

HANDOUT



SHARING RESOURCES:

THE *DODDINGTON*

Societies are a collection of interconnected individuals. Because we are interconnected, a society can only be healthy if most every individual in that community is healthy. One way to create a healthy society is to share resources.

Sharing as a societal ideal is usually the norm, not the exception. Most every society has some foundational roots that promote and celebrate sharing. For example, Indigenous ceremonies such as the Potlach or the Sundance are meant to share resources and ensure group survival. The Abrahamic traditions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism all include activities of sharing. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikh faiths also include sharing as part of their practices. Many political traditions also incorporate sharing, perhaps best reflected in the ideals of Marxism but also seen in more local traditions such as Red Toryism. Such traditions of sharing—political, religious, or spiritual—reflect the idea that we have a mutual responsibility to one-another.

Unfortunately, people do not always live up to the ideals of sharing and mutual responsibility. If enough individuals in a society fail to live up to these ideals, that society can become unhealthy.

To understand the role of sharing and mutual trust in societies, let's consider the 1755 wreck of the *Doddington*. The castaways shared resources and developed a sense of camaraderie and purpose, which directly contributed to their survival. But in a twist of fate, their inability to share in a salvaged treasure tore the castaways apart.

CAMARADERIE AND CONFLICT:

THE *DODDINGTON*

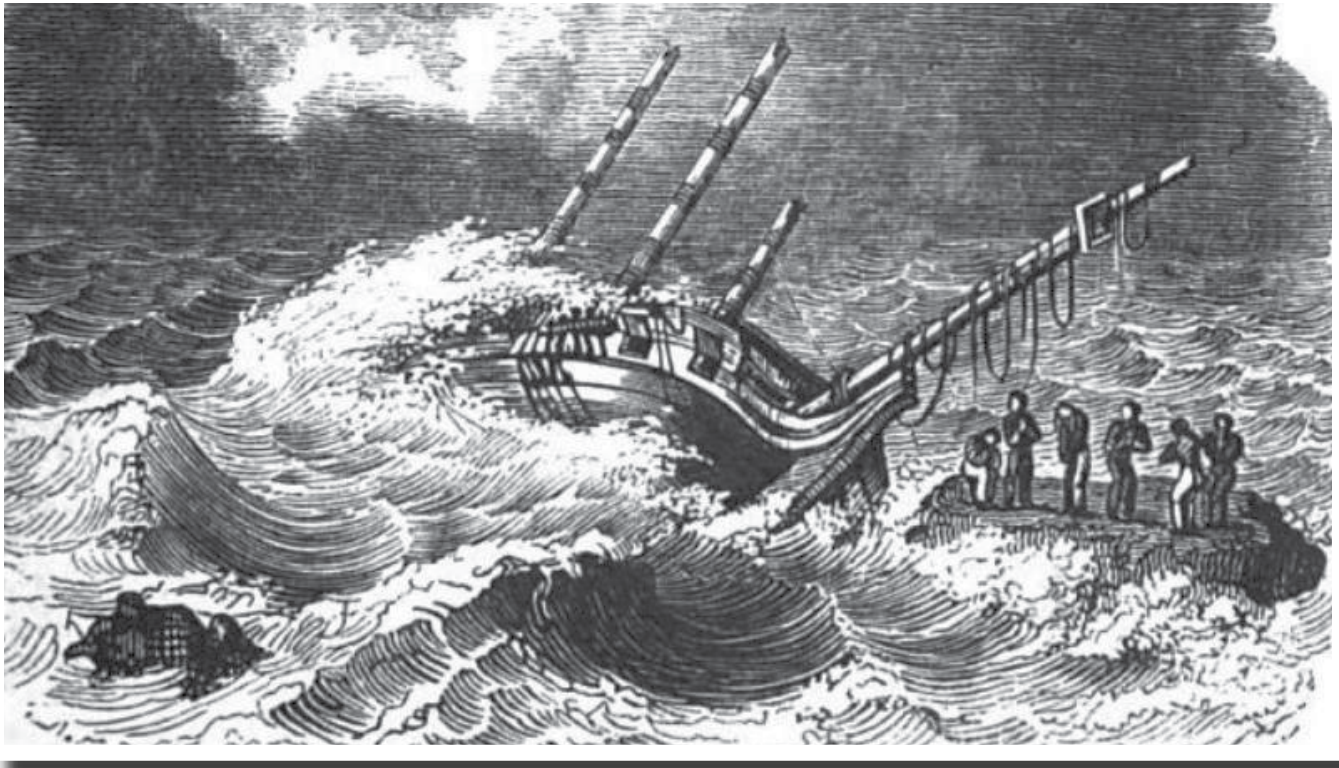
The *Doddington* was a ship of the British East India Company (EIC), a trading company operating in the Indian Ocean. On April 22nd, 1755 an EIC fleet that included the *Doddington* set sail from Dover. En route to Fort Saint George (modern-day Chennai), the fleet was carrying Bengal's first British Governor, Clive of India. His troops and his fortune were spread amongst the fleet. Aboard the *Doddington* were 270 people and a small fortune in gold coins.

Because the *Doddington* sailed faster than its companion ships, it separated from the fleet. Trouble struck the isolated ship as it rounded South Africa. Maps of the day underestimated the length of the southern edge of the continent, and so the *Doddington* turned north too soon, sailing dangerously close to the shoreline.

In early hours of July 17th, alone and trapped in a gale, the boat hit a reef on the east end of Algoa Bay. It only took 20 minutes for the *Doddington* to entirely break apart.

The rapid destruction of the *Doddington* left the overwhelming majority of people on board without a chance. Only 23 men survived, landing on the shores of Bird Island by clinging to floating wreckage. Of the 23 survivors, four were officers of the ship: the first, second, third, and fifth mates.

Much of what we know about the *Doddington* castaways is from the diaries of the first and the third mate. Their official diaries largely corroborate each other. However, the first mate also kept a secret



Wreck of the *Doddington*, depicted in *A History and Shipwrecks, and Disasters at Sea*.

Photo Credit: *A History and Shipwrecks, and Disasters at Sea*

third diary. This diary paints a somewhat more lurid story of intrigue and jealousy.

As the sun rose, the *Doddington* survivors nursed their wounds and surveyed their new home. The small 47-acre island had no fresh water, but it did host plenty of seals and birds. To the north, the mainland could be seen.

Fortunately, items from the *Doddington* were constantly washing up on Bird Island. Soon, the men had candles, gunpowder, brandy, fresh water, beer, salt pork, flour, sail cloth and canvas, tools, rope, and timber. Seven live hogs from the ship even made it to shore. Bird Island was no paradise, but they had enough supplies to live. Importantly, the men considered the resources that washed ashore to be common property, shared amongst all.

Unfortunately, not everything to wash up on Bird Island was particularly welcomed. In the early days, several bodies washed ashore. One was the wife of a survivor. Knowing the husband would be devastated to see her battered body, the castaways showed an early act of kindness and mutual

responsibility. A handful of men kept the widower distracted, while others set to work digging a grave. They said prayers, took the wedding ring from the deceased woman, and buried her. A few days later, they told the husband of the news, gave him the ring, and brought him to the grave so that he could pay respects. He was most grateful.

The diaries tell many other stories of mutual responsibility and a harmonious existence. Work duties appeared to be shared by all, and the men had concern for each-other's well-being. For example, when a few men fishing on a small boat were suddenly whisked out to sea, men on shore quickly put a rescue mission into operation. The ship's carpenter, one of the 23 survivors, whipped together a simple raft that would not get swamped like a boat could. Several men risked their lives in the choppy water to haul back the stranded fishermen.

While the men believed that all resources should be equally shared, they also understood that some skills were worthy of recognition. When their brandy dwindled, the castaways saved the last two gallons for the carpenter. Even though he was moody and

temperamental, the castaways believed he deserved extra recognition for his work. The carpenter was leading the construction of a sloop, a single-masted boat that would take them back to civilisation.

Of course, like all societies, Bird Island was not a utopia of love, solidarity, and good fortune.

An early-day exploratory trip to the mainland brought tragedy. Three men set out on a jolly boat saved from the wreckage. Their objective was to investigate the plumes of smoke that frequently rose from the mainland. When the small craft closed in on the shoreline, it overturned in the surf. One man drowned. The other two salvaged the boat and made it to the beach.

Unfortunately, the mainland proved inhospitable. The men spent a night hiding under the boat while what they thought were tigers prowled about. When they emerged from the boat-turned-shelter, the local Khoekhoe people made it clear that the castaways were not welcome. The two men returned to Bird Island, convinced that building a sloop was their only way to safety.

The most corrosive thing to happen on Bird Island, however, was due to Clive of India's fortune. The ship's officers were responsible for the protection of Clive's fortune, even in the case of a shipwreck. When a chest of his treasure washed ashore, the officers made it clear that unlike the food and supplies, the treasure would not be shared equally. They would return it to Clive when they escaped the island.

The officers' refusal to share the treasure sparked jealousy and conflict: ten or so castaways believed that whatever lay in the chest should be theirs. And so they robbed it. The theft was discovered when a man remarked that the chest felt unusually light. The officers turned it over to discover that the bottom had been chiselled open. About a third of the treasure was gone.

The first, second, and third mates proposed that everyone—themselves included—take a religious oath to vouch for their innocence. In this era of deep spiritual conviction, taking an oath was deadly serious. The consequences were believed to reach into the afterlife. The carpenter refused to take

the oath, and the majority of the men followed suit. Powerless against the majority, the officers acquiesced to their will.

Despite the shadow of stolen treasure hanging over the island, the first mate's official diary describes the men's existence as "very healthy." Indeed, they were able to focus on their primary goals: managing their camp, and building the sloop to escape Bird Island.

Seven months after the sinking of the *Doddington*, the sloop was completed. 10 metres long and 3 metres wide, the boat was made from washed up timbers, sail cloth, and other supplies from the *Doddington*. When they pushed it into the water on February 16th, 1756 it proved seaworthy. Its seams, caulked with pitch and seal blubber, held.

They christened their sloop *Happy Deliverance*, loaded it with supplies and treasure, and set off on February 18th.



Coat of Arms of the British East India Company. The company took control of much of India in 1757, replacing French rule. The Indian Rebellion of 1857—the first great rebellion against the British in the area—led to India coming under the control of the British government.

Photo Credit: Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

The journey up the African coast toward Mozambique was eventful, to say the least. The men made land a few times, acquiring food by trading items with the Indigenous population. Yet all was not happy aboard the *Happy Deliverance*.

The journey revealed limits to human solidarity, especially for 22 men squeezed onto a boat less than thirty metres square. The treasure led to constant fights. According to the first mate's official diary, it "made their condition worse than when they were on the island." Soon, the decision was made to stop the fighting by divvying up the treasure amongst themselves.

On May 18th, the sloop arrived at St Lucia, one of the largest river estuaries in Africa. The risk of crossing the estuary during rough weather led nine of the men to abandon ship. They rowed to land on the small lifeboat in tow.

In his secret diary, the first mate speculated that the men likely abandoned the group not out of fear of crossing. Rather, the men feared being prosecuted for stealing the treasure. Once they had reached St Lucia, they were close to European outposts. The breakaway men likely thought at this point, with their treasure, they could make it on their own.

The 13 men remaining on the sloop successfully crossed the estuary and arrived at Delagoa Bay, at the southeast corner of modern-day Mozambique. Anchored in the bay was the British trading vessel the *Rose*. The *Rose* was en route to Madagascar, stopping at Delagoa Bay so its captain could negotiate for cattle with the locals.

What unfolded at the bay suggests just how deeply fractured the relationship between the officers and the castaways had become.

While the 13 *Doddington* castaways waited for the *Rose* to lift anchor, so they could sail with them to Madagascar, out of nowhere a small boat appeared on the river that drained into Delagoa Bay. In it were three of the men who had abandoned ship at St Lucia. The six others were said to be on their way. The imminent return of the deserters prompted the officers to secure the treasure once and for all.

The officers coaxed a few men off the *Happy Deliverance*, then returned to the sloop in the *Rose*'s small armed boat. They forcibly took back as much treasure as they could.

The raid left the men on the *Happy Deliverance* spooked and fearful. Led by the carpenter, they pulled anchor and fled in middle of the night.

Some days later, as the *Rose* sailed towards Madagascar, its crew caught site of a sail. It was the *Happy Deliverance*. The *Rose* caught up to the fleeing sloop, and the men negotiated an entente. The carpenter bought the sloop, presumably with his stolen gold coins, and the two boats sailed together to Madagascar. There, the men went their separate ways.

The officers of the *Doddington* were ultimately able to deliver to Clive what little remained of his treasure. But saving the treasure had a high cost. It sparked continuous fights, ultimately shattering the solidarity of the *Doddington* survivors.

WHY SHARING RESOURCES MATTERS

Overall, the survivors of the *Doddington* fared reasonably well. Much of this was due to fortunate circumstances. Not only did vital resources wash ashore, but the castaways included men with the skills to build a boat to bring them to safety. They shared resources and food equally, found a common purpose in building a sloop to escape Bird Island, and even showed acts of kindness. When it came to sheer survival, the castaways performed well. They shared what needed to be shared.

Nonetheless, the presence of Clive's treasure proved all-corrupting. It led to periodic bouts of jealousy and feuds, a robbery on Bird Island, a breakdown of the men's relationship on the *Happy Deliverance*, and an armed conflict at Delagoa Bay.

Had the treasure never washed ashore, the wreck of the *Doddington* may have proven to be a near-perfect illustration of what can be achieved through cooperation and human decency. The breakdown of the *Doddington*'s castaway society serves as a reminder of how large, disproportionate wealth can corrupt even the most bonded people with an otherwise common purpose.

CLIVE OF INDIA'S GOLD

Fights over Clive's lost fortune continued into the 21st century. When a dive crew discovered the *Doddington* wreck in 1977, Clive's gold was nowhere to be found. Someone beat them to it.

In the 1990s, the gold turned up at a Florida coin dealer. The coin dealer said that the gold was salvaged from a wrecked pirate ship, found at a secret location just outside of South African waters.

The dealer's claim that the gold was found in international waters is legally important. Generally, a country's territory extends 12 nautical miles (22 kilometres) from its coast. Areas further out are international waters. When a shipwreck is found within a country's waters, it becomes the property of that state. When a shipwreck is found in international waters, it becomes the property of the finder. Exceptions will arise if somebody makes a claim to be the rightful owner of the wreck.

By claiming the gold was found in international waters, the coin dealer was saying that South Africa had no rights to Clive's fortune. The dealer and the government went to court to determine who owned the treasure. The dealer ultimately agreed to turn over a third of the coins to South Africa.

DISCUSS

1. Look at ways that *Doddington* castaways acted with decency.
 - a) How does this compare to other shipwrecks such as the *Batavia*?
 - b) How would acting with decency towards each other contribute to a society's success?
2. Think about the carpenter receiving extra brandy.
 - a) Are there situations where some people deserve more wealth and resources than others?
 - b) If so, should there be limits to inequality? Where do we draw the line?
3. Think about the treasure and how it brought their solidarity to ruin. Recall that the officers were bound by the terms of their employment to protect it.
 - a) How would you have dealt with the treasure if you were one of the castaways?
 - b) How would you have dealt with the treasure if you were one of the officers?
4. Is wealth a good thing for a society? Is it a corrupting force? Or does it depend on how a society makes use of its wealth?