

AGENDA ITEM No. 9

The story of the Statue

In 1882 a civic delegation from the Mayor of Plymouth arrived in Tavistock to raise funds to erect a statue to Sir Francis Drake on Plymouth Hoe.

Incensed at the idea that the Plymothians were attempting to steal Tavistock's famous son, the worthies of Tavistock led by Rev Edward Spencer headmaster of the Grammar School agreed to start a fund to raise money for a bronze statue of Drake.

Before they could launch their appeal Hastings Russell, the Ninth Duke of Bedford, offered to pay for the statue as a gift to the town.

The Duke commissioned the Austrian born sculptor, Joseph Edgar Boehm (1834 - 1890), who was a member of the Royal Academy and sculptor-in-ordinary to Queen Victoria.

Various sites for the statue in Tavistock were considered, including Bedford Square, the Meadows and Fitzford. Boehm thought that Fitzford would showcase his work to best advantage where it would be within view of Crowndale where Drake was born.

The 10ft high statue, which had been cast in Surrey, came by train to Tavistock on Friday 21st September 1883 and remained at Tavistock South station overnight. At 6.0am the following morning it was taken the half mile to Fitzford. The two tons of metal were hoisted into position and a sheet was thrown over the statue to await the official opening fixed for the following Thursday, September 27th.

After a prayer and speeches, the statue was unveiled followed by a lunch for the dignitaries at the Town Hall. The whole town enjoyed music and dancing in the Pannier Market Hall, and an athletics event in a field behind the Fitzford Cottages.

Five months after the statue was unveiled in Tavistock a copy was erected on Plymouth Hoe in early 1884 without the bas reliefs.

In 1885 railings were added around the pedestal after vandals broke Drake's sword and drunken railway navvies had taken to sleeping off their heavy drinking bouts on the steps below.

In 1999 the original plaster model for the statue was found hidden in woods on Haldon Hill, near Exeter. It was transported to Buckland Abbey where it was repaired and is now on permanent display.

The Panels Around the Statue

To be added

Who was Drake?

Sir Francis Drake is an iconic figure – a man of his time whose achievements and exploits in the second half of the 16th century helped to lay the foundations of Britain's historical maritime power. However, his involvement in both privateering and the early slave trade reveal a darker side to the seafaring heritage of the Tudor age.

Early Life

Francis Drake was born at Crowndale on the outskirts of Tavistock around 1542. His father Edmund Drake was a tenant farmer for Francis Russell, 2nd Earl of Bedford. In 1548 when Drake was still a child his father was charged with assault and robbery and the family left Tavistock for Chatham in Kent. Growing up on the River Medway, Drake learnt his maritime skills having been apprenticed aged 12 to a local ship owner.

By his early 20s he had become a master mariner and moved from Chatham to Plymouth to work for his kinsmen the Hawkins family who owned a successful merchant fleet.

The English had become aware of the riches of the New World and the Spanish and Portuguese use of African slave labour. John Hawkins, would become the first Englishman to establish a slave trading venture.

Introduction to the Slave Trade

Between 1562 and 1568 Drake sailed on three of Hawkins' expeditions to Guinea and Sierra Leone with the last two voyages part funded by London merchants and sanctioned by Queen Elizabeth I who even provided Hawkins with two of her warships

The voyages involved brutal attacks on villages along the African coast often with the help of rival tribal chieftains. Whole communities would be kidnapped and taken on board the ships and transported en masse and in terrible conditions to the West Indies to be sold to the Spanish to work on plantations and in the silver mines of South America. Hawkins was able to add to his tally of slaves by attacking Portuguese slaving ships at sea and stealing their cargoes. It is estimated that between 1,200 and 1,400 Africans were enslaved in this way many of whom died before they even reached their destination.

Drake and Hawkins' third slaving expedition ended when a flotilla of Spanish ships ambushed their ships at the Mexican port of San Juan de Ulúa, destroying four of their vessels and killing or capturing many of their crew. Drake escaped unharmed, but the defeat left him with a seething hatred for Spain and its king, Philip II.

The Privateer

Drake never engaged in slave trading again, but instead focussed his attention on attacking the Spanish. Between 1570 and 1572, with the unofficial approval of the Queen, he sailed as a privateer with two ships and a small crew made up of men from Plymouth and Tavistock raiding the coast of the Spanish Main plundering ports and seizing ships. During one of his attacks at Nombre de Dios, off the coast of

Panama, an escaped African slave called Diego came to warn Drake that soldiers were on the way and to seek refuge from his Spanish masters aboard Drake's fleet. Diego introduced Drake to the Cimaroons, a group of escaped African slaves living in the jungle. Using them as guides he was able to ambush mule trains transporting silver from the Pacific to the Caribbean coast and in the process brought back untold amounts of silver and treasure. Diego returned with Drake to England and continued to sail with him on his future expeditions.

Circumnavigation of the World

In 1577 the Queen commissioned Drake to sail into the Pacific Ocean via the Strait of Magellan and investigate the extent of Spain's colonisation along the west coast of the Americas. He left Plymouth with five ships, but only one, the Pelican, was sturdy enough to make it through the Straits to the Pacific.

Drake renamed the Pelican the Golden Hind in honour of his patron Sir Christopher Hatton, whose crest featured a 'golden hind'. Once in the Pacific Drake sailed northward pillaging Spanish settlements, capturing ships and charting the unknown west coast of North America.

As he travelled up the American west coast, he landed in California, north of the northernmost Spanish settlement at Point Loma (san Diego). He named the landing site Nova Albion and claimed the region for England. He carried on further north in search of the fabled North West Passage, but having reached Vancouver decided that it may indeed have been a fable and so turn south again to rest and restock before sailing across the Pacific to the Spice Islands and home again by way of the Cape of Good Hope

On the 26th September 1580 he returned to Plymouth the first Englishman to sail his ship right round the world and only the second circumnavigation in history. For his achievement and for the vast treasures he brought back with him he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth.

Life ashore

For a while Drake enjoyed his life and his treasures on shore. He bought Buckland Abbey just four miles south of Tavistock from Sir Richard Grenville and in 1581 was elected Mayor of Plymouth and served as an MP. His wife Mary died in the same year and in 1585. He married Elizabeth Sydenham.

The Armada

By 1585 Spain and England were officially at war and Drake was ordered to lead an expedition to attack the Spanish colonies. He left Plymouth in 1585 with a fleet of twenty-one ships.

He first attacked Vigo in Spain and then plundered Santiago in the Cape Verde islands. After this the fleet then sailed across the Atlantic, sacked the port of Santo Domingo, and captured the city of Cartagena de Indias in present-day Colombia. En route home he raided the Spanish fort of San Agustín in Spanish Florida, then sailed further north to the failed English settlement of Roanoke rescuing the stranded colonists. He finally reached England on 22 July, when he sailed into Portsmouth, England to a hero's welcome

By this point the Spanish had taken to calling Drake “el Draque” - the Dragon. Some Spanish mariners were so afraid of him that they believed he practised witchcraft and possessed a magic mirror that allowed him to see the location of all the ships in the sea.

In 1587 word reached Queen Elizabeth that King Philip of Spain was planning an invasion of England to avenge the death of the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots.

Drake was sent to sea again to disrupt their plans.

In 1587 he sailed to the port of Cadiz in Spain and set fire to the ships of the gathering Spanish naval forces, before raiding forts along the Portuguese coast. This delayed Spain's invasion of England by a whole year, an intervention that became known as 'singeing the King of Spain's Beard'.

By 1588 the Spanish Armada, a fleet of 130 ships, sailed to invade England and overthrow Queen Elizabeth I. They intended to eradicate the Protestant faith and stop the raids on their fleets by English privateers.

Queen Elizabeth appointed Drake as second in second-in-command of the fleet. The English ships sailed from Plymouth to attack the Armada and Drake himself was able to capture of the Spanish flagship Nuestra Señora del Rosario.

When the Armada attempted to regroup off Calais, Drake organised a night-time fireship attack causing mass panic amongst the Spanish.

There followed an immense naval battle during which the Spanish fleet were bombarded by the long-range English guns and finally retreated many Spanish ships were swept by storms into the North Sea and wrecked on the coasts of Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Armada had been defeated.

Drake's Leat

Back in Plymouth in 1589 after an unsuccessful attack on Lisbon. Drake became involved in a major project to improve the city's water supply through the construction of an 18 ½ mile leat from the River Meavy on Dartmoor. He also built six water driven corn mills along it. Water from the leat and flour from his mills supplied the fleets leaving Plymouth

The last Voyage

Drake's seafaring career continued for another 8 years until he fell foul of dysentery whilst attempting to capture the rich port of Panama.

Before dying, he asked to be dressed in his full armour. He was buried at sea in a sealed lead-lined coffin, near Portobelo, a few miles off the coastline.

Despite numerous dives to find his coffin his body still remains lost at sea.

For further information on the history of slavery

<http://www.understandingslavery.com/>

<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/the-slave-trade-and-abolition/>