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

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## CHAPTER 4:

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

### 1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

planters, continued.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>361</sup>“May 1649: An Act Declaring and Constituting the People of England to be a Commonwealth and Free-State.,” in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, ed. C H Firth and R S Rait (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1911), 122. *British History Online*, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/p122>.

<sup>362</sup>“America and West Indies: July 1649,” in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 329-330.

<sup>363</sup>Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados*, 16, 19–21.

possible solution. By the 1640s and 1650s the potential of sugar and other colonial products was being realized by an increasing number of political administrators, partly on the encouragement of merchants turned politicians such as Noell and Povey. The conflict between the colonies and the new administration in power after the civil war, was therefore further spurred on by a growing sentiment in the metropole of the need for stricter colonial management. The existence of the colonies was mainly for the benefit of the mother-country, and their output had to be guarded.<sup>364</sup> During the summer in 1650 it was clear that the Caribbean colonies were not willing to accept Parliamentary rule, or a subservient role in the English economy. The discussion over how to ensure the submission of the rebellious colonies was managed by the Council of State, and the Admiralty. In these discussions, the opinion and advice of established Atlantic merchants were often requested, and if they were not they were made known through petitions.<sup>365</sup>

For Barbados, the policy discussions resulted in a ban on all trade to the colony, enacted in September 1650. And as the negotiations continued the idea of banning all trade was increasingly intermixed with the idea to ban foreign trade specifically. Maurice Thomson stood out as a central character in this process, actively petitioning to stop the ban on trade, though asking to maintain legislation which excluded foreign merchants. In 1651 the Navigation Act, which banned all trade with non-English merchants, was a fact. In the state paper for the Atlantic from this period it is evident that the council relied much on the opinions of Atlantic merchants, either as individuals or as members of advisory councils.<sup>366</sup> That the Navigation Act, with its ban on contact with foreign traders, was a big problem to the colonists was evident and England's largest colonial economy, Barbados, continued to refuse to surrender to the will of the Commonwealth. Governor Willoughby led the Barbadian colonists in an effort of resistance, emphasizing the trouble the island was in after it had been denied the ability to trade with the Dutch. The situation was not ameliorated by the first Anglo-Dutch war, which made trade even more difficult. The conflict across the Atlantic escalated until Cromwell dispatched General at Sea, George Ayescue to force the colony into submission.<sup>367</sup> Upon his arrival Ayescue seized around a dozen Dutch vessels anchored in Carlisle Bay. When this was not enough to force the colonists into submission the whole island was placed under blockade. Ayescue and Cromwell

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<sup>364</sup>Armitage and Braddick, *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, 53; Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy 1660-1700* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Nuala Zahedieh, "Making Mercantilism Work: London Merchants and Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 9 (December 1999): 143-58, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3679396>.

<sup>365</sup>TNA: CO 1/11

<sup>366</sup>TNA: CO 1/11, CO 1/12, see also Farnell, "The Navigation Act of 1651, the First Dutch War, and the London Merchant Community."

<sup>367</sup>TNA: CO 1/11

maintained the blockade until the island was forced to surrender in January 1652.

Governor Willoughby included in his correspondence with London, before his removal as governor, his conditions for the islands surrender, especially underlining that if the island was to be denied trade with foreign merchants and be forced to rely on English merchant shipping, then the colonists requested: *'To have as great freedom of trade as ever, no companies to be placed over them, and no commodities engrossed into private men's hands'*.<sup>368</sup> The colonists attempted to guard themselves against merchant privileges and the risks of ending up in a relationship of dependency. Though the Navigation Acts denied colonist trade with foreign merchants, they did not in themselves imply dependency, maintaining English competition in the colonial market – in the slave trade as in all else. The specification regarding monopolies and privileges either for commodities, or through grants to specific people, aimed at maintaining the level of competition. The colonies attempted, with their request, to avoid the situation that Virginia had been in under the tobacco monopoly. The alternative, a trade restricted to English merchants only, was not ideal for the colonists, but still better than a monopoly granted to specific groups or individuals, or over specific commodities. A good rapport and relationship of exchange existed between the colonists and the Dutch traders, but from the conditions of their surrender it seems that the fear of powerful colonial merchants was an equally strong motivation to resist the new legislation. The Caribbean colonist's fears were justified. The Acts of Navigation, in combination with privilege granted to the Royal Adventurers in 1663, would indeed make them, like the planters in Virginia, dependent on the men of the metropole for both labour and the accompanying extension of credit.

#### 4. A new approach to colonial management

After the rebellion in Barbados had been brought under control, management of the colonies was now organized largely by the state, which had by 1653 been declared a Protectorate under the rule of the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell. Furthermore, the large island of Jamaica had been added to the Caribbean colonies controlled by England, and as the established Stuart practice of extending patents of territorial control to supporters and royal favorites came to an end, there was need to develop a new format to colonial management. The colonies were now controlled from London, through the sending out of state representatives answering to executive

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<sup>368</sup> "America and West Indies: Addenda 1652," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 9, 1675-1676 and Addenda 1574-1674*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1893), 85-87. *British History Online*, accessed November 21, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol9/pp85-87>.

metropolitan committees. Thomas Povey and Martin Noell were active in the process of defining the role, shape and power of these committees, as well as assuring that the men on the spot, colonial governors now appointed in England, had their best interests at heart.

Martin Noell's (1615-1665) relation to official Africa trade commenced in the Interregnum, when he became a member of the EIC as the company got involved in the Guinea trade. He had extensive experience with the needs of the Caribbean labour market, and some practice in shipping human cargo, as a long-time supplier of indentured labour. Noell was among the EIC members who, upon losing access to the Guinea Coast opted for RA membership. He appears as an RA company member in the mercantile influx that took place around the time the RA was granted its second patent, in 1663. Like Maurice Thomson, whom he at times collaborated with in the Atlantic provision- and tobacco trade, Noell owned land in the Caribbean. Together with his brothers Steven and Thomas, as well as friend and partner, Thomas Povey, he managed properties in both Barbados and Jamaica, also with the help of Povey's brothers Richard and William.<sup>369</sup> Together they were partaking in the shift towards large-scale sugar production that was picking up speed in the 1640s. This shift included an increased reliance on slave labour as the style of production changed. The rise of sugar plantations, as a large-scale production unit for a cultivation style which was labour intensive, saw land gathering on fewer and fewer hands. With the annexation of Jamaica in 1655-1657, Noell invested in the new venture by securing himself around 20,000 acres of land in the newly added colony. As will be remembered the GC owned only 225 acres in Barbados when the committee of appraisal investigated its situation ten years previous.

Despite benefitting from the development of large-scale sugar production as a plantation owner, his other strand of colonial business – that of supplying indentured servants from England, was suffering and growing increasingly obsolete. Noell was, however, well connected with Spanish circuits of slave trade, and moved his attention and business activity in the direction of supplying the Spanish Americas with slaves. The awarding of the important Asiento contract to the RA, which will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, was largely Noell's doing along with his partners.

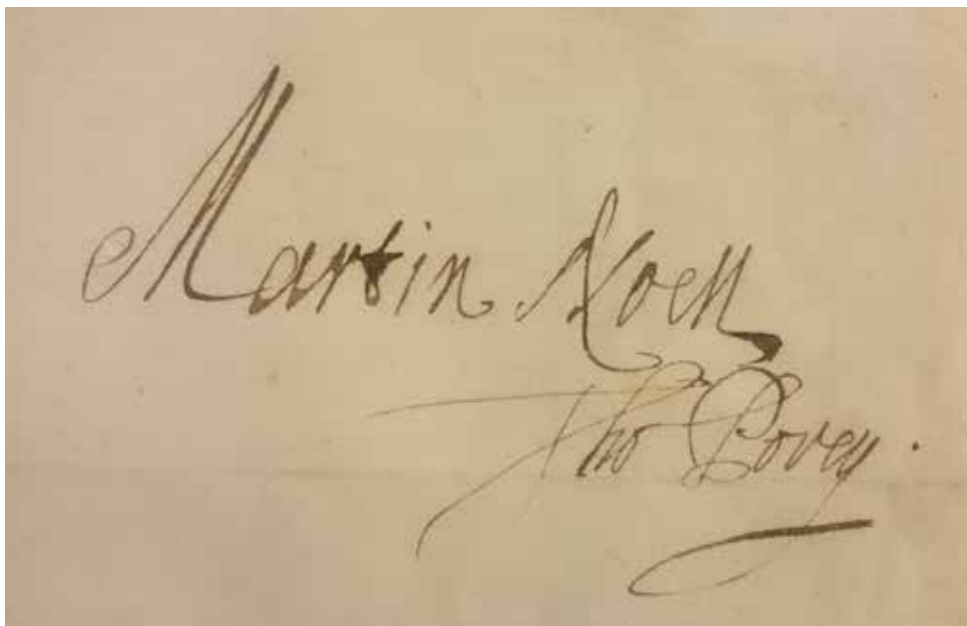
The earliest sources we have of Noell's mercantile endeavors sees him trading to the islands Nevis and Montserrat in 1650, though it appears he at that point had operated for some time already. As the GC patent was under negotiation and the Navigation Acts were brought forward in 1651, Noell became an Alderman of the City of London, indicating an established presence and trade. In the following years, he extended his mercantile activities to include markets in the other Caribbean

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<sup>369</sup>See footnote 338 above. Bailyn, "Communications and Trade," 381.

Islands, as well as in New England, Virginia, and the Mediterranean. Noell was well connected in Interregnum England, being personally close with Oliver Cromwell, and extending on one occasion a personal loan to the Lord Protector of £8000.<sup>370</sup> His close contact with Cromwell was supplemented by the important political link to Sir John Thurloe, his brother in law and secretary to the council of state. From 1655 Noell appeared as a member of the Trade Committee, and from 1656 on the Council for Jamaica, where he made use of his capacity as an established colonial trader and planter even more efficiently. His intimate connection to the Council of State and to Lord Protector Cromwell resulted in him frequently extending advice regarding the colonies and overseas trade. The combination of experience, connections, positions and wealth meant that his recommendations and suggestions for appointments of colonial offices carried weight.<sup>371</sup>

Illustration 14:  
Signatures of Martin Noell and Thomas Povey



Detail from draft version of “*Overtures touching a Councell to be erected concerning the Plantations*”.

Source: Egerton MSS. 2395, p. 271, British Library, London, UK.

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<sup>370</sup>Historical Manuscript Commission, *Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, 7th Report*. (London : [H.M.S.O.], 1870), 133.

<sup>371</sup>Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 50–51.

Thomas Povey (1615-1701), although he came to be very active in trade and mercantile activities, only did so later in his life, initially being trained as a lawyer. It is possible Povey developed his interest in the Caribbean through the work of his father who was appointed commissioner for the Leeward Islands in 1637. In 1647, he was elected member of Parliament, but in the ongoing political turmoil, with the heightened levels of suspicion and tumult characterizing the Interregnum Parliament, his career in the House of Commons was put on hold until the monarchy was Restored.<sup>372</sup> By 1654 he had commenced a partnership with Martin Noell, which continued for years to come as the two remained close during the remainder of the Interregnum, the Restoration, through the membership in the RA, and on various boards and committees. In 1657 Povey took up a seat as a member of the Committee for America, formerly known as the Council for Jamaica. From then on, and well into the 1660s he remained a conspicuous and influential actor in the development of colonial management. Though he only joined his first committee in 1657, he had, already co-authored several suggestions for colonial and trade management together with Noell.<sup>373</sup>

Povey and Noell presented numerous ‘overtures’ and prepositions for colonial management in the second half of the 1650s, the first of which appeared as early as 1654, focusing especially on Jamaica. Due to the nature and convictions that accompanied the English Civil War there was a general aversion to autocratic power and privilege for the few at the cost of the many, therefore a preference emerged for councils and committees which included a high number of members. This made decision-making and efficient work challenging, and the first recommendation by Noell and Povey was to limit membership of any committee to a select few. Povey was especially clear that he had no patience for large councils. In his suggestions for boards responsible for colonial management, membership was limited to between seven and ten persons. In Povey and Noell’s words, this limited the chance of losing sight of all the different tasks at hand and ease the priority of pressing matters. In addition, secrecy was much more attainable in smaller groups. As a result, the selection of members was crucial. Certain qualities should be represented by the board through the experience of its members, especially a commercial and overseas experience. In a suggestion for a seven-member council managing the West Indies, the membership should, according to Povey, ideally be represented by: “(1.) *One to be a Merchant that hath been in those Indias [West Indies] or trading that waie.* (2.) *One also to bee*

<sup>372</sup>R.S. Dunn, *Papers Relating to the English Colonies in America and the West Indies, 1627-1699, in the British Museum (Egerton Manuscripts 2395)*, British Records Relating to America in Microform (BRRAM) R96902 (British Museum, 1974). Records now kept by the British Library.

<sup>373</sup>BL: Egerton MSS 2395, examples of which were p.96r-97v “*Considerations for the more convenient supplying of his Highnesse affairs in the West Indias*”, and p.110r-111r “*A Preposition for the Improvement of the English Interest in the West Indias*”.

*a Merchant but not related to that trade, and who rather retires from than pursues in profession. (3.) One well experienced Seaman, not or but little trading att present. (4.) One Gentlemen that hath travailed ; that hath language and something of the civill Lawe. (5.) One citizen of a general capacitie and conversation. (6.) One that understands well our municipall Lawes and the general Constitutions of England. (7.) One to be a Secretarie to his Highness in all Affairs in the West Indias, and relating thereunto, who is solely to give himself up to this Employment.”*<sup>374</sup> Several of Povey and Noell’s closest partners and collaborators would, alongside the two men themselves, fit perfectly in to the requested roles. The proposed council would ideally be influential, answering only to the council of state, and its aims were those of unification of the government; managing legislation, distribution of justice, advising, as well as gathering information about all ports, their condition, their wants, their trade, and their proceeds. That included keeping up constant correspondence with all the main ports both in England and in the colonies. Each year a summary of this information for each colony was to be presented to the Lord Protector and his council. To anyone with interests in colonial business, a position on such a council meant a position at the center of the Atlantic web.

The council should, furthermore: “*Contrive all possible encouragement and advantages for the Adventurer, Planter, and English Merchant, in order also to the shutting out of all Straingers from that Trade*<sup>375</sup>, *by making them not necessary to it, ...*”<sup>376</sup> The extensive powers of such a relatively small board was extended by its close contact with the colonies. Not only was the suggested council at the forefront in the battle against foreign traders, but the colonies were expected to keep “*a constant correspondence*” with the board members, who were also responsible for the presentation of the state of the colonies to the Protector and his council. It is unnecessary to point out that whatever the board members chose to emphasize in their reports would naturally appear at the forefront. This bottleneck in the information exchange between colonists, and their Protector and council was unlikely to be lost on the colonists.<sup>377</sup> Merchants serving on such a board, would have intimate access to all details about the colonies on all matters from policy to market demands, as well as a direct influence over their presentation in front of the Lord Protector. Povey’s suggestions remained a suggestion for the time being but reappeared shortly after the

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<sup>374</sup>BL: Egerton MSS 2395, p.87-113

<sup>375</sup>The supply trade of the English colonies.

<sup>376</sup>Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 57.

<sup>377</sup>Examples of the establishment of such a practice can be observed later in the century, as colonists consistently appealing to select colonial administrators in strategic positions. These in turn use their position to cultivate grate personal wealth. See the contemporary publication by Christopher Jeaffreson, *A Young Squire of the Seventeenth Century : From the Papers (A.D. 1676-1686) of Christopher Jeaffreson of Dullingham House Cambridgeshire*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London : Hurst and Blackett, 1878).

Restoration when they were reproduced nearly word for word in the instructions of what was to be, again by the impact of Povey and Noell, the Council of Foreign Plantations - first appearing in 1660.<sup>378</sup>

In 1654, however, they brought no immediate success. Instead a trade committee of over seventy members was launched, and rather than a fixed gaze on the plantations and the accompanying exchange, their focus was far wider, aimed at expanding all commonwealth trade domestic and external. Noell held a seat among the seventy as farmer of the customs, and so did Maurice Thomson's brother George who at the time was customs commissioner. Bulstrode Whitelock also served the board along with Secretary Thurloe until the committee was discontinued in 1657.<sup>379</sup> By 1656, Povey and Noell had presented the Lord Protector with new suggestions, titled "*Queries concerning his Highness Interest in the West Indies*". The content of which appears to have greatly impacted the creation later that same year of "*The Committee for Jamaica*". The body changed its name soon after to the "*Committee for his Highness Affairs in America*". The constitution of the "*Committee for America*" greatly resembled suggestions that originated with Noell and Povey, and both men went on to serve as members of the board.<sup>380</sup>

The duo prepared a further two propositions specifically aimed at the West Indies, known as the "*Propositions concerning the West India Council*" (1656), and "*Overtures touching the West Indies*" (1657). In these propositions the argument for a separate committee set aside solely for the management of the colonies continued to be underlined and enforced. How could the colonies successfully be managed when the system relied on a Council of State that had so many pressing matters to deal with within England itself? Proper attention could not be given to the situation of the colonists, yet the expectations of loyalty from the metropole were high. When explaining the need for a council set aside specially for the management of colonies, Povey claimed that: "*..by this conduct and method those many rich places and severall Governments and Adventurers will have all due and continuall care and Inspection taken of them, without diversion to the nearest Affairs of this Nation, which being of so much of a greater and a closer consequence, the Superior Council can seldome be at leisure to descend any further than to briefe and imperfect considerations and provisions, which is the sad Estate of fforeigne Dominions, and distant Colonies and Expeditions from whence usually the most strict, or servile duty and obedience is exacted, but very seldome any Indulgenzie or paternall care is allowed to them*".<sup>381</sup>

<sup>378</sup>BL: Egerton MSS 2395, p.268r-269v "*Instructions for the Council of Trade*", 270r-275v "*Draft of Overtures touching a council to be erected for the Foreign Plantation*". Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 69; Steele, *Politics of Colonial Policy*, 4.

<sup>379</sup>Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 40.

<sup>380</sup>BL: Egerton MSS 2395, p.86r-86v "*Certaine queries concerning his highness' interest in the west Indies*".

<sup>381</sup>BL: Add. MSS. 11411, folio 11v-12v

The state was busy, and therefore the colonies and its inhabitants were better left to men who understood their situation, and had vested interests in their organized management.

Illustration 15:

“A new & accurate map of the island of Jamaica”



By Emanuel Bowen, 1747, London, published by William Innys [et al.].

Source: David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, Stanford University Gallery.

And further, by continuing this practice of appointing separate committees to handle different minor colonial matters there could be no consistency in policy. The colonies were trapped in a state of either aggressive control from a government which demanded but gave little in return; or in ‘ad hoc’ - where government was split between numerous councils and committees, all with differing agendas, tackling problems separately but missing the bigger picture, all while often lacking any long-term follow-through. To Povey and Noell it would be preferable if, according to their suggestion, a group of men with knowledge of the colonies and of trade was appointed to manage the entire affair.<sup>382</sup> The different queries and overtures had their desired effect, both were appointed seats on the *Committee of America*, built on their own suggestions.<sup>383</sup> The committee was granted power to correspond with the colonies

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<sup>382</sup>BL: Egerton MSS 2395, *Overtures touching the West Indies*. Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 59; Steele, *Politics of Colonial Policy*, 4.

<sup>383</sup>Formerly known as the Committee for Jamaica.

and request all information they deemed vital be provided, all addresses from colonial subjects were to go via the board – again assuring members complete information control, and in addition the committee should prepare advice and answers to colonial questions and challenges. As the first name suggested the committee was initially focused on the settling of Jamaica, but gradually their business included most of the colonies, and it was renamed the committee of America. Its work included reports on everything from colonial constitutions and governing powers, fortifications, revenue, the appointment of governors and intra-colonial conflicts.<sup>384</sup> Povey went on to become both secretary and chairman, and, as seen, Noell invested £16,000 in the annexation of Jamaica, securing himself 20,000 acres of land there. He also made sure to regain his seat on the equivalent committee after the monarchy's return in 1660.<sup>385</sup>

Their instructions authorized them to maintain a correspondence with the colonies, obtaining such information and advice as seemed essential; to receive all addresses relating thereunto, whether from persons in America or elsewhere; to consider and consult thereof and prepare such advice and answers thereupon as they judged to be to the advantage of the community. As members of the committee for America, along with several fellow merchants such as captains John Limbrey, Thomas Aldherne, John Thomson and Stephen Winthrop, as well as Richard Sydenham and Robert Bowes, Noel and Povey developed and maintained close relationships and correspondence with the different representatives of government in the colonies. Noell was especially close to Daniel Searle - governor of Barbados from the dismissal of Lord Willoughby until the restoration of the monarchy; while Povey corresponded with governor Edward D'Oyley at Jamaica; Colonel Roger Osborn in Montserrat, Governor Thomas Temple of Nova Scotia, governor James Russell at Nevis; Major William Byam in Surinam, General William Brayne – the commander of one of the Jamaica expeditions, as well as governor Edward Digges in Virginia.<sup>386</sup> The list also included Lord Willoughby of Parham – who had both attacked Guinea Company cargoes during the civil war, and led resistance to government control after the end of the civil war. Noell and Povey developed a close friendship with Parham during his second stint as governor of Barbados from 1663 to 1667. During this time Povey exerted, according to Charles Andrews, considerable power over Parham colonial policies.<sup>387</sup> As part of the developing colonial management, the merchants in the

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<sup>384</sup> Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 46–47.

<sup>385</sup> Andrews, 50–51.

<sup>386</sup> Andrews, 52–53.

<sup>387</sup> Michael A. LaCombe, “Willoughby, Francis, Fifth Baron Willoughby of Parham (Bap. 1614, d. 1666),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed February 13, 2018; Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 53–55.

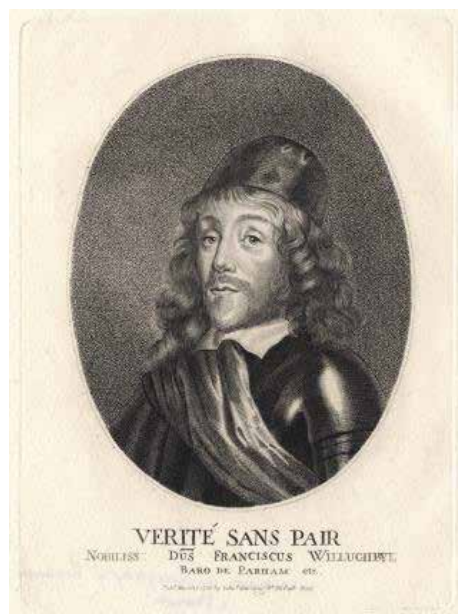
commission was given much control of the appointment of governors to colonies now placed under committee's management. They appointed Governors Russel and Osborn, who continued to look to them for support. Recommended Edward Digges for governor in Virginia, and Captain William Watts for Jamaica. Their control over the appointment of governors, the representative of state control and enforcers of law in the colony, was a part of securing their hold over the colonies and their markets.<sup>388</sup> Povey also secured positions for his two brothers, Richard became Commissioner General for Provisions in Jamaica, while William received the post of Provost-General at Barbados. Both increased the reach of the merchants into colonial management and affairs, while looking after the growing family interests.<sup>389</sup>

Illustration 16:

Thomas Povey and Sir Francis, 5. Lord Willoughby of Parham



By John Michael Wright, undated  
Source: National Trust, Dyrham Park, UK



published by Edward Harding after  
unknown artist, date unknown.  
Source: National Portrait Gallery, London, UK.

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<sup>388</sup> «Overtures» from 1657, found in British Library, Egerton MSS. 2395, folio 99 “*That every Governour shall have his Commission reviewed, and that all be reviewed in one form, with such clauses and provisions as shall be held necessary for the promotion of his Highness other public affairs, and that as soon as order can be conveniently taken therein the several Governours to be paid their allowances from hence (though upon their own accounts), that their dependencie bee immediately and altogether from his Highness.*” Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 55, 59.

<sup>389</sup>Bailyn, “Communications and Trade.”

## 5. The Restoration

1660 marked the return of the monarchy, and with Charles II on the throne England now had a king that paid much attention to the overseas possessions. The Conventionist Parliament, called immediately after Charles' return and quickly replaced by the Cavalier Parliament, assigned Charles a large sum for his private purse. The sum was to be gathered from the colonial customs. The matter of colonial management, and a profitable empire was therefore of great interest to the king almost immediately after his return. The last years of the Protectorate, after the death of Cromwell in 1658, had seen a decline in English colonial trade. Not enough had been done to bring inhabitants to newly established Jamaica, secure the trade with the English planter population, nor with the Spanish traders that frequented the island. The king, along with the merchant community was eager to exploit the colonies potential more fully.<sup>390</sup>

As soon as the king had restored his privy council, petitions from London's merchants started arriving regarding matters of colonial trade, and the council continued much the same approach to colonial management as was seen during the Interregnum.<sup>391</sup> The "*Committee for Trade and Plantation*" was launched in the summer of 1660 and included some of Charles' closest advisors. The wishes of the merchant community were conveyed to them in the form of petitions and advice, and both Povey and Noell became ardent petitioners, exploring the reaches of their former influence. Despite not serving on the newly established boards, they remained active in colonial management, quickly re-establishing themselves after the political shift.

Despite their services to the Protectorate administration, Noell and Povey, quickly became popular at the Restoration court. When the 1650s came to an end, Noell initially remained loyal to the house of Cromwell, which made his smooth navigation of the changes caused by the returning Stuart monarchy all the more surprising.<sup>392</sup> But it was indeed smooth, resulting in a knighthood in September 1662, which prompted diarist and navy board member Samuel Pepys to remark in his diary upon hearing the news: "*I this day heard that Mr. Martin Noell is knighted by the King, which I much wonder at; but yet he is certainly a very useful man.*"<sup>393</sup> Povey became treasurer to the king's brother, the newly appointed director of the Royal Adventurers into Africa, and future king James II, already in 1660. He also joined the

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<sup>390</sup>Swingen, "Chapter 4: Labor, Empire and the State: The English Imperial Experience in the Seventeenth Century."

<sup>391</sup>Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 61. 1

<sup>392</sup>Andrews, 49–51; Hughes, *Studies in Administration and Finance 1558-1825: With Special Reference to the History of Salt Taxation in England*, 132–35.

<sup>393</sup>Diary of Samuel Pepys, September 6, 1662.

company himself in 1663 and continued his involvement by investing in the RAC after 1672. He was appointed Treasurer to Tangier in 1663, but the office had to be relinquish to navy board member and diarist Pepys a year later, as the affairs were not sufficiently kept in order.<sup>394</sup> Pepys characterization of Povey's persona and skills was initially rather less flattering than that of Noell. He was all but impressed after their first meeting, writing in his diary in April 1664: "*The simple Povey, of all the most ridiculous fools that I ever knew to do business*".<sup>395</sup> Povey proved not to be a great accountant, but still established himself as a *dominus factotum* in all matters pertaining to the colonies.

Not long after launching the Committee for Trade and Plantations by the returned restoration government, alterations to its format was enacted. It was decided that trade and colonial matters should be divided, with trade left in the hands of a "Council of Trade", and the "Council of Foreign Plantations" dealing with colonial government. The process of selecting members for the two boards was a slow and careful one, and the London merchants were active in giving their opinion on appointments of the members that were to serve on them. Both boards likely appeared too crowded for Povey's liking with the Council of Trade counting over sixty members, and the Council for Foreign Plantations counting nearly fifty, but both men were granted seats. The instructions given to the Council of Foreign Plantation included most of the suggestions from the "Overtures" presented by Noell and Povey from the 1650s, regarding information control, control over appointments and legislation, and collection of information.

By 1663, eight members of the RA served on both the Council of Trade and on the Committee of Foreign Plantations simultaneously, as well as three more company members sitting on the Council of Trade specifically. The eight members who served on both council were Sir Nicholas Crispe, Sir Andrew Riccard, Thomas Povey, Martin Noell, John Colleton, Sir George Carteret, John Lord Berkley, and Sir John Shaw.<sup>396</sup> The remaining membership consisted of men with knowledge and experience from the Atlantic. Noell and Povey, along with Andrew Riccard, were among the most active members in the councils. These two councils were relatively active and efficient. The Council for Foreign Plantations heard, reviewed and reported on matters from the colonies and appointed, evicted and reinstated governors, while the Council of Trade focused on the strengthening of the Navigation Acts. The two boards assisted as the slave trade was brought under patent, supporting the RA by instilling the colonial governors to enforce the new legislation. However, towards the middle of the decade, when unforeseen circumstances crated difficulties also for the RA, the board struggled to continue. In 1665 a plague outbreak killed 100.000 of the city's 400.000 inhabitants, including Martin

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<sup>394</sup>Tristan Stein, "Tangier in the Restoration Empire," *The Historical Journal* 54, no. 4 (2011): 985–1011.

<sup>395</sup>Diary of Samuel Pepys, April 16, 1664.

<sup>396</sup>Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 67–68.

Noell. The epidemic was quickly followed by the Great Fire of London, which left 70,000-80,000 inhabitants homeless. Lastly, came the break-out of war between England and the Dutch Republic (1665-1667), largely caused by the Navigation Acts, as well as the aggression directed by the Royal Adventurers against the Dutch on the African coast.

Towards the end of the 1660's the politics of colonial and trade management passed into new hands, yet the value of combining colonial management for merchants in the Africa trade was not lost sight of. As will be shown in the next chapter, the RA was admittedly severely struggling by that point, but the members were confident the end of the war would turn things around. After all the challenging events that took place at the middle of the decade, the King's privy council again took direct charge of the management of the colonies from 1668. They would handle colonial matters until a new plan was proposed for a council in 1670. That proposal was endorsed by Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper, who had long showed interest in the overseas empire and foreign trade, and drafted together with his physician-philosopher John Locke.<sup>397</sup> The ideas endorsed by Povey and Noell since the mid-1650s, of a small board experienced in colonial matters; collecting information on all aspects of colonial life and society; as well as maintaining close contact and correspondence in the royal colonies; was again used as the foundation.<sup>398</sup> The board initially dealt only with colonial affairs, but by 1672 Ashley and Locke brought forth the suggestion of adding trade to the its responsibilities. The new commission for both trade and plantations was to be headed by Lord Ashley, who by now had become the Earl of Shaftesbury, with Locke being appointed secretary shortly after. The proposal for joining colonial management in the Atlantic with that of overseas trade, in the hands of a small council under Lord Ashley's leadership, was commissioned by writ of the Privy Seal on the September 27, 1672.<sup>399</sup> Interestingly this was the same day that the patent was granted to the Royal African Company, where both Shaftesbury and Locke stood as investors.<sup>400</sup>

<sup>397</sup>Tim Harris, "Cooper, Anthony Ashley, First Earl of Shaftesbury (1621–1683)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed February 13, 2018; J.R. Milton, "Locke, John (1632–1704)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, n.d., accessed February 13, 2018.

<sup>398</sup>Steele, *Politics of Colonial Policy*, 5; Peter Laslett, "John Locke, the Great Recoinage, and the Origins of the Board of Trade: 1695-1698," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (July 1957): 370–402. C. Robbins, "The Life and Thought of William Popple, 1638-1708," *William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series* 24, no. 2 (April 1967): 190–223; Maurice Ashley, *The Glorious Revolution*, (London, 1966), chap. VIII.

<sup>399</sup>W. Root, "The Lords of Plantations, 1675-1695," *American Historical Review* 23, no. 1 (October 1917): 20–41; Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675*, 106.

<sup>400</sup>Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, XXVIII:187. Lord Ashely is listed as no. 2 in the patent only surpassed by James. Thomas Povey is also listed as investor. As is three of the Crispe family: Sir Nicholas (presumably junior), Samuel and John. Charles Modyford, Thomas Modyford's brother, and Col. John Searle, former governor and Povey's old friend, is also mentioned.

## 6. Conclusion

The shifts ushered in by the interregnum allowed Atlantic traders to impact state-decisions and the development of colonial management like never before. Through impacting the launch of metropole measures of control, mainly in the form of colonial management boards such as the committee for Jamaica, the committee for America, the committee for trade and plantations, and later the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Atlantic merchants and Africa company investors secured their continued position of privilege. In the early decades of the century merchants providing the newly settled colonies with labour, capital and necessary European goods turned the needs of the planters against them, enforcing both a monopoly and monopsony on their colonial products. Exemplified here by the business practices of Maurice Thomson and his associate Martin Noell, this early community of provision traders held a naturally favorable position. But as the Atlantic trade grew, their position of favor – largely maintained by the lack of competition, came under threat. Through the slave trade monopoly, and their seats on executive boards with extensive control over colonial policy, their favorable situation could in part be re-created. I argue therefore, that the Interregnum – a period of deep-seated change, paradoxically represented continuation from the perspective of large-scale Atlantic traders who had increasingly to contend with rising competition.

Not only the format- but also the timing of this increased colonial control was favorable for the Atlantic traders in question, as it coincided with a dip in the indentured servant import which was gradually replaced by slave trade, all the while foreign competition was staved off through the Navigation Acts. The annexation of Jamaica ensured a long-term increase in demand, as well as a potential for Spanish trade, the latter of which will be given more attention in the following chapter. The return of the monarchy in 1660 meant a heightened interest in both the trade to Africa and in colonial control as a large part of the royal income was to be made up by colonial revenue. The ability to appoint colonial representatives, through the executive councils ensured “friendly” governors, of which some were company factors, and made the monitoring of the monopoly and the hold on colonial debtors more efficient.

The relationship that emerged between the English Africa companies after 1660 and the colonial planters caused the same animosity, frustration and debts on behalf of the planters as had the personal trade of the same merchants in the past. This frustration gathered strength and led to the forming and conjoining of strong lobbies of planters and disgruntled independent traders. Further, it may be argued that the Virginian planters had a tougher time when, in the 1630s they attempted to free themselves from what was essentially an artificial dependency on the services of the colonial supply traders. Virginian planters faced the collaborative efforts

of numerous private individuals operating in de-facto unison to corner, through monopoly and monopsony, the colonial import and export market. By the latter decades of the century when colonial production had come to rely on enslaved labour, the import of which was solely controlled (at least legally and nominally) by the RA and later the Royal African Company through their patents in combination with the Navigation Acts' hampering effect on foreign trade, an increasing level of organized resistance and opposition to the company developed. I suggest that this method of trade by dependency was optimal for smaller-scale private operations, but upon adopting a similar method as a company both the RA and the RAC became far larger targets for opposition. The colonial planter lobby banded together with private traders suffering from the company's exclusive monopoly, and through organized and public opposition the two groups contributed greatly to bringing the company monopoly down.

Furthermore, the chapter underlines the argument that it was not the institutional structure that initially impacted the actor and his activities. In the case of the England's Africa trade, relevant actors, such as Maurice Thomson, built a structure of exchange based on their needs, abilities, and experiences which benefitted their personal activities. It did not, as we have seen for the planters of Virginia and later for the planters of the Caribbean, necessarily follow that this structure would be beneficial to anyone other than the merchants themselves. The goal was the hinderance of competitors, be they English or foreign traders, and as part and parcel – to exclusively supply goods that were vital to a colony's survival. As the activity levels of the Atlantic were rising, the shelter offered by a company patent became ever more desirable.

Maurice Thomson, along with men like Martin Noell, William Cloberry, Samuel Vassall and John Wood, represented the group of long-distance traders and financiers responsible for this method of expansion. Through market control, privilege, metropolitan support, and monopoly these merchants grew rich in the early colonization process. This wealth was funneled back into exploring new trades and further hinderance of competition, a result of which was the shape of the early formal slave trade. Through their experience with plantation development, labour supplying, and provisioning, these merchants laid a foundation on which the companies of the second half of the century would stand, and eventually crumble. Through use of political connections, and manipulation of the colonial systems of governance, the ratification of the Navigation Acts spared these traders the loss of profit brought by competition with first foreign and later domestic traders.

The privilege held by the Royal Adventurers into Africa from 1663 onwards was therefore unique as it was a placement, at least on paper if not always in reality, of the responsibility for the survival of England's increasingly profitable Caribbean societies in the hands of a single company. No other English company had by that

time enjoyed such a responsibility, or opportunity for theoretical profit. The label the trade has carried, as aristocratic, privileged, or failing, deserves more nuance. If we consider the powerful legacy of these new members, labelled by Brenner as ‘ship-owners’ and ‘shop-keepers’, in the shaping of the Anglo-Africa trade, I argue that the impact of aristocrats, kings and protectors, not to say states, was dwarfed by comparison.