

Foundations

Anyone with an interest in the seventeenth-century English Empire should be aware of the name of Maurice Thompson. This London merchant rose to preeminence among the figures who drove seventeenth-century English overseas trade and colonization and whose behavior must therefore constitute the touchstone of any inquiry related to those interests. In addition, he and his associates, such as Thomas Andrews, Samuel Moyer, William Pennoyer, Rowland Wilson, and John Wood, who shared his ardently Calvinist religious views, played central roles in the rebellion against Charles I and became deeply involved in government between 1642 and 1660. The emergence of Thompson and others like him, regardless of individual confessional orientation, occurred in conjunction with the increasing importance of the wider world to English society, politics, and economics. The centrality of their association, which included one of the most prominent of the godly peers, Robert Rich, Earl of Warwick, to overseas ventures demonstrates the importance of networking and also helps to repair further the anachronistic separation that has developed between the religious views of contemporaries and the continuing quest to provide labor, especially slaves, for the colonies. Yet their careers have rarely received the attention they warrant outside of Robert Brenner's mammoth study, now over twenty years old.¹

¹ Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, for a discussion of which see Chapter 5 herein. Parliament passed a series of statutes between 1661 and 1665 that barred those who did not conform to the Church of England from local office and deprived clerics who would not subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles of their livings. Thompson verified his dissenting religious views by providing twenty shillings each to "one hundred poore silenced Ministers" in his will; Will of Maurice Thomson of Haversham, Buckinghamshire, 9 May 1676,

A tendency to focus on results has contributed to this neglect and the sketchy historical record has not helped our understanding of these imperial movers and shakers. Yet notwithstanding the ultimately extensive global influence of the English, failure constitutes the primary result of their activities, and it is only through the study of the many failures they incurred that we can obtain a comprehensive sense of the history of the English Empire.

In the grandest sense, we have the singular instance of a vision of global empire that was conceived and pursued by the Anglo-Dutch merchant Sir William Courteen. Sir William sponsored plantations in the West Indies as well as Asian and African trading ventures that he sought to link via West Africa before his death in 1636. Maurice Thompson and his partners inherited and revamped the Courteen plan over the next two decades. Their Assada Adventure, however, ran afoul of indigenous resistance to the settlement of this island in the Indian Ocean and then of the interests of the restored monarchy in the Guinea trade in the early 1660s. Even so, the scheme provided the basis for extending the English presence in the Eastern Hemisphere and for establishing the connection between Africa and Anglo-America.

The cases of Thompson and his counterparts also provide clear illustrations of how their pursuit of overseas trade and colonization fit into the changing circumstances in which these activities took place as well as how those changes affected the conduct of those ventures. As English people, such as Thompson, sought – or were obliged to seek – new situations, their understanding of the nature of society and government remained essentially the same – with the vital exceptions that emanated from the creation of the Church of England and accompanying dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s. Prior to the 1640s, England remained very much a monarchy in which the sovereign ruled over a hierarchical society of orders in accordance with an “ancient constitution,” a hodge-podge of the common law, parliamentary statute, and royal prerogative. Justices of the peace, sheriffs, bailiffs, and a plethora of lower officials connected the localities to the central government, while municipal and other corporations, such as universities, conducted their affairs in accordance with the charters that had been granted by monarchs over the centuries. Meanwhile landlords governed

PROB 11/353/63, www.marinelives.org/wiki/Tools:PROB_11/351/63_Will_of_Maurice_Thomson_of_Haversham,_Buckinghamshire_09_May_1676.

their estates under a manorial system that included courts that provided the customary means of resolving the grievances of “subordinates.”²

Important elements of this system became entrenched in faraway places. Among the most important of these was the belief that an individual’s landed income or “estate” constituted the barometer of social and political status. Reciprocity between the social orders constituted the ligaments of the body politic that served as the sociopolitical ideal throughout Western Europe and beyond. In its ideal form, tenants, servants, and other “inferiors” rendered deference to gentry and aristocrats, who, in their turn, condescended to provide order through their service as justices of the peace, members of parliament, sheriffs, and other offices. Notwithstanding the socioeconomic changes that England experienced during the seventeenth century, landed income continued, as readers of Jane Austen know, to constitute the English sociopolitical barometer of status at least through the time of the Battle of Waterloo even as England continued to experience novel socioeconomic phenomena, of which intensifying overseas trade and colonization were manifest examples.³

In addition, this system entailed the development of a metropolitan-style political culture that was based on the cultivation of patronage networks usually headed by aristocrats. These partnerships undertook the common political, social, and economic interests of their memberships, including activities in distant locations. Inevitably, the formation of these associations fostered rivalries, sometimes fierce, between them as they maneuvered for advantage at the expense of their opponents. By definition, this behavior incorporated a substantial political element. Thus, it clouded – or was clouded by – the degree to which other elements, such as religion most profoundly in the seventeenth-century, played a part in politics.⁴

By the 1610s, certain figures had worked out that overseas trade and colonization could boost both their incomes and their political prominence. Carrying out such long-range agendas, however, not only required

² Hindle, “Persuasion and Protest in the Caddington Common Enclosure Dispute,” illustrates how the system worked – and was worked – in a Hertfordshire parish, while Hindle, “Hierarchy and Community in the Elizabethan Parish,” discusses a case in which local people regarding themselves as governmentally vulnerable with respect to existing institutions sought to establish their own, in accordance with ancient custom.

³ Zagorin, *Rebels and Rulers*, 1: 61–86.

⁴ Shephard, “Court Factions in Early Modern England.” For the emergence of ideology, which arose from the confessional differences of the Reformation, see Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology*.

substantial capital, in both fiscal and mental terms, to absorb the myriad risks and extensive costs. The most successful of these individuals formed the links that enabled them to transcend the distances that aggravated the ordinary issues involved in conducting business and in governing people thousands of miles away. Reciprocity was again at the heart of these interactions as manifested in the identification of prospective patron–client relationships that sustained the political and economic wherewithal necessary for undertaking such ventures, to recruit migrants, and to sound out further opportunities. The upper echelons of these networks also used their positions to secure state approval for these initiatives. In pursuing their designs, then, those involved in overseas schemes invariably stressed the public purposes involved: the extension of trade, the augmentation of customs revenue, and increased employment.

The significance of this culture to the settlement vein of seventeenth-century English overseas expansion appears in several ways, although crucial differences existed between the metropolitan theme and its colonial variations, especially the absence of a hereditary aristocracy since people with titles tended not to migrate certainly on a permanent basis. Prior to 1613, the goals of those English people interested in the Western Hemisphere had focused on trade, primarily for animal pelts, with American Indians; the search for mines containing seams of ores that could be processed into precious metals; bases for conducting piracy; the search for a passage around or through America to Asia; and fishing.

These pursuits remained in play after 1613, but two events occurred in that year that marked a permanent shift in the *raison d'être* of Anglo-American colonization efforts to the construction of plantations. The first of these was the chartering of Robert Harcourt's settlement venture for Guiana, and the other was the successful introduction of the cultivation of Varinas, or "sweet-smelling," tobacco to Bermuda and Virginia. Harcourt's venture followed a series of English failures on the South American mainland including one of his own four years previously. As evidenced by the pamphlet he published to promote his venture, Harcourt had already developed an awareness of the suitability of America for plantations in general and of which commodities worked well in Guiana in particular. Thus, he identified sugar as the "first and principal commodity in these parts" where the canes "doe there grow to great bignesse in a short time" so that "by erecting convenient works for the boyling and making of Sugers (which at the first will require som charge & expence) may be yearly returned great benefit and wealth: the long experience of the Portugals, and Spaniards, in Brasill, and the Islands of the Canaries;

and of the Moores in Barbary, may give us certain assurance.” Other likely commodities included cotton, drugs, and dyestuffs. Guiana already produced tobacco to the extent that leaf reportedly worth £60,000 had been imported into England in 1610. As it was also in high demand in the Netherlands, Germany, Ireland, and “all the Easterly Countries,” Harcourt observed, its price “is great, the benefit our Merchants gaine thereby is infinite, and the Kings rent for the custome thereof is not a little.”⁵

Harcourt’s initiative came to nothing, however. Thus, it might have been lumped with prior English expeditions to Guiana, which sought El Dorado and other chimera, as manifestations of English foolhardiness in the attempt to duplicate in the Orinoco jungles what Hernan Cortes and the Pizarro brothers had achieved in Mexico and Peru.⁶ Yet unlike the epiphenomenal efforts of Sir Walter Raleigh and other gold-blinded explorers, it ignited English interest in colonization in the West Indies. In the broader sense, Harcourt’s investigation of Guiana reflected the sensibility that colonizers should back plantation agriculture as the likeliest way of promoting national and personal interests. Tobacco of the variety produced in South America became the best immediate prospect for achieving those ends. Within three decades, however, sugar, in accordance with Harcourt’s analysis, began to replace it in Barbados.

The belief that Virginia should devote itself to plantation agriculture manifested itself coincidentally. We do not know whose idea it was to bring tobacco from Venezuela to Jamestown. We do know, though, that John Rolfe played an integral role in extending cultivation of the weed to Virginia by conducting the first trial of Venezuelan tobacco there. Rolfe provided another boost to the previously ill-starred colony when, after her kidnaping, he famously married Pocahontas, daughter of the Powhatan sachem Wahunsonacock, thereby ending the First Anglo-Powhatan War that had beset Virginia since its founding. Less famously but no less importantly, he and his new wife then ventured to England where they served as the faces of a promotional campaign that yielded both successful recapitalization of and new management for the Virginia Company and the “tobacco boom” of 1618–22. As the colony’s future seemed to be now secured, the new officers of the company devised a plan for governing it and for providing access to labor to planters, which provided the model for the subsequent sociopolitical nature of English overseas colonization.⁷

⁵ Harcourt, *A Relation of a Voyage to Guiana*, 31–2 (on sugar), 36–7 (on tobacco).

⁶ Davies, *The North Atlantic World in the Seventeenth Century*, 3–23.

⁷ Roper, *English Empire in America*, 69–71.

The overhaul of the administration of the Virginia Company that accompanied the introduction of tobacco cultivation involved the removal of Sir Thomas Smythe, sometime Lord Mayor of London and leading English overseas merchant prior to 1625, who had led the company since its founding in 1606, and his replacement by a group led by Henry Wriothlesley, Earl of Southampton, in 1616. Southampton's clients, Sir Edwin Sandys and the merchant Ferrar brothers, John and Nicholas, put into effect several plans, all of which were employed in Anglo-America as it expanded, while Pocahontas and Rolfe publicized Virginia's new prospects.

First, the Sandys–Ferrar directorate sought to attract migrants who had a socioeconomic position that would enable them to oversee Virginia's progress and who would have a stake in the future of the colony. Thus, they developed the practice of granting headrights that granted allocations of land to free migrants that were substantially augmented according to the number of additional migrants the original grantee brought with them. They also devised a House of Burgesses as a local governmental institution, the membership of which was chosen by local planters. This institution provided the main point of contact between metropolis and colony, ensured local oversight over local affairs, and thus provided protection for the estates of planters in conformity with the seventeenth-century English comprehension of social structure.⁸

Last, but by no means least, they devised the practice of indentured servitude in 1618 as a modification of the crucial norm in any preindustrial society: the employment of bound labor in agricultural production. Servitude remained a familiar mechanism of ensuring that an agricultural labor force was in place throughout the year as well as, by dint of the customary practice of providing servants with room and board over the course of their term (customarily one year in England), an avenue for conducting reciprocity between servants and masters.⁹

The Sandys–Ferrar modification of the familiar master–servant relationship also included the cost of transportation in an indenture by which migrants who lacked the wherewithal (£6 usually) to transport themselves to America contracted with the Virginia Company (and its assigns) to

⁸ Roper, *English Empire in America*, 79–80.

⁹ Woodward, “Early Modern Servants Revisited”; Gritt, “The ‘Survival’ of Service in the English Agricultural Labour Force”; Wallace, “Governing England through the Manor Courts.” For the creation of the indentured version of servitude, see Virginia Company, Instructions to Sir George Yeardley, 18 November 1618, RVC 3: 98–109 at 100–1.

provide labor for a term of years to recover that cost. In addition to their diet, accommodation, and whatever other terms they negotiated, servants in Anglo-America were customarily rewarded with “freedom dues” after they completed their obligations: a land grant along with seed, tools, and other items necessary to make their way. This device facilitated the creation of a stunted, but nevertheless quite recognizable, version of the metropolitan sociopolitical hierarchy, but one, thanks to the use of indentures, which provided the means – at least theoretically – for servants to move up the social pyramid that did not exist in England. The promise of tobacco-producing estates brought a wave of migrants to Virginia sufficient, on the one hand, to ensure its survival, and, on the other, to nearly bring it to its knees, and indentures remained an important element of migration to the Americas into the nineteenth century.¹⁰

Yet the requirement of a written contract to enforce the respective obligations of the parties, due to the unfamiliarity of those involved with each other due to the nature of long-range migration, marked a deviation from custom as people could now trade in, and even speculate in, these contracts. By 1640, it had become the general practice of those trading in the Caribbean “to get servants bound to them and send them to the West Indies and there to sell them for tobacco or such like commodity,” while “sundry prisoners” taken at the surrender of Colchester to parliamentary forces in 1648 “did freely tender themselves & did sign and seal indentures” to be transported to Barbados “as is usual in such cases.” Even so, reports emanated that “a great many were not appareled as they ought to have been” (with the cost of clothing, transport and diet for a servant reported “at the last seven pounds” sterling per migrant). These incidents dampened enthusiasm for America among prospective servants; some individuals, having signed on to migrate, changed their minds before crossing the Atlantic. Furthermore, even if a servant had the same master for the whole of their term, the contractual tie, along with the unprecedented control that colonial planters exercised over the governmental institutions of their small ponds, undoubtedly enabled American masters to take greater liberties in the treatment of their servants than their English counterparts.¹¹

¹⁰ Galenson, *White Servitude in Colonial America*; Fogleman, “From Slaves, Convicts, and Servants to Free Passengers.”

¹¹ For trafficking in indentures, see Deposition of Thomas Silver, 4 October 1639, HCA 13/55, f. 268; deposition of Samuel Leigh, 30 January 1639/40, HCA 13/55, ff. 420r–421r; for the indenture of the Colchester prisoners, Deposition of Samuel Mott, 23 December 1648, CLA/024/06/002 (unfoliated), Depositions in Mayor’s Court of

Meanwhile, significant changes did take place, some of which resounded very deeply, if temporarily, within the familiar sociopolitical frame. In the first instance, England's population continued on the steep upward trajectory that had commenced at the very end of the fifteenth century and continued into the middle of the seventeenth. This demographic increase necessarily placed a greater general strain on the ability of the society to feed itself and to provide other essentials of life to its members, already susceptible to the vagaries of climate, while the government routinely failed to acquire sufficient revenues to meet its needs. Perhaps not coincidentally, religious fervor and sociopolitical disaffection became more pronounced during this time of recurring dearth amid profound climate fluctuations, while bread riots and objections to attempts by the Crown to attract revenue, always referencing the kingdom's ancient constitution, appeared more frequently and more stridently during the economizing Personal Rule of Charles I (1629–40).¹²

The increasing scale of commerce accompanied and then transcended the demographic rise. At least one-half of the population of England were wage workers in 1613. The export of raw wool, which had been an English economic bellwether from at least the late thirteenth century, collapsed in the third quarter of the sixteenth century, but the woolen

London 1647–8, LMA. For lack of enthusiasm of servants for American opportunities, see, e.g., Joseph West to Anthony Lord Ashley, 10 September 1669, Cheves, *Shaftesbury Papers*, 153–4. The perennial – and for social leaders, perennially vexing – issue of the movement of people in and around England had already eroded the ideal (to the degree that it ever existed) even as it gave rise to the device of indentured servitude; Souden, “Rogues, Whores, and Vagabonds’.”

¹² Precise population figures for seventeenth-century England are, of course, impossible to recover with precision, but the accepted approximations remain some 4.11 million in 1610 rising to 5.28 million in 1656; see Wrigley and Schofield, *The Population History of England*, 207–10, despite serious concerns that have been raised about the methodology employed; Hatcher, “Understanding the Population History of England.” The period under consideration began with harvests “about average as a whole,” in terms of yields between 1480 and 1619, but the 1610s included “two deficient harvests (1613, 1617) and two good harvests (1618–19) to end the decade,” before a “really bad harvest” in 1622; Hoskins, “Harvest Fluctuations and English Economic History, 1480–1619,” 39–40. Between 1619 and 1689, England experienced eighteen “deficient” harvests and twenty-seven “good” ones, but the 1630s saw just one “good harvest in ten years, instead of the usual four” (with accompanying high prices for grain), while “five bad harvests in a row” occurred between 1646 and 1650 and again between 1657 and 1661; Hoskins, “Harvest Fluctuations and English Economic History, 1620–1759,” 17–20. For agrarian revolt, see Zagorin, *Rebels and Rulers*, 1: 122–39.

cloth trade, both domestic and export, increased dramatically during the 1500s. Accordingly, the manorial system – and the tenants and copyholders to whom this extended some legal protection – that served as a primary means of ordering local society continued to erode through the practice of engrossment. This practice, whereby larger farms absorbed smaller ones, as well as that of enclosing formerly common lands by landlords, became increasingly apparent from the fourteenth century as “agrarian capitalism” spread, particularly in the southern and eastern parts of the country.¹³

The combination of shrinking smallholdings and tenancies along with the rising population, even with checks placed on it by recurring epidemics of plague, smallpox, “sweating sickness,” and typhoid fever, caused a movement of people of a scope sufficient to create a perception that lawlessness and brigandage beckoned unless something was done, especially since the medieval framework for caring for the poor had been shattered by the Reformation. And something was done: the parliaments of Elizabeth I (reigned 1558–1603) passed a series of statutes, building on previous local practices and culminating in the Poor Laws of 1597 and 1601, which provided a relatively substantial measure of poor relief by the standards of the time but was accompanied by provision for whippings for “sturdy beggars” who had moved from their parish of origin. Local corporations, assigned the responsibility for providing the relief that would stem vagrancy, employed various measures. Godly people had a particular desire to reform the indigent by putting them to work that control of the locality enabled; the approach of many towns, though, came to focus on a desire to improve the recipients of relief, as opposed to the mere “popish” provision of charity. This attitude severed the reciprocity inherent in the medieval system and may have cut many impoverished people adrift from the society of orders. Dorchester, where the Reverend John White, an early promoter of godly colonization, was a community leader, established a brewery to employ its indigent population.¹⁴

Overseas colonization became an obvious remedy for these issues in the minds of the Elizabethan promoter of colonization, Raleigh, and his

¹³ Rorke, “English and Scottish Overseas Trade”; Shaw-Taylor, “The Rise of Agrarian Capitalism and the Decline of Family Farming in England.”

¹⁴ Although the extent to which this happened varied from town to town even from parish to parish; Fideler, “Impressions of a Century of Historiography.” For Dorchester, see Underdown, *Fire from Heaven*, 113–29.

mouthpiece, Richard Hakluyt. In 1584, when Raleigh solicited additional Crown support for his American plantation schemes, Hakluyt identified the revival of trade and employment for vagrants and beggars as foremost public purposes of “western planting.” Despite Hakluyt’s urgings, the schemes of Raleigh and his contemporaries had no lasting impact outside of memory. Later promoters of colonization, however, invariably included among the reasons for pursuing their ventures the removal of the impoverished and convicts from unproductive circumstances – and parish charge – to productive labor on plantations.¹⁵

At the same time, overseas ventures contributed to the exploding demographics of seventeenth-century London. Even at the end of Elizabeth’s reign, when the notion of an English Empire did not even rate the proverbial glimmer in a paternal eye, a district of docks, warehouses, shipyards, and trades catering to maritime industry had begun to teem with an increasing number of mariners, masters, merchants, and their wives (or widows) and families. The contemporary historian-geographer, John Stow, born in the 1520s, recalled that the first building (“a fayre free school”) was constructed in the hamlet of Ratcliffe in the large parish of Stepney, just east of the city’s walls, “in my youth.” But “of late yeares,” when Stow wrote his *Survey of London*, “ship-wrights and (for the most part) other marine men, haue builded many large and strong houses for themselues, and smaller for Saylers, from thence almost to Poplar, and so to Blake wal. Now for Tower hil, the plaine there is likewise greatly diminished by Merchants, for building of small tenements: from thence towards Aldgate.”¹⁶

One study suggests that Stepney, which stretched north from the Thames to include, in addition to Ratcliffe, the riverside hamlets of Wapping, Limehouse, Shadwell, Poplar, and Blackwall, contained 12,000 to 13,000 inhabitants between 1606 and 1610. A careful, if necessarily crude, estimate speculates that the parish’s demographics burgeoned from some 21,000 to over 91,000 during the course of the seventeenth century, notwithstanding several plague outbreaks that underscored the precariousness of urban life in this period: it was the continuing flow of migrants to the capital that propelled its continuing population increase as deaths outpaced baptisms throughout the period

¹⁵ Deane, *A Discourse concerning Western Planting Written in the Year 1584 by Richard Hakluyt*, 19–35, 36–44.

¹⁶ Stow, “The Suburbs without the walls,” in Kingsford, *A Survey of London*, 69–91.

under study and that fueled the accompanying eastwardly spread of housing and commercial construction along the river.¹⁷

Ledgers and other business records that would have provided evidence of the increasing scope of trade and corresponding expansion of accommodation of the lading and unloading of commodities does not survive in significant numbers, unfortunately. Happily for the historian, however, these endeavors often resulted in disappointment and disaster and, thus, court cases. The survival of the records of these disputes does allow shafts of light to penetrate this world; they reveal that the geographic scale of English overseas interests expanded remarkably and rapidly from the late 1620s. They also reveal that it was the leaders of Stepney, now the economic locus of England, who set the agendas, provided the resources, and laid the groundwork for further overseas ventures even as the kingdom recovered from an extended period of “trade depression” that followed the Spanish siege and sack of Antwerp (1576–85) during the Dutch Revolt. The wool trade, staple of the English export economy since the Middle Ages, never recovered from the loss of access to what had been its primary Continental entrepôt. Currency debasements in Germany that devalued the price of English cloth there as well as the pursuit of costly and ineffective war waged by Charles I against France and Spain from 1625 to 1629, not to mention the wider Thirty Years War (1618–48), along with the predations of corsairs from the Barbary Coast and Dunkirk in the Spanish Netherlands, aggravated this decline.

The attempts of the Crown to reverse this trend – while simultaneously trying to promote the customs revenue generated by these trades – generally yielded negligible results. Its overhaul of the impositions placed on imports such as currants was ratified by the courts but resented by merchants, while the implementation of the “New Draperies” plan devised by the merchant and London official William Cockayne in 1614, the most dramatic instance of government intervention, proved disastrous. These circumstances reinforced the painful reality that the Dutch, who produced their cloth and other exports at lower cost, kept their English competitors for Continental markets at a disadvantage in the early seventeenth century. The resumption of the Dutch war with Spain in 1621 did provide somewhat better opportunities for English traders engaged in the Baltic Sea carrying trade from the 1630s in which iron

¹⁷ East London History Group, Population Studies Group, “The Population of Stepney in the Early Seventeenth Century,” 40–1; Power, “East London Housing in the Seventeenth Century,” 237.

importation coincidentally played an increasingly important role. This commodity was in great demand in West Africa where, along with Asian and European cloth, guns, and gunpowder, it was exchanged for “elephants teeth,” gold, and “Negroes.”¹⁸

Unfortunately for the Sandys–Ferrar management of the Virginia Company, their own experience clearly illustrates the pitfalls that were entailed in overseas matters. In a bitter irony, their plan for reviving Virginia proved to be too successful: more migrants arrived there than the colony could accommodate comfortably. By all accounts – although the political heat that the “tobacco boom” touched off obliges us to be particularly wary of the claims made therein – Virginia lacked sufficient food, housing, and other necessities to support the sudden influx of people, resulting in considerable misery. Moreover, the sudden population influx had alarmed the Powhatans, whose sachem Opechancanough harbored a longstanding enmity toward the English. On Easter 1622, the Indians carried out a devastating attack, killing over one-quarter of the settlers and destroying plantations, crops, and livestock, which might have destroyed Virginia if the English had not had some advance warning. The Powhatan attack gave Virginia a severe scorching, but the persons and attitudes of the corps of metropolitan backers of overseas trade and colonization were joined by survivors of the “massacre” who had the ambition and the experience to carry on these efforts and to assume, accordingly, leading roles in such successes as were achieved after 1622.¹⁹

The Virginia Company’s efforts also ran afoul of seventeenth-century English political culture. Warwick may have been the most prominent proponent of expanding English overseas interests during the first half of the seventeenth century; he certainly was one of the leading politicians of the period prior to the breakdown of the government in 1642. This aristocrat had his fingers in all of the proverbial overseas pies: he was a

¹⁸ E.g., Deposition of William Coppin, 3 March 1648/9, HCA 13/61, ff. 237r–238r; “Voyage to Gambo” of the *Henrietta*, *Sophia*, *Amity*, *Griffin*, and *Kinsale*, 30 April 1662, T 70/309, ff. 1v–2v; Cormontine to Right Worshipful Company, 18 February 1661/2, IOR E/3/27, ff. 106r–107r. The “Guinea trade” receives fuller attention in Chapters 3 and 6 through 9 below. For the situation of the English export trade at this time, see, e.g., Gould, “The Trade Depression of the 1620s,” 87–90; Federowicz, *England’s Baltic Trade in the Seventeenth Century*, 90–131, esp. 124–6. For grievances against impositions, which received judicial approval in *Bates’ Case* (4 Mich., 4 Jac. 1), see, e.g., Journal of the House of Commons, 12 May 1614, in Jansson, *Proceedings in Parliament*, 210–18 at 211–14.

¹⁹ Hecht, “The Virginia Muster of 1624/5 as a Source for Demographic History.”

leading member of the first English company, chartered in 1618, to trade with Africa; he was an early supporter of attacks on Spanish shipping – he commanded such a voyage himself in 1627; and he was a patron of colonization ventures from the Caribbean to New England. After he assumed his earldom in 1619, Warwick assembled an extensive web of mercantile, clerical, and political clients that he used, in conjunction with like-minded aristocrats, such as his brother, Henry Rich, Earl of Holland, and William Fiennes, Viscount Saye and Sele, to promote his fiercely anti-Spanish views, the legacy of his maternal grandfather, the Elizabethan Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex.²⁰

Warwick joined the Virginia Company in 1617 and allied with Southampton in the battle to end Sir Thomas Smythe's leadership of its venture. While he had been content initially with the management of Sandys and the Ferrars, problems arose with Warwick's enthusiasm for piracy, which extended to the Indian Ocean where to the deep irritation of the East India Company one of his crews seized a vessel carrying the mother of the Mughal Emperor and £100,000 worth of cargo. In the Western Hemisphere, the Earl invested in the Somers Island Company, which governed Virginia's sister colony, Bermuda; that island's location made it an ideal base for Daniel Elfrith and other skippers affiliated with Warwick that they used in their attacks against the Spanish; these privateers also called at Virginia. Prior to 1623, however, this sort of activity ran afoul of the peace policy of James I (reigned 1603–25). It therefore exposed the charters of colonies that harbored pirates to the threat of annulment for violating their corporate privileges. Thus, Sandys solicited Warwick to cease and desist in order to avoid royal wrath. The Earl responded to this overture, however, by forming a new alliance with Smythe that attacked Sandys's oversight of Virginia, pointing to the admittedly compelling evidence of the calamities suffered by the overflow of servants punctuated by the disaster of the Powhatan attack. The resulting campaign of denunciation and counterdenunciation created such distractions that the Crown had to step in reluctantly, dissolve the Virginia Company in June 1624, and place the colony under royal administration.²¹

The creation of this first Crown Colony in English imperial history was supposed to have been a temporary expedient, but James died the

²⁰ For the political effects of Essex and his circle, see Hammer, *The Polarization of English Politics*.

²¹ For Warwick and "privateering," see Bard, "The Earl of Warwick's Voyage of 1627"; Craven, "The Earl of Warwick, a Speculator in Piracy."

following March, and although the idea of the recreation of the Virginia Company was mooted on subsequent occasions, it never gained currency as the colonists were concerned about their land titles if the company was revived. In practical terms, however, the administration of the province remained under the guidance of men, such as Edward Sackville, Earl of Dorset, Sir John Danvers, Sir John Wolstoneholme, Sir Francis Wyatt, and Abraham Jacob, who had amassed extensive Virginia experience during the company era that they carried with them after 1624. Dorset headed the eponymous but temporary Commission for Foreign Plantations, created in 1631, which provided Charles I with advice on Virginia (and recommended a return to corporate government for the colony).²²

Meanwhile, Warwick and his associates turned their attention more closely to the Caribbean. In 1619, he joined Roger North, a veteran of Raleigh's last expedition, in a new Guiana or Amazon Company, but the patent for this venture was suspended at the behest of Diego Sarmiento de Acuña, Count Gondomar, the Spanish Ambassador, and North was sent to the Tower when he returned to London with a cargo of Venezuelan tobacco. A consideration of the case by the Privy Council, though, resulted in the reinstatement of the grant to a new company headed by the Earl, who recruited Harcourt for a resumption of colonization efforts in Guiana. This venture lasted from 1625 to 1629 while England and Spain were at war after which it became bankrupt and Harcourt was killed by Indians in 1631. This failed effort seems to have prompted Warwick to abandon the mainland and focus his West Indian agenda on the islands.²³

The Earl's circle by no means, however, constituted the only group of English people interested in the Caribbean in the early 1620s, and it is interesting that so many prominent individuals and their clients became involved in the West Indies at this time. The region had been officially off limits to English overseas operators after the Anglo-Spanish Treaty of London of 1604. This restriction, which memorialized the pacific policies preferred by James I, deeply annoyed his more militant subjects. This irritation turned to alarm as Europe became engulfed in a seemingly confessional struggle in which the Austrian cousins of the Spanish Habsburgs had driven the King's daughter, Elizabeth of Bohemia, and

²² MacMillan, *The Atlantic Imperial Constitution*, 150–1; Roper, *English Empire in America*, 73–92.

²³ Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*, 298–300; MacMillan, *Sovereignty and Possession in the English New World*, 86–9.

her unfortunate husband, Frederick, the Elector Palatine, from their Bohemian throne as well as their Rhineland principality.

This situation turned in 1623 when the plans for the “Spanish Match” between Prince Charles and the Infanta Maria Anna collapsed into humiliating farce. Charles and the all-powerful royal favorite, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, controversially traveled incognito to Madrid hoping to finalize a marriage agreement but suffered a series of rebuffs. The pair returned to England in October determined to seek revenge for the treatment the Spanish had afforded them, and their indignation overwhelmed the King’s preference for continued negotiation. A clamor for renewed hostilities with the old enemy meant that traders and colonizers could now frequent the Caribbean without risking incarceration in the Tower.²⁴

Sir William Courteen was the most active of the backers of overseas ventures outside Warwick’s circle. Born around 1568, Sir William, along with his Zeeland-based brother, Sir Peter Courteen, inherited their father’s highly successful silk and linen tailoring firm; then, utilizing their Dutch associations, they expanded into whaling and the salt trade. Their immense operation extended its sphere of interest to the Wild Coast of Guiana adjacent to the Venezuelan salt pans by the 1610s. As the overseer of the English side of things, Sir William cultivated patronage, frequently lending substantial sums of money to the Crown, which owed him a reported £200,000 by the 1630s, and to various aristocrats.

The Zeeland port of Vlissingen (Flushing), which the English held until 1616 as security for loans extended to the United Provinces during the Dutch Revolt, provided a ready point of collaboration. From there, Sir William’s group began shipping English, Irish, and Dutch settlers to the Essequibo River on the Wild Coast of Guiana after James I returned the town to Zeeland’s control. By 1623, these settlements were producing a reported 800,000 pounds of tobacco per annum. The Courteen involvement in America spread after one of their captains, John Powell, called at Barbados on his return from the Dutch expedition that had seized Bahia from the Portuguese. His favorable report convinced Sir William to secure a patent to the island through the offices of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke; he then invested upward of £10,000 in establishing a colony there. The first settlers immediately and naturally

²⁴ Cogswell, “England and the Spanish Match”; Lake, “Constitutional Consensus and the Puritan Opposition in the 1620s.”

turned their hands to planting tobacco, following the examples of Virginia and St. Christopher's.²⁵

This undertaking, however, ran afoul of the unfortunate practice, whether due to oversight, ministerial inefficiency, disinterest, dissimulation, or confusion, of Charles I of granting multiple patents to similar rights to conduct overseas trade and colonization. In addition to granting a proprietorship for Barbados to Pembroke, the King made grants to the island to James Ley, Earl of Marlborough, and James Hay, Earl of Carlisle. While Marlborough accepted a settlement and relinquished his claims, Carlisle insisted his agents had established a prior settlement to the Courteen colony. To make a long story short, violence and suits ensued that prevented the colony's political situation from stabilizing for the first decade or more of its existence and, happily for the historian, continued to produce documents related to the founding of the English colonies in the West Indies into the 1640s.²⁶

As these colonizers knew well, plantations required bound labor to succeed. Indentured servitude certainly offered one feasible means of addressing this issue, yet it never brought migrants in sufficient numbers. It is quite conceivable, given the chronology of events, that some of those involved in early Anglo-American settlement found the indenture process less than optimum for meeting colonial labor requirements fully from its inception, although we lack direct evidence of the thinking of the colonizers and merchants concerned.

Slaves presented an obvious alternative despite the emphasis that has been placed on the absence of slavery from England and the relatively late arrival of the English to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Notwithstanding these realities, we can certainly say that the introduction of African slavery into Anglo-America actually preceded that of indentured servitude. The first recorded mention of Africans at Virginia occurred in 1619/20 when Rolfe reported to Sandys that a Dutch privateer had brought "20. and odd Negroes" whom its crew had seized from a Portuguese slaver to the colony, but enslaved Africans were cultivating tobacco, as well as scouring shipwrecks for salvage on Bermuda

²⁵ Handler, "Father Antoine Biet's Visit to Barbados," 69; Davis, "Papers Relating to the Early History of Barbados and St. Kitts," 328; Mijers, "A Natural Partnership," 245–50; Klooster, "Anglo-Dutch Trade in the Seventeenth Century," 263–5; Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, 81–2.

²⁶ E.g., Papers Relating to the Barbadoes and the Caribbean Islands, MS 736, Trinity College Library, Dublin.

(founded in 1612) by 1616, and they constituted 5 to 10 percent of that colony's population by 1619.²⁷

Michael Jarvis and others have suggested that the overlapping involvement of Warwick and his circle of merchants and mariners in the plantation trade, Guinea, and piracy triggered English involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This group had developed a substantial awareness of the scope of the European demand for tobacco, of the management of Spanish tobacco production in Venezuela, and of how the slave trade in America worked by circa 1615. It is quite conceivable also that Courteen's group shared this awareness given their familiarity with Dutch plantations in Essequibo. Certainly, as Caroline Arena has recently demonstrated, Courteen's agents used their knowledge and mainland contacts to introduce Indian slavery, with natives they brought from Guiana to Barbados, directly after the English began settling that island.²⁸

The Warwick group certainly translated this system to Bermuda where they held sway, and the disasters that befell Virginia in the early 1620s seem to have encouraged a turn toward islands in English colonization. St. Christopher's might well occupy a place on anyone's favored list of places to recuperate from a nasty shock, but it might be regarded as an unlikely location for what proved to be the permanent rejuvenation of English long-range commercial and colonizing initiatives. Nevertheless, the establishment of a tobacco colony there, in conjunction with the slow recovery of Virginia after the tumults it had endured, provided both the platform for the further expansion of English overseas interests and a sense that these interests required better oversight.

The English settlement of St. Christopher's began, according to Captain John Smith's account, as an offshoot of Roger North's Amazon forays, with the first colonists arriving in January 1624 led by Captain Thomas Warner. The Englishmen found three Frenchmen already residing there with whom they divided the island, the English occupying the central part and the French the two ends. The new arrivals set to planting tobacco as well as provision crops and engaging in trade with the Indians. Smith's narrative details the tribulations of the early colonists, which included hurricanes, Indian and French plots, and excessive duties placed

²⁷ John Rolfe to Sir Edwin Sandys, January 1619/20, RVC 3: 241–8; Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda*, 17–26.

²⁸ Arena, "Indian Slaves from Guiana in Seventeenth-Century Barbados," 74–7; she notes that Indian slaves constituted a significant, albeit secondary, element in what became "the juggernaut of sugar production" on the island (81). For Jarvis's argument, see *In the Eye of All Trade*, 26–32.

by the Crown on tobacco. In 1629, Smith reported that almost three thousand people lived in the English zones of the island. Although in that same year the Spanish sacked the colony, the five years that had elapsed had proven sufficient to enable the English to extend their Caribbean presence and the socioeconomic sensibility that had developed to the much larger and less vulnerable Barbados.²⁹

During this same period, Maurice Thompson began to work his way into the role in the supplying of colonies that enabled him to rise to a commanding prominence in the direction of seventeenth-century English overseas endeavors. Thompson actually lived in Virginia for four or five years when he was a young man, conceivably as a servant, although we have no evidence on this point. Born in 1604, he was among those who came to Virginia at the onset of the “tobacco boom”; according to his own evidence, he arrived in the colony in 1618 at the age of fourteen. Thompson’s subsequent career, however, manifestly does not jibe with that of the stereotypical Anglo-American settler. In the first instance, having survived the Powhatan attack of 1622, Thompson returned to England, never to cross the Atlantic again, although his name appears among those, including William Claiborne, Ralph Hamor, Samuel Mathews, George Sandys, William Tucker, and the new governor, Sir Francis Wyatt, who received land patents in the aftermath of the disaster wrought by Opechancanough and his warriors; Thompson received a relatively middling 150 acres. He also was among the sixteen subscribers to “The Answer of divers Planters that have long lived in Virginia [to the] unmasking” of the Virginia Company’s management by Warwick’s client, the privateer and former Governor of Bermuda, Nathaniel Butler, one of the key documents of the record in the dispute over the colony between the Southampton–Sandys and Warwick groups.

Thompson’s involvement in this struggle constitutes the first apparent opportunity for him to have come to the attention of Warwick, with whom he formed a close partnership through their shared interest in promoting overseas trade and colonization and their opposition to the religious policies of Charles I. Thompson’s Virginia experience would certainly have made him aware of how a colony operated as well as the pitfalls involved. It would also have provided him with the opportunity to study how to take advantage of the opportunities entailed in supplying

²⁹ Smith, *The True Travels, Adventurers, and Observations of Captain John Smith, in Europe, Asia, Affrica, and America, from Anno Domini 1593, to 1629* [London, 1630], in Horn, *Captain John Smith*, 671–770 at 753–62.

the commodities and bound labor Anglo-American planters required and acquiring, in turn, colonial produce for resale in the metropolis or elsewhere.³⁰

Was it a coincidence then that the slave trade became entrenched in Anglo-America at this time? In 1626, within three years of subscribing to “The Answer to the unmasking” and just two years after the founding of the colony at St. Christopher’s, Thompson shipped “about sixty slaves” to that island, the first recorded English slaving voyage ever made to an English settlement. Thompson did not report on the origins of that voyage, but its occurrence indicates that he (and probably other English people) had an awareness of how the trans-Atlantic slave trade worked. A year later, the early settler of Barbados Henry Winthrop reported that 40 of the 100 inhabitants of that island, directly after the colony’s founding, were enslaved people.³¹

The cases of Virginia and St. Christopher’s set the precedent whereby tobacco provided the economic lifeline to the metropolis, but this frequently snarled: planters relied on imports for practically everything and the resulting debts required repaying; the shortage of regular money as well as of nonagricultural economic activity made the staple the currency of these places; and the need to pay for imports addicted the planters to cultivation of the weed to an extent that inevitably caused its price to plunge in the 1630s. The initial success of tobacco also brought unwanted

³⁰ For his subscription, see List of Subscribers and Subscriptions for the Relief of the Colony, [4] July 1623, RVC 4: 245–6 at 245. For Thompson’s land, see Extracts of all the Titles and Estates of Land, sent home by Sir Francis Wyatt, May 1625, RVC 4: 551–9 at 557. For the extent of his tenure in Virginia, see “The Answer of diuers Planters that haue long lived in Virginia and alsoe of sundry Marriners and other persons yt haue bene often at Virginia vnto a paper intituled The Vnmasked face of our Colony in Virginia as it was in ye Winter of ye yeare 1622,” 30 April 1623, RVC 2: 381–9 at 386; for his age, see HCA 13/54, f. 137. For Warwick’s politico-religious network, see Donagan, “The Clerical Patronage of Robert Rich, Second Earl of Warwick”; Hunt, *The Puritan Moment*, 160–82, 202–18, 251–78.

³¹ Examination of Mr. Morris Thompson in Brief Collection of the Depositions of Witnesses and Pleadings of Counsellors at Law in a difference depending in Parliament between the Merchants Inhabitants and Planters in Barbados on the one part, and the Earl of Carlisle Lord Willoughby &c on the other part, 15, 17, 19, and 26 March and 19 April 1647, MS Rawlinson C 94, f. 7v, Bodl. Thirty-two Africans reportedly lived in Virginia in 1620, see Thorndale, “The Virginia Census of 1619”; McCartney, “An Early Virginia Census Reprised,” 178–96. For Thompson and the colonial provision trade, see, e.g., Deposition of Thomas Weston, Saunders v. Weston, 1638, HCA 13/54, f. 83; Governor Harvey to the Virginia Commissioners, 27 May 1632, CSPC AWI 1: 151; Limbrey v. Wilson, 1638, HCA 13/54, f. 89; Schedules to Mary Limbrey v. Edward Wilson, 15 June 1638, HCA 24/94.

attention from the Crown, which sought from 1620 to divert as much revenue from the weed as possible into its notoriously underfilled coffers.

Political culture played a controlling role in these developments: Warwick and other patrons would not have been cognizant of what was going on in America without the efforts of their clients on the ground. Powell and his brother Henry, as agents of Sir William Courteen as well as Warwick, were in the thick of English pursuits in the Caribbean. John Powell became the first Courteen-appointed Governor of Barbados after Henry had established Sir William's colony on the island in 1627. The Courteen venture, however, ran afoul of an alliance formed by the two other claimants, and the Earl of Carlisle assumed the proprietorship of the "Caribbee Isles" in the following year. With his new power, Carlisle granted a syndicate of London merchants headed by Marmaduke Rawdon 10,000 acres of Barbados land; their own agent, Charles Wolverston, used that authority to assume the government over the entire island.³² Predictably, Powell did not recognize either Wolverston's or Carlisle's authority. Another of the Carlisle's clients, Henry Hawley, then arrived in Barbados and arrested Powell. The ensuing feuds that turned early Barbados into a political hothouse constitute an interesting element of colonial history, especially since this scenario was replicated at some level throughout Anglo-America. Yet the links between the Powell brothers and other godly participants in seventeenth-century English overseas trade and colonization have rather greater significance.³³

Moreover, Warwick's connections transcended the Caribbean, just as his interests did. For instance, the Powells knew both Henry Winthrop and Henry's father, John Winthrop, the Governor of Massachusetts Bay. Prior to his own migration to America, the elder Winthrop, through Henry and his acquaintance with the Powells (who served as postmen for the Winthrops), knew all about the importance of tobacco and bound labor for Anglo-American colonies. He also knew, probably not coincidentally, both that slavery existed as a labor option for Anglo-American planters and how the American trade in indentured labor functioned. Henry Winthrop, in relating the wonderful prospects he found in Barbados, asked his father to "send me ouer sum 2 or 3 men yt they be bound to

³² The Earl of Carlisle's Commission granted to Charles Wolverston to be Governor of the Merchants Plantations, 3 April 1628, Ms. HM 17, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

³³ The Prologue or Preface, Brief Collection of the Depositions of Witnesses and Pleadings of Counsellors at Law in a difference depending in Parliament, 15, 17, 19, 26 March 1646/7 and 9 April 1647, MS Rawlinson C 94, ff. 1-4 at 2-3, Bodl.

searve me in the West Indyees some 3 yere or 5, wch you doe thincke good to binde them for, and get them as resonable as you can, promysinge them not above 10 pd a yere.” Although the population of the infant colony was “but 3 score christyanes and fortye slaues of negeres and Indyenes,” if his father would supply him with necessities, such as knives, cheese, wax, thread, and shoes, Henry had no doubt he would send 500 or 1,000 pounds of tobacco to England in six months. John, though, having already spent £35 on various items and his patience with his “vain, overreaching” son clearly stretched, was less confident about this prospect, finding the tobacco he had already received to be “ill-conditioned, foul, and full of stalks, and evil colored,” probably due to improper preparation and shipping. Moreover, Henry’s uncle had reported that none of the grocers with whom he spoke about it would pay five shillings a pound for it.³⁴

The collective goal for the Warwick network – in addition to profit – seems to have been to carry the fight against the Catholic foe via privateering and colonization, which would also increase English territorial claims and the flow of revenue to both the Crown’s coffers and the estates of the colonizers. Thus, Warwick and his associates, often styled as “Puritans,” proposed the creation of an English West India Company following the example of the Dutch West India Company that had been founded in 1621 in anticipation of the renewal of hostilities between the Dutch Republic and Spain. While the Earl continued his private war against the Spanish, however, this particular idea of a company never came off due to the disputes over the mismanagement of the larger conflict, including the failure to capture Cadiz and the horribly dismal attempt to relieve the siege of Huguenot La Rochelle, by Buckingham. The ensuing demands for investigations into the Duke’s activities and a reluctance to throw good money after bad tied to questions over the Crown’s religious policies and the exercise of the royal prerogative that Warwick, Saye, and others raised in the parliaments of the first years of the reign of Charles I. The furor over the Crown’s religious policies and its methods of raising revenue to fight the war for which Warwick and his associates had clamored culminated in the assassination of the favorite in August 1628, the submission of a Petition of Right that demanded redress of grievances, the King’s dissolution of the Parliament of 1629, a

³⁴ Henry Winthrop to John Winthrop, 15 October 1627, and John Winthrop to Henry Winthrop, 30 January 1627/8, in Davis, *The Cavaliers and Roundheads of Barbados*, 33–6.

determination to rule without parliaments until further notice, and the end of the war for which the Crown could not pay. While the proposed English West India Company became lost in these political fights, its spirit remained alive in the form of the Providence Island Company, which Warwick, Holland, Saye, and a remarkably large and important group of partners founded in order to continue harassment of the Spanish as well as pursue other Caribbean prospects.³⁵

Thus, the socioeconomic platform for the development of Anglo-America had formed. The demands of colonizers necessitated the development of colonies that produced and consumed commodities that benefited those backers. The running of the plantation trade required agents on the ground; colonizers recruited them with offers including land and the means to transform it into an estate. Those who accepted these invitations also provided leadership for the colony by virtue of their new economic position and their connections. Successful settlements, by definition, require inhabitants and, therefore, the creation of societies. Yet for those involved in the colonial trade the recruitment of labor to cultivate staples held far more importance than the formation of American societies in of themselves did.

³⁵ Appleby, "An Association for the West Indies." For the political and religious differences of the first years of the reign of Charles I, see Cust, *Charles I*, 44–103. A note on the use of "Puritan": this was an epithet for contemporaries and none of the people referenced here would have accepted it as a description of themselves, who instead termed themselves "godly." John Winthrop, though, has become the quintessential American "Puritan," through the influential work of Miller, *The New England Mind*, and Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma*. With that in mind, Winthrop, Warwick, and many of their partners were staunch Calvinists, who, in 1627, believed in a literal Scripture and in a further reformation of the Church of England to be achieved by protesting the practice of ceremonies they regarded as useless or, worse, "popish," although the list of offending practices could vary from one believer to the next. The literature on "puritanism" is so vast and contentious as to defy ready cataloging in a footnote, but the reader could do much worse than begin with Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*; Collinson, *Godly People*; and Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*.