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Olaf Uwe Janzen

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“They are not such great Rogues as some of their Neighbours”: A Scottish Supercargo in the Newfoundland Fish Trade, 1726¹

OLAF UWE JANZEN

ON THE AFTERNOON of 8 June, 1726, the merchant ship *Christian* of Leith was about to pass through Pentland Firth between the Scottish mainland and the Orkney Islands on its way to the open Atlantic, when it was struck by a storm. The ship's master, Alexander Hutton, was obliged to bear away and make for the shelter of Kirston Harbour, dropping anchor there at 5 pm. For the next five days, the *Christian* was forced to lay at anchor, waiting for favourable winds.² Not until 14 June did those winds shift and allow the *Christian* to get underway once again. Finally, two days later and nearly two weeks after departing Leith, the ship's supercargo was able to record in his journal with some satisfaction that the *Christian* had come abreast of the lonely rock of St. Kilda. Ahead lay the open Atlantic and their destination, Newfoundland.

That Scots should venture into the Newfoundland trade this early in the eighteenth century was quite unusual; most, though not all, of the ships engaged in the Newfoundland trade were based in England, especially in the West Country shires of Dorset and Devon. Before the early eighteenth century, Scots merchants had almost no experience with the fisheries or the trade at Newfoundland.³ However, with the political union with England in 1707, the door to Scottish participation in British North Atlantic commerce became open.⁴ Newfoundland was not the only destination that the men who chartered the *Christian* could have chosen, but as we shall see, there was a certain logic to that choice.⁵ It is also a choice for which we should be grateful, for the voyage generated a rich documentation that reveals, in considerable detail, the intricacies of a sack ship voyage. Every action, from where to make landfall to how to find a customer for the cargo brought to Newfoundland,

to where and when to buy fish — and what fish to buy — to such unpredictable factors as luck and weather, are revealed. Though the voyage of the *Christian* was a novel undertaking for its investors, its experiences in Newfoundland and beyond would have been familiar to seasoned veterans of the trade. The voyage of the *Christian* therefore provides us with a window into an age when the sack ship was a central fixture of the Newfoundland trade.

THE VOYAGE

The unscheduled stop in the Orkneys shortly after the *Christian* set forth from Leith may have come as a relief to Edward Burd Jr., the venture's supercargo, for he had never before been on a long-distance oceanic voyage, and he had been troubled by sea-sickness during the *Christian*'s first days at sea.⁶ Yet for the men who had chartered the ship, the delay at Kirston was not an auspicious beginning to a commercial venture which, by its novel nature, was filled with uncertainties. The eight merchants who were party to the venture were for the most part men of some stature in the Edinburgh commercial community.⁷ A few had been investors together in previous ventures, including trade with Spain.⁸ The principal partner in the *Christian*'s voyage, William Hutton Sr., also had some familiarity with the Scottish fishing industry and possibly in the European fish trade.⁹ We can therefore assume that an important criterion for success in the Newfoundland trade had been met; the men who chartered the *Christian* were merchants with some experience in domestic enterprise as well as in trade with Europe. Moreover, they were linked by an informal but advantageous network of social, political and commercial contacts through which they could safely respond to the kind of new commercial opportunity that the Newfoundland trade represented.¹⁰

The partners appear to have prepared for their new venture carefully, to judge both by the *Christian*'s cargo and by the instructions they gave to the ship's master and to the supercargo. Five tons of "Bisquett" in 32 casks were stowed in the hold.¹¹ Captain Hutton and Edward Burd Jr. were instructed to make for "S^t Johns, Ferryland, or the Bay of Bulls, or any Harbour thereabouts". There they were to sell the biscuit "to the best advantage, rather to Masters of Ships, than to the Fishermen upon the Island". They were then to acquire a cargo "where you best can" of "good Merchantable fish, well dried & fair to the eye", without "Spots or blemishes", for subsequent delivery to Barcelona, Spain. There the investors' agent would arrange for the sale of the fish and the acquisition of a partial cargo of cork before the *Christian* began the homeward journey. The ship would stop only at San Lúcar, north of Cadiz, to complete its cargo with sherry and fruit.¹²

These were sensible instructions, suggesting that the partners had secured sound advice before venturing into the Newfoundland trade. Thus, they had taken the essential step of arranging a letter of credit from Claud Johnston, a merchant in

London with good connections in the fishery, to support the bills of exchange that Burd would have to write when purchasing fish in Newfoundland.¹³ Secondly, Burd's instruction to sell the biscuit to "Masters of Ships" rather than to "the Fishermen upon the Island" suggests that the partners sensed that it would be easier to collect bad debts from migratory fishermen who returned seasonally to England than from those who lived permanently in Newfoundland. Yet the unfamiliarity of the partners in that trade is also apparent. Burd learned later that the partners would have been wiser to secure their letter of credit through an Exeter merchant, because the planters and boat-keepers of Ferryland, where the *Christian* eventually bought its fish, preferred bills of exchange drawn on merchants of that West Country town and would willingly have sold their fish more cheaply had they been paid in Exeter bills.¹⁴ The appointment of Edward Burd Jr. as supercargo was also open to question. As the representative of the chartering party on board the *Christian*, it was his responsibility to attend to the accounts of the cargo and any other commercial affairs of the ship. Though no longer as common in commercial ventures as in the previous centuries, supercargoes were still found in newer trades "where firm business connections had not yet been established".¹⁵ Yet Burd's appointment appears to have been governed less by business logic than as an apprenticeship for young Edward and as a favour to his father, with whom William Hutton had served as Merchant Councillor of Edinburgh years before.¹⁶ Burd therefore lacked the necessary judgement within the Newfoundland trade that came with experience. Nor were the partners quite so prudent in their choice of ship for the venture. The *Christian* was both small and slow for the Newfoundland trade.¹⁷ This would ultimately prove extremely costly.

In its purpose, its cargo, and its route, the *Christian* was what was commonly called in the Newfoundland trade a "sack ship", one of at least 55 such ships reported in Newfoundland that year.¹⁸ Sack ships were the freighters of the fish trade; they did not participate in the fishery itself, but instead brought provisions and gear to Newfoundland to be sold or exchanged for fish which they then delivered to the principal markets in southern Europe. There they took on cargoes of wine, cork, dried fruit and other Mediterranean products then in demand in northern Europe.¹⁹ At 70 tons burthen, the *Christian* was fairly typical of Scottish ships of that era, but it was small for a sack ship.²⁰ It also proved to be a slow sailer, taking more than six weeks to arrive at St. John's from St. Kilda. Burd attributed the slow passage to fickle winds and the necessity of heaving to at night once they encountered icebergs, though he later conceded that the ship had been "leaky in the Passage".²¹

The slow ocean crossing was an early indication that the *Christian* was not ideally suited for a trade governed by a tight annual schedule. Timing was critical to the success of a sack ship. For one thing, the full duration of a sack ship's triangular voyage — from home port to Newfoundland to Southern Europe and back to home port — normally took just about a full year. Should too much time be spent on each stage of the voyage, the sack ship would not return home in time to be refitted for

the following year's voyage.²² Timing was also critical in selling one cargo or in purchasing another; securing the best price depended very much on negotiating a deal at just the right time. This lesson was driven home just after the *Christian* arrived in St. John's. Within hours of entering the harbour — perhaps even as Burd and Captain Hutton were being received "verry Kindly" by Captain Boulter, the naval commodore at Newfoundland — Captain Weroy of the *Crown* galley of London broke the price of fish at 16 shillings or 32 reals per quintal.²³ This was a full shilling higher and two weeks sooner than Burd had been led to expect, for which reason, the supercargo confided in his journal, Captain Weroy "was heartily cursed by almost every body".²⁴ Yet Weroy's impatience was understandable during that summer of 1726. For many years the British fishery at Newfoundland had been severely disrupted, first by war, and then by a mysterious refusal of the cod to come inshore as they normally did each spring.²⁵ The fishery was just beginning to recover — landings in 1726 were the best in decades.²⁶ Even so, the fish would not come inshore as early as had once been the case, with the result that the season was well advanced and the weather no longer as favourable for a good cure by the time large volumes of fish were being processed.²⁷ Moreover, as the fishery began to recover, so did the demand among buyers — hence, presumably, Captain Weroy's attempt to snatch an advantage by offering an unexpectedly high price. How Burd must have envied Captain Rannie, the Scottish master of a London sack ship, who had arranged to purchase a cargo of bank fish at 27 reals per quintal before he left England.²⁸ For the young supercargo, it was an abrupt and unpleasant initiation into the Newfoundland fish trade.

His anxiety over the cost of securing a cargo of fish may explain why Burd failed to record any impressions of St. John's, as he had of the Orkneys and would later of Gibraltar and Barcelona. Then again, early eighteenth-century St. John's would not have presented a very imposing sight to the young Scot. Barely a thousand people lived there, of whom possibly a quarter were permanent inhabitants, the rest being transients.²⁹ The settlement — one could hardly yet call it a "town" — comprised only a few private dwellings, a church, a dozen or so mercantile premises and, in comparison with other Newfoundland settlements, a disproportionately large number of taverns, all strung out in no particular order along the harbour-front.³⁰ Adding to the overall impression of impermanence were the dilapidated remains of Fort William, tucked in behind the town in a corner of the harbour and falling into decay and ruin.³¹ The defining feature of the community was the waterfront, dominated by the wharves, storage sheds, stages, shacks, and flakes that were characteristic of a busy harbour in one of the world's most productive fisheries.³² Yet by then the fishery of St. John's had begun to fade in importance; Ferryland produced more fish for export, while other towns rivalled St. John's in size.³³ Instead, it was its role as an information centre for the fishery, as well as its growing function as an administrative centre and rendezvous for the warships stationed at Newfoundland, which gave St. John's its significance in 1726. Captain

Weroy's action in "breaking" the price of fish typically established a benchmark for prices not only for St. John's and its environs but throughout the fishery. Similarly, the prices of imported commodities throughout Newfoundland were determined by those established at St. John's. It was for this reason that sack ships like the *Christian* came to St. John's; no matter where they might eventually purchase their fish, it simply made sense to go there first.

Burd's first task was to rent a wharf and a storehouse. Only then could the tasks begin of unloading the ship and heaving down the hull in search of leaks.³⁴ His biscuit safely stowed ashore, he then began his quest for fish to fill the hold for the next leg of the venture, the voyage to southern Europe. To this end, he sought out the advice and services of Captain Richard Newman, the fishing admiral of St. John's that year.³⁵ Over a glass, Newman advised Burd to seek his fish in Torbay, a rather exposed harbour just to the north of St. John's, assuring him that the price there would be three or four reals cheaper. Burd was still supervising the unloading of the *Christian*, but he managed some time away from this task to visit Torbay in company with Captain Hutton and Captain Newman. But when he spoke to the boat-keepers in Torbay, he learned that they would only sell at half a real below the St. John's price. Captain Newman's optimistic predictions of bargain prices vanished; his advice now was that nothing better could be expected. Subsequent haggling failed to bring about an acceptable compromise.³⁶

Burd could not disguise his annoyance with "His LdShip [Captain Newman, who] did not doe such fair things as he promissed".³⁷ Leaving Captain Hutton and the crew in St. John's to attend to the ship's hull, he therefore headed for the outports south of St. John's in search of his elusive cargo. His first stop was Bay Bulls, where he was assured by Mr. Henley, a local merchant, that a cargo could be scraped together with the help of two boat-masters there and a third from Toad's Cove (known today as Tors Cove). This, too, however, failed to work out. The man from Toad's Cove never showed up, and then one of the Bay Bulls boat-masters backed out of any deal.³⁸ It must have been with a mounting sense of frustration that Burd proceeded to Ferryland, his next destination.

Ferryland was one of eighteenth-century Newfoundland's more substantial settlements. Founded in the previous century as a proprietary colony by George Calvert, later Lord Baltimore, Ferryland by 1726 had nearly as many permanent inhabitants and more private dwellings as St. John's.³⁹ It attracted more fishing ships and more sack ships than St. John's, because it produced more fish – more, in fact, than any other community on the island.⁴⁰ Much of Ferryland's prosperity by then rested on both a thriving inshore fishery and the banks fishery — Burd claimed that "This place is the most frequented by the Bankers of any in the Land".⁴¹ Indeed, it was precisely for this reason that Burd had been drawn to Ferryland in the first place, for he had been advised that "a cargoe of Bank fish...wou'd doe fully as well as the Shoar for a Spanish Mercate".⁴² Moreover, bank fish cost less. Burd therefore approached Captain Thomas Holdsworth, who had been recommended to him as

"one of the best men in the place", and the two quickly worked out an arrangement whereby Burd would purchase 1500 quintals of "dry merchantable Bank & Shoar fish" at 14 shillings 6 pence per quintal from Holdsworth and several other boat-keepers, while Holdsworth accepted 6000 pounds of his biscuit at 14 shillings per hundredweight.⁴³

Was it a good deal? Burd insisted that "This was the best bargain I could make" if his ship were to make an early departure for Spain. It was also with some relish that he would later report that the price of fish had soared by mid-September to 16 and even 17 shillings per quintal, and that many of the buyers would go away with only half their lading; "they would now give any thing for fish, but they are not to be had".⁴⁴ Yet there is an understandably defensive tone to Burd's remarks. For one thing, shortly after arriving in St. John's he had declined an offer to sell all of the biscuit at 15 shillings per quintal "till I saw whither or not wee Stayed in the Place". Had the *Christian* arrived even sooner, his biscuit would have sold at an even better price. Instead, there were now so many sack ships in Newfoundland that he had to sell his biscuit in lots, at 14 shillings per hundredweight or less.⁴⁵ It was yet another reminder of the importance of timing to a profitable voyage. Unless a sack ship arrived in Newfoundland ahead of its rivals — and there was little doubt that the *Christian* was unlucky in this regard — it could not hope to sell its cargo at the highest possible price.⁴⁶

Nor could a sack ship hope to purchase fish at the most advantageous price if it arrived too late in the season. This may explain Burd's curious confidence that bank fish would do as well as shore fish in the Spanish market, for he knew how difficult it was for bank fish to match the quality of shore fish. This was because bank fish was heavily salted and stored for several weeks in the hold of the banking vessel before being brought to shore.⁴⁷ All the salt then had to be rinsed away before the final transformation into the familiar salt cod could be completed. According to Captain Boulter, the difference in quality between the two meant that shore fish usually fetched two reals per quintal more than bank fish "and this year in most places it was five Ryalls a Quintall dearer than the Bank fish".⁴⁸ This suggests either that the collapse of the inshore fishery during the decade after 1713 had compelled even the discerning Spanish market to accept bank fish, or that the *Christian's* late arrival in Newfoundland, together with the large number of sack ships at Newfoundland that summer, had drawn Burd into a questionable decision.

Burd returned to St. John's to find the *Christian* ready to sail to Ferryland, its hull completed and the biscuit loaded back on board. Small wonder, then, that he reacted peevishly to an unexpected demand for some dry goods that he had been trying to trade unsuccessfully for two weeks on his private account — where had these customers been when Burd first arrived?⁴⁹ But the investment of his employers took precedent over any opportunity to peddle his private stock of goods; by 18 August, the *Christian* was in Ferryland, anchored "as near to Capt Holdsworth's Stage as possible..." The bread was unloaded and Holdsworth was delivered his share. The

hold was then readied to receive the salt cod. Burd was still hopeful that the *Christian* could complete its lading and depart for Spain before the end of the month. This, however, was not to be. The business of transferring fish into the hold was one that required good, dry conditions. Instead, "bad Weather" set in, forcing Burd to wait.⁵⁰ When, by 27 August, the skies had not cleared, Burd could stand the delay no longer; "bad Weather" or no, the process of loading the fish on board was allowed to begin.⁵¹

It was a time-consuming process, taking three weeks to complete. In part, the slow pace was necessary because of the care with which the fish had to be stowed in the hold. Then there was the blustery weather, which continued to interfere with the loading process and occasionally even interrupted it.⁵² The principal factor slowing the process down, however, was related to the truck system that prevailed in eighteenth-century Newfoundland, by which merchants advanced supplies on credit to boat-keepers against repayment in fish at the end of the season, and by which boat-keepers in turn advanced supplies on credit to their servants against wages. For Burd, it meant that the fish he had purchased was delivered, not in a few large lots but rather as numerous consignments, one as small as 2 quintals, more typically in lots of 50 or 60 or 90 quintals. Most came from Holdsworth himself or from people who were paying off their debts to him by delivering fish for his account.⁵³ Several smaller lots were supplied by other byeboat men and planters.⁵⁴ Finally, on 16 September, the last ten quintals were taken on board; the last of the bread had been sold scant days before.⁵⁵ And, like a celestial punctuation mark heralding the end of the process, an eclipse of the sun, "the plainest that ever I saw", took place just two days before.⁵⁶ Shortly before noon on 22 September, after another delay occasioned by contrary winds, the *Christian* made sail, much to the obvious delight of Edward Burd Jr., who bid "adieu to Ferryland & all the Rogues in it".⁵⁷

EPILOGUE

Burd's relief was understandable. The voyage from Scotland to Newfoundland had been tedious and slow. Precious time had been spent securing the best price possible. Yet more time had been lost to bad weather and the labourious process of bringing the fish on board and stowing it in the hold. Some self-congratulation was perhaps justified merely for having secured a cargo at a reasonable price — at least one sack ship went away empty, despite offering three reals per quintal more than Burd had paid.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, this would have brought the supercargo little comfort. His success in buying a lading of fish was offset by his failure to sell his biscuit at the price he wanted. Adding insult to injury, he had sold too little of his private stock of goods to cover his personal expenses. Reluctantly, he was compelled to ask his father to arrange an advance of "some money" with his employers, to await his arrival in Cadiz. This first request was not to be his last.⁵⁹

Any relief Burd may have felt at leaving Ferryland was nonetheless premature. As the Newfoundland coast disappeared over the stern, he could not know that before him lay yet more frustrations and tribulations. The Scottish sack ship was still short of Gibraltar when vessels which had departed Newfoundland three weeks later than the *Christian* began to overtake it.⁶⁰ By the time the *Christian* finally reached Barcelona early in December, fifteen ships had already off-loaded their cargo. The local demand for fish — never very elastic — had therefore largely been satisfied. By the time Burd and Captain Hutton made their way ashore, prices had tumbled and customers were “very cool in buying”.⁶¹ On top of everything else, the quality of the fish in the hold had seriously deteriorated, greatly diminishing its value.⁶² Gregory French, the agent in Barcelona, drew attention to “the Moistness of the fish” which, during a long trans-Atlantic passage, would have caused the fish to become heated in the cramped hold. Several possible factors, all arising from the inexperience of the investors and the supercargo, may explain this. Thus, the bank fish on board may have been improperly cured, leaving too high a moisture content.⁶³ Alternatively the fish may have been contaminated by rain during loading. Then, of course, there was that great constant, the unfortunate *Christian*, slow “and Not extrardly tight”.⁶⁴ Bad judgement or a slow, leaky ship, it made little difference; the venture to that point was anything but a success.

But the *Christian*’s problems would not end in Barcelona. Once the fish was unloaded, there was difficulty in putting together a return cargo. Together with the late arrival in port, this meant that the season for favourable winds and a quick passage to the Straits had passed by the time the *Christian* began its homeward journey.⁶⁵ More than a month was spent sailing to Gibraltar, fighting gales all the way, only to learn that a long-anticipated conflict between England and Spain had at last begun. Gibraltar was besieged, and all trade was immobilized.⁶⁶ There the *Christian* remained until the middle of March, when a convoy was finally arranged. The war with Spain also meant that the original plan to pick up wine at San Lúcar, not to mention Burd’s advance at Cadiz, had to be abandoned. The *Christian* sailed in ballast instead, as far as Bordeaux, where Edward Burd Jr. made his departure in order to sample the delights of France. Meanwhile, Captain Hutton proceeded to the island of St. Martin-de-Ré, off La Rochelle, to load salt with the hope of salvaging something out of the voyage for the investors.⁶⁷

It seems highly unlikely, however, that the venture could have earned a profit by the time the *Christian* returned to Leith. We know nothing about the cost of the biscuit that had been shipped to Newfoundland so that we cannot determine whether a profit was made on that leg of the voyage. Yet the poor quality and low price of the fish when the ship reached Barcelona almost certainly meant that any profit on the second leg of the voyage was insignificant.⁶⁸ The small freights carried between Barcelona and Gibraltar would hardly have covered the expenses of sitting idle for a month in Gibraltar or travelling from there to Bordeaux in ballast. The final leg, with salt from Bordeaux to Leith, probably earned very little. Against all

that, there would have been the chartering costs, insurance, wages for the crew, port costs, the costs of outfitting and maintaining the ship, and so on, which, while not indicated by the available records, would almost certainly have exceeded the revenues generated by the voyage.

The voyage of the *Christian* therefore demonstrates how challenging the Newfoundland trade could be. The partners in the *Christian* included knowledgeable businessmen familiar with the Spanish trade and who appear to have made reasonable decisions, tempered with commendable caution. What they lacked was familiarity with the Newfoundland fish trade. Much therefore depended on their supercargo, Edward Burd Jr., whose responsibilities it had been to sell one cargo and acquire another. These he carried out with energy and initiative, and sensibly followed all the normal procedures typical of any trade of that day. In the end, however, general competence was not enough. A supercargo had to know the peculiarities of the particular trade as well, and it was here that Burd showed his weakness. The ultimate responsibility for the quality of the fish purchased in Ferryland rested upon his shoulders. That it failed to meet the standards of the market when delivered to Barcelona must be partly laid at Burd's door. The sound judgement that comes with experience and a healthy measure of good fortune were essential ingredients he had yet to acquire.

Notes

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²This paper is based largely on a *Journal of a Voyage to Newfoundland, in 1726-1727* kept by Edward Burd, Jr., the supercargo of the *Christian* of Leith, commanded by Captain Alexander Hutton. The journal is held by the Scottish Record Office (hereafter SRO) in Edinburgh, where it is catalogued as RH 9/14/102; an edited copy of the journal is available at the Newfoundland Provincial Reference Library in St. John's. Henceforth it will be cited as Burd, *Journal*. Additional documentation came from letters and accounts belonging to Edward Burd Jr. and catalogued separately by the SRO as RH 15/54.

³The earliest Scottish ship to venture to Newfoundland appears to have been the *Grace of God* of Dundee, which voyaged there and then to Lisbon in 1599/1600; W.A.

McNeill (ed.), "Papers of a Dundee Shipping Dispute 1600-1604", in *Miscellany of the Scottish History Society*, vol. 10 (Edinburgh, 1963), 55-85, esp. 68, 73. Until now it has generally been assumed that the Scots played no part in the Newfoundland trade before the mid- to late eighteenth century. Keith Matthews fixes 1752 as the earliest year in which there is evidence of a Scottish ship visiting Newfoundland; Keith Matthews, "A History of the West of England-Newfoundland Fisheries" (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1968), 423-424. David Macmillan maintained that any Scots presence in Newfoundland before the 1770s must have been a "cover" or "blind" to disguise Scottish trade with mainland North America; Macmillan, "The 'New Men' in Action: Scottish Mercantile and Shipping Operations in the North American Colonies, 1760-1825", in D.S. Macmillan (ed.), *Canadian Business History: Selected Studies, 1497-1971* (Toronto, 1972), 50-51. The Burd journal suggests that both of these conclusions need to be reassessed.

⁴Christopher A. Whatley, "Economic Causes and Consequences of the Union of 1707: A Survey", *Scottish Historical Review* 68 (2, 186) (1989), 150-181; T.M. Devine, "The Union of 1707 and Scottish Development", *Scottish Economic and Social History* 5 (1985), 23-40.

⁵For an analysis that focuses more on the Scottish economic and political context which conditioned the venture, see my previous papers, "A Scottish Sack Ship in the Newfoundland Trade, 1726-27", *Scottish Economic and Social History* 18 (1) (1998), 1-18, and "A Scottish Venture in the Newfoundland Fish Trade, 1726-1727", in Olaf U. Janzen (ed.), *Merchant Organization and Maritime Trade in the North Atlantic, 1660-1815* (St. John's, 1998), 133-153.

⁶Burd's sea-sickness is mentioned in a letter from his father, dated 23 July 1726, in SRO RH 15/54/4, A4; Burd's background has been compiled in "Genealogical History of the Family of Burd of Ford and Whitehall" (1827), National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS), Mss 5061, 106.

⁷Seven of the investors were merchants of Edinburgh or Leith, one was a merchant of Glasgow. Two of the eight were also "baillies" or magistrates, while at least four were burgesses and guild brethren; Charles B. Boog Watson (ed.), *Roll of Edinburgh Burgesses and Guild-Brethren 1701-1760* (Edinburgh, 1930). One of the investors, William Hutton Sr., was a member of the Merchant Company of Edinburgh, holding several positions of trust within that organization. In fact, shortly after the departure of the *Christian*, Hutton was elected Master of the Merchant Company; Alexander Heron, *The Rise and Progress of the Company of Merchants of the City of Edinburgh 1681-1902* (Edinburgh, 1903), Appendix V, 390-392, "Masters of the Merchant Company;" see also The Merchant Company of Edinburgh (hereafter MCE), Minutes from 1681 to 1696 and Register of Entrants with the Company from 1681 to 1902; MCE, Minutes, 2 (1702-1714).

⁸At least four of the men were partners in a sugar refinery and distillery and a stage coach company in Leith; Testament of "the late William Hutton merchant in Edin. & Resider in Leith", 28 July 1742, SRO Commissary Court Records (hereafter CC), Edinburgh Testaments, 8/8/106, 118-118v; testament of the late Baillie James Newlands, 30 July 1736, SRO CC 8/8/98, 241-244v; In their letter to their agent in Barcelona, the partners referred to at least one previous commercial voyage to that port; William Hutton Sr. & partners to William French, 14 May 1726 in Burd, *Journal*, 17v. The *Christian* would also journey to Spain for salt in 1734; Testament of "the late William Hutton merchant in Edin. & Resider in Leith", 28 July 1742, SRO CC 8/8/106, 118-118v.

⁹Hutton owned a minority share in a fishing buss and fishing equipment at the time of his death; disposition, William Hutton to spouse Christian Thomson, 28 February 1737, SRO Register of Deeds (hereafter RD), 2nd series, "Durie's Office", 3/195.

¹⁰Devine maintains that such diversification in both overseas trade and the domestic economy, together with the effective use of a network of kin and close personal acquaintances, was typical of the greater Scottish merchants, who sought thereby to "minimize the insecurities of trade, and so ... preserve their fortunes..."; T.M. Devine, "The Social Composition of the Business Class in the Larger Scottish Towns, 1680-1740", in T.M. Devine and David Dickson (eds.), *Ireland and Scotland 1600-1850: Parallels and Contrasts in Economic and Social Development* (Edinburgh, 1983), 167; T.M. Devine, "The Merchant Class of the Larger Scottish Towns in the Later Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries", in George Gordon and Brian Dicks (eds.), *Scottish Urban History* (Aberdeen, 1983), 103-4. William Hutton and his partners may not have been "great merchants", but they would have come close to qualifying, and it is almost a certainty that they aspired to become such.

¹¹10,150 lbs. of biscuit, or hard bread, in total; see "Invoice of...Bisquett", Burd, *Journal*, 1-1v.

¹²Copy of instructions for Alexander Hutton, master of the *Christian*, and Edward Burd Jr., supercargo, 24 May 1726, in Burd, *Journal*, 10v-11.

¹³Letter of Credit from Claud Johnston, April 28, 1726, SRO RH 15/54/4, A2. The worth of Johnston's credit was attested by Solomon Merrett, John Spackman, John Lloyd and David Milne. The supercargo later described the first three as "very well known in Newfoundland but especially Merrett & Hoyte [*sic*; the original clearly identifies him as Lloyd] are best known in fferryland." See Burd *Journal*, 10v. One of the witnesses was a servant to "J. Taverner Sr.", probably one of the Taverners which one authority described as "one of the more remarkable pioneer families...in Newfoundland." See W. Gordon Handcock, *Soe longe as there comes noe women: Origins of English Settlement in Newfoundland* (St. John's, 1989), 47, 50 and Table 2.1, 48-49.

¹⁴As Burd explained, "any body that have a mind to purchass a Cargoe here, would doe well to get their Credit upon Exeter, because this saves trouble to those they buy their fish from, in having their money remitted in them, from London or Bristoll; They will allwayes sell their fish a Ryall a Quintall cheaper for Exeter Bills, than for Bills upon either of the other two places." Burd, *Journal*, 12v-13.

¹⁵Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Newton Abbot, 1962), 170-171.

¹⁶Helen Armet (ed.), *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh, 1701 to 1718* (Edinburgh, 1967), 27, entry for 23 September, 1702. T. McAloon views Burd's presence on the *Christian* as "a finishing school for his commercial training." McAloon, "A Minor Scottish Merchant in General Trade: the case of Edward Burd 1728-39", in John Butt and J.T. Ward (eds.), *Scottish Themes: Essays in Honour of Professor S.G.E. Lythe* (Edinburgh, 1976), 17.

¹⁷Though in fairness to the partners, they may have had little choice in using the *Christian*. William Hutton Sr. was both the senior member of the limited partnership and the principal owner of the ship; Alexander Hutton, the ship's master, was his brother and co-owner of the ship. Presumably it was a condition of the partnership that they charter the ship for the voyage from the Huttons; "Disposition, William Hutton to spouse Christian Thomson", 28

February 1737, SRO RD, 2nd series, "Durie's Office", 1 December 1736 - 30 April 1737. The ship was almost certainly named after William's wife.

¹⁸From the annual "State of the Fishery at Newfoundland", preserved for 1726 in the Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) Colonial Office papers (hereafter CO) 194/8, 42, copied in National Archives of Canada microfilm reel B-210 (hereafter NAC Reel B-210).

¹⁹The word "sack" derives from *vino de sacca* or "wine set aside for export." Peter Pope, "Sack Ships in the Seventeenth-Century Newfoundland Trade", *Northern Seas 1999*, Yearbook of the Association for the History of the Northern Seas (St. John's, 2001), 35. See also Gillian Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577-1660* (Toronto, 1969), 6; Davis, *Rise of the English Shipping Industry*, 235-8; Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (New York, 1986), 81.

²⁰Sue Mowat, *The Port of Leith: Its History and Its People* (Edinburgh, 1994), 288; T.C. Smout, *Scottish Trade on the Eve of Union 1660-1707* (Edinburgh & London, 1963), 47-52. The fifty-five sack ships at Newfoundland in 1726 averaged just over a hundred tons each, while the ninety-four fishing ships recorded that year average just under fifty-six tons each; "State of the Fishery for 1726", PRO CO 194/8, 42 (NAC Reel B-210). Pope, "Sack Ships", 39, reports that seventeenth-century English sack ships were usually smaller than the fishing ships they served.

²¹Edward Burd Jr. to William Hutton Sr., 17 September 1726, in Burd, *Journal*, 9-9v.

²²See Jean-François Brière, "Le commerce triangulaire entre les ports terre-neuviens français, les pêcheries d'Amérique du nord et Marseille au 18^e siècle: nouvelles perspectives", *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 40 (2) (1986), 193-214.

²³It was customary at this time for the British government to station two warships at Newfoundland to patrol and protect the fishery; see Gerald Graham, "Britain's Defence of Newfoundland", *Canadian Historical Review* 23 (3) (1942), 260-79; on Robert Boulter, see entry by Michael Godfrey in David Hayne (ed.), *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 2, 1701 to 1740 (Toronto, 1969), 89-90. Boulter's ship, *Argyle*, a fifty-gun fourth-rate warship, remained at St. John's throughout the season; *Ludlow Castle*, Captain John St. Lo, was stationed at Placentia.

²⁴"even the Boat keepers themselves told that they did not expect above 30 Ryalls", Burd, *Journal*, 30 July 1726. "Breaking the price" refers to the practice by which buyers met in St. John's to settle on a price agreeable to all; the practice still prevailed in 1806 when it was described by Governor Erasmus Gower; see Shannon Ryan, *The Ice Hunters: A History of Newfoundland Sealing to 1914* (St. John's, 1994), 40. Presumably Captain Weroy violated the custom in order to assemble a cargo as quickly as possible, knowing that the higher cost of purchasing the fish would be off-set by getting to market early enough to command an even better selling price. Weroy expected to set out from Newfoundland on 7 September; this would be two full weeks before the *Christian* began her voyage to Spain; Alexander Wyllly to Edward Burd Jr., 5 September 1726, SRO RH 15/54/4, A10; Burd, *Journal*, 22 September 1726.

²⁵Matthews, "Fisheries", 307; see also Steele, *English Atlantic*, 81. The French inshore fishery also experienced poor yields during this period; see Laurier Turgeon, "Le temps des pêches lointaines: permanences et transformations (vers 1500-vers 1850)" in Michel Mollat (directeur), *Histoire des pêches maritimes en France* (Toulouse, 1989), esp. 149-152, and Jean-François Brière, "Le reflux des terre-neuviens malouins sur les côtes du

Canada dans la première moitié du XVIII^e siècle: réponse à un changement du climat?", *Histoire sociale/Social History* 12 (23) (1979), 166-169.

²⁶See data for 1726 in Shannon Ryan, "Abstract of returns for the Newfoundland fishery 1698-1833; compiled from CO 194 papers" (St. John's, 1969).

²⁷R. Boulter, "Answers to Heads of Inquiry", PRO CO 194/7, 37 (NAC Reel B-210).

²⁸*Burd Journal*, 5 August 1726. Later, as *Christian* sailed by the Azores, she spoke a pink of London, bound for Alicante with a cargo of saltcod from St. Pierre (which was then a British possession), for which purchase had been arranged before she set out for the fishery at a price of 25 reals per quintal; *Burd, Journal*, 24 October 1726.

²⁹"Survey of the Fishery in Newfoundland, 1726", PRO CO 194/7, 42 (NAC Reel B-210). According to the survey, there were 580 migratory boat fishermen and 436 "inhabitants", including masters and mistresses, employees, and servants. However, several specialists argue that the word "inhabitant" does not necessarily signify permanence. Both Keith Matthews and Gordon Handcock suggest methods of calculating the permanent population that would result in a more conservative figure for St. John's of about 250 permanent inhabitants in 1726. See, for instance, Handcock, *Soe longe*, 95-8.

³⁰For a cartographic impression of St. John's in 1728, see John Mannion, "Plate 27: St. John's" in R. Cole Harris (ed.), *Historical Atlas of Canada*, vol. 1. *From the Beginnings to 1800* (Toronto, 1987). Out of 74 taverns throughout Newfoundland, St. John's had 46; Capt. Robert Boulter, "Heads of Inquiry", 13 October, 1726, PRO CO 194/7, 35v (NAC Reel B-210).

³¹The military investment in St. John's during the recent wars had been a measure of the town's perceived importance, but the acquisition of Placentia from the French, together with the British desire to promote the development of a British fishery on the coast west of Trepassy, had shifted the military centre of gravity away from St. John's by the 1720s.

³²Fishing was less central to the existence of St. John's than for other Newfoundland settlements. The town's importance was based on its role as a centre of information, administration and service — witness the proliferation of taverns.

³³Keith Matthews maintained that the wars of 1689-1697 and 1702-1713, combined with the failure of the inshore fishery, had forced most planters at St. John's into tavern-keeping, and that "St. John's never again possessed a large sedentary fishery..."; Matthews, "Fisheries", 317.

³⁴"Wee this day took a Wharf for loading down the Ship, for which wee paid a Guinea; likewise a Storehouse at 50sh p month for a longer or Shorter time..."; *Burd, Journal*, 1 August 1726. The wharf was rented from Captain Weston.

³⁵Captain Newman's status as "fishing admiral", long a custom of the fishery, had been made law under the terms of 10 and 11 William III, cap. 25, more commonly identified as "King William's Act" or as the "Newfoundland Act" (1698-99). As Burd explained, "the first Ship in the Harbour is Lord or Admirall of that Harbour, & the Captain sits Supreme Judge of all differences that happen in the place, from whose sentence there is no appeal but to the Commadore." *Burd, Journal*, 13. See Jerry Bannister, "The Fishing Admirals in Eighteenth-century Newfoundland", this volume.

³⁶"30 Ryalls if the ship went to Torbay [to pick up the fish] or 31 if they brought the fish about to St. Johns; I offered them 29 & 30." *Burd, Journal*, 6 August 1726.

³⁷*Burd, Journal*, 4 August 1726.

³⁸*Burd, Journal*, 8, 9, and 10 August 1726.

³⁹“State of the Fishery for 1726”, PRO CO 194/7, 42 (NAC Reel B-210). Unlike St. John’s, however, Ferryland did not have a church. According to Burd, Sunday services were held in “The Doctors”, a local pub; see Burd, *Journal*, 20 August 1726.

⁴⁰Compare the numbers in “State of the Fishery for 1726” in PRO CO 194/7, 42 (NAC Reel B-210); according to Burd, “There commonly fishes here between 30 & 40 sail of Ships from 50 to 150 Tons, the greatest part of them belong to a small town in the River of Exeter called Limpston...”. Burd, *Journal*, 22 September 1726.

⁴¹Burd, *Journal*, 22 September 1726. The preference of southern European markets for lightly salted dry cod or “poorjack” had committed British fishermen to the inshore fishery since its origins in the sixteenth century. The offshore banks were ignored until the failure of the inshore fishery after 1713 left them with few alternatives; Matthews, “Fisheries”, 311-312; C. Grant Head, *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland: A Geographer’s Perspective* (Toronto, 1976), 72-4. The British shift to the banks was pioneered by New England in the 1680s; Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill, 1994), 149-150.

⁴²Burd, *Journal*, 5 August 1726.

⁴³Burd, *Journal*, 11, 12, and 13 August 1726; “Contract Betwixt Tho: Holsworth & Edward Burd junior 1726”, SRO RH 15/54/4, A14. 800 quintals of the purchase consisted of bank fish, the rest was shore fish.

⁴⁴Burd at Ferryland to William Hutton Sr., 17 September 1726, in Burd, *Journal*, 9-9v.

⁴⁵Burd, *Journal*, 13 August 1726. “I expected allwayes that the price of bread would have risen, but Such great numbers of Ships coming & all of them Bringing some, Still kept the price Low”. Burd, *Journal*, 11 September 1726. Burd would later claim that “Bread was sold in the Spring at 20 sh p %”. Burd, *Journal*, 15.

⁴⁶When Burd sought advice on “what things was wanting in this place” he was told that “unless you Could be a Erly Shipe one Dare not venture To advise,...” Alexander Wyllly (St. John’s, Newfoundland) to Edward Burd Jr., 13 December, 1726, SRO RH 15/54/4, A22.

⁴⁷Burd recorded detailed observations on the British fishery at Newfoundland in his *Journal*, 12v-15. Head claims that “Complaints of declining quality of product became frequent in the first decades of the [bank] fishery”. Head, *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland*, 74.

⁴⁸Capt. R. Boulter, “Answers to the Heads of Inquiries”, 13 October 1726, PRO CO 194/7, 32 (NAC Reel B-210). A British merchant would insist later in that century that the southern European markets “will never take bank fish if they can get shore”; evidence of Mr. Jefferey to the British Parliamentary inquiry, 1792, cited in Matthews, “Fisheries”, 312.

⁴⁹“The Inhabitants...now finding that wee were going away, came & bought Sevrall of our Small things, which at first they said they did not Want, but now were content to pay us more for them than wee at first asked...,which sufficiently Showes the temper of the people”, Burd, *Journal*, 15 August 1726. Burd and Captain Hutton were partners in a small private venture. Before leaving Leith, they had assembled a quantity of fabrics and dry goods, including shoes, capes, hats, buckles, buttons, and thread, to be sold as opportunity allowed throughout the voyage; Burd had a similar arrangement with Andrew Purdie, an Edinburgh merchant, and had accepted responsibility for a third cargo belonging to Mrs. Hutton. See invoices of all three private cargoes in Burd, *Journal*, 2-2v.

⁵⁰The time was not spent in complete idleness. Burd attempted to collect some bad debts on behalf of Claud Johnston, on whose letter of credit he drew the bills of exchange with which to pay for the fish. But the debtors were either all dead or had moved on. See Burd to William Hutton Sr., 17 September 1726 in *Journal*, 8v-9. Burd was only slightly more successful in selling the goods in his and the others' private accounts. He sold much of one consignment, albeit by peddling it in small individual lots to an assortment of individuals, but he only managed to sell a portion of a second and none of a third; see Edward Burd Jr. to Edward Burd Sr., probably 17 September 1726, in SRO RH 15/54/6, B5. The communities in Newfoundland at this time were too small and rude to generate much demand for the kind of goods Burd had to peddle, while merchants, factors, and agents brought their own goods from England and therefore had no need to purchase the kind of frippery Burd had to sell. As an inhabitant of St. John's later explained to Burd, the commodities most in demand in St. John's were rum, molasses, salt, and provisions, of which only biscuit was part of the *Christian's* manifest; Alexander Wyly (St. John's) to Burd, 13 December 1726, SRO RH 15/54/4, A22.

⁵¹Burd, *Journal*, 27 August 1726. The unfavourable weather conditions were widespread; on 5 September, Alexander Wyly would write Burd from St. John's that "the Badness of the Weather for this Three Weeks past, has very much Hindred the Ships here." See SRO RH 15/54/4, A10.

⁵²See Burd, *Journal*, various entries between 27 August and 16 September 1726.

⁵³Long vilified for its seemingly exploitive character, the truck system has recently been subjected to considerable scrutiny, leading to more complex and balanced conclusions about its nature. See for instance Matthews, "Fisheries", 177-178; Handcock, *Soe longe*, 137, 232-234; and Sean Cadigan, *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay: Merchant-Settler Relations in Newfoundland, 1785-1855* (Toronto, 1995), 105, 116-117.

⁵⁴Both planters and "byeboat men" were inshore fishermen using small boats and employing seasonal workers or "servants" to fish and to cure the catch. Byeboat men were, normally, migratory fishermen resident in England. Matthews and Handcock see "little difference" between the two groups, since some planters spent only a few years in Newfoundland and byeboat keepers sometimes over-wintered in Newfoundland, a situation requiring more complex conclusions. See Matthews, "Fisheries", 170, 177-178 and Handcock, *Soe longe*, 26, 137, 232-234. Peter Pope argues that the transience of Newfoundland residents has been exaggerated, see *Fish into Wine, the Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill NC, 2004), chapter 7. There is no consensus on this issue; cf. Cadigan, *Hope and Deception*, 105, 116-117.

⁵⁵Burd still had 25 hundredweight of biscuit left. To the end, he had hoped that the price of bread would rise, "but Such great numbers of Ships coming & all of them Bringing some, Still kept the price Low." He therefore managed to secure no better price than twelve shillings per hundredweight for the remaining biscuit; Burd, *Journal*, 11 September 1726.

⁵⁶Burd, *Journal*, 16 September 1726.

⁵⁷Burd, *Journal*, 22 September 1726. While conceding "of the best of them ... that they are not such great Rogues as some of their Neighbours", Burd warned that "the verry honestest of them will cheat you if he can hansomely & therefor its impossible for one that deals with them to be too much upon his Guard", adding that "this may Serve for a Character of the greatest part of the people that fish in the Country, as well as of those in this place".

⁵⁸“A boat came here this day from a Ship of 300 Tons that lay at Bay of Bulls, & offered 32 Ryalls p quintall but could not have his Cargoe.” Burd, *Journal*, 5 September 1726.

⁵⁹Burd to his father, September 1726, SRO RH 15/54/6, B5.

⁶⁰Burd, *Journal*, 10 November 1726.

⁶¹When the *Christian* reached Gibraltar in mid-November, Burd reported optimistically that fish was fetching 7½ dollars a quintal in Barcelona; Burd to William Hutton, Sr., 15 November 1726 in Burd, *Journal*, 16-16v. But the best price obtained when they arrived in Barcelona three weeks later was six dollars; Burd, *Journal*, 7 December 1726. Burd estimated Barcelona's annual demand for saltcod at about 30,000 quintals.

⁶²The ship anchored in the roadstead on 6 December; Burd, *Journal*. Of the 1,500 quintals of fish received in Ferryland, only 217 quintals were judged first quality; over a thousand quintals were second grade, and more than 200 quintals were third grade; see “Accompt Sale of 1500 Quintals Poorjack from Newfoundland”, Burd, *Journal*, 18v.

⁶³In his “Answers to the Heads of Inquiry” in October 1726, Commodore Bouler had indicated that the late appearance of the cod that year, combined with a wet summer, had made it difficult to cure the fish properly; PRO CO 194/8, 38v (NAC Reel B-210).

⁶⁴Burd in Barcelona to his father, no date, SRO RH 15/54/6, B1; Gregory French to William Hutton Sr. & Co., 12 January 1727, SRO RH 15/54/4, A3.

⁶⁵Arrangements had been made to have a cargo of cork waiting for the *Christian* in Barcelona, but according to Gregory French, an unusually bad season made cork not only scarce and expensive but also poor in quality; Gregory French to William Hutton Sr. & Co., 12 January 1727, SRO RH 15/54/4, A3. Instead, the *Christian* took on several small cargoes – some wine for Cadiz, some empty wine pipes for Mataró, and more wine for delivery to Gibraltar; charter party between Richard Neiland (Barcelona) and Alexander Hutton, 8 January 1727, SRO RH 15/54/6, B54. Ironically, a week after the *Christian* sailed for Gibraltar, French had “more Cork than Youl be able to take in”, Gregory French to Edward Burd Jr., 23 January 1727, SRO RH 15/54/6, B53.

⁶⁶Burd, *Journal*, entries for 14 January to 14 February 1727.

⁶⁷Edward Burd Jr. to his father, 6 June 1727, SRO RH 15/54/6, B7.

⁶⁸Ignoring for a moment various sundry charges, commissions, etc., the fish cost slightly under £1,100 in Ferryland, and sold for about £1,142 in Barcelona (5,832 reals, 2 sols at an exchange rate of 47 pence per real); Burd, *Journal*, 26 February 1727.