

Adventurers and Slavers

The Atlantic slave trade resulted in the enforced scattering of millions of Africans to the Caribbean, the Americas and elsewhere - including Britain. English involvement in the trade began with the activities of John Hawkins. His father, William Hawkins, made the first English expeditions to West Africa in the 1530s. William Hawkins was an adventurous trader who set out to explore the Guinea coast. His voyages were made in search of commercial materials such as **G** dyewoods.



'The King of this Country is adored of the common people' (119k)

Exploration and trade were the most significant reasons for people to move around the world during the 15th and early 16th centuries. The French, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch sent their merchant seamen to Asia, Africa and the Americas, where trade developed rapidly. The English, anxious not to miss out on this bounty, became experts in shipping, finance and insurance and thus major players in overseas commerce.

From 1553, a group of London merchants began a series of ventures to develop English overseas trade. Two years later these adventurers returned carrying ivory, gold, **G**Malaguetta pepper and, significantly, five Africans from Shama, in modern Ghana. These Africans were brought to England to learn English, and returned to Africa as interpreters for visiting English traders.



Queen Elizabeth I assisted the early merchant adventurers in 1561 by supplying ships and provisions. When they returned to English ports they brought not only valuable cargoes of commodities, but also more Africans, some of whom had probably become sailors on these merchant ships. Queen Elizabeth soon realised the economic value of this overseas trade. She granted a patent to eight merchants from London and Exeter to trade exclusively with Senegambia, between the Senegal and Gambia rivers, for a 10-year period.



Commission of Inquiry into Hawkins' Third Voyage

Transcript

Commission of Inquiry into Hawkins' Third Voyage SP 12/53, f. 52

image

Ad octavum articulum dicit That the Jesus the Grace of God the Swallowe and the Angell brought in them at ther departure from Cartagena in the West Indias into the saide havon of La vera Crux xl [40] negros at the leaste whereof ther were three lost in the Angell w[hic]h came to the spaniardes possession whiche negros were of the best sorte and goodlye of stature and the choise and principall of all the Negros whiche were gotten that last voyadge And moreover ther were in the Mynnyon at that tyme xij [12] negros of like goodnes whiche xl [40] negros the saide Hawkins lost in the saide fight who were eyther slayne by the spaniardes or taken by them in the saide foure shippes lost, and the same as he seythe were of the saide S[i]r william Garrardes and companies adventure And as towching the price and value of those negros this deponent seythe that he hathe ben in the west Indias in ij [2] voyages the first in the yere 1567 and the last 1568 And by that occasion knowethe by his experience the value & sale of negros in the hether parte of the west Indias whereas he seythe a negroe is worthe and were these late yeres commonlie soude for C [100] and Cxx [120] pesos of goulde And a choyse negroe worthe doble or treble so muche money And in this last voyadge this deponent knowethe that there was one negroe soude for Cl [150] pesos of goulde whiche was not so muche worthe as manie of the saide xl [40] choise negros were worthe And this y deponent iudgethe by his experiens that these choise negros might have ben soude at the hether places of the West Indias for cl [150] and CC [200] pesos of goulde one w[i]th an other For that suche negros be muche desired and in request in these places whiche be carried from thence into

the mayne lande and soule as this deponent hathe harde
the spaniardes confesse in those sea quoastes there in the
saide maine lands for iijC [46] vC [45] and somme a thousand
pesos of goulde a pece

European traders thus initially met Africans at a time long before colonial rule, when African societies possessed freedom of action and political power. As commercial trade and enslavement developed, millions of Africans were transported from one continent to another. Some of those uprooted by the slave trade were also to end up in Britain - many as servants and labourers.

In 1562, John Hawkins set out on a voyage that would mark the beginning of the English slave trade. Documents reveal that he left Plymouth with the purpose of capturing Africans along the Guinea Coast. The travel writer Richard Hakluyt (c.1552-1616) says that Hawkins 'got into his possession partly by the sworde and partly by other meanes to the number of 300 negroes'. In Sierra Leone, he took a ship laden with ivory, wax and 500 Africans.



Pioneer of the
Triangular Trade

Transcript

Pioneer of the Triangular Trade SP 12/44, f. 16

image

My Sovereigne good Lady and mystres yo[u]r highnes may be
advertised that this daye being the xvi th of September the
Portyngales who shuld have Dyrected us this p[re]tended enterpry
have fledd and as I have certayne understanding taken passadge ir
france, havinge no cause for that they had of me better
intertaynement they appertayned to suche mean p[er]sons, and a

army prepared sufficient to doo any resonable enterpryse, but yt appeared that they cold by no meanes p[er]forme ther lardge p[ro]mises, and so having gleaned a peice of mony to o[u]r m[er]chantes ar fledd to deceive some other And although this enterpryse cannot take effecte (which I think god hathe p[ro]vided for the best) I do ascertain yo[u]r highnes that I have p[ro]vision sufficient and an able army to defend o[u]r chardge and to bring some (w[i]th god[es] help) fortye thowsand m[ar]kes gaynes w[i]thout the offence of the lest of any of yo[u]r highnes alyes or freindes It shalbe no dishonor unto yo[u]r hyghnes that yo[u]r owne s[er]vante and subject shall in suche an extremitie convert suche an enterpryse and torne yt bothe to yo[u]r highnes honor and to the benefit of your whole realme. which I will not enterpryse w[i]thout yo[u]r highnes consent, but am redy to do what servicie (by yo[u]r ma[jes]tie shalbe commanded yet to shew yo[u]r highnes the trothe I shold be undon yf yo[u]r ma[jes]tie shold stave the voyadge whereunto I hope yo[u]r highnes will have some regard. The voyadge I pretend ys to lade Negroes in Genoya [*Guinea*] and sell them in the west Indyas in troke of golde perrles and Esmeraldes whereof I dowte not but to bring home great abondance

to the contentation of yo[u]r highnes and to the reliefe of the number of worthy s[er]vitures redy now for this p[re]tended vogadge, w[hi]ch otherwise wold shortly be dryven to great misery and redy to comitt any folly This I having advertysed yo[u]r highness] the state of this matter do most humbly praye yo[u]r highnes to signifye yo[u]r pleaseure by this bearere shall most willingly accomplyshe frome Plymouth the xxi th daye of September 1567

..... highnes most humble servante

[*signature*] John Hawkins

.....to the quens most exellent ma[jes]tie

.....xvi Septemb[er] 1567

Cop of hawkins to your Ma[je]stie

Fryer, P., *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, London, 1984

Williamson, J. A., *Sir John Hawkins: The Time and the Man*, Oxford, 1927