

Gow the Pirate

3rd Nov 1724

The *Caroline* - sailing from Amsterdam to Genoa
Down to Santa Cruz - 1st night out
Officers murdered - rest of the crew imprisoned in the Great Cabin

John Gow (28) becomes Captain
Captives released - to obey Gow's orders
Spare cannon brought on deck, ship renamed *Revenge* - needed victims

Gow - son of a Stromness merchant with Caithness connections
supposed to have run off to sea
attachment to Thurso girl, but her father had arranged a marriage for her and refused to allow her to break it

Earlier in 1724 Gow sounded out sailors on another ship about piracy but got no support

Piracy

12th Nov - *Delight* (Poole) en route to Newfoundland with fish
crew imprisoned, equipment taken, ship sunk

21st Nov *Sarah* (Scottish) en route to Genoa with fish

1st Dec *Batchelor* (American) timber
took provisions - sent ship off with crew of *Delight* on board

27th Dec *Lewis Joseph* - wine and fruit
captains and crews of the *Sarah* and *Batchelor* dispatched on her

6th Jan *Triumvirate* (Bristol) fish
seized two cannons, small arms, sails, cables, spoons, rum, brandy & water

The remaining prisoners were put on board the *Triumvirate*, which sailed to Lisbon and handed over the prisoners to a British man-o-war

Sailed to Orkney

Why? 1. Needed to leave Spanish coast to avoid capture
2. Not enough food to cross Atlantic

Did not sail as pirates - changed ship's name to *George* and passed as a merchant ship bound from Cadiz to Stockholm

Arrived mid-January in Stromness

Gow and pirates welcomed - no questions asked - smuggling and piracy common
Traded with Scottish and Swedish ships in the harbour

Unfortunately for the pirates - the *Margaret* was in Stromness - had been next to the *Caroline* in Amsterdam - a sailor told Captain Watt all that had happened

1st Feb Watt told the local authorities all about the pirates
10 seamen escaped in ship's longboat - stayed overnight in the Flow -
rowed to Caithness - headed south to Glasgow, Banff and Aberdeen
Another sailor, Robert Read, escaped and warned a local farmer, who
warned others and gave Read a horse to get to Kirkwall

The *George* was now undermanned so more sailors were rounded up in Stromness

10th Feb Hall of Clestrain in Orphir raided - home of sheriff, Mr Honeyman -
he was in Kirkwall discussing how to deal with the pirates
His wife hid their money in the folds of her dress
Their daughter escaped through an upstairs window
The pirates got £7 and a few spoons

11th Feb Kirkwall magistrates summoned townsmen to "meet before the
Tolbooth with their best arms"

Gow sailed through the North Isles - there was no knowledgeable pilot - grounded
on the Calf of Eday - the longboat was gone so they had no boat to move anchor

13th Feb Message sent to James Fea, who had gone to school with Gow
Fea knew navy ships were on the way
Fea sabotaged the only boat big enough to carry the *George's* anchor
Hid all smaller boats and their sails - sent for help

In the afternoon the pirates who were sent to get help were met peacefully and
entertained until they could be easily captured - their leader was taken to meet

Mrs Fea and was also captured

14th Feb The *George* was grounded even more severely when two of the enforced crewmen cut the anchor cable at the wrong time

Gow now wanted boats to take off cargo and lighten the ship

17th Feb Exchange of letters between Gow and Fea - meetings - Gow and other leaders captured - rest of the pirates taken easily and transferred to Shapinsay

HMS *Weasel* arrived - *Revenge* was refloated - HMS *Greyhound* arrived

Fea claimed salvage - accompanied the pirates south

£1000 - government reward

£300 - salvage

£400 from London merchants

Pirates claimed he'd stolen from the ship

Enemies accused him of dishonour as he had captured Gow when under a flag of truce - that he was jealous and a Jacobite

There were many lawsuits which cost him a lot of money

Trial & Execution

Gow would not plead

He was tortured with thumbscrews - did not work

He was then pressed (weights laid on his chest)

His execution took place at the dock at Wapping - washed by three tides

He had to be hanged twice - the rope broke

The leaders were tarred and hung in chains as a warning to other pirates