

Pawleys Island Brewing Company

The Gentleman Pirate

North Charleston, SC
pawleysislandbrewing.com



Pirates were usually people of ill-repute long before they started a career plundering the high seas. They often grew up in poverty, were poorly educated, struggled to make ends meet and had a long history of criminal affairs. Stede Bonnet (1688-1718), known as “The Gentleman Pirate”, fit none of those stereotypes, and his endeavors as a buccaneer have likely made him the most unusual, and possibly also the worst, pirate in history.

In colonial America, the best way to make money was to have land but for slaves, indentured servants and other impoverished people who had none, pirating became a very realistic option. Pirates were often admired by colonial citizens and thought of as Robin Hood-style heroes who took from the rich and overprivileged, and pirating even became a fairly respectable and profitable enterprise by the early 1700s.

Stede Bonnet was born in Barbados and his family had a large estate of over 400 acres. Bonnet inherited the property at the age of six after his father passed away and he was provided with a thorough education. He married Mary Allamby in 1709 and they had four children. Bonnet served in the Barbados militia but there is no record that he did any major fighting. Most likely, he spent his time quashing slave revolts.

It might have been a desire for money, it might have been a lust for adventure, it might have been frustration with the political machine of the day, it might have been a wife that nagged him to no end, or it could have just been one of the worst midlife crisis decisions any man ever made, but for some reason, in 1717, the affluent and well-educated Bonnet, who had never sailed a ship before in his life, decided to become a pirate.

Most pirates took over merchant ships, equipped them with guns, renamed them and claimed them as their own; Bonnet ordered his from a local shipyard. He purchased a 60-ton sloop, equipped it with ten guns and named it *Revenge*. He then hired a crew of about 70 men and left the sailing, navigating, planning and plundering up to them, which didn't help him build any credibility. Perhaps his oddest decision of all was that he chose to pay his crew a salary rather than share the bounty of their exploits which caused his crew to become famous for their poor work ethic, especially since they knew they would make good money even if they didn't carry out the dangerous task of attacking enemy ships.

Bonnet's pirating actually wasn't too shabby. His first voyage took him to the Virginia Colony near the Chesapeake

Bay where he captured and plundered four ships. He then moved north to New York and grabbed two more ships before returning to the Carolinas where he captured two more. He stopped for repairs in North Carolina and then set off towards Honduras only to find himself in a battle with a Spanish warship. He won the battle but afterwards almost half of his crew was killed, the *Revenge* was badly damaged, and Bonnet himself was seriously injured.

Upon arriving in Honduras, a renowned pirate haven, Bonnet took time to heal his ship and himself and he hired on new crewmembers. During his time on the island, he also became quite social and he grew especially close to a man named Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard. The two decided to sail together but Blackbeard quickly realized that Bonnet was quite amateur in his pirating so he took command of Bonnet's ship. Blackbeard allowed the still-injured Bonnet to remain aboard but had his first mate command the *Revenge* instead. Tensions eventually grew between the two men as Blackbeard felt that Bonnet had no

business calling himself a pirate and after going ashore at Topsail Island, NC, Bonnet returned to find the *Revenge* completely stripped of all its gear and Blackbeard's ship, *Queen Anne's Revenge*, nowhere to be found. Bonnet retook command of his ship and became distinctly more vicious from then on, garnering himself a nasty reputation in the area.

In pursuit of bounty and wishing to take revenge on Blackbeard, the *Revenge* again sailed up the American coast but this time found itself pursued by Colonel William Rhett, under the order of the Governor of South Carolina. Rhett cornered Bonnet at the Cape Fear River on the North Carolina coast and after a long firefight, Bonnet's crew surrendered. Bonnet's men were quickly hanged and after a long legal battle, Bonnet joined them. “The Gentleman Pirate”, who sailed the high seas wearing stylish clothing and a powdered wig fit for a grand ball, spent less than two years terrorizing trade ships before meeting his demise, but he still managed to leave a distinct mark in American history as well as at Pawleys Island Brewing Company where a grapefruit pale ale remains on tap in memory of “The Gentleman Pirate”.



A sketch of Stede Bonnet, from A General History of the Pyrates, 1725



The hanging of Stede Bonnet, also from A General History of the Pyrates

From the Brewer: This pale ale is blended 2 to 1 with grapefruit puree. It has all the things you love about an American pale ale with the added delight of slightly sweet and tart grapefruit. ABV 4.8%, IBU 28

Fraser Blake - President & Founder, Darren McLean - Head Brewer