

## Captain Morgan's Treasure

Divers close in on Pirate King's treasure  
By Adam Sherwin

THE wreck of a British warship captained 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 the Welsh, a pirate captain 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 150ft 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 ITV1 screening to follow.

So far they have discovered cannons, drawer handles, muskets, musket balls and powder barrels in the water. Archaeologists will be invited this week 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 recover 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 capsized 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 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 12ft deep. Mr Haupt said: "Even though the waters are shallow they are far too treacherous for amateur divers. We were pounded to hell by 45-knot winds and 30ft 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, who was later sent to Jamaica by Charles II as deputy governor, and after whom the brand of rum is named. 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 this year.