

Of pirates and privateers

There's a reason why many people may associate the English West Country accent with pirates who swish their swords in Hollywood-inspired pirate films and the like. Cornwall and Devon, known collectively as the West Country, both have far-reaching coastlines rich in secret coves and remote inlets which must once have been the perfect place to hide smuggled goods. These counties are still home to many ports and in centuries past, served as important bases for ships trading with Europe and the wider world.

Historically, the duty of ships launched from the West Country was to pick out and then seize foreign ships heading to or from the Americas. Perhaps this is why many of the sea-faring explorers, often referred to as 'Sea dogs', originated from this region. Gaining fame and fortune, well-known sea-faring explorers such as Francis Drake and Walter Raleigh were often held in high esteem by their peers as well as those in power.

Whilst on the surface, there was little to distinguish the 'privateers' from others involved in acts of piracy, there was, on greater examination, a fundamental difference between the two. Essentially, 'privateers' were seen as discriminate and only ever attacked and raided enemy vessels. As a result, rather than their plundering being covered up, it was instead authorised, even encouraged. Their actions were by and large held in high esteem and considered to be patriotic, benefitting both the monarchy and the c as a whole. As such, any attack by a privateer had government backing and was supported by society.

In contrast, pirates, like Blackbeard from Bristol, did not care whose ships they stole from. Historically, rather than being 'gentlemen' from a wealthier class, as was the case with many of the 'Sea dogs', pirates were often sailors or soldiers who had fallen on hard times and needed a means of survival. Initially their actions were overlooked by the officials whose role it was to enforce the law. However, over time, their indiscriminate looting of ships led to their downfall. After all, their plundering was for selfish gain and not to fund the nation's defences or plans for exploration and expansion of the realm.

Ultimately, when it came to the law and national opinion, privateers and pirates ended up having little in common. It truly was a case of heroes and villains or gentlemen and thieves.

1 Read the text again and summarise the main points about the following.

1 What features of the West Country coastline benefitted anyone wanting to hide stolen goods?

2 Why were ships sent out from the West Country?

3 Give two reasons why privateers were held in high esteem?

4 Why did people often end up becoming pirates?

2 Without looking at the text, see if you can remember the actual word used in the test, to replace the words in brackets with the same meaning.

1 Essentially, 'privateers' were seen as _____ and only ever attacked and raided enemy vessels. (able to recognise a difference between things)

2 As a result, rather than their _____ being covered up, it was instead authorised, even encouraged. (anything stolen or taken by force)

3 Initially the actions of the pirates might have been _____ by the officials whose role it was to enforce the law. (purposely ignored)

4 However, over time, their indiscriminate looting of ships led to their _____. (ruin or destruction)

3 Complete the table of words from the text with the missing forms.

Verb	Noun		Verb	Noun
associate				examination
refer				backing
authorise				survival
encourage				exploration
enforce				expansion

4 Which verbs from exercise 3 have the following meanings?

- 1 to remain alive _____
- 2 to increase in size or extent _____
- 3 to connect or relate to something _____
- 4 to support someone or something _____
- 5 to make people obey a rule or law _____
- 6 to mention someone or something _____
- 7 to officially allow someone to do something _____
- 8 to promote or inspire someone to do something _____
- 9 to travel through a new or strange place to discover what it is like _____
- 10 to look at something carefully in order to find out or decide something _____

5 Use the correct form of a verb or noun from exercise 3 to complete the sentences. More than one option may be possible.

- 1 Plans to _____ the airport are being opposed by local residents.
- 2 The police admit that it is difficult to _____ laws against texting while driving.
- 3 More government funding is needed if further education is to be _____.
- 4 In preparation for the trip to Borneo, we were sent on a jungle _____ course.
- 5 The programme focused on the health risks _____ with obesity.
- 6 Energy companies are now continuing their _____ of more remote areas of the Arctic.
- 7 We were told not to enter the building until _____ to do so by the fire-fighters.
- 8 Without financial _____ from our bank, we would never have succeeded.
- 9 After _____ the animal, the vet gave it an injection to help ease the pain.
- 10 We were surprised when no _____ was made to the recent funding cuts.

6 Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- Would you say that people generally have a romantic idea about pirates? Why / Why not?
- What do you know about modern-day pirates? Where do they exist?
- How do you think modern pirates differ from those of the past?
- Should modern-day pirates be punished for their actions? How?
- How can piracy at sea be stopped?

Glossary

- cove** (*noun*) - a cave or recess in the shoreline of a sea, lake or river
distinguish (*verb*) - to mark or recognise something or someone as being different
indiscriminate (*adj*) - not selective or making a careful judgement or choice
inlet (*noun*) - a narrow passage between islands or rocks
launch (*verb*) - to set a boat or ship in the water
looting (*noun*) - the taking or stealing of goods by force
sea-faring (*adj*) - travelling by sea as a trade or business enterprise
seize (*verb*) - to take possession of by force
swish (*verb*) - to move or cut through the air with a sharp object; making a slight sound