

Diary of a settler

Gilbert Pierce, a Tudor settler, arrives in Roanoke in the spring of 1585.

March 1585

At last we have arrived. I was proud to take this voyage across the Atlantic. They say the Queen is creating new colonies to make England more powerful. The ship's captain told us we'd make our fortunes in the new world. He said there were riches there beyond imagination – and good land for the taking. In England I was poor, but here I can serve my Queen and become a rich man at the same time! We've heard there are savages on the island. But I'm not frightened. If they do turn against us, I will fight to the death. We have God and right on our side. The captain advised us to befriend the savages. He said that although passing merchant ships would call with supplies, there might be times when we would need to ask them for food or materials.

June 1585

Here on the island, our main task is to build a good strong settlement, to secure the island for Queen and country and to identify valuable goods and materials, such as timber and furs that can be shipped back to England. There is fresh water nearby and we brought our supplies with us. I remain hopeful that they last until the next ship arrives from England. Mostly, the savages are friendly towards us. They probably recognise our superiority. However, they did get angry when we took some corn buried in the ground. We thought it was part of their winter stores. But it turned out to be a burial place. They have the heathen habit of putting food into graves so the dead won't go hungry in the afterlife.

Update: 1586

The harsh winter weather, lack of food and quarrels with native tribes drove most of us settlers back to England. Fifteen men stayed behind to guard the settlement.

