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AND THE CHILDREN'S TEETH ARE SET ON EDGE

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•CHAPTER 9•

From Africa to Disaster

When darkening clouds surcharge the moisten'd air,
And frowning tempests roll along the sky,
The prudent shepherd drives his fleecy care
Where the grey rock uplifts its head on high:
There undisturb'd he hears the roaring wind.
And sees before him sweep the driving rain;
Or, 'tween the gusts, beneath the crag reclined,
In fading distance eyes the troubled main:
So, when intestine broils or foreign rage
With angry tumult fire the public breast,
Let us, my Roscoe, fly the maddening age.
And mid domestic comforts calmly rest;
When wrath and discord through the nations roam,
Thrice happy who possess a peaceful home.

William Shepherd

War with France.

From the fall of the Bastille on July 14th 1789 until February 1793 Pitt remained aloof and kept the country unentangled with events taking place in continental Europe. As the threat from Danton's revolutionaries to the neutrality of the Low Countries increased, following the September Massacres of some 1600 aristocrats by the Paris Commune, and public sympathy with the revolution at home waned, war became increasingly inevitable. On January 21st the King of France was executed; on the 29th Danton urged the annexation of Belgium on the Convention, and on February 1st the Republic declared war on Britain and Holland. A few radicals held out against the war including Charles James Fox, but they were becoming increasingly isolated by association with the traditional enemy power, not to mention the new bloodthirsty atheists. After the first parliamentary debate on the war in the Upper House the entire opposition was able to go home in a single carriage.¹ For the merchants and their underwriters a perilous situation had arisen with the risk of capture by enemy warships and privateers. However, the outbreak of War with Revolutionary France held out the prospect of considerable profit by fitting out privateers just as it had in the American Revolutionary War. By July 1st 1793 some 67 privateers had been fitted out in Liverpool. Great numbers more were

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fitted out afterwards and large numbers of prizes taken. It has been said that the French were much too distracted to carry on this mode of warfare and their commerce was swept from the sea within three or four years.² Contemporaries found matters to be rather different.

For reasons which are unclear, between the dispatch of the *Fisher* in November 1790 and its refit and dispatch in April 1792, the Hodgsons seem not to have fitted out any vessels from Liverpool. *Fisher* was dispatched to the Isles de Loss arriving at the end of June 1792 where it remained until mid March 1793, a long time for factory based trading. 356 slaves were purchased but it departed with only 325 and delivered 315 to Grenada in early April arriving back in Liverpool at the end of July.^{3,4}

Another curious entry in the register is the *Heart of Oak*. The Hodgsons sold their interest in this vessel to a mariner named Henry Nimmo in April 1789 and he, in his turn, sold half to Robert Sellar and Gilbert Henderson in July, and then in August 1790 Nimmo and Henderson relinquished their shares to Sellar. Ownership of the vessel was transferred back to Nimmo in April 1791 and in August 1792 under Captain William Fell, it sailed for the Isles de Loss and delivered 277 slaves to Grenada in May of 1793.^{3,4} Captain Fell, Miles Barber's nephew, had worked for the Hodgsons in the past and⁵ so perhaps it was operating with the involvement of Hodgson capital. On October 5th 1793 the *Heart of Oak* was reported overset in her passage from Grenada to St Kitts to join convoy and a Dutch vessel from Demerara fell in with her on her beam-ends and "cut some cotton from her quarter."⁶ Piling up speculation in heaps, is this evidence of the Hodgsons importing cotton in exchange for use in their Caton mills?

On February 21st 1793 the 58 ton cutter *Princess Elizabeth* was registered in Liverpool to Thomas Twemlow, John Hodgson, Samuel McDowell and Thomas Hodgson.⁴ The vessel was fitted-out as a letter of marque against the French, and took, under Captain James Barclay, *Les Bons Freres* – 400 tons, bound from Port-au-Prince to Bordeaux. The prize, valued at £32,000, was taken into Falmouth on the 15th of April 1793, with a cargo of coffee, indigo and sugar.^{7,8} In July 1793 McDowell and Twemlow, regular slave traders, transferred their shares to John Lightbody and Alexander Carson, who were not concerned in the trade.⁴ John Lightbody was Thomas Hodgson's uncle by his marriage to Elizabeth Lightbody. Under the new owners, the *Princess Elizabeth*, Captain John Montgomery, took into Liverpool on December 15th 1793 the *Amsterdam Packet*, Waddel, from New York to Havre de Grace with a cargo of 48 hhds of tobacco, 24 hhds and 27 bags of coffee, 21 hhds of sugar, 25 bales of cotton and 391 casks of pearl ashes.⁹ The vessel was "believed foundered in 1793 or 1794."⁴

In July 1793 the Hodgsons acquired the ship rigged 117-ton vessel *Nancy*, Captain William Cutler Moore, which sailed in August 1793 for the Isles de Loss where Captain Gamble was expecting to receive letters by her.¹⁰ It left Africa in December 1793 and delivered 192 slaves to Barbadoes in January 1794.³ Its subsequent fate seems to be unknown. The shipping register states; "supposed not to exist 1827."⁴ A report for February 28th 1794 had Nancy, late Moore, arrived in Barbadoes.¹¹ It is possible that Moore transferred to the *Barbadoes* owned by Ralph Fisher in the West Indies and the *Nancy* was brought home by Captain Campbell.

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They were reported together at Jamaica in early April¹² and to have arrived at Penzance from there by April 24.¹³

By the summer of 1793 hostilities at sea were well under way between Britain and France in the Americas and on the African Coast. It was reported in May that Admiral Gardner was about to attack Martinique. A privateer of 8 guns had taken *Le Bon-Menage*, a French vessel with a crew of 40, the Captain of which, ignorant of the war, had only two eight pounders mounted, when he might have mounted 26. There were 674 slaves on board, along with rich India goods and gold dust valued at £100,000.¹⁴ Another letter in June announced that a French privateer, out of Bordeaux, the *Liberty*, 14 guns, had in May, on the Windward Coast taken the Liverpool vessels, the *Hazard*, the *Mercury*, Hewitt; the *Echo*, Kelly, with 120 negroes on board; the *Union*, Farrington; the *Little Joe*, Jones; the *Prosperity*, which were retaken by the frigate, *Andromache*, and brought into Barbadoes. The *Swift*, of Bristol, Roper, had also been taken and plundered of 33 male slaves, and 224 elephants teeth. It was ransomed for £1000 and made for Barbadoes. On a happier note the *Robust*, a letter of marque from Liverpool, had taken a French ship, with 200 negroes, commanded by Miles Barber, jun. at Cape Mount. The *Robust* was also believed to have retaken the *Echo* and the *Little Joe* after the French privateer, which had taken them, fled when the *Robust* hove in sight.^{15, 16}

These reports confirm Anna Maria Falconbridge's account but with the significant addition that the returning Miles Barber jun. was master of a French Slave ship.¹⁷ Unfortunately none of the contemporary accounts shed any further light on the vessel, its homeport or on what became of Miles Barber junior. Some newspapers gave more extensive accounts in reports sent in from Liverpool including the activities of the privateer, *Pilgrim* which had carried a rich prize into Barbadoes on May 29th.^{18, 19} The *Pilgrim*, Hutchinson, had sailed from Liverpool for the South Sea Fishery and on May 3rd fell in with the ship *La Libertie*, Louis Boaise Guerin, in Latitude 5. N. Longitude 23. W.; well out to sea off Sierra Leone. She had 12 six pounders and 60 men and the ships engaged for four days before *La Libertie* struck. The *Pilgrim* used 15 barrels of gunpowder in the struggle.

La Libertie was a rich East Indiaman and not the privateer from Bordeaux. The prize was a rich one, packed with tea, sugar, pepper, china and East India textiles. Among the investors were John Birch and William Barton; the latter built an extensive property in Everton and named it 'Pilgrim' after the vessel that so increased his wealth. The vessel was said to have loaded cargo worth £110,000 at Bengal, exclusive of private property and was estimated to be worth £150,000. Thus just as in the American Revolutionary war some merchants were able to considerably enrich themselves. This war, however, was not to prove so profitable for Thomas Hodgson as the last. Reports from the *Pilgrim* brought news from the African Coast about the privateer *La Libertie*, from Bourdeaux, which had taken several Liverpool vessels at Cape Mount on May 7th; the brig *Hazard*, Rigby (belonging to William Beg), the *Prosperity*, Kelsall (belonging to Richard Ward & Co), the *Mercury*, Hewitt, (belonging to John Ratcliffe), and the *Echo*, Kelly, with 120 prime slaves (belonging to Thomas Staniforth and Thomas Parke), The latter taken on the 24th off Bassa. Other reports showed that the *Mercury*, *Echo* and *Little Joe* were taken off the River Junk and the *Union* off Bassa.²⁰

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On December 1st 1793 the 150-ton ship *Jimmy* (named after the local African chieftain) solely owned by the Hodgsons sailed for the Isles de Loss arriving in January 1794 and leaving in April to deliver 237 slaves to Kingston, at the end of May after which the vessel was sold.^{3,4} It was seen by Captain Gamble of the *Sandown* off Sierra Leone and again in the West Indies where he reported an insurrection during the Middle Passage.¹⁰

The depredations by the French were just the beginning and it was not the only hardship the merchants had to endure. The onset of war caused a severe financial crisis.¹⁹ In part this resulted from the rapid expansion of the cotton industry fueled by the huge influx of entrepreneurs into ownership of mechanized mills following the expiry of Arkwright's patents. There had already been a crisis in 1788/9 when many factory hands were laid off in Lancashire. Import of raw cotton, in which surely Thomas Hodgson must have been engaged – his sons certainly made their way in this trade - increased from 5.3 million pounds in 1781 to almost 11.5 million pounds in 1784 and then to almost 32.6 million pounds in 1789. The price of yarn fell almost as fast and manufacturers had to increase output to maintain profitability. Several textile companies collapsed, some such as Livsey, Hargrave and Co., spectacularly so, when it was found they had been indulging in enormous paper transactions drawing negotiable bills on their bankers made payable to fictitious persons.²² The 1788 crisis seems to have been a classic case of overproduction or under consumption as the manufacturers preferred to term it. The crisis of 1793 was different; though large numbers of cotton spinners went bankrupt, many other firms throughout the economy went into liquidation. The numbers rose from an average of about 500 per year in the preceding years to over 1300 in 1793. The financial crisis of 1793 began when several banks stopped payment in February causing panic and general mistrust which led to the freezing up of credit and a reduction in transactions. The rapid expansion of trade after the American War had led to the foundation of many new banks and a big increase in the number of paper transactions based on their bills. The credit system was looking shaky even before war broke out, as these bills began to be heavily discounted. The outbreak of war turned boom rapidly into bust.

In Liverpool panic set in when Charles Caldwell and Company got into difficulties as did banks operated by the Gregsons and by Staniforth, Ingram Bold and Daltera.²³ The latter was finally dissolved at the beginning of 1795. Many merchants too were in trouble. Clayton Tarleton, the mayor, convened a meeting of the merchants on March 20th in the Exchange. The meeting tried to restore confidence by issuing a pledge signed by 233 of the principal merchants and houses to honour the bills of the local banks.²⁴

“We whose names are hereunto subscribed do mutually pledge ourselves to each other, and the public, that we are ready and willing to receive in payment the bills of the several Banking Houses in this town of WILLIAM CLARKE & SONS, ARTHUR HEYWOOD, SONS, & Co., WILLIAM GREGSON, SONS, PARKE, & MORLAND, and STANIFORTH, INGRAM, BOLD, & DALTERA, at One or Two months' date, as hath been the usual and customary practice.”

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The Mayor convened a meeting of the Common Council which resolved to form a committee to consider a response to the crisis.²⁴ The meeting referred to the “*late extensive failures*” and particularly of “*some great commercial and banking houses in London*” which had been followed by the failure of “*a very old and principal banking house in Liverpool.*” These failures had caused such alarm that there was “*an apprehension of a general calamity, to the merchants, traders, and inhabitants of this place, and to the County of Lancaster at large.*” The Common Council appointed a committee composed of six of its own members and six drawn from the merchants to approach the Bank of England for a loan secured on the Council’s property and to consider any other measures to “*avert the common ruin that seemed to threaten the commerce of the town.*” The Council nominated six members to serve on the committee; the Mayor, Mr. Alderman Earle., Mr. Alderman William Crosbie, junior, Mr. Alderman Case, Mr. Brooks, and Mr. Statham.

The merchants appointed John Brown, Edward Falkner, Richard Walker, Thomas Hayhurst, Thomas Leyland, and Jacob Nelson. Of these twelve men only Mr. Statham, Richard Walker, and Jacob Nelson were not involved in the African Trade.²⁴ The committee met on March 21st and reported to the Common Council that the four banking houses of the town required £100,000 to preserve public credit. They recommended the Corporation approach the Bank of England through Mr. Pitt for a loan to this amount to be available for 15 months. On March 25th they urged the merchants who held bills to show forbearance and make payments as easy as possible to their creditors to prevent a collapse of confidence.²⁴ In early April a deputation went to see the Chancellor and the Bank of England governor but their application was unsuccessful. On April 15th the Council resolved to approach parliament for the right to issue negotiable notes based on the credit of the Corporation’s estate, valued at almost £822,000. The Bill to allow the corporation to issue its own notes was passed on May 10th. This allowed the issue of promissory notes on deposition of suitable securities in values of £5 and £10 bearing no interest, and £50 and £100 bearing interest, to a total of £300,000.²⁴

At the end of May a Corporation Loan office was established in the Exchange and merchants were urged to use the facility to discharge their debts.²⁹ They were also urged to signify their agreement to the measures by signing a petition lodged in Mr. Gore’s shop near the Exchange. In the first year £140,000 of notes were issued backed by £155,000 of securities. The scheme was extended for a further year but by September 7th 1796 the loans had all been paid off and the notes withdrawn.³⁰ Over the same period Pitt issued treasury bills to the tune of 5 million pounds which gradually restored confidence, prompted a resumption of the credit markets, and gradually restored trade to more normal levels. It is not clear how this crisis and downturn in trade affected the business interests of John and Thomas Hodgson. The decline in profitability of the cotton spinning industry, caused numerous bankruptcies, and can hardly have been without effect. The Hodgsons may also have been involved in cotton broking to supply their factories in Caton and Calver. This too would have been hit by the downturn in trade.

James Currie became increasingly concerned at the effect of the War on Liverpool’s trade. Currie greeted the French Revolution with some enthusiasm and took part in agitation for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1790.²⁵ Once

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again he was concerned that the blustering of the radicals would inflame animosity rather than unite all in equal freedom. Nevertheless a small meeting was held to celebrate Bastille Day in 1790 and Roscoe published his poem³³ celebrating the revolution, “*Unfold Father Time.*” Pitt by this time had begun to move against the radicals and although Roscoe proposed, and got adopted, a loyal but reformist address to the King at a public meeting in Liverpool, they were violently attacked and a more suitably loyal address was adopted instead.²⁶ Throughout the country radicals were under pressure of which the most notorious example was the Priestley Riots in Birmingham in July of 1791.²⁷ Meanwhile Wilberforce’s Slave Trade Bill had gone down to defeat and a slave uprising in the French Island of Ste Domingue had caused a considerable wringing of hands, which Roscoe tried to counter by writing another pamphlet.²⁶ The defeat of the slave trade bill had the church bells ringing in celebration in Liverpool as Currie noted to Thomas Percival in April 1791.²⁵

“All night my ears have been dinned with the ringing of bells. When you reflect on the cause, you will not wonder if the sound seemed to me very mournful. You will guess that we are rejoicing on the issue of Mr. Wilberforce’s motion. A letter which I have from Mr. Milnes (M.P. for York) speaks of the business in the following terms:

“The great majority that appeared against us in the division was expected, before the debate, to have been much greater. An infatuation had gone forth, that if the motion was carried, the West Indies would be lost, a civil war would perhaps ensue, and the revenues become bankrupt.”

By 1792 Currie seemed to be contemplating emigration to America²⁸ but he took part in a campaign to end the monopoly of the East India Company in which the Hodgsons also participated.²⁹ Feeling that the repressive atmosphere was actually becoming dangerous the meetings of his literary society were suspended. In early 1793 Currie anonymously published the Jasper Wilson Letter which attacked the prosecution of the war with France, the methods by which it was financed and its harmful effects on trade. In March 1793 he wrote to Sir William Maxwell of his concerns.²⁵

“In the mean time, the war is producing here the most fatal effects. The first merchant in Liverpool has failed, and many others must follow. Private credit is entirely at a stand. The manufacturers of Manchester, Birmingham, and Sheffield, are altogether stagnant. God knows what will be the issue.”

In April Thomas Smyth and Francis Trench, two of Currie’s friends, went bankrupt. Roscoe would act for Trench. Shortly afterwards Currie secured a £1200 loan on the property he owned in Dumfries, sufficient to establish his family in America, should the need arise.²⁸ In the same month Wilberforce wrote to Currie for information on the state of trade in Liverpool and Currie replied in two letters by return. He was invited to visit Wilberforce in London in May. Wilberforce shared the letters with Pitt but by the time Currie returned to Liverpool he learned that peace negotiations with the French had been abandoned. In June 1793 Currie published the Jasper Wilson letter as an open letter to Pitt, which caused a sensation in the prevailing atmosphere; a time that became known as “The English Reign of Terror” or “Pitt’s Terror” – although it was by no stretch of the imagination

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comparable to the real thing.²⁵ In the Spring of 1794 he wrote to an old school friend, Dr Wells, explaining his motives.

“Of the Letter with the signature of a Jasper Wilson I am the sole author... No man was privy to my intention but one, - a public character, and a friend of administration, - who, however, did not approve of it...”

The failures last spring alarmed the friends of the Ministry, and, I believe, alarmed Mr. Pitt himself very much. The Brissotine party were at this time suing for peace in private, at the moment that they were keeping up the mob of Paris by their impudent and ridiculous threats.... In this state of things, it was a matter of importance to know how far the war had produced our commercial distresses, and how the pulse of the nation beat to its continuance. Mr. Chalmers, I find, wrote many letters, to Liverpool on these points; and I was applied to by the public character alluded to, to give my opinion on the subject...

I enquired: it seemed to me apparent that our distresses were occasioned, in a great measure, by the war, and I gave my opinion, with my reasons for it, in a letter of twelve pages. This turned my attention to the subject, and interested me much in the restoration of peace, - a wish which was strengthened by the ruin of several of my connections, and of one particular friend.

I was in London, ... in the beginning of May, and ... had some communications with my correspondent on the subject. Though a friend of administration, he ... seemed to agree, in my sentiments, ...

After my return to Liverpool, I gave up all thoughts on the subject till the 24th of May, on which day I read the Star of the 22nd, where ... the rejection of all negotiation on our part was announced. That afternoon I determined on publishing...”

The letters were published as a pamphlet with the laborious title; “*A Letter, commercial and political addressed to the Right Honourable WILLIAM PITT, in which the real Interests of Britain, in the present Crisis, are considered, and some Observations are offered on the general State of Europe.*”²⁵ It carried a verse from Isaiah to make matters plain; “*Who hath taken this Council against Tyre the crowning City, whose Merchants are Princes, whose Traffickers are the Honourable of the Earth.*” Roscoe too published a tract on the effects of the war on commercial credit “*Thoughts on the causes of the present failures*” which was read out by Lord Lansdowne in the House of Lords.³⁰

In February 1794 the Jasper Wilson letter was answered by George Chalmers, chief clerk of the Office of Trade and Plantations in *The Resources of Great Britain*. Advertisements in the press trumpeted; *With a Dedication to Dr James Currie, the reputed Author of “Jasper Wilson’s Letter.”*³¹ The dedication, as if to someone known to the author, caused Currie great offence as did the insinuation that he was a Jacobin as he revealed in his final political testimony.²⁵

“The pamphlet of Jasper Wilson being written, in spirit and in truth, with great respect for the principles and institutions of our Government, deprived its adversaries of an advantage which was too frequently given by the advocates of peace in their deplorable impetuosity and folly. To deprive him of this advantage incidentally was, perhaps, a ruse de guerre of Mr. C. Hence appeared to me the extraordinary appearance of familiarity and vulgar intimacy, in which his composition is involved. This gave a colour to insinuations constantly thrown out,

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that my attachment to the constitution was different from what I had assumed, and that I was in truth what in those days was called a Jacobin in disguise."

Currie then began a new edition, dealing with the various published replies, but in May 1794 the government suspended Habeas Corpus. Currie had been receiving various threatening letters and believed his mail was being intercepted and read. Rumours were current that he had been committed to the tower and in that atmosphere the plan to publish was abandoned.²⁸ Both Roscoe and Currie turned to more domestic and literary pursuits; Roscoe worked on his *Life of Lorenzo de Medici* which appeared in February of 1796³² to much acclaim, and in the latter part of the year Currie began work on his *Life of Burns*.³³

The French Squadron.

In August 1794 Currie wrote to Samuel Greg's wife Hannah, away visiting the Greg relatives in Ireland, about the condition of the maritime trade in Liverpool.²⁵

"... We have nothing very new here in our domestic situation. We grow more and more tired of the war, and with more and more reason. In the last seven or eight months, Liverpool has lost fifty-eight sail of square-rigged vessels, amounting to eighteen thousand tons of shipping! The underwriters here and at Lloyd's are the greatest sufferers; and so much enraged are they, that a meeting in London is talked of for the purpose of addressing the King to displace Lord Chatham."

Some months later wrote again on the death of Arthur Heywood making his melancholy views on the war obvious, *"Alas! the definition of war given by Thales the Milesian is too true; - 'In peace the sons bury their fathers; in war the fathers bury their sons.'"*²⁵

By October the underwriters were screaming, as is obvious from a letter, despite its cynical tone, written by Mercator to the Editor of the Morning Post.³⁴

"I have always been a keen Government Man hitherto, but certain circumstances... make me doubtful whether I shall be able to preserve the same sentiments.

You may recollect, Sir, the language held out by our City Members, in answer to the Opposition asserting, that or Trade was unprotected; and that the best proof of it was, that the Premiums of Insurance were then as low as in time of profound Peace....

I gave implicit faith to his assertion as to the protection given to trade, ... but on enquiry how the Premiums were, I found them to be double what they were in peaceable times....

Well, thought I; Trade so well protected as not to suffer anything from the War and yet Premiums of Insurance actually found to be double – now is my time ... to get introduced in Lloyd's coffee-house ... I succeeded so well, that in a short time I found the Gentlemen Brokers so civil, that they even came and found me out of their own accord... Would you believe it, .. I came to underwrite for premiums to the extent of 150l, at least every day. Bravo, ... a year or two of this will do. I had upon my book no less than 7000l. and not a single loss in three months; at length a ship is taken,; well no matter, I can make this up in two days, but, Alas, Sir, two days after I find two more, and in a week after as many; by and by I find seven at a time on the

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books – but still thinks I this must be some accidental thing, our Trade being so well protected, some of our cruising squadrons must fall in with those Pirates, and sweep the seas of them. By and By I find a convoy of ours taken – here I have six losses; and immediately after some other ships taken and retaken by our Grand Fleet, but these, lest they should be again taken by the enemy, they set fire to, and there goes one thousand pounds of mine.

In short, Sir, after a little time, I found all my Premiums gone, and five thousand pounds more.

I have now given up the business, in hope I may yet save a remnant of my fortune, with a determination to be no more misled by boasting Speeches of Protection to our Trade... ”

On the 30th July 1794 the 181 ton ship **Swift**, under Captain William Fell, sailed from Liverpool for Africa, with the Hodgsons and Fell as owners.³⁴ It was taken following a devastating attack by the French on Sierra Leone. The news arrived months later as some of the ships masters straggled home to land in Kinsale in a little schooner purchased on the African coast.³⁵ Reports of the events appeared in February 1795 alongside reports of the capture in the West Indies of the **Little Ben**, Curry, from Liverpool for Africa and the **William and Mary**, Patterson, from Liverpool and Madeira to Barbadoes.³⁶

On September 18th a French squadron, under English colours, drew up before the settlement, hoisted their own colours, and bombarded the town. The inhabitants struck; but two frigates continued to fire for two hours, raking the town with grape shot. The French landed, and plundered the remaining houses. Several of the free American blacks returned and persuaded the French Commander to spare their houses. He agreed but ordered the Church, the warehouses, and all the English houses set on fire, leaving the 1300 settlers destitute of provisions. The French squadron consisted of: **Experiment**, 50 guns, 600 men; **Vigilance**, 24, 300 men; **La Felicite**, 20, 280 men; **La Pervie**, 18 twelve-pounders, 220 men; and **La Mutine**, 12, 180 men.

One frigate proceeded to Bance where the garrison put up a spirited resistance for two days. When a second frigate arrived the garrison retreated under cover of their flags. The French Squadron took all the ships belonging to the Sierra Leone Company including: the **Harpy**, Telford; **Sophia**, Bevans; **Venus**, Pain; **Sierra Leone packet**, Buckle; **Domingo**, Simpson; **Thornton**, Sayford; and **James**, Williams. The squadron then went to leeward and took or destroyed 27 vessels; the **Jane**, Wright; **Barbadoes**, Jones; **Swift**, Fell; **Nancy**, Smith; **Margery**, Haliwell; **Molly**, Sellers; and **Rose**, Finlay, all from Liverpool; **Bess**, Arundel; and **Flora**, Thompson, from Bristol; and **Prince of Wales**, Webb, from the West Indies; and 17 others whose names were not then known. The **Duke of Buccleugh** of London, Capt. John Maclean and another ship, the **Ann Philippa** of Liverpool, were the only vessels to escape. **The Duke of Buccleugh**, 12 four-pounders, was attacked by the armed French brig **La Pervie**, 18 twelve-pounders, and 220 men, but was beaten off after a brisk running engagement.

Significantly the store houses on the Isles de Loss were also burned,² which would have been devastating for the Hodgsons' operations depriving them of all the advantages of a factory operation. Of the Liverpool vessels mentioned; the **Jane**, Captain Reuben Wright, was owned by William Begg and Thomas Seaman, the

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Swift, Captain William Fell, by John & Thomas Hodgson. The *Nancy*, Smith, also belonged to the Hodgsons. It had sailed from Liverpool in August 1793 under William Cutler Moore and was mentioned in Captain Gamble's account. The *Margery*, John Haliwell was owned by William Harper and Robert Wade, *Molly*, Captain John Sellers, was owned by James Fisher, John & James Aspinall and John Webster, the *Rose*, a vessel built in Lancaster in 1783, Captain Alexander Finlay, was owned by Joseph Ward and Robert Rigmaiden.^{3,4}

Of the vessels which escaped, the *Duke of Buccleuch*, mentioned by Mrs Falconbridge, had been trading at Bance and remained on the coast until January 1795 finally delivering 365 slaves to Kingston Jamaica in March 1795. The *Ann Phillipa*, Captain John Clare, trading at Cape Mount, belonged to James Welsh and John Tarleton, and also delivered 225 slaves to Kingston.^{3,4} The reports came from Captain Telford of the company's vessel *Harpy*, who arrived at Kinsale from Sierra Leone in an American schooner the *Flora* along with Captain Jones of the *Barbadoes*; Captain Wright, of the *Jane*; and Captain Fell, of the *Swift*.^{36, 37}

After leaving Sierra Leone the squadron proceeded to Cape Mount on November 7th were they captured Jones of the *Barbadoes*. After taking and plundering the vessels they put the crew and slaves ashore but detained the captains who were allowed to ransom the *Flora*. The squadron was expected to proceed to Angola where there were said to be no less than fifty vessels, 37 out of Liverpool; a prospect that was greeted with great apprehension. Some hope was held out for vessels at Bonny from the danger in going over the bar and the narrowness of the passage through which only one vessel could pass at a time.

The Sun prefaced its account with some scathing remarks about Wilberforce's position on the war with France:-³⁸

"We suppose that MR. WILBERFORCE had some notice of the intended attack upon Sierra Leone, when he became an advocate for Peace with the French – it is generally understood now that he is an advocate for a vigorous prosecution of the War."

In February rumours from the West Indies suggested that thirty West Indiamen had been captured by another French squadron.³⁹ A week later came news from Barcelona that a French frigate of 40 guns had taken more than 25 vessels between Barcelona and Algiers.⁴⁰ There were also reports that the *Union*, Captain Joseph Hodgson and the *Gipsy* Captain Miles were cut off at Angola, a term usually used to describe a slave insurrection or an attack by the Africans on shore; later reports confirmed that Miles and the crew of the *Gipsy* had all been murdered.

It was not long before the French attack at Angola materialized. On May 4th reports appeared that the *George*, Archibald Thompson and owned by George Case, the Aspinalls and the Gregsons had been taken by the French.⁴¹ A week later reports stated that the *Botton*, Lee, the *Nancy*, Hewitt, the *Julius*, Lovelace, and the *Lord Stanley*, Farquhar, were all well at Angola on February 26th.⁴² But then on June 13th heavily delayed dispatches of the 2nd and 5th of December from the Governor of Cape Coast Castle were published.⁴³

The governor received word from Elmina that 6 French ships been sighted and in the evening four ships and two brigs appeared off the castle, close hauled. At 9 o'clock a Portuguese snow was boarded and taken off Elmina. There was a deal of signaling by gun with boats going to and fro. By eleven he had two small ships and

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two brigs to leeward, and a two-decker and a frigate abreast of the Castle. The ships *Mary* and *William the Conqueror*, lying at Annamaboe, ran close in shore, and two schooners, *Fairy* and *Juno* fled to leeward. At twelve o'clock, the French vessels moved on to Annamaboe exchanging some shot with the shipping, and the fort. At two o'clock, the two-decker went off in pursuit of the schooners and the remainder came to off Annamaboe from where came a request for reinforcements. But then the Squadron got under way, and stood to leeward. At four in the morning a boat arrived with the Captain, Surgeon, and part of the crew of the ship *George*, of Liverpool, which had been captured on the windward coast. Captain Thomson, of the *George*, brought news of the vessels taken or destroyed there. The governor also reported that the French treated the English prisoners with respect giving the English prisoners boats to go ashore, and strictly respected the private property of the captains and officers. However their conduct towards the Portuguese was quite different. The Portuguese snow, *Bahia*, taken at Elmina was carried to Accra, where they put the crew into the hold, nailed down the hatches, and set fire to her.

To the list of the French squadron was added the *Harpy*, apparently converted into a hospital ship. To the list of vessels captured or destroyed at Sierra Leone and between Senegal and Accra were added the *John*, Liverpool, a Dutch schooner *Expert*, driven on shore between Annamaboe and Tambo, another Dutch schooner driven on shore at Accra, and the *George*, Captain Thornton, of Liverpool, burnt at Isassa. *William the Conqueror*, Captain Galloway; and *Mary*, Captain Willoughby, of London, had been driven on shore at Annamaboe.

After leaving Accra the Squadron had driven ashore, at Popo, the *Lady Penrhyn*, Captain Manu, of Liverpool; and the cutter *Bee*, Captain Stronach, which was later got off. Three Portuguese vessels, were captured and burnt at Wydah, two more, at Porto Novo, where a schooner belonging to the brig *Alert*, was also burnt. The list of escaping vessels also increased and to the *Ann Philippa*, Capt. John Clair, was added the *Manchester*, Captain R. Kendall, which escaped by running in between Turtle Island and the Main. The schooners, *Riley*, *Juno* and *Swallow*, had gone to leeward from Annamaboe and then tacked south with the enemy in pursuit.

It was obvious that the squadron would now run down as far as Angola, destroying everything afloat. The Governor of Cape Coast calculated that the corvette *Mutine* could go over any bar and that ships in the rivers Benin and Gaboon would not escape. He dispatched a boat directly southward to Angola, where 160 ships were believed trading, in hopes that his advice would arrive before the French.

Reports from the West Indies were no better; they spoke of the loss of Tortola, slave revolts brewing in Trinidad, trouble in Grenada, St Eustatius fallen and Demerara likely to fall soon. By July 1795 all the British Fleet had managed do was to make brief contact with the squadron, now in company with two guineamen converted into ships of war, on its way back from devastating the shipping at Angola.⁴⁴ The *Iris* frigate put into Portsmouth from Africa and reported making contact on the 24th of May in mid Atlantic (Latt. 6. 50. N. Long. 29. 50) fired a few shots and followed them for a day. The squadron consisted of one 50, two small frigates, two armed brigs, and two armed merchantmen: - the *Vulture* and *Princess Royal*. It was feared the French had taken and destroyed 64 vessels on the Angolan coast and had anchored at the River Congo by the 11th of March.

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A week later news from the West Indies⁴⁵ reported Capt. Hird, of the *Levant*, arrived at Barbadoes in the *Colonel Gascoyne* on the 4th of May with 114 sailors from ships captured by the French squadron at Bonny. The French had returned to Bonny from Old Calabar on the 25th of January, and sailed on the 30th for Cape Lopez, where they stopped for wood and water, sailing for Angola on the 17th of February. On the 23rd of March the *Colonel Gascoyne* spoke a Dutch brig, 11 days out from Angola, which had escaped by fast sailing and learned that the squadron arrived at Angola about the 11th of March.

Three weeks later the list of vessels destroyed at Angola began to be filled out; the *Peggy*, Pritchard, the *Benjamin*, Ainsworth, the *Guipuscoa*, Dufresne, the *Tom*, Connell, the *Mary*, Hunter, the *Union*, Hodgson, the *Swift*, Fell, the *Venus*, Rishton, and the *Julius*, Lovelace, had all been taken and destroyed.⁴⁶ Part of the French Squadron then repaired to Ste Domingue whilst the 50 gun *Experiment* returned to France⁴⁷

A report⁶³ from Rochefort dated 7th Thermidor (July 25th) noted the return of the *Experiment* “...which had devastated the English Settlements – Seventy four English ships were sunk, and 17000 Slaves were set at liberty – They have brought with them five prizes richly laden, who have all entered this port, notwithstanding their being chased and cannonaded by the English.”

The *Experiment* had continued its depredations of British shipping on its way home by an account published in September of one of the captured seaman, Capt. Forresdale, of the *Echo*, now a prisoner in Rochefort.⁴⁹

“I informed you before of the capture of the Echo, by the French squadron under Command of Commodore Arnaud, from the coast of Africa, on the 15th of June, Lat. 24.30. Long. 35.35. after a chase of 22 hours. We arrived at this port on the 22d of July. The squadron has captured the Experiment, Michon, of London, from Jamaica to Africa; Earl of Eglington, Bailey, of Salcots, from Clyde to St. Lucie; and William Denister, of Glasgow from Glasgow to the West Indies. The two brigs were sunk after, the Echo and Experiment brought to Port.”

The merchants who protested at the government’s failure to protect their interests on the African coast had some justification. Pitt’s policy was severely divided and the government could not decide on which seaboard the French would threaten to attack nor provide adequate defence over its Atlantic trading empire. The total compliment of naval vessels on the coast of Africa was confined to a single frigate.⁵⁰ Even that vessel, the *Iris*, spent little time on the coast; on December 29th 1794 it arrived in Plymouth⁵¹ from Torbay and on February 4th 1795 left for Falmouth.⁵² On May 3rd the *Iris* frigate was reported at Tenerife from Plymouth.⁵³ Although the frigate managed to fall in with the French squadron on the 24th of May⁴⁴ it arrived back in Portsmouth⁵⁴ on June 27th and on the 12th of July was deployed from Portsmouth with a large group of transports conveying ten thousand emigrants from Emden bound for Jersey leaving the African coast once again unprotected.⁵⁵

The French squadron had left the coast of Africa but Renneau was still a problem. The slave ship *Sally*, Captain Jonathan Mills, (almost certainly a different vessel from that owned by the Hodgsons) arrived at the Isles de Loss on the 25th of August 1796. On the 5th of September Rennau’s vessel *Mentor* arrived but was mistaken for a Liverpool ship as the *Manchester* and *Falmouth* were daily

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expected. It was flying English colours but quickly hoisted French and attacked. They cut their cables and beat out of the harbor firing a broadside as they went which took away Rennau's main top gallant yard. They escaped as the tide was running against Rennau and stood out to sea for six days. When they arrived at the Riopongos the **Mentor** came up again in company with the **Manchester** which he had taken. Fleeing southward but then hauling round to the north under cover of dark they got unseen into the Rionoones. They had lost three boats and two anchors and cables. At some point they heard from Jackson at the Isles de Loss that Rennau was determined to put them all on a deserted island with a biscuit round their necks for daring to engage him. He had not apparently attacked the property at the Isles de loss but had cut the buoys from the **Sally**'s anchors to prevent recovery.²

The Hodgsons with William Fell seem to have had one last roll of the dice in the slave trade for on 21st July 1796 the **Falmouth**, under Captain Pearson, sailed again for the Isles de Loss where 226 slaves were obtained but the vessel was captured.^{3,4} On May 21st 1797 it was reported that the **Falmouth**, Pearson, from Africa to the West Indies, had been taken by a Spanish privateer of 18 guns.⁵⁶

It was not until November 1797 that anything was done about Rennau. On November 8th 1797 the **Dedalus** frigate, Captain Bell, and the **Hornet**, sloop of war, Captain Nash, sailed from Falmouth in company of two other armed vessels; the **Ellis**, Captain Souter, and the **St. Anne**, Captain Jones both from Liverpool.⁵⁷

They cruised down to Goree, arriving on December 13th and next day attacked the French fort. They destroyed one of the forts batteries but another on the beach drove them off, but not before they had sunk the **Bell** a captured vessel lying under the protection of the fort. On the 17th they left the **Hornet** to cruise off Goree and sailed for the Isles de Loss. However on New-Year's Day the **Dedalus** struck, probably being unmanageable from damage received during the attack, and two hours later she was on her beam ends. They managed to save the ship by throwing guns and stores overboard. The guns were later recovered with the help of some skilful African divers.

In the attack they retook several vessels, including the **African Queen**, Captain Buckle. They also took the **Vengeur**, a French privateer of 15 guns and 90 men. One report concluded; "*It is supposed that the presence of these ships of war on the coast of Africa must save the Merchants of England near a million of money.*"⁵⁸ The vessels taken by the **Dedalus** and the **Hornet** under the command of Henry Lidobird Bell included; the snow **Rebecca**, from Charlestown bound for Goree with a cargo of pitch, tar, dry goods, tobacco, coffee, molasses and gunpowder; the Ship, **President** (American bottom with an English cargo) bound to Goree but captured off the mouth of the River Gambia, laden with salt and her cargo returned to the English owners on payment of the salvage; the ship, **Quaker**, 260 tons, late of Liverpool, retaken bound to Goree laden with merchandize and 337 slaves; the sloop **Ocean**, retaken, belonging to the Sierra Leone Company, a coast trader, bound to Goree, laden with cloth, iron, beads, and 30 slaves; the schooner **La Prosperite** (French), bound to Goree, laden with Guinea Corn, the armed ship **Bell**, 20 guns, destroyed at Goree.⁵⁹ However Rennau and the **Mentor** had escaped. The **Daedalus** and **Hornet** arrived back in Portsmouth on April 11th; the **Daedalus** said to be "*much shattered in the different actions she had with the French forts on that*

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coast.”⁶⁰ It was all too little and too late for many Liverpool merchants including John and Thomas Hodgson.

The Insurance Business.

Between late 1794 and into 1796 the troubles of the underwriters frequently surfaced in the Court of Kings Bench as owners of vessels and cargoes took to the law to force reluctant underwriters pay on their insurances. There were rumours of underhand dealings and widespread mistrust on both sides. In May 1795 Lloyds Evening Post accused ship owners of defrauding insurers at Lloyd’s coffee-house. In their opinion insurances had been taken out to double the amount of property on board, and information given to French correspondents as to where ships could be found and captured.⁶¹ Similar rumours were rife in the last war. Then in October 1795 a Mediterranean convoy was attacked by another French squadron and over 30 vessels and transports were taken. The Morning Post published a list of the vessels and lamented; “*that their value, from the nicest calculation, is estimated at nearly a Million Sterling and the oldest underwriter in the Coffee-house has not, since the year 1780 (to use the language of that place) experienced so bad a book...*”⁶²

In June 1796 William Boats took out an action against his underwriter, John Schoolbred, over the loss of the ***Vulture***, captured at Angola by the French squadron.⁶³ Boats was at his country house in North Wales when he wrote to his clerk in Liverpool that he had no doubt his vessel the ***Eliza*** had been taken by the French and feared the ***Vulture*** was in danger. The vessel was under insured by £3000 and he urged him to write to London for a policy to that amount. His clerk did so by the 9pm post but at 12 that night the captain of the ***Vulture*** arrived in Liverpool from France having been captured and sent home. He did not, apparently, inform the clerk until eight the next morning. Boats had not heard of his ships since the 14th of December 1794 when both were reported well at Africa. The clerk then wrote to the broker informing them of the loss and asking them, if it was not too late, not to effect the policy, but the policy had already been drawn up before his letter arrived.

Mr. Erskine, for the defendant, Schoolbred, argued that the clerk had not stated all the facts to the insurer; his knowledge of the loss of the ***Eliza*** and the risk to the ***Vulture***. Erskine suggested the clerk must have known of the loss of the ***Vulture*** before he wrote. Incoming vessels were spoke by pilot boats long before they docked, and a fact such as this would have rapidly circulated in Liverpool, but he could produce no evidence in support of the allegation.

Mingay, for the Plaintiff, Boats, maintained that the fate of the ***Eliza*** and ***Vulture*** was not something known to him but merely an opinion drawn from facts of general notoriety; namely, the presence of a French squadron on the African coast. There was no proof of prior knowledge by the clerk; the captain swore he had no communication with him until the following day. Had the fact been publicly known in Liverpool the defendant could have proved it. The premium of 20% proved the underwriters thought the risk high.

Lord Kenyon, instructed the jury that there was no doubt the assured had to declare every fact that was privately known to him, but was not bound to disclose

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facts of public notoriety, nor was he obliged to give his opinion of the risk, the underwriter had to make his own judgment of the danger. The Jury found for the Plaintiff, and awarded damages of £200, the sum underwritten by Schoolbred.

John Shoolbred, a leading light in the London African Company, who frequently presented their accounts to Parliament, and Mr Erskine, his council, were not happy with the outcome. Unfortunately the facts as stated by Boats could be borne out by reference to the press. The first notice of the capture of the **Vulture** appeared in New Lloyd's Evening Post on the 8th of May; hours after the insurance had been underwritten.⁶⁴ On the other hand there had been reports of vessels taken at Popo in the Bight of Benin, and it was reasonable to imagine the squadron were headed south. In November Erskine appealed for a new trial and was able to add to his information about Boats' attempts to insure his vessel.⁶⁵

Erskine said the Verdict had caused him great surprise. In Insurance cases, where an Insurer of a Ship had particular grounds for alarm, which he communicated to his Agent; that Agent was bound to tell the underwriter. If he did otherwise, and took out a common Insurance, without extraordinary risk, the insurance could not stand; and a new Trial should be granted. On the 12th December, 1794, the Captain of the **Vulture**, wrote to his Owner, from Bonny River, that he had nothing particular to report but that Captain Cluff, of the **Eliza**, was about to sail and he hoped to send a further account by him. The **Eliza** should have been at Barbadoes in January; but the packet sailed and brought no news of the **Eliza**. It was rumoured that a French expedition had run down the coast taking and destroying whatever vessels they could. In consequence Mr. Boats, on May 1st, wrote to his clerk, Mr. Sutton, stating that he thought the **Eliza** had been taken, but hoped the **Vulture** might have escaped, but he was running a great risk. He told him, to go as far as 20 guineas to have her insured and afterwards wrote to increase this to 25 guineas. Mr. Sutton attempted to insure her in Liverpool, but the circumstances were too well known. On the 4th of May, he wrote to Dimsdale and Co, in London, asking them to insure the **Vulture**, stating it as a common risk. Erskine went out of his way to acquit Boats of blame; "*he was a Gentleman of large fortune, who left his concerns entirely in the hands of Mr. Sutton, who was entirely to blame for the deceit. On the 6th of May the Insurance was effected. The Plaintiff's Agent was fully apprized of the loss, as Captain Patcham, of the **Vulture**, was in Liverpool within two hours of the dispatch of the letters and ... he trusted the Court would grant a new trial.*"

Lord Kenyon granted a new trial because it appeared that the plaintiff's agent had knowledge of the loss and withheld the information. As far as publicly available intelligence went the **Vulture** was reported in the press^{66, 67} as well as Bonny on March 12th and April 6th but then on May 8th as intimated at the trial the fate of Boats' vessels became known.⁶⁴

"By accounts brought by the ship Abby, arrived at Liverpool from Cape Coast, we learn that the French have been again very busy on the coast of Africa.

*The Captains of four captured ships, Messrs. Brown, Clough, Bachup and Heird, late of the **Princess Royal, Eliza, Vulture and Levant**, Liverpool ships, bring the following intelligence respecting the state of the enemy's force ..."*

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The ruling for a new trial was made absolute in November and ordered before a jury.⁶⁸ Unfortunately the outcome of the retrial seems not to have made the press perhaps because a great deal of time was taken up with the mutinies in the fleet that took place the following year.

Many merchants and underwriters were in a similar position; the war made for difficult conditions. The Lancaster West India Merchant Abraham Rawlinson was forced to change his insurance brokers after being with them for thirty years. He had used Andrew French and Company in London but in 1795 began using Bland, Satterthwaite and Co.⁶⁹ French's had gone under although his sons tried to set up again in the business perhaps using a protected marriage settlement. French & Co, Dimsdale & Co, James Baillie, Satterthwaite & Co, and John Shoolbred, were all Lloyd's members.⁷⁰ Andrew French had rather embarrassed John and Abraham Rawlinson by inserting John Rawlinson's name without his knowledge in a blank bill they had defaulted upon. The matter came before the courts after they fell into the hands of their creditors in July of 1795.^{71,72}

Writing to Bland and Satterthwaite in March 1796 for insurance on a vessel Abram Rawlinson urged them only to get terms "*by good men, which always be careful of.*" He went on to mention the 1793 financial crisis and the demise of French's insurance business. "*Can you tell us if cotton is to rise or fall, we have about 90 bales we missed sale of in Oct, we fear the Bank refusing to disct. May depress speculation, but hope not to the degree it did in 1793. Andrew French is very pressing on us to give out Insurances to his Son & Co. we are truly sorry for him, we stuck to him as close as bark to the tree for upwards of 30 years, & paid to him & Co. £100,000 – a great deal more than we cal'd for losses pray what do you suppose he'll pay per £ we have been told there's likely to be a deficiency we cannot do this again to anyone the period of a long life in trade & its time for us to think of declining mch. Indeed we have been for 9 years With reason to think it lucky we did so as times have been.*"⁶⁹

A Sawrey Saga.

Liverpool Directories for 1781 and 1787 suggest that Thomas Hodgson had opened an Insurance Office at 69 Castle Street⁷³ however they also show that Thomas Hodgson and Ellis Leckonby Hodgson had an insurance office at the Exchange in 1790.⁷³ Incontrovertible evidence of John and Thomas Hodgson's Insurance interests consists of an insurance taken out on the ship **Tom** owned by a consortium that included James Sawrey of Lancaster. That the Hodgsons faced mounting difficulties in all of their interests after the outbreak of the war is indicated by their withdrawal from the slave trade after 1796, the raising of a mortgage in 1792, the attempt to sell one of the mills in 1795, and finally a will drawn up in 1797 that is hardly commensurate with an "*eminent merchant of Liverpool.*"

James Sawrey was a prominent member of a third generation of slave-merchants who made their voyages out of Lancaster. Following early sporadic voyages in the 1730's and 40's a regular slave-trade out of Lancaster began around 1748 as the restrictions surrounding the Royal Africa Company were relaxed. The

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Lancaster slave trade involved a nucleus of owners, which evolved as earlier owners retired and were replaced by succeeding generations. James Sawrey emerged as part-owner and master in one voyage of the *Sally* (70 tons) and several of the *Sarah* (80 tons) between 1772 and 1776. The vessels were registered in Lancaster but made their voyages out of Liverpool, often co-owned by John Rawlinson and Thomas Woodburn. With the cessation of hostilities in the Americas James Sawrey joined the post war slaving boom putting together a series of voyages from Lancaster.⁷⁴

- 1781: Brig *Sally*; 90 tons – out of Lancaster
- 1783: Brig *Old England*; 80 tons - Lancaster for the Windward Coast -Charleston
- 1783: Sloop *Molly*; C. Hort - 70 tons - Lancaster for the Windward Coast-Charleston
- 1784: Brig *Tartar*; 90 tons - Lancaster for the Banana Islands - Kingston
- 1785: Schooner *Mungo*; 20 tons - Lancaster for the Windward Coast - Kingston
- 1785: Brig *Old England*; C. Hort - 80 tons - Lancaster for Bassa - Kingston
- 1785: Ship *Molly*; 114 tons - Lancaster for Sierra Leone return Liverpool - Kingston
- 1785: Brig *Fenton*; 70 tons – out of Lancaster – Kingston
- 1786: Ship *Molly*; 114 tons - Liverpool for Cape Mount Grenada return Liverpool

Most were co-owned with John Addison who died in 1788, thereafter James Sawrey shared his interests with various Lancaster men including William Watson and Robert Worswick, banker and West India Merchant. For the later voyages of the *Hope* and the *Tom* they were joined by Trotter Tatham of Liverpool.⁷⁴

- 1788: Ship *Hope*; 163 tons – out of Lancaster/Liverpool – Grenada
- 1788: Ship *Molly*; 114 tons – Lancaster/Liverpool Windward Coast Barbados
- 1789: Ship *Molly*; 114 tons – Lancaster/Liverpool for Bassa – Grenada
- 1790: Ship *Hope*; 163 tons – Lancaster for Angola - Grenada
- 1791: Ship *Molly*; 114 tons – Lancaster/Liverpool Anamobou/New Calabar Grenada
- 1791: Ship *Hope*; 163 tons – Lancaster for Angola – Grenada
- 1792: Ship *Tom*; 170 tons – Lancaster for the Cameroons Barbados
- 1792: Ship *Molly*; 114 tons – Liverpool New Calabar Kingston
- 1794: Ship *Molly*; 114 tons – out of Liverpool

In 1791 and 1792 two voyages by the *Hope* and the *Tom* were made to the Cameroons; an unusual destination for Lancaster slavers, and both carried slaves consigned to Jamaica. *Hope* was a ship-rigged vessel of 163 tons, built in Yarmouth in 1779 that had formerly been in the West India trade, owned by Thomas Moore and Edward Salisbury, West India merchants of Lancaster, and Luke Tyson a merchant of Basseterre, St. Kitts.⁹⁵ *Hope* had two masts, two decks, with a height of four feet between decks, a square stern and quarter badges, and a figurehead at the prow. Previous voyages of this vessel under masters John Baxendale, 1788, and Thomas Kirby, 1790, had probably been to Angola and Grenada; the first voyage delivering 288 slaves, and the second 211. Both voyages were apparently successful, however, when the *Hope* returned from the last voyage in February 1791 the sailors seem arrived sick and were confined to Greenwich Hospital.

For the 1791 voyage to the Cameroons *Hope* was commanded by Tobias Collins who was given detailed sailing instructions for entering the Cameroon River and for conducting trade. Collins was to proceed first to Guernsey, to the house of

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William Bell jr. to load additional trade goods and thence “*with all dispatch*” to the River Cameroons. He was urged to pursue the “*Bimba Trade*” and only to purchase healthy well grown young slaves between 14 and 28 years of age. He was told to purchase as much Ivory and other “*dead Cargo*” as he could which, the owners declared, was their reason for choosing the Cameroons. He was to reserve his supply of cowries and other expensive trade items as much as possible. The owners hoped to despatch a tender with goods and salt which he should expect about the 1st of May 1792 but if it did not arrive he should “*rather despair of our sending one.*” He was recommended to “*keep a good look out amongst the Slaves for fear of Insurrections*” and “*to promote a perfect Harmony amongst your Ships Crew.*” On leaving Africa he was to proceed to Granada to Messrs Campbell & Bailley & Co where he would find further written instructions. His commission on sales was to be “*Six on one hundred & Six and two p Cent according to the Custom of Liverpool*”. The Doctor was to have one average Slave and 1 shilling per head on all Slaves sold, paid in Island Currency. No other privileges were to be allowed.

Tobias Collins left Lancaster on September 24th 1791 and called first at Liverpool. A few goods for barter were laded on St. George’s key in Lancaster, and 1½ barrels of gunpowder to arm the ship, was collected from the Powder House on the way down the estuary. The bulk of the trade goods were purchased by ready money notes, or tradesmen’s bills, and collected in Liverpool, while some critically important supplies were bought and loaded in Guernsey. The vessel was thus filled with a bizarre selection of manufactured goods and East India imported textiles. The East India goods amounted to over a thousand pieces including Romalls, Cushatees and Bejutapauls to the value of almost £800. There were half a dozen puncheons and casks of beads worth over £200, 700 Tower guns valued at £340, a couple of casks of gun flints, 5 gross of locks, value £6, 60 gross of hawks bells at £20, 40 gross of assorted African knives - £40, 500 pewter basins and flagons - £66, 700 stone bottles and jars - £40, 34 dozen hats with silk bands - £13, 30 dozen straw hats, 8 dozen hatchets - £5, along with dozens of rings, tobacco boxes, snuff boxes, scissors etc. There were large quantities of mugs and jugs including 250 checked mugs and even 2 dozen “*common Toby jugs*” plus 45 dozen looking glasses for £20. There were also lesser quantities of other finished goods such as a few dozen lined jackets, cloaks, trousers, shirts, shoes and so on, clearly intended, not so much as items of trade, but as gifts, bribes and sweeteners for the native factors on the coast and including 5 Wilton carpets! Among them was a crate containing a number of individual china ornaments including among them 2 greyhounds, 2 sheep, 2 goats, 1 musician, 1 Boy with bird’s nests and 1 girl with flower baskets.

One of the most important items loaded in Liverpool was 60 tons of refined salt at a cost of £90. Also loaded were the supplies for the voyage, including the slaves’ victuals, consisting of 2 tons of rice in nine casks, 2 tons of split beans, and 1 ton of Barley at a cost of just under £100. 18 Bolts of various grades of sail canvas were also put on board at a cost of £40. Many of the goods laded in Liverpool were supplied by merchants involved in the slave trade who had integrated parts of the supply chain into their business. John Watson, one of the owners supplied Farriers goods, perhaps shackles and chains or perhaps cheap African quality knives. John Parr supplied the guns; it was from Parr’s shop that the Liverpool rioters of 1775 had obtained their weapons. Backhouse & Lowe supplied the rice, John Copeland

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the beads, William Beg a large part of the Romalls, Peter Rigby that part of the Swedish Voyage Iron laded in Liverpool and so on.

The *Hope* sailed for Guernsey on September 27th 1791 to purchase some valuable components of the cargo from William Bell. This included 860 gallons of brandy, of which most was intended for trade, costing £114. 50 barrels of gunpowder costing £170, again intended for trade, as 2500 smaller kegs were loaded for its subdivision. A further 1400 Iron bars, each weighing about 14 pounds, at a cost of £175 was put on board along with the most expensive item of all, 100 bags of cowries costing £800 making it the principal component of the cost of each slave. *Hope* sailed for Africa from Guernsey on October 8th 1791.

Collins voyage in command of the *Hope* seems to have been his first voyage as ship's master and it was James Sawrey's first venture to the Cameroons. The Captain's detailed instructions were, to run down the Windward Coast as far as Cape Palmas and there to strike out for Fernando Poo. From the windward side of the island he was to steer E. b. S. ½ S. for about eleven leagues to bring him to the mouth of the Cameroons "*in twelve fathom over soft Ground within half a mile of the Shore then Keep E.b.N ½ N. for the Clump of Trees at the East Point of old Mole you'll carry thirteen or thirteen & half feet over the Flats. Keep about two thirds over to the North shore until abreast of Monubao Mole then haul over to the Town & come too in five or six fathom water – NB From the Cape Camaroon I would advise you to come to Anchor in three fathom to send your Boat over the Flats and lay a few Buoys for your more certain guide.*"

The difficulty of entering the river over the bar where the tidal flow meets the river outfall is clear and he would have at best 13 feet under his keel, not much in a swell. Collins arrived in the Cameroons in May 1792 and successfully negotiated the hazards. For conducting trade he was given instructions on how to make up his trade goods and on how to make up bunches of beads to suit local custom and some ready reckoner tables to enable the him to substitute one item for another to keep costs as low as possible.

"Laver for a Prime Man Slave in the Camaroons: 8 Iron Bars, 4 Bars Cloth a India Romall & Shorn Bast, 4 Kegs powder or 50 lb Barrel, 1 Musquet Bush Gun in preference, 1 Matt, 1 Cap, 4 Brass Rods, 1 Flaggon, 2 Neptunes 32 Inches, 7 lbs Round Blue Beads, 7 lbs Fish Eyes, 7 lbs small white Domine or 10 Bunches, 40 Hawks Bells, 1 Looking Glass, 1 Box or Chest, 24 Knives, 2 Mugs, 60 Boxes Salt, 120 pints Cowries or 88lbs, 1 Large Jar – 5 Galls, 1 Black do 2 do, 100 Flints*
** Box for the Camaroons 22 Ins Long 13 Ins Broad 12 Ins deep"*

Evidence presented during the slave trade enquiry showed the slaves for the *Othello* were purchased at the following rates; a man, or man-boy, 52 bars, a boy 26 bars, a woman 47, and a girl 26 bars. A bar was estimated at about five shillings and a keg of powder was equivalent to 1 bar, a musket to 3 bars, a brass pan to 3 bars, a romal to 3 bars, and a keg of spirits to 6 bars.⁷⁶

From his ready reckoner Collins could estimate how much of one type of goods to substitute for another. A bar was equivalent to; 1 iron bar, 4 Caps, 2 Looking Glasses, 24 Redwood handled Knives, 4 Spinster Locks, 4 Large Manillas, 1 Flaggon, 2 Quart Tankards, 4 pints Cowries, 4 brass or copper rods, 4 bottles of 6 quarts, 1 3-gallon bottle, 2 mats, 1 gallon brandy, 100 pan flints, 4 Ox Horns, 20

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boxes of salt and so on. A Tower Gun was worth 4 bars, and a barrel of powder 1½ bars.

Collins was told how to string bunches of beads to suit this market. The crew must have spent some time stringing beads and arranging them in bunches as well as subdividing the gunpowder, salt and liquor. A bunch of small white domine beads was made up of 59 strings with 40 beads on each. Bunches of fisheyes comprised 19 strings with 39 beads each. Collins was also given detailed instructions concerning the purchase of ivory. For teeth up to 56lb he was to pay half a crown, between 56 & 40 lb, 2 shillings, and from 40 to 20 lb, 1s 8d. The existence of all these instructions in Hope's package book implies that Collins was quite unfamiliar with trade in the Cameroons.

Collins wrote to his owners on May 10th 1792. The voyage was not going well but, at least the crew for the most part was healthy.

"I am writing you last Per Captn Hughes I am sorry to inform you that I have been very unhealthy having lost 20 Slaves the whole of which died in the Flux & indeed I cannot say that we are yet clear of it. The Trade has been very dull this sometime past owing to the Death of some of the principal Traders but I am in hopes that they are now on the mending hand so that I expect to put off in all July having now 170 slaves on bd am in hopes my Salt will hold out for Slaves but shall have very little left for the purchase of Ivory I have got about a Ton on board the most part of which I have not yet paid for till I see what Salt I can spare as the more Salt I can pay will make it come in the cheaper you may rest assured that my utmost attentions shal not be wanting for the Benefit of the Voyage. Since writing last I have buried one white man name Morris Allen the most of the people are pretty healthy except the Carpenter he has been very ill this 2 months."

As Collins anticipated he left the coast in July but did not arrive in Jamaica (not Grenada as intended) until December 25th 1792 with 105 slaves on board.³ The real loss of slaves is not known, beyond the difference of 85 between the number landed (105) and the number purchased by May (170 on board, and 20 dead of the flux) and that Collins had little salt left to purchase Ivory and so perhaps also slaves. The vessel was sold in the West Indies and the sailors had to make 'the run' back and the ivory, if any, was consigned aboard another vessel.

Some estimate of the intended profitability of the voyage, the actual profits being unknown, can be made using the accounts presented by James Penny to the Parliamentary Enquiry of 1789 and substituting where possible appropriate figures from *Hope's* Package Book.⁷⁷ This is shown in the table below. The cost of outfitting *Hope* was £500, and the total cost including ship and materials was £1400. The cost of the trade goods sent aboard was just over £4300. James Penny estimated the cost of trade goods based on a price of £17/17s per slave including insurance for vessel and goods. For *Hope* insurance was calculated at 5% of the cost of the outfit, and was included in the cost of the cargo. The total cost of *Hope's* voyage amounted to just over £5700. The crew's wages and the shore money paid to those sailors with wives ashore amounted to just over £70 per month.

The higher potential for profit of a successful voyage (16% as against 6% on total costs) by the *Hope* arises from lower costs for fitting out, and lower outlay in trade goods compared to Penny's estimates. The cost of the 'ship and outfit – brought forward' is shown as £1400 in the voyage book and an earlier entry gives

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the cost of the 'ship & materials' as £500. If the latter is not incorporated in the former profitability is reduced and now depends more on the cost of trade goods. Penny estimated paying nearly £18 in trade goods per slave, the value of the goods taken to Africa by Tobias Collins was about £16 per head assuming a successful voyage.

Collins paid out almost all his trade goods for 190 slaves of which only just over half survived the middle passage to be sold. These losses have a devastating effect on profitability. The cost of the slaves is fixed for *Hope* by the total value of African Goods in the accounts. Penny's costs were estimated. The return on the sale of the slaves in the West Indies is based on Penny's estimate for the average price for a consignment. These were made in the context of possible restrictions being imposed by Parliament. It was in his interest to minimize the effect of any legislation by arguing for its impact on profitability. His best approach; to colour costs and be conservative over returns, whilst carefully avoiding any impression that it was misleading. Penny's estimate of purchase price is greater than Sawrey's, but the amount of Goods taken out was insufficient to purchase a full complement of slaves as well as significant Ivory and the voyage may have been under funded relative to its objectives. The owners perhaps recognized this by thinking of sending out a tender with extra goods. The tender when it arrived became an independent slave-trading vessel.

Slave Voyage Profitability

	Penny Estimate	Collins Projected	Hope Achieved	Tom Achieved	Notes
Cost of Vessel	£1,141	£900	£900	£900	1
Cost of Outfitting	£700	£500	£500	£500	
Cost of Africa fitting	£350				
Total	£2,191	£1,400	£1,400	£1,400	
Cargo for 271Negroes @ LSD,17.17.0	£4,837	£4,315	£4,315	£4,315	2
Total	£7,028	£5,715	£5,715	£5,715	
Sale Proceeds with 5% Mortality at 34 L / Head	£8,738	£8,738	£3,570	£1,063	3
Agents Commission 10%	£874	£874	£357	£108	
Net proceeds of Sale	£7,864	£7,864	£3,213	£982	
Captain's Commission 6%	£472	£445	£182	£56	
Mates Privelege 1 slave at net value	£31	£31	£31	£25	
Surgeons Privelege	£31	£31	£31	£25	
Surgeons Head Money 1s / head	£13	£13	£5	£2	
Wages	£800	£855	£855	£1,048	
5% Interest on Outfit & Cargo	£351	£286	£286	£286	
Total Costs	£2,572	£2,535	£1,747	£1,550	
Total plus Cargo & Outfit	£9,600	£8,250	£7,462	£7,265	4
Value of 2nd Hand Vessel	£1,461	£934	£934	£167	5
Goods returned			£150	£83	
Gross return	£10,199	£9,672	£4,654	£1,230	
Profit	£599	£1,422	-£2,808	-£6,035	

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Notes:

The Slave Voyage Profitability table attempts to estimate the anticipated profits from the voyages of the Hope and the Tom (Hope Achieved and Tom Achieved) belonging to James Sawrey and Co. The column Penny Estimate uses James Penny's figures for a theoretical voyage assumed to be entirely successful. Hope Projected uses the known costs of fitting out Hope's voyage to arrive at a similar estimate. Hope and Tom Achieved adjusts the projection for the actual voyage outcomes, which are unsuccessful in differing degrees – on the voyage of the Tom only 39 slaves survived the middle-passage but Hope delivered 105 slaves. Penny's estimates are based on his evidence to the Parliamentary Enquiry of 1789 and the transport of slaves under the Dolben Act adjusted for vessel size to be equivalent to the Hope and the Tom. Collins Projected estimates returns based on the Hopes costs. Hope Achieved adjusts Collins Projected for the actual number of slaves brought to market (105) but using Penny's estimates for the price realised at the point of sale. Tom Achieved proceeds similarly but the actual returns on the vessel and slaves are substituted for Penny's estimated returns.

- 1.) James Penny estimated vessel cost at £7/ton. Vessel size is adjusted to accommodate 271 slaves in line with the Dolben Act for a 163 ton vessel, the same as Hope. Penny assumed a new built vessel which is not the norm and Penny may be colouring his costs. Vessel cost for Hope is from the package book – it is a second hand vessel from the West India trade; The same cost is assumed for Tom – its burden only seven tons more – but it is ten years older . Penny's estimates for fitting out are used, the cost for conversion to the African Trade, but these are not adjusted for the vessel size. For Hope the fitting out costs are from the Package book and assumed the same for Tom.*
- 2.) Penny used a value of £17:17s:0d per slave to include all costs of the Africa Trade goods including insurance for the outward passage. For Hope the total cost is taken from the Package book. The same costs are assumed for Tom.*
- 3.) For the sale price Penny's estimates of £34 (sterling) are used for 271 slaves –for Penny Estimated and Hope Projected. In the case of Hope Achieved the actual number of slaves delivered (105) is used. In the case of Tom the actual price realised on the 39 slaves delivered is used.*
- 4.) All costs ensuing upon sale of the slaves follow Penny. Sawrey follows Liverpool practice closely.*
- 5.) Penny's estimate of the value of the vessel on return is used, being two thirds of the new cost including fitting out costs, except for Tom where the value of the vessel upon sale is known. Returned Goods are included where known. For Hope and Tom nothing is known about the value of the Ivory returned thus profits are underestimated.*

The price realized at sale is based on Penny's £34 per head average and profits are clearly sensitive to this estimate. Penny's estimates are very general, trade costs, trade goods and slave price differed from place to place and from time to time as the availability of slaves fluctuated. With the loss of so many slaves the voyage of the **Hope** as completed and shown in column 3 of the table is a losing one. It seems unlikely that any amount of Ivory could compensate, although it offered a profitable rate of return perhaps as much as 50%. But Captain Collins could not afford to purchase much Ivory.

The Voyage of the Ship Tom.

Sawrey & Co. instructed Collins to expect a tender carrying additional trade goods and salt. This 'tender' was either intended as, or became, another vessel for taking off slaves and Ivory. This was the Ship **Tom** registered in Lancaster on March 24th 1792, and dispatched under Captain William Ainsworth. After arrival in the Cameroons, Ainsworth transferred to the **Hope** and took command for the passage to the West Indies. Collins meanwhile took over as master of the **Tom** and

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returned to the West Indies in November 1793. Tobias Collins claimed pay owed him on arrival and dated his claim, for the period in which he was master of the ship *Tom*, from September 24th 1792 until February 4th 1794.

The voyage of the *Tom* seems to have been planned as an identical voyage to the *Hope*; to load slaves and ivory in the Cameroons.⁷⁸ No doubt the trade goods were much the same, though there is no surviving evidence.

Tom was not a new vessel. Constructed in 1771, it was ship rigged, of 170 tons, implying an intended cargo of 283 in compliance with the Dolben Act. What happened is unclear, but in making the dangerous passage over the sand bar in the River Cameroons a groundswell caused the ship to bottom heavily. It was crippled and made completely unmanageable; why it could not be repaired, and why they chose to leave the coast in this condition is not known. It was not uncommon for vessels to be condemned on the African Coast and sold. Perhaps, with the slaves already aboard, and another losing voyage in prospect, the decision was taken to leave the coast and hope for the best, and a voyage of six weeks turned into 6 months. The weeks passed, the slaves died; according to the owners, of starvation, and the crew grew weak.

Collins called at Principe, off the African coast, and took on 2 French Seamen who were paid 7 guineas for the voyage to Barbados. In addition three men were paid in cash at Principe; George Raymond (10/-), John Palovic (15/-), and John Pain (15/-), perhaps they attempted some repairs. When the vessel limped into Barbados, they were in no position to manoeuvre it and Collins had to have the ship surveyed off-shore, before it was condemned in the Court of Vice Admiralty. He then had to pay for the ship to be warped into the harbour for the remaining slaves and African goods to be discharged.

The slaves were delivered to the local agent, Alex Hall, and kept for some time before sale; there was a large bill for their food of £13. 7s. 9½d. Presumably they needed to bring the few remaining slaves back to some semblance of health before sale in order to get anything for them. The number of slaves had been reduced from 168 to 40 through starvation by the time they arrived; one more died on shore before sale. By January the slaves were judged fit to be sold; some in the best condition were sold by private treaty for bills of exchange and the remainder at public vendue for cash.

About half the slaves came to the auction block for a price of £50 currency or more, equivalent to about £37 sterling. One pound in Island currency was worth about one third of its sterling equivalent at the time of sale, probably as a result of the outbreak of war. The condition of the remaining slaves can only be guessed for the average price per head for the remaining 17 was only £19 currency or £14 sterling; less than the price paid on the African coast. The average price for the whole shipment was only £36 currency or £27 sterling, well below James Penny's estimated £34.

The remaining Africa Goods were off-loaded and sold at public vendue bringing in £111 currency, £83 sterling. A surprising amount was left including dozens of muskets and 2500 lbs of Iron bars. In all there were trade goods worth over 1000 bars sufficient to purchase 20 slaves in Africa. Significantly there were no cowries or salt which may have determined the close of trade. James Sawrey, in

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trying to beat down the price with cheap Africa goods, may well have been undermining his potential for success.

The damaged vessel was condemned and sold at auction, less costs for warping and unloading, commission and so on, and made £223 currency or £163 sterling. Tobias Collins presented his final account for payment, for despite the disastrous failure in which he was involved Captain Collins would have his cut. His wages covered the period 29th September 1792 to 4th of February 1794; his employment terminating with the sale of the *Tom*. Collins sailed aboard the *Hope* shortly after registration on September 24th 1791, 1 year before his back dated claim, having been paid one year in advance. His wages at £5 per month were less than half that of his first mate. However, there were perks which made his return much higher for a successful voyage, £6 in £106 on slaves sold, and a commission on any African produce. This would take his remuneration for a successful voyage above £500. Roscoe, in his pamphlet, maintained that slave-captains were the only people involved in the trade who consistently profited.⁷⁹ Payments to the captain for a completely successful voyage would also have been due under the Dolben Act, something which William Boats managed to find amusing.²

The total realised from the sale of ship and contents came to almost £1100, but the letter from Alex Hall to the owners written on February 14th 1794 shows only £700 was remitted in bills drawn on Barrows Bank, London. The difference of £514 currency was probably used to pay off the sailors who were immediately impressed into the British Naval effort against the French. This would be enough to cover full pay of a crew similar to that of the *Hope* for the six or seven months additional service; if they were also due 12 months half pay in the West Indies, then the implication is that almost half the crew were lost. An unknown quantity of Ivory was consigned to England aboard the *Allanson*. However, the *Allanson*, Captain Byrne, was taken by a squadron of French frigates en route from Barbadoes to Liverpool in August 1794; another one for the underwriters.⁸⁰

Summary Accounts, Ship Tom, Barbados

	<i>Sterling Currency Exchange</i>		
<i>Bills of Exchange Remitted</i>	699	932	1.33
<i>Sale of Ship Tom</i>	167	223	1.34
<i>Sale Africa Goods</i>	83	111	1.34
<i>Cash paid for Slaves</i>	982	1309	1.33
<i>Total</i>	1232	1643	1.33
<i>Paid to Captain Tobias Collins</i>	148	197	1.33
<i>Total Less Collins A/c</i>	1084	1446	1.33
<i>Total less Remittance Unaccounted Costs</i>	385	514	

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The voyage of the *Tom* was a dead loss; no amount of remitted Ivory could possibly save it. Alex Halle sent James Sawrey & Co a sworn affidavit from the vendue master to show that the vessel was sold at the best price, “*should it be required by the under writers.*” It would be, since recovery on insurance of the cost of the lost ship and the dead slaves was now the only way to mitigate the disaster.

Shortly after the despatch of the *Tom*, on June 26th 1792, Sawrey and Co. sent out the ship *Molly*, 136-tons, bound for New Calabar, which delivered 147 slaves to Kingston Jamaica on May 3rd 1793. However, Sawrey’s partners were growing old; Thomas Wilcock died in 1790 and William and John Watson died in 1793 and 1794. In April of 1794 *Molly* was advertised for sale in Liverpool, Sawrey and Watson remained owners, but were joined by Ralph Fisher and John Aspinall. Another voyage was attempted in July 1794 but it ended in disaster, with the vessel captured by the French, and another bill for the underwriters.⁷⁴

James Sawrey and the other owners of the *Tom* claimed for their losses on the voyage of the *Tom* from their underwriters. Each owner insured his share in the voyage with his own underwriter. Naturally the underwriters were unwilling to pay the full costs on the loss of the vessel, and its cargo of slaves. James Sawrey insured himself with a man named Bowick, and Trotter Tatham of Liverpool was insured by John & Thomas Hodgson. Both insurers refused to pay and the owners attempted to recover their losses through the courts. The separate actions for recovery of their losses, Sawrey versus Bowick, and Tatham versus Hodgson, commenced at Lancaster Assizes in the Court of King’s Bench in the August 1795. James Sawrey agreed to submit to arbitration over the recovery of the losses and any damages awarded against the defendant.⁸¹ The arbitrator, William Hinde, the younger, a Merchant of Lancaster, was to ascertain the average loss on the ship and her cargo and reduce the damages of £200 awarded the plaintiffs by the jury. The conditions of the arbitration were that if either party obstructed the process or failed to attend the arbitrator could make his award *ex parte*. The arbitrator’s decision is not known.

The Hodgsons’ legal team made sufficient headway to have the matter of compensation referred to the Court of King’s Bench at Westminster for determination.⁸² The plaintiff’s case was that the ship with her cargo of slaves departed from Africa but before reaching her destination was by tempestuous weather “*and through the mere perils and dangers of the sea*” greatly delayed on her voyage. As a consequence there was insufficient food for the slaves and many of them became distempered and died. In addition, it was said, the ship was lost with the remaining slaves and other cargo. At Bilbay on the coast of Cameroon a ground swell (a wave generated over long distances at sea with much deeper and stronger waves) struck the ship causing it to strike the ground several times, nearly wrecking it. It became leaky, the rudder was rendered almost useless and the vessel became unmanageable. Only 40 slaves survived out of 168 as a result of the diet of Indian corn they were fed. The plaintiffs maintained they had taken every care to provision the vessel but that instead of the voyage taking 6 to 9 weeks it took 6 months and 8 days to reach Barbadoes where the Captain put in instead of Granada, which would have taken 36 hours more, because of the condition of the remaining slaves.

Counsel for the Hodgsons challenged the requirement to pay the insurance for the loss of the slaves, and also argued that the ship need not have diverted to Barbadoes, but once done, it could there have been repaired. At the assizes in

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Lancaster the Judge, Mr. J. Heath, declared that the plaintiff was barred by current law from recovering the value of the slaves, whom he considered to have died natural deaths. However he referred this matter to the higher court at Westminster. On the other issues the jury found a verdict for the plaintiff to the satisfaction of the judge and the verdict was taken for the whole amount, the value of the slaves being adjusted by consent of both parties.

The law on marine insurance following the Dolben Act prevented an insurer of a cargo of slaves recovering any loss or damage except by perils of the sea, piracy, insurrection, barratry, capture or destruction by fire. Later legislation prevented recovery on account of natural death, ill treatment, or againt loss by throwing overboard. Matters which responded to another notorious case involving a claim for insurance upon the loss of slaves; that of the *Zong*, in 1781 which was well known among a spectrum of abolitionists from Sharp to Currie and was in the minds of the law officers of the day. The *Zong*, owned by Gregson, Case and Co. and commanded by Captain Luke Collingwood, after trading for slaves at Cape Coast and Anomobou, left the island of St Thomas on the African coast, carrying about 440 slaves, on September 6th 1781. Arriving in the West Indies on November 27th, the Captain claimed he mistook Jamaica, his destination, for Hispaniola. On the 29th only 200 gallons of water remained, by which time at least 60 slaves and 7 crew had died, although no rationing had taken place. The Captain informed the crew that if the slaves died a natural death it would be a loss to the owners whereas if they were thrown overboard it would be a loss to the underwriters. Collingwood argued that *“it would not be so cruel to throw the poor sick wretches into the sea, as to suffer them to linger out a few days under the disorders with which they were afflicted.”* Collingwood chose 133 sickly slaves and had them thrown overboard, reasoning that they would be ‘jetsam’ – cargo cast overboard in order to save the rest, and thus covered by the insurance. According to the Chief Mate, Kelsall, 54 slaves were thrown overboard, alive, on November 29th and 42 more on December 1st. On that day it was alleged that rain began to fall and 6 casks, sufficient for 11 days at full allowance, were collected over the next several days. Notwithstanding, a further 26 were cast overboard, fettered and bound, and a further 10 slaves leapt overboard of their own volition, to avoid being bound. By December 9th they sighted the west end of Jamaica which they reached on the 22nd.¹⁰³

Naturally the underwriters refused to pay and the owners resorted to law demanding £30 per slave in the Court of King’s Bench in the case of Gregson et al. vs. Gilbert et al. The court found against the underwriters who petitioned the Court of Exchequer for a review of the evidence. Lord Mansfield in allowing the review said *“The matter left to jury, was, whether it was from necessity; for they had no doubt (though it shocks one very much) that the case of slaves was the same as if horses had been thrown overboard.”* Although the review went against the owners, Sharp remained appalled at the inhumanity and wrote to the Admiralty to have a charge of murder brought against the crew. He did not succeed and Collingwood was, in any case, dead.

The case of Tatham vs. Hodgson came to trial on Saturday April 30th 1796 at Westminster. The court considered whether the verdict should be set-aside for the whole amount, upon the several grounds of objection, heard at the original trial. However the case was reduced to a single issue, *“Whether the loss as respected the*

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slaves, could be attributed to the perils of the sea within the meaning of the act?" Against this contention was placed the intention of the Legislature that *"mortality by natural death should not be insured against by whatsoever means that mortality was induced; whether by death, or badness of food, length of confinement, despondency, or the like. That **natural** death was to be contradistinguished from **violent** death: but that the whole policy of the act would be defeated if such a loss could be recovered in another shape, under an insurance against the perils of the sea."*

Trotter Tatham seems to have engaged some of the same legal team who argued the case of the **Zong**. The highest-ranking barrister for the plaintiffs was Cockell who was assisted by Chambre. Chambre had acted for Gregson et al. in the Zong case. Cockell and Chambre argued that the misfortune had not arisen from carelessness or inhumanity of the captain through not providing sufficient provisions but from the incalculable duration of the voyage. The length of voyage was caused by the perils of the sea and was the source to which the loss was attributable in consequence of which the slaves starved to death, which could not be considered a natural death. Nor would this contravene the humane intention of the Legislature, which was directed against losses arising from ill-treatment, negligence and misconduct.

All three Justices rejected this line of reasoning. Lord Kenyon argued that the act, being founded in humanity, ought not to be construed so as to render it useless. The act prohibited owners recovering on the mortality of slaves by natural death; but if a captain took slaves disproportionate to the provisions on board, and in consequence they died, and the owner's notwithstanding recovered their loss it would repeal the act of parliament, which ensured that every person on a voyage found his interest combined with his duty. A captain, knowing the possible length of a voyage, did not discharge his duty if he took insufficient provisions. The plaintiff could not call on the under-writers to make good this part of the loss.

Judge Grose argued that it was *"not a loss by the perils of the seas, but a mortality by natural death: if we were to determine otherwise, we should open a door to the very mischiefs that the Legislature intended to guard-against, because it would encourage the captains of slave ships to take an insufficient quantity of food for the sustenance of their slaves."*

Judge Lawrence, referring directly to the case of the **Zong** said; *"I do not know that it was ever decided that a loss arising from a mistake of the Captain was a loss within the perils of the seas. There was a case where a ship mistook Jamaica for Domingo, and it was decided not to be a loss within the perils of the seas. In this case it is impossible to decide that the plaintiff can recover without saying that the slaves did not die natural deaths. If they had died of fevers or other illness occasioned by the length-of the voyage, the plaintiff certainly could not have recovered. Now, the length of the voyage occasioned the want of provisions and that occasioned the illness of which, they died: but that is a natural death within the meaning of this act of parliament."* The plaintiff's plea for a new trial was dismissed and he was ordered not to include in the sum received the value of the slaves who died during the voyage of the **Tom**.

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This disastrous start to the War with Revolutionary France which had begun with a Credit Crunch, was quickly followed by a massive loss of shipping on the African Coast, which in turn led to vastly increased claims on insurance and increased litigation through the courts as the underwriters attempted to defend their over exposed positions, seems to have stretched the Hodgson's finances to their limits. In December 1792 they raised a mortgage, drawn up by William Roscoe, on their Rumble Row property in Caton, in the amount of £1000 from John Armstrong of Everton.⁸⁴ In 1795 Willow Mill was briefly offered up for sale by the operating company, Hodgson and Cooper.⁸⁵

On January 23rd 1797 Thomas Hodgson wrote his last will and testament.¹⁰⁵ It was not a refined production prepared by Roscoe and Lace; it was simply written out over 3 pages of a folded sheet of inexpensive paper. It was not what you would expect of an "*eminent merchant of Liverpool.*" He directed that his debts, funeral expenses and the costs of probate should be paid out of his personal estate with the proviso that if that was insufficient his real estate was made liable to these debts. To his brother he bequeathed £1000; to his sisters Elizabeth Capstick and Mary Hudson he bequeathed £50 "*as a token of my love and regard*". Elizabeth was the mother of his nephew and business associate, Isaac Capstick. Mary was married to his mill manager Thomas Hudson. To his eldest son Isaac he left £100 "*and no more not out of any disregard or his having given me any offence but solely because he is better provided for by his dear Mothers Marriage settlement than I can at present provide for the uses of my dear children.*"

Thomas Hodgson appointed as his executors, his brother John Hodgson, and his brothers-in-law John Pares of Leicester and Samuel Greg of Manchester; a choice that would later come to haunt his children. He directed his executors to use the rents of his leasehold, real and personal estate to buy securities to maintain and educate his children, Eliza, Agnes, Mary Tylston, Adam, & Anna Hodgson until they married or attained the age of 21. At which time the Estate was to be held in joint tenancy between the children and divided share and share alike. The will was simply signed by the witnesses Thomas Hudson, Thomas Capstick and Edward Milner. If his wife Elizabeth's marriage settlement was as large as that of Samuel Greg, £20,000, he cannot have believed his estate would have left Isaac disadvantaged when divided between his other children. It could on the other hand have been quite large and this still be true.

There is an air of despondency to the will and it is easy to see that Christmas and New Year 1796/7 must have been a bleak time even for a slave trader. From the summer of 1794 to the summer of 1795 the news from the coast of Africa simply got worse and worse; the number of vessels lost from Liverpool must have reached three figures. Trade whilst it may not have been as bad as in 1793 was severely affected by the war. In August 1795 the case of Tatham vs Hodgson commenced and was not resolved until April 1796. Thomas Hodgson had married Elizabeth Lightbody in 1783 and in the summer of 1795 she was carrying their seventh child. On November 30th 1795 she died aged 37 probably as a result of complications arising from the birth. Her youngest son Thomas Tylston Hodgson, whom she had lately brought into the world, died on December 9th 1795. Elizabeth Lightbody was interred in Thomas Hodgson's vault in St James's cemetery in Liverpool; probably her new son was too.

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Thomas Hodgson erected a monument in Caton Chapel to her memory, complete with a verse composed by the Reverend William Shepherd, member of Dr. James Currie's literary circle. No doubt Shepherd, Currie and Roscoe were all at her funeral along with Samuel Greg and his wife Hannah and John Pares and his wife Agnes. Strange though that Elizabeth should have made such an impression on Shepherd that it warranted this ode. Shepherd had only arrived in Liverpool in 1790 becoming tutor to John Yates' children. Of course John Yates was Elizabeth Lightbody's minister and would be the executor of her will in due course. It was through Yates that Shepherd met Roscoe and Currie.

In Memory of
ELIZABETH HODGSON,
Eldest Daughter of ADAM LIGHTBODY, ESQ.,
THE BELOVED WIFE OF THOMAS HODGSON, MERCHANT
Who died Nov. 30, 1795, Aged 37,
AND WAS INTERRED AT ST. JAMES'S CHURCH,
LIVERPOOL.

Meek Spirit! Pausing midst thy hymn of praise,
If chance on earth thou bend thy radiant eye,
While duteous hands this frail Memorial raise,
And kindred bosoms pour the plaintive sigh;
With soft complacence mark their melting mind,
Who on thy image fondly love to dwell,
Record thy Soul devout, thy Heart resign'd,
And all thy Graces all thy Virtues tell.
While Love connubial warms the human breast,
While Filial Fondness prompts the pious tear,
While glowing Friendship blesses and is blest,
Or Parents mourn a Child's untimely bier,
While Want's pale sons for burried kindness grieve,
So long thy Praises and thy Name shall live.