership in the new company and on boards that helped control the company's new customer-base – the Caribbean planter community. Charles granted the exclusive right to conduct trade on England's behalf with the West African coast to a joint-stock company led by his brother, James Duke of York, and his cousin, Prince Rupert of the Rhine.<sup>401</sup> Prince Rupert appears as a *primus motor* within the royal circles as his previous stints on the coast, discussed in chapter 3, convinced him there was gold to be found in West Africa. Attempts at dividing up the trade between the EIC and the Royal Adventurers (RA) fell through, and soon after the RA patent was issued the EIC stepped down their activity, leaving the entire coast in the hands of the new company. The results of the earlier patent negotiations from 1651, which saw the coast split up into enclaves of company control, were annulled and the freedom of trade to the region which had existed for the past decade or so, came to an end.

The first years of company activity were not too different from the first years of its predecessor, as described in chapter 1. Voyages of reconnaissance and early trade were attempted but brought little return. The company, despite its many blue-

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<sup>401</sup>Carr, XXVIII:172–76.

blooded and wealthy members, struggled to profit. Much of the involvement of the court of Charles II – at a level unseen so far, certainly for the Africa trade – can be partly explained by the potential for gold, but likely also by pressure for support stemming from the inner circles of the royal family, as the king’s brother and cousin advocated for the company’s potential. The same tendency was appearing at courts in continental Europe such as Denmark and Sweden, but most notably at the court of king Charles’ cousin, king Louis XIV of France, who also turned his gaze to overseas trade at the same time, and expected financial assistance from his courtiers.<sup>402</sup> The blue-blooded membership and the fact that the company struggled through much of its existence, gave it a reputation - in the words of K.G. Davies - as an “aristocratic treasure hunt”, unsuccessful and the whimsical result of bored courtiers who lacked the knowledge and experience necessary for the endeavor.<sup>403</sup> This chapter will question that notion, attempting to put into a new perspective the many new responsibilities and challenges facing an Africa company taking part in the greater Atlantic exchange.

Illustration 17:

King Charles II of England, his brother James Stuart, Duke of York and later King James II of England, and Prince Rupert of the Rhine, Count Palatinate.



by John Michael Wright,  
ca. 1665  
Source: National Portrait  
Gallery  
London, UK.



by Peter Lely, c. 1665  
Source: The Royal Collection  
Trust.



by Gerrit van Honthorst, ca.  
1640  
Source: National Portrait  
Gallery  
London, UK.

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<sup>402</sup>This was shown by Elizabeth Heijmans in her recently completed PhD thesis at Leiden University (fall 2017), Elisabeth Heijmans, “The Agency of Empire, Personal Connections and Individual Strategies in the Shaping of the French Early Modern Expansion (1686-1746)” (Universiteit Leiden, 2018), 15–19.

<sup>403</sup>Davies, *The Royal African Company*.

The Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa (RA) is the second representation of formal English initiative on the western coast of Africa to largely disappear into the background by a strong historiographical focus on the Royal African Company (RAC). One publication stands out and became the main reference for official company history: that of George Frederick Zook, published as a PhD thesis during his time at Cornell University, in 1919.<sup>404</sup> Zook stated in the introduction to his book, titled *The Company of Royal Adventurers into Africa*, that the work was intended to ready the ground for a larger scholarly piece on the history of the RAC from 1672-1752. Thus, like in most works on the trade, the only monograph devoted to the history of the Royal Adventurers was in reality another introduction to the history of the RAC. This is no criticism of Zook's work which is both detailed and enlightening, and in combination with other smaller studies on company history and activities, has given us a good overview of the company's daily activities, finances and eventual end. These works prove that the company is deserving of our attention for, despite its relatively short life – it existed for just over a decade, it introduced large-scale regulated slave trade, partly started and was embroiled in war, sub-contracted the Asiento to the Spanish slave trade, further consolidated English presence on the African coast, and introduced practices that laid the groundwork for the more standardized company management seen in the RAC. The RA was the first English company to be officially involved in the transatlantic slave trade, for the first time stated clearly in its patent, and it played a vital role in the increasing English activities in the 1660s Caribbean. Zook, although publishing the most comprehensive study of the RA, is not the only historian to engage with its history. Great studies of the period, on economic developments in Africa and the Caribbean, the Asiento contract, the Second Anglo-Dutch war (1665-1667), and the English Restoration - and Stuart history, have not ignored a company which, despite its problematic reputation and legacy was center-stage in many of the seismic events of the 1660s. Examples of these are Elizabeth Donnan's work on the slave trade; Nuala Zahedieh's work on the growing economic exchanges of the late seventeenth century Atlantic; the work of George Scelle and more recently Alejandro García-Montón on the history of the Spanish Asiento contracts; and A.P. Thornton's contributions on the trade with the Spanish Empire via Jamaica and Barbados – a trade that the company wholeheartedly took part in, despite its questionable legality, and much to the chagrin of the English planters and colonists.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>404</sup>George Frederick Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa* (Lancaster, Pa., Press of the New Era Printing Co., 1919), <http://archive.org/details/companyofroyalad00zookrich>.

<sup>405</sup>Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*; Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy 1660-1700*; Zahedieh, "Making Mercantilism Work"; Nuala Zahedieh, "The Merchants of Port Royal, Jamaica, and the Spanish Contraband Trade, 1655-1692," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (1986): 570–93; A. P. Thornton, "Spanish Slave-

Building on these works, this chapter will consider the methods the company applied to the age-old problem of making people honor their subscriptions, and operationalizing the trade, especially considering the decision and ability of the company to service the desirable Asiento contract to provide slave labor to the Spanish Empire.

Though a picture has emerged which emphasizes the company's losses and failures, and as an extension – the apparently unrealistic decision to take on the Asiento, I will attempt to contribute to an alternative view, considering some of the personal motives and contemporary circumstances surrounding that decision, as well as putting them into context with some of the developments discussed in previous chapters. It will be argued here that the potential for taking on the Asiento contract motivated merchants with mercantile experience to join the company in the years between its first and second patent, and may have had an impact on the decision to place English slave trade under a patent of privilege for the first time in January 1662/1663. The patent helped Martin Noell, Thomas Povey and the other members control the reaping of any potential benefits stemming from the contract with Spain, limiting it to the company, though a general spill-over of private trade between the largest English colonies and the Spanish America arose as a result. The members appearing in the company's second patent counted only 65 but represented a doubling from the original 30 appearing in the first patent, and the number grew through the decade. It will further be suggested that the negotiations between the company and the Asiento contract-holders relied heavily on the contacts of Atlantic merchants - centering around Sir Martin Noell and his international network – appearing as a private and closed negotiation largely outside the realm of diplomacy between states. The conditions stipulated by the Spanish authorities demanded that no enemy state involved itself in the process of supply, and due to skirmishes between English and Spanish settlers as part of the annexation of Jamaica it was unclear whether England qualified as a friend. The first attempts at reaching an agreement with the company therefore fell through, and the solution was an initial private contract between the asentistas and Martin Noell until the conflict was solved. Individuals therefore facilitated the contractual agreement in their private capacity, free of the diplomatic

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Ships in the English West Indies, 1660-85," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 35, no. 3 (1955): 374-85; A. P. Thornton, "The Organization of the Slave Trade in the English West Indies, 1660-1685," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (1955): 399-409; Jenkinson, "The Records of the English African Companies"; G. Scelle, "The Slave-Trade in the Spanish Colonies of America: The Assiento," *The American Journal of International Law* 4, no. 3 (1910): 612-61; Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire*; Roper, *Advancing Empire*; Alejandro García-Montón, "Seducing Smugglers: The Spanish Empire's Incentives for Inter-Imperial Official Slave Trade, 1640-1670 (Forthcoming)," n.d. Regarding the sources: The two books that give the most detail about the early years of the company were filed in the National Archive's 'T 70' category, T 70/309 and T 70/1221 are especially useful. T 70 holds most of the documents pertaining to the trade to Africa, including the official records of the Royal African Company, dated from 1672 onwards.

responsibilities of a royal company they blurred the lines between official and private trade emphasizing the entanglement of the two seemingly conflicting spheres. Furthermore, the Asiento negotiations thus represented another example of private practice being introduced into, rather than developed within, a company format. In much the same way as the 1618 and 1631 patent, as well as the EIC lease, and the format of the slave trade, represented an introduction of established private practice among select individuals into an official company format. I suggest that the extensive privileges granted to the RA in 1660, paired with the exclusion of the EIC from the Guinea coast, spurred several EIC members, such as Noell, to RA membership. The enclaves of free slave trading, which opened as a result of the patent renegotiations in 1651, were again closed, and operating through a company – especially one taking part on the supplying of the Spanish Asiento, was a profitable option. In addition, the strengthened metropolitan grasp on the colonies – in part developed by Noell and Povey as discussed in chapter 4, made a company-controlled slave trade more viable. The selection of governors and officials with tight links to the merchants and managing boards in the metropole, some of whom doubled as company factors, helped matters further.

However, I argue that the decision to involve itself, through exclusive privilege, in the transatlantic slave trade, proved to be more challenging to the company than at first appeared. The greater Atlantic exchange, in comparison to the bilateral commodity and luxury exchange between Europe and Africa, relied heavily on cycles of credit and debt, based around colonial agricultural commodities. As the trade to the colonies grew through the 1650s and 1660s so did the debts. Despite privileges unmatched by any other commercial organization in the English realm, the costs quickly outweighed the benefits as the new company's responsibility brought with it a drop in liquidity and long cycles of exchange based on colonial crop cycles. To this problem the Asiento contract appeared to as a possible solution. The Spanish markets dealt in bullion, mostly silver, to a far higher degree than the English colonies. The contract also stipulated deliveries of pre-agreed numbers of slave laborers, with pre-agreed prices, and a timeline for delivery, doing away with the insecurities and delays that came with meeting buyers upon arrival in the Caribbean, both aspects that raised transaction costs. The asentistas operated with their own factors, based in Barbados and Jamaica, who managed the transition of cargoes and shipped the slaves from there to the Spanish markets, thus relieving the company of venturing into the Spanish Main. These aspects mitigated risk and uncertainty and lowered the costs for both parties. However, the decision to focus company attention on supplying a foreign state, while holding the complete control over English colonial labour supply and struggling to reach the targets for import, was not unproblematic. It led to widespread frustration among colonists – the company's main group of debtors. Despite the assistance offered by some loyal governors, the company struggled

with collecting their debts. The weight of the growing debts was soon added to the damages brought on by the second Anglo-Dutch war in 1664/1665. The continued practice of relying on the personal credit of company managers, and of rampant borrowing from members, made the situation dire both externally and internally in the company towards the end of the decade, resulting in the extension of licenses to private traders and a gradual slipping of company control over the trade. The chapter will therefore devote time to investigating how and by whom the Asiento contract was negotiated, considering the outlook in the year the contract commenced, as well as the obstacles that appeared through the decade, before attempting an assessment of the actual outcome of the contract, using the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, and its effect on the company.

## 2. The Company of Royal Adventures Trading into Africa

After the RA received its patent first patent on December 18, 1660, an elected committee of six company members<sup>406</sup> were put in charge of company business and the first five ships<sup>407</sup> were quickly dispatched for the coast of Africa. Sailing under the command of Captain Robert Holmes, they arrived in March 1660/1. After some minor altercations with a group of Courlanders, Holmes and his crew settled Charles- and James Island in the mouth of the Gambia River. The choice of destination for the first expedition likely reflects the initial hopes of locating sources of gold. The success of the company's gold search would be no greater than it had been for the previous company, though the company's own petitions through the decade includes claims of gold imports. The latter of the two new settlements, James Island, positioned about 30km up the river, continued as an important base for the trade between England and Africa for the remainder of the early modern period, and the ruins from this activity can be seen there still. In addition to these settlements came Fort Kormantine, which continued to represent the company head quarter on the coast. Kormantine had, as seen above, initially been held by the Guinea Company after Nicholas Crispe left the company, but upon the return of Crispe after the Restoration its ownership was again debated before finally being transferred in a deal struck between Crispe and the new company in the summer of 1662.<sup>408</sup>

After settling new trading posts, and commencing initial exchanges with the African states there, and the first 3 years consisted of fitting and sending out company

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<sup>406</sup>The first committee of six consisted of Earl of Pembroke, Lord Craven, Sir George Carteret, William Coventry, Sir Ellis Leighton and Cornelius Vermuyden.

<sup>407</sup>The first five ships sent were the *Henrietta*, the *Sophia*, the *Amity*, the *Griffin*, and the *Kingsale*.

<sup>408</sup>Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa*, 1919, 14–15.

ships for bilateral exchange between Africa and England in a similar fashion to most of the GC's past activities. The ship the *Amity* returned to England in July. Its cargo, consisting mainly of ivory, hides and wax, yielded £1,579.<sup>409</sup> It would prove to be one of the very few profitable voyages that early trade granted the company. Unaware of this fact the company fitted out and sent the ship *Blackamoor* to the Gold Coast, followed by the *Swallow*. The cost of the two ships reached £3,742. Lastly, the dispatch of the *Charles*, the *James*, and the *Mary*, in September that same year, at the combined cost of approximately £5000, marked the end of ships sent by the company before the patent was renegotiated in 1663.<sup>410</sup> The cost of the first five ships at Christmas 1660/1, sent directly after the patent was signed, is not known, but considering the combined cost of £5000 for setting out the final three vessels under the former patent, an average of about £1,700 per ship is not unreasonable. That left a total bill of around £17,080 by 1663 which had brought returns worth £1,579 from the sale of the goods brought back by the *Amity* in the summer 1661. The subscriptions of the company at that point, in September 1662, stood at £17,400. Of which 16% stemmed from the royal family. £800 was promised by the king, £800 by the company governor – the Duke of York, and £400 each by the queen mother, the duchess of Orleans (the king's sister), and Prince Rupert.<sup>411</sup> Not all fulfilled their promises however, and there was £1000 missing still by October 1662 as the granting of a new and extended patent appeared on the agenda.

England was not the only state placing the trade in human cargoes under monopoly patent in the years 1662/3. After years of legal vacuum, Spain, as a result of the end of the Luso-Spanish union, now decided to sell the exclusive rights to supply enslaved laborers to their empire to merchants who were willing to pay a lump yearly sum for the privilege. In July 1662, the Asiento contract was granted to a Genoese merchant firm led by Domenico Grillo and Ambrosio Lomellino. The Genoese merchants had little to no background in the slave trade and no established contact with the coast of Africa and intended to subcontract suppliers to make sure the necessary quota of enslaved Africans reached Spanish American ports. The company jumped at the opportunity to take on a role as supplier. However, a raid carried out by Christopher Myngs on St. Jago de Cuba in the middle of the delicate negotiations made Spanish authorities reluctant to accept the English company.<sup>412</sup> As we will see below an agreement was instead negotiated with

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<sup>409</sup>TNA: T 70/309, sums rounded up to nearest pound

<sup>410</sup>Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa*, 1919, 10–11.

<sup>411</sup>British Library, *The Several Declarations Of the Company Of Royal Adventures Of England Trading into Africa Inviting all his majesties native subjects in general to subscribe, and become sharers in their joynt-stock*, by Sir Ellis Leighton, Secretary, at Whitehall January 12, 1662[3], p.2 Carr, *Ibid.*, p.173.

<sup>412</sup>"America and West Indies: May 1664," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 5, 1661-1668*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1880), 205-212. *British History Online*, accessed November 29, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol5/pp205-212>.

Sir Martin Noell privately. The initial disappointment did not slow talks of granting the company an extended patent however and was likely spurred on further when an agreement between the holders of the Asiento and the Dutch WIC was reached on 15 September 1662.

There was a need for better and more experienced management and clearer rules for the running of the company. The second patent of the company, signed in January 1662/3, saw to this.<sup>413</sup> It included more control over stock transfers, an unequivocal ban on private trade conducted by company members – a rule that appears to have remained bendable in situations where the company benefitted, exemplified by Noell shortly after entering into his private agreement with the Genoese firm. The patent area was further expanded now reaching from Cape Blanco to Cape Sallé on the Moroccan coast. Furthermore, the management group, known as the Committee of Six, was expanded. It now consisted of a governor, a sub governor, a deputy governor, and a Court of Assistants consisting of 36 members. The routine business was, however, still managed by a smaller group of seven members, including either governor, sub-governor, or deputy governor. Until this point there had been no organized plan for managing the company's calls for subscriptions, nor any schedule for when they were to take place. The assumption was that money would present itself when needed. This had not worked out as planned, and the new patent was accompanied by a second round of subscriptions. It is important to point out that these subscriptions were just that, subscriptions, that is promises to pay. The money was not transferred instantly, more often a long time passed between the promise to pay and the actual handing over of money, in some instances it never happened at all. The king was guilty of not honoring his own subscriptions on more than one occasion.<sup>414</sup> This meant a continued reliance on credit from the very earliest time of company activity. The problems that could arise internally when the company turned to the personal credit of individual members was amply shown in the case of the GC in its first decade of existence. The internal fighting over debt-responsibility brought the organization to its very knees after several rounds in court. The problem of debt quickly came to haunt the RA like it had done its predecessor in its early years.

With the second round of subscriptions, which by January 15, 1662/3 had yielded £17,000, a clear payment plan was laid out where fines were enacted for

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<sup>413</sup>Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, XXVIII:177–81; García-Montón, “Seducing Smugglers: The Spanish Empire’s Incentives for Inter-Imperial Official Slave Trade, 1640-1670 (Forthcoming),” 17.

<sup>414</sup>He invested £5,200 and £2000 in the company in the summer of 1663, during the third and fourth rounds of subscriptions. In the Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, on June 27, 1663 it is suggested to the High Treasurers that money can be granted from customs payments, but no records suggests this ever took place. “Charles II - volume 75: June 1663,” in *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles II, 1663-4*, ed. Mary Anne Everett Green (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1862), 159-189. *British History Online*, accessed December 1, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/chas2/1663-4/pp159-189>.

missed payments.<sup>415</sup> The hope was to put an end to false promises and to speed up slow payments, and to some degree this had the desired effect. In an open invitation to potential new subscribers the company secretary, Sir Ellis Leighton, explained the new rules for subscribing and asked anyone interested, within London and without, to consider becoming a member. The invitation stated that each share was worth £400, with the first half of each share to be paid by December 1, 1663, and the second half by March 1, 1663/4. Despite the secretary's open invitation, the share price was far beyond what the vast majority of Englishmen could afford, and the venture remained an exclusive affair for wealthy merchants and courtiers. One share of £400 constituted one vote at the assembly of The Generality, the yearly gathering of all the company members.<sup>416</sup> There was some acknowledgement of the fact that £400 was a steep price to pay for many, possibly because the subscriptions did not reach the desired level, and later in the spring of 1663, investments down to £50 were allowed, to include those with smaller means, on the condition that this was paid within eight days of making the subscription. These calls for open subscriptions had not been attempted before, as the inclusion into the GC relied on network connections or the occasional threat that pushed the company into a merger. This was, as was shown in chapter 3, the case when Samuel Vassall opted for membership. The RA was therefore, despite its reputation for exclusivity and high-ranking members, the most open Africa company seen so far. Still, it must be acknowledged, with the average yearly earnings of a skilled craftsman reaching only around £25 – half the cost of the “cheapest” subscription option, to be paid within eight days no less, the call was indeed not aimed at including everyone.

In the Insurance Office at the Royal Exchange in London the company book was lying open between 8 and 12 o'clock every morning until October 20, 1663, for anyone who lived in London or within a radius of twenty miles, and until November 5 the same year for anyone living further away. It appears therefore, that this was the first time that merchants based outside the City of London were actively invited to participate in company trade, breaking the exclusivity that had lasted since the operations of the Senegal Adventurers ceased at the end of the previous century. Those who wanted to subscribe to company stock needed to make their way to London and sign their name and subscription amount in the book, or request someone do it on their behalf. Leighton's invitation was published in January, and thus the period of

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<sup>415</sup>BL: *The Several Declarations Of the Company Of Royal Adventurers Of England Trading into Africa Inviting all his majesties native subjects in general to subscribe, and become sharers in their joynt-stock*, by Sir Ellis Leighton, Secretary, at Whitehall January 12, 1662[3].

<sup>416</sup>BL., Secretary, Sir Ellis Leighton, *Ibid.*, “*And we the severall subscribers do severally further agree, that any Adventurer, who shall be present at any General Court, shall vote, and rule in the Governement of this stock and trade according to his adventure, that is, for every four hundred pounds Adventure to have one vote.*”

open subscription was nearly a year long and, confusingly, overlapped with new rounds of subscriptions commenced in the summer of 1663. For those who chose to make the trip down to the Insurance Office and invest, a 10% discount was offered to those who paid their subscription on time. Leighton's invitation promised further that after seven years the stock would be evaluated fairly by a committee of company members, and anyone who wanted to receive the value of his stock in money could request it. Such evaluations were to take place every three years from that point onwards.<sup>417</sup> However, before seven years had passed it was clear to everyone that the only thing more unlikely than such an evaluation taking place, was for company members to be given any ready money for their stocks.

This second round of subscription, commencing in January 1662/3, yielded £34,000, of which a further £5,200 was promised by the king. Already by the end of August 1663, long before the first payment for the previous subscriptions were due, new subscriptions-rounds, the third and fourth by this point, were organized. Payment could be made in eight quarterly instalments, and the yield reached £29,000, of which yet another £2000 were promised by the king. These four subscription rounds took the total worth of the company to £102,000 on September 4, 1663. Of this 60%, or £57,425 was paid, leaving unpaid subscriptions worth £44,775. Zook is however clear in his work on the difficulties in calculating the numbers, as the few company books that exist do not separate between money owed for stocks and money owed the company for other things.<sup>418</sup> From September 4, 1663 to March 1664, none of the company's own records have survived. The book that held the financial records of company activity up to that point was completed and the volume that followed lost. But there evidently was held a final round of subscriptions in September 1664, yielding another £18,200, thus bringing the total stock of the company to £120,000.<sup>419</sup>

A petition to the king during the record-less period has survived to give some indication of how the company was faring financially.<sup>420</sup> In its petition the company commented on their investments; the levels of their shipping; and their trade, though the figures presented can have been somewhat inflated. The company members claimed that although it was struggling financially they managed a trade worth upwards of £160,000, all to the great benefit of England. More than 40 ships had been sent, and the importance of the company as supplier of labour in the Caribbean colonies; in "*venting*" English commodities, in supporting development of new manufacture, not to mention the importing of "*considerable quantities of*

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<sup>417</sup>BL: Secretary Sir Ellis Leighton, *Ibid.*, p.3

<sup>418</sup>Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa*, 1919, 17, fn. 33; Zook, 19–20, fn. 42, 44.

<sup>419</sup>Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa*, 1919, 19–20, fn. 42.

<sup>420</sup>TNA: CO 1/17 p. 264

*Gold and Silver*”, should be clear to everyone.<sup>421</sup> However, despite claiming to have developed a great relationship with the African states on the coast, and with most of the European states present, there was one fly in the ointment: the Dutch. The Dutch WIC’s representative on the coast, Director-General Jan Valckenburg, kept sending the company’s factors letters of protests to English presence on the coast.<sup>422</sup> In the letters he “*challengeth the whole trade of Guinny as their Propriety[sic] by sight of Conquest from ye Portugueses*”.<sup>423</sup> The Dutch argued that their eventual eviction of the Portuguese, the first claimants to the coast, in 1642, meant that the right to the coast passed to them, leaving no right of access to the English companies. The RA’s directors were clearly concerned for the future outcome of Anglo-Dutch relations on the coast, completing their petition by stating that “*our Experiences of what is past gives us just cause to apprehend what is Intended towards us for the future*”.<sup>424</sup>

It was the RA that made the first move in the lead-up to what was to become the Second Anglo-Dutch war (1665-1667). Captain Robert Holmes was sent out on a second expedition to the west coast of Africa around the turn of the new year 1663/4, just as the final subscription-round was launched. Holmes spent the Spring of 1663/4 advancing against Dutch trading centers along the coast, culminating with the seizing of Cape Coast Castle on May 1. Upon hearing the news of Holmes successful mission, the company utilized its apparently strengthened position to claim missing payments on subscriptions, as well as asking all members for a loan of £100 per £400 share they owned, which yielded another £15,650.<sup>425</sup> Despite capitalizing on the raids, the company and the king were careful about claiming knowledge or involvement in Holmes’ activities, which after his return to England, remained unclear. Had the king sent him to attack the Dutch? Or was he operating independently? He had, after all, sailed as a commander of the king’s ships, and in the service of the company, and attacked the RA’s main enemy on the African coast. Did he represent the company, and if so, were the Dutch forts and factories he had occupied now the property of Holmes and his crew, the crown, or the company?

The question of how to proceed was no longer relevant when, in August 1664, rumors of the arrival of the Dutch Admiral Michiel de Ruyter on the West African coast - turned out to be true. De Ruyter reclaimed all the Dutch forts and

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<sup>421</sup>TNA: CO 1/17 p. 264r

<sup>422</sup>“America and West Indies: June 1663,” in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 5, 1661-1668*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1880), 134-147. *British History Online*, accessed December 1, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol5/pp134-147>.

<sup>423</sup>TNA: CO 1/17 p. 264v

<sup>424</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>425</sup>TNA: T 70/75, p.11-12. In it James promised £2000, and Sir Nicholas Crispe £500.

factories on the coast in addition to Fort Kormantine, putting an end to over 30 years of English activity there. The only exception was, ironically, Cape Coast Castle which was retained and granted to the company as a replacement for their lost headquarter. The actions of Holmes and de Ruyter on the African coast in the Spring of 1664, supported by their respective African companies, tipped the scales in favor of war, and despite the RA's initial excited involvement in actions against the Dutch, it did not take long before the company realized that the war and its effects would become the biggest obstacle to overcome.

### 3. Securing the Asiento

The break out of full blown war between England and the Dutch Republic in March 1665 was terribly timed from the company's perspective. They had signed a contract to supply the Spanish Americas with enslaved African laborers less than a year before, and now the profitability and stability of the trade was dropping rapidly. The *Asiento de Negros* was, as briefly mentioned above, the official Spanish contract for supplying its vast territories in the Americas with slave labour. The mines of Spanish America, the source of much-desired silver, had initially been manned by local wage- and forced laborers. As European diseases and harsh treatment took its toll on the Amerindian populations it became clear that labour had to be acquired elsewhere. It was not an option for Spanish settlers to contribute with their own labour, nor was it considered an option to open the empire up to non-Spanish European immigration. It was therefore increasingly commonplace to traffic enslaved men, women and children from the West African Coast. Those destined for work in the mines came in addition to a sizeable number of enslaved Africans sent to work as urban labourers, as well as workers for the haciendas and Caribbean plantations. The Spanish authorities organized the trade in these labourers through the granting of the Asiento contract.<sup>426</sup>

The holders of the Asiento, the Genoese firm of Grillo & Lomellino, maintained, in return for a large lump sum paid to the Spanish state, the sole right to supply and profit from trade in African labour in the Spanish American ports – most commonly Vera Cruz, Cartagena, and Porto Belo. As seen above, the contract included an agreed-upon number of slaves to be provided over a set time-period, and the large numbers made it necessary for the main contract-holder to subcontract

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<sup>426</sup>John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (Yale University Press, 2007), 97–100, 231; Georges Scelle, *La traite négrière aux Indes de Castille, contrats et traités d'assiento*; (Paris, L. Larose & L. Tenin, 1906); Scelle, "The Slave-Trade in the Spanish Colonies of America"; Johannes Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); García-Montón, "Seducing Smugglers: The Spanish Empire's Incentives for Inter-Imperial Official Slave Trade, 1640-1670 (Forthcoming)."

parts of the privilege to other sub-suppliers. Grillo & Lomellino had no background in trade on the coast of Africa, nor any slave trading experience. Their portfolio included tax-farming, financing and wool trade. It is possible that the main intention for securing the contract was to gain access to further state contracts in shipbuilding and supplying, which the income from the transatlantic slave trade was meant to cover.<sup>427</sup> Thus, the Asiento contract meant far more than trading slaves. This was true not only for Grillo & Lomellino, but for the sub-contractors as well as it opened for access to previously closed markets in Spanish America – the largest in the Atlantic, which in addition paid for goods in silver. To Atlantic slave traders, usually limited to dealing with planters on credit in return for colonial goods, the Asiento - and trade with the Spanish territories more generally - was especially tempting.<sup>428</sup> In order to secure the contract the Genoese merchants pledged to ship 24,000 slaves over the course of seven years.<sup>429</sup>

As already alluded to above, the RA was eager to take part in the supply trade, but an ill-conceived military maneuver against Spanish officials in the Caribbean put the discussions with the company on hold. Instead one of the company's members, Sir Martin Noell, stepped forward in his own capacity and agreed to a role in the sub-contracting. The company were not selling licenses at this point in time and had just included in their new patent a strict ban on private trade. Considering, therefore, that the negotiations between Noell and the Genoese were discussed openly with the company, it is possible that Noell represented the interest of the company, which had the option of allowing one of their member to take part in the trade or have no trade at all.

The contract between the Genoese firm and Noel stipulated that Noell would provide between 600-1000 slaves, already in Barbados, to be delivered within three days of the arrival of the ship of the asentistas. The ship, named *St. Jean Baptist*, was to sail from Cadiz for the Spanish West Indies – stopping over at Barbados, onboard were the agents of the Genoese, as well as a Mr. Giles Lytcott representing Noell. Half of the cargo was paid for in Europe upon signing the contract, the second half was to be paid for by money and merchandize brought back from the Spanish territories after the sale at the cost of Grillo & Lomellino. The ship can be traced from Cadiz to Barbados, before sailing on to Vera Cruz. It is possible it did a stop-over at Jamaica, but according to the enquiries of García-Montón, Noell was not happy with the outcome, claiming in his final will that the Genoese merchants owed

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<sup>427</sup>García-Montón, "Seducing Smugglers: The Spanish Empire's Incentives for Inter-Imperial Official Slave Trade, 1640-1670 (Forthcoming)," 10–11, 14.

<sup>428</sup>Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815*, 30.

<sup>429</sup>Postma, 33.

him money.<sup>430</sup> Still, the outcome was not worse than for the company to decide to enter into contract again once the opportunity presented itself.

By the end of June 1664 – just under a year before the break-out of war, the contract between Grillo & Lomellino and the Company of Royal Adventurers was finally ratified.<sup>431</sup> From then until 1667 the RA functioned as a subcontractor to the operations of Grillo & Lomellino. In the following decades the RA's successor, the Royal Africa Company (RAC), also involved itself with the Spanish slave trade through supplying the new Genoese asentistas Barroso and Porcio, as well as Dutchman Balthasar Coymans.<sup>432</sup> In the early eighteenth century another English company would be the first and last English holder of the Asiento itself, with the signing of the contract by the South Sea Company in March 1717, to which the rapidly deteriorating RAC again served as subcontractor. What often springs to mind when mentioning the South Sea Company is the infamous South Sea Bubble of 1720, and in that debacle the Asiento played no minor part.

For the RA also, the intentions for the Asiento trade proved problematic. Interactions between the RA and the English colonies were at the time of the contract neither particularly successful or friendly. The promise of supplying Spanish markets via Barbados and Jamaica did not help relations with the colonists, who, themselves, had to refrain from trading with foreign merchants. The company's second patent in combination with the renewal and further expansion of the navigation acts, effectively closed the English slave trade off to everyone but the company. The planters and colonists could legally only purchase labour from fellow Englishmen, and the only Englishmen allowed onto the coast of Africa were the representatives of the RA. The colonists, already frustrated by the closing of the trade, now feared for the company's abilities to fulfil its obligations and rightfully believed they would lose out to traders offering Spanish silver. Furthermore, they did not trust the ability of colonial administrators to maintain the integrity of the English colonial markets, fearing a spill-over of private Spanish trade in the wake of the Asiento exchange. Therefore, the story of the RA and the Asiento necessarily also becomes a story that involves the English planter community. The trading in slaves under contract took place in the two largest Caribbean colonies the English possessed, Barbados and Jamaica, and

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<sup>430</sup>García-Montón, "Seducing Smugglers: The Spanish Empire's Incentives for Inter-Imperial Official Slave Trade, 1640-1670 (Forthcoming)," 22–25. TNA: CO 1/17, p. 105, undated. 1663 can be too early but the document itself is undated and bound with material relating to matters about the colonies from the summer of 1663. Lytcott's name is spelled in numerous ways: Lidcot/Lydcott/Lydcote. By 1663 Lytcott had already been frequenting the English Caribbean for a decade already, after the subcontract expired he directed his attention to attacking Spanish shipping.

<sup>431</sup>TNA: T 70/75, p. 16. June 16, 1664. Scelle, *La traite négrière aux Indes de Castille, contrats et traités d'assiento*, 524.

<sup>432</sup>Scelle, "The Slave-Trade in the Spanish Colonies of America."

the competition in the market stood between the English planters offering sugar and other colonial commodities in exchange for slaves, and the Spanish traders offering either similar commodities or bullion. Furthermore, a drop in sugar prices in the early 1660s was exacerbated by limiting legal colonial exports to only one market – the English domestic market. When the company announced in the summer of 1664 that it had reached an agreement with Grillo and Lomellino, it was the beginning of a steady stream of petitions from the English Caribbean community asking for the freeing up of the trade to Guinea, and a cap on slave prices. A good example of which is the petition from numerous Caribbean planters represented by Paul Painter, to which company secretary Sir Ellis Leighton was later asked to respond.<sup>433</sup>

The petitioners stated, “*there is of late a new erected Company of Adventurers Trading into Africa, who claiming to themselves the sole and only Trade of Negroes on the coast of Guiney, have totally obstructed the former free Trade of all Adventurers thither; and having contracted with Forreiners for supply of the Spanish Plantations with Negroes, do leave the English Plantations in America, which produce the same Commodities with the Spanish, either ill supplied, and at excessive prices, or not at all supplied; by reason whereof, and of the obstruction of the freedom of Trade in Negroes as aforesaid, all His Majesties Plantations in America be provided, will speedily be brought to the inevitable destruction.*”<sup>434</sup>

In addition to the fear of an undersupply of labour, the company’s trade was in breach of the expressed policies of the Acts of Trade.<sup>435</sup> The first versions of the restrictive and protectionist trade acts already appeared in 1651 and aimed at limiting trade between colonists and visiting foreign traders. By 1660 the acts were relaunched, focusing on protecting the now lucrative colonial commodities and limiting a perceived drain of resources through trade with other states. One of the least debatable breaches was the decision to allow the *asentistas* to base their factors in Barbados and Jamaica to manage the trade with the company. The acts stated, “*That no alien or person not born within the allegiance of our sovereign lord the King, his heirs and successors . . . shall from and after [...] the Year of our Lord, one thousand six hundred sixty-one, exercise the trade or occupation of a merchant or*

<sup>433</sup>BL: Petition titled *An Answer of the Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading into Africa to the Petition and Paper of certain Heads and Particulars thereunto relating and annexed, exhibited to the Honourable House of Commons by Sir Paul Painter, Ferdinando Gorges, Henry Bateson, Benjamin Skutt and Thomas Knight, on the behalf of Themselves and Others concerned in His Majesties Plantations in America*. Anno Dom. 1667. Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa*, 1919, Ch. IV.

<sup>434</sup>Printed petition, “*The Humble Petition of Sir Paul Painter Knight, Ferdinando Gorges, Henry Bateson, Gentlemen, and Benjamin Skutt and Thomas Knights Merchants, in behalf of themselves and others concerned in His Majesties Plantations in America*”. Copy dated 15 Nov 1667.

<sup>435</sup>Ireland, *A Collection of All the Irish and English Statutes Now in Force and Use, Relating to His Majesty’s Revenue of Ireland [Electronic Resource], ... Together with an Alphabetical Index to the Whole / By James Fleming*, Eighteenth Century Collections Online. (Dublin: printed for the author; and sold by Philip Crampton, 1741).

*factor in any of the said places [the English colonies]; upon the pain of forfeiture and loss of all his goods and chattels*".<sup>436</sup> Yet the sway the company held with the king assured a special permission was granted already in early 1663, allowing the asentistas an exemption from the rules. It is highly unlikely that Martin Noell would be able to request such a permission and proves the benefits of intermixing personal freedom with company contacts. In addition to controlling the access of foreigners to the English colonies, it listed a number of colonial products; specifically sugar, tobacco, raw cotton, ginger, indigo and other dyewoods; only to be circulated within the English realm. The same rule applied to any commodity coming out of England's "plantations" in America, Asia, or Africa.<sup>437</sup> The act did, however, make an exception for bullion, which could be imported into England freely along with any prizes taken by English ships.<sup>438</sup> The question of the legality of the Asiento trade therefore circled the presence of foreign traders in the English colonies, and the trade of slaves from Africa – considered "commodities", with the Spanish realm.

The trade with Spanish merchants in search of slaves and commodities had slowly picked up speed in the 1660s, and despite being on collision course with the new trade regulations, London and the responsible governmental boards, such as the Committee of Customs, the Committee for Trade and Plantations, and later the Lords of Trade, did little to limit it. Mercantilist policies suggested acquisition of bullion was to England's benefit, as is reflected in the leniency of the Acts towards bullion import, even if it came at the cost of the planters. Whether the Spanish trade was an illegality or not was therefore discussed at length back and forth across the Atlantic, without much haste, while the trade continued through much of the decade.<sup>439</sup>

The planter's fears led many to perceive the RA's belief in its ability to fulfil the contract with Grillo and Lomellino as hubris. It is, however, worth noting that when the negotiations with Grillo & Lomellino were concluded in the early summer of 1664, the company was at the peak of its abilities. Unaware of the troubles to come the company had reached, in that very year, what would prove to be the highest number of ships sent out during the entire period it had contact with the Asiento trade. Furthermore, it must be considered that to the experienced merchants who has recently joined the company ranks, relying only on the income from the elongated debt cycles of the English Caribbean, especially in combination with leaning on the personal credit of select members, was dangerous practice and should be avoided if possible. The Asiento contract represented just such an opportunity for introducing

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<sup>436</sup>Ireland, 255, point 2.

<sup>437</sup>Ireland, 260, point 18.

<sup>438</sup>Ireland, 259, point 15.

<sup>439</sup>Thornton, "Spanish Slave-Ships in the English West Indies, 1660-85," 383–85.

bullion into the company's trade and an increase in liquidity. The Asiento contracts were agreed upon in Europe, including everything from quotas, gender-composition of the cargo, and the price, with half of the payment settled upon signing the contract. This was a major benefit. It did away with the contingencies of meeting on the ground in the Caribbean, and only then negotiate cargo and payments. Such negotiations were both slow and uncertain, and detained ship and crew for longer than desired. Pre-agreed conditions also helped avoid disputes, while ready money helped liquidity and enhanced the trust between parties. The Asiento contract can in a way be seen as the "ideal" way to conduct slave trade for the merchants involved, as the RA took on the risks of the African trade and the Atlantic crossing, while Grillo & Lomellino assumed the risk of committing to take on the arriving cargoes and taking them from the English colonies to the Spanish markets, as well as returning to English territory with the promised, second-half of the payment in cash. Furthermore, as pointed out by Alejandro García-Montón in his recent research into the history of the Asiento contract, no clauses regarding the event of war were included in the contract between Grillo & Lomellino and the English company. This fact proved unfortunate considering most of their time spent servicing the Asiento took place during war.<sup>440</sup>

Basing ourselves on the company's own records, it becomes clear that the company struggled from the beginning to achieve the promised numbers. The only records that remain from the company imports to the West Indies relate to Barbados in the winter 1663/1664, which was around six months before the contract was entered into, likely contributing to the perception of the company that it could handle the contract. In that period, the company imported over 3000 slaves for sale to English planters.<sup>441</sup> This was, in comparison to coming years, a time of peace and relative prosperity within the trade, before the conflict with the Dutch Republic had gotten underway. With the supply-contract of Grillo and Lomellino the company promised to import double that number, a total of 3,500 slaves for the contract alone, from the Calabar coast into Barbados and Jamaica. Once there the slaves were to be taken over by the agents of the asentistas and brought into New Spain.<sup>442</sup> Comparing the company's goals to the levels of Dutch Asiento trade through Curacao around the same time, which - according to the work of Johannes Postma - reached nearly 3,600 slaves between 1663-1667, it indeed appears overzealous. However, then it most also be acknowledged that the import level that the company reached for the winter of 1663/1664, only very shortly after commencing their official slave trade,

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<sup>440</sup>García-Montón, "Seducing Smugglers: The Spanish Empire's Incentives for Inter-Imperial Official Slave Trade, 1640-1670 (Forthcoming)," 16.

<sup>441</sup>TNA: T 70/646. The only surviving ledger of the RA for their slave imports in the Caribbean referred to Barbados and stated that in the period stretching from August 11, 1663 to March 17, 1664 the company imported a total of 3,075. Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa*, 1919, 82.

<sup>442</sup>TNA: CO 1/19, no.5-7

was remarkable. In one season the RA imported nearly the same number of slaves to Barbados as went through Curacao over five years of Asiento trade.

#### 4. Servicing the Asiento

During the contract-term, in 1664/5, the company sent a petition to the king where the potential of the deal is discussed. The RA had committed to bringing 3500 slaves per year, at a price of £20 each, to Barbados for the Spanish to purchase.<sup>443</sup> According to the company itself the contract had the potential of bringing in 85.000 per year in Spanish pieces of eight.<sup>444</sup> The company stated that it considered itself able to service both the asentistas and the planters because its growing trade at New Calabar had much potential. And basing ourselves on the numbers of voyages done by the English in the Asiento period listed with a known region of slave purchase, Calabar and New Calabar represent 27%. (See table 1 and 2 below.) It is likely that many of the voyages done by the company where the region of slave purchase is unknown (39 %), also went to the Calabar coast. There was also speak of sending slaves to both Cadiz and Tenerife in the company minutes shortly after the contract was signed.<sup>445</sup>

As mentioned above, after the deal was agreed upon, the agents of the Genoese were granted the right to settle in Barbados and Jamaica to oversee the trade. The RA also had agents present for the same purpose. No names of any agent representing the Genoese firm in the English Caribbean has been found, but the RA was at different points represented by Giles Lydcott and John Reid, as well as more famous characters of the early modern English Caribbean such as Peter Colleton and Sir Thomas Modyford. According to this agreement, the RA brought the slaves to Barbados and Jamaica, and there transferred them over to the ships of the asentistas.

Furthermore, Grillo and Lomellino, requested that the English freighted two ships to be used in the trade. This was done by Alexander Bence, John Reid, and John Allen.<sup>446</sup> These ships came to cause some problems however as Allen explained in a letter from 1667 to RA company member, and Secretary of State, Sir Henry Bennet, Earl of Arlington: "*in respect it was dangerous for the Grillos that the Court of Spain should know the ships' contracts were made with English, the freight was to be paid to a Spaniard, who instantly assigns it to George Wallis, of Cadiz, for the use of the*

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<sup>443</sup>TNA: SP Spain, 94/46, p. 3. Thornton, "Spanish Slave-Ships in the English West Indies, 1660-85," 379.

<sup>444</sup>TNA: CO 1/19, P.5-7

<sup>445</sup>TNA: T 70/75, p.16.

<sup>446</sup>As far as can be ascertained, Allen was not a member of the company himself, but a near relative – Thomas Allen, was RA factor on the African coast. Thomas was accused of conducting private trade, and we find John writing the RA in his relative's defense – TNA: CO 1/17, no. 103 – 18.12.1663

*contractors in England*".<sup>447</sup> It appears the Genoese merchants were unsure if Spanish authority had forgotten the events of St. Jago de Cuba five years previous. The freight agreement stated that the Genoese asentistas would pay the freight of the ships, which had to be acquired in secret through the use of a Spanish contact in Cadiz, in instalments due every four months of 5000 pieces of eight pr. ship. However, to the great detriment of Allen, Bence and Reid's credit, this money was never paid. By the time that the English merchants wrote Arlington two years of freight charges, since the time the ships left Cadiz, was outstanding and the debt owed from freighting and other services had reached 80,000 pieces of eight. According to the Genoese merchants they had written to their agents at Jamaica and Barbados with orders to pay the charges, but the English merchants claimed this had led nowhere. They were left, like Noell, unhappy with their dealings. Now Allen "*begs a letter to the Ambassador at Madrid to countenance his agents in fair demanding of the money from the Grillos, and, if they refuse then to pay it, that by a letter from his Majesty the matter may be presented by his Excellency to the Queen Regent of Spain*".<sup>448</sup> If they did not get their money the RA merchants were ready to report the practices of the Genoese asentistas to the Spanish government. What eventually came of the disagreement is not known, but when the contract was up for renegotiation that same year the English company was not considered as a candidate. This has been believed to be from their lacking ability to fulfil their part of the contract, though the frustrations of both Noell and Reid, Allen and Bence may have meant that the English were also not too interested.

The losses from the actions of de Ruyter as part of the Second Anglo-Dutch war, both on the coast of Africa and in the Caribbean, were estimated to reach £176,000.<sup>449</sup> In addition came the cargo that was stuck in England for fear of hostilities against company ships, and the damper it laid on the trade to the colonies. As a result of an increasingly difficult financial situation the option of lifting its monopoly to increase its income through the sale of licenses was briefly discussed in January of 1666, but nothing came of the talks at that point.<sup>450</sup> In the petition titled "*Briefe Narrative of the Trade and Present Condition of the Company of Royall Adventurers of England tradinge into Africa*", presented to the king in early January 1664/5, the

<sup>447</sup>"America and West Indies: May 1667," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 5, 1661-1668*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1880), 463-471. *British History Online*, accessed December 1, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol5/pp463-471>.

<sup>448</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>449</sup>Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa*, 1919, 20, fn. 44.

<sup>450</sup>TNA: T 70/75, p.45-46

company were already complaining of its financial trouble due to the war.<sup>451</sup> The members claimed they had built up a great stock, rising from the initial £17,000 to £120,000; they had cultivated a great relationship with all the African heads of state on the coast; and had conducted trade worth £158,000 in the first year, though no records have been found to verify their claims. Such a yearly trade was more than what its predecessors managed in five years, the company claimed. Furthermore, the company had with the consent of the natives, settled nine new factories<sup>452</sup> on the “North Coast” from which they could expect returns of £100,000 yearly. The same number of factories had been settled on the “Gould Coast”<sup>453</sup> and, were it not for the disturbances caused by de Ruyter, they would have been returning gold to the value of £200,000, as well as £100,000 worth of “servants for the Plantations”. Lastly, the company pointed to their contract with Spain for the yearly supply of 3,500 slaves, which reportedly brought £86,000 in Spanish silver into England each year. Based on these good prospects “*The Company took up Credit partly on the Common Seale of the Company And partly on the personall security of the Commity above one hundred thousand Pounds*”. But due to the war, none of the good prospects had come to fruition, and “*they finde their Credit totally extinct*”. In combination with the debts owed to them from the colonial planters, estimated by Zook to have reached £50,000 by this point, as well as goods in storage that could not be shipped anywhere but Africa – “*they are not in any degree Capable to Still the Clamours of their Creditors much lesse to prosecute and mainteane the Trade Without some speedy and extraordinary Supply from his Majestie*”.<sup>454</sup> The king responded by granting the company the *Golden Lion*, a ship taken from the Dutch, but that was as far as his assistance stretched. Having exhausted their royal favor, the company was left to fend for itself, and as a result the discussion on licensing was taken up again.

### 5. Recorded English activity in the slave trade during the Asiento period, 1664-1667

I add below some of the data given us by the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD2) for the years 1664-1667, the period which the English company was involved in supplying the Asiento.<sup>455</sup> Please note – only of the ships that sailed openly under English flag are included, it is safe to assume there were many more. It is not

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<sup>451</sup>TNA: CO 1/19 p.7-9

<sup>452</sup>[Sic]: Pouadally, Golly, Treuisco, Gambia, Rio Nunes, Rio Grande, Sierraleon, Cerborow and Cestos.

<sup>453</sup>[Sic]: Anashan, Anto, Cantoncory, Cormentine, Cabo Corso, Wyamba, Acra, Ardra and Benin. Though the petition does implicitly suggest it, the company did not *settle* all these factories, some of them were built decades previous as seen in previous chapters.

<sup>454</sup>According to Zook near £50,000, p.20 – fn. 44

<sup>455</sup>TSTD2: [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org) (accessed: 19.09.2016)

possible to separate between voyages that were undertaken to supply the Asiento from the total number of voyages conducted by the company. We do for instance not know the names of the two ships freighted by Bence, Reid and Allen on behalf of Grillo and Lomellino mentioned above. We can, however, estimate roughly how many of the ships went to the region of Calabar – where the RA planned to get the slaves for the asentistas from. Further, I have not relied on the database for numbers of slaves exported as a way to gauge the size of the trade. It is my opinion and experience that the database relies too often on estimates and numbers that are too vague, if not non-existent, when calculating the total numbers of Africans forced to embark on the crossing.<sup>456</sup> Lastly, the recording of the year of the voyage must not be taken too strictly, as the date that decides which year-bracket a voyage falls in is, to my knowledge, not fixed. Meaning that if, in one instance, a ship is recorded on the coast of Africa in early 1665, it does not necessarily appear in the same bracket as a voyage which was recorded upon departure from London in late 1664. In such instances the first would be recorded as taking place in the year 1665, the latter in 1664, even though they may have left London, and operated on the African coast, simultaneously.

91 recorded voyages took place under English flag in the period from 1664-1667. Out of which 75 (82%) were recorded to have arrived in the Americas. Only three of the 75 ships arriving were reported without a known destination in the database (listed as “Americas – port unknown”). We can see from the table below (Table 2) that the RA organized 83 voyages in the period of the Asiento, out which 69 are recorded as completed with ships arriving in the Caribbean. It is not possible to tell from the data whether a ship was owned or simply freighted by the company, nor (in most cases) if it had multiple owners. Still, basing ourselves on the number of the database, 91% of the voyages recorded under English flag in this period were organized by the company in the period roughly covering the Asiento. During the same period, 14 of these ships were lost, six of which were reported taken by the Dutch, the other eight suffered an uncertain fate. Some were reported lost due to natural hazard, but it is possible that the number taken by the Dutch was in reality higher. If this was the case though, they do not seem to have appeared in any Admiralty court, as the database reportedly makes use of the court’s records. In total, the RA recorded ca. 17% of their ships lost in the period of the contract with Grillo and Lomellino. This is a significant amount, but perhaps not overwhelmingly so, considering that the Anglo-Dutch war was ongoing through much of the period, and was reported as a main

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<sup>456</sup>J.M. Svalastog, “The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database: Qualitative Possibilities and Quantitative Limitations” (MA thesis, King’s College London, 2012); Filipa Ribeiro da Silva and Stacey Sommerdyk, “Reexamining the Geogrpahy and Merchants of the West Central African Slave Trade: Looking Behind the Numbers,” *African Economic History* 38 (2010): 77–105.

reason by the company itself for failing to fulfil its obligations. This indicates either that the RA was exaggerating the damage caused by the Dutch, wrongly placing the blame on Dutch military action when their own financial and organizational issues were to blame, or that attacks on the company's forts and factories were more damaging than attacks on its actual shipping.

Table 2

Total number of voyages and outcomes under English flag in the Asiento period, 1664-1667

Actor/Initiator:	1664	1665	1666	1667	Total:
Royal Adventurers - Voyage completed	27	23	15	4	69
Royal Adventurers - Ship captured by the Dutch	5	1			6
Royal Adventurers - Ship lost	6	2			8
Unkown/Private – Voyage completed	2			4	6
Unknown/Private - Ship Captured by the Dutch				1	1
Captured by British after embarkation with slaves (indicating private/illegal trade)		1			1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>91</b>

Source: Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, <http://slavevoyages.org>. Accessed: 27.09.2016.

The database can also shed some light on where the majority of the slave trading took place, although details on the activity on the coast of Africa is at times lacking, as can be seen by the high number of voyages going to unknown ports. 36 voyages, (39%) in total for the entire period are labelled as such. The database offers two levels of geographical grid: “region of slave purchase” and the more detailed “place of slave purchase”. Table 3A shows the voyages where the *place* of slave purchase is known and thus gives the greatest geographical detail. It does not, however, mean that we do not know the wider *region* of slave purchase for some of the voyages where the actual port of trade is unknown. I have included the regional information for those 36 “unknown” voyages in Table 3B, which has a far wider geographical scope. The regional specification which includes Calabar, referred to in the database as “The Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea Islands” saw high general activity in the period, with 25 “known” and 11 “unknown” voyages reportedly going there (39% of the total). It was one of the busiest areas for the traffic of slaves, and not limited only to English visits. It was also the potential for trade to that area that the company stated made it possible for them to supply the Asiento in addition to the needs of the English colonies.

Table 3A  
African *ports* of slave purchase under English flag during the Asiento period

Places of trade in Africa	1664	1665	1666	1667	Total:
Ardra	5	7		3	15
Calabar	8	8	9		25
Gambia	4	1			5
Kormantine	3	4	1		8
Madagascar	2				2
Port of trade unknown	18	7	5	6	36
<b>Total:</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>91</b>

Source: Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, <http://slavevoyages.org>. Accessed: 27.09.2016.

The Bight of Benin and the Gold Coast both had company factories – Cape Coast Castle, Ardra, Wiamba and Kormantine, and it was to these factories the ships were usually directed by the company management. Yet this period saw several of the factories belonging to the company under threat by (or lost to) the Dutch. According to the company itself it had nine factories and settlements on what they call the “*North Coast*” of which most were reportedly fortified. These were: “*Poriadally, Goally, Trevisco, Rio Nunez, Rio Grande, Gambia, Sierraleon, Cherboro, and Cestos.*” Further they had on the Gold coast another nine factories of trade: “*Anashan, Anta, Cantoucory, Cormantin, Cabo Corso [Cape Coast Castle], Wyamba, Acra, Ardra and Benin.*”<sup>457</sup> The recorded activity for the Asiento period is centered further south, around Calabar, although most of the records relied on by the database for voyage routes are instructions given to the ship’s master before the ship left London, and therefore it is not always certain where the ship actually went. Captains may have deviated from the plan especially during war time. The two voyages to Madagascar listed in table 3A were conducted privately.

<sup>457</sup>TNA: CO 1/19, p.5-7

Table 3B

African *regions* of slave purchase under English flag during the Asiento period for voyages with port unknown

Recorded region for the 36 voyages where port of trade is unknown:	Total:
RA ships reportedly lost to the Dutch – no port recorded	6
West Central Africa and St. Helena, incl. Angola	1
Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea islands, incl. the Calabar coast	11
Bight of Benin	2
Gold Coast	2
Other Africa	14
<b>Total:</b>	<b>36</b>

Source: Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, <http://slavevoyages.org>. Accessed: 27.09.2016.

Table 3C separates the 83 voyages done by the RA from the total number of voyages, and also shows what is known for the ships that did not make it to the Americas. Seeing that five of these voyages (those where the intended port of call on the African coast is known) were lost in known areas of company settlement; Gambia, Ardra and Kormantine, it is possible they also fell victim to Dutch hostility, though this cannot be confirmed from the sources.

Table 3C

The outcome and ports of RA voyages on the Coast of Africa during the Asiento period

Outcome	Ardra	Calabar	Gambia	Kormantin	Port Unknown	Total:
RA – voyage completed	14	24	2	6	23	69
RA - Ship captured by the Dutch					6	6
RA - Ship lost	1		3	2	2	8
<b>Total:</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>83</b>

Source: Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, <http://slavevoyages.org>. Accessed: 27.09.2016.

Moving to the Caribbean, the ships crossing the Atlantic with slaves destined for the asentistas aimed for Jamaica, but more often in this period, Barbados. A large majority of the voyages were completed in Barbados.

Table 4A  
All voyages arriving in the Caribbean under English flag in Asiento period, 1664-1667

Destination:	1664	1665	1666	1667	Total:
Americas – Port unknown	1	1		1	3
Barbados	21	13	9	6	49
Jamaica	2	7	5	1	15
Nevis	1	1			2
St. Kitts	3				3
Surinam	1	1	1		3
<b>Total:</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>75</b>

Source: Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, <http://slavevoyages.org>. Accessed: 27.09.2016.

Table 4A shows all the English activity, whereas table 4B shows only RA activity:

Table 4B  
Caribbean ports of call for RA ships in the Asiento period, 1664-1667

Destination:	1664	1665	1666	1667	Total:
Americas – Port unknown	1	1		1	3
Barbados	19	13	9	2	43
Jamaica	2	7	5	1	15
Nevis	1	1			2
St. Kitts	3				3
Surinam	1	1	1		3
<b>Total:</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>69</b>

Source: Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, <http://slavevoyages.org>. Accessed: 27.09.2016.

From table 4B we can see the company sets off to a good start in 1664 but gradually runs into trouble presumably as the Anglo-Dutch conflict takes its toll both on company operations in the Americas and on the company position on the African coast.

Going back to the response by Secretary Leighton to the complaints and criticism of Paul Painter et. al from 1667 mentioned above, he stated on behalf of the company that the planters had little to be unhappy about. In the end, the company

had really only brought 1200 slaves for the asentistas, he claimed. In fact, Leighton said, the main point of entering into the contract with the Genoese in the first place had been to stop it from going to the Dutch. Furthermore, the undersupply of the asentistas was in fact a bonus for England, as it weakened Spain. Lastly, Leighton concluded that the few slaves that had been sent into the Spanish territories had mainly gone to the silver mines, and thus were not involved in the production of commodities that competed with those of the English planters.

Whether the complaints of the planters were warranted is a matter of debate. Their complaints saw to it that the RA had to agree to sell slaves to them at set price that appear reasonable compared price levels when the trade to Africa had been free. According to the petition of Paul Painter and his fellows from 1667, planters could buy slaves for as little as £12, and max. £16, in the time before the company was granted the monopoly over the trade. If paying in sugar, then between 1,600-1,800 pounds would suffice. Now, Painter claimed, the company had been selling its best slaves at £18 to the Spaniards, and claiming as much as £30 from the English, often for slaves they deemed to be of lesser quality. It was left to the company secretary, Sir Ellis Leighton, to respond, and he expressed frustration that the company was accused of favoring the Spaniards when, in fact, only 1,200 slaves had gone to them. The agreed upon price had been set at the reasonable price of £17 for slaves sold to the English planters, he said, and they had more than sufficiently been supplied. Furthermore, Leighton pointed out, in response to planter complaints from as early as 1663, the company director, the Duke of York, had been more than willing to agree to a set price, and a total number of slaves the planters desired each year.<sup>458</sup> All he needed was a number. To this request the planters never gave a clear answer. Some increase in price had occurred, Leighton admitted, but this was due to the war. In fact, the planters lacking ability to pay for their slaves was putting the company's finance at risk. Leighton finished off by sourly pointing out that although free trade might be a wise choice if only Barbados was taken into consideration, the king and the company had to think of *all* of England's trade!<sup>459</sup>

Making use of the only surviving ledger from the company's activity at Barbados, the winter of 1663/4 saw the company import 3000 slaves. According to Zook's estimates of payments for these slaves in both sugar and coin, the company really was selling their adult slaves at an average of £17 each, but it is of course

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<sup>458</sup>British Library, *The Several Declarations Of the Company Of Royal Adventures Of England Trading into Africa Inviting all his majesties native subjects in general to subscribe, and become sharers in their joynt-stock*, by Sir Ellis Leighton, Secretary, at Whitehall January 12, 1662/[3], the duke offered either £17 or 2,500 pounds of muscovado sugar pr. slave

<sup>459</sup>Printed pamphlet, *Answer of the Company of Royal Adventurers to Sir Paul Painter et. al*, (See above.)

difficult to use this as a projection for the price levels later in the decade.<sup>460</sup> Painter's claim of £18 per slave sold to the Spaniards, if correct, is somewhat surprising though, as that would mean that the company had gone down in price from the £20 per slave stated in the contractual agreement with the *asentistas*. This in a time of war when Leighton claimed an increase in prices should be expected. Painter, along with other planters may have exaggerated their plight for dramatic effect, and there was arguably every reason for the planters to complain about whatever number of slaves offered by the company, as an oversupply would work to their benefit in force prices down. This may partly explain why the planters were hesitant of giving a finite number of slaves needed from the company each year.

## 6. Winding up the company

On April 9, 1667 the court of assistants agreed to grant trading licenses to merchants who wanted to trade with their own ships, as well as to any officers on the company's ships who wanted to engage in private trade. The cost of a license was £3 per ton. Meaning that an average ship of 130 tons would bring in £390 to the company coffers.<sup>461</sup> In the period from 1666/7 to 1672, and the chartering of the RAC, the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database reports 44 ships sailing to the coast of Africa under English flag, many of which are listed at company ships. Though it is challenging to know how many voyages that do not appear in the database and the exact income this brought the company, it maintained the system of licensing, in varying degree, until the RAC was launched. The company attempted only a minor break at the end of the war when it tried to revive its operation. The lacking activity was eventually noticed, and Arlington – still the Secretary of State – asked, at the king's request, his fellow company members whether they intended to carry on the trade, or if they had fully given up on it.<sup>462</sup> The company denied this and pointed again to the losses from the war. If only the King could help by paying his subscription or force the planters in the Caribbean to make good on their debts, the company would be able to pick up their trade again. To this they received no answer. The only alternative to licensing out the trade was to attempt to get more subscriptions to the company stock, but this was impossible. No potential investors believed that their money would go anywhere other than towards paying the company's frustrated creditors. Such an assumption was justified. From the company's petition mentioned above, we see that much of the

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<sup>460</sup>Zook, *Ibid*, p.,82

<sup>461</sup>The number 130 tons is the average of the ships with known tonnage from 1666-1672 in the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database.

<sup>462</sup>Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa*, 1919, 24.

company debt was acquired upon the credit of the company's managing members, and thus they were personally suffering in a double fashion from the company's poor condition.

The directors personal distress goes far towards explaining why, firstly it was decided that a new company free from the troublesome reputation of the RA should be launched, and secondly why the members of the new company, the RAC, shortly after its launch decided to inherit large portions of the debts the RA was still owed in the Atlantic.<sup>463</sup> The new company was supposed to be dis-attached from the old, and able to present more promising and tempting prospects to potential investors. The chance of the RA getting to a level where income from trade could be hoped for was obsolete. While the launch of a new company was being discussed the RA directors also had added ammunition for forcing a settlement of the company's debt with its creditors.

With the possibility of a new company looming in the background the company's creditor group was given two options for solving the problem of company debt. The English companies were not the only ones forced to reinvent themselves at the end of the 1660s, as their former adversaries, the Dutch WIC also struggled on the brink of bankruptcy. The WIC and the RA were both placing their creditors under strain while the decision of the two companies' fates were decided. The RA was, however, not burdened, perhaps to its creditors chagrin, by the political importance placed on its Dutch equivalent, and therefore appears to be more easily discarded.<sup>464</sup> The creditors of the WIC managed to push through substantial shifts in the company's organization as a result of the bankruptcy debacle, while the creditors of the RA could accept defeat, or hang on to whatever was left. They could either accept the terms of payments the company offered; which was a devaluation of old stocks by 10% of their original worth; and a return of near 40%, or £22,800, of the total debt of £57,000.<sup>465</sup> Alternatively, they could hang on to what was left of the company and its remaining assets, while the king granted an exclusive patent to a new Africa company. The reference to devaluations of stocks as part of the debt settlement indicate that at least a part of the creditors group were company members. The remaining debt portion, £38,000, or roughly 2/3 of the total, was reduced to 1/10 of its original amount, to £3,800, and added as part of the new stock. Several of the creditors were not willing to accept such a deal. The RA's debts remained unsettled while the first subscription round for the new company got underway. The RA directors tried stretching the promise of re-payment from of the total debt by

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<sup>463</sup>TNA: T 70/100

<sup>464</sup>Erik Odegaard, "Recapitalization of Reform? The Bankruptcy of the First Dutch West India Company and the Formation of the Second West India Company, 1674," *Leiden University*, (Forthcoming), n.d.

<sup>465</sup>TNA: T 70/100

a further few percent, but this was still considered unacceptable. Only when the king officially granted the new company a new letter patent on September 27, 1672, were the creditors finally convinced that they could not hope for a better deal and accepted the terms.<sup>466</sup> Whatever stocks they may have had in the RA would according to the agreement be transferred to the RAC, with a 10% reduction of their original value, and therefore some of the creditors likely continued in the RAC. Whether they influenced the decision for the RAC to continue requesting payment of the RA's planter debt is not known, but the membership overlap between the two companies offers a potential explanation of the unwillingness to let those debts go and for the willingness of the new company to take them on. The patent granted to the RAC in 1672 was the last to be issued in the Anglo-Africa trade.

## 7. Conclusion

The RA appeared in its first years as a treasure hunt. It was focused on finding gold in the Gambia, had no clear plan to manage their investments, and received meagre returns on their first voyages. However, as it became clear that the markets for Spanish slave labour were opening up, and that foreign subcontractors could hope for a share, the company hoped for better days. The potential trade with the Spanish empire, a near insatiable market that dealt in bullion rather than credit, likely contributed to the decision of several large-scale Atlantic traders to join the company. Many of them moved their interest in the Africa trade from the EIC to the RA when the slave trade was included in the company patent in 1663. The new patent of 1663 marked the influx of mercantile expertise into the company, and included for the first time the slave trade to the English colonies. The ban on trade with foreign merchants left the colonial planters with little choice but to deal with the company, or else risk illegal trade.

The frustration of the planters did not diminish when it appeared that the company entertained notions of taking on the task of supplying the Spanish *Asiento*. They feared the company would not be able to cover both the needs of the colonists and the demands of the *asentistas*. In addition, the *asentistas* offered pre-agreed contracts with clear delivery plans, a favorable division of risk, and half of the payment up front. They also took on the risk of shipping the slaves into Spanish America and returning with the bullion to English territory. All of these factors put the planters, who had to purchase labour in the open markets, on the backfoot compared to the Spanish traders. To make matters worse the *Asiento* trade was in

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<sup>466</sup>TNA: T 70/75, p.101-102

breach of the Acts of Navigation, as it required agents of the Genoese *asentistas* to be based in both Barbados and Jamaica, but a special permission was granted by King Charles II already in early 1663, before the agreement between Noel and the *Asentistas*, in preparation for the deal that was to come. This was even more frustrating as the English planters were expected to refrain from purchasing labour from foreign traders to supplement their demands.

As García-Montón points out in his article, the Royal company had diplomatic power to sway the English government on their own policy, assuring the necessary royal support. This is noteworthy as a combination of both private and public initiative arose in the early months of 1663. The diplomatic implications of the royal company simultaneously hindered their acceptance by Spanish authority as a contract holder, all while assuring the necessary exemptions from policy to establish the trade. Noel, in his private capacity, was free of the diplomatic connections of the RA and could take on the contract without hinderance but could not alone assure the *asentistas* the necessary permission to position their agents. A combination of private and public efforts was necessary as the contract got underway.

The servicing of the *asentistas* looked manageable to the company at the point their contract was signed. They had delivered high numbers of slaves, had recently seen Captain Holmes successfully attack Dutch holdings on the coast, and received additional funds from their members. However, it quickly became clear that the Dutch were retaliating, seriously threatening the company's hold on the coast, while the outbreak of war saw to it that the company never again reached the level of trade they had enjoyed at the time of the contract. The company presented different outcomes and estimates of their trade depending on who was asking, presenting returns of upwards of £300,000 in one instance and then complaining of financial hardship the next. The *Asiento* contract could secure huge sums in Spanish silver in one instance, and in the next only 1200 slaves had been delivered. The planters were unhappy, and the contract was not renewed. However, there are indications that the *Asiento* trade also proved disappointing from the company's perspective. Noell believed himself cheated until his death, and Alexander Bence, John Reid, and John Allen was eventually owed a massive sum in missing freight payments from the *asentistas*.

The planters complained of not being supplied with labour during the contract period, but numbers from the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database confirms that the company maintained trade throughout the war years, although activity likely dropped, and prices likely rose. The planters complained of exorbitant prices, while the Spanish traders reportedly enjoyed far lower price levels, though that fits poorly both with the prices agreed in the contract and the economic effects of trading during war. In addition, the company secretary claimed there had been willingness from the side of the company to consider a fixed price, as well as a pre-agreed number of slaves

imported, but the planter community had not been forthcoming with the wishes.

Lastly, it must be acknowledged, that the Asiento contract must have appeared as the ideal way to secure the company from the clutches of planters' debts. For a company that still had to rely on the personal credit of its members and were haunted by the "*clamours of their creditors*", and eventually had to surrender to a cripple amount of debt, much of which was owed to its own members, the chance of a pre-agreed, pre-paid, risk sharing contract like the Asiento must have appeared too good to pass up. The Asiento wasn't the savior of the company, hampered as it was by the Anglo-Dutch war, and instead the relationship between the company and the English planters worsened considerably, and in the end the company saw itself forced to resort to licensing, before passing on their patent to its successor the RAC.

# CONCLUSION

The granting of a new charter in 1672, to the Royal African Company, marked the last of the attempts at formally organized Anglo-Africa trade under exclusive patent. The gradual development of methods and solutions for managing business, handling information, and trade decisions contributed to making the RAC's operation the most extensive, and most professionally organized seen so far. The company had intricate systems for information management, for employment plans, for keeping its books, and for keeping in touch with its shareholders. Despite these developments, the RAC has become known in the historiography, not as the culmination of gradual business development with increasing responsibilities in trying markets – but rather as the prime example of failure in the history of the English joint-stock companies.<sup>467</sup>

One of the main arguments for labelling the company a failure has been that its demise has appeared to arrive swiftly. A notion tied closely to the tendency of seeing the company history as detached from events and developments originating earlier in the century. Rather than contextualizing the company's fate in a longer narrative, historians have so far focused on the immediate conditions and decisions made from 1672 onwards. Indeed, the launch of the company was noticeable; its goal for initial capital, though not very substantial, was overshot by 10% relatively quickly; it had strong royal backing; and the company was granted the most extensive constitutional rights of any English company so far. Therefore, its failure to profit properly, in a world of growing Atlantic trade and protectionist policies, has been deemed noteworthy and a testament to poor management. However, to fully understand the fate of the RAC's we must cast our gaze further back in time, beyond its immediate predecessor, even beyond the return of the Stuart monarchy, and consider the century up to that point in its entirety.

The focus on monetary profitability has furthered the notion of the early Africa companies as insignificant. I have tried to nuance this image by approaching the development of both the Guinea Company and Royal Adventurers into Africa as an entangled history, where the company as a structure and the private interests existing within it were both separate and entwined. The stretch of coast from Cape Verde down to Angola, was quite possibly the most contested stretch of shore in the world in the seventeenth century. The intra-European competition was intense, the trade was volatile, and the markets delicate and changing. Already at the launch of the Guinea Company in 1618, these challenges quickly resulted in a strong reliance,

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<sup>467</sup>Davies, *The Royal African Company*; Carlos and Kruse, "The Decline of the Royal African Company"; Pierre Boule, *Companies and Trade: Essays on Overseas Trading Companies during the Ancien Régime* (Leiden University Press, 1981).

among the company's inexperienced members, on the assistance and expertise of established Africa traders. It is therefore a paradox that it was the often the very same traders who thwarted the company's chances of establishing a thriving trade. With their superior knowledge and expertise, the established Atlantic merchants quickly brought the company to its knees, showing little regard for its well-being, all while profiting from private activity on the side. In this way, and as was discussed in the introduction, the company's relationship with its private members could be both symbiotic and encumbering, depending of the intensions and power relation between member and the company. In the case of the GC, its first decade of existence included round after round in court over company debts, which divided the membership, and likely contributed to ruining the company's credibility in the relatively small circle that was London's business community. But despite its struggle with debts it still served some members well, as they continued their trade while the company buckled under its obligation to creditors. One such an example was seen with the ships the *Benediction*, into which Humphry Slaney and partner Nicholas Crispe privately invested £20,000 all while the company was struggling with repaying a debt of under £1000.

This thesis has tried to show the intricacies of interactions between company and private interests in the earliest Africa companies from a perspective that captures and reflect the power relations between them. Often the objectives and needs of private individuals took premier position when deciding the company's future. As the company leadership came to include some of the biggest Atlantic traders of the period, who managed both company and extensive private portfolios at once, it becomes difficult to both separate them and to see *the company* as an entity with power to exercise control. With their private trade technically taking place under the company's canopy, the mercantile activity and network building of these company merchants has either disappeared from view or been seen as poor company policy and management. Yet, this thesis has attempted to show that it is more accurate to turn that notion on its head and instead consider the company something that fell under the canopy of its Atlantic trader's extensive private operations. I have argued here that most of the major decisions and shifts in company focus and aim can only be understood by including what we know of these members and their private situation. Large shifts such as the managing of the ongoing political turmoil at the time; increased trade in slaves; changes to the patent; and inclusion of the Indian Ocean into company activity, were tightly linked to private needs and concerns. The Restoration brought with it the added bonus of an even more extensive company patent that offered more protection and control as the competition in the Atlantic grew. It was company activity indeed, though the wellbeing of the company was of secondary importance. If we consider the control that these large-scale Atlantic traders held over company direction through the first half of the seventeenth century,

it is difficult not to see much of its activity as largely of benefit to private interest and informal in nature.

Presentations of such a private/corporate dynamic, where individuals in their private capacity hold most of the cards, have appeared less often in literature as scholars quite understandably tends to emphasize monetary profit when assessing the success of a company. However, it should be remembered that there was not always a correlation between a company's bottom line and the privileges it could offer to those of its members who were able to make use of them. In the case of the early English Africa companies it appears that the strongest of the company's members relied the least on its monetary success, and unlike the courtiers and other investors they saw other benefits than the income they could gain from the company's activities. This is not to say that a company's profits were irrelevant, nor that the GC was unprofitable – as we've seen its returns were at times substantial, but it is still worth considering that a company offered other benefits than the profits it generated. The merchant members of the GC quickly turned the company into a shelter from competition, enjoying their exclusive rights to the coast and to the markets in London, and with the company patent on their side they continued to develop their private commercial activity. Yet this was not a one-sided deal, and the company as an entity benefitted greatly from the experience, networks and credit access these merchants brought with them. The more the company's interests aligned with the private aims of its merchant leaders, the more dedicated they became to its survival.

By putting a string of influential merchants centerstage the thesis has attempted to question the inherent notion of a conflicting relationship between the corporate and the private, and by extension questioned other supposed divides in company format and geographical scope. As seen in Chapter 2, Slaney and Crispe along with partners William Cloberry and John Wood, careful to maintain the patent, relaunched the company in 1631. Through their *indenture quadripartite* the small group now managing the Guinea Company developed a format fit for their purpose. A small circle of tightly-connected, experienced traders now shared the challenge of developing their activities on the Gold Coast. The group applied the method of choice when a European state wished to establish itself on the West African coast, requesting - from the local African rulers, the right to lease land and erect forts manned by company personnel. Chapter 3 showed how the company operations on both the African coast and in the Americas had reached sizeable proportions already by the 1640s and serves as a testimony to the groups understanding of a highly unpredictable and challenging trade, in a period that was anything but calm domestically. The GC especially was led by men who mostly had personal experience from the African coast. Humphry Slaney, Nicholas Crispe, John Wood, Maurice Thomson, and others had personally spent time trading abroad. The company's continued reliance on their personal credit and reputation ensured their involved supervision. Thus, in the

case of the GC, the merging of company and strong private interest often appears as beneficial to the company as it could be costly. This thesis therefore builds on the work by historians such as Søren Mentz and Emily Ericsson mentioned in the introduction, who seek to revise our image of the private/corporate dynamic. Like them, this thesis argues for the need to nuance our view of the impact private initiative had on company structure and the outcome of their activities. The private experience, connections, and credit brought by the entry of established traders was vital for the company securing its position.

Still, this thesis has directed its focus to the upper echelons of company management, the very center of company decision-making, meaning that it leads us to question what the company really was at its core. As has been argued throughout the preceding chapters, the GC, and to a large extent also the RA, was in many ways little more than a shelter from the competition these merchants experienced in an increasingly crowded Atlantic. The desire to protect oneself from competition is a common feature shared by all the individuals presented in this thesis, and it impacted several of the company's major decisions. As a result of this, the early English Africa companies can largely be seen as the result of what is often labelled as informal empire-building. Most of it initiated activity appear to move from the bottom up, as it arose internally at company member level, rather than being an expression any state authority's plans for expanding England's control and presence abroad. It is fair to question whether one can really talk of the company's management as the "bottom", but the term is used here in an attempt to separate this type of activity from state- and crown-initiated activity typically referred to as being "top-down" initiatives. In the case of the GC, private, and thus more informal, initiatives and objectives lay at the heart of most of its major decisions, and the obligations the company had to the patent it held was of secondary importance. This is not to say that the company operated in a vacuum free from Crown or other state involvement, however. The companies were certainly assisted by the English state's increasing desire to expand through the seventeenth century, and through the extension of patents that favored it, it was helped to secure its operations. Furthermore, their failure to fulfil the obligations laid out in their patent was at times used against it by competitors outside the company structure. However, the request for- and management of- these privileges came down to the merchants that represented the company leadership and were often used mainly in support of their own private ventures under cover of the company.

Despite the strong private interests and its impact on company direction, if we return to the list of common features shared by the overseas trading companies of the seventeenth century presented by the contributors to the workshop paper "*The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History*" discussed in the introduction, the early Africa companies fits well with several of them. Both companies had to manage

the balancing act of being subordinate to state authorities domestically, as well as abroad. They, like other larger overseas companies, had to manage its obligations to the English crown, as well as to the African states it encountered on the coast. They relied on the English state extending patents that made their operation possible, and for African acceptance of their presence and inclusion in trade. Should they fail to fulfil their obligations, they risked exclusion from African markets, as seen in chapter 1. Furthermore, like other companies operating abroad at this time, they were granted privileges that far exceeded those extended to English subjects domestically. Their patents allowed them to seize the property of English subjects and stop them from conducting their trade in the regions covered by their patents. However, as has been seen, it was not always possible for the company to fully enforce these rights and several cases were brought before the courts, with differing outcomes. The constant pressure from outside competition ensured that the Africa companies remained dependent on constant negotiation. Its negotiations with powerful challengers such as Maurice Thomson, Samuel Vassall and their partners frequently resulted in an inclusion of the challengers into the company structure, putting them in strategic positions where they wielded strong control over company decisions. Company membership could be a source of relief for the challenger also, as seen in the case of Samuel Vassall, who had suffered great personal losses in the period immediately preceding his inclusion in the company fold.

Thus, both the GC and the RA remained strong examples of seventeenth century patented corporations, all while largely existing for the benefit of merchants who sheltered their activities within them. Merchants who first appeared as challengers, and who later used the company structure to further private initiatives. As a result, the company was managed by experienced traders who has a vested private interest in protecting company privileges, and who could assist with their connections, personal credit, and reputation when needed. A dynamic mode of collaboration between the merchants in the company leadership accounted for and cushioned the fluctuations of trade and private fortunes and spread the risk to maximum effect, even if this was not reflected in the company's bottom line. The Guinea Company's operations, remaining tight-knit until the very end of its existence, operated with a blurry line between the private- and the corporate sphere throughout. Detecting any clear policy is challenging, as limited liability and entity shielding was invoked or ignored depending on circumstance. The use of personal credit and networks represent the beneficial side of having strong individual members. Decisions were not always made with the company's interests in mind but having the option of tapping into the personal credit of individual members assisted the GC in weathering fluctuations in the trade. The diverse portfolios of traders like Nicholas Crispe and John Wood offered some of the stability and flexibility the company needed. This was true also for the RA, who relied on Martin Noell to negotiate the asiento contract through his

own network, and who could enter into agreements with Spain which the company, in its official capacity, could not. Simultaneously, the necessary permissions from the English king for setting up a legal trade via the English colonies that included foreign merchants was more easily granted to a company. More importantly, a patent such as the one covering the supply of labour to the English colonies, necessary for partaking in the Asiento contract, could only be granted to an official actor such as the RA. In the case of the Asiento, both the private and the corporate played an integral part and underlines the intricate relationship between private persons and company membership.

The investigation by the Navy and the Committee of Customs into the company in the 1640s offer a rare insight into the company's conditions. The final report was not overwhelmingly positive but was also not worse than could be expected in a trade of high volatility. The company's debt of £10,000, though not necessarily to be taken as a sign of health, is not shocking considering that the company members returned cargoes valued to £40,000 over the five years that preceded it. It also showed that the company employed a number of people on the African coast, during a time when activity has been believed to be low. 26 men received their wages from the company between their posts on the Gold Coast and at the Sherboro River, with wage levels, on average, on par with that of a skilled craftsman in England. Though we have no way of confirming without doubt that the company actually paid their employees the stated wage, it does not come across as a company in quite as much disarray as has been perceived. In addition, the assessments of the company's colonial holdings by the committee appear, as discussed in chapter 3, remarkably low, going against price estimations that recent scholarship has yielded for the same period. It may be that there were personal interests at play when the committee wrote up their report, as at least one of the committee members – Samuel Vassall, was one of the company's biggest challengers at the time. To reveal all the company's holdings and debts to a committee which included competitors cannot have been particularly tempting.

The company accounts also show that already by the 1640s the company had started involving itself in colonial production, mainly cotton – though some indications of sugar production appear by the 1650s, and it was already owed money by planters in both Barbados and Virginia. Slaving voyages were also planned by Wood, and his new associates, the Rowland Wilsons - father and son. The trio were soon joined by former interloper and large-scale Atlantic trader, Maurice Thomson. The charter renegotiations of 1651, discussed in chapter 3, substantially changed reality for the private merchants in the company. The renewed charter divided up the coast based on activity and market strength, and though the company maintained its exclusive access to their traditional areas of activity on the Gold Coast and in the Senegambia region, private traders could now access regions with growing slave

trade. It is likely that several of the prominent members traded slaves in a private capacity still and saw competition increase. The attempts by Thomson throughout the late 1640s and 1650s for bringing the East India Company onto the coast, may have been linked to this development, as the EIC was better able to handle the increasing competition.

The potential of combining two cycles of exchange, the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic, into one connected commodity chain had been realized by merchants who had brought the two through their private trade. But with their involvement in the two companies this connection now became company policy. With historiographical tendency of seeing these two oceanic spaces as separate not only in geography but also in activity, with the Indian Ocean centered around luxury exchange – and the Atlantic on settlement and colonial production, this example of innovative private practice becoming company policy has faded into the background.

Thomson privately started negotiations between a group of fellow traders interested in colonial settlement in the east – the Assada Adventurers, and the East India Company, for a trade that aimed at building connections stretching from the Atlantic into the Indian Ocean basin. He had much personal experience from supplying settlement colonies with labour, capital and European staple goods, having brought the colony of Virginia nearly to its knees in the 1630 through the planter-merchants *mateships*. Thomson was not alone in this, but at various times center stage in the conflict between the merchants and the Virginian planters, along with his partners. They held the tobacco monopoly in the colony over several years, and the benefits of being a monopolist and monopsonists simultaneously were now being attempted recreated in the east. In the end, settlements at the islands of Assada and Pulo Run did not materialize, but the later slave trade to the English colonies, under the patent of the RA from 1663, took on a similar shape to that of 1630s Virginia, where it grew to become equally unpopular among the Caribbean planters. As a member of the Guinea Company Thomson was all the better positioned to navigate the agreement between the EIC and the GC for a lease of the latter's patent.

Thus, the predatory treatment of colonists as a method applied by colonial merchants in the so-called merchant-planter *mateships*, though initially made use of by individual merchants and small-scale partnerships, was gradually brought into the practice of the company through the entry of these Atlantic merchants into company ranks and the transferring of their methods. As sugar cultivation was rising in the 1640-50s, and Jamaica was added to England's collection of colonies, enslaved Africans labour was added to the list of "commodities" that English colonies relied upon colonial merchants to supply. The merchants' position was further strengthened with the introduction of the Navigation Acts in the 1650s and early 1660s, aimed at removing non-English competition. The mercantilist system had, despite some moderation, only grown in strength and the return of Charles II (with the Restoration)

and signified an even stricter consolidation of colonial policy aimed at drawing the Atlantic territories ever closer to the metropole. The Africa companies may not have enjoyed the position of monopsonists that the early colonial merchants had enjoyed in Virginia, but they were, by 1660, the only legal provider of African labour in the growing colonies.

Despite the best efforts of the EIC, the company was forced to abandon the coast as the connection between the two oceanic spaces again came to rely on private engagement. It can serve now as reminder that not all decisions made in the process of English empire-building were based in economic logic, marking the end of what appeared to have been a profitable market connection with the return of the Stuart monarchy to power.

The period of the Interregnum, despite being considered among the most tumultuous periods of English history, represented instead a continuation of the status quo for several of the large-scale Atlantic traders involved in the Africa trade, as it ushered in a new era of colonial control and management. By actively contributing and participating in the development of colonial boards, politically connected merchants like Martin Noell and his partner Thomas Povey got in-depth insight into colonial markets, and influence over colonial policy through the appointment of colonial governors. With assistance from the Navigation Acts, foreign competition could be quelled, and the challenges of a busier Atlantic better controlled. Upon the return of the king in 1660, Parliament voted to award Charles, for his own personal disposal, a lifetime control of the customs. According to the estimates of Nuala Zahedieh, the income from the customs, of which colonial revenue made up a significant amount already in 1660, came to account for up to 40% the king's total income.<sup>468</sup> Thus, the returned king's already great interest in empire, expansion and overseas trade, was further spurred. This manifested itself as a continuation of the movement towards consolidating England's colonial empire, a policy that was maintained and amplified also by James - the younger of the Stuart brothers, upon his ascension to the throne. Colonial trade expanded greatly in the final decades of the seventeenth century, much of which was tightly linked to increased support and focus from the state, demonstrated through the gathering of former proprietary colonies under crown management, expanded navigation laws, and increased administrative control. Examples of how this control was established was seen in chapter 4, in the reforms in colonial administration and the launching of information-gathering boards focused especially on the colonial trades and plantations. As mentioned, this enhanced state-control aimed to benefit England, the monarch, the metropole – and by extension London's mercantile community, though it often did little for the colonies.

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<sup>468</sup>Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy 1660-1700*, 44.

Once the slave trade was secured, the attention of the RA and its members, turned towards the Asiento. Spain's decision to open up its empire for trade in slaves, spurred the hopes of the English company for a part in the trade. The company was initially ineligible, due to political obstacles, and instead the connection with the Genoese asientistas Domenico Grillo and Ambrosio Lomellino was secured by Martine Noell personally. However, the securing of a special permission from the king to circumvent the Navigation Acts and allowing the asientistas to place factors in the English colonies, was left to the company. Thus, as highlighted above, securing the Asiento contract required both the private and the corporate sphere. The contract was no great success – for either party, and made the company unpopular, but a re-evaluation of the perceived hubris behind the company thinking itself capable of servicing both the Asiento and the English colonies is warranted. In the period surrounding the contractual agreement with Grillo and Lomellino, the company had been commercially quite successful, also in comparison to the trade levels of their most ardent competitors, the Dutch. However, as ardent competition turned to war, the company found it increasingly challenging to fulfill their many obligations. Considering the numbers offered by the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, the levels of company activities are not as low as would perhaps be expected, but the chronic tendency of over- and underestimation in the company's own reports, depending on the recipient, makes it a challenge to determine whether it was indeed out of its depths or not. The turmoil caused by the war, however, and the increasing need to extend credit to planters, placed the company in the red and increasingly dependent of credit itself. This credit appears still to have come from company members, and the solution of declaring company bankruptcy likely hit several of them hard. The decision for the RAC to take on parts of the RA's debts, indicates that several of the creditors involved themselves in the new structure in the hopes of regaining their money. This resulted in the new company starting on the backfoot, and the problems of extensive planters' debts and lacking liquidity, followed it until the Africa trade was deregulated at the end of the century.

The diverse company members presented throughout this thesis had a defining impact, as members as well as in their private capacity, on the Africa companies. Their motivations for joining were multiple, but all revert back to the desire to control increasing competition and to further develop their trade under the protection of the patent. Samuel Vassall's many losses likely prompted him to consider company membership, while the chance to develop and connect new markets motivated Maurice Thomson. The earlier traders like Slaney, Crispe, Cloberry and Wood, had already established themselves privately, some even before the first patent was granted, but saw a chance to protect their partnership by holding on to the patent privileges as the first members of the company were squeezed out towards the end of the 1620s. Martin Noell's interests spurred an active participation in

the development of colonial control, and facilitated the taking on of the Asiento by the Royal Adventurers. The presence of strong private interests was not necessarily a negative, in return the company got experience, engaged management, planned development, support in times of challenge from outsiders, and access to personal credit and networks. Much their activity may not appear profitable from a company perspective, but in the case of the GC – and to a lesser degree the RA, profit was a relative term and interests entangled. It is difficult to imagine large-scale merchants such as those presented here being willing to marry their fortunes, cargoes, reputation and personal credit access to the company for decade after decade if they did not reap returns. The profitability of companies stretches beyond the purely pecuniary.

Returning to the quote of J.W. Blake from the introduction, this thesis has attempted to investigate “*the difficulties of transition from the fitful, groping – and all-too-often semi-piratical – ventures of the Elizabethans to the peaceful and regular Guinea trade of the restoration companies*” and the merchants who successfully overcame these difficulties of establishing the English Africa trade on a firm footing. The Africa trade’s volatility, with a delicate market balance, geopolitical upheaval, and strong competition, stretched out across the Atlantic basin, makes the ability of these merchants to maintain their business activity, their companies, and their profits, worthy of our attention. Through their diverse and extensive background, they pulled the English Africa trade and its companies into the process of the English expansion. As has been shown, this group and the networks they represented were not particularly big, considering the number of English traders that would circumvent the globe in centuries to come. Yet still they had a strong and lasting impact on the direction of the coming British Empire. Despite the African companies’ terrible humanitarian impact in their own time, and the legacy of large-scale trade in enslaved people that they birthed, their record as insignificant and unsuccessful in their endeavors should be revised. Through a reconsideration of what company success meant to the contemporaries involved we can better understand the role, impact, and the consequences of the actions of these early manifestations of organized Africa trade, and thus also better our understanding of the impact and full consequences of their legacy.

## APPENDIX 1:

# LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE GUINEA COMPANY AND THE ROYAL ADVENTURERS TRADING INTO AFRICA, 1618-1663.

Names listed in the patent granted to the Guinea Company on November 16, 1618 by King James I&VI.<sup>469</sup>

1.	Robert Rich	Knt, Lord Rich
2.	Robert Mansell	Knt, Vice-Admiral
3.	Sir Ferdinando Gorges	Knt
4.	Sir Warwick Heale	Knt
5.	Sir Allen Appesley	Knt
6.	Sir Richard Hawkins	Knt
7.	Sir Henry Nevill	Knt
8.	Sir William St. John	Knt - Company Governor
9.	Sir Thomas Tracy	Knt
10.	Sir Richard Bingley	Knt
11.	Sir Giles Mompesson	Knt
12.	Sir Thomas Dutton	Knt
13.	Sir Francis Blundell	Knt
14.	Sir Arnold Herbert	Knt
15.	Sir John Bingley	Knt
16.	Sir Henry Williams	Knt
17.	Abraham Williams	Esq.
18.	Anthony Bugges	Esq.
19.	Oliver St. John	Esq.
20.	Oliver Nicholas	Esq.
21.	William Herbert/Harbert	Esq.

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<sup>469</sup>TNA: C 66/2170

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22. Thomas Emerson	Esq.
23. Edmund Sadler	Esq.
24. Thomas Morgan	Esq.
25. Meredith Morgan	Esq.
26. Lewis Powell	Esq.
27. George Dunscombe	Esq.
28. Thomas Love	Esq.
29. Phillipp Jones	Esq.
30. Samuell Crooke	Esq.
31. William Dackombe	Esq.
32. John Davies	Merchant
33. John Watkins	Merchant
34. Michall Best	Merchant
35. Richard Salford	Merchant
36. William Awdely	Merchant

Names listed in the second patent granted to the Guinea Company on June 25, 1631, by king Charles I.<sup>470</sup>

1. Sir Richard Young	Knt and Baronet
2. Sir Kenelm Digby	Knt
3. George Kirke	Esq, Gentleman of the Robes
4. Humfrie Slany	Merchant or of sons of them, of London
5. Nicholas Crispe	Merchant or of sons of them, of London
6. William Cloberry	Merchant or of sons of them, of London

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<sup>470</sup>TNA: C 66/2573

Names listed in the patent granted to the Royal Adventurers trading into Africa on December 18, 1660.<sup>471</sup>

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. James                | Duke of York and Albany, High Admiral of England        |
| 2. Maria                | Princess Royal  |
| 3. Henrietta            | Princess  |
| 4. Rupert               | Prince, Count Palatine of the Rhine, Duke of Cumberland |
| 5. George               | Duke of Buckingham                                      |
| 6. George               | Duke of Albermarle                                      |
| 7. James                | Marquess of Ormond,                                     |
| 8. Phillip              | Earl of Pembroke and Mountgomery                        |
| 9. Henry                | Earl of St. Albans                                      |
| 10. Edward              | Earl of Sandwich  |
| 11. John                | Earl of Bath  |
| 12. Thomas              | Earl of Ossery  |
| 13. George              | Lord Berkley  |
| 14. William             | Lord Craven   |
| 15. John                | Lord Berkley  |
| 16. Charles             | Lord Brandon  |
| 17. George Carterett    | Sir,  |
| 18. Charles Howard      | Colonel   |
| 19. William Coventry    | Esq   |
| 20. Charles Sidely      | Sir, Baronet  |
| 21. John Warner         | Sir, Baronet  |
| 22. Charles Berkeley    | Sir, Knt  |
| 23. Henry Jermyn        | Esq   |
| 24. William Legg        | Esq,  |
| 25. John Denham         | Esq,  |
| 26. Anthony de Martes   | Sir, Knt  |
| 27. Ellis Leighton      | Sir, Knt  |
| 28. Edward Turner       | Sir, Knt  |
| 29. Edward Gregory      | Esq   |
| 30. Richard Nicholls    | Esq   |
| 31. Cornelius Vermuyden | Esq   |

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<sup>471</sup>TNA: C 66/2936

Names listed in the patent granted to the Royal Adventurers trading into Africa on January 10, 1663/4.<sup>472</sup>

1.	Katherine	Queen
2.	Mary	King's Mother
3.	James	Duke of York,
4.	Henrietta Maria	Duchess of Orleans
5.	Rupert	Prince
6.	George	Duke of Buckingham
7.	Mary	Duchess of Richmond
8.	Edward	Earl of Manchester
9.	Phillip	Earl of Pembroke
10.	Henry Jermyn	Earl of St. Albans
11.	John	Earl of Bath
12.	Edward	Earl of Sandwich
13.	Charles	Earl of Carlisle
14.	(presumably) John Maitland	Earl of Lauderdale
15.	George	Lord Berkeley
16.	William	Lord Craven
17.	(presumably) John	Lord Lucas
18.	Charles	Lord Gerrard
19.	William	Lord Crofts
20.	John	Lord Berkley
21.	Thomas Grey	Esq
22.	George Carterett	Sir, Knt
23.	Charles Sidly	Sir, Knt
24.	Ellis Leighton	Sir, Knt
25.	Edward Gregory	Gentl.
26.	Edward Turnor	Sir, Knt
27.	Anthony de Merces	Esq
28.	William Legge	Esq
29.	Richard Nicholls	Esq
30.	William Davison	Sir, Knt
31.	William Cutler	
32.	James Modiford	Sir, Knt

<sup>472</sup>Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, XXVIII:177–82. TNA: C 66/3029

33.	Thomas Cullen	Gentleman (Gentl.)
34.	George Cock	Gentl.
35.	Charles Porter	Gentl.
36.	John Colliton	Sir, Knt
37.	John Buckworth	Gentl.
38.	John Robinson	Sir, Knt
39.	Nicholas Crispe	Sir, Knt
40.	Richard Ford	Sir, Knt
41.	William Rider	Sir, Knt
42.	John Bence	
43.	George Smith	Sir, Knt
44.	John Shaw	Sir, Knt
45.	Martin Noell	Sir, Knt
46.	Abraham Bigges	Gentl.
47.	Thomas Povey	Esq
48.	Edward Blackwell	Esq
49.	Matthew Wren	Gentl.
50.	Tobias Rustat	Gentl.
51.	Martin Noell	Gentl. Junior
52.	Henry Johnson	Gentl.
53.	James Congett	Gentl.
54.	John Ashburnham	Gentl.
55.	Edward Noell	Esq
56.	James Noell	Esq
57.	Francis Meynell	Gentl.
58.	John Cooper	Gentl.
59.	Andrew Rickard	Sir
60.	William Harbert	Esq
61.	John Jacob	Sir
62.	John Harrison	Sir
63.	John Wolstenholme	Sir
64.	William Wake	Sir
65.	Sylas Titus	
66.	Peter Proby	

## APPENDIX 2:

### DEBTORS TO THE GUINEA COMPANY FROM CA. JUNE 1643-JUNE 1644.

Barbados owed to the account of company factor George Reid:

John Burrows  
Henry Franckland(?)  
Thomas Bell  
Edward Craft  
The Governor Phillip Bell  
Lieutenant Thomas Cobham  
Captain Gerard Hawtine  
President Pierce  
Jonathan Hawtine  
Robert Benson  
Henry Collingwood  
Benjamin Gregory

Virginia, owed to the account of company factor John Webb:

William Freeman  
Hugh Ambrose  
Thomas Conyers  
Robert Myles  
Captain Henry Fleete  
John Duke  
William Parry  
Samuel Smeade  
Randolph Sturgon

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The National Archive, London, UK

**Court of Chancery – Proceedings:**

C 2/ChasI/C129/94 - Crespe v Guinea Company

C 2/ChasI/S94/34 - Slaney v Appesley

C 2/ChasI/S85/4 - Slaney v Whitmore

C 2/ChasI/S44/26 - St. John v Havercamp

C 2/ChasI/S87/25 - St John v Davies

C 2/ChasI/C52/38 - Cloberry v Bateman.

C 2/ChasI/T24/64 - Thompson v Combes

**Chancery and Supreme Court of Judicature - Patent Rolls:**

C 66/2170 - Patent granted to the Guinea Company on November 16, 1618 by King James I&VI (formerly Patent Rolls, 16 Jac I. pt. vi)

C 66/2573 - patent granted to the Guinea Company on June 25, 1631, by king Charles I

C 66/2936 - patent granted to the Royal Adventurers trading into Africa on December 18, 1660, by king Charles II (formerly Patent Rolls, 16 Jac I. pt. vi)

C 66/3029 - patent granted to the Royal Adventurers trading into Africa on January 10, 1663/4, by king Charles II (formerly Patent rolls, 14 Car.II., pt. xxvii)

**Colonial Series:**

CO 1/6 - America and West Indies, colonial papers, 1631-1633

CO 1/9 - America and West Indies, colonial papers, 1639-1643

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CO 1/13 - America and West Indies, colonial papers, 1656-1659

CO 1/14 - America and West Indies, colonial papers, 1660

CO 1/15 - America and West Indies, colonial papers, 1661

CO 1/16 - America and West Indies, colonial papers, 1662

CO 1/17 - America and West Indies, colonial papers, 1663

CO 77/7 - Correspondence, original - Secretary of State, East Indies Original Correspondence, 1643-1654

CO 77/8 - Correspondence, original - Secretary of State, East Indies Original Correspondence, 1655-1662

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HCA 13/108 - Instance and Prize Courts: Examinations and Answers, 1632-1633  
HCA 24/108 - Instance and Prize Courts: Files of Libels, Allegations, Decrees, Sentences and Miscellaneous Documents, 1646-1648  
HCA 24/109 - Instance and Prize Courts: Files of Libels, Allegations, Decrees, Sentences and Miscellaneous Documents, 1649-1650  
HCA 24/110 - Instance and Prize Courts: Files of Libels, Allegations, Decrees, Sentences and Miscellaneous Documents, 1650-1652  
HCA 24/111 - Instance and Prize Courts: Files of Libels, Allegations, Decrees, Sentences and Miscellaneous Documents, 1652-1655

**Privy Council:**

- PC 2/31 - Privy Council: Registers, Mar 4, 1620/1 - May 30, 1623

**State Papers and Proclamations:**

- PRO 31/8/63/4 - Domestic Records of the Public Record Office, Gifts, Deposits, Notes and Transcripts, Series II, Copies of commissions, instructions, articles of treaties, and other State papers in the Public Record Office, 1625-1645  
SP 15/36 - Secretaries of State: State Papers Domestic, Edward VI - James I: Addenda, letters and papers, 104  
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SP 16/155 - Secretaries of State: State Papers Domestic, Charles I, letters and papers, 1629 undated.  
SP 16/181 - Secretaries of State: State Papers Domestic, Charles I, letters and papers, 1630 undated.  
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SP 25/65 - Council of State: Books and Accounts, Order Books, Feb 17-Apr 28, 1651.  
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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Julie Mo Svalastog was born on July 4, 1988, in Drammen, Norway. In 2010 she completed a BA in history, focused on the economic development of Denmark-Norway's Caribbean colonies in the 18th century, at Universitetet i Agder in Kristiansand, Norway. From 2008 to 2009 she spent one year at Université Toulouse II-Le Mirail, Toulouse, France, at Département UFR d'Histoire, Arts et Archéologie. In September 2012 she finished her MA thesis in Early Modern History, titled: *The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database: Qualitative Possibilities and Quantitative Limitations*, at King's College London, under the supervision of Dr. Toby Green.

Between 2013 and 2017 Julie was employed as PhD researcher in the ERC funded project '*Fighting Monopolies, Defying Empires 1500-1750: A Comparative Overview of Free Agents and Informal Empires in Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire*' based at Leiden University, the Netherlands. There her work focused on the early modern English expansion and was conducted under the supervision of Prof. Catia Antunes (Leiden University) and Dr. William Pettigrew (Kent University/Lancaster University).

Julie was awarded the Naomi Wulff Prize by the European Early American Studies Association for her contribution to the 2016 EEASA Conference, titled *Space, Mobility and Power in Early America and the Atlantic World, 1650-1850*. Her contribution was titled "*Challenging Porous Frontiers: Bringing England's East India Company to the coast of Guinea, 1640-1660*".

After finishing her manuscript Julie has joined the peer-review management team at SAGE Publishing in London.