



17 OCTOBER 2019

BLACK TUDORS: THREE UNTOLD STORIES

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I thought I knew the Tudors. I had “done” them at primary school, secondary school and university. But I was wrong. Because I didn’t know about the **Black** Tudors. My journey began when I heard in a lecture that the Tudors began trading to Africa in the middle of the 16th century.

This was news to me.

I began to wonder what those Tudor sailors thought of the Africans they encountered, and vice versa. I went to the library and started reading. It was then that I found a reference to a document that left me dumbstruck.

It said:

‘**great numbers of negars and Blackamoores**, which she is informed, **Have crept into this Realme** since the troubles between her highness and the King of Spaine...’

There were Africans living here in England!

I had to find out more. These ‘great numbers’ of Africans must have left some trace in the large body of records that survive from Tudor England. I began my search.

Over the next few years I found evidence of over 200 Africans living in Tudor England. They appear in:

- Parish registers, Tax Returns, Household Accounts, Court Records. Wills, Diaries and Letters, and Pictures – this is John Blanke, who inspired my book cover, the only known portrait of a Black Tudor.
- They were living across the country from Edinburgh and Hull to Plymouth and Truro.
- The largest numbers were in London, and the southern port towns of Plymouth, Southampton and Bristol.
- But also, in rural villages- like Bluntisham-cum-Earith in Cambridgeshire.

Many of the individuals I found are only recorded in one liners, like this parish record. In my book, *Black Tudors*, the 10 chapters are based on 10 Africans whose lives I was able to piece together in greater detail. Today I’m going to tell you about three of them: Jacques Francis, a salvage diver; Mary Fillis, a woman from Morocco baptized in London; and Edward Swarthy, who worked as a porter in a Gloucestershire manor house.

But before I do, I’d like to challenge a common assumption:

When I tell people about the Black Tudors, they often say: ‘Oh, you mean slaves? Well, I don’t. It is all too easy to assume that all Africans in Europe at this time were enslaved. We are bombarded with images of enslaved Africans, often dating to later periods. Most recently, in the film *12 years a Slave* and the television series *Roots*. But we need to think of these images alongside the ones of Africans in early modern Europe:



Then consider that people at the time made other assumptions. In 1572, Juan Gelofe, a forty-year-old African man, enslaved in a Mexican silver mine told an English sailor named William Collins “that England must be a good country as there were no slaves there.” Collins replied that “it was true, that they were all freemen in England”.

Theory:

- Gelofe and Collins were right: there was no law of slavery in England.
- As William Harrison explained in his *Description of England* (1587): As for slaves and bondmen, we have none; nay **such is the privilege of our country** by the especial grace of God and bounty of our princes, **that if any come hither from other realms, so soon as they set foot on land they become as free in condition as their masters**, whereby all note of servile bondage is utterly removed from them.
- Indeed, the only known court case (Cartwright, 1569) to explicitly consider the issue of slavery in this period resolved ‘that England has too pure an Air for Slaves to breathe in.’

In practice:

- In 1587, a Portuguese doctor called Hector Nunes admitted in this petition to the Court of Requests that he had: ‘no remedie...by the course of the Common Law of this realme... to compell’ an “Ethiopian” who “utterly refuseth to tarry and serve” him “to serve him duringe his life.”

Africans reported becoming free in England:

- In 1490, Pero Alvarez told the King of Portugal that he had been set free by Henry VII of England.

And over a century later:

- Diogo, an African who was taken to England by an English pirate in 1614, reported to the Portuguese Inquisition that when he laid foot on English soil, ‘he immediately became free, because in that Reign nobody is a slave.’

So now, let me introduce you to the three Black Tudors I want to tell you about tonight. I’ll show you how they were connected to the Tudor history we know, as well as answering some of the new questions their lives provoke. In the book, I begin each chapter with an imaginative paragraph focusing on a key event from the individual’s life. I will read these first, then tell you more about them.

1. Jacques Francis

Jacques plunged into the sea, and the cold engulfed him. It was so different to the warm waters where he’d learnt to swim and dive as a child. He took a series of deep breaths, allowing his lungs to inflate with air and take precious oxygen into his blood, and dived beneath the waves. As he reached the depths, he began to make out the shape of the wreck through the murky water. He had heard the tale of how this proud warship had met her doom. The men of the town didn’t agree on exactly what had caused her to sink, but they well recalled the spectacle of her quick, cruel disappearance beneath the waves. The screams of the drowning men were loud enough to reach the shore. Their skeletons would be waiting for him among the sunken timbers. Hundreds of onlookers, including King Henry himself, had watched, helpless, as the ship went down. The Mary Rose; that was what they called her. And now that splendid ship lay lifeless before him in the water. Her side was studded with guns of iron and bronze, the latter marked with the royal crest. That was why he was here, why the king had hired his master: to salvage the expensive weaponry. The Venetian could not dive this deep himself and so he’d found Jacques, and the other divers in his team, and brought them to this cold island to perform a miracle for the English king.

We think we know the story of “The sinking of the Mary Rose”.

- But, as we know, on 19th July 1545, having just set sail from Southampton on her way to fight against an invading force of 30,000 Frenchmen, disaster struck.



- This is the Cowdray engraving, which shows her almost submerged.

Less than 30 of over 400 men aboard survived.

Lady Carew, the wife of the ship's Commander Sir George Carew, was watching the disaster unfold from Southsea Castle. She fainted as she saw her husband die.

- Henry VIII, by her side, was probably more upset at having lost the expensive war ship and her valuable guns. The Ordnance aboard was worth £1,723 at the time- at one estimate, more than £1.75m today.

After the initial efforts to raise the ship failed, Henry VIII sought to at least recover the guns from the wreck. At this time Englishmen, even most Europeans, could not swim, let alone dive. This was partly why so many of the *Mary Rose's* crew drowned. Even bathing was considered dangerous: The royal physician Andrew Boorde wrote that it "allowed the venomous airs to enter and destroyeth the lively spirits in man and enfeebleth the body".

- But Africans **could** swim.
- When Richard Hawkins visited the Caribbean island of La Margarita in 1593 he observed the 'expert swimmers, and great divers', who over time and with 'continual practice' had 'learned to hold their breath long underwater, for the better achieving their work.'- which was to dive for pearls.
- Pieter de Marees, a Dutchman who travelled to the Gold Coast in 1602, noted that men from that area were 'very fast swimmers and can keep themselves underwater for a long time. They can dive amazingly far, no less deep, and can see underwater.'
- The association became axiomatic. In George Chapman's 1596 play *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, one character says he will 'Moor-like, learn to swim and dive/ into the bottom of the sea'.

When H8 needed to salvage items from the *Mary Rose*, he hired a Venetian named Peter Paulo Corsi. Corsi had a team of divers, and the head diver was Jacques Francis, an African. Two others, George Blacke and John Iko may also have been African.

This then, is the part of the story that, until now, has remained untold.

African divers salvaged guns from the Mary Rose.

Jacques Francis was born in 1528, probably on Arguin island, off the coast of Mauretania. The island's treacherous waters wrecked many ships, making it a good training ground for a salvage diver. Jacques would have learnt to swim and dive as a child, developing the lung capacity, mental strength and ability to equalize the pressure in one's ears required to dive without any breathing apparatus – a skill now known as 'free diving'.

By the time he was eighteen, he was working for Corsi in Southampton. The team took their 'meat and drink' at the Dolphin Inn, the principal inn of the town, which is still in business today. The *Mary Rose* was not the only wreck Francis and his team were working on in this period. In November 1546, a fire had broken out aboard the *Sancta Maria and Sanctus Edwardus*, and she sank, only two miles from the shore. The ship belonged to one Francesco Bernardi of Venice and she was carrying the goods of various other Italian merchants. Corsi and his team were hired by the merchants to salvage the goods from the wreck. However, the relationship between them soured and in 1547, the merchants accused Corsi of stealing some tin from the wreck.

The case came before the High Court of Admiralty, and it is the records of this case that tell us most of what we know about Jacques Francis.

JF himself testified on Wednesday 8 February 1548, in support of his master, Corsi. He did not speak English well, so the court appointed an interpreter named John Tyrart to translate. It was specified that Francis testified 'of his own free will'.

But not everybody was happy with his testimony.



- In an effort to discredit him, three of the Italian witnesses in the case described Jacques Francis as a ‘slave’.
- One, Anthony de Nicholao Rimero of Venice complained to the court that Francis: “ys a morisco born where they are not christenyd and slave to the sayd peter Paulo [Corsi]... And therefore he beleavythe that no Credite nor faithe ought to be geven to his Sayenges as in other Strange Christian cuntries hit ys to no suche slave geven.”

It was certainly true that throughout history, slaves were not allowed to testify in court.

- Roman law stated that slaves could not give evidence unless it was taken under torture.
- Villeins, the feudal serfs of medieval England, could not give evidence in court. As late as the 1530s, the duke of Suffolk was brought before the Court of Chancery to represent one of his villeins.
- Equally, slaves in colonial America were not allowed to testify in court. In 1732, it was enacted in Virginia that black men and women ‘are people of such base and corrupt natures that their testimony cannot be certainly depended on’.

However, Jacques asserted that he was a ‘famulus’ to Corsi, meaning a servant or attendant, rather than a slave (servus).

Jacques self-description as a servant was accepted by the court and his evidence was taken. *So, that’s the other untold part of the story: Jacques Francis, the African salvage diver who worked on the wreck of the Mary Rose was not enslaved.*

As you will see, later in this talk and if you read my book, English **courts were to depend on the testimony of Africans on more than one occasion in the century following Francis’s appearance.**

The fact that Africans were considered reliable witnesses in court shows they were not enslaved.

We don’t know what happened to JF after the court case. Whether Corsi was in a position to employ him is uncertain as in 1549 he was committed to the Tower for abandoning his work on the Mary Rose to do some salvage work for the Earl of Arundel **but** JF’s rare skills would surely have continued to be in demand.

So, that’s the first of the three people I’m introducing you to today, the second is Mary Fillis of Morisco, and I will again read you the opening paragraph from the Chapter on her.

2. Mary Fillis

‘Our Father, which art in heaven . . .’ The strange words echoed around the church. ‘Hallowed be thy name . . .’ Mistress Porter had helped her learn this verse, and what it meant, in preparation for the day. When she’d reached the end of the Lord’s Prayer, Reverend Threlkeld asked her to rehearse the articles of her belief and she did so, carefully and fluently. Then he asked, did she desire to be baptised? ‘Aye,’ she replied. And so they went to the font. The whole congregation called on God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ to receive her into Christ’s Holy Church. She had been in London thirteen or fourteen years now, since she was six or seven. She had seen the church spires every day, towering over the city streets. She had heard these people speak of their God, of his great Providence, of his Heaven. And of his wrath. Finally, Reverend Threlkeld said ‘I baptise thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Ghost. Amen.’ And it was over. She was a Christian, and she could go forth and ‘daily proceed in all virtue and godliness of living’.

Mary Fillis was born in Morocco in 1577, the daughter of Fillis of Morisco, a basket weaver and shovel maker. At the time of her birth, her country was in the throes of a civil war, waged between Abu Abdallah Mohamed and his uncle Abd al Malik. The war culminated in the Battle of Alcazar in 1578, also known as the Battle of the Three Kings, because 3 kings fought and died there... the uncle, his nephew, and...Sebastian I of Portugal, who had intervened on the side of the nephew. His death led to Philip II of Spain taking the crown of Portugal, and with-it gaining control over all her overseas territories, becoming even more powerful and threatening to the English.



*That's another thing I never learnt at school – that Elizabeth I's archenemy, Philip II, the villain of the Tudor story, became King of Portugal as a result of a battle fought on **African** soil.*

Mary Fillis came to London when she was six or seven, in 1583 or 4. She became a servant to John Barker and his wife Anne, who lived in Mark Lane, in the parish of St. Olave's Hart Street. MF was not the only African in the Barker household- In 1593, Laying Mouea 'a blackamoor of 20 years' was living there, while George 'a blackamoor out of Mrs Barker's was buried at St. Olave, Hart St in 1595.

How did she get here?

We don't exactly know how and why Mary Fillis came to London. What we do know (*although again, this is not a part of the traditional narrative of Tudor history*) is how England's relationship with Morocco was developing at this time. The English started **trading** to Morocco in 1551 and, by 1558 there was a regular trade, with English factors resident in the Atlantic ports of Larache, Safi and Agadir. Indeed, before the 1620s there were more Britons resident in North Africa than in North America.

The trade was formalized when 40 London merchants formed the Barbary Company in 1585, with Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester as their Governor. Leicester's real interest was in the arms trade with Morocco: Besides the sweet cargoes of sugar, dates, almonds and molasses, the English were importing saltpetre, a key ingredient for making gunpowder.

At the same time a **diplomatic relationship** began between Ahmad Al- Mansur, who had become the Sultan of Morocco after the Battle of Alcazar, and Elizabeth I.

She sent ambassadors to Morocco, and embassies from Morocco visited London in 1589 and 1600.

They came to discuss whether they could forge a military alliance against their common enemy: Spain. It was no coincidence that the 1589 embassy came the year after the English defeat of the Spanish Armada: the battle had shown Al-Mansur that Elizabeth I could be a credible ally.

So, as I said, Mary Fillis came to London aged six or seven in 1583 or 4, a year or two before the Barbary Company was formed.

Within this context the knowledge that John Barker was a merchant and sometime factor for the Earl of Leicester becomes important.

For the Earl of Leicester, who incidentally also had an African servant at this time, was as I said, governor of the Barbary company. Indeed in 1585, he sent Sultan Al-Mansur some horses as a gift.

So, it's plausible that Barker was trading to Morocco, possibly on Leicester's behalf. This goes some way towards explaining how Mary came to work for him...

- John Barker died in 1589, but Mary Fillis continued to work for his widow, Anne Barker for several years.
- By 1597, Fillis had left the service of widow Barker and was servant to one Millicent Porter of East Smithfield.
- Millicent Porter was a seamstress, aged 58 in 1597.

Back in 1584, the then forty-five-year-old Millicent Porter had been charged with being 'one that liveth very suspiciously', and had done public penance at St Paul's, despite denying she was 'guilty of fornication or adultery'. Perhaps this experience made her one of those reformed characters that make the most zealous evangelicals. She certainly encouraged Mary Fillis to be baptised, indeed it was she who went to speak to the curate, one Christopher Threlkeld, on her behalf.

Mary Fillis was baptized at St. Botolph's Aldgate on 3 June 1597.



This is the amazingly detailed account of the event written by Thomas Harridance, the parish clerk.

This was one of 66 known baptisms of Africans in Britain in this period, not to mention burials, marriages and court appearances that would also have required baptism.

Again, we know about the Protestant Reformation, but not about Africans who became Protestants.

Both church and laymen believed Africans could become Christians. One Baptist preacher quoted a biblical verse when discussing the baptism of an African in his congregation: “God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” A merchant, William Bragge, wrote that Africans were “Created after the Image, Similitude, and Likeness of God”, and “in time the Lord may call them to be true Christians”

These beliefs are particularly significant in comparison to the way Africans were treated later on. For example, in 1760, *Lloyd’s Evening Post* reported:

Last week a Negro girl about nine years old, having eloped from her mistress on account of ill-usage, was brought to a Church in Westminster by two housekeepers, to be baptized. But the mistress of the girl, getting intelligence of it, while the Minister was reading the churching service, seized upon her in the face of the congregation and violently forced her out of the Church, regardless of her cries and tears; telling the people about her that she was her slave, and would use her as she pleased.

Millicent Porter’s approach was quite the opposite and she was not the only one - pains were taken to educate Africans in Christian doctrine - Due to the nature of Protestant belief, baptism required some level of education. For example, the merchant Paul Bayning, a neighbour of the Barker’s, died in 1616, he left £5 to John Simpson, the minister of St Olave, Hart Street, for ‘instructing Anthony my Negro in the principles of the Christian faith and religion when he shalbe fitt to be baptised’.

When ‘Mary Fillis went to see the Curate of St Botolph’s Aldgate Christopher Threlkeld, she demonstrated a good understanding of the faith, ‘When he asked her ‘certen questions concerning hir faith’, she answered him ‘verie Christian lyke’, and afterwards when he asked her to say the Lord’s Prayer, and also to ‘rehearce the articles of her believe’, she ‘did both say and and [sic] rehearce verie decently and well, confessing hir fayth...’

This performance would have required a good understanding of the English language, and serious instruction, as she was able to recite the Lord’s Prayer and the articles of her faith off by heart.

The parish clerk’s account lists who attended the baptism, including himself. These three were the godparents, and here it says ‘divers others’ were also there.

The large congregation that attended may be due to the curiosity of parishioners keen to witness a relatively unusual event, but they also represent a ritualised welcoming of the new convert into the wider community. The words of the ceremony ordained that the convert was now ‘regenerate’ and would be ‘grafted into the body of Christ’s congreation’.

This acceptance was probably partly why Mary Fillis wanted to be baptised

Baptism was necessary to play a full role in Tudor society.

She might also have wanted to get married...

Marriage required Christian status

In some cases we know Africans who were married very shortly after being baptized.



Marriage between Africans and English people was not unheard of.

- George Best (not the footballer!) reported in 1578 that: 'I myself have seene an Ethiopian as blacke as cole brought to England who taking a faire English woman to wife, begat a sonne in all respects as blacke as the father'
- The parish registers yield some more concrete examples:

For example, John Accomy, sometime servant to the Cappell family, married the widow Peronell May in January 1603 in Little Hadham, Hertfordshire. African women married too: in 1600 'Joane Marya a Black Moore' of the parish of St Philip and St Jacob, Bristol was described as 'nowe the wyffe of Thomas Smythe'. There was a Biblical precedent for this: according to the popular Geneva translation, Moses had married 'a woman of Ethiopia'.

Millicent Porter died and was buried on 28 June 1599. The sermon preached at the funeral was very suitable - as it was based on Acts 9:36, which tells the story of how St Peter resurrected a woman named Dorcas, who was also a seamstress.

We don't know what happened to Mary Fillis after her mistress died. Perhaps she was able to make a living as a seamstress, having learnt the trade from her mistress.

And I just want to show you this lovely portrait, which was probably painted in Bologna, but shows a woman with pins in her bodice that suggest she too was a seamstress.

There are two burial records for African women named Mary in the parish registers of St Botolph's Aldgate: in 1623, when Fillis would have been forty-six, and in 1631, when she would have been fifty-four.

Mary was a fairly common name, so there is no way to definitively identify either woman as Mary Fillis.

Perhaps we can hope that neither of them were her, as the first was described as a 'poor woman ... who died in the street in Rosemary Lane' And the second as 'a poor blackamore woman at Tower Hill'.

So, that was the second of the three Black Tudors I'm presenting to you today, the third, final one and perhaps most dramatic one, is Edward Swarthy, the Gloucestershire porter... and here's the opening paragraph to his Chapter:

3. Edward Swarthy (don't have a portrait of him as he is completely unknown)

Sir Edward Wynter had a reputation for violence. In his youth he had killed a man in a duel, fought against the Spanish Armada, raided the Caribbean with Francis Drake and spent four years imprisoned in France after seeking to 'follow the wars' on the continent. Yet as he approached forty, in the winter of 1597, he was serving as a Justice of the Peace in Gloucestershire. Still, all was not peaceful at home. Wynter had summoned one of his servants, John Guye, to appear before him in the Great Hall of White Cross Manor, where a small crowd of local men had gathered. At first they exchanged only words; Wynter accused Guye of gross negligence. But when Guye did not appear to be the least bit contrite, Wynter called for his porter, Edward Swarthy. On his master's command, Swarthy took up a rod and brought it down hard and fast on Guye's back. Guye cried out in pain. The assembled company looked on in shock as a man of good standing was soundly whipped. Sir Edward struck a few blows himself before it was over. As Guye limped away, he 'bade him depart like a knave', dismissing him from his service for good. Edward Swarthy looked down at the rod in his hands, then back at the man he had dined with every day in that very hall. In the future he would have to turn him away from the gate. He gripped the rod very tightly, and the colour drained from his dark skin. For Edward Swarthy had another name. His alias was 'Negro': he was a Black Tudor.

Let's start with Edward Swarthy's name. First name, 'Edward', is the same as that of his master, Sir Edward Wynter. This suggests he had been Baptised, with Wynter as his godfather, as was a common practice at this time. The local parish registers do not survive before 1678, so there is no way of finding out for sure. His surname 'Swarthy' is simply a descriptive name, based on his skin colour, 'swarthy' meaning dark-skinned.



The Wynter household, where Swarthy was working as a porter was in a Gloucestershire village of Lydney- some thirteen miles southwest of Gloucester, between the River Severn and the Royal Forest of Dean.

How did Edward Swarthy, an African man, come to be working as a porter in rural Gloucestershire?

The most likely explanation is that Edward Wynter brought him back from the voyage to the Caribbean he embarked upon with Sir Francis Drake in 1585-6.

Africans in the Spanish Atlantic world

It was inevitable that Drake and his men would encounter Africans as they voyaged through Philip II's Spanish Empire.

- Between 1502 and 1619 over 300,000 Africans were transported to the Americas. [* working in Spanish silver mine]
- Not all of them were enslaved: the Maroons had run away from the Spanish and established their own settlements in the hinterlands, intermarrying with the native population.
- This painting depicts three Maroon leaders from Esmeraldas in Ecuador on a treaty-signing visit to Quito in 1599.

Again, while we're familiar with Francis Drake, his voyages to the Caribbean and encounters with Africans often remain untold...

- Here is Sir Francis Drake (*incidentally the jewel he is wearing round his waist, known as the Drake Jewel, has this fascinating depiction of an African*).

Drake's fleet of 24 ships left Plymouth in September 1585. Wynter was in command of a ship called the *Aid*. They raided the Spanish ports of São Tiago in the Cape Verde Islands, and Santo Domingo, Cartagena and San Agustin in the Caribbean, before returning to Portsmouth via Roanoke, Virginia on 28 July 1586. At every port, enslaved Africans joined the English. Pedro Sanchez testified at Havana in June 1586 that Drake 'carried off 150 negroes and negresses from Santo Domingo and Cape Verde'. Edward Wynter was most likely to have met Edward Swarthy during the raid of Cartagena, in which he took an active role as a land commander.

The Spanish suspected that Drake had intended to take the Africans who joined him to Roanoke to help establish the new English colony there. In the event Drake found the English at Roanoke desperate to go home, and shortly after his arrival there was a terrible storm, with hailstones 'as big as hen's eggs' that killed many, including perhaps some of the Africans. Some survived. One got as far as Paris, as Edward Stafford, ambassador to France reported in August: "There is in this town a Negro with a cutt one his face that sayethe he came with Sir Frances Drak and stole away from him when he was landed in England."

Two Other Africans with Drake 1586:

- The 'blackamore' who arrived in the household of Henry Percy, ninth earl of Northumberland was brought there by 'Mr Crosse's man'. This was probably Robert Crosse, who was part of Drake's company, captain of the *Bond*.
- The 'Ethiopian Negar' that Cornish mariner John Lax of Fowey brought to Portuguese Jewish doctor Hector Nuñez in October 1586 was 'brought from the porte of Santa Domingo in Nova Spayne beyond the seas': one of the places Drake had raided.
- So Swarthy seems most likely to have come to England in this way.

Swarthy was not the only African serving in a gentry or aristocratic family at the time. He was one of about two dozen including those working for the Earl of Leicester, the Cecils, and Walter Raleigh.

He was probably remunerated for his services, as we know other Africans were paid wages at this time, such as James the Blackamoore, who worked as a cook for the Earl of Bath.

So, what led to Swarthy whipping John Guye at White Cross manor in 1596?



The whipping of John Guye, a white Tudor Englishman, by Edward Swarthy, a black Tudor, is a shock today because when we think of whipping in the context of black history, we assume that it was always the white man whipping the black man.

But, on 3rd December 1596, Edward Swarthy whipped John Guye in front of a crowd of at least 20 men. These witnesses were shocked for a completely different reason: because John Guye was a high-status servant.

Who was John Guye?

- Served the Wynter family since he was a child.
- Educated in Greek, Latin and French.
- in control of Wynter's Iron works, earning £60 a year. (average £4 for a servant)

Why was he whipped?

Well, immediately before ordering Swarthy to whip Guye, Wynter accused him of: Neglecting his business and running off to Ireland while Wynter was away, with two other servants, leaving the iron works unmanaged.

He ended by saying “And therefore you have deserved correction at my hands, being so good a master unto you and always willing to prefer you. And therefore you shall have punishment for your great abuse!” But Wynter's neighbour and enemy, James Bucke, had a different explanation: he believed Wynter was angry because Guye had got married without his consent, to Anne Bucke, James Bucke's daughter.

For the whipping of John Guye was an episode in a Long-running family feud between the Wynters and the Buckes. Indeed, we only know about the whipping because James Bucke took Edward Wynter to court in 1597. The case was heard in the Court of Star Chamber, so named after the beautifully starry ceiling of the room where it met.

The judges of Star Chamber were none other than Elizabeth I's Privy Council, which at this time included both Cecils, and the Earl of Essex, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Lord High Admiral, so the case was heard by some of the most prominent politicians and noblemen in the land.

In this case, the whipping was only one of the crimes James Bucke, accused his neighbour Sir Edward Wynter of. But it was the one part of the case against him that Wynter freely admitted.

Edward Swarthy was also called to give evidence in the case. Here is his deposition. That he was, like Jacques Francis, allowed to testify, shows that he was a free man. Swarthy admitted that he had whipped John Guye but said that the command had come ‘on the sudden’ and he was not ‘prepared of his rods’ beforehand, so the whipping was not premeditated.

While we don't know what became of Swarthy after 1597, we do know that John Guye went on to become Mayor of Bristol, Governor of first English colony in Newfoundland, where he encountered the Beothuk people [*] and an MP in the parliaments of 1621 and 1624.

It is quite something to consider that in his youth, he had been whipped by an African man.

Conclusion

So, those are the three Black Tudors out of the ten in the book, whose stories have been untold until now. And the ten in the book are just a fraction of the 200 or so Africans who were living in England centuries earlier than previously thought. Some came here directly from Africa, like Mary Fillis, some from southern Europe and others from the Spanish Caribbean like Edward Swarthy. And they were not enslaved.



On the contrary, there was no law of slavery in England and Africans were paid wages and allowed to testify in court- both key indicators of free status. That they were accepted by the Church of England, through baptism, marriage and burial is really significant in this highly religious society. But the image I'd like to leave you with is that of Edward Swarthy, a Black Tudor, bringing a rod down on the back of John Guye, a future colonizer, because it utterly inverts everything we thought we knew about the Tudors.

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