

History is Gay Podcast
Episode 1: Were Some Pirates Poofsters?

Gretchen: Hello and welcome to *History is Gay*, a podcast that examines the underappreciated and overlooked queer ladies, gents, and gentle-enbies that have always been there in the unexplored corners of history. Because history has never been as straight as you think.

[Theme music plays]

Gretchen: My name is Gretchen and here with me, and my fellow co-host, is Leigh.

Leigh: Hello!

Gretchen: In this episode, the first episode of our podcast, we are going to be talking about... [sing-song voice] queer pirates.

Leigh: Queer pirates! Arrrrrr.
Yes. We've been really excited about bringing this up. I'm very excited to get into some of these people.

Gretchen: I know, they're awesome.

Leigh: Yeah, so the way this goes is, we're going to introduce you to some people from history that we think are really awesome. We're going to start out with a brief bio of each of those people, and then we'll kind of transition into a discussion about evidence that they may not have been quite as straight as some people would assume. And then we'll end the podcast with kind of a "how gay were they?", our personal rankings and how likely it is that they weren't straight.
Sound good? Yeah.

Gretchen: Great.

Leigh: Cool. All right.

Gretchen: Awesome.

Leigh: So, uh, Gretchen who are we talking about in this inaugural episode?

Gretchen: Well, we had originally planned on doing a whole thing about queer pirates and sailors and – only to get into the history and realize that there are a lot, actually a lot more than we could do in a single episode unless you wanted to listen to us talk for three hours in a row. Um,

[laughter] so, so specifically today we're going to talk about Anne Bonny, Mary Read, Calico Jack Rackham, and Pierre the Pansy Pirate. Some of you may be wondering about the title of this episode, "Were Some Pirates Poofers?"

Leigh: [laughter] Yeah it's, uh, it's very special to us.

Gretchen: Right.

Leigh: Yeah. Uh, so when we were, when we were first thinking about doing this episode, we started into our research and we found an article – one of the first articles that we found – that had "Were some pirates poofers?" as the episode title, er, as the article title and we laughed for a good thirty seconds, I think-

Gretchen: Right.

Leigh: –before moving on and deciding in that exact moment that, "should we make this the episode title? Yes. Yes. I do think we should."

Gretchen: Yeah, we should. [laughter] We are going to be talking about, as I said, these four characters and they are all – uh, not characters, they're human beings. Um, I'm just thinking *Black Sails*, I guess because they are, they all appear as characters in *Black Sails*. Which is an awesome show. You should watch it.

These are all people who were pirates during what we call the Golden Age of Piracy, which is the 17th to 18th century in the Caribbean. And just to be clear, these are all British pirates, both English and Irish.

We do have some really awesome information about pirates in the South China Seas that we really want to get to in another podcast. We just couldn't fit it in here, so stay tuned for that. There's some really, really cool information and interesting characters there as well.

Leigh, why don't you tell us where a lot of this comes from?

Leigh: Yeah. So, a lot of the histories of this specific trio and, you know, a little bit of addition of Pierre, this quartet of pirates, comes from one book that a lot of historians will reference. It's called *A General History of the Pyrates*, by a Captain Johnson, who a lot of people have over the years claimed is Daniel Defoe, AKA the author of *Robinson Crusoe*.

There's a lot of other resources and books that we're going to be referencing, and on our website we're going to have all of those things linked, and we'll also have it linked in the podcast description. So if you want to read more about these folks, that's where you can go.

It's also, it's important to say that there is a lot of debate and controversy over the historical accuracy of this document, so people have accused

Captain Johnson of editorializing a little bit about these folks, but we're going to treat it as close to a piece of source material as we can get, because it's basically one of the only things we have other than, like, court documents from these folks.

Gretchen: Right? Right. It seems legitimate to us as people who have studied history in various ways that this is, may not be a “primary primary” source document, but given that Captain Johnson often references, he does reference like court proceedings and eyewitness testimony, that it seems as though he is getting his information from primary source documents and I feel more comfortable trusting someone who may be a second-hand source of primary source documents than, you know, then not. Seems like he probably has a good read on things given that he lived not that long after a lot of these people did. So yeah, we're treating it as a viable source.

Leigh: Yeah. Yeah. And this, this book was published in 17 – I think it was 1724, which we'll get into – but it's shortly after all of these folks went on trial for their various piratical acts.

Gretchen: Right. So it's, it's fairly close to the time period in which we're talking about in terms of sources.
So yeah, let's get into it. Why don't we start with our favorite?

Leigh: Oh, you mean Anne Bonny the most savage, savage lady on the seven seas, as I like to call her.

Gretchen: Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh.
This lady, guys, like, even just her as a human being is, [groans] she is like badass.

Leigh: Can I go back like four hundred years? And marry a pirate? Because I want to do that with Anne Bonny.

Gretchen: That's legit.

Leigh: So Anne Bonny was born 1702 in Cork, Ireland. She was born as Anne Cormac and she died in 1782. She was an illegitimate child, raised as a boy, or tomboy, disguised as a boy and moved to South Carolina in her childhood. And she actually ended up being familiar with seafaring and piracy through her father's trade. They would spend a lot of time on the waterfronts.

And then when her mother died, when she was fifteen years old, she actually became the head of her father's household, and soon after that she married a poor sailor, specifically despite her father, and then left her

husband to join a Captain Jennings and his mistress. And soon after that she got bored again – [Gretchen laughs] you might be noticing a little bit of a pattern – and shortly after that she left both of them for Jack Rackham's crew in the Caribbean.

So that's, like, very, very brief kind of history of what was going on, who she was before meeting up with our other friends. Gretchen, do you want to, do you want to talk to you a little bit about?

Gretchen: According to Captain Johnson, she was a quote 'strapping and boisterous girl have a fierce and courageous temper' unquote. And that just like tells you everything you need to know. She's strapping and boisterous. We actually have quite a few details about some of her, uh, what I call or what we call her, rather violent exploits. A lot of these took place actually before she became a pirate. So it kind of gives you an idea that like, she wasn't this pure maidenly girl who was corrupted into becoming a pirate. Like she was kind of always.

Leigh: She was always a little bit... bold.

Gretchen: Strapping and boisterous.

Leigh: Strapping and boisterous. It might be, might be an understatement. She started out her life as a young child by stabbing a servant maid on her father's plantation; is one of her greatest hits.

Gretchen: She beat a would-be rapist with a chair until he was ill; a considerable amount of time. Apparently he was making advances that she disapproved of and when he wouldn't stop, she just like beat him.

Leigh: Just beat them over the head with a chair.

Gretchen: Yep.

Leigh: Relatable. So...

Gretchen: I have wanted to do that.

Leigh: Yeah. Yeah. When she left her father's plantation with her poor sailor, her father was not very excited; he wanted to marry her off and he wanted to continue the family wealth. And so he disowned her. He, quote 'turned her out of doors' and in revenge she burned down her father's plantation

Gretchen: As you do.

Leigh: As you do.

And then was basically, like, wanted for the murder of her father. So she's, she started out, she was on a roll.

Gretchen: Right, right. One of my favorites is that she used her sword at one point to publicly undress her fencing instructor. She was so skilled with her sword and to me it's like, even if that's an embellishment, I don't care. I love the idea of that.

Leigh: It's one of my favorite images in researching all of these people.

Gretchen: It's very cinematic. Like I can imagine that playing out on a screen if I were to watch it, that'd be awesome. So her exploits didn't just last before she became a pirate. She has a couple early on in her career after she met Jack, which I think will mention these things and then transition to talking about Calico Jack Rackham. But when early on in her, after she became a pirate, Jack Rackham offered to buy her a divorce from her husband; Was it John Bonny?

Leigh: [carelessly] Jack, John, Jack. I look, we all know who we're here for.

Gretchen: James Bonny, I think. Yeah. James Bonny. So Rackham offered to purchase her divorce. Oh, backtrack a little bit. James had had her like stripped naked and take to, like, before the governor of New Providence, which is Jamaica, and you know, said that she was basically, she was cheating on him and she needed to be punished.

So Jack Rackham was like, 'okay, I'll buy, I'll buy you a divorce' basically, I'll buy you from James Bonny. And Anne Bonny's response was that she refused to be sold like an animal. Like honey, honey, I, I feel that. Hashtag relatable. [both laugh]

Leigh: Yup. She also, once she was roaming around with Jack, she ended up becoming his second in command on the ship by shooting a guy who's quote 'attentions were becoming obnoxious to her' end quote. So she wasn't afraid to kind of push her weight around; she kicked Jack out of his own Captain's quarters [Gretchen snorts] and then took them for herself; you know, good way to hide being a woman, but also just a good way to make yourself the de facto Captain of a ship, as close as you could get.

Gretchen: She and Jack Rackham had a baby together, and apparently she went to Cuba and had her baby. And then left her baby in the care of others because she was. She wanted to keep being a pirate.

Leigh: Yep. Yeah. There's a lot of, there's a lot of times you'll see with these folks that there's arguments that like, oh, these women were prompted to go to sea and become pirates because of love affairs. But the evidence suggests that most of them who went to sea disguised as men, they did it for various economic reasons, or they just wanted to escape things, and you can tell from Anne Bonny, like she was never quite exactly satisfied and she was always moving around.

Gretchen: Right. That it may be that her relationship with her first husband, James Bonny, might have, you know, prompted her to leave the shore specifically. But it looks more, but she left him behind very soon afterward, and it doesn't look like she went to sea for James or stayed a pirate for James Bonny, or even for Jack Rackham.

Yeah. And with other women that we researched it, yeah. It seems to be similar that it's not necessarily about, 'oh, my husband's a sailor' or, you know 'the man that I love, you know, is captured by pirates, so we need to find him', that there may be a level of truth and that's also a very convenient way to escape to sea and then not come back for years at a time because [mock unconvincing tone] it can take a long time to find someone on the big, giant oceans of the world.

How convenient that is. [both laugh] You just don't come back.

Leigh: And speaking of finding somebody on the big wide oceans, uh, I guess that'll bring us to Calico Jack Rackham, right?

Gretchen: Yes.

Not much is known of Calico Jack Rackham's early life. We know that he was born sometime around 1682 and died in 1720. He was the second in command to a Captain Charles Vane, also a pirate. And while on a raid of a much larger French man o' war, Vane commanded the retreat out of caution. Vane didn't want to get into a fight with a much larger ship – which is fair – but Rackham argued that they, the crew needed to take the ship, and that the Captains decision – oh, but like Charles Vane was Captain, so his decision was final – and the ship fled.

Shortly thereafter, Rackham called for a vote of no confidence [suppresses laugh] in Captain Charles Vane and took over, but he wasn't; what's interesting to me about Calico Jack Rackham is he doesn't seem to be very vindictive, even though he took over from Captain Charles Vane, he actually supplied Vane and Vane supporters well, like he gave him a boat and supplies, when he kicked them off, he didn't just throw them into the ocean.

So despite kind of the image of, I think, cruel and bloodthirsty pirates, there's evidence that at least some of them were, you know, they weren't quite so, like cruel and bloodthirsty as maybe we think of them as.

Other information about Jack Rackham. He, this is, I love this story. So he tricked a Spanish ship out of their warship. The warship had been sent to patrol in the area in the Caribbean for pirates and Jack Rackham and his crew attacked at low tide, under the cover of nightfall. And then once they had defeated the Spanish, on their warship, they actually turned the cannons on their own ship to make it look like they were the, actually the Spanish who were firing on the pirate ship that was now empty and then escaped [begins laughing] with their brand new man o' war!

Leigh: I mean, it's basically, it's, it's a, it's like a weird Trojan horse on this kind of level of scheming.

Gretchen: Right?

There is some speculation that part of the reason we include Jack Rackham in this crew is because he was very close with Anne Bonny and Mary Read and Pierre – who we're going to talk about – but part of it is that there are some, there is some speculation that Jack and Vane might have been more than just a Captain and second. But we'll get to that in our, in our next section where we talk about evidence for and against straightness. So Jack Rackham met up with Anne Bonny around 1719 and shortly thereafter they were much in the company of...

Leigh: [flamboyant tone] Pierre Bouspeut! Aka Pierre the Pansy Pirate! We're not making that up.

Gretchen: No, we're not. That's actually what he's called!

Leigh: [excited] That's his name you guys! That was his name! He ran a coffee shop, He did hairdressing. He had a dressmaking shop.

Gretchen: I mean...

Leigh: What else is, I mean I don't want to like sit in stereotypes but...

Gretchen: But stereotypes typically exists because there's a grain of truth.

Leigh: Yeah.

Gretchen: This feels like one of those situations, especially because the word, the term 'pansy' was not like bandied about back, you know, like it

pansy has a very specific connotation in the time period in which these people would have existed. Like you don't just call someone a pansy. Like nowadays you can say pansy and it typically means like a coward, you know, but back in the day pansy didn't really mean that.

Leigh: Yeah. Pansy had a very, very specific type of meaning.

Gretchen: Right? That, that maybe you were a man who liked men.

Leigh: Just maybe a little bit.

Gretchen: Just maybe. [both laugh]

Leigh: Ah yeah.

So before we move on to Mary Read, uh, we wanted to talk a little bit about the adventures of Anne, Jack and Pierre, or, as Gretchen deemed them, [amused tone] the drama pirates.

Gretchen: These guys were so extra you guys.

Leigh: This is the most extra trio ever. So they had a lot of adventure before Mary Read came along. So Anne and Rackham and Bouspeut had a very dramatic; see this is my, this is my favorite story, right? Like you have your, your Spanish warship and I have this crazy batshit plan.

Gretchen: It's such a good story.

Leigh: Where they had a very dramatic and theatrical privateering raid. So they stole a boat and they went and covered the entire thing and themselves in turtle blood. Where did they get that much turtle blood? I don't know!

Gretchen: I don't. [voice trails away in contemplation]

Leigh: Look. Pierre was a man of many talents [Gretchen begins to laugh]. Maybe he had a weird turtle farm somewhere. I don't know. So they like covered themselves in turtle blood. They put up one of Pierre's dressmaker dummies, dressed in women's clothing and they made it appear like Anne was standing over it, having massacred it, like with a blood soaked axe, like this crazy lady standing over this dummy hacking it away.

Gretchen: Yep.

Leigh: And another ship passes by, sees this and get so freaked out that they just ended up giving all of their cargo to the pirates without a fight right there. Like coming upon this ship being like 'Oh, okay, let's see what this

situation is'. And then when all the pirates come up and say 'Hey, we'd like to take over all of your cargo'. They just went 'Yeah, no, seems okay. Yeah. Seems good'.

Gretchen: Yeah. 'Here take this and, take this and go!'.

Leigh: 'Y'all are a little crazy'. But I just liked that they went to the effort of 'Hey, I know what we can do! We can just make it look like a creepy bloody murder scene'.

Gretchen: Right? And I feel like it's very telling that, that Anne was the one with the bloody axe.

Leigh: Oh yeah.

Gretchen: No, I see her being totally into that. Like, oh yeah, of course. Yeah. Cover me in turtle blood and give me a bloody axe.

Leigh: Can I ship Anne Bonny and Lizzie Borden; is that a thing? [Gretchen bursts out laughing] I mean, I know they're like totally different time periods, but...

Gretchen: I did think of Lizzie Borden while you were talking in my head. I was hearing that, [singsong tone] 'Lizzie Borden took an axe...'

Leigh: Right! Exactly. Well, I've been. Come on, it's, we gotta. We gotta have our axe wielding crazy queer murder ladies together.

Gretchen: Oh my gosh. They would destroy the world. Yes.

Leigh: Oh man. Somebody write that fic.

Gretchen: [whispers empathetically] Yes. So history side of *Tumblr*, those of you who are into writing historical fiction slash alternate universes. Here you go. Anne Bonny and Lizzie Borden.

Leigh: Let this be your plot bunnies. Let them breed.

Gretchen: Have fun.

But like, Anne and Calico Jack were, I mean that wasn't the only time that they were just kind of spat in the face of convention. I feel like they're just like 'Whatever. We don't give a fuck'.

Oh yeah, fair warning. We, we say swears. Yeah. We, we will say the swears [Leigh laughs delightedly] because honestly, because I can't help myself.

Leigh: [smug tone] Would you say we curse like sailors?

Gretchen: Yes. Oh God, we're salty. Salty, like sailors.

Leigh: Oh my gosh. It's just gonna happen. Alright. So yeah. So, Anne Bonny and Calico Jack--

Gretchen: They had accepted an offer of a king's pardon to reform. This was the thing in the early 18th century that the king of England sent out a proclamation that any pirates who turn themselves in and promised to be good boys -and girls, though he probably didn't know that - to be good citizens of the British empire could have all of their crimes erased as long as they agreed to never be pirates ever, ever again.

So, Anne Bonny and Calico Jack had, I believe, a bounty on their head at that point and decided like, that sounds cool. And, oh yeah, and part of it was that Anne got a pardon for the murder of her father. And so they returned to New Providence and accepted the king's pardon, signed their paperwork or whatever. And once they got out of port, they promptly mutinied against any of the people on their crew who didn't want to keep being pirates and said, 'just kidding guys' [snorts] 'we're still pirates'.

Leigh: We love piracy.

Gretchen: We love it so much. Just kidding. You can take your pardon and shove it.

Leigh: They were the ringleaders.

Gretchen: They really, really were totally were. And on this ship is where they met... Mary Read! Would you like to tell us about Mary Read?

Leigh: I would like to tell us about Mary Read, Uh, so Mary Read [laughs], this is like inside the actors studio! Mary Read. So she was born around 1690 died 1721 and, look, she was also an illegitimate child. Raised as a boy. [sarcastic] What? It's almost as if gender conventions did some weird stuff!

Gretchen: Right.

Leigh: That ended up having people go to see something about like being illegitimate and not being able to inherit land, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. All that fun. Woo. Patriarchy is great stuff.

But yeah, so she was raised as a boy. Uh, she actually ended up working as a cabin boy. Her mother actually, she had a son that died very young, and then what she ended up doing was she disguised Mary as her brother and raised her as her brother, and brought her around to I think some, some family members where she...

Gretchen: I believe it was the mother in law that like...

Leigh: The mother-in-law. Yes.

Gretchen: She had had a son and then the boy died in infancy, and then she had an affair which resulted in Mary's birth. And so what Mary's mother did was say, 'Oh, no, no, no, this is the baby I had with my husband. This is little Mark the son that I had with my husband. Please continue to support me financially'.

Leigh: So yeah. She continued passing as a man through being hired out as a foot boy. She enlisted as a cabin boy on a warship and she continued to go by the alias Mark. She enjoyed the freedom and opportunities of presenting masculinely, um, got a lot of things out of it she wouldn't have been able to do, had she been raised as a woman. She ended up marrying a man and starting an inn with him; he actually was a fellow soldier.

So she enlisted on the warship, and she fell in love with a man after she revealed that she was a woman and they opened an inn together, they decided to leave their life at sea. They opened up the *Three Horseshoes* inn, but, you know, nothing can really stop Mary from going back to sea. Her husband died, and because it was peace time and there were a lack of customers, she didn't really have any reason to stay. And so she again donned men's clothing and signed on to a Dutch merchant as Mark Read, and then the ship was captured by none other than our friends Anne Bonny and Calico Jack. [they whoop]

Gretchen: So we will get into Mary and Anne and Jack's interactions in our next section. So for now we're going to finish up their bio and we'll talk about, kind of the end of their life. And then we'll backtrack and talk about all the good stuff about Mary and Anne and all that.

So what year was this? 1721. The bounty hunter Jonathan Barnet led a surprise attack on Jack and Anne's ship, and all but the lady folk – so Anne Bonny and Mary Read – fled below deck. They remained top side and were

quote 'howling like banshees'. The two women flew at the sailors. So they attacked the people who were attacking them. Just the two of them took them on, two ladies against the world, man. [sighs wistfully]

Leigh: Yes, yes. Mary drew two pistols and yelled down at the pirates into the below of the ship. And she yelled at them to, quote, 'come up and fight like men' when they did not, because they were cowards, she shot down into the hatch. She killed one of them and injured a whole bunch of the others. These ladies, were not messing around no. They're my favorites.

Gretchen: Nope, nope. Anne actually the night before; so they were all convicted of piracy, and Jack the night before he was scheduled to be executed – and he was actually executed – but, so the night before that, she actually supposedly told him that 'if he had fought like a man, he would not have been hanged like a dog'. And we have here in our notes, hashtag, stone cold bitch. [laughs]

Leigh: Yeah. At their trial for piracy, one of the witnesses against them was a woman who – we thought this was really interesting – who testified that they quote 'wore men's jackets and long trousers and handkerchiefs tied about their heads, and that each of them had a machete and pistol in their hands. They cursed and swore at the men'. And the deponent further said that her reason for her knowing and believing them to be women was by the largeness of their breasts. So...

Gretchen: [approvingly] Nice.

Leigh: Hashtag nice.

Yeah, no, it's, they, you know, they were disguised as men, but they kind of went around not really caring. Who knew they weren't hiding it that much. It was, you know, really kind of a means to an end so that they could do what they wanted to do.

Gretchen: Right. So as I mentioned, Jack was convicted of piracy and he was hanged. Anne and Mary were also convicted of piracy alongside the rest of the men on the crew, but they 'pled their bellies', which is a colloquial term for saying, 'I'm pregnant, don't kill me!'. And Mary died in jail, of a fever, which may or may not have been due to childbirth. We don't actually know, but it's a possibility that she did give birth to a child, and then she and the child died in prison.

There's no real word of Anne after this. This is what's fascinating about – I mean many things are fascinating about Anne – but it is interesting that we

have no record of her death. She apparently didn't die in jail alongside Mary, but we actually don't know what happened to her after that.

Leigh: There are rumors that maybe she returned to the Carolina's. Got married again, had babies, lived to the age of eighty-four. There are some rumors that, you know, she died elsewhere very shortly after, but she kind drops off the map.

Gretchen: We don't really know where she goes. Hopefully she had a long and enjoyable life because.

Leigh: Maybe she went and found another, another pirate lady.

Gretchen: Yeah. Maybe. Yeah, it's possible. Maybe she found one named Max. Sorry that's a *Black Sails* reference.

Leigh: [laughs] Um, I don't, I don't watch *Black Sails* [Gretchen makes a pained noise]. And Gretchen keeps telling me too.

Gretchen: [whispers for emphasis] *It's so good*. Max x Anne is my favorite anyway, so speaking of pirate ladies, who maybe like other ladies, we're going to now transition to our next section; why is it that we think that this group of people might not have been straight. And we're going to start that off with a little bit. We're gonna do a little bit of a general discussion of history and the golden age of piracy, and that will really kind of set the tone for why it is that we come to the conclusions that we do about Anne and Jack and Mary and Pierre.

I mean, but I mean Pierre. Yeah, he's Pierre.

Leigh: But, just like, full stop. Just like. Yeah, come on Pierre.

Gretchen: Yeah, you don't really have to say anything. You just have to call them Pierre the Pansy Pirate and you're like, oh, okay.

Leigh: Right. I got this, I got this. Yeah. But yeah, a little bit of history. So this is the golden age of piracy, and this is an era in which seafaring life didn't quite line up with what was being brought down as edicts from British royalty, in that seafaring life was kind of free of restrictions, it ran as its own sort of society, especially pirates who lived on the margins outside of main society.

Gretchen: Right? Like a lot of the pirates, contrary to their; I mean piracy has existed for a very long time. The piracy that we see in the 16th century was very much done, for like, monetary reasons. So you would typically

have pirates who had, like, a family back home, that they were pirates so that they could support their family. But in what we call the golden age of piracy, at least in on the European side of things, pirates didn't really have close ties to home or family on the mainland. They were very much kind of the rejects or castoffs, like they were the fringes of society. So they didn't really have a lot of strong connections to like British society as a whole or even specifically to like family ties at home.

We saw with Mary Read that once her husband died and her inn failed, she went to sea and at that point she literally had nothing tying her to the mainland. I mean, and even with Anne Bonny; granted her family literally went up in flames because she, she put them there. [both laugh] But she then didn't have any ties to society either and that's kind of seems to have been the norm for pirates in the golden age, that they didn't really have a lot of ties to the shore or even Europe. They were, they were pretty exclusively in the Caribbean and they didn't really have, you know, go back home, you know, home in quotes as the British kingdom. They didn't really go back. They just kind of stayed in the area.

It also seems to very much have been a space of potential freedom for women. Kind of, as you mentioned earlier.

Leigh: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, there's a lot of discussion about how throughout their lives, these female pirates had a pattern of quote 'switching genders' when it most suited them, you know, both Mary Read and Anne Bonny adapted to their environments. When they were on the mainland and they were married to men and they were running businesses and doing all of those sorts of things, they assumed this more feminine gender. They would dress as women, they would dress in dresses and petticoats and all of that. And then they would appear, you know, they were appearing as boys to escape poverty. They would, you know, anytime that they were pulled back into a situation where they would have to conform to the norms of British society they – British society or you know, the surrounding area – they escaped out onto the sea. Drawn perhaps into that, by this lightening of conventions.

Gretchen: Yeah, because even the way that they, you know, escape – I guess you could call it an escape – their being hanged, is to appeal to their status as women, and specifically motherhood, which is interesting, especially because someone like Anne Bonny who we know had a child previously that she, you know, had in Cuba and then left in the care of others, that she was not a, does not seem to have been a specifically maternal person. But when she's operating within British society is like, 'Oh yeah, right, I'm a woman and I'm pregnant, don't kill me'.

And that's not to pass any kind of judgment, it's just, that seems to be the way that these women operated was when they're in contact and in relationship to British society, they tend to play on kind of, their more feminine traits in other situations. We might call this kind of thing code switching, which is typically used in linguistics to talk about – because I'm sorry, I'm a, I'm a linguist – so code switching is when you change kind of the way that you talk depending on your audience. That this is a kind of, like, gendered code switching, not done I think out of malicious intent but really just out of a level of necessity in that, you know, when you're operating in British society they were women and so they would, you know, like use behaviors and, and things like that associated more with femininity, and then when they were at sea, which would have been considered a more, I guess, masculine sphere, they were more likely to, as you say, wear men's clothes, you know, do kind of hard labor, the kinds of things expected of men.

And yet we also kind of know that Mary and Anne don't seem to have always specifically hidden the fact that they were women while dressing as men. So that, I mean that kind of tells us that that life at sea for these, at least these two specific women seem to have given them like a freedom to exist outside of their society's structures of masculinity and femininity.

Leigh: Absolutely. Yeah. And that extends also to sexuality, which is, you know, what we're here primarily to talk about. So there were, you know, there's a really great article that we read where the author explains pirates as being largely poor, multicultural rebels who spat on the order that government sought to establish through tyranny and oppression, saying that they flouted the standard perceptions regarding class, race, nationality, and even government. There were no fixed categories for a pirate's identity, right? So we may have very, you know, specific notions like we talked about in our introduction about, you know, what it, what gay and what straight means. But there are a lot of things to say that, that on these ships, all those kind of things got cast aside.

Gretchen: Right? Because the facets of one's identity weren't as important as the purpose that you served on deck, on ship, what was important on a sailing vessel was what could you contribute to the running of the ship, not your, your race or your gender or your religion or things like that. Which isn't to say that all of those things – kind of not to put like a modern lens of just say like, oh, those things were dismissed – but there does seem to be a level in which, what the most important thing about you was your role on the ship and what you could offer to the crew in terms of your skills and talents and things like that.

Yeah. That same author, her name is Christine Hernandez, mentioned interestingly, just on that, that Vane, that just as their peers, so just as Anne and Mary's peer's changed their national loyalties at will, which is something that pirates would do. So these women seem to change their genders. So there seems that, like, life at sea, it seemed, seemed to have more of a fluid dynamic unfixed. By fluid, I mean unfixed, that pirates were, could be used as mercenaries, could be hired as mercenaries and they weren't really beholden to any one like nation state or whatever. And the same seems to be true in terms of gender for, for women like Mary and Anne which is interesting.

Leigh: Yeah.

Gretchen: Yeah. There's some other really cool stuff from an author called B. R. Burg, that in his book, *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition*. Do you want to tell us a little about that Leigh?

Leigh: Yeah. So this guy actually suggests that the vast majority of pirates were what we would consider homosexual, and although there isn't really enough evidence to support this, nevertheless, to indulge in these things, a pirate colony was probably just about the safest place that you could be in order to be yourself outside of society's norms. So we compared it a lot too. You know, like situational gayness or like a *vaquero* kind of situation where this is, this is just the way things may have been on ships because you are outside of the, you know, the realm of tyranny, of a government. Yeah. Did, do you want to talk a little bit about Tortuga?

Gretchen: Oh, Tortuga! So William [struggles to pronounce] Dampier; we're sorry if we butcher any of these names. We're, we're, we're Americans.

Leigh: [apologetically] We're not French.

Gretchen: We're not French. I don't know how to pronounce that. So in his book *Memoirs of a Buccaneer*, he actually complained about homosexuality on Tortuga, where he had to fight two duels to keep ardent suitors at bay and in fact it does seem like homosexuality was a, um, I guess you could call it a problem. I don't see it as a problem, but, seems to have been, I guess, for the governors there who would have been from the more rigid societies of France and Spain and England in the Caribbean colonies. So in 1645, the French government of Tortuga shipped in a bunch of prostitutes! [trying not to laugh] They were basically, they believe that the people there were being too gay. And so they're like 'Oh, I guess we'll give them prostitutes. Maybe that will make them not be homosexual anymore'. Surprise! Everyone had threesomes!

Leigh: Yup. Everybody. Everybody just decided 'Oh look, more folks to have a good time with'. So there's something, there was something already going on in this society that could not just be, you know, quote 'neutralized' by the introduction of women. It wasn't necessarily a, 'Well, I guess we'll be gay because there are no women around' because clearly when women were introduced into this situation, everybody just decided to have a really good time.

Gretchen: Yeah. They're like, well, I guess we're. I guess we like both. The more the merrier. And this is significant, especially because we know from, like, court cases and trial logs that homosexuality was actually heavily condemned, specifically in the British Royal Navy they were punished very heavily for it. According to author, I believe, David Cordingly;

"Considering how the navy cooped up thousands of young men for months on end without access to women, it is surprising how few homosexual incidents resulted in prosecutions. One can only conclude that homosexuality was either overlooked, was not reported because of savage punishments or is very rare."

Those are his options. So we know that there are court cases where sailors would have been prosecuted for what they would have called, you know, bugging, which is sodomy, basically gay sex, and like his conclusion, given that there's, you know, there's fewer than one would expect, but we also know based on the court cases that we do have that the punishments were quite severe. So it seems that it is, well it seems, seems likely that there may have been cases that weren't reported because they didn't want to get punished for it.

It also seems to be the case that a lot of the reported punishments that we have in British society seem to involve a layer of abuse, like a Captain with a young boy, like a Captain with a cabin boy. So it may also be that there was more room for punishment when there was a layer of oppression in the situation and that, you know, a more mutual relationship between like two adult males, even in the British navy, might not have been so heavily condemned, that what they were really worried about was abusive relationships. And so that's what's punished, but we do- the thing to get out of this, you know, regardless of where it falls with all that evidence is that it was punished in the Royal Navy, maybe not to a degree that we would expect, but there were punishments for it.

So the lack of restriction, of any kind, in pirate codes to me is telling, because we do have actual pirate codes – so they're like codes of conduct – and none of them that we have is there any kind of restriction or any kind of recorded punishment than of homosexuality. It just, it's not there. This

doesn't seem to be something that they need, felt the need to have any kind of rule about. And given that this was something that there were rules about in the societies that they came from, to me that seems like pretty good evidence that, you know, this was probably fairly, if not normal, then at least acceptable. I mean...

Leigh: There's, there's not just a giant gap in what is recorded as acceptable practice.

Gretchen: Right. And we, I mean, we even have evidence of what people have called pirate marriage, which is called *matelotage*, which is where two men, and I say men, we say men in this situation because the vast majority of them were. Women like Anne and Mary would be the exception though, maybe not, I mean maybe not.

There may have been more awesome ladies who disguise themselves as men that we just don't have their stories. But *matelotage*, back to that, two men would hold all things in common. It would have probably been for inheritance purposes, but we happen to think that it's possible that it could have been for romantic reasons. We don't see any need to assume that, you know, in legal documents of, you know, inheritance and joint holdings if there's no love involved because hey, guess what? We have something in our society where people have a legal binding contract where they own things together and if one of them dies, the other person gets their stuff and hey, a lot of the time they love each other.

Leigh: [heavy sarcasm] What?

Gretchen: What? So the very sarcastic explanation is my way of saying, I think that it's a very high likelihood that *matelotage*, where it occurred that there were at least some of it was out of love, that they were in a romantic relationship with each other. Some of them even had wives in common. I mean three cheers for poly pirates, man.

Leigh: So yeah, so now, now that we've rambled on about all of the context that's going on at this period in history, about how the lines of gender and sexuality and class dynamics are all kind of a little bit of a blur in piratical radical society. Um, let's bring it back to, to our friends that we're discussing here and talk a little bit about more about the context of these specific folks and our own reasonings as to why we think that they are queer.

The majority of which we're going to get into with the relationship between Mary and Anne. With Pierre, I mean we're just gonna. We're just gonna. Say it here. Like, do we need to say anything other than he's called Pierre, the

Pansy Pirate and in the source material and he ran a hair and dress making shop?!

Gretchen: Right? I mean, yeah!

Leigh: Yeah.

Gretchen: Again, again, we don't, we don't approve of stereotypes. And, and also sometimes they're accurate.

Leigh: Yeah. Based out of truth. We say this with love. Pierre is beloved among these, these podcast hosts.

Gretchen: Yes.

So yeah. Calico Jack. Calico Jack seems to have, like his friend Pierre, had a fondness for a splashy waistcoats, bright ribbons and gaudy Calico pattern breeches. That's actually where he gets his name. Calico Jack Rackham is because of the, a very brightly colored heavily patterned clothes that he liked to wear.

And according to one of our sources, as I briefly mentioned earlier, it has been suggested that Calico Jack may have come to New Providence as the paramour, as well as the quartermaster, to Captain Vane and the, I mean the third. So that's, I mean, that's two bits of evidence. The third for us is, is that queers tend to come in packs, right? We tend to find each other and hang out together, so if Pierre is, I mean, gay, and as we will get into Mary and Anne and they seem to have a very... They seem to like each other very much. Seems not quite as likely that the fourth member of the pair would be entirely straight.

Leigh: Yeah. Yeah. It's, you know, unless you want to introduce the token straight of the group, but let's be real. Yeah. Queer people, we travel in packs. We do not exist as the sole queer character on the television show surrounded by the straights.

Gretchen: Right, right. I mean in like, yeah. It didn't mean your as your favorite pirate radio shows. I mean Pierre and Jack and Anne loved drama that like they're, they're pretty extra people. I, I don't know, but that's all we have for Calico Jack.

Now we're going to get into Mary and Anne.

Leigh: The main event, Mary Read and Anne Bonny. Oh, they met and had instant attraction with one another. Instant attraction. This is, this is the meat of, of what we're talking about.

Gretchen: Oh yeah. Tell us about this instant attraction.

Leigh: So when Anne Bonny and Rackham took over the ship that Mary Read found herself on when she was first, quote, 'captured by pirates', which, you know, she went pretty willingly. It's true!

Gretchen: She did.

Leigh: You know, they asked, they asked, you know, hey, you could either become a prisoner or you can join the crew. And she was like, 'Yeah, I think I'll do that!' direct quote.

Um, but no. So there's, it says in one of our sources that,

"There was quite a handsome, clean cut man who caught the roving eye of Anne Bonny, and admired the sailor's skill and daring. The shipboard friendship became a strong attraction, especially for Anne, she decided to reveal her identity only to discover that the object of her desire was holding the same secret."

End quote. That I think is so fascinating! Each of them became attracted to one another in the guise of men and then found out that they were both women and they were each other's confidant. They decided to keep each other's secrets. And so we've got this really interesting thing at play where it feels like there's just multilayers of queerness, right? You're, you're doing this thing where you are supposed to be disguising yourself as a man, but you're finding yourself inexplicably attracted to this other person, and they were deciding to go for it and then trying to figure out how to navigate this friendship. They needed to reveal their identity. They were fast friends. They were constantly seen together aboard the ship. They fought side by side, back to back. They were pretty much inseparable.

Gretchen: According to Johnson,

'Mary Read's sex was not so much suspected by any person on board, so no one on the ship knew that Mary Read, was that Mark Read, was actually Mary Read till Anne Bonny, who was not altogether so reserved in point of chastity, took a particular liking to her'

And that's like our favorite thing. I mean it's super judge-y, like it's super patriarchal and judge-y, but I love it. Not altogether so reserved in point of chastity. Basically just say that Anne likes her sex.

Leigh: Yeah. Bonny is a free loving woman.

Gretchen: Yeah. She enjoys herself a lot and really liked what she saw with Mark Read and gee, how interesting that-- that Mark Read actually ended up being Mary Read, and remember that as Leigh mentioned earlier, part of Anne's early story was that she left the people she first met left her husband, James Bonny, for was actually a Captain Jennings and his mistress. So, Anne Bonny is not altogether unfamiliar with ladies. She seems to have to have had a relationship with a woman previously.

Leigh: Or at least at least tangentially, you know, as in, in being in some sort of unconventional arrangement in which there was another woman.

Gretchen: Yeah. So apparently Anne and Mary were such good friends that Jack got jealous, because at this point Jack did not realize that Mark was Mary.

Leigh: Yes, super, super jealous. Captain Calico Jack got so jealous of Anne's affection for Mark that he threatened to cut her new lovers throat quote 'to therefore to quiet him'. She let him into the secret also. So it wasn't until Jack was like, 'Hey, hold on, wait a minute. My Lady is looking at this other dude, and that makes me a little squirrely. I'm going to kill this guy because he's taking my woman!' and then she's like, 'Wait, no, hold on. It's, it's. Hold on. It's fine. She's a lady also it. It's totally cool. We're all right'.

Gretchen: Yeah. Yeah. Um, the, the story according to Johnson was that Jack Rackham burst into the cabin one day with the intent of killing Read in his mind and Rackham, discovered Mary stretched out on the bed before and not entirely clothed and visibly a woman, which again, love it. Love it.

Leigh: Yeah.

Gretchen: Not entirely clothed and visibly a woman.

Leigh: It's my favorite. Yeah. I mean, I have a lot of my favorites in this, but.

Gretchen: Oh Man. Their story's so great.

Leigh: Yeah. There's a, it's the same guy that we keep referencing. Richter Norton, a historian who's worked a lot in looking into this kind of queerness element of, of Anne and Mary's relationship. He mentioned specifically that a lot of historians may view this moment as Anne having just ripped off Mary's clothing just moments before. For some reason [Gretchen laughs] there's, there's no explanation as to what the reason was, but that she had just now

discovered her quote, true gender. Um, but he thinks that this is probably unlikely. Right? Like these two women had been so intimate for far too long. They shared such a rough lifestyle that, like, there, there was, there was no way that at that point they had not been fully acquainted with one another's gender.

Gretchen: Right. Yeah. Like that to me is such a like gal pal, like, 'Oh no, like, Anne totally just accidentally uncovered the fact that, that Mary was a woman right then when Jack conveniently burst in. Right when Mary's naked for totally non-sexy reasons'. Yeah. You just...

Leigh: You're just naked in your bed chamber. It's fine.

Gretchen: Right, right. I know that.

Leigh: That's right. With your best gal pal.

Gretchen: Right. I totally just hang out with my best gal pal, you know, not entirely clothed and visibly a woman just all the time. You're just like...

Leigh: I totally have completely naked baths with my platonic gal pal in ancient Greece. See? It's the same thing.

Gretchen: Yeah, just they were, they were just really good friends and...

Leigh: Real good friend.

Gretchen: Anne just happened, had just, just then happened to uncover the truth. How convenient for Jack to bust in right then. Yeah, if you can tell, we think that's bullshit. [laughs]

Leigh: Yeah, just, just a little bit. Yeah. And I thought it was really interesting too that even, even beyond the relationship of Anne and Mary, there was another point later in which Mary ended up falling for another man, a navigator who was on a ship that they captured, and they became mess mates and strict companions until she again revealed to him that she was a woman. When she found she had a friendship for her, as when she found he had a friendship for her as a man. She suffered the discovery to be made by carelessly showing her breasts which were 'very white'. Um, so this weird kind of blurring of gender and attraction continues with everyone that they are interacting with. And there's a whole lot at play.

Gretchen: Right? I mean, and, and that's not even; I feel like people don't realize the implications of Jack getting jealous. That like, for Jack to have gotten jealous of what he perceived of as being affection between Anne, and

who he presumed to be a man, like for that to cause so much jealousy that he was willing or wanted to kill this presumably male friend... It can't have been entirely friendly. Like it couldn't have just been like a casual, like 'Hey, we just enjoy hanging out with each other 'because I mean Jack was ready to kill Mary because he-

Leigh: Especially. Well, especially if you think about, you know, if you put it in the context of a, of there really having been no possibility that Anne and Mary did not already know each other's secrets.

Gretchen: Right. Right. Right. So he, like, he's getting jealous of an intimacy between what he thinks of as, you know, his girlfriend and another man like, but they have like such a strong intimacy. There's no way they didn't know each other's secret and it's to the point that to an outside observer, they look like it looked to him like, to use colloquial terms, that Anne was cheating on him. Like if that's his perception, chances are they weren't just friends, they weren't just gal pals.

Leigh: We're just, we're just gal pals, as it were, I guess. Gal and mysterious lover pals.

Gretchen: [giggling] Yeah, she is naked in her cabin. I feel like again, that just like you don't usually get naked and someone's cabin unless, unless something's happening.

Leigh: Absolutely. Alright. So, so to wrap up now that we've talked for, I don't even know how long anymore we'll find out when we edit this. Um, but so we want to kind of wrap things up with our general thoughts and impressions on our, kind of how gay were they scale, and we may in the future find that are our own perceptions deviate from one another. But I think this week Gretchen and I found ourselves, pretty pretty lined up, right?

Gretchen: Yeah. We didn't really have any differences really. I mean, Pierre, as we keep saying he's a ten out of ten, we're pretty damn sure! Pretty damn sure. When it comes to Jack, we were both kind of in the middle on that one.

Leigh: Yeah. Four out of ten, five out of ten.

Gretchen: Like for me, it was like a fancy, you know, fancy clothes don't always make the man. And although like some sources say he might be Vane's lover, I'd just like, to me what it comes down to is the fact that he hung around with so many people who are much more probably queer, is suspicious, because as we say we tend to come in packs. So there's very

little about his actual story that we can kind of hang that on. It has a lot more to do with like inference just based on who he's hanging out with.

Leigh: Yeah. I'm really interested to see if, you know, in the annals of history, if anything else comes up with Captain Vane. Right. And also I'm just really fascinated by his initial attraction to Anne Bonny, because she was also disguising herself as a man. So how did this come about? How did this situation come about where she felt like she needed to, [Gretchen makes supportive noises] needed to reveal herself as a woman, unless there had been some sort of attraction between them and then, and then by revealing herself, she would, you know, legitimize it as a more heterosexual thing. I think of it kind of as like a Li Shang x Mulan situation, right? Like, like, okay, we all know, you know, Li Shang was totally into Mulan; buddy thought while she was a dude. So like leaning towards some hints of, you know, what we would call bisexuality, right?

Gretchen: Yeah. No, that's a really good point. And as we've seen like this, this is a running theme for both of these women. Both of these women had relationships. I mean Mary, it happened twice where she had a relationship with a man and you know, there seems to be a level of attraction there. Then she was like, 'Oh wait, I'm a lady!'. So yeah, there's something to that with, with Jack potentially. Yup. Yup. Mary and Anne I think we were both pretty much on the same page for that.

Leigh: Like this is the reason why we wanted to do this episode, and even one of the original episodes we want, one of the original ideas we had for the podcast in general, one of the first people that we kind of pinged on is there so much about them and their relationship between their adventures together and how much of a tight unit they were, how much they balked at everybody else's cowardice and being captured together and just that part about being walked in on in bed naked. The fact that they were inseparable right after casually leaving so many other lovers, right? They were so dismissive of all of their paramours and yet the only thing that separated them was being actually physically separated by the justice system.

Gretchen: Right? Right. Yep. According to one of our sources – Norton again – says that evidence of their homosexuality is not so clear cut. As you know, we historians might wish. At most they were bisexual, which I think is fairly clear that they're definitely not strictly lesbians. Both of them have his-you know, relationships with men. But in any case, we have to take into account the fact that Anne and Mary's, their dismissive treatment of their lovers, of their male paramours, even their children in Anne's case; she drops her kids off in Cuba. Their obvious enjoyment of their cross dressing and the fact that they acted together as a couple and obviously loved one another. So the evidence suggests that they must have been relevant, you

know, that their experience is relevant to a history of, you know, the lesbian or, to broaden the term, the woman loving woman or Sapphic experience. That they are very much relevant to that because- it is interesting that they were much more dismissive of their male paramours than they were of each other. I mean, it seems that once they met they are, the running theme, like they stick together like glue in a way that neither one of them stuck with their male lovers.

So yeah, we, I mean, we'd probably put them at an eight or a nine. Like I can't definitely say like, yes they are, but I'm pretty damn sure. I would be highly surprised.

Leigh: I mean as sure as you can be in a situation where you're dealing with people from hundreds of years ago and there was very few primary sources that say a lot of these things, but the fact that those very few primary sources have very telling passages in them that speak to literal attraction and their very close relationship.

Gretchen: Right? So I mean, that just about wraps it up. The last thing I'll say before we offer some other concluding thoughts is that if you happen to agree with us that Mary and Anne were very likely not straight, and that maybe Jack might've had his leanings to, uh, you should definitely watch *Black Sails*. It does come with trigger warnings for violence and some other things like that. Like I can't unabashedly, or unreservedly I should say, endorse it because it is fairly violent.

But the one thing I will say, Anne Bonny is definitely bi as fuck. There is definitely pretty sure that Jack had probably had an unacknowledged thing for Vane even there. And Mary slash Mark Read shows up in the finale, in the, what I call the fan servi-est of fan service. It's pretty awesome. It's a very, very, very queer friendly show.

There are other queer pirates. Max is my personal favorite. She's one of 'em. She is a sex worker who- like sex worker turned woman of power. She's also a woman of color. She has a relationship with Anne, it's beautiful and amazing. Plus one of the main messages is choosing love and resisting and oppressive society, which seems actually to fit in very well with some of the stuff we said earlier about the history of the time period. And pirates kind of living on the margins. So if you like queer pirates and want to watch a show that has queer pirates, *Black Sails* is a show with queer pirates. I just have to get that plug in because it's, while...

Leigh: You're really, you're really going for that.

Gretchen: It's such a good show!

Leigh: You're really going for that endorsement.

Gretchen: Yes! I am in no way paid by *Starz*. I, I wish I were like, yeah, sorry. *Starz*; do you want to give me some money for the fact that I love your show and tell people to watch it? [both laugh]

Leigh: All three people listening to this first episode. So anyway, yeah, final, final thoughts. We were both really compelled by the performance of gender expectations and queerness of Anne and Mary falling in love, thinking the other was a man, only for them to both be women. Do there's, they're, they're more than likely queer in more ways than one that kind of multi-layered.

Gretchen: Right! And we may even, we had such a really good discussion when we were planning this episode that we may even circle back around to this kind of idea of gender performance in the 18th century, British Maritime Society because there are some other like female sailors for whom this running theme seems to fit. And it's just a really interesting idea because as much as we, you know, we also, we really want to talk about people in history who had, who would fall kind of on the sexual orientation spectrum of attraction.

But also we're very, we're also very much interested in, in gender and the way that gender hasn't, you know, hasn't always been binary and the way that society's kind of have, some societies have had more room for alternative expressions of gender than what we seem to have in our society now. And also the ways in which people who live in these societies with, with binary gender kind of inhabit and kind of play with gender as a concept in their experience, as we see with Mary and Anne. So we definitely want to circle back around to that at some point. We just didn't have time to cover that today. So hopefully that means you guys will keep listening because we have more things to talk about. Yup.

Leigh: Absolutely.

Gretchen: So that's it for today's episode. You can find us online individually. Leigh, why don't you tell them where, where you can be found.

Leigh: So when I'm not nerding out about old timey queer folks, I'm usually talking about comics and queer TV over at [aparadoxinflux](#) on twitter and crying about Xena episodes on my couch.

Gretchen: And once again, I'm Gretchen, when I am not talking about gay history, I am writing nerdy media analysis and probably fangirling over *Star*

Wars, Steven Universe, Wynonna Earp, at thefundamentals.com. My personal website is gnellis.com, or you can find me on [Tumblr](#) and [Twitter](#) as gnelliswriter. All one word.

Leigh: *History is Gay* podcast can be found on Tumblr at [History is Gay Podcast](#), twitter at [HistoryisGayPod](#), and you can always drop us a line with questions, suggestions, or just to say hi at HistoryisGayPodcast@gmail.com.

Gretchen: And our website is www.historyisgaypodcast.com, where you can find all of our show notes and our list of resources in case you want to check those out for yourself.

Leigh: We also want to say that if you're enjoying the podcast and you want to hear more, you should subscribe and rate and review us on iTunes. That'll get people to see the show and hopefully we'll get a nice community going here.

Gretchen: And that's it for *History is Gay*. Until next time...

Leigh: Stay queer.

Gretchen: Stay curious.

[Theme music plays]