

Episode 48 – Winding Roads

The Pirate History Podcast
by Matt Albers

We left off last time at the conclusion of one of those ship board meetings. The captains and crews gathered together to make their plans, and discuss their code. This was a surprisingly everyday occurrence.

It happened all over the Caribbean, relatively frequently, in secluded coves and hidden harbors. Right now there were 9 ships, all of them small – barques and peraguas and single masted open boats. But they carried, all told, between 500 and 600 men.

That's not a small fleet. It's not as large as Morgan's fleets, or even the fleet of Coxon and Sharp some two years earlier, but it was no slouch either. Again though, it was a relatively typical sight in those days to see a group of several hundred pirates meeting off the coast of the Spanish Main planning a raid.

See, in a lot of ways, this was the real beginning of the Golden Age of piracy. That whole golden age thing is something historians named the period, and there's endless argument about exactly what that means.

When I started this show I chose to begin with the discovery of the New World and Sir Francis Drake. He was the first, greatest, and most famous of the rovers, and an inspiration to generations of English pirates.

But he wasn't really a pirate after all. His actions sometimes walked a tightrope of legality and he had a sort of rob the Spanish now, ask questions later attitude, but he was still a commissioned privateer.

Most historians will look at Henry Morgan as the dawn of the golden age. The era of the buccaneers and the brethren of the coast. The combined English and French and Dutch corsairs raided and attacked the Spanish Main with impunity for years, and Port Royal was exactly the hive of scum and villainy it's been made out to be in the culture. It could be, and often is, seen as the dawn of the age of pirates. But... still, that doesn't sit right with me. Captain Morgan cuts a dashing figure on the labels of rum bottles, and his myth is certainly one of... bloodthirsty piracy.

But Captain Morgan is something of a misnomer, really. Captain Morgan only

properly describes him for maybe four years of his life, and two major campaigns. After that he's Admiral Henry Morgan, commander of the British Jamaica Station and commissioned leader of men. And then after *all that* he's now Governor Sir Henry Morgan, knighted by the king and commissioned to oversee England's largest and most profitable colony in the West Indies.

Morgan owned five plantations, hundreds of slaves, appointed and promoted militiamen and naval officers. His signature graced reports read by Parliament, the Lords of Trade, the Privy Council, the Lord High Admiral and even the King. Not to mention Spanish Viceroy and French Governors and Dutch masters of trade.

Is that the typical career path of a lowly pirate? Of course not. And, much like Francis Drake, Henry Morgan had the legal authority to do what he did.

As did the thousands of men sent to the West Indies and the South Pacific in prosecution of that Anglo-Dutch War. They were legitimate, legal, commissioned privateers in wartime. But when that war ended they were just sort of... there. Thousands of veterans, men in their 20s and 30s, on hundreds of ships with – all of a sudden – no jobs and no prospects.

Beyond... what? They weren't about to take up jobs on sugar plantations. They didn't have money to buy land. They'd have to get a license with the East India Company to trade. All they had were ships and guns.

SO it's here, in the late 1670s and early 1680s, that we suddenly see literal armies of men taking to sea to plunder and pillage and pilfer whatever they could get their hands on. It's a decent argument that this moment, right here, is the dawn of the Golden Age.

Of course, it's a lot more complex than all that, and at best you could really call the dawn of the *first* golden age of piracy. It would lead to all sorts of international crises, and you'd think England would learn something, but we'll see this scenario play out again in 30 years or so at the end of the War of Spanish Succession.

The this era is often underrepresented by popular media. In the Pirates of the Caribbean movies we start off in Port Royal and Tortuga, all very 1665, and then – out of nowhere – we have Blackbeard show up like it's 1718 all of a sudden. I mean what happened?

I think that's a symptom of how they were portrayed by the contemporary writers. Alexander Exquemelin was perfectly happy to embellish his story. He could sex it up, add in a dash of torture, and top it off with the ... what is he, a protagonist? Antagonist? With Morgan anyway, with the main character burning Panama to the ground and then holding a Spanish princess hostage as his prospective concubine.

That's a great story.

Captain Charles Johnson, whoever he or she may have actually been, was absolutely writing a work of fiction. He took real events, actual history, and then ran with it. And told great stories.

But Dampier, well, his writings weren't embellished fiction. They're littered with pages and pages of ... natural science. He can go on at length about Indian customs, or currents, or fruits and vegetables. He wrote pages about manatee. And all that's important. He did great work that probably advanced scientific knowledge about the Western Hemisphere more than any of his contemporaries.

But his work isn't exactly the bodice ripping, swashbuckling adventures that sold books. As a result, this whole period is sometimes seen as less exciting. Even boring.

Well, today, I'm here to make a case otherwise. Today's story has it all. Battles at sea, sword fights on land, savage barbarous Indians, friendly Indian Kings (and their daughters), witch doctors, Spanish Armadas, stuffy English governors, romance, terror, fleeing for your life, backstabbing, & betrayal.

This is Episode 48 - Winding Roads

The fleet consisted of Captains William Wright, John Coxon, Jan Willems, Jean Rose (the same that raided Portobelo alongside Coxon and Sharp), Jean Tristain, Thomas Payne, & Captain Archembaud.

Last time I introduced captain Archembaud as Captain Archemboe, and captain Jan Willems and John Williams, but neither is correct.

Willems may have introduced himself as John Williams, Englishman, but he was in fact Dutch, and I think Archembaud was probably just poorly translated by Dampier.

Thier fleet was gathered here, along with William Dampier, Edward Davis, & John cook, preparing to raid up and down the Main. It was, essentially, just business. These weren't the romanticized rebels and anarchists that later pirates became. They weren't out to shake the foundations of Europe, or fighting for self rule, they were old navy-men, one time privateers, and as there was 'no peace beyond the line,' they chose to continue their trade.

They raided Spanish cities, took Spanish ships, and stole Spanish gold. It was a natural occupation, really. They'd been doing it in one form or another their entire adult lives and, as far as any of them were religious, they were Protestant. The English and Dutch, obviously, but even the French in the fleet were Huguenots and Calvinists.

So they chose a target and prepared to set out. Their first destination was to be a small island called San Andreas, just west of Providence Island. There they hoped to find ships to steal, and if not there were strong, tall, cedar trees there to build sloops.

Dampier, Davis, Cooke and the other men who'd so recently arrived from the Pacific needed to find a crew. Most of the ships were small, and full. The only one with room was the crew of Jean Archembaud, so they go aboard. At first it seems alright, despite being a minority of Englishmen on a French ship, but it soon turns pretty awful. According to Dampier the French were lazy, incompetent seamen:

“Indeed we found no cause to dislike the captain; but his French seamen were the saddest creatures that ever I was among; for though we had bad weather that required many hands aloft, yet the biggest part of them never stirred out of their hammocks but to eat or ease themselves.”

And just in case you were wondering exactly what Dampier means by ease themselves, he tells you in some detail about the head, and the process by which men... relieve themselves on board a ship.

It was altogether an unpleasant voyage. But it was interrupted a few days out by a fierce squall, followed by a storm. For most ships it wouldn't have been too much of a problem, but these small, light, empty pirate vessels were tossed about. They quickly lost sight of one another.

The storm didn't last long, and Captain Archembaud's ship at least survived,

with Dampier aboard. They got their bearings, set a course northwest, for San Andreas, and arrive a few days later.

When they arrive there's... no one else. It's a small, deserted, empty little island. There are trees, yeah, but hardly any fish, no turtles, no birds large enough to bother hunting. They could still conceivably build a sloop, but if no one else arrived to sail her, then why bother? They hardly had enough men to crew their little ship, much less a larger one.

Later that day though, Captain Tucker arrived. His was an even smaller ship, with no guns and fewer men. His whole crew could go ahead and climb aboard Archbaud's craft and they still wouldn't need another ship.

And it still wouldn't be enough to take much more than a fishing boat.

But they waited. The next day they spotted sails on the horizon. There were two ships, one small, and one much larger. And they were headed right for San Andreas. They got their ships ready to sail, and readied the guns, but they lingered.

As the ships got closer the lookouts noted that the larger ship had Spanish sails. But they lingered. At the least they might be able to take her.

I think it would surprise most of us in the modern world just how slow these sailing ships were. Battles at sea could take hours, unless it was a great naval engagement between lines of ships. Chases at sea might take days, with very little changing in the meantime. And waiting on a ship of unknown origin and potential hostility to arrive from the horizon could take the better part of a day.

It was probably tense, but also, kind of dull. You might end the day dead or in chains, but until then you would just sort of be hanging around.

But finally the ship hailed them, in English, and dropped her sails. It was Captain George Wright aboard a Spanish tartan, with his old ship in tow. A tartan is a small ship, single masted, with a lateen sail and a forsail. It was very much like the sloop they intended to build, and would be fast, agile, and able to tack against the wind.

Think sort of like a modern racing sailboat, only covered with guns and filled with heavily armed killers. It was perfect, if they transferred the guns from Captain Archbaud's ship, and Captain Wright's. She would have 12 guns, plus the

four swivel guns she already carried, and about a hundred men.

The only problem was that it would incorporate three ships, with three crews and at least four captains. Wright agreed to take everyone aboard, provided they all agreed to sail under his command, but not everyone was willing.

William Dampier, John Cook, and the other Englishmen immediately asked to come aboard. They were not in the least happy with Archembaud's ship, and they told Wright all about it. There was some quavering, but eventually he agreed. It was better, but still not enough to fill the Tartan.

Archembaud didn't want to come aboard, nor did his men. Despite the fact that they hardly had enough men to crew their ship, it was a good ship, and they didn't want to lose it. So they came to a compromise. Captain Tucker would go aboard Archembaud's ship, with his closest officers, while the rest of his crew would sail under Captain Wright.

That's not a bad deal. Both ships were now adequately crewed, with plenty of guns. It was, honestly, even better than having one fully crewed and heavily armed ship. It would let them trap ships between them, or lure ships into an ambush, or at the least give them a spare vessel should one of them sink.

Now, I considered telling the backstory of Captain Wright here. It's not a bad story, but not a particularly important one. Captain Archembaud's story is better, a bit, but still nothing too special. They were both fairly prominent Privateers during the war. They both started off as Navy officers, who were given commissions to raid enemy possessions in the West Indies and did really impressive work. They were even, in some cases, trusted to carry important messages into enemy territory.

And maybe someday I'll go into it. But those are war stories, and, while we have detailed accounts of what they did during the war, it's all in the vein of official reports. You know, Captain Wright sacked this port and burned this many ships losing none of his own. They were reports for the military planners and bean counters back in London or Port Royal. What really interests me is what they did later, outside the law.

The crews boarded their new ships and they spent the next few days careening them. They loaded guns and food and rope and tar and adjusted the rigging. The Tartan was turned into a proper man-o-war. It would be quick and dangerous, especially with those swivel guns at the fore and aft.

After a few days though, it became clear that no one else was coming. They might have been lost in the storm, but it was much more likely they got blown off course and sailed for their backup rendezvous.

They sailed southwest, stopping at the Corn Islands, or Islas del Maize, where they gathered some food and hoped to meet some of their fleet. But there were only a few naked Indians which Dampier describes in great detail.

They continue on to the Moskito Coast and the Bluefield river. Again, they hoped to find their friends, and here they actually might have. The mouth of the Bluefield had become something of a haven for English pirates out of Port Royal.

See, the Moskito coast was full of Moskito Indians, hostile to the Spanish and friendly to the English. That was certainly helpful, but the Moskito coast was tactically important for more than that. It made a good place to stop between Port Royal and the Main. Pirates would usually stop there and refit their vessels, before heading on to Portobelo or Cartagena or wherever they planned to attack.

It had become such a frequently used rest stop, that there was even a ... it's too much to call it a settlement, but not enough to call it a camp. See, the Moskito coast was really close to Providence Island. Dampier even goes out of his way to mention the island, properly an English possession belonging to the Earls of Warwick, but of course it was back in Spanish possession by now.

But if you'll remember way back to that puritan pirate expedition in 1630, the English providence Company tried to establish a colony on Providence. Their main source of income was Privateering, and the colony eventually failed under Spanish pressure.

Well the English and Dutch people there really didn't have anywhere to go. Jamaica was still Spanish then, as was Cuba, Mexico, the Main, and most of Hispaniola. They would have to travel several hundred miles, against the wind, through enemy waters, if they wanted to reach a friendly island.

Which they couldn't do. So they headed for land, and tried to avoid the Spanish. They headed for the Moskito coast, where the natives were at least not overtly hostile, and set up camp. It wasn't a colony, and it wasn't a settlement, but it was a place where they could eat and sleep.

One of their most prominent sailors was a Dutchman called Abraham Blauvelt. He kept them together, and led them, eventually, back to civilization. He was almost mythical to the buccaneers, one of their founding fathers, kind of like Pierre la Grande. Only Blauvelt actually existed and served alongside Admirals Myngs, Mansveldt, and Edward Morgan back in Port Royal.

They stopped at the Bluefields river, and Anglicized version Blauvelt. Which was experiencing something of a Renaissance. After Henry Morgan sacked Providence in 1670, and tried to retake it for England, Spain took it back. The men who were there fled, much like the Providence Company, to the Moskito coast. They set up a camp.

Then, things in the West Indies became increasingly uncomfortable for the buccaneers of the Americas. First Tortuga, then Port Royal became unfriendly. The remnants of the Brethren of the Coast needed somewhere to put their feet up. Many chose those logwood camps near Campeche, but the rest chose the Moskito coast. And after the war the privateers drifted there more and more.

By 1681 the Moskito coast was, well, less than a settlement, yet more than a camp. If you were in need of a crew, you could probably find some men at Bluefields quickly running out of rum and money. If you were in need of a woman, you could likely find one in some beach side bungalow who would take you in for the right price.

If you needed repairs, or supplies, or just a safe harbor, it could be found at Bluefields. But, notably, it was never a home. It was too exposed to be a permanent base, at least for now.

Still, Wright and Cook and Dampier and all the rest stopped off. But they didn't find any of their friends. So they continued on to their appointed rendezvous, the Bocas del Toro, just to the south.

It was there, at last, they encountered one of their own. Captain Yankes was there waiting for them. The three ships lay anchor and everyone climbed aboard the man-o-war to share tales. Wright told of his daring and perilous capture of the Spanish vessel, but Yankes had a more troubling tale.

After the storm they were all separated, but they searched for the other ships in the fleet. He found Coxon, Willems, & Tristain. Everyone who was unaccounted for except Captain Payne. They continued the search, but they were surprised by an armadilla of Spanish Guarda Costa.

The Spanish ships drove right in between them, splitting the pirate fleet, and opened fire. Yankes and Willems disengaged, tacked away, and made their escape. They were too small to be much use, and didn't carry any heavy guns besides.

John Coxon and Tristain covered them with suppressing fire, but it was clear they would be overwhelmed if they didn't make their escape as well. It was a daring move, but they both fled at once, in opposite directions. If they could split the armadilla they might be able to regroup with Yankes and Willems, and take them on properly.

But the Spanish flota didn't split, and chase after both ships. They ignored John Coxon all together, and the entire fleet chased after Jean Tristain. It was a good move by the Spanish. They had a much better chance of taking at least one pirate ship down if they stayed focused and didn't get separated.

The other pirates watched helplessly as the Spanish followed Tristain, unable or unwilling to help him. The Spanish:

“fired and chased him, but he rowed and towed, and they supposed he got away.”

Payne was... who knows where. Probably sunk or captured or killed. They hoped Tristain had made good his escape, but they didn't know. And if he did he was unlikely to return this way any time soon. Captain Willems hadn't been seen since immediately after the battle. It appears he fled. So, the fleet was in shambles. They had to decide what to do from here on out.

John Coxon and Jean Archembaud thought it foolish to continue on. They had to return to Jamaica, or Petit Goave, or somewhere where news was bought and sold to regroup and plan another venture. Plus, for Archembaud, there were questions about the legality of the expedition now that the Frenchman carrying their commission was gone.

Captain Wright though had himself a fine man-o-war, and wanted to put her to use. John Cooke and Edward Davis and William Dampier thought that was an excellent idea, and Captain Yankes decided to tag along.

They chose to sail east from the Bocas del Toro, past Portobelo and past Darien, to raid the shipping around Cartagena. The ships were mostly in fit sailing condition, and they set out at once.

In what is one of those moments that historians can look back on see the almost comic timing of it, Captain Payne arrived in the Bocas del Toro on the heels of the rest of the fleet. Now, Payne was older than the rest of the pirates. He'd had a long and distinguished Naval career back in Europe, and in the South Pacific. He'd come out to the West Indies to privateer and make enough to comfortably retire.

But, then the war ended, and he still hadn't secured his nest egg. He was so respected that he was even chosen to deliver terms and notice of surrender to enemy cities and their governors, which must have stung considering the financial position those messages put him in personally.

So, he turned to piracy, alongside many of his contemporaries. The difference was, well, he was the most talented and decorated naval officer in the fleet, and probably the best man to have on your side in a fight. But he wasn't really much of a pirate.

He knew everything about sailing and fighting, but very little else a pirate needed to know. For example, where it was safe to make camp, and where not. The Bocas del Toro were perfect for hiding your ships from Spanish eyes, but it was well known among proper pirates that you didn't go ashore. The Indians in these islands were not Mosquito, and they were most definitely not friendly.

“The Indians here have no commerce with the Spaniards; but are very barbarous and will not be dealt with. They have destroyed many privateers, as they did not long after this some of Captain Pain's men; who, having built a tent ashore to put his goods in while he careened his ship, and some men lying there with their arms, in the night the Indians crept softly into the tent, and cut off the heads of three or four men, and made their escape; nor was this the first time they had served the privateers so.”

Still, that was unknown to Dampier and all the rest for the time being. They were sailing for Cartagena, past Portobelo, past Darien, on the coast of the viceroyalty of Colombia.

They find some healthy hunting grounds there, but nothing too impressive. They take “Indian corn, hog and fowls.” They secure hauls of raw sugar, molasses, marmalade, a little bit of tobacco. It was worth a pretty penny after a few weeks of work, but nothing on spices or indigo or just good old fashioned silver and gold.

They met with a Jamaican cruiser or two who accompanied them for a time, but they came and went. They spent time careening, and hunting, and generally enjoying a leisurely few months pirating about the coast of the Spanish Main.

Finally, come August, Dampier and Cooke talked Wright into returning to la Sounds Key off the coast of Darien. That's the very same spot where Dampier and Cook & Davis emerged from the jungle months earlier, and they hoped to find word of Lionel Wafer.

They arrived, lay anchor, shot off a volley. It was easily loud enough to be heard from shore, and then they set about to wait. Before long an Indian canoe set off from the coast rowing toward them. It was carrying maybe a dozen men, and when they got close enough it became clear several of them were English. The whole party climbed aboard. Most of them were Indians, which Dampier described these in some detail.

They were copper colored, they had black hair, strangely cut. They went naked, aside from a cloth around their waist, and never wore shoes, despite their small feet. What he talked about at length was the jewelry. They had earrings, nose rings, and lip piercings that held what he called beards of tortoiseshell or, if you were a king, gold.

Four of them were Englishmen though, and men they knew. Robert Spratlin and William Bowman were there, remember those two who refused to cross the river after Mr. Gayny had drowned? The other two were Mr. Richard Godson, druggist, scholar, gentleman, and translator of the Greek Testament, and John Hingson, Mariner. Those two had been assumed dead by Dampier and the others, so it was a happy meeting all around.

But Lionel Wafer was nowhere to be seen. Well, he had been loved, but his injuries were severe after all. That burn, down to the bone, and his river crossing? It's no surprise he didn't make it.

While all the Englishmen were shaking hands and embracing and questioning their companions about just what they'd been up to, one of them turned to look at the Indians all sitting back on their heels, as most Indians were wont to do, and huddled together. And then suddenly he exclaimed:

“Here's our doctor!”

And it was in fact their doctor, Lionel Wafer. But he looked very much to have

gone native. He was deeply tanned – all over – and nearly naked, save for a lion cloth and a silver... ahem, sheath around his genitals. That was different from the Kuna. He was painted all over, in the Kuna fashion. His hair was strangely cut and he wore a... nose ring in his septum. And earrings, and necklaces. Feathers and beads... he looked like a native son of the Kuna.

I mean, it had only been a few months, had he already gone native? But once he was called out Wafer laughed and stood and shook hands all around. He'd been waiting to see if anyone would recognize him, and it took them all a while. At long last, Dampier took him aside and asked exactly what had happened to him in that Kuna camp. Why was he dressed so wildly? The other men were properly dressed. Why had he pierced his nose?

And Wafer had a story to tell. Those months had been long and difficult. And they held their share of dangers for the Englishmen. At first he was delirious with pain and truly expected to die soon. But an old Indian woman came into his tent every few hours to chew herbs and spread them over his wounds. She wrapped the poultice in plantain leaves and left him to rest. Occasionally he was fed, and when his four friends arrived in camp they were fed too. But there was a hostility about the camp toward the Englishmen. The women especially were not kind.

His wounds healed quickly, in about 20 days, but things got worse. The women would spit at his feet, and were feeding them poorly. It soon became clear that they thought Dampier and his party had forced the Kuna guides to travel north, against their will, and would force them on board their ships to serve as scouts and guides and hunters.

This, well, this wasn't an unfounded fear. There probably had been no shortage of young Kuna and Moskito men hustled onto pirate ships and merchant ships and even navy ships. They were friendly, but let's face it, Europeans weren't exactly considerate of the needs of the AmerIndians.

The Kuna told Lionel Wafer that they feared for their sons and husbands; that they had been gone too long. The women began gathering wood, stacking it, and staring daggers at the English. It soon became clear what they were building. Pyres. They intended to burn the English if their men weren't returned. They had ten days.

The days passed. One, two, three. So slowly. Four, five, six. It became clear that they were hostages. Or rather, prisoners condemned to die. Seven, eight, nine. The Englishmen resigned themselves to their fate.

But on that last day a group of Kuna warriors led by a high ranking chief came to town. They saw the pyres and met the Englishmen, and talked the women down from burning the prisoners. He suggested they be taken North, to their camp on the coast, where they might hear word of their sons.

Then, if they still had no word, there they could be killed. The journey was perilous and terrible. It nearly claimed their lives, but at long last he found himself at the mercy of a Kuna king, who had wife that had taken ill.

Wafer was taken to her, and found she had a high fever. Then he saw the Kuna take her into the river and place her on a stone. The young men then shot at her with bows and needle thin arrows, to bleed her.

Wafer was appalled, and told the men to stop that and bring her to shore. He produced a small blade and cut into one of her veins. She began to bleed, and bleed, and the king believed Wafer had killed her. He was grabbed and about to be hustled out but he convinced the king to let him finish his work.

He was just in time. She had been bled just enough, and Wafer bound her cuts. Wafer spent the night in custody, his fate hinging on that of the king's wife.

In the morning he was collected, and brought into the village square, before a solemn, quiet crowd. He might have expected a horrible death, but instead he was lifted up, and the people cheered. His patient lived, and her fever was gone. She was already up and walking, and came out to greet Wafer.

The next weeks became a blur. He was dressed as one of the Kuna, and revered almost as a god. His nose and ears were pierced, and ceremonial ornaments were set there. He was carried everywhere in a great hammock, and fed the finest food by the most beautiful women. And those women stayed around to see that all his needs were met.

I mean, not bad right? If I were Lionel Wafer, I'm not sure I would have returned to English society. But it was becoming clear that the King and his wife were preparing to marry him off to one of their daughters.

She was young and beautiful, to be sure, and Wafer even considered it, but that would mean life among the Kuna, probably never to see home again.

He convinced the King to allow he and the other Englishmen to travel north, to

that village on the coast. The king allowed it, even though I suspect he knew what Wafer was up to. While he was there, continuing to enjoy himself, they heard the unmistakable sound of a heavy gun being shot at sea.

And so Wafer, the four other pirates, and a small cadre of Kuna men set out to meet them. And there they had their reunion with Dampier and Cook and Davis.

It was a happy affair, mostly, but I wonder if Lionel Wafer, when recounting his tale later in life, ever wondered how life might have turned out if he had married that Kuna princess and settled down.

Sadly, Mr. Godson, that scholarly druggist who so loved his bible, took ill once aboard, and died three days later. He was properly buried in a fashion that would have pleased him and the fleet set out. Again.

They were headed east, beyond Cartagena. Cartagena was far too strong to attack, and they remembered well the visitations of Henry Morgan on their city. Dampier writes:

“We passed by Cartagena. We sailed by in sight of it, for it lies open to the sea: and had a fair view of Madre de Popa, or Nuestra Senora de Popa, a monastery of the Virgin Mary, standing on the top of a very steep hill just behind Cartagena. It is a place of incredible wealth, by reason of the offerings made here continually; and for this reason often in danger of being visited by the privateers, did not the neighborhood of Cartagena keep them in awe. It is in short the very Loreto of the West Indies: it has innumerable miracles related of it. Any misfortune that befalls the privateers is attributed to this lady's doing; and the Spaniards report that she was abroad that night the Oxford man-of-war was blown up at the isle of Vacca near Hispaniola, and that she came home all wet; as belike she often returns with her clothes dirty and torn with passing through woods and bad ways when she has been out upon any expedition; deserving doubtless a new suit for such eminent pieces of service.”

He's saying they stood in awe of the monastery, in service of Mary, and no privateers dared attack. He's saying that the Spanish tradition was, and he relates it with awe, that it was in fact Mary, the Virgin Mother, who traveled the ocean on that night in January 1669, when Morgan and his lieutenants were all aboard the HMS Oxford planning their raid on Maracaibo. It was she that set their powder aflame, and destroyed the ship, killing more than a few pirates.

But they moved on. Past Maracaibo, toward the Dutch Island Curacao. But before they reached the island, Wright doubled back. It's probable he gathered some sort of news from some of the locals, or overheard a bit of gossip in a Spanish tavern. See, they were back in civilization, and here, even in Spanish waters, they were given the benefit of the doubt.

They used fake names, and bribed their way past the guards of course, and they were certainly watched, but as long as they kept to themselves and didn't cause any trouble they could visit the taverns and brothels to their hearts' content.

What they were looking for isn't clear, though there is mention of vessels hauling pearls, but they came upon a decent sized Spanish vessel on her way to Maracaibo. Wright caught her first, and engaged the ship. He opened with a volley from his big guns, and then switched to the swivel guns and small arms to pick off enemies. Then Yankes arrived, after maybe 20 minutes of hard fighting, and entered the fight.

While the Spanish craft was busy dealing with Wright, Yankes boarded her, and suddenly the fight was one of pistols and steel on deck. Yankes men fought hard, and pushed the Spanish back, when Wright came aboard opposite him. The two crews had the Spanish surrounded, and they surrendered.

They took their prize to a quiet harbor to discuss just what to do with her. She was a 12 gunner, laden with sugar and tobacco. And an armory full of small arms, shot, and powder. It was a good ship, even if the cargo was virtually worthless to the pirates.

Wright claimed the ship, as he'd engaged her first. But Yankes argued the claim, citing privateer code. He and his men had boarded her first, and taken the fight to the Spanish. It was his by rights. Wright countered that since he had the only letter of marque – which was no longer valid by the way – he should get the ship.

It got heated, with voices raised and hands gripping their sword hilts with white knuckles, when the men intervened. They put it to a vote, and the English crew of Wright didn't want the ship. They voted to give it to Yankes. So Wright transferred his guns and cargo the Yankes' Dutch vessel, and Yankes to his new Spanish one. The tartan, the man-o-war, was sunk.

After the refitting and such was done they headed on to Curacao. They arrived hoping to sell all their sugar and tobacco and marmalade.

“Captain Wright went ashore to the Governor [Nikolaas van Liebergen] and offered him the sale of the sugar, but the Governor told him he had a great trade with the Spaniards, therefore he could not admit us in there; but if we could go to Saint Thomas, which is an island and free port belonging to the Danes and a sanctuary for privateers, he would send a sloop with such goods as we wanted, and money to buy the sugar, which he would take at a certain rate; but it was not agreed to.”

Of course the Governor couldn't trade with pirates. Curacao was surrounded by Spanish colonies. Spain and the Netherlands were closely allied at this point. Curacao was basically a giant Dutch warehouse handling all the goods Spain needed to sell. It's a fascinating place, and it has a great story. I'll get around to telling the story of the Dutch in the West Indies one of these days. When I can wrap my head around it.

So the pirates continued on. They sailed on to what they called Salt Tortuga, an island off the coast that closely resembled a turtle, in April 1682. They called it Salt Tortuga to differentiate it from French Tortuga. Which Dampier just totally brushes aside! Like some 16 year old punk who proves just how obsolete all your reference points are.

Like, pff. Yeah, I guess I heard Tortuga used to be cool, but nobody goes there anymore. It's sooo 166late. Everyone goes to Petit Goave now. How don't you know that?

He was right of course, Tortuga was well past her privateering prime. They knew they could sell all their cargo in Petit Goave, if it came down to that, but they had the whole of the Windward Islands to try their luck. They were the most densely populated and competitive islands in the West Indies. They were sure to find something.

They didn't find anything. No one would trade with them. They were ... pariah, in the Lesser Antilles. They were chased off at the docks. Sometimes threatened with arrest. Even, once, actually detained until it became clear that a few hundred drunken, angry, armed, broke pirates would descend on the magistrate's office if they weren't released.

They caught a major break when, once again rebuffed, sitting by the street and starting to feel a bit hungry, Wright was approached by an Irish trader just, fresh

off the boat from the Old Country. He had a hold full of salted beef, and prices weren't what he'd expected. He was willing to trade some for tobacco and sugar, which he could absolutely move.

It wasn't exactly purses full of gold, but the men were growing hungrier and more restless, and they needed something. Wright agreed. If he threw in a cask of rum.

They had a second piece of amazing luck in their months wandering aimlessly around the Caribbean. They happened upon some other pirates, down on their luck in what... they were realizing quickly was a society leaving them behind. It was none other than Captain Tristain and Jan Willems. They were safe and sound here, not in a Spanish prison, and just as disaffected as Wright and his crew.

It was a happy encounter, and they shared their beef and rum, but it quickly soured. See, they were leaving these islands on the far east of the West Indies (they were in the Leeward Islands now, having left the windward islands behind) they weren't ... good places for pirates and privateers.

It wasn't exactly dangerous, it was... well, they were obsolete here. Back in Jamaica, and along the Spanish Main, the war was ongoing. Imperial Spain controlled the water and the resources, and Old Henry Morgan built fortresses and navies to keep her at bay.

But here, where England and France and the Netherlands and even Spain all intermingled, they'd left the war far behind them. They were concerned with trade, and profit, and commercial enterprises. The governors were secondary powers on these islands. The Company was always in charge. It might be the British East India Company, or the Dutch West India Company, or the French, but they controlled the ebb and flow of... sugar and slaves and cargo and profits.

They were cosmopolitan, international cities, bustling and moving like living organisms.

It was a brave new world, and one that didn't need men like George Wright or any of his old privateer naval brethren.

Now, William Dampier and Lionel Wafer saw this as clearly as any of them, but they processed it differently. They were educated men, relatively cosmopolitan themselves, and much more acclimated to the ways of polite society. They saw the writing on the wall, and brought it to John Cooke and Edward Davis.

This was going nowhere, they said. The fleet is at an impasse, and nothing these old sea dogs can do will change that. These men, all younger and more... vital, than their captains and most of their men, realized they would need to unhitch themselves from this sinking ship. And quickly. So Cooke and Davis made it their mission to capture a ship, any ship, as long as she was seaworthy.

As you might imagine, it didn't take long. They were just off the coast of Puerto Rico when they took a boat out and captured a Spanish merchantman, small and fast, and brought her back to the fleet.

Now, much like they had done back in the Pacific under Bartholomew Sharp, they were acting independently. And this time their companions weren't having it. Wright left the fleet. He said, to try his luck selling this cumbersome cargo elsewhere, try to spread out our web, you know, we'll hit twice the ports this way.

But he may have been upset at losing so many skilled crewmen. The new ship was filled with English crew. All the Pacific Adventure veterans were there. John Cook, Edward Davis, William Dampier, Lionel Wafer, Spratlan, Bowman, Hingson, the others that had escaped the Pacific with them, and a few new recruits who saw that they had a far better plan than the other captains. John Cooke was made Captain John Cooke once again.

They spent a few days getting their ship ready and turning her into a bona fide pirate ship. She was lean and fast and dangerous. And then, they anchored off the coast of Hispaniola. They were nearing Petit Goave, and many hoped they could sell off their cargo there.

In the night, while the men were sleeping and feeling secure for the first time in months, a fleet of canoes rowed over to their new ship. They were skilled and they rowed silently. The men climbed aboard, without so much as a noise, and drew their pistols and cutlasses. They sneaked into the crews quarters and positioned themselves around the room.

Then they struck. They didn't fire, or stab, or strangle.

They bound the crew of English pirates. Held them at gunpoint, and took the leaders captive. It was revealed the perpetrators, the dastardly pirates, were none other than Captains Yanke, Tristain, and their company of French privateers.

See, they were in French waters now. They had commissions from the French

Governor at Petit Goave. They wanted this new pirate ship for themselves, along with all the ships and cargo of their own. So they took each and every Englishman captive, and took command of the ship.

It was the worst sort of rank betrayal. If it was revenge, well, maybe you could understand. But what was there to revenge? This was greed. The greed of the lowest, dirtiest, most rotten pirates in the seas.

And, I'm wondering if Captain Wright didn't know it was coming, or at least suspect. He sailed off remember, before they entered French waters. He sailed south, to avoid their territory, and left Cooke and Dampier to their fate. He would have brought them along, as they were on his ship, but they took their own ship, and left his crew. And he let them sail on unknowing into French waters.

Here's the rub. The French were legally privateers. They were completely withing their rights on that voyage. They were seeing to the will of the Governor, and by extension King Louis XIV. The English were nothing more than pirates. They had no authority. And it was, on some level, the duty of those scheming, vile, detestable French dogs, to turn them in to the authorities in Petit Goave.

Cooke, Davis, Dampier, Wafer and all the rest had been played. Brilliantly. They'd worked for years, more than three years since they'd seen Jamaica, and for Dampier and Wafer, more than 7 or 8 since they'd seen England. They had nothing to show for it, and soon they'd be hanging from French gallows at the behest of a man they'd trusted as a friend.

The crew was put ashore just at Ila-a-Veche to the south of Hispaniola. That same place the Virgin Mary had appeared to destroy the Oxford. Perhaps the Spanish were right. Maybe she did deliver punishment to the pirates. This was certainly a poetic enough place for it. They were marooned without guns or even much in the way of provisions.

Now, what happens next differs depending on the account you read. According to some, Jan Willems realizes what happened and sails for Ila-a-Vache to rescue the English. According to Dampier it was Captain Tristain that took ten men aboard his ship, including Cooke and Davis.

See, if it was Jan Willems, he was rescuing them out of that sense of duty and loyalty I spoke about the pirates having toward one another. If it was Tristain, he was taking them before the governor to see them executed.

This is an important distinction, as we'll soon see.

Whoever it was, Cooke and Davis reached Petit Goave the next day. The French crew went ashore to enjoy their first night back in what was essentially their home city. While they were away the English took control of their ship and sailed it out from under the nose of the Captain, the harbormaster, and the governor. They returned to Ila-a-Veche in the night, and rescued their countrymen, and sailed away, around Hispaniola, toward Tortuga, and onward, to their destination. The North American colony of Virginia.

That night they named their new ship, under Captain John Cooke, revenge.

But here's the question. If you choose to believe Dampier, that was an apt name. They'd been betrayed by Tristain, and taken their own ship back in retribution, calling her Revenge. That's a good, and y'know, morally defensible, story. Sounds good before a judge doesn't it? It was those filthy filthy French all along!

But if it was in fact Jan Willems who rescued the English, and they stole his ship in an act of rank backstabbing betrayal, well, considering the story to come the name Revenge takes on a hint of prophecy.