



Divers close in on Pirate King's treasure

By Adam Sherwin

THE wreck of a British warship captured by the 17th-century privateer Sir Henry Morgan has been discovered off the coast of Haiti.

HMS *Oxford*, a frigate sent by the British Government to defend Jamaica in 1669, was destroyed in an explosion that killed 350 sailors while Captain Morgan dined in the great cabin. The swashbuckling adventurer — a national hero to others — escaped, but the vessel, said to be laden with booty from his expeditions, with treasure reputedly stuffed inside one of the cannons, was sunk.

A team of divers who pieced together the ship's location from contemporary accounts believe that they have identified the remains of the 150t *Oxford*.

"There is little doubt from the cannons, brass fittings and English naval anchor that this is the *Oxford*," Rick Haupt, leader of the team, said.

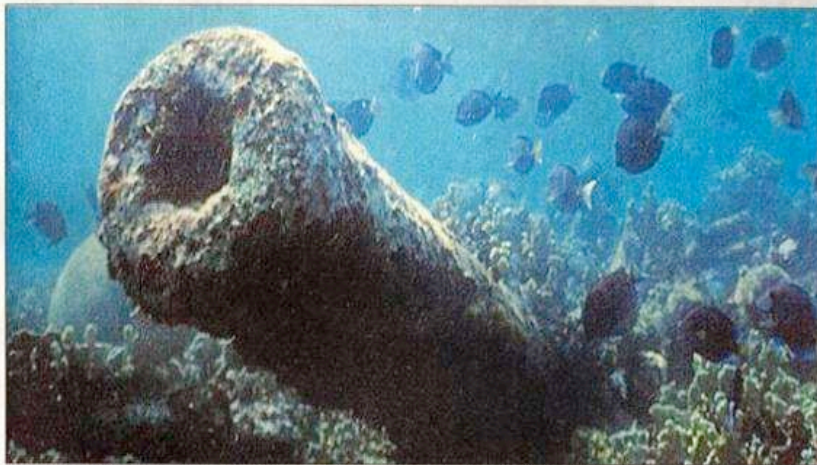
The divers braved 30ft waves, as well as the chaos surrounding the removal of Haiti's former President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, to complete the expedition.

They filmed the search for a documentary to be screened by the Welsh language channel S4C, with an ITV screening to follow.

So far they have discovered cannons, dragger handles, muskets, musket balls and powder barrels in the water. Archaeologists will this week be invited to carbon date the findings and confirm that the wreck is the *Oxford*.

But Mr Haupt, 54, a German diver who identified a series of historic wrecks off the Canadian coast with his Oceans Discovery team, believes that the ship has more secrets to give up.

"There must be treasure down there," he said. "Why was Morgan so desperate to re-



A cannon from HMS *Oxford*, which sank off the Haitian coast 350 years ago under the command of Captain Sir Henry Morgan, right. The wreck lies only 12 feet beneath the waves

cover his ship?" Captain Morgan had become a licensed privateer acting for the British Government, raiding Spanish colonial outposts in Cuba and Panama and helping to secure Jamaica from attack. He chose the wealthiest cities to attack and did not flinch from using rape and torture to terrify their inhabitants into handing over their possessions.

Historians record that Captain Morgan and his hard-drinking crew were celebrating the capture of two French warships aboard the *Oxford*, which was anchored near L'Île à Vache off the coast of Haiti, when disaster struck. A spark from a pig roast on the deck of the *Oxford* is said to have ignited the forward magazine, blowing off the front third of the ship.

Captain Morgan was catapulted through the window of his cabin. The two captured French warships

captured on top of *Oxford* and the ship went down, killing 350 men.

Captain Morgan survived, and made off in another captured French vessel, *Le Cerf Volant*. He returned to Haiti in

search of his sunken vessel in 1675 in the *Jamaica Merchant*, but that ship sank in a hurricane. Its remains were discovered three years ago by Mr Haupt.

In February, Mr Haupt and

his partner, Bruce Leeming, identified the likely resting place of the *Oxford* from detailed listings of the whereabouts of British vessels held in Port Royal, Jamaica.

Captain Morgan sailed with

a ten-strong flotilla, so the team eliminated areas that would have been unsuitable for such a large fleet. Sailing from Jamaica in two catamarans, the team discovered the *Oxford* lying in waters only



waves. When I saw the whole reef littered with cannons and thousands of artefacts tumbling from the deep it was the most extraordinary sight in all my years of diving. Black clouds of powder spiralled off one of the cannons when I scratched it with my knee."

Oceans Discovery is now asking Unesco to designate the area a World Heritage Site to protect the *Oxford* from modern-day pirates.

Discovering the ship was a naval exploit worthy of Captain Morgan himself. Mr Haupt said: "We sailed right into the deposing of President Aristide."

"A French warship stopped us and said we were mad to go into Haiti. Armed rebels were commandeering any vessel they could find to get Aristide's supporters out. Fortunately, we have friends from previous expeditions in L'Île à Vache who looked after us."

Paul Calverley, the producer of the S4C documentary, said: "The discovery of HMS *Oxford* is an event of real historical significance, particularly to the Caribbean."

"It's also one of the greatest finds a diver could have."

The documentary will be broadcast in English and Welsh later this year.

Captain Morgan was the toast of brigands

REGARDED by historians as the greatest buccaneer, Captain Henry Morgan laid waste to the Spanish Main in a series of audacious raids (Adam Sherwin writes).

The "pirate king", born in Monmouthshire in 1635, could "swear, curse, drink and whore with the best of them in many a den of murder, or lead a bunch of desperadoes through hostile jungles and fever-ridden swamps", according to the Jamaican historian Clinton Black.

He was first sent to sea by Oliver Cromwell in an ill-fated expedition to capture Spanish territories. One of his most notorious raids was in 1668 when he took Puerto Bello in Panama using captured nuns and priests to

shield his crew. So much coin was plundered that the Spanish pieces of eight became an additional legal currency in Jamaica, Captain Morgan's base.

In August 1670 he caused a diplomatic furore when he captured Panama City despite a peace treaty between England and Spain. He was arrested and transported to London but when relations with Spain deteriorated, Charles II knighted him and sent him back to Jamaica as deputy governor. He proved an astute politician and able planter.

Captain Morgan richly deserved the brand of rum named after him and died of dropsy and alcoholic excess in 1688. He was given a state funeral in Jamaica.