

THE 1625 CARRACK SHIPWRECK

This is the story of a Portuguese carrack that shipwrecked on the beach of Jamestown in 1625, leaving its 300-member crew stranded on the island for more than six months. Of course, place names differed in those days. The area where the island's chapel and buildings stood was known as *Agoada Nova* [meaning “new watering place”] by the Portuguese and as Chapel Valley by the English. The future King James II of England, after whom the emerging town would eventually be named Jamestown, was not born for another seven years, in 1633.

The ill-fated carrack bore the name *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* meaning Our Lady of the Conception. Considering her end at St Helena, she was probably deemed an unlucky ship by her crew. If so, this was also true of many other Portuguese vessels in the early 1620s. During that period, the annual Portuguese armadas en route to India experienced a series of unfortunate setbacks, including heavy losses from storms, perilous coastlines, and encounters with English and Dutch vessels.

For instance, the *Conceição* was among the eight ships that set sail from Lisbon on 31 March 1620.¹ Damaged by storms, she was unable to navigate around the Cape of Good Hope and eventually returned to Portugal on 17 September. Out of the seven remaining vessels, three met with shipwrecks, and only four successfully reached Goa.

The following year, in 1621, the Indian armada once more featured the *Conceição* in a fleet of ten ships. Setting sail from Lisbon on 29 April 1621, the fleet faced fierce storms yet again. On this occasion, she was one of the nine ships compelled to return to Portugal, returning on 6 October. Only one ship managed to reach Goa that year.

In 1622 the *Conceição* remained in Portuguese waters. Misfortune continued to plague the eight ships that set out on the voyage to India that year. Three vessels succumbed to shipwrecks, one was captured by Turkish ships and transported to Algiers, leaving only four to reach either Goa or Muscat successfully.

The *Conceição* formed part of the 1623 Indian armada, comprising eight ships. Departing from Lisbon on 24 March, their progress was slow, with the equator crossed on 1 June and the Cape rounded on 25 July. Only the galleon the *Santo Andre* managed to traverse the Indian Ocean before the monsoon reversed direction, reaching Goa within the same year. The remaining seven, including the *Conceição*, arrived too late (on 22 September) and had to anchor at Mozambique for six months until the new season. Among them, the pinnace *Nossa Senhora da Guia*, was late in arriving at Mozambique having been captured after a battle by the outward-bound East India ship *Coaster*. The Portuguese ships was damage by its capture that it was released as no longer worth keeping.

However, the Mozambique anchorage proved to be unsafe. Disaster struck on the night of 24 January 1624 when a squall led to the wreckage of three ships - the carrack *Santa Isabel*, the galleon *São Simão* and the pinnace *São Braz* – all being cast ashore. The four remaining ships eventually weighed anchor on 27 March and set sail for Goa, but then the luckless *Nossa Senhora da Guia* parted company and was wrecked on the Arabian coast. Thus, only the *Conceição* and two other ships - the carrack *São Francisco Xavier* and the galleon *Misericórdia* – successfully reached Goa on 24 May.

The 1624 Indian armada (eight ships) which left Lisbon on 25 March 1624) was either far luckier, or maybe they were better led, because it was neither delayed nor suffered any losses. Reaching

Goa the following on 2 September, the Portuguese now had 12 ships at anchor, of whom half were retained to en-gage with hostile Dutch shipping and to support in a blockade of Ormuz.

Of the remaining ships, three from the 1624 armada (*Cinco Chagas* [carrack], *Nossa Senhora da Quietação* [carrack] and *São João* [Galleon]) and three from the 1623 armada (*Nossa Senhora da Conceição*, *São Francisco Xavier* and *Misericórdia*) were loaded with a cargo of peppers, cloths and other goods. These ships set sail for Lisbon on 4 March 1625. They probably rounded the Cape without incident around May but then ran encountered heavy weather. This only damaged one ship, the *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* but this was so severe that its captain Dom Francisco de Sa only kept it afloat through constant pumping and the throwing of some cargo stacked on the deck overboard. Since the ship was not sufficiently seaworthy to reach Lisbon, it was decided, even despite, explicit instructions not to do so by the royal decree, that the best option was to beach the *Conceição* at St Helena.

The returning armada probably arrived off Chapel Valley Bay, today's Jamestown Bay, around the first week of June 1625. After warping the *Conceição* close inshore, part its cargo was distributed among the five other ships. In turn, these ships offloaded some munitions, equipment and food before setting sail for Lisbon, leaving the crew of the abandoned ship behind. This crew, said to comprise about 150 Portuguese and similar numbers of "blacks", now needed to make the ship seaworthy, defend themselves against hostile shipping and sustain themselves, both from their own and those of the island.

The crew now began the task of unloading the remaining cargo onto the beach, repairing the ship and making it seaworthy. However, this was interrupted within a few days by the arrival of the 1,000-ton Dutch ship *Hollandia* on 14 June, enroute from the East Indies to Holland. Trouble between the Portuguese and these newcomers was inevitable. In the past, the Portuguese had fought side by side as allies with Dutch and English forces against the Spanish. However, this changed in 1580 when the Portuguese monarchy was forcibly merged with that of Spain (until 1640). During this period, Holland was engaged in its 80-year War of Independence against Spanish rule. Consequently, after 1580, Dutch ships treated Portuguese vessels with the same degree of hostility as those from Spain. Similar comments can be made about the English in their two wars with Spain, from 1585–1604 and 1625–1630.

Hollandia was captained by Willem Isbrantsz Bontekoe and in his account, he evidently regarded the *Conceição* as a Spanish ship:²

'The 14th June came in sight of the same [St Helena], at which we did all rejoice. Ran close along the coast. On coming round the point, towards the Church Valley where the watering-place is, we saw a Spanish carack lying right before the Church valley. As soon as they saw us they brought out an anchor to the landward, and shortened in close to the shore, and immediately with the boats carried some guns on land and made a battery. We with the ship *Hollandia*, coming near them, ran into a whirlwind, for the coast is very steep and the winds whirled over the land. Therefore, we could not reach them for our intention was to board them, cut their ropes and pull them to sea. We could have done this, for she carried her guns so high that with our ship we could have lain under their shot. Had our intent succeeded, we doubted not to have mastered them; but by the said whirlwind we could not get closer than a musket shot to them'.

'We manned our yawl; sent the Junior-Merchant Herman de Coningh (he was from The Hague) with a peace-flag to them. Seeing that, they hastily manned their boat and came to meet our men in between the two ships. They hailed each other. Asked us from where we came. Our

men answered from Java and that we had drifted from our consort and awaited her every hour. Our men asked where they came from, they said from Goa. They asked further (seeing they occupied the watering-place) if they would permit us to come and fetch water, which we had much need of, and having that we should immediately depart. Upon which they shouted: “*Anda pero, Anda canaly*” [“Go away, you scoundrel/dog”] I, with many more abusive words. Then our men returned with the sloop to our ship and related to us what had happened’.

‘Thereupon we at once called the ship’s council together to consider what we should do. Resolved that the yawl should at once return and ask if they had determined whether we should come to fetch water or not, and if as before they would not consent thereto, then our men should return to the ship, and we give them so much time to consider as the length of one glass, and if ere it was run out they came and agreed to our request, then we would leave them in peace, and if not we should immediately fire away at them. With this resolution the yawl rowed again to them with the peace-flag. They came again with their boat to meet our men. In their boat ftood a monk with a hood on his head, who hailed our men. Our Junior Merchant De Coningh having said his speech was given a refusal as before: “*Anda pero, anda canaly*!”

* We do not want to see you here, begone”! Our men coming on board reported this to us. We then let the bell be rung, said our prayers, set a glass of half an hour in the socket and as soon as that same glass had run out and we saw no sign of their coming, we fired at them quickly with demi-cannons, of which we had eleven, and shot into the carack so that she shook, for she was easy to hit; their foeship or castle was, so seemed, as high as our fore-top, although we had a ship of 1,000 tons. We continued to shoot at them till they shot little more from the carack, but with the pieces which they had brought on land from the carack and set up on their battery, they shot steadily at our ship and hit her as if they had laid it in by hand. For each shot was one that touched us, two, three, four foot above the water, so that we feared they would sink us; we had several wounded. Among them our second carpenter by name Bokjen, of Dort, had both legs shot off; lived a little time, but died suddenly, by reason of which we could not remain lying there. Resolved to bring out an anchor on the shore-side where a reef lay.[†] We shortened in behind this reef till we were free of their shots from the battery’.

‘We lay so near the coast that one could have thrown a stone on to the land. Then came the night. We summoned all the officers to the cabin, with the steward; inquired of him how much water we still had, and reckoned over how much we required, knowing we had yet to pass the Equinoctial Line, and then it might still be a long time ere we came to Holland. We found accordingly that we could give no more than four mugs a day of water. So we asked the officers, and the officers spoke with the men what they thought - whether they would engage in a life and death fight to have water against the enemy who held the watering place, or should we continue our voyage home and be content with four mugs of water a day. This question therefore being put to all, it was agreed unanimously by all the officers and the whole ship’s crew to continue our voyage and be content with four cups of water a day. Immediately weighed anchor to set sail’.

‘But when it was day, as we were beginning to tow the ship out from the land, the Specks[‡] came up on the coast with musket and shot from above down into the ship and at the boat, so that it was scarce to be flood; yet (by God’s help) we got off the shore. Had we stayed there another hour, we should have been in great peril to lose many of our company’.

* in modern parlance this roughly translate as the challenge ‘Come on, try it Rascal.’

† Perhaps this was Mundens Point.

‡ Boats

The victorious Portuguese had little to celebrate because the Dutch bombardment had damaged the *Conceição* beyond repair. Tents and barricades were erected on the beach using silk and cotton goods from the cargo and the guns were mounted in a battery wedged by Indian clothing and other materials. Timbers were removed from the *Conceição*, and a blacksmith's forge was set up to construct a small sloop. This vessel was promptly dispatched to Bahia (now Salvador) in Brazil to request aid.

The Portuguese settled into their life on the island for the next six months. Towards the end of that period a new threat was developing at South Africa where three Dutch ships (*Maagd van Dort*, *Leeuwin* and *Weesp*) were anchored at Table Bay. Upon being joined by the English ship *Star*³ the captains decided to unite forces and sail back to Europe in convoy. While this collaboration was not unusual at the time, competing colonial and trade ambitions in the subsequent years would eventually lead to a breakdown in the relationship, ultimately resulting in three separate Anglo-Dutch wars. The four ships left Table Bay on 25 October, arriving at St Helena on 20 November. While it's possible that they took fresh water at Table Bay, it certainly seems to have been needed by the time they reached the island.

Full details of the English and Dutch side of the encounter at St Helena was written by a crew member of *Star*, possibly its chaplain because when the author later described the amputation of one of the crew's legs, he wrote 'I did read a prayer or two unto him.' This original description has been converted from archaic to modern English spellings and phraseology.

The apparent preference by the Portuguese for the English over the Dutch can be explained from the fact that at that time they had only received news of the courtship of the Infanta by Prince Charles (later King Charles I) in 1623. They were unaware that these negotiations later broke down, soon being followed by hostilities with the Anglo-Spanish War (1625-1630):

'The true account of an attack carried out by one English ship and three Dutch ships against a plantation of Portuguese in Chapel Valley at the island of St Helena is as follows':

20 November 1625:

'Between 6 and 7 PM we anchored with three Dutch ships in Chapel Bay at St Helena. Onshore in Chapel Valley, we saw a plantation of Portuguese. Due to misfortune, their ship was extraordinarily leaky and unable to navigate the seas, let alone complete the voyage to Spain. They were forced to put in here for the safety of their lives and goods. Their ship was hauled close to the shore. They greeted and welcomed our ship with 2 pieces of ordnance, which they discharged upon our anchoring. The Dutch had already anchored their ships an hour before we entered the road. Consequently, a consultation was held aboard the *Maid van Dort*, the Dutch admiral's ship, where our commanders were also present to discuss their actions.'

'It was decided to row a boat to the shore the next morning with a white flag of peace displayed, carrying one English and one Dutch merchant, both of whom could speak Portuguese, along with six men with small shot for protection, to negotiate with the enemy, learn about their forces and defences if the need arose, to understand who they were and understand their intentions. We would state that we had arrived to obtain refreshments, and these we must and would have, either through mutual agreement or, if necessary, by force of arms'.

21 November 1625

'About 8 AM, the above-mentioned party set out in our skiff towards the shore. They displayed a white flag, and every ship hoisted white ensigns on their poops. As the boat approached the shore, a small boat with three men on board came from the shore towards our boat. When they

were within hailing distance, the men in the canoe stopped rowing, and a Portuguese man stood up, addressing those in our boat. He told them that it would be futile for them to attempt to go ashore and warned them not to approach closer. If they wanted to negotiate, their general would send a boat for that purpose within an hour. Having conveyed this message, the canoe left, and our boat returned to the *Dort*.

'Within an hour, as promised, the Portuguese boat arrived with its white flag. It approached our ship [*i.e.*, the *Star*], prompting the Admiral of the *Dort* signalled with a white flag that he expected the meeting to take place on his ship. Despite this, the Portuguese, distrusting the Dutch and following their general's orders, made their way toward our ship. Our English merchant went aboard the boat alongside the ship and invited the Portuguese Nuntio [*Nuntio = diplomatic representative or negotiator*] to come on board, swearing an oath of safe return. Once on board, the merchant escorted the Nuntio to the roundhouse and hosted him there. The Nuntio was of medium stature with fair complexion, a settled and stern countenance, and bold spirit. His attire was modest, reflecting the condition of his estate. He carried a Japanese weapon by his side, emphasizing the importance of his honour, which he would surrender only in death to the proudest enemy'.

'Shortly after, our commanders joined the meeting in the roundhouse, along with the Dutch, who were displeased that the boat had come to us and not to them. These being gathered the Nuntio then said that he was speaking on behalf of his General and asked permission to express his thoughts freely, as he was committed to doing so. They all agreed, encouraging him to speak. He then took a seat, with the brim of his hat turned up, placing his right hand on his cutlass and his left hand on his waist. He said that the English were welcome, and if they wished to come ashore, they would have water and any other refreshments the island offered. They could move around as peacefully as their own men. However, the Dutch must leave for they would neither have water nor anything else here'.

'These words were scarcely uttered before the Dutch, unable to restrain their deep-seated anger, declared that they take water and more; they were minded seizing any goods and urged an immediate and peaceful surrender. In that case, they would only take the merchandise, everyone's life and possessions being spared. Our commanders confirmed what the Dutch had declared through a corporal oath, clapping their hands to their chests'.

'The Nuntio replied that he would rather yield to the English, who sought nothing beyond their goods while the Dutch always wreaked havoc on both their own and their employers' possessions. If that was not sufficient, they also either enslaved everyone or put them to the sword. Additionally, they [the Portuguese] had constructed a fort in the name of their king, on behalf of their country, for the safeguarding of lives and the protection of their goods. Three carracks that were part of their convoy bound for Spain had left them sufficient munitions to defend themselves against any opposition. At present, they were not inclined to yield to either the English or the Dutch. They were as willing to sacrifice their lives as their goods and would keep both in defiance of us all'.

'Turning his attention to the English, he cautioned that if we sided with the Dutch, we would be treated in manner. He concluded by claiming that his entire company comprised 150 Portuguese, a similar number of blacks and 16 mounted cannons. His general and company would settle the matter through combat, advising us to expect no other response. He then said he must now leave and needed to know what message to convey to his general and was told that if agreement could not be reached by fair means the matter would be resolved by compulsion.

With this answer, he left. In keeping with his promise and the rules of war, our merchant ensured his safe return although the Dutch vowed that had he come aboard their ship, they would have compelled him to change his tune and dance to their music before allowing him to depart’.

‘Given this outright rejection, a general consultation was convened after his departure to agree the best course of action. A lengthy discussion ensued because there was much uncertainty. A battle was perilous and went against the commands of our employers for laden ships to engage in military actions against fortifications of unknown strength. Despite initial reluctance, it was ultimately decided to launch an attack. One of our merchants, Mr. Heynes, initially resisted due to the imminent danger posed to both the ship and goods. In response, the Dutch suggested that if he wouldn’t consent to bringing in the ship for an offensive, it would help to discourage the enemy on the far side. After careful consideration, he changed his stance. First, the enemy’s forces were probably weak, possessing only a limited supply of gunpowder and shot, the Nuntio having exaggerated the strength of his defences. Second, the profit that could accrue to both the employers and the employed. Third, it was necessary to remove the potential inconvenience to ships in distress that had not stopped at the Cape of Good Hope, instead navigating to St Helena. Fourth, account should be taken of the fact that English commanders are collectively bound by their commission to aid and assist the Dutch in any action for their well-being and the defeat of the enemy’.

‘There were also particular reasons why we (the English) should join the Dutch in this venture. First, to avoid the disgrace we would face if the Dutch alone initiated an attack against the enemy (as they were fully resolved to do) and succeeded in seizing all of the goods. Second, it was known from conversations amongst ordinary seamen that they were determined to go aboard the Dutch ships and assist them if our commanders did not consent to bring in our ship. Their reasons were:

- They were certain that they would not always work for the same employer.
- It was anticipated that upon learning of their retreat in times of necessity, their employers, masters, and owners would probably scorn their future employment, either domestically or internationally, all men being given to think the worst.
- They were convinced that by not venturing as far as the Dutch, they would be branded as cowards at home and become a byword to the Dutch wherever they went, affecting not only them but all other Englishmen as well’.

‘The 23 November was chosen as the day of attack [*the timing of the attack only becomes clear further in the text. Having met the Nuncio on 21 November, plans were made for men to be landed at Lemon Valley on 22 November, who over the next day would make their way to the rear of the Portuguese on Chapel Valley beach. Thus, a coordinated attack on the Portuguese would ensue from land and sea on 23 November*], each ship being positioned before daybreak to initiate the attack, either dismounting or forcing the enemy away from their cannons. 130 English and Dutch men were selected and well-equipped with various munitions. They were assigned to approach the shore in our longboats and stay close under the rock [*‘Under the rock’ = ‘beneath the cliff’*]. Upon the signal, a trumpet noise from the ships, they were to swiftly disembark and overrun the enemy. Each longboat was equipped with four murderers, one gunner, and six men to assist him. Additionally, the surgeon’s mate from each ship was present to receive and attend to any wounded individuals. If they were compelled to retreat, these boats were ready to take them in before the enemy could cut them off’.

22 November 1625

‘On this day, each longboat, manned by both English and Dutch, and well-equipped with men and munition, bravely rowed close to the shore, within the range of a caliver shot in front of the enemy’s defences. They discharged their muskets, but the enemy, in disdain, chose not to return either great or small fire. Subsequently, they rowed towards Lime Valley [*Lime Valley = Lemon Valley*], situated about half a mile to the northwest of Chapel Valley. Hugging the shore closely, they sought a suitable place to land their men. The plan was for these men to engage the enemy on land while the ships cannonaded from sea. However, this plan ended before it began because upon reaching Lime Valley, named after the lime trees growing in it, they realized that whilst this was the best landing point, this route would be both dangerous and wearisome to climb, being rocky to the point where two men could not walk abreast to the top. They also feared that the enemy might roll down stones upon their heads, which they could easily do, thus causing harm or even braining them, two men above being sufficient to thwart 200 trying to ascend. Even if they managed to reach the top, they would need to spend the first night in the open. This would result in their gunpowder becoming moist, and their matches would fail due to the continuous rainfall. Although these could be kept dry by each man carrying a coat, the rocks were so steep that the men could hardly carry their own munition. They also needed to march uphill and downhill for 2 or 3 leagues (?) before they could reach a position to harm the enemy. The sheer exertion of this march would potentially break the spirit of even the strongest individual’.

‘Even if they managed to land, kept their gunpowder and shot dry and undertook the march and combat, they also faced the problem of what to do with any injured men. It was not feasible to carry them away, yet it would also be a miserable choice to leave them behind. Even if their approach was not opposed, the enemy might cunningly retreat. Our men being eager and disregarding any command, might then pursue them relentlessly. The enemy might have had 2 or 3 pieces of ordnance planted loaded with case shot and stones. If discharged, they could have cut down every man and mother’s child. For these reasons, the plan was abandoned, all our boats returning back again’.

23 November 1625

‘At 2 AM they implemented the previously decided plan by hauling the ships close to the shore. Each ship was positioned two ship lengths ahead of the other, with a small warp extended towards the shore so that broadsides of ordnance could be better brought to bear. Our ship and the *Dort* were situated in the middle between the other two. Our ship had three hawsers and one stream cable [*Strem Cable = A cable or chain that is paid out or let out from a vessel to the sea bottom while the ship is at anchor, anchoring it to the seabed and providing the vessel from turning with the current or wind*] laid out to seaward, providing the means to haul off our ship as needed’.

‘As we approached, the enemy welcomed us by firing three cannons successively. Two of these shots passed completely through the *Dort*. The battle began and quickly intensified, lasting from daybreak until 11 in the morning. The enemy had a significant advantage over us because our ships rolled, heaved, and pitched so much that we seldom made accurate shots. At times, a shot would fly so high into the air that it seemed aimed at pushing Jupiter from the heavens. Shortly after, another shot would be so low and short that it seemed destined to drown before reaching the shore. In short, the instability of our ships resulted in most of our shots being as far from the target as we were from the success of our expectations’.

‘We continued firing our ordnance until 11 o’clock, realising that we were no closer to achieving our goal than when we started the battle. Firstly, the enemy’s barricades were not made of earth, as we initially believed, but of large bundles of coarse materials, such as arseclouts [crude name

for loin cloths] and shashes [?]. Our ordnance could not penetrate them due to their size and strong compactness, as became evident when one or two bundles arrived from the shore aboard the *Dort*, with the shot found in the middle of them. Secondly, our ships were significantly damaged and likely to worsen if we persisted. Thirdly, more enemies were expected at sea, and if we had depleted all our munition here (which was likely if the fight continued), we did not know where to acquire more for defence if needed. Fourthly, and lastly, to risk our men, ship, and yards, endanger our voyage for the pursuit of an uncertainty, especially when there was no apparent likelihood of achieving it, would be deemed a most ridiculous, rash-headed, and desperate enterprise’.

‘Having contemplated and carefully considered these factors, it was deemed best to haul off our ships without further loss of men and time, as well as to prevent damage to the ships and goods. We soon executed this plan, weighed anchor and left. The *Leuin*, a ship of 500 tons, had to release two cables and was pleased to escape. After being half a mile from the shore, the Portuguese in a boat approached and cut away their buoys, ensuring they wouldn’t weigh those anchors again. Thus, the battle ended’.

‘In this battle, the *Dort* lost 2 men, with 13 others injured, one of whom had the top of his hair shot away with further injury. The *Dort*’s hull sustained 17 or 18 shots, including 2 through her mainmast, and one through her foremast. Additionally, both her pumps were shot asunder’.

‘The *Leuin* had only one boy injured in the eye with a splinter. She received 2 dangerous shots in her mainmast, rendering her unable to bear any sail for the next 24 hours’.

‘The *Weesop* had no men hurt and only received two shots between wind and water, which were promptly stopped and repaired’.

‘In our ship, the *Star*, of the 15 barrels of powder we had, 5 were expended in this battle. We received 3 shots – the first in the mast, which shot our rufftree [a sturdy handrail running around the ship’s perimeter] without further harm. The second shot landed between a luff and our chase, passing through our surgeon’s cabin, breaking a whole case of strong waters, and entering one man’s breeches, bruising his thigh without significant harm. The third shot, during warping out, went through and through the roundhouse, causing no other damage’.

‘We lost 2 men, each having one leg shot away as they came from our buoy in our longboat, returning aboard. If the shot had been a langrage (?), as it was a round one, it would have sunk our boat and endangered the lives of our merchant and 17 or 18 more men who were in her’.

[..] Throughout the entire battle, as far as we could discern, the enemy only employed 5 pieces of ordnance. They did not rush in the discharge but took their time, making each shot count.

The *Star* ultimately arrived back in England. Meanwhile, the sloop constructed at St Helena from the wreckage of the *Conceição* had managed to reach Bahia in Brazil. Its crew was doubly fortunate in not only making a safe crossing but in timing their arrival. Unknown to them, Bahia had been taken by the Dutch West India Company in May 1624 and then taken back on 30 April 1625 by a joint Spanish-Portuguese fleet under Admiral Fadrique Álvarez de Toledo y Mendoza sent from Lisbon. When told of the situation at St Helena, Mendoza acted decisively and despatched two galleons (*Nossa Senhora da Atalaya* and *San Miguel*) and four smaller ships to St Helena. They arrived at the end of December, about a month after the departure of the *Star* and the three Dutch ships.

Work began to transfer the *Conceigao's* cargo from the beach to the anchored Portuguese ships when in early January 1626, yet another Dutch vessel arrived. This was the *Middelburgh*, which in March 1625 had become separated from the *Hollandia* and *Gouda* in a great storm and been forced to overwinter in Madagascar. The two Portuguese galleons wasted no time and immediately raised their anchors and gave chase. However, when caught, the *Middelburgh* put up such a furious defence with the loss of the Spanish commander and many of his officers that it was cast off and allowed to escape. Presumably it later sank because the *Middelburgh* was never heard of again.

The battle-damaged galleons returned to Capel Valley Bay and the entire fleet of six ships sailed to Pernambuco in Brazil. From there they picked up six merchant ships and at the end of February sailed to Lisbon. On 11 April, the armada encountered a violent storm off the Azores when several ships were lost. The remaining ships carrying the last of the *Conceigao's* cargo finally arrived at Lisbon in early May.

Back at St Helena, within days after the departure of the Portuguese ships to Bahia, the East India Company pinnace *Scout* arrived at Chapel Valley Bay on 9 February.⁴ The master's mate, William Minors, left a record of this visit. Initially, he went ashore to find lemons.

9 February 1626:

'Anchored at St. Helena. Went ashore for lemons but found none larger than walnuts, as the Portuguese had recently gathered the rest'.

11 February:

'On going ashore, they saw a Mestizo with a white flag, who told them that there were three more on the island. All of them had run away from the Portuguese; also that that a carrack had been cast away, and the survivors had landed all their goods and six pieces of ordnance, successfully holding the island for six months'.

'In the meantime, three Dutch ships and the *Starr* arrived, intending to obtain water, but they were not allowed'.

'Two war galleons and four smaller ships arrived from Fernandobuck (Pernambuco) to retrieve the goods saved from the carrack. Then *Middleburgh* arrived seeking water. Realising the *Middleburgh* was in distress, lacking masts or sails, two war galleons weighed anchor and pursued her. The ensuing battle with the *Middleburgh* lasted from four in the afternoon until the next morning. When the Spanish captain had his hand shot off, they abandoned the chase, the *Middleburgh* continuing its course for Holland'.

12 February

'This morning, the master sent me ashore with the boat and I went with the Mestizo to Chapel Bay. There, we found the three other musteezos. We also saw the carrack shattered into a thousand pieces. We also saw all the places they had fortified and came across a large number of pumpkins they had planted. We brought these on board the ship'.

The *Scout* finally left St Helena for England on 19 February, sailing for England.

The last known sighting of the remains of the *Conceigao* took place eight years later when the East India Company ship *Royal Mary* commanded by James Slade arrived at Chapel Valley Bay on 11 June 1634. One of its passengers, the English merchant and traveller Peter Mundy (or Munday), provided the following description:

"We anchored in St Helena, a quarter mile from the shore, between Chapel Valley and Lemon Valley, in 20 fathoms, close under the Hills. At some time one of their Carracks (there being 3 in Company) proved leaky and not able to proceed, was here hauled ashore, and her goods landed. They remained there until other ships from Portugal came and brought all away, dwelling here in the meantime and fortifying themselves against English, Dutch, or any other that should offer to molest them.

Many of the ribs of the Carrick were yet to be seen with an abundance of ironwork all over the strand."

It would not be surprising if, for readers, the destruction of the *Conceigao* in 1625 resonates with a far earlier story. The first edition of Thomas Brooke's *St Helena* history (1808) history mistakenly described the loss of one of João da Nova carracks at Deep Valley on the island's southwest coast in 1502.⁵ Then he modified the story in his second edition (1824) when he claimed that after the carrack was wrecked, the timbers were used to build a chapel in a valley, later called Chapel Valley. That last version was then repeated in Philip Gosse's 1938 history and elaborated by the addition of a footnote with a meaningless reference. Alexander Schulenburg untangled all this nearly three decades ago at which time he suggested that the myth quoted by both Brooke and Gosse had its origin in the story of the *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* wreckage in 1625.⁶ This suggestion is persuasive, yet it also means that both Brooke and Gosse twice repeated the same incident in their respective books, in the opening pages the supposed João da Nova wreckage of 1502, and then some pages further on, partial descriptions of the *Conceição* wreckage of 1625.⁷

Note: All URLs are presented in TinyURL format and were accessed in February 2024.

¹ C. R. Boxer, 'On a Portuguese Carrack's Bill of Lading in 1625', *Biblos (Coimbra)* 14 (1938): 193–222; C. R. Boxer, *From Lisbon to Goa, 1500-1750: Studies in Portuguese Maritime Enterprise* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), 176–200.

² Constantin de Renneville and Isaac Commelin, *Recueil Des Voyages Qui Ont Servi à l'établissement et Aux Progrès de La Compagnie Des Indes Orientales, Formée Dans Les Provinces Unies Des Païs-Bas*, Nouvelle édition, vol. Tome VIII (Rouen, 1725), 403–9; <http://tinyurl.com/mszm2ws4>; William Ysbrandsz Bontekoe, *Memorable Description of the East Indian Voyage, 1618-1625* (London: G. Routledge, 1929), 145–49; <http://tinyurl.com/r7kfkwb>; A detailed account is give in P. L. Teale, 'Island of St Helena, 1625: The Battle for Chapel Valley', 1975; A brief account is provided in Robin Gill and Percival Leslie Teale, *St Helena 500: A Chronological History of the Island* (Epping: Creda Communications, 1999), 45.

³ Franco Frescura, 'A Survey of Post Office Stones: Used at the Cape of Good Hope, 1601-1652', *Forerunners, The Journal of the Philatelic Society for Greater Southern Africa* XXXII, no. 1 (October 2018): 10–18; <http://tinyurl.com/ysu5scy9>.

⁴ William Foster, *English Factories in India 1624-1629* (London: Clarendon Press, 1929), 110; <http://tinyurl.com/58v7eh6w>.

⁵ Thomas H. Brooke, *A History of the Island of St Helena: From Its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1806* (Black, Parry and Kingsbury, 1808), 35.

⁶ Alexander H Schulenburg, 'Joao Da Nova and the Lost Carrack', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* 16 (Autumn 1997): 19–23; Alexander Schulenburg, 'Philip Gosse and the Discovery of St Helena', *Notes & Queries* 45, no. 4 (1998): 476; <https://tinyurl.com/w7rer6sa>.

⁷ Thomas H. Brooke, *A History of the Island of St. Helena: From Its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1806; to Which Is Added an Appendix* (London: Black, Parry and Kingsbury, 1808), 47–48, 63–65; Philip Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (Oswestry: Anthony Nelson, 1938), 3, 34–35.