

The recent discovery of the wreck of an old ship on the bottom of the ocean near the coast of North Carolina has revived interest in the colorful character who was the ship's last captain. The ship is believed to be the *Queen Anne's Revenge*, which sank in 1718. Her captain, who was the most frightful pirate of his days, was called Blackbeard, whose real name was Edward Teach. He had been a sailor on British ships in the Caribbean during Queen Anne's War (1702-1713). These ships were often involved in attacks on French and Spanish ships in the region and were allowed to keep a percentage of whatever they captured from these enemies of the queen.

All this changed in 1713 when the European powers declared peace and the war ended. Teach and hundreds of other sailors had to choose between returning to unemployment in Britain or continuing to do what they knew best, only as pirates. They started as small groups in small boats, attacking and robbing merchant ships, and eventually took control of larger ships which had the speed and power to dominate the trade routes in and near the Caribbean.

When they captured a large French ship, which they renamed *the Queen Anne's Revenge*, Blackbeard and his crew finally had a true pirate ship, 80 feet long, with three masts and more than three dozen cannons. Blackbeard soon learned that a terrible reputation, a pirate flag and some warning shots from his cannons were all that he needed to stop most ships without a fight.

In contemporary accounts, Blackbeard is described as a 'demon from hell', whose huge black beard was twisted into long tails and who carried several guns and swords in belts slung across both shoulders.

Blackbeard's reign of terror lasted until 1718 when he was killed in a sea battle with two British ships which had been sent to put an end to piracy in the region. After his death, Blackbeard became a romantic figure and stories about his daring adventures and tales of secret buried treasure helped create the popular image of pirates we still have today.