

Chapter 11

Harry Takes A Wife



1 - SIR HENRY MORGAN | BY FREDERICK HENDRIK VAN HOVE

BY THE TIME OF his return to the Point, flush with victory over the Spaniards at Grenada, Harry Morgan was a celebrity with an enthusiastic following among the Brethren of the Coast and bonds of friendships among prominent and influential islanders. Of course, Morgan was one of the “old guard,” one of Venables’s originals from 1655 who together had endured hardship and deprivations of the kind that bind men in friendships that last a lifetime. He had many such friends, including two future brothers-in-law, Robert Byndloss and Henry Archbould who were both well-to-do planters on the island.

We do not know if Morgan was expecting his uncle, Sir Edward, to come out to Jamaica in 1664, but one supposes the news pleased him. He would also have been pleased to find he now had six cousins living on the island. However, whatever pleasure he took from their company would soon be interrupted, for the Morgan family received belated news that Sir Edward had died in action during the taking of St. Eustatius earlier that summer.

Morgan was left with six cousins, all minors, to be concerned about. The orphaned girls would surely find husbands, for there was always a shortage of white women on the island and no shortage of white men to marry them. In the meantime, however, Sir Edward’s children required protection and sound council, both of which Harry Morgan could and presumably did offer.

Morgan was undoubtedly pleased and would surely have approved when he learned later that year that Sir Edward's eldest surviving daughter, Anna Petronella, would become the wife of his friend, Major Robert Byndloss. Byndloss had been a member for Cagway in the first House of Assembly. Now, he was the current commander of Fort Charles and a member of the Jamaica Council. Byndloss also owned a fine 2000-acre estate in the Vale of St. Thomas. Shortly thereafter, Harry Morgan himself married Sir Edward's second surviving daughter, Mary Elizabeth. We do not know the date of their marriage, but it probably took place at Port Royal. Unfortunately, that parish's register of marriages for that time has been lost. The parish records for St. Catherine parish do survive, however, and they show that, some six years later, on the 30 Nov 1671, Joanna Wilhelmina, Sir Edward Morgan's third surviving daughter was married to the much older Colonel Henry Archbould, also a member of the Council and the owner of one of the largest estates on the island.

England was still at war with the Dutch, so there must have been pressure on Morgan to return to duty as an officer in the Port Royal militia. And, although the record is not clear on this, a contemporary account claims he joined with Edward Mansfield in an attempt on the Dutch at Curaçao in the autumn of 1665. It is debatable whether this actually occurred for Morgan and his family would still be in mourning after the death of Sir Edward. Furthermore, his orphaned cousins were all minors, with only

20-year-old Charles Morgan to head up the family in Harry Morgan's absence. Besides, one would expect that Harry would require several weeks to recover from his prolonged expedition. One might also expect him to have affairs to arrange and settle. We must remember that he had become a man of some means, though perhaps not yet wealthy. He had received a land-grant for his army service, so he had a plantation to manage. Moreover, he had marriage plans to make, and he'd want to spend as much time as he could with his new wife.

Nevertheless, the 17th Century *History of the Buccaneers* does state that Edward Mansfield selected Morgan as his second in command of the Brethren of the Coast, and that Morgan accompanied the old buccaneer to Old Providence. These stories have been repeated by several later chroniclers, but I question their accuracy.

Whether or not Morgan was involved, Modyford commissioned Edward Mansfield, as admiral, to lead 600 buccaneers against Curaçao in the autumn of 1665. In addition to his privateer commission, Modyford had granted against the Dutch, Mansfield held a Portuguese letter-of-marque against Spain. So, convinced there was little chance of booty in Curaçao, the buccaneer admiral chose instead to attack Spanish targets. Many Jamaica-based buccaneers were Dutch. David Martien and Edward Mansfield himself, whose real name was Mansvelt, were examples. Several other buccaneers had personal ties with other Dutchmen. It is not surprising, therefore, that

they were reluctant to go against the Dutch colonies. So, it should not surprise us that, instead of attacking the less profitable Curaçao per his instructions from Modyford, Mansfield would use his Portuguese letter-of-marque and lead his force against the Spanish Main.

In November, Colonel Theodore Cary returned from Sir Edward Morgan's ill-fated campaign against the Dutch at St. Eustatius and Saba. From Cary, Modyford learned that a raid on Cuba was being planned by the buccaneers. Having received the King's proclamation against such actions, the governor could not condone this and directed William Beeston to take three or four privateers still at the Point and search for Mansfield's squadron. Modyford gave Beeston instructions to dissuade the buccaneers from their Cuban project and induce them to attack a Dutch target instead.

However, after seeking Mansfield's squadron without success for six weeks, Beeston abandoned his search and returned to the Pont. In his journal, Beeston wrote:

“this parcell [sic] of ships and privateers were commanded by Mansell, [Mansfield] and he cared for dealing with no enemy but the Spaniards, nor would go against Curacao, neither were any of them taken notice of for plundering the Spaniards, it being what was desired by the generality, as well the government as privateers.”

The name William Beeston is mentioned several times in our story, for not only did he play a part in the actions covered, but he kept a handy journal which survives to this day. Beeston, who was born at Titchfield in Hampshire in 1636, arrived in Jamaica in May 1660. In 1664 he was elected as a member for Port Royal to Jamaica's first house of assembly, and in December of the same year, he was made Judge of the Court of Common Pleas. Beeston also served as an officer in the Port Royal militia.

While Beeston searched in vain for him, Mansfield was landing on the south coast of Cuba with the alleged intention of purchasing provisions. But when the Spaniards refused to deal with the buccaneers, he led his army against the Cuban town of *Sancti Spiritus*. After marching between 200 and 300 buccaneers 42 miles inland, Mansfield "routed a body of 200 horse" and sacked the town. With *Sancti Spiritus* in flames, the buccaneers rounded up several dozen prisoners and marched them back to their boats. Later, they ransomed the prisoners for 300 much-needed cattle, which the Cubans delivered to their ships anchored off the coast.

During Mansfield's raid, Morgan appears to have stayed home and resumed his responsibilities as an officer in the volunteer Port Royal Militia. Records show that in early 1666, he was promoted to the rank of colonel. And, when Governor Modyford realized how rundown the Point's defences had become, it was to his new friend Harry

Morgan that he turned, assigning him to supervise the repair and expansion of the harbour defences.

In early 1665, Modyford had made his concerns regarding the island's future known to Albemarle in London. Acting as chairman of the *Committee of the Privy Council on the affairs of Jamaica*, the duke had written to Modyford later that year giving him permission to grant commissions against the Spaniards at his discretion, "as should seem most to the advantage of the King's service and the benefit of the island." However, the governor had not exercised his discretion very often, for he still hoped he could convince his Spanish neighbours to trade with his colony. The Spaniards had been slow to reciprocate, and now he feared they never would.

Meanwhile, the decision to shut down private actions against Spanish targets took a huge toll on the Point. As buccaneers drifted off to other sanctuaries, mainly Tortuga, fewer vessels visited the Point to be refitted and supplied. The population was in decline, and the need for tradesmen of different stripes diminished to the point that many in the town were unemployed and destitute. To punctuate this general decline, the manpower of the volunteer-militia regiment had shrunk from 600 to about 150.

The colony sorely missed the plunder—the coin, bullion, cocoa, logwood, hides, tallow, indigo, cochineal, etc.—the privateers had regularly brought in to be sold to

residents of Jamaica at irresistible prices. Local planters suffered too, for many of them relied on income from the provisions they sold to the private men-of-war. Bertrand d'Ogeron, the French governor of the buccaneer colony of Tortuga, made matters even worse. Believing that France would soon declare war against England, he was making a bid to attract the Jamaican privateers to his island. He offered them Portuguese letters-of-marque to use against Spain as an enticement, France having made peace with Spain. Many found his inducement irresistible, for it offered a means to continue plundering Spain's settlements and doing it legally.

Modyford had hoped that he could retain 1,000 to 1,500 buccaneers at the Point, thereby ensuring the town's viability and the protection of his island colony. Unfortunately, his inducement was letters-of-marque against the Dutch and Mansfield's recent behaviour dispelled any hopes the governor had of that happening.

However, the clear and present threat posed by Spain had not diminished so far as the governor was concerned. Modyford remained convinced preparations were being made in Cuba to send a large force to retake Jamaica. Furthermore, Spain continued taking English ships and treating captured Englishmen as common pirates, even when it was apparent, they sought only to engage in trade. Former captives who had gained their release or engineered their escape told chilling accounts of their mistreatment at the hands of the Spaniards. What's more, news often

reached the island of Englishmen held under appalling conditions in Spanish prisons. Making matters worse, the subjects of these accounts frequently had friends or family at the Point, and they craved retaliation against the Spaniards.

Such reports were nothing new, for the governor had been hearing such things since taking up his appointment in 1664. They did, though, illustrate how ineffective his policy had been of markedly reducing the number of privateer commissions. Clearly, Jamaica was no closer to free trade with its Spanish neighbours than when he arrived on the island.

We get some appreciation of the governor's frustration with the *status quo* from paragraph 12 of a resolution of the Council of Jamaica in favour of resuming the granting of letters-of-marque against the Spaniards. The resolution passed unanimously and was entered in the Minutes of a meeting of 22 Feb 1666:

12. It seems to be the only means to force the Spaniards in time to a free trade, all ways of kindness producing nothing of good neighbourhood, for though all old commissions have been called in and no new ones granted, and many of their ships restored, yet they continue all acts of hostility, taking our ships and murdering our people, making them work at their fortifications and then sending them into Spain, and very lately they denied an English fleet, bound for the Dutch colonies, wood, water, or provisions. For which reasons it was unanimously concluded

that the granting of said commissions did extraordinarily conduce to the strengthening, preservation, enriching, and advancing the settlement of this island. [Source: Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies, No. 1138, Minutes of the Council of Jamaica.]

After Beeston's return, Modyford employed Colonel Cary to find Mansfield and once again try convincing him to attack Curaçao. Dutch forces had recovered St. Eustatius and Saba, but Captains Searle and Stedman had taken Tobago. Accordingly, Cary met with Mansfield and his captains on one of the Cays south of Cuba. He left the meeting with the belief the buccaneer captains had agreed unanimously to undertake the mission. Back in Jamaica, Cary reported to Modyford that the buccaneers had again chosen Edward Mansfield as their admiral and had sailed towards Curaçao. And further that they had even given him a letter to deliver to Modyford, "*professing much zeal in his Majesty's service and a firm intention to attack Curacao.*"

After reading the letter, Modyford observed, "*They [buccaneers] are much wasted in numbers, many being gone to the French, where Portugal commissions are of force against the Spaniard.*"

The governor heard nothing further from Mansfield until two of the ships that had sailed with him arrived at the Point. They reported the admiral's failure to accomplish anything against the Dutch. The report claimed that

Curaçao might have been taken, but “*the private soldiers aboard the Admiral were against it, averring that there was more profit with less hazard to be gotten against the Spaniard, which was their only interest.*”

Also reported was the news that after Mansfield’s buccaneer army had made an abortive attempt on the Costa Rican town of *Cartago*, he had set out to capture *Providencia*—an island off the coast of Central America known to many as “Old Providence.”

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