

## **Thar be pyrates!**

### **English pirates from C15<sup>th</sup> to C17<sup>th</sup>**

Q: Why were the pirates in lockdown? [answer at the end in Sources]

Ever since merchants began sailing the seas, there have been those eager to rob them of their merchandise.

The true nature of piracy was theft on the high seas, often hand-in-glove with violence. Boarding another ship at sea usually involved bloodshed and sometimes, in the murder or selling into slavery of the survivors. Often, only a few- those worth a ransom - survived. It was a grim, dirty business.

Not all pirates went to sea. Others were the financiers, the providers of ships and safe havens, and the fences who dispersed and sold the stolen goods. Pirates at sea were the cutting edge of organised crime networks, while the great and the good of society turned a blind eye – or even supported their activities.

From the Roman era to the 19th century, piracy was common in the busy English Channel. Coastal towns were on a frontier, the lawless sea, where norms of behaviour did not apply. Those towns bred tough merchants and ships' crews who were ready to defend themselves against pirates, or to prey on others if the opportunity arose. It was dog eat dog.

In the late 3rd century, Saxon and Frankish pirates operated in the Channel, and a Roman fleet commanded by Carausius was active in seeking them out in their lairs in the labyrinthine Rhine estuary. Vikings are famous for piracy and raiding.

The most famous real-life pirates roamed the seas during the so-called 'Golden Age of Piracy'. These were buccaneers who terrorised the Caribbean between 1650 and 1720 from their bases on the islands of Tortuga and New Providence. They include Henry Morgan, William 'Captain' Kidd, 'Blackbeard' (Edward Teach), Charles Vane, 'Calico Jack' (John Rackham), Mary Read and Ann Bonny.

Most had short careers ending at the gallows but some survived, such as Henry Morgan who became Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica and died of natural causes in 1688. Ann Bonny escaped the noose because she was pregnant, and ended her days at 84 years of age, a respectable woman far away from her swashbuckling pirate life.

The lives of these Caribbean pirates were illuminated in Captain Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Pyrates*, published in 1724. He gave an air of respectability to their rapacious careers, and a legendary, heroic status, which influenced later literature and storytelling.

## LICENCE TO PLUNDER

In the Middle Ages, the Channel was infested with pirates. In wartime, medieval rulers turned to these adventurers for their ships, skill and daring, licensing them as 'privateers' to plunder enemy ships and raid coastal settlements.

This was 'legalised piracy' to inflict damage on the enemy. Pirates cared nothing for the twists of official diplomacy and in peacetime they continued their plundering – foreign ships were just fair game. Equally, the Crown often turned a blind eye in consideration of services rendered: privateers became pirates only when their activities obstructed foreign policy.

A high, ragged wall that forms part of Dartmouth Castle in Devon is the last remnant of a fort built in 1388 by John Hawley (c.1350–1408), mayor, merchant, privateer and inspiration to the poet Chaucer.

At that time England was at war with France, part of the long conflict known as the Hundred Years War (1337–1453). But while the countries fought, Dartmouth shipmen continued to trade wool, tin and dried fish for European wine and linen.

The king made use of these hardy sailors, in the absence of a standing navy, to protect the English coasts with their private fleets. They were licensed to attack the ships of the king's enemies and to help themselves to their valuable cargoes while they were at it. The king took a portion of the profits, as was standard practice across Europe.

This so-called 'privateering' differed from piracy, which preyed indiscriminately on the ships of any nation. Ships of neutral countries were meant to be left alone, as were French ships during the various truces of the war. But the Dartmouth shipmen had their eye on profit rather than diplomacy, and their dubious activities meant that the king's authorities frequently had to wade in to settle complaints from abroad.

John Hawley was one of the richest and most successful of these 'privateers', and was repeatedly commissioned by the king to 'keep the seas'. Two of his ships even formed a part of Richard II's escort to France for his marriage to Isabella of France in 1395.

He sailed the Channel between the 1370s and 1408, wreaking havoc on the king's enemies as a privateer – and making himself wealthy in the process.

Hawley was elected mayor of Dartmouth 14 times, and was twice the town's MP. He was even made a collector of customs. Yet Chaucer's fictional shipman from Dartmouth, apparently based on Hawley (whom he had met in 1373), suggests that he was no saint. Chaucer described a ruthless character who took no account of 'nice conscience', kept a dagger on a cord about his neck, and sent his enemies 'home by water' – that is, made them walk the plank, or simply sunk their ships.

The evidence certainly suggests that Hawley was more unscrupulous than most of his fellow privateers, often overstepping the boundary between legitimate privateering and out-and-out piracy. He was frequently summoned to account for himself, repeatedly warned, and even thrown

into the Tower of London for six weeks in 1406. He was released only after pledging to compensate some merchants in Barcelona.

One trader from Piedmont spent many years trying to get compensation for Hawley's lucrative seizure of his cargo of olive oil and wine.

But still the king mostly turned a blind eye, profiting alongside Hawley and his fellow privateers.

So it was no wonder that Edward III feared the 'reproach which might befall the town of Dartmouth' from vengeful European seamen, and sent orders to 'survey and correct all defects in the said town and port, and fortify the same', as did his successor, Richard II.

What defences the town already had is not known, but the first fort was Hawley's. In 1388 he and the civic authorities built a series of battlemented towers linked by an enclosing wall on a rocky peninsula at the narrowest point of the mouth of the River Dart. From this 'fortalice', men armed with catapults and handguns could defend the river mouth against hostile ships.

Hawley, meanwhile, kept at it. Even in the last year of his life, when he was nearly 60, he was one of a number of shipmen accused of illegally seizing 17 foreign ships. He was buried in splendour in Dartmouth's grandest church, St Saviour's, alongside a brass portrait of himself, flanked by his two wives. Of all English pirates, Hawley comes closest to the heroic stereotype of a fearless adventurer in troubled times.

The same blurring of the line between piracy and privateering can be seen in the 16th century, when Elizabethan 'sea dogs' sailed the Atlantic to raid Spanish treasure ships returning from the Americas.

The likes of Sir Francis Drake and John Hawkins brought daring and skill to naval warfare and their search for glory and profit. Many were gentleman courtiers who were quietly encouraged and sometimes financed by the Crown and Privy Council.

### **The Killigrews of Arwennack**

While some sought riches in far-off places, others were at work looking for plunder in the Channel. Among them was the ancient Cornish gentry family of Killigrew, based at their manor of Arwennack in the lea of Pendennis Castle, Falmouth. They included John (d 1567), his brothers Peter (1532-86) and Thomas, his son Sir John (d 1584), and his grandson, also John (c 1547-1605). Henry VIII had built Pendennis Castle on Killigrew land, for which the family received its captaincy, enabling it to control shipping on the Fal river.

When Mary Tudor became queen in 1553, Peter and Thomas fled, fearing persecution for being Protestants who had preyed on Spanish ships. For three years they operated from Le Havre in Normandy with Henry Strangways, and the approval of the king of France. More Spanish ships were taken in the Channel.

Sir John Killigrew's exploits are first recorded in 1552 and continued until his death in 1584. His flagrant pirate dealings were concealed by his astonishing appointment as commissioner to investigate piracy from around 1577.

Most famous among his 'achievements' was the seizing of a Spanish ship The Lady of St Sebastian, which was sheltering near Arwennack in 1582. His men overpowered the crew, seized the cargo of Holland cloth and sailed the ship to Ireland. As commissioner, he concocted a false report, but an official investigation disclosed that Lady Killigrew had presented several lengths of the stolen cloth to her servants.

Killigrew was summoned to the Privy Council in London, but no record of punishment survives.

### **Henry Strangways**

Dorset man Henry Strangways is known to have been in a pirate crew in Ireland, in 1549. Three years later, as a ship's captain, he captured several Spanish and English vessels, storing some of the plundered goods in Portland Castle, where George Strangeways was in command. He worked with the Killigrews out of Le Havre in 1553 but came to England in 1554. Imprisoned several times, he was always released, possibly through bribery.

In 1559 he was engaged by merchants to capture a Portuguese fortress in west Africa. The Privy Council forbade it but the Lord Admiral, Edward Lord Clinton, was an investor in the enterprise, so Strangways was allowed to leave aboard the Salamander. He immediately returned to piracy in the Channel, taking four rich Spanish and Portuguese ships.

Captured in July 1559, Strangways was tried in London and sentenced to death. Sir Nicholas Throckmorton interceded with Queen Elizabeth I and Strangways was pardoned. In 1562, he was employed as a captain of English soldiers in France. With two vessels he fought his way up the River Seine, through a fortified barricade, to relieve the city of Rouen. Strangways was mortally wounded and died in Rouen, something of a hero.

His career underlines, perhaps most of all, how pirates were complex, talented, and fearless individuals who exploited the opportunities afforded by a constantly changing, violent and unforgiving world.

### **The Golden Age of Piracy**

From the 16th century, large Spanish ships, called galleons, began to sail back to Europe, loaded with precious cargoes that pirates found impossible to resist. So many pirate attacks were made that galleons were forced to sail together in fleets with armed vessels for protection. As Spanish settlers set up new towns on Caribbean islands and the American mainland, these too came under pirate attack.

By the time Elizabeth Tudor had ascended the throne in 1558, English piracy had entered into a Golden Age, as freebooters roamed its coastal waters virtually unchallenged. With fat prizes, particularly Spanish treasure ships to be found further out to sea, the plundering spread into the waters of the Atlantic and finally to the Caribbean, the well-spring of Spain's ever increasing wealth. But as the violent, frequently profitable enterprise of piracy escalated into a state of near anarchy, English commerce began to suffer heavy losses in the waters closer to home.

The Crown made sporadic attempts to bring piracy under control but the results were frequently less than desirable. In an effort to deal with the disruption of English shipping by pirates without causing undue expense to itself, the Crown offered commissions to merchants and port towns having the most urgent need to make sea-lanes safe for their own commercial enterprises. The merchants concerned received no payment from the Crown and were required to outfit their own ships at their own expense. However, the terms of the commission allowed the recipients to attack and seize pirate ships and cargo in order to recoup their personal losses. Far from alleviating the piracy problem this system simply added to the chaos when commissioned merchants were not too scrupulous as to how or from whom they recouped their losses.

The Calendar of State Papers from the reign of Elizabeth I contain many hundreds of complaints of piracy, petitions for compensation and requests for the convening of courts of inquiry directed to the Crown and local authorities. But unless a specific act of piracy outraged an influential English merchant or caused diplomatic embarrassment, punishment was neither consistent nor severe. In 1573, for example, a ship bearing the Earl of Worcester, the Queen's emissary to the court of France, was seized by pirates in the Straits of Dover. The Queen's christening gift to the infant daughter of Charles the IX, a gold salver, was somehow saved but a dozen of the Earl's retainers were killed and property valued at £500, an enormous sum in those days, was taken. In this case, the Queen herself was the outraged party and hundreds of known pirates subsequently were rounded-up and jailed. But after the dust had settled most of them were set free and only three suffered the penalty for piracy and were hanged.

Despite this notable episode, the Crown's stance remained typically "Elizabethan", which is to say, contradictory. In an age which vacillated between enlightenment and gross inhumanity, the Crown, while deploring piracy in principle was perfectly willing to turn a blind eye to the pillaging when it was in its own best interests to do so. Thus, considered to be rogues and criminals when they interrupted their own country's shipping, English pirates were magically transformed into patriot-heroes when their plundering was directed against the enemies of the Crown. The Queen herself was known to have loaned ships and taken her share of the loot from marauding expeditions aimed at Spanish or French shipping. Inevitably, the situation deteriorated into a quagmire of conflicts of interest and lawlessness. Pirates were frequently under the patronage and protection of influential men, government officials who were themselves involved in the illegal but profitable ventures as underwriters. A veritable catalogue of piratical crimes may be found documented in the Calendar of State Papers, Acts of the Privy Council and High Court of Admiralty records for the reign of Elizabeth I — captured pirates being released by town mayors, brokers negotiating deals between ship owners and pirates for the return of goods seized by the latter, respectable merchants involved in the discreet "fencing" of pirate loot. In the year 1576 alone, persons fined for "*trafficking with pyrats*" included the mayor of Dartmouth, the Lieutenant and Deputy Customs Searcher of Portsmouth, the Deputy Vice Admiral of Bristol, the High Sheriff of Glamorganshire, William Winter, a relative of the Surveyor of the Navy and William Hawkins, brother of the Treasurer of the Navy.

To say simply that English piracy flourished during the last half of the 16th century is a gross understatement of the situation. It had, in fact, achieved the status of a recognized profession. Social mobility in Elizabethan England was such that many young men who forged careers and amassed modest fortunes as members of the marauding brotherhood of pirates, rose meteorically in the service of their Queen and Country.

The career of that notable Elizabethan and intrepid Yorkshireman, Martin Frobisher, is illustrative. Arrested many times in the 1560s for piracy, Frobisher was subsequently hired by the Queen's most trusted councillor, William Cecil, as a ship's captain on Crown business. By the mid 1570s, Frobisher had become convinced of the existence of a Northwest Passage to the Orient and mounted expeditions to go in search of it. But his reputation as a pirate was so well known that potential merchant underwriters were reluctant to commit ships and money to the now "reformed" Frobisher! It was only after Frobisher the explorer returned to England with an Eskimo and ore, mistakenly identified as gold, that substantial and whole hearted support was secured for two more such voyages. Though Frobisher was not successful in finding the illusive passage to the Orient and the ore in question turned out to be worthless, he rose in fame, fortune and service to the Crown.

The year 1588 saw the sometime pirate in command of one of the four English squadrons in the campaign against the Spanish Armada. When Sir Francis Drake couldn't resist taking a ship for spoil during the middle of the engagement, Frobisher flew into a rage and left the following utterances to history: *".....she (the Spanish Galleon) had spent her masts, then like a coward he (Drake) kept by her all night because he would have all the spoil. He thinketh to cozen us of our shares of 15 Thousand ducats: but we will have our shares or I will make him spend the best blood in his belly: for [I have] had enough of those cozening cheats already."*

Despite the almost unbearable distraction of Drake making off with more than his fair share of the spoils of war, the outraged Frobisher managed to concentrate on the business at hand, distinguished himself in the engagement and earned a knighthood. Sir Martin Frobisher, Elizabethan extraordinaire, pirate and patriot, died in Plymouth in 1594 of wounds suffered while fighting the old Spanish nemesis off the coast of France. The brilliant career of Sir Martin Frobisher, played out during that turbulent and reckless time when England was forging its destiny on the seas, was not unique. There are many similarities and parallels to be drawn between Sir Martin and his equally brilliant and famous contemporaries: Drake, Raleigh, Hawkins, Grenville, the Gilberts (among many others) who rose to rank and prominence despite frequent lapses into acts of outright piracy.

The illustrious Sir Henry Mainwaring, who rose from the status of a common pirate to knighthood and Admiral in the Navy under Elizabeth's successor, best summed up the situation when he said of his former brotherhood: *"...the State may hereafter want such men who are commonly the most serviceable in war."*

### **The "Sea-dogs" of War and the Rise of Privateering**

When in 1585 hostilities with Spain heated to the boiling point and war became imminent, the Crown lacked sufficient funds to build an efficient wartime Navy. With an invincible armada poised to strike, England had no alternative but to depend on private shipping to help defend her shores and interrupt enemy commerce. In an effort to defend herself against the "gathering storm", Queen Elizabeth openly and officially instituted the system to become known as "privateering", one which was based on very shaky legal and moral foundation, but its evident necessity deemed justifiable enough at the time.

A privateer, the term which also encompasses men who served aboard her, was a privately owned armed vessel commissioned by a letter of marque from the Crown to interrupt and capture enemy shipping in time of a declared war.

Privateers, were privately owned (rather than navy) ships armed with guns, operating in times of war. The Admiralty issued them with 'letters of marque' that allowed them to capture merchant vessels without being charged with piracy.

A letter of marque was a commission authorising privately owned ships (known as privateers) to capture enemy merchant ships. A letter of marque was issued by the High Court of Admiralty. Any captured vessels were then brought before admiralty courts for condemnation and sale, with a subsequent division of those goods made among the Crown, the privateer who seized them, and other officials. Thus, while the actual practice of privateering was well established among seafaring nations, it had never been governed in England by a system of rules and regulations laid down by the Admiralty until the hostilities with Spain had developed into open warfare in the mid 1580s.

A period of reprisal or state of belligerency which developed between two nations for specific acts or grievances could have existed before an actual declaration of war. In that case, letters of reprisal were issued, which enabled the bearer to undertake operations to interrupt enemy shipping although a state of war had not officially been declared. The difference between a letter of reprisal and a letter of marque was a matter of hair splitting as the former invariably led to the latter and a full scale declared shooting war.

Harassment and disruption of Spanish shipping had become an activity officially sanctioned by the Crown in 1585. Letters of marque were issued by the High Court of the Admiralty to anyone who wished to take prizes and had the price of a commission. Privateering offered the Crown a measure of control as well as well as a sizable piece of the profits — only enemy shipping was to be taken, all prizes were to be brought back to the English ship's home port and the cargo was not to be rifled until inventories and appraisals were made by Admiralty Officers and the appropriate divisions made. Since the system known as privateering largely had absorbed the bulk of pre-war pirates into its ranks along with their attitudes and general lease on life, commissioned privateering frequently deteriorated into the taking of neutral ships or the embezzling of captured cargo before the Admiralty Officers could secure the Queen's custom duties.

Frequently, ships would be taken without benefit of a letter of marque but Admiralty Officers might not object too strongly provided they received a share of the booty. Since privateering crews were not salaried but received a percentage of the spoils, they threw themselves into their work with great enthusiasm. The distinguishing line between outright piracy and licensed privateering was frequently perilously thin.

Francis Drake was England's most famous privateer. In the sixteenth century, he attacked Spanish treasure ships returning from the new world sharing his profits with Queen Elizabeth I. He was knighted for his services.

Privateers were viewed as heroic and noble as opposed to pirates, who had no letters of marque, and were universally condemned as thieves and vagabonds.

The earliest letter of marque was issued in 1293 and they continued to be issued in times of war until privateering was abolished in 1856.

Buccaneers lived on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola and its tiny turtle-shaped neighbour, Tortuga, in the 17th century. At first they lived as hunters, but later the governors of Caribbean islands paid the buccaneers to attack Spanish treasure ships. Although raids began in this way, with official backing, the buccaneers gradually became out of control, attacking any ship they thought carried valuable cargo, whether it belonged to an enemy country or not. The buccaneers had become true pirates.

### **Why did pirates become pirates?**

In England there was social disruption. Smaller farmers were forced off the land by ruthless landowners and smaller tradesmen were challenged by larger businesses. These displaced people flocked to urban areas looking for work or poor relief.

In London especially there was overcrowding and unemployment and funds for the poor could not meet the need. People had to shift for themselves. Distressed people weren't simply worse off, they had no hope of making a better life. Piracy tempted poor seamen because it offered them the chance to take more control of their lives.

In an age when few people travelled and young men might have to work seven-year apprenticeships before they could make an independent living, many were tempted to go to sea anyway, though the life was a tough one.

Adolescents who longed to escape could get a job on a sailing ship before they were fully grown: agility was needed as much as brute strength.

Yet ordinary seamen toiled for modest wages and were subject to strict discipline. In contrast, piracy not only offered them a chance to get rich quick but also a rare opportunity to exert a degree of power over others.

Becoming a pirate was called 'going on the account' as they had to agree to live by the rules of the ship. These rules were often strict and breaking them could mean flogging or even death. If a pirate was found stealing from their comrades or deserting during battle, they were marooned on a desert island with meagre supplies. Most would die a slow death from starvation if they could not hunt or fish.

Pirates required ships that were fast, powerful and with a shallow draught, this was vital to a pirate attack and they needed to be able to navigate in shallow coastal waters to hide in secluded coves and inlets. Schooners were used by pirates in North American waters as they were fast, easily manoeuvred with a shallow draught but were large enough to carry many guns and a large crew. Pirates often took over captured merchant ships and altered them to suit their purpose to increase speed, cut more gun ports and also to hide the true identity of the ship. They would also utilise the weapons, clothes, medicines and food found on board.

Pirates used flags to frighten passing ships into surrendering without a fight. The original pirate flags were blood red and this signalled that no mercy would be shown once the pirates boarded and battle ensued. As piracy developed, more flags were used and pirates often had their own flags. The Jolly Roger (a skull and crossbones) is the most famous pirate flag. The symbol had been

appropriated from the symbol used in ships' logs, where it represented death on board. It was first used as pirate flag around 1700 and quickly became popular with pirates, who designed their own versions e.g. a skull and crossed swords.

To board ships pirates would jam the rudder with wooden wedges so that the ship could not be steered. They would then use grappling hooks to board the ship while heavily armed with pistols, daggers and cutlasses for hand-to-hand fighting. Pirates also used homemade weapons such as hand grenades made by filling wine bottles with gunpowder or create smoke screens by setting fire to yellow sulphur. Merchant seamen under attack tried to prevent pirates boarding by greasing decks or scattering dried peas or broken glass on the decks. The pirates would take all the treasure or cargo that the ship carried. These might include silks, jewels, spices, wine, brandy, linen, money or slaves. Sometimes the pirates added the captured ship to their fleet or sank it to get rid of any evidence that would convict them. The seamen would be killed, ransomed, taken as slaves or joined the pirate crew.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the slave trade was a lucrative business, the profits from slavery attracted many pirates. Some became slavers whilst others sold cargoes of slaves captured from the merchant ships bound for the American colonies or from raids on the West African slave ports.

### **What made the Caribbean so pirate-friendly?**

Pirates, like smugglers need convenient hide-aways and the Caribbean with its many islands and thousands of bays provided the perfect terrain for raiders.

The local population had been largely killed off by accidentally imported European diseases to which they had no resistance. With constant malaria and frequent epidemics of yellow fever raging through the Caribbean, official navies were at a significant disadvantage to seasoned crews making naval action that much more difficult.

The existence of thriving land bases such as Nassau where pirates could sell their ill-gotten (or officially-approved) gains was crucial to the pirate economy.

### **How did it all end?**

While the Caribbean was primarily a staging post for Spanish treasure on its way to Madrid, there was little incentive for the British, French or Dutch to do much to discourage piracy. As Spanish power declined and Britain and France asserted themselves as the dominant regional powers it became obvious that potentially lucrative colonies where slaves were growing tobacco or sugar were threatened by uncertainty at sea and something had to be done to stamp out piracy.

In 1670, the Royal Navy had just two ships in the Caribbean, by 1718 the presence had swelled to 124 and piracy had become a shadow of its former self. A hundred years after that and the French had lost Haiti (their main Caribbean possession) to a slave revolt and Britain had double its number of ships there. The Navy hunted down pirates ruthlessly and dispatched quick and summary justice to anyone they caught.

Outright piracy and the use of pirates as privateers for European states would occasionally flair up but rarely would it remain a significant problem for long. The use of privateers was largely abandoned after the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1856.

### **Bringing pirates to justice**

Justice, like life, was short, brutal and spectacular for pirates.

Seamen and their families were very aware of the penalty for piracy. The publicity surrounding the trials and executions of pirates made sure of that.

Most trials lasted no more than one or two days, even when 20 or 30 prisoners were involved. This was mainly because there were no arguments in their defence. It was the usual practice for the accused men to conduct their own defence.

Since most of the men on trial were seamen with little or no education, they could not make a good case for themselves. Their response was usually one of the following:

they said nothing at all in their defence

they simply said they were drunk at the time

they claimed they were forced men - their ships had been captured by pirates and they had been compelled to do as they were told

The official punishment for piracy was death by public hanging. Pirates captured at sea could receive a summary punishment of hanging at the yardarm though only if no legal judgement could be obtained due to the location. Likewise, if a ship was attacked by pirates on the way to America and the pirates were captured, they could be executed without trial under Marine Law but otherwise all robberies and felonies committed by pirates at sea could be heard in any County of England, by the Kings Commission as if the offences had been committed on land.

For more than four centuries pirates were hanged at Execution Dock on the north bank of the Thames. The exact spot is shown on old maps of London and lies a mile downstream from the Tower of London on a bend of the river at Wapping.

The gallows were built on the shore near the low tide mark. When an execution was due to take place, large crowds gathered on the shore and in boats moored out in the river.

The condemned man had to travel in a procession from the Marshalsea Prison on the south bank, across London Bridge and past the Tower of London to Execution Dock.

After the pirate had been hanged it was usual to let three tides pass over the body before it was taken away to be buried in an unmarked grave or sent to Surgeon's Hall for dissection.

The speeches and confessions of criminals about to be hanged in England and the colonies were usually printed. They sold in large numbers in the days following an execution.

It was the custom to display the corpses of the more notorious pirates at places along the river. They would be seen by the crews of all ships entering and leaving the port. Normally they would stay there for three tides.

The body of Captain Kidd was left suspended at Tilbury Point on the lower reaches of the Thames. It would have been visible there for an hour or more as the ships navigated Sea Reach. That was the broad stretch of the river that curves around the desolate point.

After Blackbeard was killed in battle, his head was cut off and tied as a trophy to the yardarm of HMS *Pearl*.

To make sure that the pirates' bodies remained intact for as long as possible, the corpses were coated with tar. The tar may also have stopped birds pecking the flesh. Once coated with tar, the body was fitted into a specially made harness of iron hoops and chains that held the head, body and legs in place. A condemned man was measured for his iron cage before his execution, and many pirates feared this more than the hanging.

The Piracy Act of 1698 made it possible for Admirals to conduct trials at sea or anywhere else without having to bring the accused to England. It would lead to the execution of 600 pirates, estimated to be around 10% of those active in the Caribbean at that time. The remains of convicted pirates would soon adorn the harbours of foreign ports as well as swinging in the wind by the Thames.

### **Famous Privateers and Pirates**

Drake and Frobisher (see above)

Raleigh the Privateer and Roanoke

Roanoke is an island off the coast of what is now N Carolina where there was an early Elizabethan settlement. While he received many offices and lucrative endowments from Queen Elizabeth I, one of Sir Walter Raleigh's main sources of income came from privateering enterprises. When in 1584 Raleigh acquired the patent authorizing him to search out and take possession of, for himself and for his heirs, "*remote, heathen and barbarous lands*" not held by any Christian prince, he sent the first reconnaissance voyage to Roanoke in the hopes that a colonial scheme would add to his purse. Since immediate returns on colonization ventures could be extremely speculative, Raleigh encouraged investors by combining colonial plans with privateering enterprises. Roanoke, with its lush vegetation, virgin forests and bountiful harvests from the sea, was indeed "Raleigh's Eden." But it was also ideally suited as a base from which the English could prey upon Spanish treasure ships as they lumbered their way North from the Caribbean to catch the homeward flowing currents of the Gulf Stream just off the coast of the Outer Banks. After leaving the 1585 military colony on Roanoke, Sir Richard Grenville captured a fortune in Spanish booty on the return trip to England, which no doubt pleased the investors. However, when this first attempt at colonization ended in disorder in June of 1586, it became more difficult for Raleigh to secure further financial backing. The tenacious and ambitious Raleigh did not waiver in his determination to gain a permanent foothold in North

America and in 1587, another attempt at colonization on Roanoke was made. This time, families were to be settled on their own land in a self-governing community. But once again, privateering was to be a large part of the lucrative bait for investors.

In the final analysis, interest in privateering came into direct conflict with the business of "settling" and no doubt contributed to the eventual failure of the colony. In 1588, having returned to England for supplies, Governor John White secured two pinnaces and attempted to relieve the colonists he left on Roanoke the previous summer. The captain and crew, bent on privateering enroute, received a dose of their own salts — during an attempt to take a prize, the two pinnaces were badly damaged and were forced to turn back to England before making Roanoke. The following year yielded a bumper crop of prizes along the Spanish Main and Sir Walter continued to reap his share of the spoils. His interest in the Roanoke colony had apparently waned, but not his appetite for lucrative privateering ventures. When John White finally returned to Roanoke in 1590 with another privateering squadron, the colonists had vanished.

#### Sir Richard Greville

Richard Grenville was born in Bideford in Devon, England in 1542, the son of Roger Grenville, a member of the local gentry. Richard's nautical connections began with the death of his father, drowned in the infamous sinking of the *Mary Rose*, the flagship of Henry VIII of England (r. 1509-1547). The ship capsized in the harbour of Portsmouth in 1545 with the loss of 500 lives. Richard spent part of his education at London's Inns of Court, a collection of institutions that mixed a legal education with the function of a finishing school.

Like many of the Elizabethan period's most famous mariners, Grenville often sailed across the line of the law. In 1562, Richard was pardoned after he had participated in a London riot and killed a man. The young man's respectability seems not to have been tarnished as he attended Parliament in 1563. Three years later, Richard was off to Hungary where he fought against the Turks. Restless legs next took him to the Munster region of Ireland in 1568 where he settled on a plantation with his family. This project came to an end with the start of the Fitzmaurice rebellion in 1569. Although Richard stayed on to help reassert English control in the province, his own plantation was destroyed. By 1571 Richard was back in England and Parliament where he represented Cornwall.

In 1574 Richard got together a consortium of Devon businessmen to fund an expedition he would lead to find the fabled great southern continent (both Australia and Antarctica were then unknown to Europeans). However, Elizabeth I of England (r. 1558-1603) was concerned about infringing on Spanish territorial claims in South America and the man with control of the country's purse strings and chief minister in the government, William Cecil, Lord Burghley (1520-1598), said no. Burghley was more interested at that time in finding the Northwest Passage that might permit a short sea route from North America to Asia and so he funded instead an expedition led by Martin Frobisher (c. 1535-1594) for that purpose. The exploration of what lay south of the equator was left to Sir Francis Drake (c. 1543-1596) later in the decade. The first half of Grenville's life showed promise, then, and was certainly exciting enough but it would pale in comparison to the colourful adventures of the second half.

In 1585 Grenville commanded the fleet which sailed to North America carrying a group of England's first New World colonists. The expedition was masterminded by Grenville's cousin Sir Walter Raleigh (c. 1552-1618) who had named their destination Virginia in honour of his queen after the first landing there in 1583. Queen Elizabeth provided this new expedition with the 160-ton

ship *Tyger*. Grenville left Plymouth on 9 April 1585 with his fleet of five ships, of which *Tyger* was the largest. The crew included a young Thomas Cavendish (1560-1592) who would later circumnavigate the globe in 1586-88. Another famous name was John White (c. 1540 - c. 1593), the celebrated cartographer and artist who mapped and captured the sights of this corner of the New World and who had already accompanied Martin Frobisher in his search for the Northwest Passage in the 1570s.

A storm in mid-May separated the fleet, and Grenville in the *Tyger* was blown off course to end up in Puerto Rico. A few small Spanish vessels and ports were then plundered in the Caribbean - as was always intended - in order to pay for the expedition. Eventually regrouping and restocking at Hispaniola, three ships made their way tentatively through the difficult shallows of the Carolina Banks. In mid-July, the *Tyger* ran aground and seawater seeped into the ship's stores, ruining much of the foodstuffs meant for the colonists. The trio of ships was then joined by the remaining two vessels which had also got lost in the storm.

The settlers were led by Ralph Lane (d. 1603) and, unable to reach the mainland proper, they were deposited on Wokokan Island. Lane and Grenville did not get on and the colonists moved to nearby Roanoke Island (in modern-day North Carolina) when the mariner sailed back to England for more supplies. Lane was left with the smallest vessel, the pinnace, with which he might explore the region. Grenville, meanwhile, like most Elizabethan mariners, never turned down the chance of a little profit if the opportunity presented itself. Off Bermuda, he captured the 300-ton *Santa Maria de San Vicente* on his way home. The capture of sugar, ivory, and spices would pay off all of the expedition's costs.

Grenville returned to Virginia with new provisions for the colony in 1586 but, unbeknown to the mariner, Lane and his fellows had already left and sailed back to England with Sir Francis Drake, fresh from one of his raids against the Spanish in the Caribbean. Grenville missed the party by only a few weeks. Grenville did leave 15 men and two years of supplies for them to hold out until new colonists might arrive, but these men were never seen or heard of again. It was typical of the hopeless optimism of the period and that colonists and their backers had little idea of the challenges they faced in terms of environment and the native inhabitants. Another group of settlers would found the Roanoke Colony of 1587, but facing hostile native peoples, they would mysteriously disappear; no trace of them could be found when the island was revisited in 1590. Grenville, meanwhile, recuperated at Newfoundland and then attacked and stripped two Spanish vessels to help pay for his relief mission.

In the summer of 1588, Grenville fought with success in the battles to repel the Spanish Armada with which Philip II of Spain (r. 1556-1598) hoped to conquer England. In 1591 England's policy against Spain was to attack their treasure ships laden with gold and silver from the New World. In this way, Philip II would be deprived of the resources needed to build a second Armada and the English crown would get correspondingly richer with the loot taken. The field of operation was chosen as the Azores island group in the mid-Atlantic, and Grenville was appointed second in command of an expedition led by Lord Thomas Howard. Grenville's ship was the *Revenge*, which had seen sterling service as Drake's flagship in the battles with the Spanish Armada. The English fleet of six royal ships and a number of private warships and supply vessels left Plymouth on 5 April 1591. Several Spanish treasure ships were captured along the way over the next three months. It looked like the Azores would be a happy hunting ground for the privateers.

Things went wrong in the Azores when a large Spanish fleet of 56 ships, including 17 royal galleons and commanded by Don Alonso de Bazán, arrived unexpectedly in August. Howard had been awaiting a treasure fleet due from the west and not this fleet of warships from the east; consequently, he withdrew. Grenville was given the task of forming a rear-guard escort to the fleeing English fleet and so was left the most exposed ship. Grenville was delayed after he picked up 90 of the *Revenge's* crew on land where they had been recuperating after a wave of illness had hit the English fleet. It is also possible that Grenville deliberately tried to engage the enemy in that typical heady cocktail of bravado and folly that Elizabeth's leading mariners seemed unable to abstain from.

Surrounded by enemy ships, trapped alone in the island group and facing overwhelming odds, Grenville's *Revenge* did more than hold its own, at least for a day. Over the course of 15 hours on 9 and 10 September, cannons and muskets were fired at point-blank range as the Spanish tried to grapple and board the English ship. The usual firebombs were not thrown by either side as the ships were all so close together and if one caught fire, all would do so. This envelopment of the English ship by four or five Spanish vessels prolonged the battle as none of the other Spanish ships could then participate for fear of striking their comrades.

In the confusion, the *Revenge* managed to twice repel a party of Spanish marines who boarded the ship, sink two enemy ships, and inflict damage on 15 others. Grenville was gravely wounded by a musket ball, though, and he gave orders for the *Revenge* to be scuppered by blowing up the powder store. The crew, almost all of whom were wounded, ignored their now unconscious captain and surrendered. Grenville was taken captive but died from his wounds a few days later. As it happened, the *Revenge* and seven ships of the Spanish fleet were then sunk by a hurricane.

The heroic last stand of the *Revenge* was described in detail in Sir Walter Raleigh's *Report of the Truth of the Fight about the Isles of Azores* and famously became a subject of a poem, *The Revenge*, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892).

The last stand of the *Revenge* became the stuff of legend and remembered as one of the great episodes of the then still-young Royal Navy. For the Spanish, meanwhile, the battle in the Azores displayed the advantages of using a military convoy for their treasure ships and they would employ this strategy with success from then on. Some great galleons loaded with treasure would still be captured but the convoy system now allowed a steady river of gold and silver to safely reach a Spain now at the zenith of its power.

## Blackbeard

Blackbeard or Edward Teach (c.1680-1718) is one of the most infamous pirates to have ever lived. Known for his fearsome image and daring acts on land and sea throughout the West Indies and along the North American East coast, his legacy has been the inspiration for many depictions of pirates throughout history.

Little is known of Edward Teach before his rise to pirate captain. It is thought he began his life at sea as a British privateer in the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1713). Here, he would have plundered Spanish ships in the West Indies for the British government.

After the war, his privateering turned to piracy under the instruction of Captain Benjamin Hornigold. Rising through the ranks due to his naval skill, Teach soon became a captain in his own right.

Blackbeard had a knack for theatricality and a startling portrait of him has ensured his image has lived on. As well as being heavily armed with knives, cutlasses and pistols, Blackbeard (real name, Edward Teach) tried to make himself look especially fearsome in order to intimidate his victims. He had wild eyes and a mass of thick tangled hair. With an enormous black beard reaching his waist, Teach reportedly lit fuses in his long hair giving him a crazed and frightening appearance.

Stories of his misdeeds spread and fact and fiction blended into one. Tales of torturing prisoners, even turning on his own crew with no warning were rife and provided the pirate captain with an excellent method of maintaining order. This added to the image of terror and strengthened his position with both his crew and enemies.

His flag depicted a skeleton stabbing a heart with its spear and toasting the Devil with a glass in the other hand. It showed the danger that Blackbeard brought and his alliance with the Devil. This was another technique used to instill fear into his enemies and to let them know just who was attacking them.

In January 1718, Teach formed a base on Ocracoke Island just off North Carolina, on the eastern seaboard of the United States, then known as the British Colonies.

From here, he continued his acts of piracy such as bribing the local Governor Charles Eden for a royal pardon and gaining the title 'privateer' to provide a legal backing to his actions. Blackbeard rose to fame in possibly his most brazen act: Teach used his flotilla to blockade the port of Charlestown in the province of South Carolina. Over the course of a week, nine vessels were stopped and plundered as they attempted to sail out of the harbour, where Teach's fleet was moored.

Teach informed some of his prisoners that his fleet required medical supplies from the colonial government of South Carolina and that if none were provided, all would be beheaded and their ships burned.

Two pirates and a prisoner were sent to the town but when they did not return he moved eight ships into the harbour, causing panic and looting within the town. Shortly after his supplies were delivered the prisoners were released, after reportedly being robbed of all worthy possessions.

This siege represents the height of Teach's notoriety, not just as a skilled captain but a fierce leader who was not confined to the sea and would maraud where he pleased. Exploits such as these made Teach one of the most commonly reported pirates in the news and in the print of his age.

His exploits had become too bold and he had angered Alexander Spotswood, the governor of Virginia. Spotswood assembled private pirate-hunters to overpower Blackbeard's forces. The main pirate hunting ships were the HMS Pearl and HMS Lyme under the command of Lieutenant Robert Maynard.

Upon locating Teach and his pirates on Ocracoke Island, Maynard blocked all exits and entered the inlet hoping to surprise Teach and his crew.

However, Teach spotted the ships and cut his anchor, attacking the ships outright with his cannons and destroying a third of the force in seconds.

When the ships closed in, grappling hooks, smoke, and explosive grenades were thrown, and the pirates boarded the ship. Maynard had prepared for this eventuality by hiding the majority of his troops below deck and ambushing the pirate boarders. The ambush proved a success and the pirates were overwhelmed.

Teach and Maynard are reported to have fought man to man with pistol and swords. Teach was eventually wounded by one of Maynard's soldiers and overwhelmed by the rest of the crew.

After the battle, it was noted Edward Teach had been shot at least five times and received over twenty blade wounds, making it difficult to tell what was the felling blow. The head of the infamous Blackbeard was hung from the mast, and all but two of the captured pirates were eventually hanged.

Edward Teach died on the 22nd November 1718.

'Little wind & fair weather, this day I anchored here from North Carolina in the Adventure Sloop Edward Thache formerly Master (a Pyrat) whose head I hung Under the Bowsprete of the Said Sloop in order to present it to ye Colony of Virginia & ye goods and Effects of the said Pyrat I delivered to my Commanders Dispersal.'

Lieutenant Maynard's log entry from 3 January 1719

### Edward Low

Captain Edward (Ned) Low was born in Westminster. He was one of the most brutal men to command a pirate ship. During the 1720s he plundered ships on both sides of the Atlantic and became notorious for his savage cruelty.

He took a sadistic pleasure in cutting off the noses, ears and lips of his victims. He also tortured and murdered the entire crews of some of the ships he captured. Low was never caught and is believed to have ended his days in Brazil.

### Henry Morgan

Welshman Henry Morgan considered himself a privateer rather than a pirate as he operated mostly in collusion with the then Governor of Jamaica and he targeted Spanish ships.

Captain Morgan – famous today as the face of a brand of spiced rum. But who was he? Pirate? Privateer? Politician?

He was born in 1635 in Llanrhymny, then a village between Cardiff and Newport, in South Wales, to a prosperous farming family. It is believed he spent his childhood in Wales but how he came from Wales to the West Indies is uncertain.

The most accepted version is that in 1654 Henry joined Cromwell's troops under General Venables in Portsmouth. Cromwell had decided to send an army to the Caribbean to attack the Spanish. Morgan arrived at Barbados in 1655 as a junior officer in Cromwell's forces and took part in the unsuccessful attack on Santo Domingo before taking Jamaica, a then largely undeveloped but strategically positioned island with a large natural harbour, from the Spanish. Life on Jamaica was hard, with diseases such as yellow fever and attacks on the British by Maroons (runaway slaves), yet Morgan survived.

After the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, Henry's uncle Edward was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica. Henry later married his uncle's daughter, Mary Elizabeth Morgan in 1665. By 1662 Henry Morgan had his first command as a captain of a privateer ship involved in an attack on Santiago de Cuba.

After several successful campaigns against the Spanish, by 1665 Morgan was already a wealthy man with sugar plantations on Jamaica, becoming a man of some status on the island. His fame was also spreading, particularly after the successful attack on Puerto Bello in Panama in 1666 during which he took the town, held the residents to ransom and then beat off a force of 3000 Spanish soldiers, to return with an enormous amount of booty.

In 1666 he was made Colonel of the Port Royal Militia and elected Admiral by his fellow privateers. The 'king of the privateers' was then appointed Commander-in-chief of all Jamaican forces in 1669, and by 1670 he had 36 ships and 1800 men under his command.

In 1671 he led an attack on Panama City, the capital city of Spanish America and reputed to be one of the wealthiest cities in the world, a great prize for privateers. Although outnumbered by the Spanish, Morgan's reputation preceded him; the defenders fled and the city fell, burning to the ground. However, all the gold and silver had already been moved to safety before Morgan's attack. To make things worse, it appeared a treaty had been signed between England and Spain, and the attack on Panama had actually taken place at a time of peace between the two countries. Word of the treaty had not reached Morgan in time to stop the attack.

To appease the Spanish, an order to arrest Morgan was sent to the Governor of Jamaica who was at first reluctant to arrest his island's most famous resident. However, Morgan was transported to London under arrest where he remained a prisoner of state, charged with piracy.

Back in Jamaica, without their leader the privateers were reluctant to engage the enemy and England was now at war again with Holland. Hearing of the troubles in the Caribbean and the risks to the very lucrative sugar trade, King Charles II enlisted the help of the notorious Captain Morgan. The charismatic 'pirate' Morgan was knighted by the King and returned to Jamaica in 1674 as Lieutenant Governor.

Morgan spent the rest of his life in Jamaica in Port Royal, a city infamous as the capital of piracy, where he spent his time on politics, his sugar plantations and drinking rum with his old privateer comrades. The exact cause of his death on August 25th 1688 aged 53 is uncertain; some sources say

tuberculosis, whilst others cite acute alcoholism. At the time of his death he was a very wealthy man indeed, with large sugar plantations and 109 slaves.

### William 'Captain Kidd'

Captain Kidd can be said to be the most unfortunate pirate ever to sail the high seas! For it was his bad luck to sail as a privateer/pirate just when the rules changed and the privateer/pirate became an outlaw.

William Kidd was born in Dundee, Scotland, in 1654, the son of John Kidd a seaman, and his wife Bessie Butchart. He became a sea captain, his first ship being the *Antigua*. He emigrated to New York in the 1680's where he met and married Sarah Bradley Cox Oort, a wealthy widow.

During the war between England and France in the 1690's, Kidd became a successful privateer in charge of the vessel *Blessed William*, defending American and English trade routes with the West Indies. He was commissioned by the English government to take charge of an expedition against pirates in the Indian Ocean. Kidd's public mission was to rid the sea of pirates, but it was probably understood by his backers that he would also take every opportunity to capture any enemy ships that had valuable cargo.

On 6 September 1696, Kidd and a crew of 150 men left New York aboard the 32-gun *Adventure Galley*, bound for the Indian Ocean. One of the pirates he set out to capture was Robert Culliford, who sailed with a surgeon named Jon Death. The story goes that Culliford would order his men to load their cannons with china dishes, as the china shards would shred the sails of the ships that he was attacking.

Poor Captain Kidd was not very adept at finding pirates. The mood of his crew turned ugly and mutiny was in the air. Finally, his crew forced him to turn pirate himself. In late January 1698, the *Quedah Merchant* was sighted rounding the tip of India. Kidd and his crew attacked and took the ship: the cargo was silk, muslin, calico, sugar, opium, iron and saltpeter and worth a rumoured 70,000 pounds. The *Quedah Merchant*, renamed the *Adventure Prize*, was kept by Kidd, as he was forced to abandon and sink his now leaking ship.

Unfortunately for Kidd, it was now two years since he had begun his voyage and in that time there had been a change of attitude in England toward piracy. Piracy was to be stamped out and was now a criminal act.

Kidd finally arrived in the West Indies in April 1699 to find that he was now deemed to be a pirate and that the American colonies were gripped by pirate fever. Up and down the coast, everyone was on the hunt for pirates.

Kidd managed to negotiate a pardon from the English authorities for his actions, claiming he was forced to piracy by his crew. Kidd sailed for Boston, stopping along the way to bury booty on Gardiners Island and Block Island. Some of the booty on Gardiners Island was later recovered. The New England governor, Lord Richard Bellomont, himself an investor in Kidd's voyage, had him arrested on 7 July 1699 in Boston. He was sent to England aboard the frigate *Advice* in February 1700.

The shamelessly rigged trial started on 8 May and was completed the next day – the verdict was that Kidd was guilty of the murder of one of his crew and guilty of multiple acts of piracy.

Captain William Kidd was hanged on 23 May 1701. The first rope put around this neck broke so he had to be strung up a second time. His corpse was placed in a gibbet at the mouth of the Thames River and left to rot, as an example to other would-be pirates. His English backers, though tainted by the piracy scandal, kept their estates and power.

After his death, his legend grew, especially the stories of buried treasure. Authors such as Robert Louis Stevenson with his book “Treasure Island” and Edgar Allan Poe (“The Gold Bug”) helped fuel the myth.

### Calico Jack

John Rackham, also known as “Calico Jack,” was an English pirate famous for two reasons: his design of the famous Jolly Roger flag (a skull with two crossed swords), and for having two female pirates, Mary Read and Anne Bonny, in his crew.

Calico Jack was a notorious pirate who terrorized the waters around the Bahamas and Cuba. While at first Rackham was merely a quartermaster for Charles Vane’s sloop, *The Ranger*, he reached captaincy by branding Vane a coward after retreating from a man-o-war and called a vote which removed Vane’s captaincy.

As captain, Rackham plundered many small ships close to shore around the Caribbean. In December of 1719, he made a much bigger capture, *The Kingston*, a large ship with a very bountiful cargo. While this robbery was a huge success for Rackham and his crew, it was short-lived, as merchants had seen the robbery and sent bounty hunters to capture Rackham. While on shore on Isla de los Pinos, the bounty hunters caught up to Rackham; they did not manage to find him, but they took his prize with them.

Rackham later sailed to Nassau, where he received a pardon from Governor Rogers by claiming that Vane had forced him into piracy. Rogers accepted and allowed John to receive the pardon and remain in Nassau.

During the short time Rackham held his pardon, he began an affair with Anne Bonny, the wife of James Bonny, a sailor working for Governor Rogers. Upon discovering the affair, James Bonny attempted to have Anne convicted of adultery. However, she escaped with Rackham, stealing a sloop and nullifying his pardon.

For two months they sailed the Caribbean, capturing ships until they sailed to Cuba for Anne to deliver Rackham’s baby. While in Cuba, Anne would meet Mary Read, the second woman to join Rackham’s fleet.

Soon after, Governor Rogers declared John Rackham and his crew pirates, after which the pirate hunter Jonathan Barnet began his search for them.

In October of 1720, at Bry Harbour Bay in Jamaica, Barnet's sloop attacked Rackham and captured him. He was then sent to Spanish Town, Jamaica, where he was tried, convicted, and sentenced to hang.

## Bartholomew Roberts

Bartholomew "Black Bart" Roberts was the most successful pirate of the "Golden Age of Piracy," which lasted roughly from 1700 to 1725. In spite of his great success, he is relatively unknown in comparison with contemporaries such as Blackbeard, Charles Vane, or Anne Bonny. Here are 10 facts about Black Bart, greatest of the real-life Pirates of the Caribbean.

### Black Bart Didn't Want to Be a Pirate in the First Place

Roberts was an officer on board the ship *Princess*, a ship used to transport enslaved people, in 1719 when his ship was captured by pirates under Welshman Howell Davis. Perhaps because Roberts was also Welsh, he was one of a handful of men who were forced to join the pirates.

By all accounts, Roberts had no wish to join the pirates, but he had no choice.

For someone who didn't want to be a pirate, he turned out to be a pretty good one. He soon earned the respect of most of his shipmates, and when Davis was killed only six weeks or so after Roberts joined the crew, Roberts was named captain.

He embraced the role, saying that if he had to be a pirate, it was better to be captain. His first command was to attack the town where Davis had been killed, to avenge his former captain.

Roberts' biggest score came when he happened upon a Portuguese treasure fleet anchored off of Brazil. Pretending to be part of the convoy, he entered the bay and silently took one of the ships. He asked the master which ship had the most loot.

He then sailed up to that ship, attacked and boarded it before anyone knew what was happening. By the time the convoy escort – two massive Portuguese Men of War – caught on, Roberts was sailing away in his own ship and the treasure ship he had just taken. It was a gutsy move, and it paid off.

Roberts was indirectly responsible for beginning the careers of other pirate captains. Not long after he captured the Portuguese treasure ship, one of his captains, Walter Kennedy, sailed off with it, infuriating Roberts and beginning a brief pirate career of his own.

About two years later, Thomas Anstis was persuaded by disgruntled crew members to set out on his own as well. On one occasion, two ships full of would-be pirates sought him out, looking for advice. Roberts took a liking to them and gave them advice and weapons.

In 1721, Roberts captured the massive frigate *Onslow*. He changed her name to *Royal Fortune* (he named most of his ships the same thing) and mounted 40 cannons on her. The new *Royal Fortune* was a nearly invincible pirate ship, and at the time only a well-armed navy vessel could hope to stand against her. The *Royal Fortune* was as impressive a pirate ship as Sam Bellamy's *Whydah* or Blackbeard's *Queen Anne's Revenge*.

In the three years between 1719 and 1722, Roberts captured and looted over 400 vessels, terrorizing merchant shipping from Newfoundland to Brazil and the Caribbean and the African coast. No other

pirate of his age comes close to that number of captured vessels. He was successful in part because he thought big, usually commanding a fleet of anywhere from two to four pirate ships which could surround and catch victims.

In January of 1722, Roberts captured the *Porcupine*, a ship used to transport enslaved people he had found at anchor. The ship's captain was on shore, so Roberts sent him a message, threatening to burn the ship if a ransom were not paid. The captain refused, so Roberts burned the *Porcupine* with some 80 enslaved people still shackled on board. Interestingly, his nickname "Black Bart" is attributed not to his cruelty but to his dark hair and complexion.

Roberts was tough and fought to the end. In February of 1722, the *Swallow*, a Royal Navy Man of War, was closing in on the *Royal Fortune*, having already captured the *Great Ranger*, another one of Roberts' ships. Roberts could have run for it, but he decided to stand and fight. Roberts was killed in the first broadside, however, his throat torn out by grapeshot from one of the *Swallow's* cannons. His men followed his standing order and threw his body overboard. Leaderless, the pirates soon surrendered; most of them were eventually hanged.

Roberts may not be the most famous pirate – that would probably be Blackbeard – but he has still made an impression on popular culture. He is mentioned in *Treasure Island*, the classic of pirate literature.

### **Famous female pirates**

Anne Bonny/Roberts and Mary Read

The pirate Mary Read was born in London. As a young woman she joined the army in Flanders disguised as a boy soldier. She later went to sea, still dressed in male clothes, and was captured by a pirate ship commanded by 'Calico' Jack Rackam.

Another member of Read's pirate crew was Anne Bonny. After several plundering expeditions around the Caribbean together, their ship was captured off Jamaica and the crew were sent for trial in Spanish Town.

All the men in the crew were hanged but Mary Read and Anne Bonny were reprieved because they were both pregnant. Mary fell ill with fever soon after the trial and died in prison.

Anne Bonny took part in many attacks and fought fiercely. In 1720 she was put on trial in Jamaica and sentenced to death. Bonny claimed that Rackham would not have been hung like a dog if he had fought like a man!

### **Piracy's links to the slave trade**

One interesting aspect that little attention is given in popular culture however is the Piracy/slavery relationship that occurred throughout the Early Modern period, with the British perspective being quite interesting. How these piracy/slavery interactions differed; some pirates were former slaves, pirates and privateers would employ slaves on their crew, capturing people to sell into slavery, it

differed from crew to crew. The reason for the pirates working in the slave trade also differed as well; finances played the most important reason but there was religious slavery, performed by the Barbary pirates of North Africa, and racial slavery by privateers during the early modern period.

Compared to the Barbary pirates the European privateers seemed similar in performing their piracy and slave trade in the name of their home kingdom. The main difference however is that the reason these privateers traded in slave was originally to make a good fortune. Accounts on Francis Drake in the 1500's show him in his youth travelling to the 'Gold Coast' along the West African Coast with another privateer and buying slaves to sell. Shortly after this he raided Spanish plantation sites in the Caribbean, using slaves to help with this piracy. This early form of the British Slave trade was primarily focused on profit rather than with little racial elements but this would later develop into the racial slavery that occurred often during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. This racial slavery can be better seen with privateers like Woodes Rogers, as slaves purchased by him were treated lower than livestock, as they were seen as objects for profit. By the 'Golden Age' racial slavery had risen dramatically.

Slaves during the Golden Age of Piracy from 1696 to 1726 had more freedom compared to those captured by privateers - if they could obtain this freedom that is. It was quite common for pirates to raid the slave trading vessels, and sell captured slaves when they needed more money and had the room on their ships. There were plenty of slaves who became pirates themselves for the freedom they wished to gain. The main reason for this is that each crewmember had equal say on the happenings of the ship, with these individual pirate societies being the most equal and democratic societies in the world at the time. Blackbeard's crew was said to have had a third of its members being former slaves and one of his most trusted subordinates was a man named Black Caesar, a former slave from the West African coast. Racial influences would even affect pirates who were captured, as while most pirates were hanged; if the pirate was black they would be forced into slavery again.

If one looks at all the interactions between piracy and slavery it is obvious that the primary reason the slaves were captured and sold were for financial reasons. It was not uncommon for the captain of the pirate ships to become rich from the slaves sold or ransomed. Pirates who were former slaves themselves would take part in the trade for this easy money. With this put into interpretation, while nationalism, race and religion did have a major impact on slavery it was the rise of economics and primitive forms of capitalism which caused the interaction of piracy and the slave trade.

## Sources

A: Because the 'aaarrgh' rate was too high

There are very many on-line sources for this topic, so I have highlighted just a few that I have visited. This a topic where everyone can find their own material and discover a slightly different angle on the subject, which should make for a wide ranging discussion

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