

ADAM NIGHTINGALE

The
Shipwreck
Cannibals

CAPTAIN
JOHN DEANE
AND THE
BOON ISLAND
FLESH EATING
SCANDAL



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The
History
Press

To Matthew Frost, God's adventurer.

Contents

Title Page

Dedication

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Part One: Survivor

1 Two Brothers

2 The Captain's Story

3 The First Mate's Tale

4 Eighteenth-Century Rashomon

Part Two: Soldier

5 Peter Alekseevich

6 Babel

7 Apraxin

8 Prizes

9 Court Martial

10 A History of the Russian Fleet

Part Three: Spy

11 Townsend

12 Who Sent You Here?

13 O'Connor

14 That Violent Spirit Now Ceasing

15 Tell Me What You Will Undertake And I Will Do It

16 Neither at Peace or at War

17 Revisions

Part Four: Statesman

18 Water for Wine

19 The Duke of Lorraine

20 Irish Confederates and English Smugglers

21 Abused by this Madman

Part Five: Survivor

22 1746

23 Mr Miller

24 Last Will and Testament

Epilogue

Appendices: John Deane in Fiction

Plate Section

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**What shall we do unto thee, that
the sea may be calm unto us?**

The Book of Jonah

Introduction

Of the ten survivors of the *Nottingham Galley*, Captain John Deane was one of the few that could still physically stand upright when a New England fishing boat retrieved him and his crew from the rock the locals had christened Boon Island. The fishing vessel, or shallop, had left the open sea and had entered the mouth of the Piscataqua River on the way to Portsmouth where food, lodging and medical attention awaited Deane and his crew.

There had been fourteen survivors when the ship had struck rock and marooned the crew on Boon Island. Four had died. Two had perished on the island and one was lost to the ocean. The body of the last of the dead had been discovered on the mainland. The rest had survived for twenty-four days, blasted by the wind and soaked by the ocean, with no natural shelter and virtually nothing to eat. They had come close to starvation. They had come near to madness and had believed themselves eternally damned. They had all done something to survive that they were loath to talk about away from the confraternity of survivors. They had eaten human flesh.

John Deane's credit was good and he was keen to get to his lodgings ahead of the rest. He had arranged for a canoe to take him to Portsmouth faster than the shallop could presently manage. Deane transferred from the shallop to the canoe. He took his friend Charles Whitworth with him. Whitworth was lame in both feet and incapable of walking. He had to be carried into the canoe. The two men reached shore at eight o'clock in the evening. Deane spotted his lodgings and leapt out of the canoe. He forgot himself for a moment. He had barely strength enough to walk but now he ran to his lodgings. He entered the house unannounced. He was skeletal. His hands were torn ragged and some of his fingernails were missing. The house belonged to Jethro Furber, a friend of Deane's who had led the party that had rescued him and his crew from Boon Island. As Deane entered the house unannounced, he encountered Thurber's wife and children who fled from him in fright.

Deane seemed indifferent to the fact that he had driven his hosts from their own home. He walked around the house until he found the kitchen. He picked out the ingredients for a meal, some turnip and some beef. He placed them on the kitchen table, determined to cook something for Mr Whitworth and the men that had rowed him here. He began to prepare the meal. He reserved a small piece of turnip for himself and ate it raw.

Preparations for the meal were disrupted when a group of local men entered the kitchen. They laid hands on John Deane and dragged him from the kitchen table. Confusion reigned for a short while until Mrs Thurber returned to the house with more accurate information. John Deane was released, taken to his room and tended to. Mr Whitworth was lifted from the canoe and carried to the Thurber house.

The remaining survivors of the *Nottingham Galley* were brought to Portsmouth and taken care of by the town's populace. Most of them were incapable of walking. Most had suffered horribly from frostbite. Only John Deane retained possession of all of his fingers and toes. Many of the survivors would never regain full health. A few would die shortly afterward.

The men convalesced as best they could. The town seemed to take them to heart. It was evident that a great drama had played itself out some seven leagues from where they lived. The survivors were rendered heroes in the eyes of the populace. But it couldn't last. At some point the protest, the official account a captain must give when he has lost his vessel, had to be written. The shared secret needed to be addressed. They had all eaten human flesh. They had done it to survive. They had eaten a man.

already dead. No innocent blood had been shed. But any potential scandal Deane must have anticipated was all of a sudden subsumed in a new controversy.

Deane wrote his protest. Christopher Langman, the first mate, countersigned it. But as soon as he was well enough to leave his lodgings Langman turned on his captain. Along with the boatswain Nicholas Mellin and George White, a member of the crew, Langman appeared before a local magistrate and all three signed affidavits denouncing John Deane. They accused Deane, his brother Jasper and Charles Whitworth of fraud. They claimed that Jasper Deane and Charles Whitworth had overinsured the ship's cargo and that John Deane, on at least two separate occasions, had tried to lose the ship so that Jasper Deane and Charles Whitworth might claim on the insurance. The second attempt to lose the ship had resulted in the wreck of the *Nottingham Galley* and the subsequent loss of four lives. Langman, Mellin and White also accused John Deane of having perpetrated a violent assault on the first mate in the hours immediately preceding the shipwreck.

Little seemed to have been done to address the accusations in New England so Deane and company and Langman and company, returned to the British Isles and resumed the controversy there. In London, John Deane got wind of the fact that Langman intended to publish a detailed account of the Boon Island adventure. Jasper Deane quickly rushed into print Deane's version of events, narrowly beating Langman to the punch. A pamphlet war erupted. And although accusations of fraud and brutality were the principle charges for each side to either prosecute or refute; tales of cannibalism were the salacious anecdotes lapped up by the reading public that turned the affair into a *caus célèbre*. And although both parties agreed on the necessity of eating human flesh in their warring versions of events, each put their own spin on theirs and their enemies' attitudes towards cannibalism.

Everyone involved would be tainted by the events of Boon Island. But because John Deane lived the longest and achieved the most, the weight of the broken taboo hung heaviest upon him. And despite a career that would bring him into the orbit of Peter the Great and Robert Walpole, heaping glory and further shame upon him, the spectre of Boon Island would always cling to him, like Sinbad's Old Man of the Sea, wrapped around his throat and waist, choking him, virtually impossible to dislodge no matter how hard he tried.

Part One



Survivor

Two Brothers

John Deane was born in either 1678 or 1679. His older brother was named Jasper after their father. He had a sister named Martha. The family was moderately wealthy. Other than that, virtually nothing is known of Deane's youth and early adulthood. His childhood home was the village of Wilford. The parish of Wilford was situated on the southern borders of Nottingham. Nottingham Castle was visible across the River Trent and the fields that separated Nottingham from Wilford Village. The dark, compact Anglican beauty of St Wilfrid's church dominated the river bank on John Deane's side of the Trent. Access to Nottingham was granted by ferry. In landlocked Nottinghamshire the ferry would have been John Deane's principal contact with the element of water in his early years.

By the time John Deane was ready to embark for New England, Nottingham was still the moderate conurbation that Daniel Defoe would describe in the 1720s as, 'one of the most beautiful and pleasant towns in England'. Wilford was a benign satellite to the pleasant East Midlands town. Although subject to the rigours of an eighteenth century quasi-pastoral existence that included unnavigable roads, punishing winters, flooding, poaching and the occasional act of highway robbery, Wilford was a relatively pleasant place for John Deane to have grown up in. The only real emblem of the chaotic world beyond the county's borders was the presence in Nottingham of a prisoner of war, the French aristocrat Camille d'Houston, the Comte de Tallard, captured at the Battle of Blenheim and residing in the town under luxurious house arrest.

The biographical void of John Deane's early years would become filled with tall tales. John Deane was a butcher's apprentice. He fell in with a gang of professional deer thieves. He left the gang for fear of the gallows but the itch for excitement remained. He sought satisfaction through legalistic channels and joined the Royal Navy. He fought against the French in the War of Spanish Succession. He prospered under the martial governance of Admiral Rooke. He was present at the liberation of Gibraltar. He was promoted to the rank of captain. He left the navy but by 1710 was broke and in need of a financially rewarding venture that would satisfy his taste for high adventure. He threw in with his brother and decided to go to New England.

Apart from the friends and business contacts the Deanes had clearly established in New England and a reference in a letter John Deane wrote in the late 1720s to having been in the coastal Irish town of Dungarvan 'at the beginning of the late French wars', virtually nothing of the elaborate prequel to the events of 1710 can be substantiated. Most of it came from the imagination of the forgotten Victorian writer W.H.G. Kingston, author of a popular novel about John Deane. Many of the fanciful imaginings of Kingston's fiction were reported as fact by Victorian and Edwardian historians and still exist as corruptions in the biography of John Deane to this day. Whatever the true nature of John Deane's naval apprenticeship, his brother Jasper certainly felt confident enough in his abilities to offer him the captaincy of a small ship in a trade voyage to the English colonies on the east coast of North America. Jasper Deane had gone into partnership with the merchant Charles Whitworth. He had bought a 120-ton ship. He named the ship the *Nottingham Galley*. Its cargo of rope and cheese was jointly owned by Jasper Deane and Charles Whitworth. A crew was recruited and plans were made for a late-season voyage to Boston in 1710.

The *Nottingham Galley* may have originally been Swedish, a prize taken in war and then sold on to Jasper Deane. Its ten guns were certainly Swedish. If the vessel itself wasn't from Sweden then the guns may have been fitted onto an unarmed English vessel, weapons on a merchant ship being a necessity even in times of peace as attack from pirates was a constant threat. But England was still at war with France and the coastal waters were fertile hunting grounds for Louis XIV's privateers.

Half of the *Nottingham Galley's* cargo was in London. The other half was in Ireland. To get the cargo to Ireland the *Nottingham Galley* would have to sail the long way round the British coast in order to minimize the chance of encountering the French. This was not the only risk. The lateness of the season meant a greater chance of storms and bad weather.

In August 1710 fourteen men set sail for New England. What follows is John and Jasper Deane's version of events.

The Captain's Story

John and Jasper Deane's account of the voyage began as they approached the Irish port of Killybegs to pick up their cargo before setting sail for Boston. Prior to this, as Langman's account would attest, they had set sail from Gravesend in early August and sailed to Whitby under the protection of a merchant convoy guarded by two men-of-war before Deane had broken away from the convoy and sailed to Killybegs. Between the shore of the mainland and the island of Arran, as they approached Killybegs from the south, they spotted two ships heading toward them. The ships were French privateers.

Langman would make much of Deane's encounter with the privateers, accusing him of deliberately trying to secure the ship's capture. John Deane, in his account, didn't mention the privateer episode at all. The Jasper Deane-sponsored account gave it short shrift, stating that John Deane's intention should the *Nottingham Galley* fail to outrun the French, was to run the ship aground and torch her rather than submit to capture.

The privateers were successfully evaded and the *Nottingham Galley* docked in Killybegs. Deane's cargo was a mixture of rope, which he had taken on board in London, and butter and cheese, which was waiting for him in Ireland. Three hundred pieces of cheese and 30 tons of butter were loaded onto the *Nottingham Galley* at Killybegs. The ship set sail for Boston on 25 September 1710. Nothing dramatic happened of any significance until the *Nottingham Galley* approached New England in early December.

Land was spotted. The *Nottingham Galley* was east of the Piscataqua River, heading south toward Massachusetts Bay. The coast of New England was covered in snow. A north-easterly gale assailed the *Nottingham Galley* with hail, rain and snow. A thick fog enveloped the ship and the mainland was obscured from view. The fog hung on the ocean for approximately twelve days. Around the eleventh day the fog lifted for fifteen minutes. In that tiny window of visibility John Deane observed the mainland and tried to determine where they were. Neither Deane nor his crew could make any kind of accurate judgement as to their exact position; 'unaccountable currents' had dragged them off course. Nevertheless John Deane ascertained that the safest course of action would be to steer the ship in a south-westerly direction because the wind was blowing in from the north-east and land lay to the north-east and the south-west. His intention was to sail south-west until ten o'clock that evening and then lie by until daybreak the following morning. It was the eleventh of December, or thereabouts.

The weather was against them. The *Nottingham Galley* was peppered with further rain, wind and snow. John Deane had posted a member of the crew as a lookout. Deane stood watch himself. The time was somewhere between eight or nine o'clock at night. Through the evening black, John Deane spotted waves breaking where there shouldn't have been waves. He called instructions to the steerman to, 'P helm hard a starboard!' The command caught the steerman by surprise. The steerman bungled his orders but it made no difference. The command had been issued too late. The *Nottingham Galley* had struck rock.

The impact was violent and disorientating. The waves were high and the night so dark that whatever the ship had hit was barely visible through the black. The crew couldn't stand upright on deck. The

ship was lifted by the waves and swung parallel with an island that none of the crew could yet see. Waves broke across the deck. John Deane ordered his crew to take immediate shelter in his cabin. Fourteen men huddled together below deck. John Deane called his crew to prayer for their immediate deliverance. Once they had offered up pleas to God, John Deane set them to work. He ordered his men back on deck. He commanded them to chop down the masts. He led by example. Some, but not all of the crew, followed him. Those that stayed behind had temporarily lost their nerve, paralysed by the fear of death and the prospect, despite their prayers, of imminent eternal damnation.

The wind, for the only time that night, aided John Deane and his crew. The force of the gale snapped the masts before Deane and company could do any real damage to them. The ship's masts fell toward the mass of rock barely discernible in the dark. A crew member risked his life by climbing onto the bowsprit and trying to see what it was exactly that the ship had struck. He was the first to make out the small land mass and reported his observations to the captain. The masts had formed a bridge and a possible route of escape, should the hull of the ship be breached. Deane summoned Christopher Langman, the first mate. He called on Langman because he was a strong swimmer. Deane selected two more equally skilful swimmers and gave them the task of reaching the rock and finding the safest place for the remainder of the crew to join them. Once Langman and company had found a safe point of disembarkation they were to alert Deane. Langman and company shimmied across the masts toward the rock. Deane returned to his cabin.

John Deane had gone back to the cabin in order to retrieve anything that might have been of value to the crew if the ship sank. He was looking for official papers, money and the means to make a fire, namely gunpowder and a flint. He was making provision for the dual prospect of either being marooned or rescued. Deane descended the steps below deck and entered his cabin. As he began gathering his things the ship lurched and the stern sank deeper into the ocean. The walls of the ship bulged inward. Seawater entered the ship at a frightening rate. Deane had underestimated the damage that had been done. The spine of the *Nottingham Galley* had been shattered and she was drowning in salt water. Deane grabbed what he could and struggled to get back on deck. It was a near call. He had come dangerously close to drowning in the belly of his own dying vessel.

Nothing had been heard from Christopher Langman or the two swimmers that had accompanied him, so John Deane decided to traverse the fallen mast himself and try and reach the rock. He removed his outer clothing. He waited for the movement of the sea to carry the ship that bit closer to the rock and then climbed onto the mast. The mast was predictably slippery but Deane moved forward as best he could. He reached the end of the mast. The mast didn't quite touch the rocks. Deane would have jumped the gap and hope that he could gain purchase on the rocks without injuring himself too badly. Deane jumped. He reached for the rocks but the rocks were slippery. He slid into the freezing water. He was lifted by the sea and flung back against the rocks. He found it hard to gain purchase. He struggled to climb to a safe part of the island. He would make a small amount of progress and then fall back in the ocean. As he hung onto the rocks, as he repeatedly tried to drag himself up and onto the island, the rocks cut into his fingers and ripped out some of his fingernails. Eventually Deane hauled himself to a place of relative safety and coughed up and spewed out the salt water he had taken into his lungs.



Captain John Deane crossed the broken mast of the *Nottingham Galley* in order to reach the precarious safety of Boon Island. *Illustration by Stephen Dennis*

Deane shouted back to his men. He guided them across the mast and onto the island. All the remaining crew members reached the island in safety. Deane and the ten men whose rescue he had just engineered walked across the island seeking higher ground. They met Christopher Langman and his two companions. It was ten o'clock in the evening. All fourteen men huddled together and prayed, thanking God that they were all still alive.

Deane and his crew travelled leeward looking for any kind of natural shelter. There was none to be found. As they walked, the dimensions and character of the island were becoming clearer to them all. The island was a scant 100 yards long and 50 yards wide. Besides rockweed there was virtually nothing in the way of vegetation. The ground was a mass of jagged rock. The simple act of walking was painful. The sharpness of the rocks also negated the only way, at present, they had of keeping warm, the stone prohibiting walking around to generate warmth and protect their circulation. Deane and his crew were forced to huddle together, motionless, their only defence against the wet and cold on their first night on Boon Island.

Deane began his first morning on Boon Island with a degree of optimism. If the night's labours had been principally concerned with abandoning ship and keeping his men warm and alive, then the morning was to be about salvage, rescuing whatever he could find from the broken corpse of the *Nottingham Galley* and using the provisions to sustain his men until rescue.

Deane made his way to shore. He expected to see much of the ship still skewered on the rocks. But there was virtually nothing there. The bulk of the *Nottingham Galley* had been carried away and buried by the ocean. Masts, yards and detritus floated on the water, secured by the ship's anchor. This was nature's taunt to Deane and his men, as the wreckage was at the mercy of the waves and too far out

sea to safely retrieve. Bits of tent, wood, canvas and sail had washed up on the shore or else could be found in the rocks. At present these were the only materials Deane had to work with. They would have to do.

Most of the food had gone down with the ship. Fragments of cheese were found among the rockweed. Added together they amounted to the equivalent of three whole pieces of cheese. Even rationed carefully they wouldn't last long. Gulls circled the island and floated on the water. Seals were spotted nearby but not on shore. The island was presumably their home so it could only be a matter of time before one of them ventured onto land and sacrificed itself to the needs of an already hungry crew. During his stay on Boon Island, John Deane would make frequent midnight hunting trips to capture a seal. He never did. But there were more pressing needs than seal or gull meat. The men required a fire. Between them they had a flint, some gunpowder and a drill. For the next ten or so days they would repeatedly try to utilise these tools to start a fire. Their efforts would prove useless. The materials and everything around them was irredeemably sodden.

Two gunpowder horns had been rescued from the *Nottingham Galley*. These became the crew's water receptacles. One was designated for common use among the men. One was reserved for the sick. On Boon Island there was always rain enough to provide a steady source of fresh drinking water. There was enough snow and ice on the island to provide a secondary source of water, although the snow and the ice had a predictably salty tang to it. However desperate things would get, the absence of drinking water would never be a serious impediment to their survival. It was one of nature's few concessions to Deane and his crew in the painful ordeal that lay ahead of them.

At the end of their first full day on Boon Island the men tried to sleep. Their situation had been fractionally improved by a canvas sheet that had washed up on shore. They crawled underneath it and huddled together.

On the morning of the second day the elements had improved somewhat. Up until now, any view of the mainland had been obscured by the hostile weather. It was still frosty but John Deane could see land and had an inkling of where they were. He believed that he was looking at Cape Neddock. It was a fishing country and so the chances of being spotted by a shallop improved the possibility of rescue. At least that was what he told the men. Privately he was doubtful that any shallop would risk the winter sea to sail close enough to the island to ever spot them. He kept his doubts to himself but let his men dine for a while on the succulent half-truth, good morale being as valuable as food, water or warmth at this point in their endeavours.

It seemed to be a time of introspection for John Deane. He was concerned with questions of command now that a form of de facto equality had fallen on the marooned crew. Aboard the *Nottingham Galley* his authority had been absolute. He would have expected his orders to have been obeyed without question. Deane had been on the island for less than a few days and some of the crew had refused simple requests as well as direct commands. Crew members were shirking the common tasks. Deane's response was to neither impose command nor insist on obedience. He wandered off alone to search for materials, a pretext designed to give the crew the necessary room to decide for themselves if they still wanted him to lead them. The crew talked in Deane's absence. The majority came to the decision that Deane would remain their captain; that they would defer all powers of command to Deane exactly as they had when on board the *Nottingham Galley*. Ten men were in agreement. There were three voices of dissent, the first mate Christopher Langman and two unnamed sailors. Langman and company were overruled. John Deane was made aware of the crew's decision. He agreed to carry on as before with the concessionary gesture of consulting the crew in the case of certain important decisions.

The next few days on Boon Island were spent searching for further materials and tending to the sick. Three crew members had fallen ill. They all convalesced together. Worst among them was the ship's cook. He was physically weaker than the rest of the men and inexperienced when it came to toughing out the natural rigours of life at sea. In these extreme circumstances it was more than his body could bear. At noon, on the third or fourth day, the crew reported the cook's death to John Deane. Deane ordered the cook's body to be taken to edge of the island and given to the waves.

When the cook had been alive he had been the most conspicuous in his complaints about the lack of food on Boon Island. He seemed to feel the extremities of hunger before anyone else. The other crew members hadn't arrived at that point of desperation quite yet. But as the cook's body was given to the ocean many privately considered whether his corpse might not have been put to better use as a meal for the living. These were the first thoughts of cannibalism among the crew. Even John Deane was not immune, pondering privately whether it might not have been better to eat the dead cook rather than bury him at sea.

The supply of cheese had not yet run out. There was about half a pound of cheese for each man. During the food distribution Deane would ensure that everyone received exactly the same ration. This was an act of diplomacy on Deane's part. Despite the crew's decision to obey Deane's orders, not everyone appeared to be pulling their weight in the allocation of daily tasks. Deane could have withheld food from those he deemed to be wilfully lazy but he chose not to.

In that first week on Boon Island, in addition to the cheese, the crew ate powdered bone. The bones were from pieces of beef from the food supplies of the *Nottingham Galley*. Fish had eaten the meat but the bones had washed up on shore. The crew smashed the bones to powder on the rocks in order to render them digestible.

The men were starting to show the grotesque physical effects of half a week in the freezing weather. Most of the crew were suffering from frostbite. Many had lost some degree of feeling in their fingers and their toes. When fleeing the *Nottingham Galley* some members of the crew had gone barefoot. Others had worn boots and stockings. Those that wore boots had to have them cut from their feet. As the boots were removed and the stockings peeled off, skin and toenails came away with the material. Feet were horribly blistered. Deane tended to the wounds of his men as best he could. He personally dressed ulcers, binding feet in makeshift bandages fashioned out of linen, rags and oakum that had washed up on shore. He cleaned wounds, washing them with an antiseptic brew concocted from a mixture of seawater and human urine.

The hands of many of the crew had begun to change colour. This was a source of pressing concern for Deane. Discolouration presaged the onset of mortification. It was important to keep the blood circulating in the hands and feet, or fingers and toes might have to be amputated. The best defence against the mortification of the skin was work. And there was important work that needed to be done. The canvas sheet could not continue as their only defence against the night cold. A shelter had to be constructed. Building work would be easier than had been previously anticipated as carpenter's tools had been discovered in the preceding day's search for materials.

The first structure built by the survivors of the *Nottingham Galley* was a tent. It was triangular in shape. The tent was between 8 and 9ft in diameter. It was made from a mixture of canvas and sail and bits of oakum. The tent pole was a wooden staff. On top of the pole was a flag made out of a piece of cloth that stood as a signal to passing vessels. It was an important achievement but there was a problem. When it came time for the men to bed down for the night it became evident that there wasn't enough space within the shelter for everyone to lie down properly. All of the crew were obliged to sleep on their sides. Problems arose whenever a single crew member decided he wanted to turn over.

If a man turned over it caused disruption among the other men. Deane's solution was to regiment the men's sleep. During the night, at two-hourly intervals, a call would be given and the entire crew would turn over in unison. Comical though it must have appeared, it seemed to work and the men's chance of getting some approximation of rest was substantially increased.



The crew of the *Nottingham Galley* took shelter from the fierce New England elements in an improvised tent. *Illustration by Stephen Dennis*

Deane and the crew began to turn their attention to getting off the island. Having built a tent they now felt galvanised enough to try their hand at constructing a small boat. In terms of materials there was now sufficient wood washed ashore to build a boat. Nails had been discovered in the rocks. As far as tools were concerned the men had a caulking mallet and a cutlass. Many of the crew had their own knives. They used the knives to carve teeth into the cutlass blade, turning a weapon into an improvised saw.

John Deane described his crew's efforts:

Three planks were laid flat for the bottom, and two up each side, fix'd to stanchings, and let into the Bottom timbers, with two short Pieces at each End, and one Breadth of new Holland's-Duck round the Vessel, to keep out the Spray of the Sea: they caulk'd her with Oakum, drawn from old Junk: and secured the Seames with Canvas, Pump-leather, and sheet-lead, as far as the extent of their small Stock would allow; a short mast was fix'd, with a square Sail; seven Paddles provided for Rowing, and an eighth, longer than ordinary, for Steering.

While constructing the boat the workforce consisted of John Deane and two members of the crew. The working day lasted four hours. The cold prohibited working any longer than that. On some days the

cold was so intense that no work was done at all. The irony of the entire endeavour was that the man best qualified to oversee the building of the boat was too incapacitated to help. The ship's carpenter was so weak he couldn't even offer advice. He had been among the first of the survivors to fall ill. He coughed up large amounts of phlegm and suffered from back pain and neck stiffness. He would lose the use of both feet and be incapable of walking.

At the end of that first week on Boon Island three things happened that raised the crew's morale. Work was finished on the boat; a carpenter's axe washed up on shore; and three boats were spotted. John Deane was the first to spot the boats. They were about 5 or so leagues away. They were sailing from the south-west. The wind was north-east. Most of the crew were in the tent. John Deane called them all outside. They shouted and gesticulated trying to get the attention of the boats. The boats didn't see them and sailed by. The crew ought to have been despondent but instead drew encouragement from the near miss. They reasoned that the boats might have been a search party responding to the presence of wreckage from the *Nottingham Galley* that had washed up on the shore of the mainland. If this were the case, then an ongoing search must be in progress and rescue was simply a matter of time.

In spite of a newly acquired incentive to sit where they were and wait for rescue, most of the crew were still determined to use their newly constructed boat and affect their own deliverance if they could. Work had finished on the boat around about 21 December. The day's weather was relatively placid and favoured an attempt to launch the boat. There was space in the boat for six people. Whether six was a point to be debated by Deane and the crew. Deane proposed himself. The crew agreed. Deane was the fittest among them and the most experienced. It was also agreed that Jasper Deane and Christopher Langman should go. Four more crew members whose names are not reported were selected. The crew paused for a moment's prayer, committing the success of their impending adventure to God.

Every crew member that had the strength to do so dragged the boat to the water. The crew were weak. Dragging the boat was an effort. The sea was uncharacteristically smooth. The surf was high. The boat was dragged into the water. The crew were obliged to wade deeper into the sea than felt safe to ensure that the boat was properly launched. John Deane and a crew member hauled themselves into the boat first. The smoothness of the ocean was deceptive. There was a sudden swell in the water that turned the boat over and pitched Deane and his companion into the sea. The boat was smashed to pieces against the rocks. The carpenter's axe and the caulking mallet had been on board. Both tools were lost to the ocean. Deane and his companion struggled to get ashore. Both men nearly drowned in the attempt.

Deane and the crew were despondent. The blow to their morale erased all thoughts of discovering wreckage and New England rescue parties. As if to mimic their mood, a violent storm blew up that afternoon. John Deane drew some encouragement from the tempest. He knew that, had his boat not capsized, he would be in the ocean in the middle of the storm and would surely be dead. He saw something of the wisdom and the grace of God in the destruction of the boat. He also believed that God had spared him for the sake of the men. He remained the fittest among them and possessed the soundest mind. The men relied on him. If he died then they would not know what to do. They would give up. Deane's sense of divine perspective was not shared by his men. That night their melancholy could not be penetrated. They truly believed that they would all die on Boon Island.

Boon Island exacted its toll on the survivors in increments. Their physical condition was growing worse by the day. The hands of many of the crew were starting to exhibit symptoms of gangrene. Ulcers were giving off a shocking odour. There was nothing left to bind the wounds with, save a bit of

linen rag. And at last hunger had supplanted lack of heat as the main impediment to Deane and his crew's chances of survival. The supply of cheese had run out. Deane scoured the island for alternative sources of food. The men ate rockweed and kelp. Deane found mussels, which the men could eat raw but they were physically difficult to gather. Nevertheless, Deane managed to provide his men with an average of three raw mussels a day.

Although hunger was their greatest enemy there were other devils to contend with. Those who understood the seasons knew that there was an impending spring tide due. The tide could theoretically cover the island and drown them all. Concerns of a more metaphysical nature assailed the minds and the souls of many of the crew. With death as tangible as it was, some of the men feared that if they died they would go straight to hell. The prospect of eternal punishment invoked a profound and debilitating fear among the crew. John Deane was more certain of his own standing with the Almighty. He believed that God had blessed him with more physical strength, a better constitution and a stronger mind than his crew specifically for the purpose of exhorting and encouraging them to trust in the delivering power of God.

Deane and the crew's attempts at piety manifested itself in a strange relationship with the calendar. During the course of their stay on Boon Island, no member of the crew was ever completely certain what day of the week it was. In recounting the events of Boon Island, both John Deane and Christopher Langman often approximated the dates when recalling their experiences. The crew would observe two Sundays during the week, presumably out of a sense of religious anxiety, making certain that they accurately observed the Sabbath, even if that meant observing it twice. They also celebrated Christmas Day on two separate occasions, just to be certain.

The crew needed something to galvanise them to activity. John Deane had given Christopher Langman the job of trying to trap and kill a seagull. While they had been on Boon Island the seagull had floated on the water and flew by but had seldom landed on the rocks. If Langman could trap and kill one, the fresh meat might provide the necessary spur to move the men to work. Langman killed his seagull. He presented the dead gull to John Deane who cut it into thirteen pieces and distributed them among the men. There was barely enough for a mouthful each. The meat was raw but the men were grateful and enjoyed their tiny meal. It was a small difference but it had the desired effect. The men's spirits lifted and they were ready for their next great endeavour, the building of a raft.

The crew member at the heart of the new building project was a man known only by his nationality. John and Jasper Deane simply called him the 'Swede'. The only physical description of him is that he was 'stout'. John Deane would express doubts and a degree of ambivalence about the success of the venture he was about to bring into being. In contrast, the Swede would completely embrace the prospect of building a raft and became the main motivating force behind its construction. In fact, since arriving on Boon Island, it had been the Swede that had repeatedly suggested the prospect of building a raft as a means of escape. The mood of the group was in accord with that of the Swede. Construction began on the raft.

What made the Swede's involvement truly remarkable was the fact that he could not walk. Since his arrival on Boon Island, the Swede had contracted a severe case of frostbite in both feet. He quickly lost the use of his feet and became one of the crew's first invalids. Although not explicitly stated, it is likely that the Swede was one of the two stricken crew members obliged to convalesce with the dying cook. He was an excellent swimmer and may have been one of the two men selected to accompany Christopher Langman when he left the *Nottingham Galley*. The Swede had suffered more than most but his enthusiasm was infectious. A new optimism seemed to arrest the crew.

It took five or six days to build the raft. The crew had virtually no tools at hand and limited raw

materials. John Deane described the raft's construction:

After deliberate thoughts and consideration, we resolved upon a Raft, but found abundance of labour and difficulty in clearing the Fore-Yard (of which it was chiefly to be made) from the junk, by reason our working hands were so few and weak.

That done, we split the Yard, and with the two parts made side pieces, fixing others, and adding some of the lightest Plank we cou'd get, first spiking and afterwards seizing them firm, in the breadth of four Foot: We likewise fix'd a mast, and of two hammocks that were drove on shore we made a sail, with a paddle for each man and a spare one in case of necessity.

The raft was only big enough to carry two men. The Swede insisted that he was to be one of the two. He wanted John Deane to accompany him. This time Deane refused. He didn't share the Swede's confidence in the mission's chances of success. The nature of the raft's primitive construction would leave the occupants waist-deep in water while trying to either sail or row to the mainland on a journey that would take a minimum of ten to twelve hours. Deane had also been here before. His own experiences in the first shattered boat can only have informed his pessimism. But for the sake of the rest of the crew, at least for the time being, Deane kept his misgivings to himself.

There must have been an unwelcome sense of *déjà vu* when shortly after construction was finished on the raft another boat was spotted. This time the sail of a ship was seen. The ship was leaving the Piscataqua River some seven leagues away. Once again the crew attempted to get the attention of the ship. The ship failed to notice them and the ever oscillating mood of the crew sank back into familiar despair.

The following day the crew called on their depleted reserves of optimism and endeavoured to launch the raft. The weather was reasonable but it was afternoon, somewhat late in the day to safely attempt something like this. The Swede had found a replacement for John Deane and was keen to sail. Christopher Langman cautioned the Swede to launch at another time. Langman stressed the lateness of the hour as reason not to sail. The Swede reassured Langman that an afternoon launch made no difference as it was a full moon that night and as far as he was concerned that was as safe as sailing in the daylight. John Deane agreed. The crew prayed together and the raft was launched.

Like Deane before him the Swede and his companion were tipped into the ocean by another swell. The Swede was an outstanding swimmer and made it back to shore. His companion floundered and went under. John Deane swam after him and dragged him to safety.



A swell in the ocean tipped the Swede into the freezing sea as he tried to escape Boon Island in a makeshift raft. *Illustration by Stephen Dennis*

The men retrieved the raft before it could be smashed against the rocks. The raft was intact but the mast and the sail were gone. The Swede was keen to get back in the raft and try again. This time John Deane cautioned against it, advising patience for a better opportunity to relaunch the raft. The Swede didn't want to wait. He was kneeling on the rocks. He grabbed his captain's hand. He conceded that he might die but he was determined to go anyway. He wanted John Deane to come with him but was willing to go alone if necessary. He asked Deane to help him back into the raft. Deane was reluctant. He pointed out the obvious; that without the sail and mast the journey would take twice as long and the chances of survival would be greatly reduced. The Swede was adamant that he needed to attempt the journey. He hated Boon Island and would sooner drown in his raft than stay there any longer than he had to. Deane consented and gave the Swede permission to relaunch the raft.

The Swede's first sailing companion would not rejoin him but the Swede's example moved another member of the crew to take his place. John Deane gave the Swede some money. It was estimated that the Swede would reach the mainland at two o'clock in the morning. If successful his instructions were to light a fire on a designated hill in the woods as a signal that he had reached the shore safely. The Swede was helped back onto the raft. He requested the remaining party pray for him as long as they could still see him. The Swede and his new companion rowed and steered the raft toward the mainland. The crew watched and prayed until they couldn't see the Swede, his companion, or the raft anymore. As the raft disappeared from view it was estimated that the Swede was halfway to shore. During the evening the good weather evaporated and the wind grew rough and violent.

Two days after the Swede had left Boon Island the crew saw smoke rising from the mainland. The smoke came from a different position than that agreed between the Swede and his crew mates. Yet the

crew still believed that the author of the smoke signal was the Swede. If the Swede and his companions had made it to the shore then they would find settlers and bring help. The Swede appeared to have fulfilled his part of the bargain. The onus on the crew was to stay alive until help arrived.

The threat of the spring tide had passed. Boon Island had not been covered with water as feared. Nobody had drowned but the water level had risen bringing with it a more subtly dangerous set of problems. The water submerged the mussels John Deane had been harvesting. The mussels were no longer the men's main source of nourishment. Deane still tried to ensure that his men received their daily ration of three mussels each. Deane took it upon himself to collect the mussels because he was still the strongest man among the crew and because the men refused to do it themselves. The majority of the men were either incapacitated, unable, or simply loath to help. To collect the mussels Deane had repeatedly sink his hands into the icy cold water. Each time he did this his hands went numb for a while. The longer he did this the more he risked permanently losing the feeling in his hands and arms. Gangrene might follow and if that happened, Deane would have to have his hands amputated to stop the rot spreading to the rest of his body. The irony of the entire venture was that whenever Deane tried to eat a mussel himself he couldn't keep it in his stomach. He ate rockweed instead.

The crew waited. As the anticipated rescue failed to materialise, it became evident that the prospect of starvation was now the men's principle adversary. The men still believed the Swede was alive. They believed that the rivers on the mainland had frozen. They rationalised that this had delayed the Swede's attempts to find a settler with a boat that might come and retrieve them. They would wait for the Swede. They would do whatever was necessary to avoid starving to death.

A piece of main yard washed up on shore. Attached to it was a patch of green hide. The men wanted to eat it. They pleaded with their captain to bring it to them. Deane retrieved the hide, cut it into tiny pieces and let the men feed on it.

Although Deane was stronger than the rest he was feeling the stab of hunger in his own tortured fashion. He considered eating the ends of his own lacerated fingers. He considered eating his own bodily waste.

Deane tried to keep his men active as best they could manage. If they were reluctant to leave the tent then they could mend it.

The health of two members of the crew was of particular concern. Deane's cabin boy seemed particularly susceptible to the cold. Deane tended to him with an extra degree of care. At night, Deane and the boy removed their wet clothes. They wrapped themselves in oakum and Deane bid the boy lie on him to share body heat. But the most stricken member of the crew was the carpenter. At this stage in his illness he couldn't talk. He could only communicate through drawing. He was too weak to cough up the large deposits of phlegm that hung heavy upon his lungs. The crew tended to him as best they could. He died sometime in the night, his corpse resting among the sleeping members of the crew until morning.

On the first full day of the carpenter's death, John Deane instructed the stronger members of the crew to remove the corpse and place it a safe distance from the tent. Deane left the tent to look for food and supplies. He found another piece of hide attached to another piece of the main yard. He picked the hide up and bit into it, testing its suitability as food. It was tough and his teeth couldn't make any kind of purchase on the rough material. Around noon he returned to his men. The body of the carpenter was still in the tent. The men hadn't lifted a finger to shift it. When Deane asked why the men complained that they were too weak.

Deane was incensed but tried to contain his anger. He searched around for some rope. He gave the rope to the men and ordered them to tie it around the carpenter's body. Deane took hold of the rope

and tried to drag the corpse out of the tent. He was weaker than he thought and found the labor difficult. ~~He was joined by a few other members of the crew but their combined efforts were feeble.~~ They dragged the body a few steps outside the tent and then gave up.

John Deane returned to the tent exhausted. He wanted to sleep but there was something wrong with the crew. There was an intensity among them and an alertness present that had been absent in recent days. Charles Whitworth needed to talk to Deane in front of the men. He told Deane that the crew wanted to eat the body of the carpenter.

While Deane had been out foraging, the crew had discussed what to do with the carpenter's body. They had elected Whitworth as their spokesman because he was a gentleman and more likely to persuade the captain to consent to their request. John Deane said nothing. He was appalled. The crew pleaded with him to let them eat the carpenter's body. When Deane finally spoke, it was to organise a conference of sorts that would debate and discuss all the moral permutations of what they were proposing to do.

Deane did his best to hide his exhaustion. He listened to arguments and counter-arguments. There was the dual consideration of legality and theology. What they were doing might be illegal, unnatural and sinful; a crime against the law of the land, nature and God himself. Weighed against that was the necessity to survive. Nobody really knew if the Swede had been successful in his endeavours or whether he was in fact dead. If he was successful, the crew couldn't guarantee that they could sustain their existence long enough on infrequent meals of raw mussel and patches of hide for a rescue party to reach them before they starved to death. Deane listened to all the arguments and decided to put it to the vote.

The decision to eat the dead body was by no means a completely unanimous one. Despite the hunger, Christopher Langman and two others were strongly opposed to cannibalism on religious grounds. But the majority voted 'yes' and Deane gave his consent to butcher and eat the dead body of the carpenter. The majority were ecstatic.

Deane tried to reassure Langman and his allies. Nobody had killed the carpenter. The need to survive was arguably the greater moral imperative. To eat his corpse was only wrong if the crew had been complicit in ending his life for that purpose. That had not been the case. They had tried to keep him alive as long as possible. No sin had been committed. Langman was not convinced and Deane, despite being an apologist for cannibalism in those moments, almost certainly retained some degree of doubt. But once the decision had been made, he committed to the practicalities of what they were about to do. Deane reasoned that, despite the levels of hunger, the reality of eating raw human flesh might be more difficult for the men than they had anticipated. He decided that human flesh needed to look like animal meat. It would be an easier adjustment for the men to make when the time came. In order to do this, any physical semblance of humanity in the carpenter's corpse would have to be cut away and dumped into the sea. What was left would be quartered, dried and divided into rations, which Deane would control. The majority agreed but the question remained as to which of the crew would help with the butchering.

None of the crew would consent to help butcher the body. When Deane wanted to know why, the crew complained that it was too cold to work, or that they were sickened by the actual mechanics of butchery and couldn't do it, despite an academic willingness to join in. Deane was angry and offered no assistance. The crew begged him to butcher the corpse. Deane eventually agreed. He managed to persuade one member of the crew to join him and the bloody work began.

Deane and his companion cut off the carpenter's head, hands and feet. They skinned him. They extracted his bowels. They threw the sundered body parts and rejected internal organs into the sea.

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