

# BOOTHBY'S ARRIVAL\*

by Ian Bruce

The following text will be of interest to anyone who has been landed on St Helena's wharf in rough seas. The island's boatmen know their business, skilfully depositing passengers safely in the most swollen waters. Richard Boothby would have been grateful to have had some of these with him when he landed in December 1630. One excessively long paragraph has been broken into several shorter ones but otherwise the text is reproduced exactly with all its peculiar punctuations and spellings.<sup>1</sup>

After three months or more abode at *Madagascar*, we set sail to visit via Cape Bona Esperanza [Cape of Good Hope, Portuguese name is Cabo da Boa Esperança]; where arriving the Salvages brought us foure Cowes and some other small refreshments, which they sold us for Iron hoops, and peeces of brasse, and made shew to bring us more speedily. But the next day two Dutch shis [ships], coming out of *Holland* laden with Souldiers for the Southern parts of India, the Soldanians, or Upland men never came more at us; yet we had the daily company of a few poore Sea borderers, that hung about us for reliefe, such as we cast away, who feed also upon Whale, or other dead fish, lying long, and stinking on shore.

Having spent above three weeks time in expectation of refreshments from the Natives, and seeing none came, we resolved to set sail to *St Helena* in our way homeward: where arriving, and at our first landing, we under-went much hazard by reason of the violence of surging waves neere shore, and in the landing we lost two Boats, and divers men, yet some men got ashore, not without great hazard, and divers returned back to the ships, not daring to adventure, as my two adversaries in chief.

Those of note that got first ashore, were Captain *Weddall*, Captain *Swanly*, Mr. Greg. Clement, and my self: for my own part, I found great cause to give God thanks for two great deliverances, the one in landing, the other in getting a ship-boord again. The first that led the way was Captain *Weddall* who leaping out of the boat so soon as the rising waves brought the Boat to the height on shore, and falling off again, by speedy haste, got on firm ground, and yet not very dry: And after him followed Captain *Swanly* and Mr. *Clement*, in more danger, the rage of the waters more and more increasing, and I my selfe very timorous to adventure but two lusty strong Sailers, (to whom, as to all the ships company, I was much indebted for their loving respects, though I was not able to requite their courtesies (especially in great dread by a leak ship, the Sailers though they threatened to make the Captain and Merchants to take their turns at the Pump, yet would free me, many offering to supply my turn at the Pump as long as life or strength lasted in them) gave me great incouragement, adventuring themselves into the sea some depth to catch me leaping out of the bloat, & each taking me by the hand, we all run violently together to get out of the fury of the returning waves, and so by Gods blessing, though washed up above the middle, got safe on firm ground where we presently saw spectacles of great grief, two Boats with many men in them overturned with the violence of the waves, & the men lost with the Boats, and two who striving as we had done, to get ashore, were washed off into the Sea, and by Gods great mercy cast ashore again by another great raging wave, and left upon the sands; which the Mariners ashore perceiving, ran speedily unto them, catching them by the legges or armes, or any part of them, and so ere the surging flood returned, drew them out of the force of the raging waves, where they lay as dead men; but it pleased God that by the pains of the Sailers, and strong waters, that some had about them they in the end recovered: the one was a Salvadge [savage], or native of *Madagascar*, an ancient man, who with his sonne, were desirous to saile along to visit

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England; and the other was a very honest man, of good worth and credit, by name Mr. *John Hammerton*, yet living, and keeping a Cooks shop, and victualling house at *Pye-Corner*, neer *Smithfield*.<sup>2</sup>

Here about forty or fifty being gotten ashore, were put to our shifts for three dayes and three nights, to get meat, for none could be landed for us from the ships, for which the Sailers took marvellous great pains to catch lean Hogges, and Goats, with the help of one or two Persia Greyhounds<sup>3</sup>, brought whelps from thence, wherof one was mine, did stand us in great stead; but the men wanting shooes, were so galled with running upon rocks, that many were very lame. And so with such poore provision, wanting bread (yet not fresh water) we spent that time, untill in the end newes was brought us, that some more men were got ashore, and had more safe landing, which we taking good notice of, made haste out of the Island, to endeavour to get again on ship-board.

But coming to take Boat, we found the danger as great, or greater, than in the landing; and the chiefe means we had to get to our Boats, was by the help of a high steep rock, bending hollow into the Sea, to get into the top, of which one at a time was to take the opportunity of the fall of the Sea between the rock and the shore; and so in that *interim*, to get upon the top of the rock, whither our foresaid Captains, Mr. *Clement* and myself happily attained but another young man, not making so much haste or speed, was washed away ere he could attain the rock, and never seen after: we sate a good while in great danger upon the rock, the waves arising often to the very top consulting how to get into the Boat.

And Mr. *Elmor*, the Master under Captain *Weddall* advised the Captain to take the opportunity of the Boats rising with the water, to leap into the Boat. But the Captain held that way dangerous, for fear lest the Boat should hit a against the rock, and so split, and so cast away all the men in her also: and therefore he stripping himselfe into his linnen breeches, and getting hold of the end of a long line from the Boat, made it fast under his armes, the men in the Boat holding one end of the line, and we upon the rocks the other end, and so leaping into the Sea got safely into the boat, whom the Master wisely advised to be carried off into another Boat out from the raging of the waves, neer shore, whilst he endeavoured to fetch off the rest.

Which done, Captain *Swanly* approved of the Masters way: and so at the rising of the Boat with the wave, to the top of the rock, leapt into the Boat (prudently kept off from striking against the rock) and so escaped into the other Boat. And Mr. *Clement* took the next turn and likewise got well off: my turn coming, the Master and Sailers encouraged me to the same way, promising to stand ready to catch me with all the help; so also I adventured, & by their great assistance, to whom I acknowledge much thankfulness, not forgetting Gods great mercy, I also got safe into the other Boat, and at last into the ship *Jonah*. But I was no sooner off, but Mr. *Clements Blackamore* of *India*, having gotten upon the rock, was by the violence of a great wave over-topping the rock, washed into the Sea; but he skilfull in swimming, was also by the industry of the Mariners, saved.

And thus, God be praised, we and many others got safe aboard again: but the next day or one or two days after, the raging of the waves, occasioned either by wind or tide, or both, we had good passage to and again from ships to shore, for a months time, refreshing our selves in the uninhabited island, with Hogges, Goats, and Fish. The relation whereof I have been the more prolix, willing to give admonition to others that shall come after, to be cautious if they find their landing dangerous, in which Island I with my Countrey-men had a plantation, and my selfe among them in so pleasant, healthful, fruitfull, and commodious a place for trading with all Nations at their return out of *India*, and so invincible and impregnable, being once (though but easily fortified) that one hundred men may easily oppose and defend themselves against one hundred thousand, and a matter of no great charge, that I am perswaded some ones mans estate in England is able to perfect that business; to whole endeavours, if at any time attempted, I with all prosperous and happy success. So here, after a merry Christmas kept,

with such homely fare as the place would afford, (it being our last place of Rendevous in this long voyage, we took our leave one of another in both ships, untill it should please God to send us safe arrival at our desired port, our on happy native Countrey of England.[..]

Boothby was sparing with his dates and reference has needed to be made to EIC Calendar State Papers to establish a precise timeline.<sup>4</sup> This also gave alternative name spellings of several participants - Captain Weddell, Captain Swanley and Gregory Clement. It also named Boothby's ship as *The Jonas*, an unusual name for superstitious sailors to crew.

Arrival at Saint Augustin, Madagascar	June 1630.
Departure from Madagascar	1 October.
Arrival at Saldana Bay (north of Cape Town)	21 October.
Arrival of Dutch ships	5 November.
Departure from South Africa	17 November.
Arrival at St Helena	4 December.
Departure from St Helena	20 January 1631.

Based on his description of the island as a “pleasant, healthful, fruitful, and commodious” place, it has for almost a century been claimed that Boothby was the first to formally recommend that the East India Company should colonise St Helena.<sup>5</sup> This seems unlikely, his comment forming a single sentence of a 39-page tirade against the EIC and two of its officers who had imprisoned him and confiscated his goods. He certainly recommended that the East India Company should colonise Madagascar, sparing neither himself nor his readers in a 72-page pamphlet.<sup>6</sup> Had he in like manner recommended St Helena as a colony, it does not seem credible that he would limit himself to a single sentence. Again, nothing has yet been found in the EIC records that suggests Boothby in the slightest way influenced the decision to transport settlers and troops to St Helena 28 years later.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Boothby, *A True Declaration of the Intollerable Wrongs Done to Richard Boothby, Merchant of India, by Two Lewd Servants to the Honorable East India Company, Richard Wylde, and George Page. As Also a Remonstrance of the Partiall, Ingratefull and Unjust Proceeds of the India Court at Home, against the Said Richard Boothby, Etc* (London? Unknown Publisher, 1644), 21–24, <http://tinyurl.com/lmsp7z5>. Boothby was a merchant who invested £2,400 into the East India Company some time after 1615, sailed to Surat, India where his disputes with officials led to his imprisonment for six months, his property being confiscated [Gwyn Campbell, *David Griffiths and the missionary 'History of Madagascar'*, *Studies in Christian Mission*, v. 41 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2012), 416, <http://tinyurl.com/y9o7xwcb>]. He first drew up a long declaration of the “wronges, injuries, affronts and u[n]just proceedings” he had suffered in 1629 [Peter Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667*, ed. Richard Carnac Temple, vol. II (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1914), xx, <http://tinyurl.com/y722fk6b>].

<sup>2</sup> This is presumed to refer to Pye Corner, being the intersection of Cock Lane and Giltspur Street. A public house, the Fortune of War (demolished in 1910), occupied this corner and gained fame as one of the places where in 1666, some three decades after Boothby's visit to St Helena, the Great Fire of London was halted, saving all the houses along Cock Street. This is may be the only tenuous connection St Helena has with the Great Fire.

<sup>3</sup> Various Authors, *The Saluki - A Complete Anthology of the Dog* (Read Books Ltd, 2013), <http://tinyurl.com/lmbfg36>.

<sup>4</sup> William Noel Sainsbury, *Calendar of State Papers. Colonial Series, East Indies and Persia, 1630-1634* (London: HMSO, 2008), 141–54, <http://tinyurl.com/ya5pbuvf>.

<sup>5</sup> William Foster, ‘The Acquisition of St. Helena’, *The English Historical Review* XXXIV, no. CXXXV (1 July 1919): 281–89.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Boothby, *A Breife Discovery Or Description of the Most Famous Island of Madagascar Or St. Laurence in Asia Neare Unto East-India* (London: Printed by E.G. for John Hardest, 1646), <http://tinyurl.com/ya7y5h3k>.

<sup>7</sup> Ethel Bruce Sainsbury, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc. of the East India Company, 1655-1659* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), <http://tinyurl.com/ya6cr8r5>.