



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

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

Svalastog, J.M.

### **Citation**

Svalastog, J. M. (2018, September 19). *Mastering the worst of trades : England's early Africa companies and their traders, 1618-1672*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/65635>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/65635>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/65635> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Svalastog, J.M.

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

**Issue Date:** 2018-09-19

## 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

---

<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

---

<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

---

<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*

---

<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

---

<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

---

<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

---

<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

---

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

---

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

---

<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,

---

<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 Gambia*”.<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

---

<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*

---

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 Sherboro 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?

---

<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>

---

<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*

---

<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

---

<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

---

<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,

---

<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

---

<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*

---

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>

---

<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

---

<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

---

<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

---

<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

---

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.