

# DRINKS WITH DEAD PEOPLE

## QUARANTINE EDITION

MARCH 27, 2020:  
[CAPTAIN KIDD](#)

William Kidd, was tried and executed in 1701 for throwing away the king's commission to turn pirate in the Indian Ocean. Kidd claimed he was innocent. Was he?

### THE STORY

William Kidd was a successful privateer and merchant sailor of Scottish origin. In 1695, intrigued by the possibility of a fat payday, Kidd entered into an agreement with two of the most influential men in England and its colonies to attack the King's enemies and bring home the spoils (they meant to take legit ships through admiralty court, and quietly make money off pirate goods under the table).

After more than a year at sea Kidd's ship, the *Adventure Galley*, had taken no prize, and the crew, many of them former pirates themselves, were angry. Tension led to fighting – Kidd killed a crewman in a scuffle – and the capture of the *Quedagh Merchant*, a rich vessel, was too little, too late. The crew largely mutinied over to the pirate Robert Culliford, and left Kidd with a big problem: the *Quedagh Merchant* sailed under French safe-passage papers – and French ships were fair game – but its owners and crew were Armenian, Indian and English. Kidd said he believed the capture to be legitimate, but it easily looked like he had turned pirate.

Kidd sneaked back to New York (ditching the *Merchant* in the Caribbean) and was arrested, jailed, and sent to London for trial. England was abuzz: If upstanding Whig politicians had basically created a pirate syndicate, what would this mean? Both political parties in England assumed Kidd was a pirate, [Richard Zacks](#) writes, “the Tories delighting that he was a pirate and the Whigs claiming that he wasn't our pirate.” Abandoned by his rich sponsors, Kidd went on trial for a murder charge and five counts of piracy. He was hanged on May 23, 1701 at Execution Dock.

Read on [at the blog](#) for more detail and resources.

### DISCUSS:

The story is definitely murky. Do you think Kidd really turned pirate?

What is the difference between a privateer and a pirate, really? (Here's some [context](#).)

What would the pros and cons have been for nations supporting piracy?

Why is [the rum gone](#)?

Why do we romanticize historical piracy vs. [modern piracy](#)?

Hi, I'm Betsy. Stuck at home? Let's learn history together, because the past helps us to understand that we are not alone. Weekday updates during #COVID19.

**Questions? Comments? Say hello.**

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### READ MORE:

Primary source: [Trial of Captain Kidd](#), 1701 (Library of Congress)

“[The Pirate of Pearl Street](#),” Bowery Boys (PODCAST)

Daniel Defoe, [A General History of the Pyrates](#), 1724

“[Biography of Captain William Kidd, Scottish Pirate](#),” ThoughtCo