The following documents describe the case of James Dick, a naval purser, and storekeeper at the Jamaica dockyard from 1796 to 1803. The notes which accompany them are designed as an historical and numismatic background to a section of the First Commission of Inquiry into Naval Abuses, printed in the Naval Chronicle for 1803.¹

Briefly, Mr. Dick was found to have been importing counterfeit coin into the West India Islands. The accidental discovery in 1797 of some boxes of this currency, addressed to him, had caused Vice-Admiral Sir Hyde Parker² to write to the Admiralty and to the Navy Board, who eventually came to the conclusion that Dick had been doing no more than that which was an accepted practice in the Islands; but they were induced to inquire minutely into his general financial conduct, and found that he had been tampering with government money. This aspect of Mr. Dick's dubious activities does not concern us. All that need be said is that he failed through negligence or ignorance to credit Government with the premiums which he exacted on bills drawn for official purposes by various naval officers on the Jamaica station. His misdemeanours were made public in 1803 and he was dismissed.

The export of counterfeit coins from England and America to the West Indies was extensively carried on during the late eighteenth century. Since 1705, the Islands had adopted a gold standard, based first on the Spanish and then on the Brazilian gold currency. In time, the fineness of these coins was greatly reduced, and many light or clipped pieces began to circulate.

These came to be accepted by their weight, without regard to their original value and denomination. The Leeward Islands resorted to the expedient of raising the weight by inserting a gold plug into the centre of these coins and making them conform to a local standard. The favourite piece so treated was the Portuguese "joe" or "johannes" (half-dobra). Not only were the plugs often of bad alloy, but the coins themselves were often forged by enterprising manufacturers at Birmingham, Sheffield, and at Baltimore in America.³ The piece illustrated (Pl. VIII, 7) bears the mint-mark "B" (indicating Bahia on the original) and may stand for either Birmingham or Baltimore. A genuine Portuguese half-dobra is illustrated for comparison (Pl. VIII, 6).

² The younger of the two admirals of that name and Nelson's Commander-in-Chief at Copenhagen, 1801. In 1797, he was Commander-in-Chief on the Leeward Islands station.
Forgery of billon and copper coins (usually the Cayenne sous struck for Louis XVI in 1789) was also extensive, and these were generally exported from England.

Vice-Admiral Sir Hyde Parker to Evan Nepean Esqr.

(Secretary to the Admiralty)

Adventure, Cape Nichola Mole, 13th of June, 1797

Sir,

I beg you will be pleased to communicate to the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, that Mr. de Coetlogon, Storekeeper at this port, being in want of money to pay the current expenses of the Squadron, represented to me that no cash could be procured here under the enormous discount of seven and a half per cent; that there were two boxes, supposed to be money, belonging to Mr. Dick, Storekeeper at Jamaica, on board the Adventure storeship, which he begged my permission to make use of. In consequence of this representation, I ordered him to cause the said boxes to be opened in the presence of Captain Whyte, and if found to contain money, Mr. de Coetlogon was to make use of it and send bills to Mr. Dick for the Amount. The result will be best explained by the enclosed copies of letters from Captain Whyte and Mr. de Coetlogon, together with one from the manufacturer at Birmingham, which was found in one of the boxes.

Although this money is not of a specie that is current in Jamaica, it was nevertheless intended to be issued, and what, as appears by the letter found in the box, Mr. Dick seems to have been accustomed to. At any rate, the appearances of fraud intended to be practised are so strong, that I have judged it my indispensible duty to represent it to their Lordships for their decision, submitting it to their consideration, whether in order to discover the amount of base coin transmitted to Mr. Dick at former periods, as well as to other persons, it may not be proper to have the person of the manufacturer secured and him strictly examined.

By the Mermaid I shall transmit a duplicate of this, with samples of the copper coin, as well as the Johannes which the maker sent to Mr. Dick for his approval. I have likewise acquainted the Navy Board herewith, and am &c.

Hyde Parker

P.S. In case it should be their Lordships’ pleasure to dismiss Mr. Dick for his nefarious conduct, I beg leave to recommend Mr. de Coetlogon as a proper person to succeed him.

First enclosure: A letter from Captain Whyte to Sir H. Parker describing the opening of the boxes and the finding of spurious coin. Second enclosure: Mr. Charles de Coetlogon, Naval Storekeeper at Cape Nichola Mole, to Sir H. Parker:

Adventure, Cape Nichola Mole, 2 June 1797

Sir,

In pursuance to the directions signified to me in your order of this day’s date, the cases of money belonging to Mr. Dick, Naval Officer at Jamaica, have been opened in the presence of Captain Whyte of His Majesty’s ship Adventure, and have been found to contain as follows, viz.

Case No. 1 D. Containing sixty-two papers of a coin supposed to be stampees and four papers of a copper French coin (two sous pieces).
Case No. 2 D. Containing sixty-two papers of a coin supposed to be stampees.

1 Cape St. Nicholas Mole in the Island of San Domingo.
2 Naval storekeeper.
As I believe neither of the coins to be current in this Island, I have, therefore, to request you will be pleased to give me directions for my further proceedings.

I am, &c.,
Charles de Coetlogon

To Vice-Admiral Sir Hyde Parker,
Commander in Chief, &c., &c.

William Bullock to James Dick
James Dick Esq. to William Bullock.

September 1795
124 papers of stampees, five gross in each, at 3s. 3d. per gros, 100l. 15s.

Sir,
The above, I hope will meet your approval, being a close imitation of the pattern sent, and a different composition to those you had before. I observe in your letter, you say you was to have the stampees at 3s. per gross; I never can afford them to you at that price; it was 3s. 6d. I have now let you have them as low as I can afford them, 3s. 3d. I have inclosed in box No 1 four papers of two sous pieces; expect you will find them answer your purpose. I have had application from St. Kitts, Tortola and Martinico, but not liking the mode of payment have not executed those orders. Thought it not amiss to send you a few to try them. The inclosed joe I send for a sample, the value of this 4s. 6d. (gold) at 23s. 9d.: It is well executed: this has been worn in the pocket. Two-sous pieces, 3s. per gross. Have inclosed you a few Newspapers: they may afford you some amusement in that part of the world.

Bristol Street.

Your future favours will be attended to your most obedient servant

Wm. Bullock

Sir Hyde Parker wrote another letter to Nepean on 23 June enclosing samples of the spurious money. One extract only need be quoted.

"The coin of this part of the world which goes by that name [stampee] passes for, and is really valued at 14d. sterling each, of course a gross, or 144 in number, amounts to 18s. sterling, leaving Mr. Dick a profit on this spurious coin of 14s. 9d. a gross, or very nearly 500 per cent."

Through the Admiral, the Navy board called upon Mr. Dick to explain his conduct; meanwhile the latter had produced a lengthy defence in a letter to Sir Hyde Parker.

James Dick to Sir Hyde Parker
Jamaica, 19 June 1797

Sir,
I have received your letter of the 8th instant, inclosing a report of a survey held on two boxes found on board the Adventure bearing my address, a copy of a letter to you from Captain Whyte, and a copy of an original letter retained in your possession with those boxes, and I am very sorry that the business should come before you in such a questionable shape, as to warrant any unfavourable construction of my conduct; but I trust that when you have perused the detail of facts here offered for your consideration, you will not think it necessary to make the representations mentioned in your letter. In the first place, Mr. Bullock’s letter shows that a traffic in such base metal is carried on in the Islands therein mentioned; and although I never had any interest in them myself, I have seen such pieces in circulation as small change, as well in Antigua

1 Underlined in the Naval Chronicle.
as Martinico, particularly in the latter, where I believe they are openly imported as merchandize.

Mr. Alexander Norval who was carpenter of the Trusty and came to the Leeward Islands in that ship with me in 1793, was in June 1794 removed to the Boyne, in consequence of the recommendation of Sir John Jervis, who upon the capture of Martinico, appointed him Master Shipwright at Fort Royal, where he died in September 1795.

This worthy man, whose conduct entitled him to the good offices of all men who knew him, having, previous to his sailing in the Boyne, heard that this sort of coin was manufactured and sold at Birmingham, formed a design of carrying some out with him; but not knowing the means of procuring them, he requested me, as I was idle in town, to find it out for him, and if the expedition against Martinico succeeded, to send him out some. I had no difficulty in finding out the manufacturer, from whom I ordered the quantity first mentioned in his letter, and sent them to Norval, who paid me for them upon my arrival at Martinico, in June 1795 with Sir John Laforey, and he at the same time requested me to write to Bullock through my agent, for the quantity now in those boxes, and also that they might be directed to me for their better security, as he imagined.

[Here Dick interrupts his defence to explain that the boxes were put on board the Commerce de Marseilles, one of Admiral Christian’s fleet destined for the West Indies, but that she was delayed and damaged by gales¹ and the money eventually reached San Domingo on board the Adventure, which had not touched at Martinique. The boxes were waiting to be sent to that island, where they were to be given to Mr. Martyr, Norval’s executor.]

... and I can only add, that if either the law of England, or the Colonies, has been infringed by the part I have taken to serve a worthy man, I was perfectly ignorant that such laws existed. In case, notwithstanding this candid statement of the business, you should think it fit to represent to the Admiralty and Navy Board, I am sure you will do me the justice to send this letter with yours,

I am, &c.,

James Dick

To Sir Hyde Parker, Knt.

Dick wrote to Nepean, transmitting a copy of this letter, and assuring him that he had not intended to transgress any law. He remarked that at the time of his leaving Portsmouth, Birmingham johannes were sold openly in every silversmith’s shop there. His son, Captain John Dick, R.N., also wrote to the Commissioners of the Navy in his father’s defence. He argued that there could have been no intention to pass base joes amongst the dockyard workmen at Jamaica, for everyone knew that these pieces only circulated by weight. But people were not so particular in the Leeward Islands (i.e. St. Kitts, Tortola, &c.).

Finally we have a letter from Bullock himself to Captain Dick.

William Bullock to Captain John Dick, R.N.

London, 25th August 1797

Sir,

In consequence of your application to me for an explanation of the transactions which have passed between your Father, Mr. Dick, late Sir John Laforey’s secretary,

¹ A French Line-of-Battleship of 120 guns taken by Lord Hood at Toulon, 1793. Used as a storeship. She was so badly strained by these gales that she was found unfit for service and had to be broken up soon afterwards.
and myself, relative to some Negro money called stampees, or black dogs, which I sent him to the West Indies, about two years and a half ago.

Sometime in 1794, or the beginning of 1795, I received a letter from Mr. Dick, dated in Martinique, requesting me to procure and send him some negro West India coin: In consequence thereof, I procured from Mr. Stulhouse, in August or September following, and sent him 124 papers, five gross each; in one of the two cases in which they were packed, Mr. Stulhouse sent as a sample for Mr. Dick's perusal, but without orders, two patterns of a two-sous piece, and one of a joe; all of which he was in the habit of shipping for the Leeward Islands, from whence he received considerable orders. Since the above-mentioned transaction, I have never either seen or heard from Mr. Dick, or has he ever acknowledged the receipt of them. They were shipped in Admiral Christian's fleet, of course thought they were long since received, and am perfectly astonished to hear of the stoppage of them, it being as regular and constant a traffic to the West Indies, as any other article from London, Liverpool, Bristol, and Falmouth and insured as such at Lloyd's Coffee-house; had it been considered otherwise, I am persuaded that your father would never have ordered them, or would I execute any commission by which either his or my character could be impeached.

Upon inquiry I am confident that you will find not only the transaction to be perfectly legal, but a matter of necessity: the want of negro money in the French Leeward Islands has been of great loss and inconvenience during the war. I am &c.,

William Bullock.

The "Stampee" or—as it was often called in the British Islands—the "Dog" or "Black dog" (in allusion to its colour) was the Sous-marquée of the French Islands. Originally, these coins were old billon colonial issues of 24 deniers, counterstamped with a crowned "C" ("Colonies"), from which they were known as Créoles Tampès (éstampés).

Their inscriptions were nearly always obliterated by wear. After 1779 large numbers of counterfeits were produced on new blank flans. Zay says that the French islands were inundated with them. Brass or base metal counterfeits were struck not only with the "C" stamp but also imitating the worn inscription of the old issues. (Pl. VIII, 9.)

The genuine "C"-marked pieces were taken back to France by sailors and became current at Brest for two sous about 1803; many were imitated there, and as these were prohibited, both the genuine coins and their imitations soon went out of circulation.

Martinique was taken by a British expedition under Sir John Jervis and General Gray in January 1794. Stampees, mostly counterfeit, continued to circulate there until March 1797, when they were prohibited. In the following August they had to be legalized, and were admitted into currency again at 10 deniers each or 18 to the shilling of 15 sols.

The "C"-marked coins were supplemented by Cayenne two-sous pieces of the 1789 issue (Pl. VIII, 8). Howland Wood describes these as "Black dogs", but from Bullock's letter it would seem that both the "C" pieces and the Cayenne issues were known by this name in England.

Stampees were demonetized in February 1828, according to Zay.

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2 Zay, op. cit.
3 See James, Naval History of Great Britain, i, 239 ff.
4 Zay, op. cit., mentions these decrees (p. 69).
Counterfeit Currency to the West Indies

We have seen that the gold joe was a recognized currency in the Leeward Islands. It was also used at St. Vincent, Grenada, and St. Lucia in the Windward Islands, and at Barbados in the same area. At St. Vincent it was decreed on 27 July 1798 that

“All gold coins were to pass by weight at 8s. currency per dwt., and 4d. per grain, with the following exceptions of coins to pass by tale:—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coin</th>
<th>dwts</th>
<th>grs</th>
<th>Currency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2l. 2s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Joe</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6l. 12s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chalmers calculates that the half-joe was worth 8 dollars at the old rate of 8s. 3d. per dollar (i.e. before this Act, made necessary by the great number of counterfeits in circulation at St. Vincent).¹

Captain Marryat tells us in Peter Simple that the price of a ticket of admission to a “Dignity Ball” (a ball given by the coloured community at Barbados) was half a joe or 8 dollars—a high price for midshipmen and lieutenants on their first commission.²

All Marryat’s recollections of the West Indies were of a somewhat later period. He served as a lieutenant in H.M.S. Newcastle, on that station in 1814. Presumably he was referring to the joe, which in spite of its name was only a half-dobra.

Light joes were imported into Barbados as well as into the Leeward Islands. A committee, appointed to look into the matter in June 1791, recommended that foreign gold coins should pass by weight and not by tale, and fixed the joe at a weight of 16 dwts. 16 grs. and a value of £5.³

The joe was still in use at St. Vincent in 1831, but it was no longer popular, having been succeeded by the Spanish doubloon, and soon afterwards it disappeared from circulation.

The Naval Chronicle tells us very little more about James Dick. In February and March of 1803 the evidence of a number of witnesses was taken. Amongst them were Sir Hyde Parker, Charles de Coetlogon, and several members of the Navy Board. Their depositions are a repetition of the letters already printed, but it emerged from the examinations of Captain Sir Andrew Snape Hammond (Comptroller of the Navy) and Sir William Rule (Surveyor) that the Navy Board had been divided on Dick’s explanation. Another member of the Board, Captain Harmood, had disagreed strongly, but he had been overruled and nothing was done until it was found necessary to call Mr. Dick to account for his other dealings.

In his examination, Dick again sheltered behind the defunct Norval, but he had so obviously been aware of the profit to be made out of base coin that the Commissioners censured him heavily in that section of their report. His accounts had still not been passed by the time of the publication of the Report in 1803.

¹ Chalmers, op. cit., ch. v, pp. 84 f. In 1808, Ede valued a “half-Dobrao” at £1. 15s. 10d. English. (Wt., 9 dwt. 5 gr.) The coin he illustrates is dated 1742.
² “The price of the tickets of admission was high—I think they were half a joe, or eight dollars each.” Peter Simple, Everyman ed., chap. xxi, p. 260.
³ Chalmers, op. cit., ch. iii, pp. 53 f.

Obv. C crowned on blank flan.
Rev. Blank. ĀE and brass.


Obv. LOUIS XVI • R(o) • DE • FR(A) • ET • DE • NAV • round 3 Lis crowned.
Rev. COLONIE DE CAYENNE round 2 SOUS 1789 A in four lines in circle.
A = Paris mint. ĀE.