

with incompetence and dismissed. The command of the station was left to a surgeon, John Zephaniah Holwell, who enrolled as militia the remaining Europeans; they fought till their ammunition was exhausted and then surrendered, the Nawab assuring Holwell that they would be honorably treated. According to most accounts 146 were captured, with only one woman among them, but other records indicate that possibly there were four or five.

Holwell reported that 146 persons were thrust into the guardroom of Fort William at eight o'clock on Sunday evening, June 20, 1756. The building was demolished in 1818, so that no exact figures are available as to the size of the "Black Hole", but most authors concur in saying it was 22 feet in length, by 14-15 wide; height is quite uncertain, but Holwell considered it a cube of 18 feet a side. There were two small barred windows on the west side; from illustrations one surmises that the height inside could not have been above 12 feet.



Portrait of J. Z. Holwell by Sir Joshua Reynolds. (From *Echoes from Old Calcutta*, by H. E. Busted, 2nd Edition, 1888, published by Thacker, Spink & Co., Calcutta.)

Holwell's account of the night is terrifying, even though it is moderate in tone and matter-of-fact in assertions. The wretched prisoners crowded against the door in a vain effort to burst it open; those at the windows made desperate attempts to bribe the guards outside or to purchase water for fabulous sums. Very soon the atmosphere became stifling, thirst unbearable; Holwell confessed having attempted to drink his urine, but its sharp taste made him desist. He appears to have been at one of the windows most of the time since he tried to parley with the guards; but none the less the perspiration from his body was so profuse that a fellow prisoner was able to allay thirst from his shirt-sleeves. Others stripped off their clothing and soon sank to the floor lifeless.