

The Voyage of the Silver Falcon

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In Autumn 1618, a 40-ton pinnace called the Silver Falcon lay at anchor in Dover Harbour. To modern eyes it would have been terrifyingly small to be a cargo ship on the transatlantic route, but that was the plan. The joint owners, Edward Lord Zouche and a merchant trader called Jacob Braems, intended it to sail to Virginia to set up a tobacco business. They would leave men there to plant tobacco and corn, and to trade for furs and salted fish.

The Virginia Colony had been established in 1607 but had a poor start. The first settlers were gentry and craftsmen, not farmers, and they contended with famine, disease, and often tense relationships with the native Americans. The local tobacco was dark and bitter, not at all to English tastes, but by 1613 a milder Spanish variant

was being sown, though the Spanish still claimed a monopoly on its trade to Europe. Yet from 1619, basic infrastructure was in place to export it, with ports, warehouses, and an inspection system.

Edward, the 11th Baron Zouche, was the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports and Constable of Dover Castle. He was also a Commissioner of the Virginia Company. He had been a royal ward in his teens, in the care of William Cecil, and held a string of public appointments throughout his life.

Jacob had arrived from Flanders towards the end of the 16th century, probably fleeing religious persecution, and settled in Dover. Two decades later he owned wharves and warehouses along a huge stretch of the dockside and his business was flourishing.



*11th Lord Zouche, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports
1615-25*

Aboard the Silver Falcon was a mariner called John Anthony. John had not been born in England. He was likely brought here by Henry Mainwaring, a ship's master. Mainwaring was, to put it politely, a privateer – an officially-sanctioned pirate. Henry was well-educated but, as a younger son, had to make his own fortune. After buying his first ship in 1612, he preyed on Spanish vessels off the coast of Morocco, seizing more than thirty ships and their cargoes. Unfortunately for him, relations between England and Spain became more friendly and James I set him an ultimatum: return to England, surrender the ships and he would receive a free pardon; otherwise, an English fleet would be sent to destroy him. He chose well, and Lord Zouche then employed him to oversee the construction of the Silver

Falcon, which was launched in August 1616. Mainwaring was knighted in 1618.

It seems possible that John Anthony was found aboard one of the seized Spanish ships, but he might also have met Mainwaring in one of his shore bases at Marmora or Tunis, or even arrived in England by another route. He speaks of Mainwaring as his “master,” in the sense of a working relationship. Certainly, by 1619 Anthony was described as “a mariner of the town and port of Dover” and was a sailor on the Silver Falcon.

In the early 17th century, Dover was an important port and trading centre, the “eye of the kingdom”, with a good, well-defended harbour and easy access both to continental Europe and routes west to Africa and the Americas. Dover was the leading member of the Cinque Ports and many of the 3,000 population were involved in seafaring. Although Henry VIII had spent a lot of money on the harbour, by 1550 the entrance was blocked by a bank of pebbles and shingle. Elizabeth I's commissioners initiated a new project to enclose a “pent” that filled with water at high tide. The outflow at low tide then scoured the entrance clear. The work took place during summer 1583 and, from then on, larger vessels could dock once more.

There were problems that autumn, 1618, that delayed departure; rumours of unrest in Virginia and a Spanish attack on the Governor, who was implementing the reforms of the Great Charter. Some mariners were reluctant to sail into danger; investors withdrew funds. Finally, the Silver Falcon got a warrant to travel to Virginia in February 1619 and sailed on 2nd March. There were twenty-five men on board, including John Anthony.

But the voyage did not go according to plan.

Instead of heading for Virginia, the ship met a Spanish frigate off Bermuda, carrying 20,000 lbs. of sweet tobacco grown in the Caribbean. Officially, it was traded for goods aboard the Silver Falcon, though the Spanish later claimed it had been stolen. It was certainly possible that the crew, picked by Mainwaring, had previously sailed with him, and learnt the skills of privateering. The Silver Falcon then returned to Europe, but not to Dover. It headed for Flushing in the Netherlands, which further fuelled the accusations of piracy.

Jacob Braems crossed the Channel to Flushing in haste and attempted to sell the tobacco to merchants from Amsterdam. His co-owner, Lord Zouche, was furious and dispatched the Mayor of Dover to Flushing to stop him. He confiscated most of the cargo and the Amsterdam buyers pulled out of the deal. Amid accusations and acrimony, the tobacco was left to rot. There was no profit for the owners and other backers; in fact, they lost money on the venture.

With no profits, the mariners could not be paid. John Anthony had been relying on his wages as he planned to invest them in goods to take on his next voyage, to sell or exchange for profit. Eventually, like the rest of the crew, he twice petitioned Lord Zouche and the Privy Council for payment and that is why we know about him - the legal paper trail. He was owed £30 back pay and says he owes, £3 for board and lodging and could not get further credit. He has, also pawned his best clothes but needed to provide for himself with winter coming, plus kit himself out for his next voyage. This was important; he could not go back to sea until he had his money, but he had no means of support while in port.

£30 was a good wage. Ordinary mariners earned up to £2.50 a month (far more than

a land-based labourer), specialists like boatswains or carpenters up to £5 per month. Sailors were also provided with meals aboard and often expected a share of the profits on a trading voyage (especially a privateer). They could also take goods aboard themselves, to trade on their own account. Anthony finally received his wages, plus interest of 17s/6d, in Spring, 1620.

What happened next?

Lord Zouche had James I to stay at his country estate, Bramshill, in 1620. He continued to hold public offices and remained involved with the Virginia Colony until his death in 1625. But since he had only daughters, the Barony then fell into abeyance until 1815.

Henry Mainwaring never achieved the status he felt he deserved. Zouche made him Lieutenant of Dover Castle "out of pity" but dismissed him a few years later since he was rarely there, accusing him of brawling in the streets and being a notorious womaniser. Whilst in that office, Henry wrote *The Seaman's Dictionary*, not published until 1644. He served one term as MP for Dover but attempts to get re-elected came to nothing. He later served in the Ship Money fleets, controlling piracy in the Channel, rising to vice-admiral. Mainwaring tried to improve his finances through marriage, but was outlawed for debt in 1641 and died, intestate, in 1653.

Jacob Braems established a dynasty in Dover. His son, Arnold, married into Kentish gentry, and joined him in the family business. Together, in 1623 they built a Custom House near the pier, which survived until 1806. The National Archives holds Jacob's Will, dated 2nd July 1641, which suggests a man of means, owning businesses and property and living comfortably.

As for John Anthony, the petitions give one more snippet of information. He is described as a "negar" in one, "blackmore" in the other, contemporary terms for an African. We might speculate whether he was discovered on the Spanish ship by Mainwaring as crew or as "cargo," since the Spanish were already trading in slaves. But whatever the English did overseas, it was never legally possible to be a slave here. In a court case of 1549, in which a master sought to justify whipping his slave, it was stated that "The air of England has long been too pure for a slave, and every man is free who breathes it." This is often misattributed to Lord Mansfield, who supposedly quoted it when giving judgement in the 1772 case *Somerset v. Stewart*, though it was more likely from a speech by the barrister William Davy. The words were taken to mean that enslaved people were free the moment they set foot in England though, in reality, by the 18th century many African servants were "owned" by their masters, to be bought and sold.

We can be certain Anthony was a free man as he was called "a mariner of Dover," was paid wages and was able to testify in court; he had the pride and confidence to take on a Baron and win. We see him and his life for a brief moment as he seeks justice and then he vanishes from the records again. Or does he? There is a John Anthony, a ship's carpenter and, later, ship builder, who married twice, had several children, sailed to Brazil, and made his Will in Lisbon in 1650 - but it is a common-enough name.

1619 is a significant date for the first permanent English colony established on the North American mainland. That year, an English privateer took twenty plus Africans (from the Kingdom of Ndongo, present-day Angola) from a Portuguese

slave ship and traded them in Virginia for provisions. By 1661, Virginia had passed a law allowing any free person to own slaves. But what if the voyage of the Silver Falcon had gone to plan and it had reached the colony first? What if the first African in Virginia had been a free man, a skilled mariner, a man of worth, with the

eloquence and confidence to speak up for his rights? Could John Anthony's mere presence have re-set the thinking of the first colonists, so that ever after they saw Africans as co-workers and fellow human beings, never as possessions? Could one sailor, a man from Dover, have changed the course of North American history?

Saving the Roman Forts

Dr. Brian Philp, MBE

Director, Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit

November 2021 will be the 50th Anniversary of the successful battle to prevent the total destruction of two major Roman forts under the York Street bypass. Our team of Kent Rescue Unit had battled for 140 days to discover and record two important Roman forts ahead of the construction of the York Street bypass. The earlier was that of the Classis Britannica naval fort with dozens of buildings and other structures surviving to a remarkable extent. This is the only Roman naval fort surviving across the Roman Empire.

The second fort, one of the late-Roman shore-forts, had been sought for over four hundred years, but eventually eliminated from the record doubt. Again, we found long lengths of the defensive fort walls, bastions and great defensive ditches had survived. Sadly, all were to be destroyed by the construction of the new bypass planned to be cut very deeply into the slope of the hill.

Such was the quality of the structures that the unit had to launch a fierce battle for preservation against strong opposition. However, good support came from across Kent and from the New Dover Group, the latter encouraged by Jack Woolford and Doug Crellin. Finally, the unit appealed to

the Government and won the battle on the very last day of operations and the A20 bypass was then raised six feet. A victory for Dover, Kent, and Britain. Our young active reporter of the day, Terry Sutton, raced to the site with the news of the victory and gave it front-page coverage in the good-old Dover Express. I have been an avid reader every week since then! Our excavations have continued across Dover ever since and have covered more than forty sites including the famous Roman Painted House. Most of the sites have already been published in four large volumes still on sale at the Roman House.



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