Roanoke Voyages and Sir Walter Raleigh’s “Virginia” (1584-1603)

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Gilbert’s Patent

Sir Humphrey Gilbert (Left) was an older, ½ brother of Walter Raleigh and the son of a Devonshire gentleman, whose widow (Catherine Ashley - Right) afterward married the father of Sir Walter Raleigh. Gilbert served the Queen in Ireland and fought for the Netherlands against Spain. He urged the search for a northwest passage to Cathay, which led to Martin Frobisher’s license for that exploration.

In 1578, Sir Humphrey Gilbert got a Royal Charter (“Patent”) from Queen Elizabeth I to search for a NW passage to the far East and claim lands for England in North America.
On Gilbert’s first voyage intended for Newfoundland, his ½ brother Walter Raleigh captained the “Falcon” with Simon Fernandez as master. The Falcon was a tiny Elizabethean vessel less than seventy-five feet long, with a complement of gentlemen, soldiers and mariners, some seventy in all.

Raleigh's cabin was on the poop deck in the stern, below was Fernandez with the charts and navigational instruments, below that was the cabin for the officers. At the forecastle were the quarters of the skilled mariners, the smith, the carpenter and the sail-maker.

In the centre, dark and cramped, the deck painted blood red, were the rest of the practical crew. They slept on folded sails between the guns, in skin rotting damp. The less fortunate groaned with dysentery, typhus, beri-beri or scurvy. The food was mere gruel, salt beef, flat beer and weevil infested biscuits from the hold; but it was ruthlessly controlled by the ship's boson mate. Theft of food was a serious crime and the punishment was to nail the offender's hand to the mast and cut it off.

In this less than luxurious transport, Raleigh eventually reached the Cape Verde Islands, after facing forty foot waves and storms that often blew the main mast level with the sea. Large numbers of the crew had died and the expedition was soon obliged to return to Plymouth.
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Gilbert’s first voyage in 1578 failed to reach the New World, and it cost him his whole fortune; but, after further service to the Crown in Ireland, he sailed again for Newfoundland.

In August of 1583, he arrived in the harbor at St. John’s and founded a colony in Newfoundland; but on the return voyage to England, he went down heroically with his ship in a storm south of the Azores.

His settlement at St. John’s (i.e., the 1st English settlement in No. Am.) was viewed by Gilbert as merely the beginning of a scheme for ousting the Spanish from the New World.

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The “bark”
Raleigh and Sir Walter Raleigh
The First English Voyage of Exploration to Raleigh’s “Virginia”

In two “barks” on 27 April 1584, Raleigh’s Captains Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe with ship’s pilot Simon Fernandez left England on a reconnaissance voyage to North America. They travelled thru the Canary Islands and the West Indies and reached the North American coast on 4 July 1584. Finding an entrance thru the “Outer-banks” of NC, they entered, anchored, and took possession of the land for England. They explored the area and traded with friendly Indians. They explored Roanoke Island, found it suitable for a colony and returned to England with two Indians “Manteo” and “Wanchese” who lived in the area.
Map of "Raleigh's Virginia"
English Arrival and Exploration of Roanoke Area (1584)
Exploring the Roanoke area in a ship’s launch
Raleigh’s 2nd Voyage – Led by Richard Grenville (Right) and Ralph Lane
On Apr. 9th, 1585, Sir Richard Grenville in the “Tiger”, with 4 other ships and 2 “pinnaces” (i.e., smaller boats for navigating shallow waterways), sailed from Plymouth for Roanoke in Raleigh’s “Virginia”. They went the Southern route thru the West Indies and lost 1 pinnace at sea. The expedition landed at Puerto Rico (PR) and built a small fort and a replacement for the pinnace.

Building a “pinnace” in PR
John White drawing of the fort Grenville’s men built in Puerto Rico -- where they collected salt and built a replacement for their pinnace that was lost at sea.
1st Colonization Efforts are a Failure

With Raleigh's cousin, Sir Richard Grenville, in command of the expedition at sea, the voyage on the vessel Tiger proved difficult; and Ralph Lane (a former officer of Queen Elizabeth’s household whom Raleigh appointed Governor for the intended Roanoke Colony) found himself at odds with Grenville most of the time.

When the colonists finally arrived in the Americas, Lane was left on Roanoke Island, Virginia with 107 settlers (including the Indian “Manteo” who was earlier taken to England with Amadas and Barlow’s expedition) to explore and fortify the area. Almost immediately, Grenville left in the Tiger & returned to England – capturing a Spanish treasure ship and its rich cargo (the 300-ton Santa Maria) on the way home.

Governor Lane employed his men in exploring the surrounding area within a 130-mile radius and in erecting a fort on Roanoke Island to protect their outpost. The settlers had insufficient supplies and their contacts with the Native Americans went poorly. Wingina (a local chieftain) even tried to organize other tribes against the English.

Thomas Harriot (the expedition’s scientist and navigator) and John White (artist) made maps and documented the Indian culture, plants, and animals that they found. In 1591, their findings were widely reported in a book by Harriot with engravings by Theodor De Bry based on paintings made by John White from 1585-1590.
Indians & Life in Roanoke
The Palisade & Indian Village of Pomeiooc
One of the wives of Chief “Wingina” or Chief “Pemisapan” – John White Drawing

Indians Fishing in Roanoke
Swallow-tail Butterfly
Alcatarsa. This fowle is of the greatnes of a Swanne, and of the same forme sauing the heade, which is in length 16 ynches

Brown Pelican
This is a funny fish, and flote upon the sea. Some call them Careols.

Portuguese Man-O’-War

Garopa

A lande Crab.
Diamond-back Terrapin
Sir Francis Drake’s Rescue of the 1st Colonists

Drake was a younger cousin of the English explorer and privateer John Hawkins of Plymouth with whom he sailed on voyages to Africa and the Spanish Main before his famous circumnavigation of the globe in 1578-1581. For that feat, Drake was knighted by Queen Elizabeth. In 1586, he led an armada of 23 ships (below) that attacked towns/forts in the Azores, Spanish Main and Florida (i.e., St. Augustine) before coming to re-supply Raleigh’s settlers on Roanoke Island.

In July, 1586, Governor Lane and all but 3 of his men abandoned the Roanoke colony and left in Drake’s ships heading back to England.

In Aug. 1586, a relief ship sent by Raleigh arrived at Roanoke, found the colony deserted, and went back to England.
Drake’s Raid (Sailing Clockwise with the Winds in the Atlantic)

“Spanish Main” from Bragzio’s map of Drake’s Raid of 1585-1586 (Route shown by Hatch-marks)
The 2\textsuperscript{nd} Attempt to Establish a Colony at Roanoke

In the Fall of 1586, Sir Richard Grenville arrived again at Roanoke only to find the colony abandoned. He left 15 men there with plenty of provisions in order that they might retain possession of the land for England. Then, he returned to England; arriving at Bideford in December of 1586.
3rd Attempt to Establish a Colony at Roanoke (John White)

In 1587, John White led another expedition to establish a colony in North America. Raleigh had instructed his sea captains to re-site the colony 100 miles further North in the Chesapeake Bay with a decent harbour; but, one of the captains (i.e., Simon Fernandez) over-ruled these instructions and set the colonists down again at Roanoke. There were 85 men, 17 women, 11 children and the Indian “Manteo” in this group of settlers. The group included White’s daughter who was pregnant and delivered the first English child born in America (named “Virginia Dare”). On 27 Aug. 1587, John White left the colonists and returned for more supplies and reinforcements in England. Unfortunately, he arrived back in England only to find the country preparing for an attack by the Spanish Armada which came in 1588. So, he was unable to return to Roanoke with needed supplies and reinforcements as planned.
Relief Expedition of 1590 and the “Lost Colony”

Captains Abraham Cooke, Edward Spencer and John White left England in 3 ships bound for Roanoke on March 20th, 1590. They were engaged in privateering in route and arrived near Roanoke on August 16th.

Six of the relief crew, including Captain Spencer, were drowned while trying to land on the Island. White found nobody there and only a carving of the word “Croatoan” on a tree – possibly indicating where the colonists had gone.

White was unable to look for the colonists at Croatoan or elsewhere due to bad weather; and, the relief ships returned to England.

What happened to this “Lost Colony” remains a mystery today.
Raleigh’s Final Attempts at Colonization in America

While Raleigh accused them of infringing on his rights to trade in North America, Co-captains Bartholomew Gosnold and Bartholomew Gilbert together with John Brereton (a gentleman adventurer) tried to establish a colony on Elizabeth's Island south of Massachusetts in May of 1602. By July, they had to abandon the colony due to a lack of supplies.

This 1602 voyage is the first recorded European expedition to Cape Cod. The co-captain, Bartholomew Gosnold, was an experienced seaman who had sailed with Walter Raleigh and was related to Gilbert on Gosnold's father's side.

In nineteen days on Cape Cod, they built a fort/storehouse and began a successful trade with the Massachusett Indians in furs, skins, and the sassafras plant. Their freight realized a great profit back in England -- the sassafras alone selling for £336 a ton.

(at left) Gosnold and Gilbert pictured at Cuttyhunk in 1602
In 1603, Raleigh sent **Bartholomew Gilbert** back out with instructions to establish a colony in the Chesapeake Bay area. Setting anchor in the Chesapeake Bay, Gilbert and four crewmen went ashore to search for the missing members of the Roanoke Colony. They subsequently ran afoul of, and Gilbert was killed by, a group of Algonquian Indians on July 29th. The rest of his crew returned to England in September.

**Bartholomew Gosnold** subsequently commanded one of the three ships (i.e., God Speed) that transported colonists to Jamestown, Virginia in 1607. He carried 52 of the original colonists and later died of malaria in Jamestown on August 22, 1607. (Jamestown Settlement Ships: “Susan Constance, God Speed & Discovery” pictured below)
The “Rest of the Story” for Sir Walter Raleigh

Raleigh fell into disfavor with Queen Elizabeth’s successor, James I. He was stripped of his estates and charged with conspiring against the King. Raleigh was confined to the Tower of London and wrote his “History of the World” (1614).

Raleigh was released in 1616 and allowed to lead an expedition in search of gold in South America. That expedition was a failure; and, for attacking a Spanish settlement, he was beheaded at Westminster on 10/29/1618.

In addition to encouraging English colonization of the New World, Raleigh is credited with introducing potatoes and tobacco (below) into the British Isles.
References


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