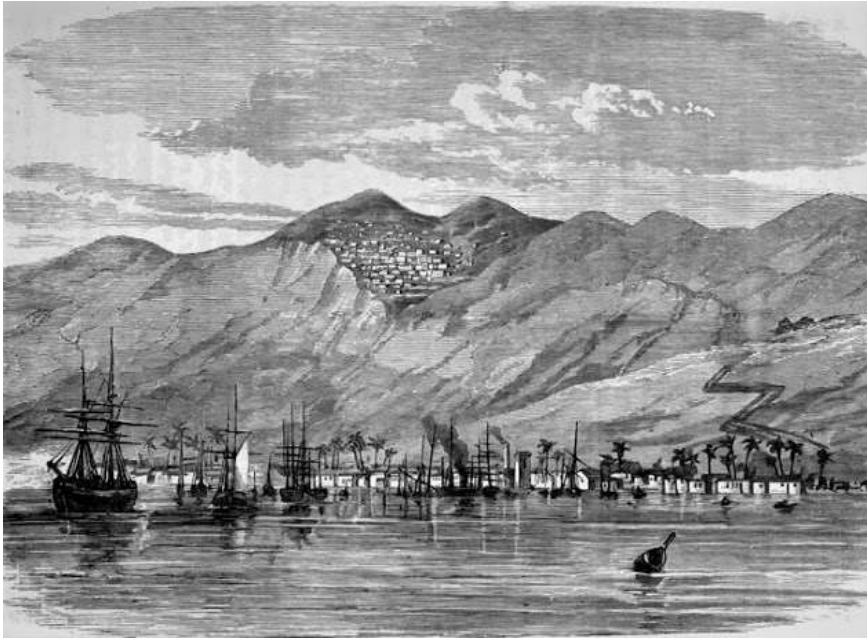


Chapter 13.1

Raid on Portobello, part II



Kingston Harbour, Jamaica
From *The Sea Its Stirring Story of Adventure Peril & Heroism*
by Frederick Whympere

Admiral Morgan's commission from Governor Modyford, under which he had sailed to Portobello, allowed plunder taken on land to be shared only among himself and his men. Only prizes and their contents taken at sea were subject to deductions of the fifteenths, tenths, etc. These had to be condemned by the Admiralty Court at Port Royal before they could be liquidated and the proceeds shared out.

There was almost certainly some individual looting, but this was probably limited as one might expect each

privateer would want to make sure he received a fair share and would not tolerate his associates taking more than they properly deserved. However, some evidence does support the practice of an entire company pre-sharing a portion of the plunder before reporting the official tally from which the king, etc., would deduct their share. So it is likely that Morgan's privateers did very well indeed for a few months' work. Dangerous work, without question, but such men were used to danger and seldom shrank from it. Simple arithmetic suggests that each share of the plunder and ransom was about 600 pesos or £150, a considerable sum worth several years' pay for a 17th-century soldier or seaman.

Most accounts claim that the spoil's sharing-out was done in the cays south of Cuba, after which Morgan returned to Jamaica in triumph, arriving there in mid-August 1668. Some days after his return, Admiral Morgan and his senior officers appeared before Sir Thomas Modyford and gave their account of the events at Portobello. Morgan's verbal report (reproduced below) was written down and sent to Lord Arlington in London. This is the source of most English accounts of the Portobello raid, and seems more reliable than John Esquemeling's more fanciful version.

Admiral Henry Morgan's official report to Governor Sir Thomas Modyford

(with spelling and place names unchanged)

Source: *Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies*, No. 1838,
Information of Admiral Henry Morgan and his officers,
Port Royal, 7th September, 1668.

Setting sail in May last, we fell in with the coast of Porto Bello, and being informed of levies made there also against Jamaica, and also by some prisoners who had made their escape from Providence that Prince Maurice and divers Englishmen were kept in irons in the dungeon of the castle of the town, we thought it our duty to attempt that place. The French wholly refused to join in an action so full of danger; so leaving our ships on June 26, forty leagues to leeward at Bogota, we took to our canoes, twenty-three in number, and rowing along the coast, landed at three o'clock in the morning and made our way into the town, and seeing that we could not refresh ourselves in quiet we were enforced to assault the castle, which we took by storm, and found well supplied with ammunition and provisions, only undermanned, being about 130 men, whereof seventy-four were killed, among whom the Castellano was one. In the dungeon were found eleven English in chains who had been there two years; and we were informed that a great man had been carried thence six months before to Lima of Peru, who was formerly brought from Porto Rico, and also that the Prince of Monte Circa had been there with orders from the King of Spain to raise 2,200 men against us out of the Province of Panama, which Porto Bello stands in, the certainty whereof was confirmed by all the Grandees. The Governor of the second castle refusing to permit our ships free entrance into the port, we were forced to attempt the taking of it, which ended in the delivering up the castle and marching out with colours flying, and the third castle immediately surrendered to five or six Englishmen. And now having possession of the town and three castles, in the former were 900 men that bare arms, the fifth day arrived

the President of Panama, with about 3,000 men; whom we beat off with considerable damage, in so much that next day he proffered 100,000 pieces of eight for delivery of the town and castles in as good condition as we found them. In the first castle there were 30 brass guns besides iron, in the second 13, all brass, and in the third 14 guns. On the 2d August, making the best of our way homewards, we arrived at Jamaica about the middle of that month; only Captain Edward Collier put on shore in the Bay of Cordivant, within four leagues of Santa Marta, for provisions, and had the good luck to take the Governor's kinsman prisoner, from whom he had again information of the strong intention of the Spaniard against Jamaica as also of the revolt of the Indians, their taking of Monposse and putting to the sword men, women, and children, and intending to surprise Santa Fe, and further that there was found the richest gold mine in the King of Spain's dominions, for keeping which they were fortifying strongly at Santa Marta.

We further declare to the world that in all this service of Porto Bello, we lost but eighteen men killed and thirty-two wounded, and kept possession of the place thirty-one days; and for the better vindication of ourselves against the usual scandals of that enemy, we aver that having several ladies of great quality and other prisoners, they were proffered their liberty to go to the President's camp, but they refused, saying they were now prisoners to a person of quality, who was more tender of their honours than they doubted to find in the President's camp among his rude Panama soldiers, and so voluntarily continued with us till

the surrender of the town and castles, when with many thanks and good wishes they repaired to their former homes.

In his report to Modyford, Harry Morgan mentioned news of Prince Maurice (1620–52). He was the younger brother of Prince Rupert of the Rhine and a first cousin of King Charles II. While sailing near the Virgin Islands in September 1652, Prince Maurice went down in *HMS Defiance* during a hurricane. Rumours that he had survived the storm and was imprisoned in Porto Rico, persisted for many years, however.

Governor Sir Thomas Modyford remained more convinced than ever that, to ensure Jamaica's safety from a Spanish attack in force, he must use the privateers to keep the Spaniards on their heels. He had received a letter, dated 2 Feb 1667, from the Duke of Albemarle approving his strategy:

And for your giving commissions to the privateers [against the Spaniards], I think you have done pursuant to your own instructions and orders sent you, until there shall be some other alternative of these orders. [Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies, No. 193, i. Enclosure in letter of 23rd August, 1669.]

On 1 Oct 1668, Modyford again wrote to his cousin the duke and explained that although Morgan had raided two Spanish *towns* with “commissions only against *ships*,” his actions were justified because:

It is most certain that the Spaniards had full intention to attempt this island [Jamaica], but could not get men; and they still hold the same minds, and therefore I cannot but presume to say that

it is very unequal that we should in any measure be restrained while they are at liberty to act as they please upon us, from which we shall never be secure until the King of Spain acknowledges this island to be his Majesty's and so includes it by name in the capitulations. [Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies, No. 1850, Modyford to Albemarle, 1st October, 1668.]

Along with his letter to Albemarle, Modyford enclosed Francisco Martin's deposition (discussed below). Martin



Henry Bennet, 1st Earl of
Arlington

was a Spanish seaman, who reported the fate of Modyford's missing son John who had been missing and presumed lost at sea four years earlier. He said John "*was questionless either murdered or sent into the South Seas by these [Spaniards], our cruel neighbours.*" Modyford concluded by urging his cousin, "*so to present my behaviour in this great affair, that no sinister construction may be put upon my*

actions." [Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies, No. 1859, ii. Declaration of Francisco Martin, 12th September, 1668.]

Modyford's privateer strategy must have suited Harry Morgan well. Morgan, with the governor's blessing, set about assembling a semi-permanent force with which he could launch successive attacks designed to keep the Spaniards reeling.



About Modyford's son: When Modyford arrived in Jamaica to take up his post as governor, his wife Lady Elizabeth had remained in England. Sir Thomas dispatched his eldest son, John, with Captain Swart's frigate *Griffin*, to bring his wife to Jamaica. Months passed, then years, without news of either the ship or his son. Around the time Morgan returned from Portobello, Major Samuel Smith, who Modyford had appointed commander of the garrison on Providence Island in 1666, finally returned to Jamaica. That was on 18 Aug 1668. Smith had endured nearly two years of ill-treatment in Spanish prisons.

He had sailed to Providence Island aboard Sir Thomas Whetstone's ship and took up his post there. At that time, he had only 51 men fit enough to defend five of the colony's six forts. Still, he fully expected he'd receive additional manpower in due course so the King's latest West Indian colony could be adequately defended. However, unbeknownst to Major Smith, Don Juan Perez de Guzmán, President of Panamá had received the news of Edward Mansfield's seizure of Spain's *Santa Catalina* colony and acted with surprising quickness. He chose José Sánchez Jiménez, *sargento mayor* of the Portobello garrison and a trusted colleague he had brought from Puerto Rico, to lead an expedition to reclaim *Santa Catalina*.

When the Spaniards attacked in force, Major Smith's men resisted for three days. Finally, however, after having been driven out of four of the forts, he agreed to surrender,

“... upon articles of good quarter, which the Spaniards did not in the least perform, for the English, about forty, were immediately made prisoners, and all except Sir Thomas Whetstone, myself, and Captain Stanley, who were the commanders, were forced to work in irons and chains at the Spaniards’ forts, with many stripes, and many are since dead through want and ill usage. The said three commanders were sent to Panama, where they were cast into a dungeon and bound in irons for seventeen months.”

According to Peter Earle’s account in *The Sack of Panamá*, José Sánchez Jiménez reported to President Guzmán that Major Smith surrendered on condition of “*el quartel de la vida*,” granting his and his men’s lives only. But this was certainly not what the Englishmen had intended or understood the terms to mean. They fully expected they would be treated as the former Spanish colonists had been in 1666 when the old privateer Admiral Edward Mansfield had granted them safe conduct and had landed them on the Spanish mainland. Smith was eventually sent to Havana, where he “*was clapped into goal*,” but finally liberated and allowed to return to Jamaica.

This is what would really have caught Modyford’s attention, however. Smith reported further that many English prisoners were then “lying in irons” at Havana, and he had been credibly informed that the *Griffin*, commanded by Captain “Swaert,” had been sunk by a Spanish galleon. [Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies, No. 1826, Deposition of Major Samuel Smith, 18th August, 1668.]

Additional news of his son arrived a couple of weeks before Modyford wrote to Albemarle. Francisco Martin, a Spanish seaman, told officials in Jamaica that he had been the master of a frigate and that, in August 1664, two English ships had been wrecked on the coast of Florida with only five men surviving. After living for some months among the Indians, Spanish soldiers who had been searching for them captured the Englishmen and imprisoned them at San Augustin. One of the men was young and “of a pretty gross body, very good face, and light hair somewhat curling.” He called himself John and said his father was governor of Jamaica. The commandant ordered Martin to transport the prisoners to Havana and had given him instructions that they be then put on the first vessel sailing for Spain so that they could return to their own country. However, no means of transportation had been found for them while he was at Havana.

That was the last Sir Thomas heard of his son.

Such stories infuriated Jamaicans and hardened, even more, their hearts against the Spaniards who had treated their countrymen so dishonourably. One can only guess at Modyford’s personal view of the Spaniards when he learned of his son’s fate at their hands. Moreover, Major Smith’s report played into the hands of those who believed in the philosophy, “there’d be no peace beyond the line.” Regardless of the current status of the relationship between England and Spain in Europe, the West Indian colonies, they believed, should continue to be belligerent

so long as Spanish officials obstinately refused to recognize the King of England's sovereignty over Jamaica.

There were prominent merchants in Jamaica—with influential backing from England—who still believed peace and open trade with their Spanish neighbours were possible, desirable, and profitable. And those who actively engaged in such were handsomely rewarded. This group was in the ascendency on the island, and it seemed certain the views of its members would prevail in time. Neither Morgan nor Modyford were among them, however.



The Great Fire of London

When news of Morgan's success at Portobello reached London, it was received as a much-needed morale booster. England's capital had suffered much hardship from two great tragedies in the previous four years.

First there had been the plague of 1664–1665, which had killed over 68,000 people in less than a two-year span. Then early on the morning of Sunday, 2 Sep 1666, a fire started in the house of Charles II's baker on Pudding Lane near London Bridge. It soon spread to warehouses on Thames Street that were filled with combustibles. From there, fueled by a strong easterly wind, it swept through central parts of the city until it was finally extinguished on Wednesday, 5 September.

The fire gutted the medieval City of London inside the old Roman wall, and it threatened—though never reached—the upper-class districts of Westminster and King Charles's Whitehall Palace. The flames consumed as much as 80 percent of the inner city, including 13,200 houses—most of which were wood and pitch construction with thatched roofs, all dangerously flammable. Also destroyed were 84 parish churches, dozens of Guild Halls, St Paul's Cathedral, and most municipal buildings, leaving an estimated 100,000 homeless.

In Henry Morgan, Londoners had a hero to conjure up memories of Sir Frances Drake and the glorious years of Queen Elizabeth's reign. No one seemed inclined to punish Morgan for exceeding his commission when he raided Portobello. Not even the highest levels—not King Charles nor his brother, the Lord High Admiral, nor even the pro-Spanish Lord Arlington, the Secretary of State—showed any desire to sanction him. By all appearances, these great men of England shared overriding objectives: firstly,

Spain's written recognition of England's ownership of Jamaica and Cayman Islands; and secondly, breaking Spain's monopoly on trade with her American colonies. To start with, Spain must grant English ships access to Spanish ports for water, wood and provisions, especially in times of emergency. And if Spain faced more of her richest cities being sacked by Harry Morgan and his buccaneers, perhaps it would be moved to grant such access.

The Spanish Ambassador to England was Antonio Francesca Mexia, Conde de Molina. Even before Portobello, this nobleman had made complaints regarding the actions of the Jamaican privateers. In August 1668, he protested several hostile acts "committed upon the subjects and on the ships and territories of the King of Spain in America." He supplied details, of which we can be sure there was no lack of supply. Molina's complaints were considered by the Privy Council in December 1668 but effectively countered by several examples of Spanish aggression against Englishmen—which Sir Thomas Modyford had helpfully provided to Lord Arlington.

One such was a deposition by Robert Delander, a privateer who said that when his ship was demasted off Cuba's east coast, he had obtained permission to put into Havana to refit. Once in port, the governor ordered his ship confiscated and sold, and his crew sent to Seville as prisoners. They were detained for nine months before some English merchants paid for their release. Besides, even though the English ambassador at Madrid had appealed to the Spanish ministry on behalf of Delander and his crew, other than

the men's freedom, the Spaniards gave no other compensation.

In another deposition, two privateers told how they had been chased by a Spanish ship of war they recognized as the *Griffin*, formerly the Royal Navy vessel commanded by Captain Swart. As previously mentioned, the *Griffin* had mysteriously disappeared on her way to England in 1664.

Two other men described how Captain Edward Beckford had been fired-on by an armed ketch near the South Cays off Cuba's coast. Beckford captured the ketch, and when he arrived at Port Royal, his prize was identified as Alexander Soares' property. Eighteen months earlier, it had sailed from New England and had not been heard of since.

Then too, there was an affidavit made by a Jamaican merchant before the High Court of Admiralty in which he defended Governor Modyford's position regarding Portobello. The merchant was visiting England and advised the Court of Modyford's efforts to renew friendly relations with the Spaniards. He spoke of the polite letters the governor had sent to Spanish leaders immediately after taking up his post as governor, and how he had recalled of all privateers. He also described the capture of a pirate ship, the execution of some of her crew, and the restitution of her two Spanish prizes.

The Privy Council subsequently decided that the Portobello hostilities had occurred either before the treaty

between Spain and England had been ratified or were mutual with both sides being at fault. Accordingly, the two nations should move forward with a proposal for “*a total reciprocal amnesty and oblivion of all that is past, and a settlement of mutual good intelligence for the future, as to kind reception into the harbours and ports, affording all necessary refreshments of wood, water, and victuals for their money.*”

Ambassador Molina must surely have felt frustrated by the polite coolness and lack of specific action his complaints were met with by the English king and his ministers. However, he tried again, giving Lord Arlington even more specifics about the Portobello attack. He referred to the recent arrival of the ship *George and Samuel* from Jamaica. Its bill of lading revealed that, besides what the owners and other merchants received in plate from the Portobello raid, “the share of every soldier was 600oz., or £80 at half a crown per ounce.” The ambassador demanded restitution and that governor Modyford be punished for the breach of the treaty between Spain and England. [Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies, No. 1899, Memorial of the Spanish ambassador, 7-17th January, 1669.]

Again Ambassador Molina’s protests received a polite reception but an irksome lack of action. However, it should be noted that Lord Arlington did sympathize with the Spaniard’s cause. He saw merit in securing a treaty that provided for open trade between his nation and Spanish America. Before he had been ennobled as Lord Arlington and became secretary of state, Henry Bennet had been King Charles’s representative in Spain. This was during

the days of the Commonwealth. He was one of the leaders of a faction that favoured negotiation rather than force. Though, they did acknowledge the threat of force—and occasionally its use—could be persuasive in negotiations. At this time, however, Bennet could not be seen as being overly friendly with Spain. Too many at Court held Harry Morgan in high esteem. Sir Thomas Modyford's strategy for ensuring the safety of his island colony was too much favoured at present. Besides, the very highest circles in London were being tempted by talk of an alliance with France to strip Spain of her American empire.

Those who shared Arlington's views were not without some influence, however. Like the secretary of state, they wanted provocations like the raid on Portobello to end and saw in Modyford a significant impediment to peace with Spain. Among these was Thomas Lynch, a wealthy planter with properties in the parish of St. Thomas-in-the-East.

Lynch had first come to Jamaica with Penn and Venables in 1655. In 1660 he returned to Jamaica after spending time in England and was then described in the *Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies* as a captain. In 1661 he was appointed provost-marshal of the island for life and lieutenant-colonel of the newly created 5th regiment of militia a year later. In April 1663, Lynch was sworn in as a member of the first Council of Jamaica. In April 1664, he was elected president of that body and acted as interim governor for two months. In early 1665, however, Sir Thomas Modyford discharged Lynch from

the Council and the office of chief justice without making his reason public. Lynch complained in a letter to Lord Arlington that Modyford had either punished him for his “uncourtly humour of speaking plain and true,” or the governor had been prejudiced against him by former governor Colonel D’Oyley.

Until his dismissal from office, Thomas Lynch had intended to marry and make Jamaica his home. Instead, he returned to England and was still there during the raid on Portobello. After his return to Europe, Lynch spent a winter or more at Salamanca learning the Spanish language and studying all he could about Spanish America. Following this, he improved his knowledge and practiced his language skills by talking with merchants and others in Salamanca and later in Andalusia.

For some years, Lynch had been the “slaving agent” for the Royal African Company and stood to benefit from trade with Spain, if only the governor would put a stop to the bothersome privateer raids against Spanish America. In time, his experience in Jamaica, along with his newly acquired skills in Spanish, brought him to the attention of those who believed Modyford must soon be replaced. They were looking for someone who saw peaceful trade with Spanish America as a priority for Jamaica.

Thomas Lynch became their man and, later, will feature more prominently in our story.