The Slave Trade
& Richard Laird Warren

There is not as much information available about the first commission of HMS Trincomalee, from 1847 to 1850, as compared with its second commission. The first commission was on the North American and West Indies Station and the command of the Trincomalee was given to Captain Richard Laird Warren who gained a reputation as being harsh on his crew. The ship left Portsmouth on 21st September 1847 with a crew of 240.

On 6th November 1847 the Trincomalee arrived at Bermuda and the ship then helped to police British interests in the Caribbean and South America. The crew helped with the suppression of riots in Haiti. During 1848 the ship was on the look out for slavers running slaves to the West Indies, and she later moved north to carry out fishery protection duties off Newfoundland.

During 1849 the ship was to be found protecting Cuba, then held by the Spanish, from the United states which was expanding at that time. The first commission ended on 9th August 1850 when HMS Trincomalee arrived back in England, at Devonport, Plymouth.

There is a Parliamentary paper for the House of Commons dated 1835 which provides an insight in to the part played by ships of the Royal Navy, in policing the slave trade at that time. Two Portuguese schooners, the “Apta” and the “Santissimo Rozario e Bom Jezuz” were both apprehended with their slaves on board by Richard Laird Warren, whilst he was in command of His Majesty’s sloop, “Trinculo”.

Captain Richard Laird Warren

The following are extracts from the Parliamentary paper.

“...we beg respectfully to call your Lordship’s attention to the sanction and connivance which the Portuguese Authorities of the Islands of Princes and St Thomas continue to show to the worst description of illegal Slave Trade.

The “Apta” according to the evidence of the Master, was only 30 feet long, and 11 feet in beam; and she was made to carry 54 slaves, together with a crew of 10 persons and 1 passenger, making 65 persons altogether.

Former instances on record prove how much sufferings, which the slaves must experience from the smallness of such vessels as the “Apta” trading between the islands and the adjacent Coast, are increased and prolonged by the ignorance of the Masters, who are generally imperfectly acquainted with navigation, particularly if they meet with bad weather. We trust that some means may be adopted to compel a stricter attention to their duties,, on the part of the Portuguese Authorities; and that the execution of the Alvara [permit] of His Most Faithful Majesty, dated at Rio de Janeiro, 26th January, 1818, may be, at the present time, urged upon the Portuguese Government, with better success than formerly.

If the penalties of the 1st Article of that Law be honestly enforced, we are persuaded that adventurers, however bold, will hesitate to embark in a speculation like that in which the owners of the “Apta” were engaged, with the prospect of such a speculation being followed by the confiscation of the vessel, and her lading, and by the fining and banishment of the Master and Supercargo …”

Report of the Case of the Portuguese schooner “Apta”, Christovao Xavier Vellozo, Master:

“… a Passport, dated at the City of St. Antonio in Princes Island, on the 5th November, 1833, and signed by “Joze” Ferreira Gomes, Knight of the Order of Christ, Auditor General, President of the Commercial Board, and Colonel of the Forces of His Majesty, and by Antonio Castello de Vid, principal ecclesiastic of the Bishopric, both entrusted with the general government of the Islands of Princes and St. Thomas. This Passport authorises Christovao Xavier Vellozo, the Master and Proprietor of the Portuguese schooner, “Apta” of the Island of Princes, to prosecute a voyage of lawful commerce to the Ports of that adjacent coast around the Island of St. Thomas.

Having obtained these papers, C. X. Vellozo sailed direct to Cape Lopez, situated about 1 degree South of the Line, with a cargo consisting of rum, tobacco, dry goods, guns, and iron bars, which he bartered for a return cargo of 54 slaves, with whom he was proceeding to his destination, the Island of St. Thomas, when fallen in with and detained on the 27th December last, by His Majesty’s sloop, “Trinculo”, Acting Commander Warren commanding, in latitude of 0° 20' North, longitude 6° 36' East, for being engaged in the illicit traffic in slaves, contrary to the Treaties existing between His Majesty and His Most Faithful Majesty, the King of Portugal.

His Majesty’s sloop, “Trinculo”, being obliged to proceed down to the Cape of Good Hope, and the prize schooner being only 30 feet in length, and therefore too small to attempt a voyage to Sierra Leone, both the vessel and her stores, with the slaves on board of her, were left in the charge of Lieutenant-Colonel Nicholls, Commandant and Superintendent of

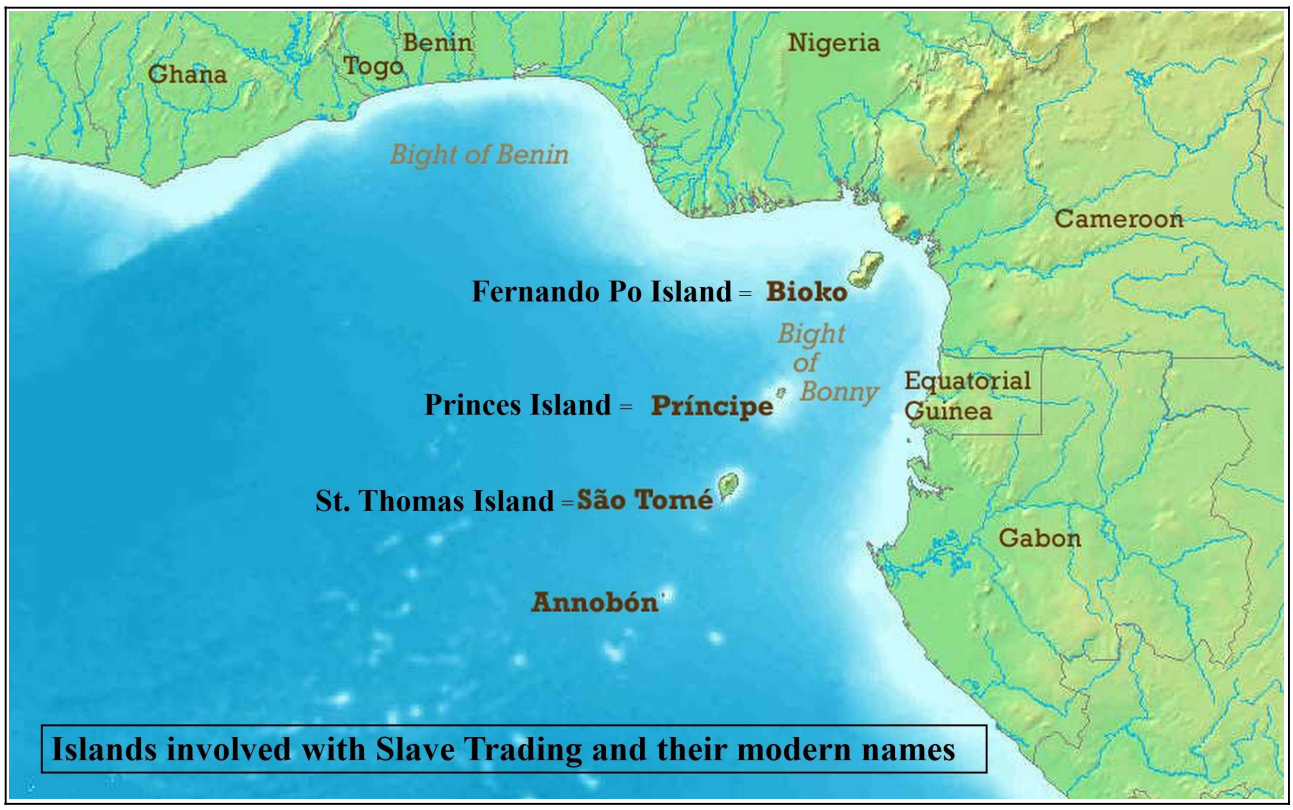
Fernando Po, who, on the 2nd January 1834, (6 days after the capture was made,) gave full receipts for the same.

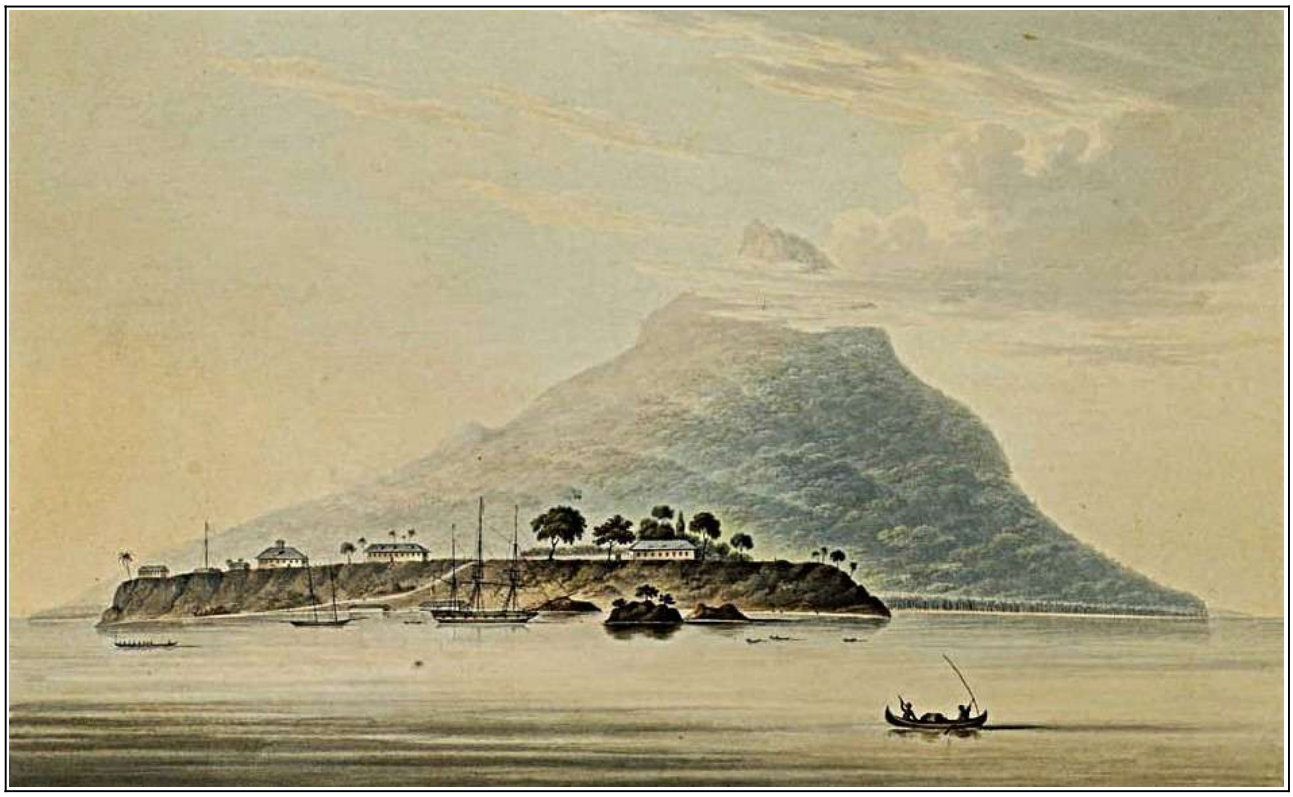
General Sir Edward Nicholls c1851

Richard Laird Warren, Esq., the Acting Commander of the “Trinculo” at the time when the “Apta” was captured, arrived at this place [Fernando Po] late on the evening of the 12th instant, in His Majesty’s schooner, “Forester”, on his way to join His Majesty’s ship, “Aetna”, to the command of which he had been appointed ….

On the 13th instant the “Apta” was regularly brought before the British and Portuguese Court, on the Petition of the Proctor for the Captor, that the Affidavit of Captain Warren, authenticating the Papers of the detained vessel, might be received and filed, as also the Receipt for the stores left, and, the slaves landed, at Fernando Po, from the said vessel….

The Captor’s Declaration is to the following effect: “I, Richard Laird Warren, Acting Commander of His Britannic Majesty’s sloop, “Trinculo”, hereby declare that, on this 27th day of December 1833, being in or about latitude 0° 20' North, longitude 8° 6' East, I detained the schooner or vessel named “Apta” sailing under Portuguese colours armed with 2 guns, 1 pair of pistols, and 3 cutlasses, and, commandered by Christovao Xavier Vellozo, who declared her to be bound from Cape Lopez to St. Thomas, with a crew consisting of 12 men, and 3 passengers, whose names, as declared by them respectively, are inserted in a list at the foot hereof, and having on board 54 slaves, said to have been taken on board at Cape Lopez on or about the 24th day of December 1833…..





Clarence Cove, Fernando Po Island

… the said vessel “Apta” was in so defective a state after seizure that he ordered her to be taken to the Island of Fernando Po, at which place he ... caused a survey to be held upon her, whereupon she was pronounced unseaworthy … and in consequence thereof the slaves on board the said vessel were disembarked (54 in number) at the said Island, and were delivered over, together with the stores of the said vessel, unto Colonel Edward Nicholls, the Superintendent thereof.”

There was no separate receipt given by Colonel Nicolls for the 54 slaves landed from the “Apta” but they are included in a receipt for 108 slaves, dated 2nd January, 1834, being the number of slaves landed that day from the “Apta”, and from another Portuguese schooner, called the “Santissimo Rozario e Bom Jezuz”.

A report dated 27th June 1834 was sent to His Majesty’s Commissioners to Viscount Palmerston from Sierra Leone which was received on 18th August 1834. ...

“We have the honour to enclose our report of the case of the Portuguese schooner “Santissimo Rozario e Bom Jezuz”, Francisco Silvestre, Master, which was captured by His Majesty’s sloop, “Trinculo”, Richard Laird Warren, Esq., Acting Commander, on the 28th December last, in latitude 1° 7' North, longitude 7° 47' East, with 54 slaves on board. The Case of this vessel is so exactly similar, in all its material points, to that of the Portuguese schooner, “Apta”...The Papers of both vessels are in exactly the same form, written by the same hand, and signed by the same persons. The vessels were about equal in size, and sailed from the same port direct to Cape Lopez. Both embarked the same number of slaves, on the same day, and at the same place. Both were captured by His Majesty’s sloop, “Trinculo”, and carried to Fernando Po together, where they now lie, the stores and slaves of each having been landed, and delivered into the charge of Colonel Nicholls, the Commandant and Superintendent of that island …; the only dissimilarities in the cases of the two vessels are, that they had different owners, and that one was bound to the Island of St. Thomas, whilst the other was bound to the Island of Princes.,,The 54 slaves, who formed the cargo of this vessel, having been landed at Fernando Po … [were] emancipated by a Decree of the British and Portuguese Court …

On 2nd January 1834 Colonel Nicholls produced a receipt as follows:

“This is to certify, that on the 2nd January, 1834, there were landed at this establishment, from His Majesty’s sloop, “Trinculo”, Richard Laird Warren, Esq., Acting Commander, 108 slaves, as follows, the cargoes of the schooners, “Apta” and “Santissimo Rozario e Bom Jezuz”:

Men…...34
Women…...20
Boys…….39
Girls…...15
….

Thanks to the actions of Richard Laird Warren 108 slaves received their freedom in January 1834.