

## The Covenanters and the *Crown*

In 1679, after the Scottish Covenanters' uprising was quashed at the Battle of Bothwell Brig, around 1,200 prisoners were herded into the open space at Greyfriar's Church in Edinburgh.

Many of these prisoners were set free after making submission, while some were executed and others died of illness, or wounds.

The 250 prisoners that were left proved a problem. They had to be "disposed" of somehow.

So, in November 1679, these unfortunates were lead on to a ship, the *Crown of London*, in Leith, where they were to be transported to English plantations in America to become slaves.

Under the command of one Captain Patterson, the *Crown of London* set sail in December 1679.

The captain's planned course is unknown, but the ship's first port of call was Orkney where, on December 10, 1679, she sheltered from a storm off Scarvataing, a headland in the parish of Deerness, a mile or two from the sheltered bay of Deer Sound.

In gales typical of the season, the ship was driven on to rocks after her anchor chain snapped. The captain and crew escaped the doomed vessel by hacking down the ship's mast and clambering across it to

The Covenanters were 17th century Scottish Presbyterians, devoted to maintaining Presbyterianism as the sole religion of Scotland.

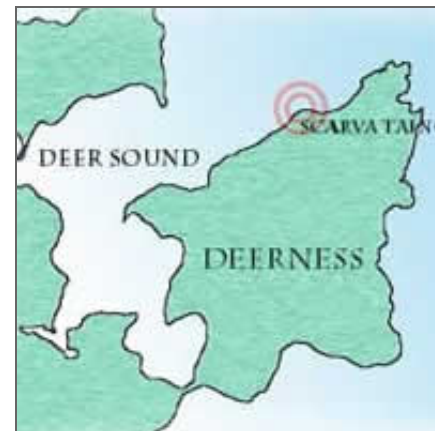
They were bound by oath to sustain one another in the defence of their religion and therefore signed covenants in 1557 and in 1581, which were re-endorsed in 1590 and 1596.

When Charles I of England came to the throne in 1625, he was opposed by the Scottish nobility because of heavy taxes he imposed, and his attempts to impose the Anglican church on Scotland.

In 1638, a General Assembly of Scotland, consisting exclusively of Supplicants, defied Charles and abolished the Anglican episcopacy, leading to the First Bishops' War in 1639.

The Second Bishops' War began in 1640, after a new assembly reaffirmed the decisions of its predecessor. At about this time the Supplicants became known as Covenanters.

The persecution of the Covenanters continued when



The site of the wreck of the *Crown* in December 1679.

reach land.

The prisoners, however, were not so fortunate.

They had been confined to the hold and the hatches battened down under the captain's orders. The reasoning behind this act was simple - the captain would be paid for the number of slaves on board the vessel and recompensed for those who died on the voyage. He would receive nothing for an escaped prisoner.

So, when the ship left port, Patterson took steps to make sure none did.

One member of crew did attempt a rescue by breaking through the deck with an axe. His valiant efforts meant that around 50 prisoners escaped and made it to the Deerness shore.

The remainder perished as the ship broke up and sank. It is said that over the following days, bodies washed up over three miles of the Deerness coastline.

Of the 47 or so prisoners who escaped to shore, most were recaptured and shipped to slavery in Jamaica, or New Jersey.

The people of Orkney were told that the prisoners were rebels fleeing from justice, but some are said to have escaped capture. Tradition has it that some survivors made it to [Stromness](#), where they found passage on a ship to Holland. Local tradition also dictates that some were permitted to settle in Orkney.

It has also been suggested that the ship, filled with prisoners, was never meant to make it to the colonies. A fully-laden vessel, travelling the northern routes at that time of the year was bound to run into trouble, especially when it had no provisions adequate for such a major voyage.

At the time the Colonial ports in America were open only to ships from England - a

Charles II came to the throne in 1660. But after the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, Presbyterianism was restored as the state religion of Scotland.

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The Covenanter's Memorial, Deerness

fact that makes it highly doubtful that a ship bearing cargo from Scotland would have been permitted to land.

Was there a darker motive behind the voyage of the *Crown of London*?

A monument for the Covenanters was erected in Deerness in 1888, three hundred yards from the spot where the ship went down.