

BARBARY SLAVES

The fishermen and coastal dwellers of 17th and 18th century Hampshire lived in terror of being kidnapped by pirates and sold into slavery in North Africa and elsewhere. Hundreds of thousands across Europe met wretched deaths on the Barbary Coast in this way.

Barbary slaves rarely escaped captivity, and often lost all hope of ever seeing home again. Theoretically any captive could gain release if someone paid their ransom but often payment took a long time to arrive. When word reached home of their captivity and the ransom was demanded, someone had to raise the money. If the family had wealth, that could be a simple task, but most captive sailors were poor and their families had little hope of amassing the money except through charitable donations.

PHILANTHROPY IN HAMPSHIRE

The next two documents illustrate how local communities played a part in the freeing of slaves held for ransom through the organisation of collections.

The first page is an extract from the Laverstoke register of baptisms, marriages and burials, 1656-1812. It includes a list of contributions made to a collection for the 'redemption of captives out of Turkish slavery' in 1670.

The largest contributions were made by "The Lady Trott" and the Rector, Philip Baker, but 25 other parishioners gave amounts between fourpence and a shilling, bringing the total to one pound and ten schillings.

HRO:46M76/PRI

The second document is a list of contributions towards "the redemption of slaves" and probably relates to white slaves, perhaps in the hands of Barbary pirates.

It was preserved among the papers of the Jervoise family, and includes contributions by several members of the family as well as other individuals, probably parishioners of Herriard. The document is undated but may originate from around 1681.

Jervoise of Herriard collection, HRO:44M69/G4/1/129

A GRANDMOTHER'S LEGACY OF FREEDOM

This document is the will of Ann Newland of Castlehold in the Isle of Wight. It is unusual in that it includes a bequest of “one half of all that I have in the world’ to her Grandson, John Smith ‘now a slave in Barbary...”

The money is “to be pay[e]d to him... at his return home...” or to go towards supplying his “necessityes in Barbary or for his redemption out of slavery”, 1694

HRO:1696A/071

“In the name of God Amen the seventh day of June in the sixth year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord/ and Lady W[illia]m and Mary by the grace of god of England Scotland France and Ireland King and Queen Defenders of the faith/ anno domini 1694 I Ann Newland of Castlehold in the Isle of Wight in the County of South[amp]ton widow being old and feeble/ but in health of body and in good and perfect memory (thanks be to god) and being desirous to settle things in order do make/ this my last will and testament in maner and form following (viz) (first) I commend my soul to god and body to the earth/ to be decently buried as my Execut[er] hereafter named shall think fitt and as touching my wordly goods my will and/ meaning is the same shall be imp[l]oyed and bestowed as hereafter by this my will is expressed my debts and financiall expenses/ being paid; I give unto my Grandson J[oh]n Smith now a slave in Barbary the one half of all that I have in the world to be pay[e]d/ to him by my Execut[er] at his return home But in case his occations should require any money to supply he necessityes in/ Barbary or for his redemption out of slavery my will and meaning is Such monyes to him (the said J[oh]n Smith) or to his/ use pay’d shall be deducted out of that part of my goods to him given...”

HRO:1696A/071

RESCUED FROM PIRATES?

This is a copy of the deposition of Edward Stevens of Cowes in the Isle of Wight. He was a mariner and testifies that three men, one of whom pretends to have his tongue cut out and the other two to have been 'scarrified', made the journey from Cowes to Gosport in his sloop (a sailing vessel with a single mast). The three men pretended they had been captured by Algerians and carried into slavery presumably in the hope of gaining people's pity and charity. They had a pass from the Consul of Leghorn backing up their story but it was believed to be forged. Mr Stevens remembers that about 6 months before he carried the same men from Cowes to Portsmouth and has seen them begging in Portsmouth and on the Isle of Wight, 6 May 1751

HRO:Q9/2/6/12

South[amp]ton to wit Edward Stevens of Cowes in the Isle of Wight and County of South[amp]ton Mariner on his information on Oath saith that three men one of whom pretends to have his tongue cutt out and the other two to be scarified came over the morning in this informants passage sloop from Cowes aforesaid to Gosport in the County aforesaid and that they pretended they had been taken by the Algerians and carried into slavery and also pretended they had a pass from the consul of Leghorn ? certifying the same which pass this informant has seen and also pretended that they were on Wednesday last landed from out of a vessel at Shankling in the isle aforesaid from thence And this informant further said that he believed such pass was and is forged for that he this informant will remember about five or six months ago he carried the same persons from Cowes aforesaid to Portsmouth in the said county And also saw the said persons begging in Portsmouth aforesaid in the month of July last and acknowledged they had been now begging in the island aforesaid and believes they are vagrants but do not know there names Edward Stephens

Sworn at Gosport aforesaid the sixth day of May 1751 Before me one of his Majestys Justices of the Peace in the said County

HRO:Q9/2/6/12