

Chapter Title: Calib and 'a Madagascar Negro': freedom seekers in the London suburbs and beyond

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14. *Calib* and ‘a Madagascar Negro’: freedom seekers in the London suburbs and beyond

Run away from his Master, Charles Pope of Bristol, on Saturday the 17th past, an Indian Boy, about 14 years old, strait black hair, with a sandy coloured Coat, lined with straw coloured Crape, with a grey cloth Cap lined with red Serge, his name Calib. Whoever gives notice of him to Mr. Walter Masters in St. Martins-lane, London, or at the Royal Coffee House over against the Royal Exchange London, or to his aforesaid Master, shall have 20s. Reward.

The London Gazette, 12 November 1685

Run away the 13th instant from Mr. Nath. White, a Madagascar Negro, aged about 15, in an old grey Coat, Linnen flower'd Breeches, blue Stockings, without a Hat or Cap, and lately come from India. Whoever secures him, and gives Notice to Mr. Baker, an Apothecary in Cheapside, London, or to Mr. White at Ipswich in Suffolk, shall have a Guinea Reward and Charges.

London Gazette, 23 July 1691

Freedom seekers from outside London either escaped in their own localities and made their way to the capital or during visits there while accompanying those they served. Of the 174 runaway advertisements that include a clear indication of where the runaway had escaped from, twenty-five specified locations outside London. An unnamed ‘Negro about 18 years old’ escaped ‘from Hogsden in Hertfordshire, and is about London’.¹ Neither the freedom seeker nor the person he escaped from are named in the advertisement, and it is unclear how the latter knew the former was in the capital, although London was a highly likely destination. This young man would have faced challenges in making the journey of perhaps twenty-five miles to London, for he ‘speaks very little English’, but a week after his escape he was still free. In early March 1691 ‘a Negro named Philip’ escaped from ‘Mr. William Alexander at Malden-Ash in Essex’. Alexander appears to have been a London merchant of that name with a family home in Ongar, the Essex parish in which the hamlet of

¹ ‘A Negro about 18 years old’, *London Gazette*, 8 Sept. 1684.

Marden Ash is situated.² Salvador, 'A Black about 25 years of Age', escaped in Gravesend in Kent in late May 1692. Despite being unable to speak English, he was still at liberty three weeks later because he had either disappeared into London some twenty miles to the west or had joined one of the many vessels moored by or passing Gravesend as they headed out to sea.³ The identity of the person seeking and claiming Salvador is unclear, but he could be returned 'to Mr. Peter Houblon in Sice-lane' in Cheapside. This was Peter Houblon, a member of a well-established Huguenot family of London merchants, and the nephew of Sir John Houblon who served both as lord mayor of London and the first governor of the Bank of England. Several members of the Houblon family were shareholders in and directors of the East India Company.⁴

Other freedom seekers appear to have eloped while in London with enslavers whose permanent residence lay outside of the city. In July 1691 'a Madagascar Negro' eloped from Nathaniel White.⁵ The unnamed freedom seeker was 'aged about 15, in an old grey Coat, Linnen flower'd Breeches, blue Stockings, without a Hat or Cap, and lately come from India'. He could be returned for the reward of one guinea and charges to an apothecary named Baker in Cheapside or to the man who claimed ownership of him, 'Mr. White at Ipswich in Suffolk', some eighty miles north-east of the capital. White was a surgeon in Ipswich, which may explain his connection with the London apothecary Baker.⁶ It is unclear how or why Nathaniel White was in possession of a young and newly arrived enslaved person, but it is not surprising that this young man sought to escape. Ipswich was a sleepy Suffolk market town which probably contained few if any other people of colour.

² 'RUN away ... a Negro named Philip', *London Gazette*, 19 March 1691. Marden Ash in the parish of Ongar may well be the Malden-Ash specified in the advertisement. It is about 30 miles north-east of the City of London. Will of William Alexander, Gentleman of Chipping Ongar, Essex, 1672, National Archives, PROB 11/340/11; Will of William Alexander, Merchant of London, 1726, National Archives, PROB 11/607/116.

³ 'A Black ... his Name Salvador', *London Gazette*, 16 June 1692.

⁴ Peter Houblon, Junir, is listed as living in Sice Lane in S. Lee, *The Little London Directory of 1677: the Oldest Printed List of the Merchants and Bankers of London* (London, 1863). His will makes clear his relationship to other members of the family, including his uncle Sir John Houblon (Will of Peter Houblon, Merchant of London Saint Peter Westcheap, National Archives, PROB 11/483/240). For details of John Houblon's life see H. G. Roseveare, 'Sir John Houblon' (2004), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13861>> [accessed 1 May 2020].

⁵ 'Run away ... a Madagascar Negro', *London Gazette*, 23 July 1691.

⁶ Nathaniel White was named as a surgeon in documents related to the case of R. Barnard innholder, of Ipswich, Suffolk v. N. White surgeon, of Ipswich, Suffolk, Court of Chancery (Six Clerks Office, Records of Equity, Records created, acquired, and inherited by Chancery, National Archives, C 6/360/16).

In July 1677 'A Negro Man, by name *Anthony*' escaped 'from Colonel *Cowper* of *Dickham* place, in the Counties of *Sussex* and *Hampshire*'.⁷ It is not clear whether *Anthony*, who was about twenty-four years old, 'of a middle stature, very bushy hair, much pock-broken, and in old ragged Cloathes', escaped from *Cowper*'s home on the *Sussex* and *Hampshire* border, or if he seized the opportunity of escaping during a visit with *Cowper* to the capital. *Cowper* advertised for *Anthony* six weeks after his escape, so the freedom seeker was at liberty for at least that length of time, probably in London. *Cowper* gave two contacts to whom *Anthony* might be returned, both in the capital: *Thomas Vyle*, a bookseller, printer and newspaper editor 'at the Office of the *City Mercury* at the Northwest corner of the *Royal Exchange*', and *William Jeston*, a smith at the sign of the *Scythe* and *Frying Pan* in *Clerkenwell*.⁸

Over a period of three years two people escaped from a Bristol merchant named *Charles Pope*. In mid-November 1685 *Calib*, 'an Indian Boy, about 14 years old', escaped from *Pope*, followed three years later by *Gambo*, a thirty-five-year old 'Negro man' (also known as *John Gobe*).⁹ Both advertisements referred to 'Charles Pope of Bristol', so the two freedom seekers may have escaped from him there or about 115 miles to the east in London, for *Pope*'s business regularly took him to the capital. *Pope*'s father, *Thomas*, was also a Bristol merchant and had owned two plantations in Virginia, one of them near *Pope*'s Creek in *Westmoreland* county.¹⁰ A decade later *Charles Pope* was listed as one of the owners of the Bristol ship the *Maryland Merchant*, which was engaged in 'the Plantation-Trade'.¹¹ Clearly the *Pope* family were deeply invested in both the plantation trade and plantations themselves; these activities, together with their status as prominent Bristol merchants, made the ownership of enslaved people all too probable. To have two enslaved people attempt escape from *Charles Pope* within three years may suggest a particularly unhappy environment, although in the end we cannot know what inspired a fourteen-year-old South Asian boy and then a thirty-five-year-old African man to escape.

⁷ 'A Negro Man, by name *Anthony*', *London Gazette*, 30 Aug. 1677.

⁸ D. F. McKenzie and M. Bell, *A Chronology and Calendar of Documents relating to the London Book Trade, 1641–1700*: ii, 1671–1685 (Oxford, 2005), p. 351; A. W. C. Hallen, 'A family of Smiths', *Genealogical Magazine*, ii (1898), 45–8.

⁹ 'Run away ... an Indian Boy', *London Gazette*, 12 Nov. 1685; 'ON the 18th ... a Negro man', *London Gazette*, 22 Oct. 1688.

¹⁰ Will of *Thomas Pope*, Merchant, 1684, National Archives, PROB 11/381/273.

¹¹ Ship *Maryland Merchant*, 'House of Commons Journal Volume 12: 27 May 1698', in *Journal of the House of Commons: xii, 1697–1699* (London, 1803), pp. 287–9, *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/commons-jrnl/vol12/pp287-289>> [accessed 23 Jan. 2019].

Furthest from London was an unnamed fourteen-year-old boy who ‘was taken away ... by a Person on Horse back, from Bangor near Wrexham’, approximately 250 miles north-west of London. According to the newspaper advertisement, this boy belonged ‘to my Lady Broughton of March whiel Hall’. He was marked by ‘four figures upon his breast, likewise several marks on his hips’, former perhaps West African country markings although they could have been brand marks.¹² It is unclear whether the person on horseback was helping to liberate this boy who was claimed as property by Lady Broughton or simply stealing him: an attractive enslaved boy could be sold to another person in England or to a merchant or ship captain for trafficking to the colonies. Lady Broughton’s son Edward had become a planter in Jamaica, where he represented St George’s parish in the island’s assembly in 1682.¹³ This is the most likely explanation for how the widowed Lady Mary Broughton came to hold this young boy as her property. The family were clearly wealthy, and when she died a decade later Lady Broughton left several properties in Westminster and London to her children, even though she had been resident in Marchwiel in Wales, and her status was confirmed by her subsequent burial alongside her late husband in Westminster Abbey.¹⁴

Even when freedom seekers eloped dozens or hundreds of miles from London, advertisements appeared for them in the capital’s newspapers and listed contacts in the city to whom they might be returned. London clearly attracted people of colour who might disappear into the mass of people and find new opportunities for work, community or even escape from England. Moreover, the *London Gazette* and other newspapers were read not just in the capital but all over England, and so were an effective means of advertising for runaways more widely. In runaway advertisements English men and women were helping to develop racial slavery as a social construction and a lived reality, one that was becoming normalized for the many thousands of English men and women who casually perused these advertisements as they read the newspapers, gradually becoming accustomed to slaves and slavery in England.

¹² ‘A Black Boy’, *London Gazette*, 28 Oct. 1686.

¹³ List of Assembly, Minutes of the Council of Jamaica, 21 Sept. 1682, ‘America and West Indies: September 1682’, in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies*: xi, 1681–1685, ed. J W. Fortescue (London, 1898), pp. 291–305, *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol11/pp291-305>> [accessed 1 May 2020].

¹⁴ Will of Dame Mary Broughton, Widow of Marchwiel, Denbigshire, 1695, National Archives, PROB 11/429/84. For the Westminster Abbey graves of Lord and Lady Broughton see ‘Sir Edward Broughton’, Westminster Abbey <<https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/sir-edward-broughton>> [accessed 1 May 2020].