

= Demerara rebellion of 1823 =

The Demerara rebellion of 1823 was an uprising involving more than 10 000 slaves that took place in the Crown colony of Demerara @-@ Essequibo (now part of Guyana) . The rebellion , which took place on 18 August 1823 and lasted for two days , was led by slaves with the highest status . In part they were reacting to poor treatment and a desire for freedom ; in addition , there was a widespread , mistaken belief that Parliament had passed a law for emancipation , but it was being withheld by the colonial rulers . Instigated chiefly by Jack Gladstone , a slave at " Success " plantation , the rebellion also involved his father , Quamina , and other senior members of their church group . Its English pastor , John Smith , was implicated .

The largely non @-@ violent rebellion was brutally crushed by the colonists under governor John Murray . They killed many slaves : estimates of the toll from fighting range from 100 to 250 . After the insurrection was put down , the government sentenced another 45 men to death , and 27 were executed . The executed slaves ' bodies were displayed in public for months afterwards as a deterrent to others . Jack was deported to the island of Saint Lucia after the rebellion following a clemency plea by Sir John Gladstone , the owner of " Success " plantation . John Smith , who had been court @-@ martialed and was awaiting news of his appeal against a death sentence , died a martyr for the abolitionist cause .

News of Smith 's death strengthened the abolitionist movement in Britain . Quamina , who is thought to have been the actual leader of the rebellion , was declared a national hero after Guyana 's independence . Streets and monuments have been dedicated to him in the capital of Georgetown , Guyana .

= Context =

Demerara was first colonised by the Dutch in the 17th century under the auspices of the Dutch West India Company (DWIC) . The economy , initially based on trade , began to be superseded in the 18th century by sugar cane cultivation on large plantations . The Demerara region was opened to settlement in 1746 , and new opportunities attracted British settlers from nearby Barbados . By 1760 , they had become the largest contingent in Demerara ; the 1762 business registers showed that 34 of 93 plantations owned by Englishmen . The British were a major external threat to Dutch control over the colonies from 1781 until 1796 , when Britain obtained de facto control . Following a raid by privateers in February 1781 , British occupation lasted until January 1782 , when the island was recaptured by the French , then allied with the Dutch .

The British transferred rule of Demerara to the Dutch in 1802 under the terms of the Peace of Amiens , but took back control of it a year later . In 1812 , the British merged Demerara and Essequibo into the colony of Demerara @-@ Essequibo . The colonies were ceded to Britain by treaty between the Netherlands and Britain on 13 August 1814 . Stabroek , as the colony 's capital was known under the Dutch , was renamed as Georgetown in 1812 . The colonial powers appointed a governor to rule in their stead , and the local legislation was decided on by a Court of Policy .

The mainstay of its economy was sugar , grown on cane plantations worked by slaves . The sale of the crop in Britain enjoyed preferential terms . There were 2 @, @ 571 declared slaves working on 68 plantations in Essequibo , and 1 @, @ 648 slaves in Demerara in 1762 . These numbers were known to be much understated , as the slave headcount was the basis of taxation . By 1769 , there were 3 @, @ 986 declared slaves for Essequibo 's 92 plantations and 5 @, @ 967 for Demerara 's 206 plantations . The slave labour was in short supply and expensive due to the trading monopoly of the DWIC , and smuggling from Barbados was rife . Dutch colonists ensured white dominance over their growing slave population through the collaboration of indigenous natives , who strongly resisted white domination but could also be relied upon to take up arms against any Spanish incursions . When slaves rose up in Berbice in 1763 , natives blocked the border to prevent the disruption from spreading into Demerara .

Rapid expansion of plantations in the 19th century increased demand for African slaves at a time when supplies were reduced . The supply shortage of labour for production was exacerbated by the

British abolition of trade in slaves in the Slave Trade Act 1807 . The population consisted of 2 @, @ 500 whites , 2 @, @ 500 freed blacks , and 77 @, @ 000 slaves . Ethnically , there were 34 @, @ 462 African @-@ born as against 39 @, @ 956 " creole Negroes " by 1823 in Demerara and Essequibo . Treatment of slaves were markedly different from owner to owner , and from plantation to plantation . Plantations managed by agents and attorneys for absentee owners were common . Caucasian owners and managers were prevalent , and there were very few mixed @-@ race " mulattoes " who advanced to become managers and owners . Lower @-@ class whites and coloureds were considered " superior " , giving them access to skilled work . Blacks who performed skilled work , or worked within households and enjoyed greater autonomy , were regarded as having higher @-@ status than other slaves . Slaves who toiled in the fields would work under drivers also slaves , but who had delegated authority of plantation overseers .

= = = The plantations = = =

Although some plantation owners were enlightened or paternalistic , the slave population was on the whole poorly treated . Churches for whites existed from the inauguration of the colonies , but slaves were barred from worshipping before 1807 as colonists feared education and Christianisation would lead slaves to question their status and lead to dissatisfaction . Indeed , a Wesleyan missionary who arrived in 1805 wanting to set up a church for slaves was immediately repatriated by order of the governor . The London Missionary Society (LMS) entered Guyana shortly after the end of the slave trade at the behest of a plantation owner who believed that slaves ought to have access to religious teachings . Hermanus Post , a naturalised Englishman of Dutch descent , advocated teaching of religion and literacy . The idea , considered radical at the time , was supported by some who may have thought religion was to be offered as a consolation in place of emancipation . The colonial administration was hostile to the idea . It was written in the official journal , Royal Gazette , in 1808 : " It is dangerous to make slaves Christians , without giving them their liberty . " Others strongly opposed . Other plantation owners , who felt that teaching slaves anything other than their duties to their masters would lead to " anarchy , chaos and discontent " and precipitate the destruction of the colony . Post ignored these protestations and made facilities available for worship . The facilities were easily outgrown by popularity of worship within just eight months . The LMS contributed £ 100 ; Post gave the land and paid the balance , and a chapel with 600 @-@ person capacity was inaugurated on 11 September 1808 . He also had a house constructed for the minister at a cost of £ 1200 , of which £ 200 was subscribed by other " respectable inhabitants of the colony " . The first pastor , Reverend John Wray , arrived in February 1808 and spent five years there ; his wife operated a girls ' school for white children . After the chapel 's construction , the owner wrote of improvements :

They were formerly a nuisance to the neighbourhood , on account of their drumming and dancing two or three nights in the week , and were looked on with a jealous eye on account of their dangerous communications ; but they have now become the most zealous attendants on public worship , catechising , and private instructions . No drums are heard in this neighbourhood , except where the owners have prohibited the attendance of their slaves [at the church] . Drunkards and fighters have changed into sober and peaceable people , and endeavour to please those who are set over them .

Post sought to have more missionaries appointed to other places in the colony . However , Post died in 1809 , and was lamented by his slaves . Conditions of his slaves markedly deteriorated under new management ? they were once again subject to whipping and forced to work on Saturdays and Sundays . Soon after Wray arrived in 1808 , he fought for the rights of slaves in the colony to attend church services which would take place nightly . When Governor Henri Guillaume Bentinck declared all meetings after dark illegal , Wray obtained the support of some plantation owners and managers . Armed with their testimonials , he sought to confront Bentinck but was refused audience . Wray went to London to appeal directly to the government .

When Wray was transferred to nearby Berbice at the end of his term , the mission was without a pastor for three years . John Smith , his replacement sent to the colony by the LMS , was equally

welcomed by the slaves . Writing to the LMS , Smith said that the clergy was explicitly ordered to say nothing that would cause slaves ' disenchantment with their masters or dissatisfaction with their status . Many in the colony resented the presence of the preachers , whom they believed were spies to the abolitionist movement in London . They feared that the religious teachings and the liberal attitudes promoted would eventually cause slaves to rebel . Colonists interrupted services , threw stones at the churches , barred ministers ' access to certain plantations , refusing permission to build chapels on plantation land ; slaves were stopped from attending services at every turn . Smith received a hostile reception from the Governor John Murray and from most colonists . They saw his chapel services as a threat to plantation output , and feared greater unrest . Smith reported to the LMS the Governor had told him that " planters will not allow their negroes to be taught to read , on pain of banishment from the colony . "

Furthermore , religious instruction for slaves was endorsed by British Parliament , thus the plantation owners were obliged to permit slaves to attend despite their opposition . Colonists who attended were perceived by Smith to be disruptive or a distraction . Some overseers attended only to prevent their own slaves from attending . One of owners ' complaints was that slaves had too far to walk to attend services . When Smith had requested land to erect a chapel from John Reed , owner of " Dochfour " , the idea was vetoed by Governor Murray , allegedly because of complaints he had received about Smith . Colonists even perverted the intention of a circular from Britain which mandated giving slaves passes to attend services ? on 16 August 1823 , the Governor issued a circular which required slaves to obtain owners ' special dispensation to attend church meetings or services , causing a sharp decline in attendance at services .

At about the same time , Smith wrote a letter back to George Burder , the Secretary of the LMS , lamenting the conditions of the slaves :

Ever since I have been in the colony , the slaves have been most grievously oppressed . A most immoderate quantity of work has , very generally , been exacted of them , not excepting women far advanced in pregnancy . When sick , they have been commonly neglected , ill treated , or half starved . Their punishments have been frequent and severe . Redress they have so seldom been able to obtain , that many of them have long discontinued to seek it , even when they have been notoriously wronged .

Da Costa noted that the slaves who rebelled all had motives which were underpinned by their status as chattels : the families of many were caught in the turbulent changes in ownership of plantations and feared being sold and / or split up (as in the case of the slave Telemachus) ; Christians frequently complained of being harassed and chastised for their belief or their worshipping (Telemachus , Jacky Reed , Immanuel , Prince , Sandy) ; female slaves reported being abused or raped by owners or managers (Betsy , Susanna) . Slaves were also often punished for frivolous reasons . Many managers / owners (McTurk , Spencer) would insist that slaves work on Sundays , and deny passes to attend church ; Pollard , manager of " Non Pareil " and " Bachelor 's Adventure " , was notoriously violent . Quamina complained of frequently being deprived of his legal day off and missing church ; unable to take care of his sickly wife , he found her dead one night after coming home . Jack Gladstone , a slave on " Success " , who did not work under a driver and enjoyed considerable freedom , learned of the debate about slavery in Britain , and had heard rumours of emancipation papers arriving from London .

Among the plantation owners , Sir John Gladstone , father of British Prime Minister William , who had built his fortune as a trader , had acquired plantations in Demerara in 1812 through mortgage defaults . This included half share in " Success " , one of the largest and most productive plantations there ; he acquired the remaining half four years later . Gladstone switched the crop from coffee to sugar , and expanded his workforce of slaves from 160 to more than 330 . Sir John would continue to acquire Demeraran plantations , often at fire sale prices after the rebellion and well into the decade , and his agents would be able to optimise his assets across the different properties . By the time emancipation was enacted in Britain in 1834 , he owned four plantations ? " Vreedenhoop " , " Success " , " Wales " and " Vreedestein " .

John Smith , writing in his journal on 30 August 1817 , said that the slaves of " Success " complained about the work load and very severe treatment . Sir John Gladstone , believing that the

slaves on his estates were properly treated , wrote a letter to the Missionary Society on 24 December 1824 to clear his name . He wrote that his intentions have " ever been to treat my people with kindness in the attention to their wants of every description , and to grant them every reasonable and practicable indulgence . " He stated that the work gangs were doubled from 160 after production shifted to sugar from coffee . Gladstone later maintained that

Even on Sugar Estates , the grinding [of the canes] ceases at sunset ; and the boilers , the only parties that remain longer , finish cleaning up before nine o 'clock ... Their general food , in addition to salt fish and occasionally salted provisions , consisted of plantains which they preferred to other food . Plantains were cultivated in the ordinary daily work of each estate , or purchased when deficient , and they were supplied with more than they could consume . The slaves were provided with clothing that was suitable for the climate and their situation ... They have the Sabbath and their other holydays to dispose of , for the purpose of religion , if so inclined .

Gladstone , who had never set foot on his plantation , had been deluded by his attorney in Demerara , Frederick Cort , into believing that it was seldom necessary to punish the slaves . He asserted they were generally happy and contented , and were able to make considerable money by selling the surplus produce of their provision grounds . Subsequent to the revolt , the secretary of the London Missionary Society warned Gladstone that Cort had been lying , but Gladstone continued to identify himself with Cort and his other agents . Robertson , his second son , inspected the estates from 22 November 1828 to 3 March 1829 , during which he observed that Cort was " an idler and a deceiver " who had mismanaged one estate after another . Only then was Cort dismissed . In Britain , Lord Howick and others criticised the concept of absentee landlords . Sir Benjamin d 'Urban , who took up his office of Lieutenant Governor of Essequibo and Demerara in 1824 , wrote to Earl Bathurst , Secretary of State for the Colonies , on 30 September 1824 , criticising " .. the injudicious managers under whom too many of the slaves are placed ; half educated men of little discretion , or command over their own caprices ; good planters perhaps ? but quite unfit to have the charge of bodies of men , although they might take very proper care of cattle " .

= = The revolt = =

Slaves with the highest status such as coopers , and some other who were members of Smith 's congregation , were implicated in leading the rebellion against the harsh conditions and maltreatment , demanding what they believed to be their right . Quamina and his son Jack Gladstone , both slaves on " Success " plantation , led their peers to revolt . Quamina , a member of Smith 's church , had been one of five chosen to become deacons by the congregation soon after Smith 's arrival . In the British House of Commons in May 1823 , Thomas Fowell Buxton introduced a resolution condemning the state of slavery as " repugnant to the principles of the British constitution and of the Christian religion " , and called for its gradual abolition " throughout the British colonies " . In fact , the subject of these rumours were Orders in Council (to colonial administrations) drawn up by George Canning under pressure from abolitionists to ameliorate the conditions of slaves following a Commons debate . Its principal provisions were to restrict slaves ' daily working hours to nine and to prohibit flogging for female slaves .

Whilst the Governor of Berbice immediately made a proclamation upon receiving his orders from London , and instructed local parson John Wray to explain the provisions to his congregation , John Murray , his counterpart in Demerara , had received the Order from London on 7 July 1823 , and these measures proved controversial as they were discussed in the Court of Policy on 21 July and again on 6 August . They were passed as being inevitable , but the administration made no formal declaration as to its passing . The lack of formal declaration led to rumours that masters had received instructions to set the slaves free but were refusing to do so . In the weeks prior to the revolt , he sought confirmation of the veracity of the rumours from other slaves , particularly those who worked for those in a position to know : he thus obtained information from Susanna , housekeeper / mistress of John Hamilton of " Le Resouvenir " ; from Daniel , the Governor 's servant ; Joe Simpson from " Le Reduit " and others . Specifically , Simpson had written a letter which said that their freedom was imminent but which warned them to be patient . Jack wrote a letter (signing

his father 's name) to the members of the chapel informing them of the " new law " .

Those on " Le Resouvenir " , where Smith 's chapel was situated , also rebelled . Quamina , who was well respected by slaves and freedmen alike , initially tried to stop the slave revolt , and urged instead for peaceful strike ; he made the fellow slaves promise not to use violence . As an artisan cooper who did not work under a driver , Jack enjoyed considerable freedom to roam about . He was able to organise the rebellion through his formal and informal networks . Close conspirators who were church ' teachers ' included Seaton (at " Success ") , William (at " Chateau Margo ") , David (at " Bonne Intention ") , Jack (at " Dochfour ") , Luke (at " Friendship ") , Joseph (at " Bachelor 's Adventure ") , Sandy (at " Non Pareil ") . Together , they finalised planning in the afternoon of Sunday 17 August for thousands of slaves to raise up against their masters the next morning .

Joe of " Le Reduit " had informed his master at approximately 6 am that morning of a coordinated uprising planned the night before at Bethel chapel which would take place that same day . Captain Simpson , the owner , immediately rode to see the Governor , but stopped to alert several estates on the way into town . The governor assembled the cavalry , which Simpson was a part of . Although the rebellion leaders had hoped for mass action by all slaves , the actual unrest involved about 13 @, @ 000 slaves over some 37 estates located on the east coast , between Georgetown and Mahaica . Slaves entered estates , ransacked the houses for weapons and ammunition , tied up the whites , or put some into stocks . The very low number of white deaths is cited as proof that the uprising was largely free from violence from the slaves . Accounts from witnesses indicate that the rebels exercised restraint , with only a very small number of white men were killed . Some slaves took revenge on their masters or overseers by putting them in stocks , like they themselves had been before . Slaves went in large groups , from plantation to plantation , seizing weapons and ammunition and locking up the whites , promising to release them in three days . However , according to Bryant , not all slaves were compliant with the rebels ; some were loyal to their masters and held off against the rebels .

The Governor immediately declared martial law . The 21st Fusiliers and the 1st West India Regiment , aided by a volunteer battalion , were dispatched to combat the rebels , who were armed mainly with cutlasses and bayonets on poles , and a small number of stands of rifles captured from plantations . By the late afternoon on 20 August , the situation had been brought under control . Most of the slaves had been rounded up , although some of the rebels were shot whilst attempting to flee . On 22 August 1823 , Lieutenant Governor Murray issued an account of the battles . He reported major confrontations on Tuesday morning at the Reed estate , " Dochfour " , where ten to fifteen of the 800 rebels were killed ; a skirmish at " Good Hope " felled " five or six " rebels . On Wednesday morning , six were killed at ' Beehive ' plantation , forty rebels died at Elizabeth Hall . At a battle which took place at " Bachelor 's Adventure " , " a number considerably above 1500 " were involved .

The Lieutenant @-@ Colonel having in vain attempted to convince these deluded people of their error , and every attempt to induce them to lay down their arms having failed , he made his dispositions , charged the two bodies simultaneously , and dispersed them with the loss of 100 to 150 . On our side , we only had one rifleman slightly wounded .

After the slaves ' defeat at " Bachelor 's Adventure " , Jack fled into the woods . A " handsome reward " of one thousand guilder was offered for his capture . The Governor also proclaimed a " FULL and FREE PARDON to all slaves who surrendered within 48 hours , provided that they shall not have been ringleaders (or guilty of Aggravated Excesses) " . Jack remained at large until he and his wife were captured by Capt. McTurk at " Chateau Margo " , after a three @-@ hour standoff on 6 September .

= = Trials = =

On 25 August , the Governor Murray constituted a general court @-@ martial , presided over by Lt.-Col. Stephen Arthur Goodman . Despite the initial revolt passing largely peacefully with slave masters locked in their homes , those who were considered ringleaders were tried at set up at

different estates along the coast and executed by shooting ; their heads were cut off and nailed to posts . A variety of sentences were handed out , including solitary confinement , lashing , and death . Bryant (1824) records 72 slaves having been sentenced by court @-@ martial at the time of publication . He noted that 19 of the 45 death sentences had been carried out ; a further 18 slaves had been reprieved . Quamina was among those executed ; their bodies were hung up in chains by the side of a public road in front of their respective plantations and left to rot for months afterwards . Jack Gladstone was sold and deported to St Lucia ; Da Costa suggests that a letter Sir John had sent on his behalf resulted in clemency .

John Smith was arraigned in court @-@ martial before Lt. Col. Goodman on 13 October , charged with four offences : " promoting discontent and dissatisfaction in the minds of the Negro Slaves towards their Lawful Masters , Overseers and Managers , inciting rebellion ; advising , consulting and corresponding with Quamina , and further aiding and abetting Quamina in the revolt ; failure to make known the planned rebellion to the proper authorities ; did not use his best endeavours to suppress , detain and restrain Quamina once the rebellion was under way . " The officers on the court martial judging Smith included a young Captain Colin Campbell , later to become Field Marshal Lord Clyde .

Smith 's trial concluded one month later , on 24 November . Smith was found guilty of the principal charges , and was given the death sentence . Pending an appeal , Smith was transferred from Colony House to prison , where he died of " consumption " in the early hours of 6 February 1824 ; To minimise the risk of stirring up slave sentiment , the colonists interred him at 4 am . The grave went without markings to avoid it becoming a rallying point for slaves . The Royal reprieve arrived on 30 March . Smith 's death was a major step forward in the campaign to abolish slavery . News of his death was published in British newspapers , provoked enormous outrage and garnered 200 petitions to Parliament .

= = Aftermath = =

The rebellion took place a few months after the founding of the Anti @-@ Slavery Society , and had a strong impact on Britain . Although public sentiment initially favoured the colonists , it changed with revelations . The abolitionist debate which had flagged , was galvanised by the deaths of Smith and the 250 slaves . The Martial law in Demerara was lifted on 19 January 1824 . In Demerara and Berbice , there was considerable anger towards the missionaries that resulted in their oppression . Demerara 's Court of Policy passed an ordinance giving financial assistance to a church that was selected by plantation owners in each district . The Le Resouvenir chapel was seized and taken over by the Anglican Church .

Under pressure from London , the Demerara Court of Policy eventually passed an ' Ordinance for the religious instruction of slaves and for meliorating their condition ' in 1825 which institutionalised working hours and some civil rights for slaves . The weekend was to be from sunset on Saturday to sunrise on Monday ; field work was also defined to be from 6 am to 6 pm , with a mandatory two @-@ hour break . A Protector of Slaves was appointed ; whipping was abolished for women as was its use in the field . The rights to marriage and own property was legalised , as was the right to acquire manumission . Amendments and new ordinances continued to flow from London , each progressively establishing more civil rights for the slaves , but they were strongly resisted by the colonial legislature .

Many planters refused to comply with their provisions . The confrontation continued as the planters challenged on several occasions the right of British government to pass laws binding on the colony , arguing that the Court of Policy has exclusive legislative power within the colony . Plantation owners who controlled the voting of the taxes disrupted administration by refusing to vote the civil list .

In August 1833 , the British parliament passed the ' Act for the abolition of slavery throughout the British Colonies , for promoting the industry of manumitted slaves , and for compensating the persons hitherto entitled to the services of such slaves ' , with effect from 1 August 1834 . Plantation owners of British Guiana received £ 4 @, @ 297 @, @ 117 10s . 6 ½ d. in compensation for the loss of 84 @, @ 915 slaves .

