PIRATES AND BUCCANEERS

Nearly 400 years ago, in the 17th century, the Caribbean islands became the home of many buccaneers. They were a mixed group of mostly English, French and Dutch men and women. Many of them were shipwrecked and **marooned** off the coast of Hispaniola. They hunted wild boar and cattle, and learnt from the Carib people how to **cure** meat. Curing is a way of preserving meat with salt and spices so that it does not go bad in a hot climate.

The meat was spread in strips over a wooden grate or boucan. This was placed near a slow-burning fire. The heat dried the meat to a fine red colour. It had a delicious taste. The sailors sold the meat (which was also called boucan) to ships that passed by.

This is why they were called **buccaneers**. Later the buccaneers were chased off Hispaniola by the Spaniards. They took to sea and lived by capturing Spanish ships. They also became known as **pirates**.

Over the next one hundred years there were many pirates in the Caribbean. James Johnson was a cabin boy who, without knowing it at the time, joined a pirate ship in New Providence. Here is his story.

A Boy's Story

My dream came true in May 1716, on the day the Vengeance sailed into Nassau. Captain Joe strode ashore, and beckoned me towards him.

He said: 'Ah lad, I see you watch with a longing in your eye as the ships come and go. You've got the sea in your bones. We need a cabin boy, and you're welcome aboard!'

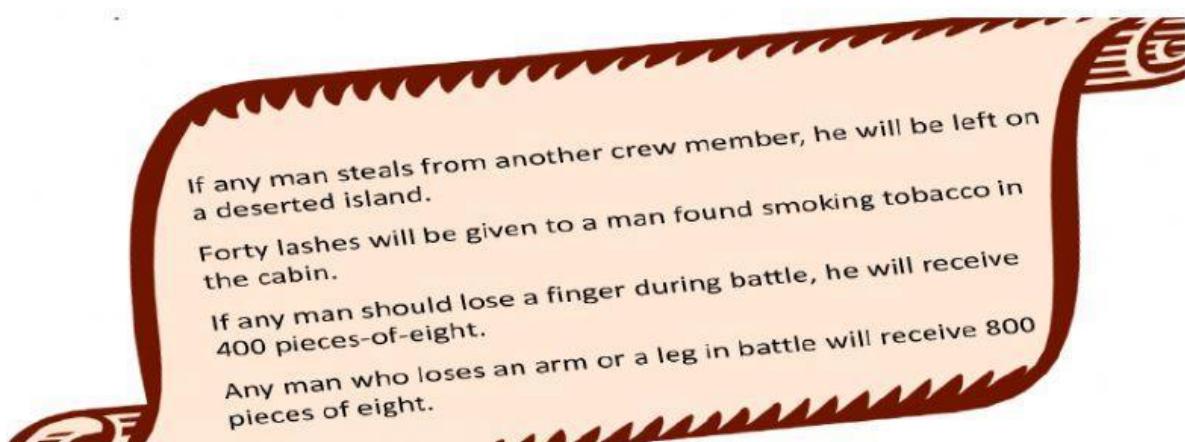*I bid my aunt goodbye and set sail with Captain Joe and his crew that same afternoon.*

As we left the harbour behind us, the crew hoisted the pirate flag, the Jolly Roger – which was sometimes called 'The Banner of King Death'. Only then did I realize that I had joined a pirate ship.

Life on board was frightening and very dangerous. We attacked other ships, seized their goods and treasure, and fought many fierce battles. Suffering, misery and death were a part of our lives. Life on the high seas was not as I'd imagined it would be.

Some pirates had their headquarters in Nassau. The Governors who ruled the islands could not stop their raids. There were too many hiding places for our ships amongst the cays and bays.

Although there was a lot of fighting, we still had to obey the shipboard rules and traditions.

If any man steals from another crew member, he will be left on a deserted island.

Forty lashes will be given to a man found smoking tobacco in the cabin.

If any man should lose a finger during battle, he will receive 400 pieces-of-eight.

Any man who loses an arm or a leg in battle will receive 800 pieces of eight.
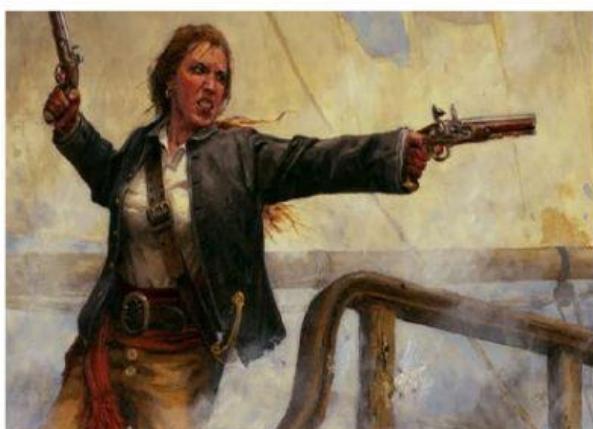
I met three famous pirates. The most frightening was Edward Teach. We all knew him as Blackbeard, and
he struck terror in the hearts of us all. He was a tall man, with long, thick,
dirty black beard tied up with red ribbons. During a battle, he stuck
burning cord in his hair to terrify his enemies. He shouted at his men for no
reason, and no one dared challenge him. He was finally killed in 1718,
during a fierce battle with a government warship.

Can you imagine women as pirates? Anne Bonny and Mary Reade were
pirates who dressed like men – and fought like devils! Anne Bonny was
born in Ireland and moved to America. There she secretly married a sailor, but her father disowned her, and
the sailor left her when he found she had no money. Then she met Captain Jack Rackham, a pirate who was
known as Calico jack. She went to sea with him, and together they captured many ships, stealing the goods
the ships were carrying.

Mary Reade was raised as a boy. She ran away from home an d fought as a soldier in Europe. She did not
find this life very exciting, so she sailed across the Atlantic and joined Calico Jack's ship. One day the ship
was ambushed by government vessels. Anne Bonny and Mary Reade both fought bravely alongside the
men, but finally they were captured. Both of the women should have been hanged, but Anne was saved
because she was pregnant. Mary died of fever in prison.

Another pirate I heard about but never met was Stede bonnet. He was an army officer who became a pirate
with a ship called the Revenge. He filled it with guns and men, and told everyone he was going trading
among the islands. Instead he terrorized the Caribbean, stealing and burning as he went. Then he sailed
north to Virginia where he met Blackbeard, who took over the Revenge for a time. Bonnet was finally
captured by government forces and hanged.

Anne Bonny

Mary Reade