

PIRATES

with

Ely Museum

Pirate Flags



When we now think of a pirate's flag we think of the "Skull and Cross Bones", however many pirates had their own unique designs that in their day would have been well known and would strike fear in the crew of a merchant ship if they saw it.

To start with, many pirate ships did not have flags with designs on, instead they used different colour flags to say different things. A plain black flag had been used in the past to show a ship had plague on it and to stay away, so pirates started flying this to cause fear. However it also usually meant that the pirate would accept surrender and spare lives. Others used plain red flags, which dated back to English privateers who used it to show they were not Royal Navy, in pirate use this flag meant no surrender was accepted and no mercy would be shown! Over time pirates started adding their own designs to these plain coloured flags, these unique flags would soon become well known as the pirates reputation increased.

Favourite things for pirates to have on their flags were skull, bones or sometimes whole skeletons, all meaning death and aiming to cause fear. They also often used images of swords, daggers and other weapons to show that they were ready to fight. An hourglass would mean that your time is running out as death was coming and a heart was used to show life and death.

A flag would often be made up of one or more of those items and would sometimes include the Captain's initials or a simple outline of a figure depicting the Captain. These different flags were not actually around for long and as the "Golden Age" came to an end so did the custom of making them, however the image of the Skull and Bones is still associated with piracy to this day.



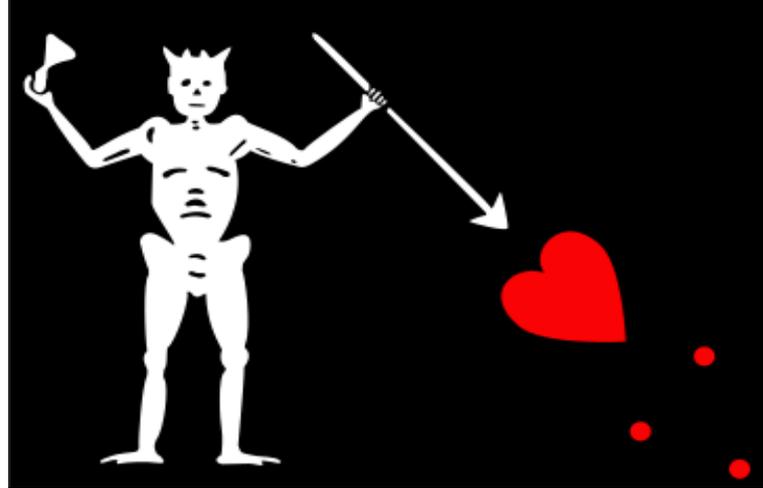
Jolly Roger Flag

PIRATE FLAGS



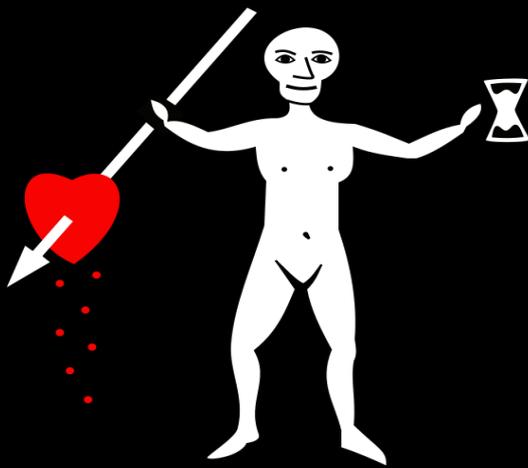
John Rackham's Flag

The flag designed by "Calico Jack" Rackham, an English pirate who was active during the early 1700s, was a variation on the basic skull & crossbones design, it uses two cutlass swords for the bones beneath the skull instead though. Calico Jack was a mostly unsuccessful pirate but is remembered for his two fearsome female crew, Anne Bonny & Mary Read.



Edward Teach's Flag

Known as Blackbeard, Edward Teach's flag is one of the most dramatic of all pirate flags, it features a horned skeleton holding a spear aimed at a heart that is dripping blood in one hand, while raising a toast to death with the other! Despite his fearsome flag, Blackbeard is said to have been fairly bad at plundering, and was also a fairly peaceful pirate.



John Phillips' Flag

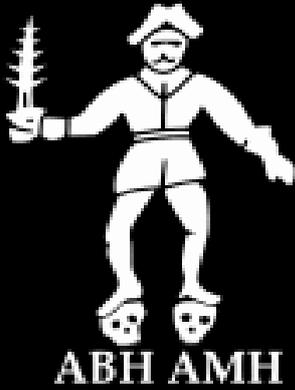
This flag, with a figure in the centre, a pierced heart dripping blood on one side and an hourglass on the other has been attributed to 18th century pirates John Phillips and John Quelch. Contemporary descriptions of Phillips' flag match this design.



Emanuel Wynn's Flag

Among the earliest pirates to put a Jolly Roger on his flag was the French pirate Emanuel Wynn. Eye-witnesses described a flag depicting a skull, crossed bones and an hourglass being flown on Wynn's vessel around the year 1700!

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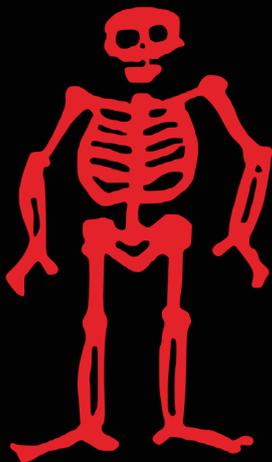
Bartholomew Robert's Flag

One of 4 flags used by "Black Bart" Roberts, who had particular animosity toward the islands of Barbados and Martinique because their governors sent pirate hunters after him! This flag features a figure of himself standing on two skulls, with the letters ABH (A Barbadian Head) and AMH (A Martinico's Head) beneath the skulls. In some variations of this flag, Roberts' sword is engulfed in flames too.



Christopher Moody's Flag

One of the most distinctive pirate flags was flown by Christopher Moody, a former member of Black Bart's crew, during the 18th century. The flag's red colour, along with the winged hourglass, arm holding a dagger and the skull and crossbones told Moody's prey that their time was running out and no lives would be spared!



Edward Low's Flag

Edward Low, was known for being particularly brutal and savage, displayed a blood-red skeleton on a black flag. Those who saw this flag knew they would meet a grisly death if they refused to surrender at once!



Stede Bonnet's Flag

Known as the "Gentleman Pirate", Bonnet's flag include a heart and dagger represent life and death, while the skull acts as a scale

