

BLACK OLIVER AND THE DUTCH INVASION*

By Ian Bruce

When the Dutch invaded St Helena around the new year of 1672/3, most of the island's population left on a small fleet of ships and sailed for Brazil. Many refugees probably fled with just a few possessions, but the planter John and Grace Coulson¹ and their children, Nathaniel, Elizabeth and Martha also managed to take their slave Black Oliver, together with his wife (possibly not a church marriage) and two daughters, Mary and Martha.

That the Coulsons sold Oliver to Mr Abrams², an English merchant, as soon as they arrived suggests that they only took him for his monetary value, rather than because they had any great affection for him. There is also little sign they were very greatly concerned about splitting up Oliver's family either; having made the sale they re-boarded the ship with money in their pockets and sailed for England, taking his wife and children away with them.

Oliver must have despaired he would ever see them again. Not in his wildest dreams could he have imagined the joyous turn of events that would not only take him back to St Helena but also lead to the reunion of his family; that they would all be freed and given their own plantation with equal rank and status as the Coulsons. On the other hand, not in his worst nightmares would Oliver have imagined that John Coulson and he would one day attend an event resulting in one being shot and killed and the other hung from the gibbet.

The Dutch invasion of St Helena has too often been presented as a parochial scheme to set up a safer anchorage for home-bound merchant ships than the Cape. That this action formed an important part of a global two-year war between the Dutch and English is rarely mentioned. Oliver and his family were not alone in having their lives split apart by this wider conflict, yet the start of the Third Anglo-Dutch war can be dated from an apparently innocuous event – the reunion of a brother and sister in Dover two and a half years earlier.

If Oliver was treated as the bottom of humanity, these siblings were at the very top. In June 1670, Charles II travelled to Dover to meet his youngest and favourite sister Princess Henrietta, Duchesse d'Orléans. Acting on behalf of Louis XIV, her mission was to persuade Charles to join France in an invasion of the Dutch Republic. By the terms of the Treaty of Dover, she not only succeeded in gaining his agreement to supply 60 English warships but also to the secret and politically explosive provision that he would convert to Catholicism.³ Princess Henrietta died only a month later, possibly having been poisoned, but the decision had been made and England declared war on the Dutch just under two years later in April 1672.

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Henrietta, Duchesse D'Orléans

This was one of the relatively few occasions when England and France fought shoulder to shoulder in Europe as allies.⁴The Dutch had expected an attack from France but not from England. Within weeks of the start of the war (in April or May 1672) four men-of-war ships belonging to the Dutch East India Company slipped out of Amsterdam and set a course for the Cape of Good Hope.⁵Arriving at the Cape Colony on 2 October, one of their passengers Isbrand Gosketook command as Governor and energetically set to work to improve the defences at the Cape. Simultaneous preparations were made to invade St Helena. The following extracts come from journals kept by the Dutch at the Cape Colony.⁶

30 November 1672

Council meeting held this morning, in which it was decided to carry out the exploit at St Helena without delay, and to employ for the purpose the fluyt [Dutch transoceanic cargo vessel] *Cattenhurgh* and the little vessel *Vliegende Swaen*, as no dependence can be placed on the arrival of the *Hellevoetsluys*. These vessels are to leave not later than 10 days hence. As chief commander of the expedition was appointed Jacob de Geus, skipper of the *Vryheyt*, with the title of skipper-commander.

Troops were embarked on the ships on 10/11 December and it was noted that “A remarkable courage and dauntless heart were observed among them”. After a storm, the squadron eventually left the Cape on 13 December 1672 with a force of 110 guns and 634 men. The original idea to take St Helena was probably discussed in Holland before Goske’s departure because on 11 January a ship arrived with belated orders to cancel the action: “[..] if the expedition destined to St Helena had not yet left, it should be abandoned, and the ships sent to Batavia [Jakarta, Indonesia]”.

Meanwhile, at St Helena, much of the year that led up to the invasion had been troubled. Richard Coney was appointed Governor in 1669 but having failed to appoint an Executive Council was ruling in a dictatorial manner. In May 1672, the East India Company’s (EIC’s) Court of Committees received letters from the island’s minister and inhabitants complaining of “unjust and arbitrary proceedings”.⁷ Enquiries were made of candidates who could replace Coney and this led to the appointment of Anthony Beale. He had worked as a carpenter on the EIC ship *Return* and for the past nine months had been employed as a surveyor of Company ships.⁸ Beale boarded the East India Company’s ship *Humphrey and Elizabeth* (Captain Robert Medford, 400 tons, 36 guns) in June 1672. Given the recent outbreak of the war and anxiety about the vulnerability of St Helena’s defences to a Dutch attack, Beale’s ship was also loaded with 75 soldiers, 40 barrels of gunpowder, 30 great guns and 150 muskets. Captain Medford was instructed “to assist in bettering and furthering the fortifications there as the Governor [i.e. Anthony Beale] and Council shall desire, and to keep his ship in a good posture of defence in case of an attack by the enemy.” Beale arrived at the island on 16 November and work began to strengthen the fortifications. He was not to know, but he only had six weeks to prepare for an invasion.

Most English histories describe the lengthy and stout defence of St Helena when the Dutch invaded. This may be a fiction, there being obvious signs that Beale and Medford put a positive gloss on the loss. For example, Beale’s report to the East India Company claimed the Dutch ships arrived on 20 December and took the island after 10 days of determined defence⁹ whereas the Dutch records show their ships arrived on 29 December but were delayed landing 300 men due to contrary winds. They finally took the island on 1 January 1673 with little resistance.¹⁰ The EIC ship *Surat Merchant* (26 guns) accompanied by the French ship *Vautour* (36 guns) fortuitously arrived in a weakened condition at Jamestown (or Fort Town as it then seems to have been called) during the course of this invasion and joined the *Humphrey and Elizabeth* at anchor. This joint force of 96 ship guns combined with the fortress guns might at least have slowed down the invasion; this was probably a microcosm of Singapore in 1942 where most of the guns were pointing out to sea. Once it was realised Dutch forces had landed at Old Woman’s Valley and were marching towards the town, the island’s guns were spiked. This was a temporary measure which could probably be remedied by the Dutch in days.¹¹ Whilst most of the population boarded the two EIC and the French ships, many slaves seem to have been left behind, but John and Grace Coulson managed to take Oliver and his family with them aboard the *Humphrey and Elizabeth*. The ships sailed for Brazil¹² in such haste that they cut and left four anchors behind, these being retrieved by the Dutch and landed back on the island.¹³ Communications were slow – it was three months after the invasion that *Vliegende Swaen* finally arrived back at the Cape from St Helena on 5 March and brought news that it had succeeded:

Captain Bredenbach having landed, brought the news of the happy conquest of the aforesaid Island, which had been taken without any resistance worth mentioning, for the enemy, fearing by God’s special dispensation the power of our arms, did not await our

arrival, but fled with all their movables to an English vessel of war sent from England with a reinforcement of 40 soldiers [actually 75] and ammunition, leaving behind them only a few poor husbandmen, who after the island had been completely taken possession of, came to us with a white flag to ask for pardon. In the captured forts only 29 metal and iron guns were found of different calibre, mostly all spiked, and a small quantity of ammunition and other lumber, etc. Moreover, God Almighty had also let fall into our hands the flute *Johanna Catharina* destined [which sailed] via Madagascar and Mozambique to Barbados with 240 slaves, and which had called at St Helena for refreshments. These slaves, obtained so unexpectedly, will come in very handy here.¹⁴

Later records in this journal show a few of the Barbados-bound slaves were kept St Helena, most being shipped back to the Cape where they suffered a high rate of mortality. Meanwhile, St Helena's inhabitants arrived at Brazil (port unknown) and the two English ships replenished their stores before sailing on to England. This gave the Coulson family time to sell off Oliver. Meanwhile, Governor Beale hired "a nimble Portuguese frigate", probably from a Mr Jacobs, to warn home-bound EIC ships that they would receive a hot reception from the Dutch if they tried to take their refreshment at St Helena.¹⁵ Maybe this was the reason he sailed to Brazil rather than back to England, perhaps even hoping he could somehow help retake the island from the Dutch. He certainly had sufficient foresight to seek out a good guide to the island. Beale will certainly have visited St Helena in the past but was unlikely to know the best landing points to discreetly land troops and retake the island. Oliver must have been recommended, so Beale persuaded his new owner to allow his newly purchased slave to join the frigate crew and sail to St Helena. Incidentally, to be this familiar with the island's geography and coastline implies Oliver must have lived there for some years, maybe for a significant part of the EIC's fourteen-years of occupation. It is unclear from the records whether the soldiers evacuated from St Helena also boarded the frigate.

The story of what happened next has been repeated in many histories, but its main source seems to have been the testimony of his former owner, Mrs Grace Coulson, on 29 March 1711.

Mrs Grace Coulson being examined declares that Black Oliver was her slave and also his wife and when the Dutch took the Island in 1672 they went to Brazil and there sold the said Oliver to an English merchant one Mr Abram by name. Capt. Anthony Beale and Capt. Metford commander of the *Humphrey and Elisabeth* hired a sloop¹⁶ at Brazil to come and cruise to the windward of this Island to give notice to all merchantmen that the Island was taken by the Dutch and they persuaded Mr Abram to let the said Oliver go in the aforesaid sloop because he knew the Island. Being upon her cruise to the windward of the Island they met with Sir Richard Munden to whom they gave notice as aforesaid and Black Oliver being well acquainted with the Island took him out of the sloop and ordered him to conduct his men into the country to retake the Island which he performed - for that good service Sir Richard Munden gave him his freedom and sent the money to his master to Brazil and five pound more than he paid for him. Mr. Coulson and his wife arriving in England with the said Black Oliver's wife the antient old Company bought her of them and sent her here to her husband and repaid Sir Richard Munden.¹⁷

To fund the cost of a frigate, Beale needed to have taken significant funds when he abandoned St Helena. After sailing from Brazil, Captain Metford must have taken the frigate to the southeast windward approach to St Helena. From here not only could all homebound ships from India be warned that the island was occupied by hostile Dutch forces but any ships

coming from England could also be intercepted – the normal course of any ship from England was to sail toward the Brazilian coast, then south to pick up westerlies taking them towards the Cape followed by a northerly loop to pick up the same southeast trade winds to the island as home-bound ships returning from India and the Far East. Beale probably arrived at his station sometime after 22 April 1673 because on that date four EIC ships from Surat unwittingly arrived at St Helena and came under fire by the Dutch. These ships were forced to steer to the West Indies to replenish their stores.¹⁸ In fact, it was not until 4 May that Beale's frigate saw any ships and this was a fleet from England commanded by Captain Richard Munden.

Munden was aboard the Royal Naval frigate *Assistance*.¹⁹ having sailed from Gravesend on 18 January 1673 with three other warships (the *William and Thomas*, the *Mary and Martha* and the *Levant Merchant*) and two fireships (*Eagle* and *Castle*).²⁰ He had first protected ten EIC merchant vessels on the first part of their voyage to India, parting company at St Jago (Santiago, Cape Verde Island). From there, he set sail on 3 February for St Helena. His orders were to meet up with a convoy of EIC ships returning from India and protect them back to England.²¹ By good fortune, he carried a force of soldiers, sent to further supplement the St Helena's defences against Dutch attack. En-route the fleet met severe storms and one of the fireships (*Eagle*, captained by Richard Kedgwin [also spelt as Keigwin]) had to be abandoned.

According to Munden's journal, Beale's frigate was sighted on 4 May 1672 at 2 am.²² Beale came aboard at 6 am, at which time St Helena could be seen in the distance on a compass bearing of 275° (i.e. to the northwest) and a little over 40 miles away.²³ Hearing details of the Dutch invasion of the island for the first time, Munden resolved to recover it by force, laconically commenting in his journal, "we having noe other business too doe". The ships lay to for the rest of that morning so as not to alert the Dutch. At 1 pm, Munden in *Assistance* with Oliver, Beale and Captain Kedgwin aboard crept closer to the island. By sunset, when they were at a distance of six leagues (16 miles), a "well manned and armed pinnace" was launched to allow Oliver and Kedgwin to inspect the Dutch defences at a close distance during the hours of darkness. Returning at 7 am on the morning of 5 May, they reported no Dutch ships anchored at James Bay (then normally called St Helena Road), so the town was only defended by land-based canons. Meanwhile, Munden's other ships had sailed forward overnight and joined Munden.

Oliver and Kedgwin accompanied 350 men onto the fireship *Castle* and the Portuguese frigate. Oliver's role was to guide the ships to a landing point that was unlikely to be guarded with paths that could be followed into Jamestown. By settling on an attack at Prosperous Bay, he proposed the troops should be landed on a dangerous beach and that they were then to clamber up the near-vertical cliffs – a truly heroic venture with shades of The Guns of Navarone. Kitching later wrote the following about the practicality of the landing:

The beach there is deceptive; landing in modern small boats can only be made at a rock, Kedgwin's Rock, and the nature of the beach, made up as it is of large stones, does not lead one to suppose that Kedgwin could have put his force ashore directly on it, particularly with the sea running which on 4 May Munden logged as a 'small gale'. If, as the evidence seems to indicate, Kedgwin began his landing at noon, he can hardly have completed it before sunset and the troops then had to scale the precipitous cliff ever since known as 'Hold Fast Tom', a very steep loose crumbling track, the last 100 ft. being sheer.²⁴



Holdfast Tom, Prosperous Bay

After this tricky beach landing, the ascent up the cliff must have been just as dangerous. Indeed, an analysis of island strongholds written in 1734 dismissed the need for strong defences at this point of the island:

There hath never been any guns here and the ascent of the hills is so difficult that Jonathan Higham who is now living among us who was one of the men that formerly retook this country from the Dutch and was then a soldier has often affirmed that though they landed 200 men there yet if 20 men with firearms had opposed them they should not have been able to have got up the Hills and there are many people of this country that cannot go up or down in that place now.²⁵

After somehow clambering up to the top, the force approached Jamestown overnight from the east, finally arriving at 11 am the next morning²⁶ only to be warned by a trumpet that the fortress had already surrendered to Munden's ships the previous day. The sea attack succeeded despite Munden's impulsive exposure to the shore guns for a full hour before his other ships arrived. The latter only arrived at nightfall but on seeing the full English naval force the Dutch hauled down their colours. Back at the Cape, the Dutch heard the gloomy news that they had lost the island a month and a half later, on 24 July.

The *Castlere* joined the other ships and Beale's Portuguese frigate was sent to its earlier station windward of the island to look out for either Dutch reinforcements or home-bound merchant ships, both expected to arrive soon. Five days later, on 11 May, the Dutch ship *Europa* was captured, carrying a new Governor for the island. Then five EIC merchant ships arrived and Munden followed his original instructions, to protect them on their voyage back to England. The convoy left St Helena on 26 May and en-route captured two further Dutch ships approaching Ascension. As also instructed, he left his force of soldiers to

garrison the island and build defences [at Munden's Point and Lemon Valley]. He appointed Captains Kedgwin and Field (Captain of *Levant Merchant*) as Acting Governor and Deputy Governor.

Before his departure, Munden was sufficiently impressed by Oliver's service to not only reward him with liberation but also to promise the same for his wife and children, now living with the Coulson family in England. Whether Munden actually had authority to grant this extended favour is not known, but he was received with great joy and favour back in England, rewarded with a knighthood and his full decision regarding Oliver's family was ultimately sanctioned by the EIC in London.

His Majesty hath been pleased to Confer the Honour of Knighthood upon Captain Richard Mundy, in consideration of the eminent Service performed by him, in the Retaking *St. Helena*, and the taking at the same time, the Three Dutch East-India Prizes, Having been recommended to his Majesty by the Right Honourable *George Lord Berkeley of Berkeley*; his Lordship being known to be an Eminent encourager of Trade, and a great Lover of Merchants and Seamen.

The London Gazette, 8-11 December 1673

News took an interminable time to arrive in England in the years of sail. Having sailed from Brazil, the *Humphrey and Elizabeth* and *Surat Merchant* with the inhabitants of St Helena arrived at Portsmouth on 22 May 1673 with the first news that the Dutch had taken the island six months earlier, much to the consternation of both the EIC and the British Government.²⁷

The EIC directed that "that many of the inhabitants of St. Helena who came home in the Company's ships are in great want, the Court direct the Shipping Committee to give them such relief as they think needful."²⁸ That some islanders were rendered destitute is demonstrated by a petition from the inhabitants of Poplar and Blackwall who complained they were having to support Mary Harper and her three children after her return from St Helena – she was described as being in great distress and was eventually given £2 from the EIC poor box.²⁹ Formerly the wife of a planter, she is not thought to have returned to the island.

In London, the authorities could only hope Munden's force would reverse the situation and this was confirmed on 16 August 1673 when the Dutch East India ship *Papenburgh* was captured and taken to London with news that it had passed St Helena and observed a number of English ships at anchor, apparently in possession of the island; Munden confirmed the news the following week when he returned on 22 August with his EIC convoy and three Dutch prize ships.³⁰

Plans were at once drawn up to return the planters back to the island.³¹ By October it was decided they should return to their old lands, their children and servants having free passage to the island. A long letter from the EIC dated 19 December 1673 went out in these ships with

detailed instructions on the future administration of the island, including the terms of freedom granted to Oliver and his family. The Coulsons were to be paid £18 to compensate them for the compulsory loss of Oliver's wife and daughters:

We have received an account from Sir Richard Munden that a certain negro was very serviceable in guiding those of the English that first landed in order to its retaking and that Sir Richard Munden redeemed him from a Portugal to whom he was sold - we have repaid the money to Sir Richard Munden and have also paid Mr Coleston (sic) £18 which he allegeth he disbursed in charges for the negroes wife and his two children so that we have sent the said negroes wife and his two children over to him as free planters and do order that he receive land and two cows as other planters with all privileges as a reward of his service and the encouragement of faithfulness.³²

Both the Coulson and Oliver families boarded one of two ships - the *European* (82 passengers) and *John and Alexander* (33 passengers).³³ Carrying the island's new population, the ships joined an EIC convoy off the Downs for the first part of the voyage to St Helena. The list of passengers included a group of "12 Negro company servants", which presumably included Oliver's family, whilst the Coulson family once again included John and Grace and their three children. A third ship, *Loyal Merchant*, which left England sometime after 31 December 1673, carried a further 40 planters, 20 young women (maybe sent in the hope of increasing the population) and provisions.³⁴ The Third Anglo-Dutch War ended a couple of months later in February 1674.

Following their arrival at St Helena, each family of planters was given 20 acres of land "rough and smooth" plus two cows and provisions enough to last nine months. Oliver was assigned land in the Longwood district.³⁵ So far as the records show, he was treated no differently from other planters. The EIC directed that consideration should be given to "how the Company's plantation negroes and beasts may be disposed of".³⁶ Putting to one side the fact that cattle and slaves were treated as having equal status, the fact that sufficient slaves were available for distribution implies some were left behind when the Dutch invaded, their number supplemented by those destined for Barbados and captured by the Dutch. It is not known whether Oliver was also given slaves - it would be surprising if he was!

It is impossible to know how the Coulson family felt about the elevation of Oliver and his family from slavery to equal status to them as planters. All that can be said for certain is that a dozen years later Oliver and his former master were both present during a mutiny on 21 October 1684.

The Dennison mutiny arose from a background of general resentment that a wide range of taxes had been imposed on the civil population in the early 1680s by Deputy Governor Robert Holden. These ranged from taxes on imported goods through to a poll tax on the number of household members, slaves and cattle. The mutiny was precipitated by an argument between Holden and a soldier named Allen Dennison on 8 October 1684 resulting in him being imprisoned. According to testimony given at the military trial, eight days later, a soldier called William Bowyer led a large group of 20 soldiers to Fort James. To the rear were 20-30 civilians, including John Coulson who had formerly owned Oliver. Coulson was now a prominent man having served on the governing Council 1673-1681 before Governor Blackmore dismissed him.³⁷ As will be seen, slaves may have witnessed the scene but there is nothing in the records that suggest they participated in what followed. Arriving at the upper mount of the fort, Bowyer and other soldiers at the front tried to break down the door and take

Governor Blackmore and members of his Council as prisoners. Sheltering inside the fort, Blackmore ordered his soldiers to open fire, killing three and injuring fourteen others of the crowd outside. Oliver was one of those killed. His former master John Coulson was imprisoned. A year later in October 1685 he was hung with four other civilians.³⁸ Those widowed by these events were allowed to remain on the island but their land and houses were sequestered to the EIC and they were ordered to pay rent. Falling in arrears, Grace Coulson was taken to court in 1690 but refused to make payment, storming out of court with the words, “you may do what you will and turn me with my children out of doares I am bleeding every day and you may as well hang me as you did my husband”.³⁹

Most histories seem to assume that because he was shot and killed, Oliver must have been one of the mutineers.⁴⁰ Given his important role in helping the authorities to recover the island from the Dutch, this denouement certainly makes for a good story but there are two reasons why it seems wrong. Firstly, as discussed more fully below, Oliver’s son John sold 20 acres of land to John Worrall⁴¹. He could not have done this if the land had been sequestered. In other words, the authorities do not seem to have regarded Oliver as a mutineer. Secondly, apart from Oliver, all of those killed or injured appear to have been slaves, yet there is nothing in the records to suggest that slaves were in any way involved in the mutiny. Had they been the survivors would certainly have received savage sentences from the courts. Documents relating to the death of Oliver and the storming of Fort James have been examined by Professor Stephen Royle.⁴² A section of papers from the Orme Manuscripts at the British Library includes a petition to Parliament describing the distress of the civil population as a result of Holden’s measures to impose new taxes and a protestation at the execution of John Coulson and others. The bottom of the page was torn off so there was no signature. On the reverse was the statement: “3 Kild upon spot and 14 wounded by a great gun from ye castle wall and small shot”. Below were listed eleven names and a large black ink blob, which may have obscured other names.

Will	Robin	Bi... un?
Jack Snr	Set	Harry
Jack Junior	Pedar	Neptune
Seiper	B... (Black Oliver?)	

There is a suggestion of a name beginning with the letter “B” which may have been for “Black Oliver” but it is impossible to say. Where they are legible, all the names were forenames. This looks to me like a list of slaves because both forenames and surnames would have been listed for soldiers or planters. However, there seems to be a contradiction here. If the slaves took no part in the mutiny, why were they the target of the guns?

Precisely what happened will never be known but it is suggested that the troops inside the fort may have been unwilling to aim at their fellow soldiers, preferring to shoot over their heads instead. Maybe that meant groups of slaves watching the scene beyond the rioters were in the line of fire. Did Oliver have the misfortune to stand amongst them?

An interesting point in the research was reached when the lives of Oliver’s children were examined. There are two records for the baptism of his daughters at St James Church:

- Mary Oliver baptised 10 January 1686 - “father Black Oliver, planter”.
- Martha Oliver baptised 15 May 1692 - “father Black Oliver, guide in taking island”.⁴³

Sharp-eyed readers will see a major discrepancy here because Oliver was supposedly shot and killed in October 1684, yet neither of these later records imply he was deceased. Whilst this initially raised the question of whether the date of Oliver's death was correct, further investigation showed that Mary gave birth to a child only six years after her baptism and Martha five years later. Probably in both cases, the clergy realised they had not been baptised as infants so on different years frogmarched them to the font for the service to be conducted. It seems likely that these were the two daughters taken to England with their mother back in 1673.

Oliver seems to have been held in great esteem by the men he helped retake the island. Although nothing has been found to suggest he suffered prejudice from other planters, attitudes certainly hardened toward his children after the 1684 mutiny. All but two of his children were born free and, as will be seen, several were able to read and write letters to one another. It is suggested their difficulties arose less from having black skins and more because this was a small civil population trying to cope with a rising number of slaves. The possibility of a slave uprising was a constant fear. Interactions between slaves and freed slaves probably needed to be discouraged. By 1723, a census recorded seventeen "Free Blacks", the number having grown following the emancipation of several other slaves. That same year, the planters raised a petition protesting at "the inconveniences of having free blacks". This problem was recognised by the EIC who directed that all newly liberated slaves must in future leave the island by the first available ship.⁴⁴

Nothing is known about Oliver's wife and only a little about his children. That John Oliver (or "Black" Jack) sold his father's 20 acres of land was revealed in a tithe case held on 29 March 1711 when William Coales claimed ownership of the land. Coales claimed his father Henry had bought it in 1697 from John Worrall, who had acquired it from Jack Oliver.⁴⁵ It was on this occasion that Grace Coulson testified and related the story of how Oliver had gained his freedom.

Shortly after his father's death, Jack Oliver was taken on by John Matthews (planter) as a servant or apprentice.⁴⁶ On 12 March 1690, he was accused of "offering to ravish a young girl of about 8 or 9 years old."⁴⁷ He seems to have protested his innocence too stoutly when the accusation was put to him in front of the Governor and Council. No evidence was presented but "he very audaciously not only peremptorily denied the same but behaved himself very impudently as if by his boldness he would prove himself guiltless". It was ordered, "he should be imprisoned and have irons put on him for his bold audacious carriage before ye Govr and Council". When the case went to court, the jury acquitted him but without any explanation, the Court ordered he should be flogged anyway.⁴⁸ Anna Winterbottam has suggested in her thesis that the court went still further by enslaving Jack.⁴⁹ Three years later, he was in trouble again having been accused of spreading rumours about a slave called Jack lying with the wife of Daniel Collier. Once again, the court dismissed these charges, although the slave was duly whipped with 61 lashes at the gallows.⁵⁰

Jack had several sisters of whom Mary and Martha's baptisms have already been mentioned. It has been suggested that Martha had a child in 1697, the father being Gabriel Powell, a man with a notorious reputation of cruelty to his slaves.⁵¹ A couple of years later, she was recorded arriving at Bencoulen, Sumatra having been deported from St Helena. She arrived there on 28 November 1699, "a free Black woman with two small children (one but 14 daies old)". She

remained at Bencoulen for at least two years because a letter dated 1671 from her addressed to Will Oliver is held at St Helena Archives— he is assumed to be another brother.

Church records show Mary Oliver's first child was baptised in 1692. In total, seven of her children were baptised in the period 1692-1718 and on three occasions she was named as "Black" Mary Oliver.⁵²

According to Anna Winterbottam, Oliver had a third daughter, Mercy (or Marcy) who was publicly whipped for having an illegitimate child.⁵³ Certainly, there is a record that Mercy Oliver's daughter Mary (aged 15 and therefore born about 1697) was belatedly baptised at St James Church in 1712 and in this Mercy was described as a "Free Black". No attempt has been made to track the line of successive generations of the Oliver family, but church records suggest Oliver's descendants continued to live on the island another two centuries, up to the 1870s.

To date, Oliver's story has been told in terms of his contrasting roles in recapturing St Helena and his mutinous action a dozen years later. In truth, in 1673 he was lucky to be at the right place in Brazil when Beale needed a guide, blessed that the Prosperous Bay landing succeeded several months later and most unfortunate if he indeed stood at the wrong place during a mutiny in 1684.

All ecclesiastical records were sourced from the Ancestors section of the Society's website. Thanks are due to Professor Stephen Royle for amplification of his examination of the Orme Manuscripts and to John Turner for use of the photo of Hold Fast Tom taken from <http://sainthelena.island.info>. All internet references were accessed in June 2019. URLs for many references below are given in condensed tinyurl format.

¹ Variations of the Coulson surname in the records range between Colston, Coltston, Colstons and Colson; Stephen A Royle, *The Company's Island: St Helena, Company Colonies and the Colonial Endeavour* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 175.

² The original source for the Abrams story quoted in various histories is Grace Coulson's testimony in 1721 [Hudson Ralph Janisch, *Extracts from the St Helena Records* (St Helena: Benjamin Grant, 1885), 97–98.

³ R. Hutton, 'The Making of the Secret Treaty of Dover, 1668-1670', *The Historical Journal* 29, no. 2 (1986): 297–318.

⁴ Julia Mary Cartwright Ady, *Madame: A Life of Henrietta, Daughter of Charles I and Duchess of Orleans* (London: Seeley and Co., 1894), 345, <https://tinyurl.com/y57o3why>.

⁵ Ethel Bruce Sainsbury, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes Etc. of The East India Company 1671-1673* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 239, <https://tinyurl.com/y8qwc5y>; G. C. Kitching, 'The Loss and Recapture of St Helena, 1673', *The Mariner's Mirror* 36, no. 1 (1 January 1950): 58–68; C. R. Boxer, 'The Third Dutch War in the East (1672–4)', *The Mariner's Mirror* 16, no. 4 (1 January 1930): 362; John Hunt, *Dutch South Africa: Early Settlers at the Cape, 1652-1708* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing Limited, 2005), 96.

⁶ H. C. V. Leibbrandt, *Precis of the Archives of the Cape of Good Hope: Journal, 1671-1674 & 1676* (Cape Town: W.A. Richards & Sons, 1902), 93, 96, <https://tinyurl.com/ycg57bnj>.

⁷ Sainsbury, *Calendar of Court Minutes, 1771-3*, 123.

⁸ Ethel Sainsbury Bruce, *A Calendar Of The Court Minutes Etc Of The East India Company-1668-1670* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 25, <https://tinyurl.com/y5pvcfhg>; Sainsbury, *Calendar of Court Minutes, 1771-3*, 125.

⁹ Sainsbury, *Calendar of Court Minutes, 1771-3*, 239.

¹⁰ Kitching, 'The Loss and Recapture of St Helena, 1673'; Boxer, 'The Third Dutch War in the East (1672–4)', 362.

¹¹ Louis de Tousard, *American Artillerists Companion, or, Elements of Artillery: Treating of All Kinds of Firearms in Detail*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: C. and A. Conrad and Company, 1809), lxxiv, <https://tinyurl.com/y2b5jffm>.

¹² Kitching stated (no source given) that the ships sailed to Iseyhe in Brazil, an unknown location. Perhaps the port was actually the South Atlantic port of Ilhéus. [Kitching, 'The Loss and Recapture of St Helena, 1673'].

¹³ Sainsbury, *Calendar of Court Minutes, 1771-3*, 290.

¹⁴ Leibbrandt, 116.

¹⁵ A bill of exchange drawn on the EIC by Captains Metford and Beale payable to a Mr Jacobs was accepted on 18 June 1673. [Sainsbury, *Calendar of Court Minutes, 1771-3*, 245]. It is presumed this was for the hiring of the frigate. The alternative suggestion [Kitching, 'The Loss and Recapture of St Helena, 1673', 62.] that this was for the purchase of Black Oliver seems less likely.

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- ¹⁶ EIC records refer to a frigate and Mrs Grace Coulson in her testimony to a sloop. During this period, a frigate was classified by the Royal Navy as a fifth or sixth-rate ship and the smaller sloop was unrated – Wikipedia, Rating system of the Royal Navy, <https://tinyurl.com/yxrxg4zo>.
- ¹⁷ Hudson Ralph Janisch, *Extracts from the St Helena Records*, 97–98.
- ¹⁸ Sainsbury, *Calendar of Court Minutes, 1771-3*, 256. Beale was accompanied by four men (John Allen, John Catneys, Edward Major, and Thomas Kennington) who later petitioned the EIC in London for compensation – a payment of £10 was distributed between the four men [Sainsbury, 275.
- ¹⁹ *Assistance* was a 40-gun fourth-rate Royal Navy frigate, originally built for the Commonwealth navy at Deptford and launched in 1650. It was eventually sunk as a breakwater in 1745 [Wikipedia, <https://tinyurl.com/y448yqqk>].
- ²⁰ Fireships, Wikipedia article - <https://tinyurl.com/yxvlo2lm>.
- ²¹ John Fryer, *A New Account of East India and Persia*, ed. William Crooke, vol. 1 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1912), 31, <https://tinyurl.com/ykqvz7wc>. Sainsbury, *Calendar of Court Minutes, 1771-3*, 189, 204.
- ²² Sainsbury, *Calendar of Court Minutes, 1771-3*, 315–17.
- ²³ Munden's journal stated: "Wee then saw the Land bareing W¹/₂N and dista about 12 Leags". For bearing and distance conversions see <https://tinyurl.com/y3kkv6re>; <https://tinyurl.com/y5e22dxl>.
- ²⁴ Kitching, 'The Loss and Recapture of St Helena, 1673'.
- ²⁵ Hudson Ralph Janisch, *Extracts from the St Helena Records* (St Helena: Guardian Office, Benjamin Grant, 1885), 174.
- ²⁶ Sainsbury, *Calendar of Court Minutes, 1771-3*, 316.
- ²⁷ Sainsbury, 107.; *The London Gazette*, 26-29 May 1673, <https://tinyurl.com/svutt5m>.
- ²⁸ Sainsbury, 242.
- ²⁹ Sainsbury, 251, 261.
- ³⁰ Sainsbury, 257.; *The London Gazette*, 14-18 August 1673, <https://tinyurl.com/tsq7a82>; *The London Gazette*, 8-11 December 1673, <https://tinyurl.com/ss2u5zv>.
- ³¹ Sainsbury, 260, 262, 269.
- ³² Hudson Ralph Janisch, *Extracts from the St Helena Records*, 1–4.
- ³³ Ethel Sainsbury Bruce, *A Calendar Of The Court Minute Etc. Of The East India Company 1674-1676* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 5, <https://tinyurl.com/y9cectvs>.
- ³⁴ Sainsbury, *Calendar of Court Minutes, 1771-3*, 299, 304; Royle, *The Company's Island*, 47, 175.
- ³⁵ Oliver and his family probably lived in a simple dwelling but in later years a house called Walbro (also known as Rose Cottage) was built on his land. William Balcombe would lease the land to feed the French during the early Napoleonic period and Count Las Cases was detained at this location before his expulsion by Governor Hudson Lowe. [G. C. Kitching, *A Handbook and Gazetteer of the Island of St Helena Including a Short History of the Island under the Crown 1834-1902* (St. Helena: GC Kitching, 1937), 41; Percival Leslie Teale, 'Saint Helena: A History of the Development of the Island with Special Reference to Building Civil & Military Engineering Works' (Durban, University of Natal, 1972), 2.82, <https://tinyurl.com/y5jleljm>.] It has also been claimed that Oliver's land was used to propagate the island's first crops of New Zealand flax, Phormium tenax. [*St Helena: Almanack and Annual Register*, 1913, 85.]
- ³⁶ Sainsbury, *Calendar of Court Minutes, 1771-3*, 296.
- ³⁷ Royle, *The Company's Island*, 115.
- ³⁸ Royle, 114–20; Hudson Ralph Janisch, *Extracts from the St Helena Records*, 30–32.
- ³⁹ Hudson Ralph Janisch, *Extracts from the St Helena Records*, 50. The three Coulson three daughters later appealed to the House of Commons who resolved that the execution of John Coulson had been unlawful. [Journal of the House of Commons' 10 (23 January 1690): 341; <https://tinyurl.com/y57rgnlm>.]
- ⁴⁰ T. H. Brooke, *History of the Island of St Helena, from Its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1823.*, 2nd ed.. (London: Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allen, 1824), 122; Kitching, 'The Loss and Recapture of St Helena, 1673', 66.
- ⁴¹ Possibly Corporal (later Sergeant) John Worrall who married Eleanor Allis in 1709 by whom he had two children in 1711 and 1714 and sold a house known as Walter Morris in Jamestown in 1718 [St James Church records; [Teale, 'Saint Helena', 3.40].
- ⁴² Royle, *The Company's Island*, 117 Also, private communication from Professor Royle.
- ⁴³ Witwatersrand University website, St James Baptism Register 1680-1807, page 2, 4; <https://tinyurl.com/yy9xdtlg>.
- ⁴⁴ Colin Fox, *A Bitter Draught - St Helena: The Abolition of Slavery 1792-1840* (Elveden, Norfolk: Society of Friends of St Helena, 2017), 7, 213–15.
- ⁴⁵ Hudson Ralph Janisch, *Extracts from the St Helena Records*, 97–98.
- ⁴⁶ Royle, *The Company's Island*, 100.
- ⁴⁷ The girl was identified as Leah Isaack [Robert Colquhoun, *Yamstocks, Brushmakers and Latter-Day Saints: The Isaacks of St Helena and Their Descendants* (London? R. Colquhoun, 1998), 46.]
- ⁴⁸ Royle, *The Company's Island*, 101; Hudson Ralph Janisch, *Extracts from the St Helena Records*, 49.
- ⁴⁹ Anna E. Winterbottom, 'Company Culture: Information, Scholarship, and the East India Company Settlements 1660-1720s' (Queen Mary, University of London, 2010), 228, <https://tinyurl.com/y4tdz46f>.
- ⁵⁰ Robert Colquhoun, *Yamstocks, Brushmakers and Latter-Day Saints*, 45–47.

⁵¹Winterbottam, 'Company Culture', 228. All ecclesiastical baptism records for 1697 - 1698 are missing, details of this birth being sourced from St Helena Archives, *Consultations*, Vol. 4, fol. 57, 5 April 1697.

⁵² Witwatersrand University website, <https://tinyurl.com/yy9xdtlg>.

⁵³Winterbottam, 'Company Culture', 128.