

The Truth about the Pirates of Gothenburg

Performed on 15th Nov 2019 by the *Not Quite a Ceilidh* players and written by John Chaplin.

Once a year the Anglo-Swedish Society of Gothenburg performs a play celebrating some connection between Sweden and the UK.

In 2019 we celebrated the 300th anniversary of the end of the Golden Age of Gothenburg piracy and the Anglo-Swedish events of 1719. What follows are some of the truths behind the fiction.

The Plot: Elizabeth Norris and Mabel Carteret were on their way to join Elizabeth's father Admiral Sir John Norris of the British Baltic fleet stationed in the Stockholm archipelago when they were captured and held hostage on the island of Marstrand by Vice Admiral Peder Tordenskjold (the Dano-Norwegian naval hero). Lord Carteret, the British Ambassador and Daniel DeFoe, arrive in Gothenburg on 26th Sept. 1719 to arrange for the ladies rescue. Carteret and DeFoe meet with Governor Posse and the pirate queen of Gothenburg, Ingela Gathenhielm to arrange for a rescue. DeFoe is invited to the Gothenburg Book Fair. Two out-of-work privateers, Thomas Chapman and Long-John Sahlgren and a Livonian Cornet, Georg Staël von Holstein, are recruited to make the rescue attempt. On their way to Marstrand the three men meet Elizabeth and Mabel who have made their own escape in a leaky row boat with the name of Brexit. Together all five row back to Gothenburg entertained by tales of pirate adventures. Blackbeard's ghost appears on several occasions. They are followed by Tordenskjold who captures the New Naval Yard in Gothenburg and makes use of the new smugglers tunnel (Västlänk) to enter Gothenburg and the Governor's Residence. Tordenskjold shoots Georg and steals a portrait of Elizabeth. Georg demands the return of the portrait and a duel is arranged for one year later when his wounds are healed. Tordenskjold tries to get Elizabeth to return to his paradise island full of Danish hygge but is confronted by Long-John who has now fallen in love with Elizabeth and she with him. Tordenskjold is forced to retire once again avoiding capture.

The Cast: Sharon Abrahamson as Elizabeth, Catriona Chaplin as Mabel Carteret (and the parrot), Michael Bontà as Captain Chapman, Ron Jones as Long John Sahlgren, John Petersson as Georg Staël von Holstein, Gisela Barnard as Ingela Gathenhielm, Monica Edholm as Henrietta Posse, Jean Irving as Mark/Mark Read, Alan Taylor as Vice Admiral Tordenskjold, Birger Ekengren as Governor Nils Posse, Robert Cullen as Lord Carteret, John Chaplin as Daniel DeFoe (and Blackbeard's ghost), with Keith Barnard as narrator and Robinson Crusoe.

Lord Carteret, the British Ambassador comes to Gothenburg.



Lord John Carteret, 2nd Earl Granville, arrived in Gothenburg as the British Ambassador to Sweden in late June 1719 and would therefore have had to negotiate the Dano-Norwegian blockade. He may have met Tordenskjold at this time. He was 29 years old and this was his first public office in foreign policy. It was no easy task, Sweden was in the final stages of the Great Nordic War and he had to convince the Swedish senate and Queen Eleonora to accept territorial losses in return for monetary aid and a renewed Anglo-Swedish alliance. He had been a Lord of the Bedchamber (assisting the King with dressing, waiting on him at table, etc) and was particularly favoured by George I, as he was one of very few nobles in England who would speak German. King George I of England, who had

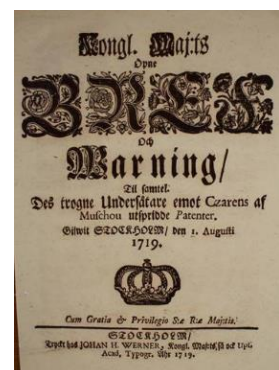
recently arrived from Hannover, could not speak any English and conversed only in German or Latin. Extracts from Lord Carteret's letters during his time in Sweden are published in "*Lord Carteret, a political biography, 1690-1763*". (Lord Carteret is depicted in the 2011 film *Pirates of the Caribbean*)

Don't talk to me about a long way! (from Hasse och Tage-På jobbet)

Carteret's letters say that it took him two weeks to make the crossing from England and more than 7 days to travel from Gothenburg to Stockholm. (It probably takes 15 days to cross Sweden on horseback if you are not in a hurry). Leaving Gothenburg was also delayed because there were no horses available in Gothenburg due to the war. The Governor of Gothenburg, had to requisition horses from the countryside to help him.

The Russians are coming! Lord Carteret reported that from Stockholm, it was possible to see light from the fires of burning villages in the archipelago, set alight by the Russians.

A Swedish invasion of Inverness. King Charles XII planned to support the Highlander Jacobite rebellion of June 1719 to restore the 'pretender' James Stuart on the throne of Britain. An expeditionary force was to be disembark from Gothenburg but the King died before the landing at Inverness could take place. DeFoe wrote a pamphlet in 1717 entitled "*What if the Swedes Should Come?*"



Nils Posse af Säby was the Governor (Landshövding) of Gothenburg and



Bohuslän in 1719. He was a gifted speaker and writer. As head of the Värmland regiment he had taken part in Karl XII's Polish war, and he wrote a detailed diary of the regiment. He had previously been governor of Bauschenberg in Kurland and of Gotland.

Henrietta Beata Posse (Horn af Marienburg) had her portrait painted by the Dutchman Johan Starbus in 1719.

Repairs to the Residenset. In 1719 the Governor's residence, was in need of repair. The city authorities refused to finance the work, so Nils Posse had to foot the bill himself. No doubt employing cheap labour (eg ex-pirates as we suggest in the play).

Captain Thomas Chapman was a Yorkshireman who had served in the British Navy at the battle for Gibraltar (1704). After the 13 year war of the Spanish Succession ended in 1714 Chapman was one of a massive number of British sailors who were demobilised and facing unemployment at home. In 1714 he was in Stralsund (now German Baltic coast) where he met Charles XII who had smuggled himself back to Swedish territory following his 5 year exile in the Ottoman Empire. Chapman must have impressed the King because he was recruited to spy on the Russians in London and in 1715 he was made a captain of the Swedish navy and captained one of Lars Gathenhielm's ships in Gothenburg as a Privateer. In 1719 the privateer licences were withdrawn and once again Chapman was unemployed. However, later that year (after the Danish attack) he was appointed Superintendent of the New Navel Yard.



Chapmanstorg (Chapman's Square) in Gothenburg is named in honour of Thomas' son, Charles 'Carl' Chapman, who sailed six times to China as captain for the East India Company. His brother, Fredrik, was the first shipbuilder to take a scientific approach to shipbuilding. Fredrik was knighted in 1772 taking the title "af Chapman" (as in the ship in Stockholm) and became a Vice Admiral in 1791.

Peter Wessel Tordenskjold – 'Nordens Største Søhelt'



In Denmark and Norway, Tordenskjold, is a legend and hero. He is the subject of books and films. He's seen to be the descendent of the Viking spirit, or the cheeky little guy outsmarting his more powerful adversaries. The Danish city of Frederikshavn hosts an annual summer festival in his memory. Tordenskjold had been promoted to captain of a 20 gun frigate in 1712 at the age of 22 by King Frederik IV and relentlessly attacked the Swedish navy regardless of the odds and always evading

capture. He was so successful that the Governor Mörner of Gothenburg put a price on his head. Tordenskjold responded by asking the Governor to send a frigate of 26 cannons for him as he wanted to be collected in style. He attempt to provoke the Governor several times, mocking the Swedes, accusing them of letting their privateers attack merchant ships instead of fighting real warships. His greatest success was at the battle of Dynekilen (1716) where he captured 30 Swedish ships and ended the Swedish invasion of Norway, for which he was made a Vice Admiral (aged 26). He is also famous for the Dano-Norwegian siege and capture of the island of Marstrand in July 1719 (see Tordenskjold's soldiers below) and for planning the daring night-time raid on Nya Varvet, Gothenburg.



It is said that he was never really happy unless he was engaged in a naval battle. When things were at their worst in storm or battle, he was wont to shout to his men, "Hi, now we are having a fine time!" and this battle-cry has passed into the Danish language. (The story of Tordenskjold's last days was taken up in a Danish film '*Tordenskiold & Kold*' (2016) English title: Satisfaction 1720).

Tordenskjold's soldiers, who never could be found. In order to encourage the commander of the fortress on Marstrand to surrender, he was invited to a 5 hour dinner during which Tordenskjold's soldiers marched past wearing different hats to give the impression that there were considerably more Danish troops than there were. The ploy worked and the commander surrendered the fort. 'Tordenskjold's soldiers' has become an idiom to mean seeing the same people popping up in different roles eg in politics, media and business. The commander was court-marshalled in Gothenburg and executed.

Ingela Gathenhielm was the pirate queen of



Gothenburg. Following the demise of her husband, Lasse i Gatan, she became the head of a pirate empire in Gothenburg until Charles XII's death in 1718 and the withdrawal of her letter of

Marque (Privateer licence). In the attack on the New Naval Yard in 1719, she lost several of her captured ships. She diversified into other businesses, including a rope-making factory (a ropewalk), a sail making factory, a bakery, a forge and a distillery.



Jakob Sahlgren was the richest man in Gothenburg, mainly due to the monopoly on sugar production in West Sweden awarded by King Charles XII. Sahlgren at one time donated four barrels of gold to Charles XII for the continuation of the Northern war. Sahlgren also had dealings with the pirates of Gothenburg and may have engaged in this trade for a few years. (In the play he is Long-John Sahlgren and falls in love with Elizabeth Norris)

Miss Elizabeth Norris... is the Admiral's daughter who falls in love with a



pirate, someone very unsuitable to her father. In real life she was the object of Tordenskjold's affections and not the daughter of the British Admiral Sir John Norris. However, the Admiral did have a daughter (named Lucy) who married against her

father's wishes and Lucy's mother, in her last will and testament, refers to Lucy by the name of 'Elizabeth'.

...and her daughter **John Norris**. Apparently in an effort to appease her father over her marriage, Lucy gave her only child – a daughter – the first name of 'John Norris'. John Norris Fisher became a well-respected art collector and appears to have been approved of by her grandfather the Admiral.

George Bogislaus Staël von Holstein ... was a Livonian colonel with the Skaraborg regiment in Gothenburg. On 24 July 1719 von Holstein in a daring move he repositioned cannons to Arendal (close to Volvo nowadays) a location previously considered to be impossible, giving him line-of-sight on Tordenskjold's ships, which were attacking the fortress of Nya Elfsborg. This manoeuvre took Tordenskjold by surprise, Nya Elfsborg was saved and the Danish fleet was forced to withdraw, with the loss of 70 (or some say 200) men. The family of Staël von Holstein was accepted into the Swedish nobility and received their coat of arms in 1719.



... had a wife in Russia. In 1704, after the battle for the city of Narva (his birth town), Georg was captured by the Russians and imprisoned first in Siberia and then in Moscow. In 1710 during his captivity in Moscow he married the 29 year old Countess Ingeborg Christina Horn af Rantzien who was also being held prisoner together with her father a Field Marshall from Swedish Greifswald in Pomerania. Georg was released in exchange for a Russian officer in 1711, while his wife remained imprisoned. In 1722 he planned to marry the 25 year old Sofia Elisabeth Ridderschantz. However, the wedding plans were abandoned when Ingeborg, who he had not seen for 12 years, was released from prison.

Georg wants to recover the portrait of Miss Elizabeth Norris. Tordenskjold did have a portrait of an English woman, whose name is given as Miss Elizabeth Norris. He is said to have obtained the portrait from Lord Carteret and that he kept it on him at all times. The lady was apparently worth £80,000. In 1720 Tordenskjold planned to travel to Britain to marry her and possibly join the British navy. He was travelling to England when the fatal duel took place.



Mary Read swapped gender roles back and forth. Mary/Mark did



not work for the Gathenhielms but she was a cross-dressing English pirate. As a teenager she joined the Army as a man but then got married and settled down in England as a woman before being widowed and taking up piracy as a man. She is the most famed female pirate of all time and “very profligate, cursing and swearing”. She joined another female pirate, Anne Bonny, on a pirate ship of Captain “Calico Jack” Rackham (he designed the Jolly Roger flag). They seized ships around the Caribbean between 1718 to 1720. Mary died in prison in 1721.



Other women sailed as pirates without disguise. Pirate ships were the most egalitarian workplaces that existed in the 1700s. All pirates had equal rights, equal votes, equal share of the booty. Pirates represented a culture that did not judge any individual by skin colour or even gender, but by character.

Daniel DeFoe in Gothenburg knows about pirates. DeFoe



published *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719 claiming that Crusoe himself had written the book. In that year a copy made its way to Gothenburg purchased by Eric Cederbourg, a magistrate and chronicler. Crusoe’s family were merchants from Bremen making him partly Swedish. DeFoe wrote several pamphlets and reports about Sweden including a 400-page ‘*History of the Wars of Charles XII*’ again in the first person as if he were a Scottish soldier in the Swedish army.

Most of our knowledge of pirates comes from ‘*A General History of the Pyrates*’ (1724) by Captain Charles Johnson (aka DeFoe). DeFoe often used fictitious names preferring to call himself the editor or translator. One of his early pamphlets had been misinterpreted as a criticism of the British government policy and, consequently, he had been imprisoned, bankrupted and pilloried (3 times) in London. It is rumoured that the only way he was able to reduce his sentence was to agree to work for the government as a spy. One biographer called him “*the biggest liar that ever lived*”. In ‘*A General History ...*’ there is the first account of the cross-dressing pirate Mary Read and of other Caribbean pirates. One island described is Saint-Barthélemy which became Swedish in 1784 in exchange for French trading rights and tax exemption in Gothenburg.

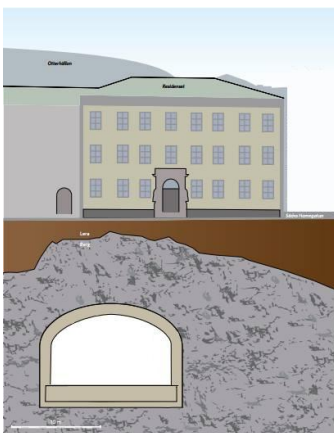
The play describes events on 26th Sept. 1719 including the Danish attack on the New Naval Yard (Nya Varvet).

On the night of 26 Sept. 1719, 30 of Tordenskjold's men under the command of Captain's Budde and Kleve successfully infiltrated the Swedish defences by sailing two galleys and nine small boats filled with combustible material up the Göta älv virtually unchallenged.



They were hailed once from Käringsbatteriet at "*halvgången tolv*" (11 o'clock) and replied that they were just some Swedish fellows up to some mischief with the Danes. To disguise themselves as Swedes they turned their coats inside out to show the blue lining, the colour of the Swedish uniform. They passed through to Gothenburg without the alarm being sounded. At the new naval yard they overran the 12 man garrison killing one midshipman and tried to escape with as many ships as they could. They started to tow Ingela Gathenhielm's prize possession, the 36-gun frigate *Le Comte de Mörner* out into open water but were prevented by underwater defences. In the end they only managed to re-capture one Danish galley but they set fire to the other ships in the harbour including the *Comte de Mörner*. Shown burning in this painting by JC Andresen (Göteborg Maritime Museum). Tordenskjold said of the commander of Nya Älvsborg "jeg er her for at lære ham at holde sig vaagen".

Tordenskjold uses the smugglers' tunnel from Haga to enter the Residence which Posse will have bricked up. The Västlänk tunnel currently under construction will pass under both the Residence and Sprängkullen (Haga church). There is also a bricked up exit from the basement of the Residence to the street.



Tordenskjold entered the tunnel dressed as a fisherman. Legend has it that Tordenskjold disguised himself as a fisherman and visited Marstrand to reconnoitre the defences and the Swedish squadron before the siege.

Georg challenges Tordenskjold to a duel one year later. Early,



on the morning of 12 Nov. 1720 a duel took place in a forest clearing near Hannover. It was Georg's uncle Jakob Axel, who met Tordenskjold. Jakob was also a Swedish Livonian colonel who owned a 'snake with seven crowned heads'.

The exact nature of the duel 'had not been shared with the Seconds', all that was known was that the honour of a lady was at stake. Jakob, as would be expected had a rapier while Tordenskjold had only his ceremonial (and shorter) dress sword. He arrogantly rejected a longer sword offered by his servant. Jakob dispatched Tordenskjold with a single hit. Good fortune abandoned him that day when it never had in battle. When Tordenskjold's body arrived in Copenhagen, the portrait of the lady was not found in his pocketbook. His body lies in a black marble sarcophagus in Holmens Kirke, Copenhagen. There is a statue of him in the grounds. (photo 'Tordenskjold gaar i Land' 1942)

Blackbeard had a teaching certificate. Blackbeard's real name was Edward Teach. He spurned the use of violence, relying instead on his fearsome image to elicit the response that he desired from those whom he robbed. He did not go to Eton as stated in the play but in the novel *Peter Pan* the pirate Captain Hook was an old Etonian: his last words as he climbs the bulwarks are '*Floreat Etona*' ('may Eton flourish'), the motto of Eton College.



In 1927 Barrie gave a talk to pupils at Eton with the title '*Hook was a good Etonian though not a great one*'. Hook was described in the book *Peter Pan* as having a "distinguished slouch" which is also a known characteristic of an Eton schoolboy. See Rees-Mogg for examples.

But, there were books on board Blackbeard's ship. Maps, charts



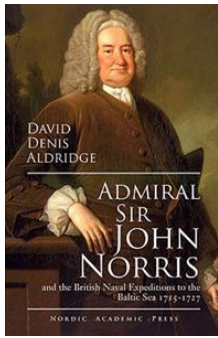
and books were prized items as part of the pirate booty taken from captured ships. In May 1718, Blackbeard ran his 40 gun frigate the 'Queen Ann's Revenge' aground at Topsail inlet, North Carolina (not discovered until 1996). On board, still preserved, were pages used as wadding for the firing mechanism of the cannons. These fragments match pages from *-A Voyage to the South Sea and Round the World-* (1712) which has an account of the real life adventures of Alexander Selkirk, who was marooned on an uninhabited Pacific island (named Robinson Crusoe Island in 1966) for four years and four months. This was a very popular story in the early 1700s and inspiration for DeFoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Pirate ships were overmanned for routine ship's duties and therefore the crews, between battles, had time for leisure pursuits, possibly to read.

Carteret owned a colony in North Carolina. Lord Carteret had inherited a one-eighth share in the colony, which stretched from Virginia to Florida, through his great-grandfather Sir George Carteret (grated by Charles II).



Lord Carteret used Blackbeard's treasure. The most likely location of the famous treasure, which has never been found, is North Carolina. In 1718 the governor of North Carolina, Charles Eden, awarded Blackbeard a King's Pardon. However, Blackbeard continued to operate as a pirate from his base in North Carolina and the governor of Virginia put a price of £100 on his head. Blackbeard was ambushed on 22 November 1718, in an inlet on Ocracoke island (NC) and beheaded. A letter on his body, written by Eden's secretary, led to the discovery of contraband held by the secretary, and Governor Eden was also accused of profiting from Blackbeard's crimes. Lord Carteret corresponded with Eden frequently, notably about the purchase of forced labourers for the colony. Many of these men were Jacobite rebels who later became pirates. DeFoe writes in his book *Captain Singleton* about the collusion necessary between pirates and colonists in the fencing of stolen goods "A thousand statues can't reach them". A large tourist industry exists today around the Blackbeard legend, attracting over 300,000 visitors a year to Carteret county.

Admiral Sir John Norris did not prevent the Russian attack.



Admiral Norris brought a squadron into the Baltic every summer between 1715 and 1721 to protect British and allied (inc. Russian) merchant shipping. In 1719 he had 22 ships, including his 80-gun flagship the *Cumberland*. He had worked alongside the Russians to develop their navy in St Petersburg and was an admirer of, Czar Peter. In 1719, however, King George I of England changed British allegiances in the Baltic.

The King instructed Norris to attack the Russians where possible and to help Sweden regain control over Livonia as a buffer to Russian expansion. Although, Admiral Norris continued to patrol the Baltic he did not engage the weaker Russian navy. Reasons for this remain contested.

Bremen sold to Hannover and Stettin to the Prussians. Carteret's letters tell how Queen Eleanor was persuaded to sell Bremen and Pomerania to secure peace. Bremen, Livonia and Pomerania (incl. Stralsund, Greifswald, Stettin) were important parts of Sweden in 1719. Charles XII arrived back in Sweden (1714) when he reached the town of Stralsund. Georg's family was from Livonia, his wife's family was from Greifswald; home to the first Swedish University. Henrietta Posse spent part of her childhood in Bremen, where her father had been the Swedish Governor. Livonia became part of Russia in the Treaty of Nystad (1721) negotiated by Admiral Sir John Norris.



Captain Flint, aka Poll, was a gift to Silver from DeFoe. In the novel *Treasure Island* (1883) by Robert Louis Stevenson, Captain Flint was the name of Long John Silver's 200 year old parrot. Stevenson said that he got the idea of a pirate having a parrot from Robinson Crusoe and that "no doubt the parrot once belonged to Crusoe". In *Treasure Island*, the parrot gets the last line as she did in our play.



"Awrk pieces of eight"

Some sketches/quotes used in the play

- The scars scene in the rowing boat, Act 2 is from JAWS (1975) directed by Steven Spielberg –
- The opening scene of Tordenskjold talking to the cadets is from Tordenskiold & Kold, a Danish film 2016
- *Don't talk to me about sad.* Hasse och Tage-På jobbet <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1w0l9GNI0OU>
- *"Never sick at sea, What never? Well hardly ever"* Gilbert and Sullivan HMS Pinafore
- *"They'd none of 'em be missed"* Gilbert and Sullivan The Mikado
- *"And peace with Poland"* Adapted from 'a little piece of Poland' To Be or Not To Be (1983) Mel Brooks
- *"It was on display in the council offices"* Douglas Adams, Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. 1978
- *"We all know him to be a proud, unpleasant sort of man".* Jane Austen Pride and Prejudice 1813
- *"Captains log. These are the voyages of the pirate ship Onsala"* Star Trek (Lasse was born in Onsala).
- *"somewhere between reality and all she's ever dreamed of".* JM Barrie Peter Pan
- Various other lines taken directly from Daniel DeFoe's many books and a few adapted from Shakespeare.

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