

# PIRATES

Ahoy there me hearties! We're about to set sail so hop aboard and delve into the infamous world of pirates.

Words by Hayley Penrose

**C**aptain Hook, Blackbeard, Captain Jack Sparrow and Anne Bonney are all names we have heard. They are some of the most well-known pirates - fictitious and real - because of their dastardly plans and fear-inducing legends. There are lots of different portrayals of pirates today, from rum-drinking drunk to fearless underdog, but how do these compare with the pirates of history?

Piracy is defined by the Oxford dictionary as 'the practice of attacking and robbing ships at sea.' Any person who became a pirate was considered an outlaw. That made it a risky business to be in, as being caught often resulted in death. Even though that was the case lots of crews were made up of volunteers. Many people turned to a life of pirating because the lifestyle was often better than, or at the very least on par with, that of Navy ships. Many navy crews recruited off the street, nabbing men as young as 18 through to 55 year olds. To discourage mutiny on their



Blackbeard is one of the most feared and well-known pirates. He died in 1718.

ships, they would often hold off paying wages - there are reports of one man who got 17 years of back pay at the end of his service. Pirates on the other hand, had a share system in place for their riches and many of the leadership positions, including captain, were democratically elected.

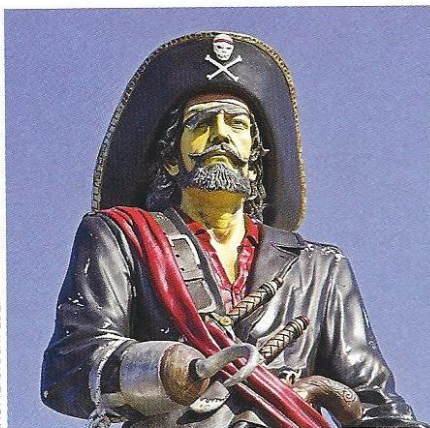
The Golden Age of Piracy has been defined numerous times with varying dates, but the broadest time frame says it began in the 1650's and lasted almost 100 years, through to the 1730's. During this time, privateers also sailed the seas. They were people with a letter of marque from the government which authorised them to attack foreign vessels.

It was not uncommon for privateers to cross into the world of piracy; one man who did was Captain Kidd. Unfortunately for him, he attacked an East India Company

vessel and became a wanted man. He buried some of his treasure on Gardiner's Island, thinking he could use it as a bargaining tool. Soon after, he and his wife were captured in Boston and sent to London for trial where he was sentenced to death. He faced hanging, but it took more than one attempt as the noose broke. His body was then hung in chains along the River Thames to remind others of the consequences of breaking the law. Captain Kidd's story was the inspiration behind Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*.

Possibly the best known pirate is Blackbeard, who had a pirate army of 300 and commanded four ships at the height of his career. Widely feared, Blackbeard was known to leap into battle with two swords and several knives and pistols at the ready. A ruthless pirate, he captured over 40 merchant ships in the Caribbean and killed many prisoners. His pirating came to an end when he was captured by the Royal Navy and beheaded. His head was placed on a stake near Virginia's Hampton River as a warning to other pirates.

Another pirate of the time was the cruel François l'Olonnais. From his humble beginnings working on a plantation, the Frenchman successfully turned to pirating capturing many ships and becoming one of the most successful pirates on land attacks. He was a vicious man, gaining historical infamy when he ravaged the town of Maracaibo in Venezuela and gained 200 000 Spanish dollars. There are even rumours that he ate a Spanish soldier's heart during one of his attacks. His own death was just as gruesome, being devoured alongside his crew by a local

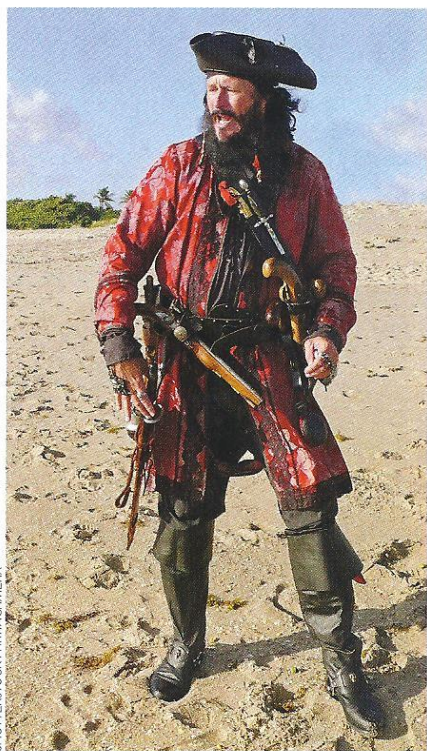


This pirate figure can be found in Sestri Levante, Italy

tribe on the Panama coast after their ship became lodged on a sandbar.

While male pirates dominated the time, there were a few females making a name for themselves on the seas. Two of the most well-known are Anne Bonney and Mary Read, the only women known to have plied their trade in the Western Hemisphere.

The two women met when they were aboard Calico Jack's ship, both disguised as males. They discovered each others secret and quickly became friends. They had reputations as 'ferce hell cats' and no one else was as bloodthirsty as them in battle. One day the crew were celebrating a victory with some heavy drinking when the British Navy surprised them. The drunken pirates hid below deck leaving Anne and Mary to defend the ship, killing one Navy officer and wounding several others before being overwhelmed and captured along with the rest of the crew.



*Captains were the best dressed on board their ship*

Calico Jack and all the male crew members were sentenced to death by hanging. Anne visited her lover before his execution and spoke the famous words - 'had you fought like a man, you need not have been hang'd like a dog.'

Anne and Mary were also found guilty,



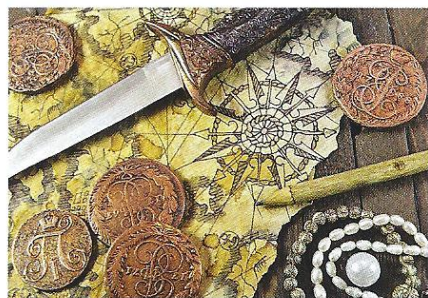
*Pirates spent most of their lives sailing on the high seas*

but both were pregnant and the British law forbade killing an unborn child so their sentences were postponed. It is unknown exactly what happened to them next. Mary is said to have died of a fever in the Spanish Town prison before the birth of her child, although there are those who believe it was a fake death and she was sneaked out of the prison. There is no record of Anne's execution and stories of her fate are plenty.

With so many great characters, it is no surprise that pirates became a feature in books and movies. Hollywood embraced the tales of the sea and created many attributes that are associated with pirates today. Nearly every villainous pirate captain tells someone to walk the plank, but in actual fact pirates were much more likely to throw the victim overboard or engage in keel-hauling. Keel-hauling was a punishment used in the Dutch navy that became strongly linked to pirates. It involves tying a person to a line that looped beneath the ship then throwing them overboard and dragging them under the ship's keel. When pulled quickly, the victim would make contact with the barnacles on

the hull which caused serious cuts, loss of limbs and even decapitation. If they were dragged slowly they could sink enough to avoid that fate but would most likely drown.

Pirates still exist today, although they are quite different to those of the past. Today's pirates, predominantly found around Somalia, use the latest technology likes GPS and satellite phones, and are armed with heavy duty firepower. They make their money by stealing and kidnapping for ransom. The average ransom is around \$120 000. It's a pirate's life for some. ★



*Pirates collected treasure by pillaging and plundering other ships*