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BUCCANEER'S FLAGSHIP FOUND IN CARIBBEAN 24.05.04

The final resting place of the flagship of legendary buccaneer Henry Morgan is believed to have been found in a relatively shallow part of the Caribbean

The Oxford blew up with Morgan aboard off Haiti in 1669 as the government-sanctioned pirate celebrated the capture of two French vessels. Morgan himself survived. More than three centuries on, in just 12 feet of water off Ile a Vache, near Haiti, wreckage of what is thought to be the Oxford has been discovered by divers working with a television documentary team. The ship was sent to the Caribbean in 1668 by the Government to protect British interests in Jamaica, which Morgan promptly did with great relish, raiding and pillaging as he went. But as he celebrated the capture of two French warships the following year, a spark from a pig roast on Oxford's deck ignited the ship's magazine. Her bow was blown off and the force of the blast threw Morgan – who was officially Admiral in Chief of the Confederacy of Buccaneers – through his cabin window and into the Caribbean. Oxford, a 26-gun frigate, sank, reportedly taking the booty from Morgan's pirate raids with her. The two captured warships tied alongside capsized and went down with Oxford. Six years later Morgan returned to the spot, supposedly to recover the loot, but was shipwrecked in a storm – and survived again. “When I saw the reef littered with cannons and thousands of artefacts it was the most extraordinary sight in all my years of diving,” said diver Rick Haupt, whose research led to Oxford's discovery. “There's little doubt from the cannons, brass fittings and English Naval anchor that this is the Oxford.” Whether there is treasure down there or not, the divers are determined that the site is not plundered by modern-day raiders; they are looking to have it listed by the United Nations, not least because 350 men are entombed in the wreckage. “While Oxford resembles a large coral reef with cannons, it's still awe-inspiring,” said documentary maker Paul Calverley. “The discovery is of real historical significance, particularly to the Caribbean.” Morgan was eventually knighted and appointed Deputy Governor of Jamaica. When he died on the island in 1688 – after a drinking binge, true to his buccaneering roots – he was given a state funeral. The discovery of the wreck will be broadcast in a documentary produced by Channel 4's Welsh-language station S4C, which will also be broadcast on national TV later this year.