

THE ORIGINS OF THE BELIZE SETTLEMENT

Los orígenes del asentamiento de Belice

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Resumen

Este artículo analiza la fundación de Belice en el siglo XVII. Comienza con los dos mitos sobre el “origen” que se han mostrado tan duraderos, como el de la misteriosa figura de Peter Wallace de una parte, y la idea de los naufragos por otra. El artículo demuestra que ambos mitos son ficcionales y que nunca existió una figura histórica llamada Peter Wallace. Como el nombre de Belice no puede derivar del de Wallace, la segunda parte del artículo explora las posibilidades alternativas, concluyendo que es, en efecto, una derivación de una palabra maya. La parte final considera entonces la identidad y localización de los colonizadores que llegaron antes del establecimiento del comercio de palo de tinte.

Palabras clave: Belice, Peter Wallace, Orígenes míticos, palabras mayas, palo de tinte, asentamientos británicos.

Abstract

This article explores the foundations of the Belize in the 17th century. It begins with the two “origin” myths that have proved so enduring in Belize regarding the mysterious figure of Peter Wallace on the one hand and the idea of shipwrecked sailors on the other. The article demonstrates that both myths are in fact fictions and that here never was an historical figure called Peter Wallace. Since the name “Belize” cannot therefore be derived from “Wallace”, the second part of the article explores the alternative possibilities and concludes that it is indeed derived from a Maya word. The final part of the article then considers the identity and location of the settlers who came before the establishment of the logwood trade.

Keywords: Belize, Peter Wallace, Origin Myths, Maya Words, Logwood, British Settlers

The Spanish reached Belize before the British and the Maya long before either of them. Yet the history of Belize is intimately associated with the British because they were the first Europeans to establish a settlement that was more than transitory. It was this settlement that eventually expanded to reach the boundaries of modern Belize.

All Caribbean countries, with one exception, can document the date of first permanent settlement by Europeans with some accuracy. Cuba, for example, was first settled by the Spanish in 1511, Antigua by the British in 1632, Martinique by the French in 1635 and St. Eustatius by the Dutch in 1636. The one exception is Belize, whose British origins have been shrouded in a mixture of fact, myth, legend, naivety and dishonesty.¹

All societies strive to establish a narrative about their origins. Some of these are creation myths that may once have been believed, but are now accepted as fable. An example is the Finnish myth about the origins of ancient Karelia, where the earliest inhabitants are said to have sprung from an egg.² Others have an element of historical truth that has been embellished over time to favor the founders. An example is the colony of Jamestown in Virginia, whose first British inhabitants were much more incompetent and disorganized than their subsequent sanitized image would suggest.³

The purpose of this article is to disentangle the facts from everything else in the stories about the origins of Belize. The article starts with two common myths that Belize was first settled either by a buccaneer called Peter Wallace or by shipwrecked sailors or – in some versions – both at the same time. These two myths can now be shown to be false despite the fact that they have been repeated *ad nauseam* in the secondary literature.

Since Wallace never existed, the name of the country cannot be derived from his surname - as has often been suggested. Thus, the second part of the article looks at the etymology of the word ‘Belize’. This is complicated by the large number of countries and publications in which places and people have been named ‘Belize’. It is easier to say with certainty what words ‘Belize’ is **not** derived from, although a strong case can be made for its derivation from a word or words in Yucatecan Maya.

The third part of the article is concerned with the first British settlers **before** the establishment of logwood extraction as the main economic activity. This is the most problematic part of the article, as we will never know with certainty who the first settlers were. There is a certain justice in this, however, since we will also never know who were the first Paleo-Indians or Maya in Belize – nor, for that matter, the first Africans, Garifuna or refugees from Yucatán.

1.1. The Wallace and Shipwrecked Sailors Myths

A Google search using ‘Peter Wallace Buccaneer’ as the keywords records over one million entries. This is an astonishingly high number. Most of these repeat the claim that Wallace, Wallice or

¹ Spanish *entradas* into Belize, however, have been reasonably well documented. See, for example, Philip Ainsworth Means and Andres de Avendaño y Loyalo, and Alonso Cano, *History Of The Spanish Conquest Of Yucatan And Of The Itzas*. (Cambridge, Mass: The Museum, 1917); Doris Stone, “Some Spanish entradas 1524-1695,” *Middle American Research Series*, no. 4 (1932): 213-296; Thompson (1988), Grant D. Jones, *Maya Resistance To Spanish Rule*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989). And Elizabeth A. Graham, *Maya Christians and Their Churches in Sixteenth-Century Belize*. (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2011)

² This story is told in an epic poem called the Kalevala written by Elias Lönnrot in the 19th century.

³ See John H. Elliott, *Empires Of The Atlantic World*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006)

Willis⁴ came to Belize in either 1638 or 1640, that he founded a town at the mouth of the Haulover Creek that is today called Belize City and that he was a buccaneer of Scottish origin. Many also claim that he came from the island of Tortuga, off the coast of Haiti, where the British had established a foothold until they were driven off by the French in 1640.

Strangely, however, there is no mention of 'Wallace' in the literature on Belize before 1827. In the first book devoted exclusively to the Belize settlement, written by Captain Henderson and published in 1809, there is no mention of his name.⁵ Nor is he mentioned by Nathaniel Uring, who visited the settlement in the early 18th century.⁶ Even more surprising is that he is not listed by Alexandre Exquemeling in his exhaustive study of buccaneers first published in 1678.⁷ Furthermore, when the *Honduras Almanack* - a quasi-official record of the settlement - was first published in 1826, there was no mention of Wallace and the authors stated cautiously that the "British settlement of Honduras, of which Belize is the capital, cannot be traced to be of any greater antiquity than from the administration of Oliver Cromwell".⁸

This understandable caution was thrown to the wind in the second edition of the *Honduras Almanack* published in 1827.⁹ This states that 'Wallice' was "Lieutenant among the Bucaniers who formerly infested these seas.....he first discovered the mouth of the River Belize".¹⁰ This was then repeated in subsequent editions, with the 1829 edition stating that "The town of Belize, situated at the mouth of the river of the same name, was so called after its first discoverer, Wallice, a noted Bucanier who made this, the place of his retreat".¹¹

More information on 'Wallace' was provided by the final edition of the *Honduras Almanack* in 1839 where we learn that "Belize owes its origin to a Scotch Corsair Chief of the name of Wallace, a native of Falkland in Kinrosshire. At the time that these formidable pirates were driven from Tortuga, a small island situated a few miles north of St. Domingo [Haiti], Wallace to escape from the just vengeance of the Spaniards fled for security amongst the numerous islands on the coast of Yucatan and

⁴ As the name is not spelt consistently, we will refer only to 'Wallace' unless it is absolutely necessary to use a variant spelling in order to avoid confusion.

⁵ See George Henderson, *An account of the British settlement of Honduras*. (London: R. Baldwin, 1809). The second edition in 1811 also makes no reference to 'Wallace'.

⁶ See Nathaniel Uring, *A history of the voyages and travels of Capt. Nathaniel Uring, with new draughts of the Bay of Honduras and the Caribbee Islands, and particularly of St. Lucia, and the harbour of Petite Carenage, into which ships may run in bad weather, and be safe from all winds and storms*. (London: J. Peele. 1726) and Uring, *A history of the voyages and travels*, ed. A. Dewar (London: Cassell, 1928).

⁷This book has been published in many languages and editions with considerable variation in content as each country sought to betray 'its' buccaneers in the most favorable light. However, no edition in any language refers to 'Wallace'. For a relatively recent English edition, see John Exquemeling, *The buccaneers of America, a true account of the most remarkable assaults committed of late years upon the coasts of the West Indies by the buccaneers of Jamaica and Tortuga*. (Place of publication not identified: Corner House, 1976).

⁸ See *The Honduras Almanack*. (Belize: Authority of the magistrates, 1826), 5. Cromwell was Lord Protector from 1649 until his death in 1658, although it could be argued that his 'administration' included the years of the Civil War that began in 1642.

⁹ The *Honduras Almanack* was at first supported by funds from the public assembly in Belize and there were annual editions between 1826 and 1830 inclusive. The quality was superb and these early editions sometimes included color prints as well. There was then an edition in 1839, which is of a very inferior quality. The 1829 edition is available digitally as a Google book (<http://books.google.com/>) and the 1839 edition can be found in the Digital Library of the Caribbean (<http://www.dloc.com/>).

¹⁰ See *Honduras Almanack* (Belize: Authority of the magistrates 1827), 5.

¹¹ See *Honduras Almanack* (Belize: Authority of the magistrates 1829), 5.

finally settled at the mouth of the River Belize. Here after many vicissitudes both by sea and land Wallace fixed his residence, erected a few log huts and a small fort alicé, which stood on the site now occupied by the handsome premises of Messrs. Boitias and Delande".¹²

This edition of the *Honduras Almanack*, in addition to reasserting that 'Belize' is derived from 'Wallace', gives an interesting insight into Wallace's *modus operandi*. Wallace, we are told, was joined from time to time by other "restless spirits" who "made repeated incursions upon the Spaniards.....It does not appear whether this small but formidable band of Settlers were received with encouragement by the natives or treated as enemies, - they formed however a close alliance.....with the fierce and indomitable Indians of the Mosquito Shore; by arming these new allies with fire arms they carried on a series of hostilities of the most destructive kind with the Spanish forces by whom the Settlement was surrounded on all sides".¹³

This version of the Wallace myth was then reproduced faithfully by John Lloyd Stephens, who visited Belize during his exploration of Maya sites in Central America (Stephens cited the *Honduras Almanack* as his source).¹⁴ Since this book was immensely popular, going into many editions, the Wallace myth acquired an international following which would never have been possible if it had remained confined to publications in Belize. As a result, the story was repeated in many other secondary sources.¹⁵

By now the careful reader will have noted that Wallace may have been a 'noted' buccaneer, but he appears not to have had a first name. This omission was made good by Justo Sierra, a Mexican author, who wrote a series of articles about Belize in the magazine *El Fénix* published in Campeche between 1849 and 1851. Sierra, whose articles were entitled 'Ojeada sobre el establecimiento británico de Belice', not only claimed that Wallace's first name was 'Peter', but also that he landed in Belize with 80 companions.¹⁶ In addition, Sierra claimed that Wallace did not settle until the Spanish fort at Bacalar had been destroyed by a group of buccaneers. Bacalar was attacked by Abraham Blauvelt in 1648 and again in 1652,¹⁷ so this places Wallace's arrival in the 1650s – not 1638 or 1640s as implied by the *Honduras Almanack*. Sierra therefore added three elements to the Wallace myth and it is worth quoting him in full, as the article is not often cited these days:

"Dicese que un bucanero escosés, atrevido y emprendedor, llamado Peter Wallace, movido de la fama de las riquezas que se ganaban en aquellas expediciones infames, y asociado de los mas resueltos de sus camaradas, determinó buscar un sitio a propósito en que colocar perpetuamente su guarida, a fin de salir a sus piraterías en la mejor ocasión y volver con toda seguridad. Como esto ocurría a

¹² See *Honduras Almanack* (Belize: Authority of the magistrates 1839), 2.

¹³ See *Honduras Almanack* (Belize: Authority of the magistrates 1839), 3.

¹⁴ See John L. Stephens and Frederick Catherwood, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*, Vol. 1. (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue and Co, 1854), 14-15.

¹⁵ See, for example, Ephraim G. Squier, *The states of Central America: their geography, topography, climate, population, resources, productions, commerce, political organization, aborigines, etc., etc., comprising chapters on Honduras, San Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Belice, the Bay Islands, the Mosquito Shore, and the Honduras Inter-Oceanic Railway*. (New York: Harper & brothers, 1858), 576-577.

¹⁶ Hubert Bancroft, in his three volume history of Central America, would repeat Sierra's account almost word for word, although he gives as his sources Manuel Peniche, *Historia De Las Relaciones De España Y México Con Inglaterra*. (México: Imprenta del gobierno, 1869) and Francisco de Paula García Peláez, *Memorias Para La Historia Del Antiguo Reyno De Guatemala*. (Guatemala: Establecimiento tip. de L. Luna, 1851). See Hubert H. Bancroft, *History Of Central America*. Vol. 2 (San Francisco: Bancroft, 1883), 624.

¹⁷ See below.

mediados del siglo XVII, la costa de Yucatán bañada del golfo de Honduras, se hallaba totalmente deshabitada de españoles, pues el único establecimiento que allí había, el de Bacalar, había sido aniquilado por la irrupción del filibuster Abraham y por la sublevación de los indios de aquel distrito. Wallace hizo un perfecto reconocimiento de aquellos bajos y arrecifes.....y desembarcó allí con unos ochenta piratas, que desde el momento mismo construyeron unas cuantas chozas, circunvaladas de una especie de empalizada o ruda fortaleza”.¹⁸

Various authors, Belizean or based in Belize, then consolidated the myth over the next eighty years without adding much of substance. Archibald Gibbs, for example, mentions Wallace, but treats him more as a figure of legend and does not give a first name.¹⁹ The *Handbook of British Honduras*, the successor to the *Honduras Almanack* and published three times between 1890 and 1892, also mentions the ‘celebrated buccaneer’ Wallace, although without much conviction and again without giving a first name.²⁰ On the other hand, the next edition of the *Handbook* in 1925 was much less circumspect, the authors including a chronology in which it is stated that in 1638 “Wallace, or Willis, a Scotch Corsair Chief, the Buccaneer of Historical fame, to escape from the just vengeance of the Spaniards, established his rendezvous at the mouth of the Belize River, where he erected a few log huts. He came from Hispaniola.”²¹

The next development in the Wallace legend can be traced to a Guatemalan historian, Francisco Asturias. Writing for the first time in 1925, Asturias claimed that Wallace was Sir Walter Raleigh’s ‘primer oficial’ and that he accompanied him on his voyage of 1594 intended to discover El Dorado. After the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603, Raleigh’s fortunes declined and Wallace is said to have left his service and ‘se dedicó a correrías por su cuenta.’ Asturias claims that Wallace set sail from England on May 14th 1603 and arrived at the mouth of the river Belize, where he established a settlement. He then became disillusioned by squabbling among his companions and returned to England in 1617 where he died in 1621.²²

Sir John Burdon, editor of the three-volume *Archives of British Honduras* and governor of the colony at the time of publication of the first volume in 1931, was sufficiently intrigued by Asturias’ claims that he started a correspondence with him in 1930. This exchange of letters was then reproduced by Asturias in the second edition of his work on Belize, published in 1941.²³ The correspondence makes clear that Asturias had no primary sources for his claims about Wallace, even repeating his statement from the first edition that he had no proof (‘sin tener ningún comprobante, me imagino que

¹⁸ Sierra, quoted in Eligio Ancona, *Historia De Yucatán, Desde La Época Más Remota Hasta Nuestros Días*. Vol. 2 (Barcelona: Imprenta de J.J. Roviralta, 1889), 367-368. Ancona quotes Sierra to say ‘Petter’ for Wallace’s first name, but this is a misprint for ‘Peter’.

¹⁹ See Archibald R. Gibbs, *British Honduras*. (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1883), 21-22.

²⁰ See Lindsay W. Bristowe and Philip B. Wright, *The Handbook Of British Honduras, 1890-91, Comprising Historical, Statistical, And General Information Concerning The Colony*. (Edinburgh, 1890), 25.

²¹ See Monrad S. Metzgen and Henry Cain, *The Handbook Of British Honduras, Comprising Historical, Statistical And General Information Concerning The Colony*. (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1925), 1. In fairness to the authors, the historical sketch (p.31) is more cautious, repeating almost exactly the words of the earlier editions of the Handbook.

²² See Francisco Asturias, *Belice*. (Guatemala, 1925).

²³ See Francisco Asturias, *Belice*. (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional de Guatemala, 1941).

es en esta expedición cuando él llega a la desembocadura del Río Viejo, que desde entonces comienza a llamarse de Wallace o BELIZE’).

Unfortunately, instead of quietly burying this nonsense, Burdon repeated some of it in his Introduction to the *Archives of British Honduras* as if it had some authenticity.²⁴ Even worse, Burdon misquotes Asturias by stating that Wallace arrived in Belize in 1617, when Asturias actually said he had **arrived** in 1603 and **left** in 1617.²⁵ Thus, a new layer was added to the Wallace myth, which has been repeated in numerous secondary sources.

Many of these elements of the Wallace myth were conveniently summarized by José Antonio Calderón Quijano, who is most famous for his attempt to derive the name of Belize from Wallace.²⁶ However, the high point of the Wallace myth was provided by E.O. Winzerling in 1946, when he devoted a whole chapter of his book on the origins of Belize to ‘Captain Willis’. We now learn that ‘Willis’ set sail (from where is not stated) in 1639 for Tortuga with a group of adventurers ‘drawn mostly from those expelled from Nevis’ and became master of the island. He was then driven off by the French in August 1640 and set sail for the mouth of the river Belize where he founded a settlement ‘approximately in September 1640’.²⁷

The publication of Winzerling’s book was followed soon after by the rise of the nationalist movement in Belize.²⁸ This played down the European origins of the settlement and emphasized instead its African and Maya roots. Understandably, there was little room in this new narrative for ‘swash-buckling heroes’ such as ‘Wallace’. Assad Shoman, for example, does not mention him in either the first or second edition of his *Thirteen Chapters of a History of Belize* nor does the quasi-official *A History of Belize: Nation in the Making* that is widely used in schools.²⁹

The legend, however, has refused to die despite the lack of interest of most contemporary Belizeans. A recent history of Belize, for example, states: “The ‘Wallace Legend’ suggests that a Scottish buccaneer or pirate, Peter Wallace, first settled at the mouth of the Belize River, possibly in 1638. His name was supposedly mis-spelt by the Spaniards until it changed into the word ‘Belize’. So far, there is not enough historical evidence to prove this legend.”³⁰

This agnosticism with regard to the historical evidence is fortunately incorrect. We can in fact demonstrate that [Peter] Wallace never existed and therefore cannot have been the founder, or one of the founders, of Belize. The key is what persuaded the authors of the *Honduras Almanack* to change their story between 1826, when there is no mention of Wallace, and 1827, when there is. The answer,

²⁴ See John A. Burdon, *Archives of British Honduras*. (London: Sifton, Praed & Co., Ltd, 1931), 3.

²⁵ This mistake is all the more extraordinary as Asturias had corrected Burdon’s error in their correspondence during 1930. See Asturias, *Belice*, 14.

²⁶ See José Antonio Calderón Quijano, *Belice 1663 - 1821*. (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1944), Lámina II.

²⁷ See E. O. Winzerling, *The Beginning Of British Honduras, 1506-1765*. (New York: North river Press, 1946), Chapter 4.

²⁸ The Wallace myth was, however, kept alive by Stephen L. Caiger, *British Honduras*. (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1951) and all editions of the *Brief Sketch of British Honduras* published between 1927 and the 1960s. Even R.A. Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History of British Honduras, 1638-1901*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), D. A. G. Waddell, *British Honduras*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) and Narda Dobson, *A History of Belize*. (Port of Spain: Longman Caribbean, 1973) devote some space to it.

²⁹ See Assad Shoman, *[13] Chapters of A History of Belize*. (Belize City: Angelus Press, 1994); Assad Shoman, *A History of Belize in 13 Chapters*. (Belize City: Angelus Press, 2011) and Robert Leslie and Rachael Heusner, *A History of Belize*. (Benque Viejo del Carmen: Cubola Productions, 2008).

³⁰ See Joe Iyo and Froyla Tzalam and Francis Humphreys, *Belize, A New Vision*. (Belize City: Factory Books, 2007), 287.

curiously, is found in the two volume *Annals of Jamaica* written by the Reverend George Wilson Bridges and published in 1828.

In the second volume, Bridges appends a 'supplementary note on the history of Honduras'.³¹ Here we learn that his information on the Belize settlement came from "two highly respectable and well-informed inhabitants of Honduras, George Westby and Thomas Pickstock, Esquires." These two Baymen,³² both of whom were members of the Public Assembly in Belize and the second of whom was a well-known merchant, can be presumed to be the source for Bridges' claim that:

"Willis, the notorious Buccaneer, was the first Englishman [sic] who settled on the banks of the river to which he gave his name. The Spaniards called it Walis, and the corrupting influence of time has softened it to Belize. The ex-governor of Tortuga sought his retreat on the shores and isles of Yucatan, where a multitude of his subjects or friends, who preferred a distant fortune to a narrow home, quickly joined him."³³

Bridges had access to the *Honduras Almanack* for 1827, as we learn from his note on mahogany,³⁴ and his account of Wallace is similar to that of its Belizean authors (possibly Westby and Pickstock).³⁵ However, it is not exactly the same. First, Bridges spells the name 'Willis' not 'Wallice' and, secondly, Bridges claims he was an ex-governor of Tortuga – a claim not made by the *Honduras Almanack* until 1839 (see above).

The reference to Tortuga and the spelling of 'Willis' turn out to be crucial. Unlike the origins of the Belize settlement, the origins of the Tortuga settlement are well documented.³⁶ Tortuga was claimed by the Providence Island Company, established by the Earl of Warwick and other leading Puritans in 1629, and named Association Island. The Spanish had succeeded in driving off the British and French settlers in December 1634,³⁷ but they drifted back and by the end of 1639 its population was around 300 (mainly British). They chose as their governor Captain Roger Floud, who had at one time been sheriff of Providence Island.³⁸ The settlers, however, were dissatisfied with Floud, who was forced to return to London to clear his name.

The remaining British settlers elected a Captain James as their leader (called in the Providence Island records 'President James').³⁹ By now, however, the French on the island had fallen out with their British colleagues and a plan was hatched to overpower them. An expedition was sent from the French half of St. Kitts in 1640 and the British were driven off. The British then left for Providence Island, which would be captured by the Spanish in 1641.⁴⁰

³¹ See George W. Bridges, *The Annals of Jamaica*. Vol. II (London, 1828), 497-505. Both volumes are available digitally as Google books.

³² The settlers in the Bay of Honduras were known as Baymen; those on the Mosquito Shore were known as Shoremen.

³³ See Bridges, *The Annals*, 134.

³⁴ See Bridges *The Annals*.

³⁵ It is almost certain that Pickstock was one of the authors. See Cave (1976).

³⁶ See, for example, Newton (1914) and Karen O. Kupperman, *Providence Island, 1630-1641*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³⁷ See Clarence Haring, *The Buccaneers In The West Indies In The XVIIth Century*. (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1910), 60.

³⁸ See Newton (1914), 280.

³⁹ See Haring, *The Buccaneers*, 64, note 1, and Newton (1914), 280-1.

⁴⁰ See Haring, *The Buccaneers*, 63-65.

The history of Tortuga was first recorded by three French authors, although unfortunately none of them had access to the documents of the Providence Island Company. The first, J.B. Du Tertre, uses information based on the testimony of the French governor.⁴¹ Writing in 1667, Du Tertre stated that the 300 French and British buccaneers in 1640 chose an Englishman ('un anglais') as their chief. This presumably is Captain James. However, Father Charlevoix writing in 1733 repeated essentially the same story, but gave the name as 'Willis' ("Parmi les Anglois.....il y en avoit un, nommé Willis, qui étoit homme de tête & de résolution").⁴²

We will never know why Charlevoix chose to call Captain James 'Willis'. It is possible, as surmised by Arthur Percival Newton, that his first name was 'William' and Charlevoix confused his first and second name.⁴³ However, there can be no doubt that the 'ex-governor of Tortuga' referred to by the French writers, the *Honduras Almanack* and Bridges was none other than Captain James. This man never went to Belize, although he does appear in 1663 in a list of buccaneers operating from Jamaica and Tortuga.⁴⁴ Intriguingly, he is also cited in the apocryphal story by Gibbs as the sea captain who discovered the value of logwood in 1655.⁴⁵

An extensive search for a buccaneer called 'Wallace', 'Wallice' or 'Willis' in the 17th century reveals not surprisingly that there was no such person. The original mistake was made by Father Charlevoix in 1733 and we will never know whether the authors of the 1827 edition of the *Honduras Almanack*, nearly a century later, deliberately or accidentally repeated the error. The Reverend Bridges, who almost certainly had access to Charlevoix's work, at least spelt 'Willis' correctly, but he must also take some of the blame for spreading the Wallace legend.

If 'Wallace' never existed, the first of the foundation myths can be laid to rest. However, what of the second (the myth of shipwrecked sailors in 1638)? This first makes its appearance in the 1829 edition of the *Honduras Almanack* which contains a chronology. This states:

"1638 – this year a few British subjects first inhabited Honduras, having been wrecked on the coast."⁴⁶

This story was then repeated in most subsequent editions. It resurfaces in Gibbs, who states "In 1638 a few British sailors were wrecked on the coast of Yucatan and would appear to have settled."⁴⁷ It was then repeated in all editions of the Handbook of British Honduras with the 1925 edition going so far as to claim that 1638 was the year **both** of the shipwrecked sailors **and** the arrival of Wallace!⁴⁸

The shipwrecked sailors myth has never enjoyed the popularity of the Wallace myth, but it still has its supporters. One of these, perhaps surprisingly, is the Belizean newspaper *Amandala*. In an article in 2011, introducing its readers to the complexity of the territorial dispute between Belize and Guatemala, the newspaper stated:

⁴¹ See Jean B. Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale Des Antilles Habitees Par Les François*. (Paris: Jolly, 1667).

⁴² See Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix and Jean B. Le Pers, *Histoire De L'isle Espagnole Ou De S. Domingue*. Vol. II (Amsterdam: Chez François L'Honoré, 1733), 10-11. This work is available digitally on the website of the Bibliothèque Nationale Française (<http://gallica.bnf.fr/>).

⁴³ See Newton (1914), 281, note 10.

⁴⁴ See Haring, *The Buccaneers*, 273.

⁴⁵ See Gibbs, *British Honduras*, 24, who quotes the *Honduras Almanacks* of 1826 and 1827 for this story, which is demonstrably false (see Chapter 2). The original source is William Dampier, *A Voyage to New Holland, &C. In The Year, 1699*. (London: Printed for James Knapton, at the Crown in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1699).

⁴⁶ See *Honduras Almanack* (1829), 40.

⁴⁷ See Gibbs, *British Honduras*, 23.

⁴⁸ See Metzgen and Cain, *The Handbook of British Honduras*, 1.

“Our history began when English and Scottish sailors (buccaneers) landed at the mouth of the Belize River in 1638. They were the first to do so and might have claimed the land in the name of the sovereign, except for the fact that this land, our land, by an accident of history was from 1494 a part of the Spanish Main.”⁴⁹

Shipwrecks are common in foundation myths, as indeed in literature (*Robinson Crusoe* being the most famous example). There were, however, many shipwrecks off the Central American coast in the first half of the 17th century and it is possible that the Belize shipwrecked sailor myth is based loosely on one of these. In 1642, for example, the *William and Sarah* was wrecked 20 to 30 leagues from Providence Island and four or five leagues from the Mosquito Keys off the coast of modern Nicaragua with 50 or 60 being saved.⁵⁰ Even more intriguingly, a slave ship, in which the slaves had overpowered their Portuguese masters, was wrecked to the south of Cabo Gracias a Díos in 1641 and the survivors were captured by the Miskitos.⁵¹

What is certain, however, is that shipwrecked British sailors cannot have founded Belize in 1638. First, the Spanish fort at Salamanca de Bacalar was fully operational at this time and the Spanish would not have tolerated a foreign presence in such close proximity. They did not tolerate it in Providence Island in 1641 and Roatán in 1642, so they would certainly not have ignored '80 sailors' at the mouth of the Belize River in 1638. Secondly, this was the period when the Providence Island Company was flourishing with monopoly rights over privateering along the whole Central American coast. Any shipwrecked British sailors would have therefore made their way back to Providence Island or to the small British settlement at Cabo Gracias a Díos. Finally, the Providence Island Company records are silent on both such a shipwreck and also on a British presence anywhere in Belize, whereas they provide considerable details on the attempts to colonise the Mosquito coast and the Bay Islands.

The two myths about the origins of Belize are therefore without foundation. They do, however, have a common source (the *Honduras Almanack*) which was written at a time when the Baymen craved respectably and hoped to become a British colony. It is understandable that the settlement's elite should create a narrative that put them on a par with other British colonies in the Caribbean. This is no excuse, however, for modern historians who have a duty to put the record straight. There was no Peter Wallace and no shipwrecked sailors established a settlement at the mouth of the Belize River in 1638.

1.2. The Etymology of 'Belize'

If Wallace never existed, then the word 'Belize' cannot be derived from his name. By the time the Wallace myth was created in 1827, the settlement was already starting to be called Belize and the word, or close versions of it, had been in existence for a long time as the name of the country's main river and the town at the mouth of the Haulover Creek. The heroic efforts of Calderón Quijano and many others to establish the derivation of 'Belize' from 'Wallace' were therefore all in vain.⁵²

⁴⁹ See Amandala 6 May 2011.

⁵⁰ See Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 340.

⁵¹ See Eduard Conzemius, *Ethnographical Survey Of The Miskito And Sumu Indians Of Honduras And Nicaragua*. (Washington: U.S. G.P.O, 1932), 17.

⁵² In fairness to Calderón, *Belice 1663 – 1821*. His book is still worth reading for other reasons, particularly his treatment of diplomatic history.

The word 'Belize' must therefore have a different provenance. Since the Maya had been in possession of Belize for thousands of years, we can be sure that they had named all the rivers, main geographical features and many of the islands long before the arrival of Europeans. The Maya texts, however, were largely destroyed, so we are forced to rely on the Spanish chroniclers for second-hand information about these names. The chroniclers, in turn, relied on the priests, soldiers and adventurers who carried out the first *entradas* into what is today Belize.

Among these first Spaniards to enter Belize were some good linguists. Nevertheless, it was often a struggle for the Spanish to write down the sound of the Maya words in Spanish letters as the orthography of [Yucatec] Maya and Spanish were so different. The Maya, for example, had a letter that sounded like 'w', although this letter does not exist in the Spanish language. It is not surprising, therefore, that we find among the chroniclers many variant spellings of the same Maya words.

By way of illustration of the etymological problem, we may consider the first Spanish *entrada* that took Hernán Cortes across the Maya mountains and down to the Sarstoon River in 1525. The first attempt at orthography by the Spanish had rendered the Maya word for the river as 'Zactun', which would go through many variations before being anglicized to 'Sarstoon'. However, the evolution of the word is fairly clear and the Maya origin has never been in doubt.

The second *entrada* brought Alonso Dávila to Belize in 1531.⁵³ It is possible that on his retreat southwards from Villa Real, the town he founded near modern day Corozal, Dávila may have entered the Belize River.⁵⁴ However, he and his followers were fleeing from their Maya pursuers and were in fear of their lives. There was no meaningful contact with the villagers on the river and no opportunity to learn its Maya name. The Spanish chroniclers of Dávila's failure are remarkably silent on place names in Belize and dwell more upon his safe arrival in Honduras.

The third *entrada* brought the Pacheco family to the northern half of Belize in 1545. The three members of the family were exceptionally cruel, even by the standards of the day, and certainly did not win any hearts and minds with their barbarous behavior. However, they were the first Spaniards to reach Tipu, one of the most – if not the most – important Maya settlements in Belize at that time. They 'converted' the Maya to Christianity and paved the way for the visit of numerous Spanish priests, soldiers and administrators in the following decades.⁵⁵

Tipu, as we now know thanks to recent archaeological work,⁵⁶ was on the eastern branch (the Macal) of the Belize River. The Pacheco family reached it by taking the New River as far as the southern end of the New River lagoon. They then travelled overland to reach the Belize River, probably around Banana Bank, crossing Labouring Creek on the way before proceeding upstream to Tipu. Over time, this would become the favoured route of the Spaniards for reaching Tipu, although on occasions they used the Hondo River as far as navigation permitted before marching southwards to

⁵³ Ignoring the failed attempt by Francisco de Montejo to subjugate Yucatán in 1527-9, when the conquistador may have briefly reached modern day Corozal.

⁵⁴ See Robert S. Chamberlain, *The Governorship Of The Adelantado Francisco De Montejo In Chiapas, 1539-1544*. (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1948), Thompson (1988) and Graham, *Maya Christians*.

⁵⁵ See Grant D. Jones, *The Conquest Of The Last Maya Kingdom*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998)

⁵⁶ See, for example, David M. Pendergast and Grant D. Jones and Elizabeth Graham, "Locating Maya Lowlands Spanish Colonial Towns: A Case Study from Belize". *Latin American Antiquity* 4, no. 1 (1993): 59.

Tipu. What is clear is that they did not go south down the coast of Belize and enter the Belize River from the sea.

The chroniclers are all in agreement that the river on which the village of Tipu was located was called the Tipu. Indeed, it was standard practice for the Maya to name their towns and villages after the rivers on which they stood. However, some chroniclers were confused about the location of Tipu and often assumed it was on a branch of the Hondo River such as Booth's River or River Bravo. This has caused great confusion, as any user of early maps of Belize will know, and the mistake was repeated by Doris Zemurray Stone in her important article on Spanish *entradas* published as late as 1932.⁵⁷

Now that the mistake has been corrected, we can say for certain that Tipu was the Maya name for the Belize River. However, no one has ever claimed that 'Belize' is derived from 'Tipu', so the problem of etymology remains despite the fact that the Belize River is the most important in the country and that the town of Belize stood close to its mouth.

Fortunately, the mystery can be solved by reference to a much later *entrada* in 1677. This was undertaken by Father José Delgado with the purpose of exploring an overland route from Guatemala to Yucatán in anticipation of the Spanish military campaign to defeat the Itzas in Petén. Father Delgado, a Dominican priest, travelled with Maya interpreters from Alta Verapaz in Guatemala to the Belizean coast, hispanicizing all the Maya names for the towns, villages and rivers along the route.

Father Delgado is most famous for having being captured by settlers close to the Manatee lagoon and providing the first direct evidence of a permanent British presence in Belize. However, he deserves to be more famous for what followed. After his release, he was allowed to proceed northwards along the coast of Belize back to Yucatán. Although the settlers kept one of his Maya entourage, he was allowed to retain the services of others and with their help carried on naming the rivers along the coast.

If we pick up his story at the Texach (Manatee River), he says⁵⁸:

"From here to the river of Xibum four leagues.

From here to the river of Balis two leagues.

After these two leagues one enters in the river of Tipu."

Delgado wrote four different accounts of his journey and his spelling of Xibum varies. Thus, it is also written as Xilam.⁵⁹ However, all are agreed that this is the Sibun River. Since two leagues is roughly eight kilometers, the next river is the Haulover Creek – today a canalized branch of the Belize River. Delgado calls this 'Balis' and 'Baliz' in different versions of his story, but it is clear that this must be the 'river' that flows through modern Belize City. Delgado never had a chance to enter this water system with his Maya guides, so he probably did not realize that the Haulover Creek is not strictly speaking a river. Nevertheless, he was quite correct when he said that the next river was Tipu, as this is of course the Belize River.

⁵⁷ See Stone, "Some Spanish *entradas*"

⁵⁸ See Thompson (1972), 29. See also Francisco F. Ximenez, *Historia De La Provincia De San Vicente De Chiapa Y Guatemala De La Orden De Predicadores*. (Guatemala: tipografía nacional, 1930).

⁵⁹ See Stone, "Some Spanish *entradas*," 268.

It is now clear why the Spanish chroniclers did not use the word 'Balis' or 'Baliz' at first. The river that mattered for the Spanish was the Tipu, as this led to their missions in the heartland of Belize. The Balis was a minor waterway that they would never have had occasion to use. Even if they had reached the Belize River from the sea, they would not have used the Balis – preferring instead the main artery that reaches the coast just north of the Haulover Creek.

For the British, however, it was a different story. The Balis would become a crucial part of their history and economy. It was a tributary by which they could reach the Belize River from the cayes and its mouth would in due course become the site of their main town. And although they probably never read any of Delgado's accounts of his journey, they had access to all the same Maya informants for the name.

'Balis' or 'Baliz' is no doubt a corruption of the original Maya word brought about by Delgado's hispanicization.⁶⁰ Thompson has claimed that it means 'muddy' or 'muddy waters' in Yucatec Maya.⁶¹ Using modern Maya-Spanish dictionaries, this cannot be proven.⁶² However, 'Ba', 'Baal' and 'Bal' are very common prefixes in modern Maya and 'Ba' is even a word in its own right.⁶³ Thompson may be correct, but this is something where modern scholarship may yield dividends in future.

The word 'Balis' then underwent two different evolutions – one in Spanish and one in English. The one in Spanish is relatively simple, as the Spanish would regularly replace the first letter with 'V' or and the last with 'z' or even 'x'. Thus, the title of a map in 1751 is given as:⁶⁴

Plano de los tres Rios de Baliz Nuevo y Hondo cituados entre el Golfo Dulce ó Provincia de Goatemala, y la de Yucatan, en el que se manifiesta sus Esteros, Lagunas y Canales y á que Embarcaciones son aseccibles (sic); la cituacion del Real Presidio de San Phelipe de Bacalar, el camino que de él va á la capital de Mérida, la Laguna del Peten Itza y parte de su camino despoblado hasta el último pueblo de Yucatan.

However, 25 years later in 1776 the title of a map of the region is given as:

Mapa del Ceno (sic) de Honduras, Establecimientos de Ingleses, havitaciones de Indios Caribes en la Costa de Valis, navegacion de esta para Navios y Balandras con sus principales fondeaderos, abrigos, aguadas y escollos, estendida de orden de el Muy Ylustre Señor D. Martín de Mayorga, Presidente Gobernador y Capitan Gral. de este Reyno de Guatemala.

The Spanish were also prepared to write it occasionally as 'Walis', 'Waliz' or 'Walix'. Thus, the title of a communication from the Governor of Yucatán to Spain in 1733 states:⁶⁵

⁶⁰ One should note that Delgado used Maya words as the basis for his name of every river without exception during his *entrada*. See Thompson (1972), 28-9 and Ximenez, *Historia De La Provincia De San Vicente*.

⁶¹ See Thompson (1972), 31.

⁶² See the website of the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies (<http://www.famsi.org/reports/96072/index.html>), which contains the most up to date Maya-Spanish dictionary currently available.

⁶³ There are 34 entries for 'Ba', 92 entries for 'Baal' and more than 200 for 'Bal' in the Maya-Spanish dictionary.

⁶⁴ Many old Spanish maps and documents of Central America, including Belize, can now be accessed through the Portal de Archivos Españoles (<http://pares.mcu.es/>)

⁶⁵ See Portal de Archivos Españoles (<http://pares.mcu.es/>)

Expediente sobre el permiso del corte del palo de tinte concedido a los ingleses en los ríos Walis, Nuevo y Hondo, provincia de Campeche; providencias para impedirselo en los parajes a que se extendieron y nueva concesión por los últimos tratados de paces.

This demonstrates at the very least that the word cannot be Spanish in origin, since 'W' is not a letter in the Spanish alphabet.⁶⁶ This again strongly suggests that it is of Maya origin.⁶⁷

The Spanish were in fact fairly consistent in the way they wrote the name. A search on the Portal de Archivos Españoles (<http://pares.mcu.es/>), where much material has now been digitalized and more is being added all the time, shows that the name was almost always given as 'Balis' or 'Valis' with some variation in the final letter.⁶⁸ This can also be seen in the splendid cartographic catalogue of Belize compiled by Alain Breton and Michel Antochiw.⁶⁹ However, as the British presence became more established, the Spanish cartographers would give the English name as well. This was not a variant Spanish spelling, but an attempt to understand English usage.⁷⁰

The British, never very good linguists, had much more trouble with the name 'Balis'. As early as 1705 it was written 'Bullys'.⁷¹ By the middle of the century it often appeared as 'Bellese'.⁷² This was still in use in 1775 in the famous Jefferys map of that year, where the river is named 'Rio Baliz or River Bellese'.⁷³ By the time of Henderson,⁷⁴ it had become 'Balize'⁷⁵ and the final step was taken in the Honduras Almanack when it became 'Belize'.⁷⁶

The evolution from 'Balis' to 'Balize' is straightforward, but why did the Baymen feel it necessary to change the name from 'Balize' to 'Belize'? This could simply be normal linguistic corruption of a kind that is common in all languages. However, there is another intriguing possibility. The name 'Belize' or 'Bélize' was in common use in French literature from the mid-17th century to describe a mythical female figure. This name has nothing to do with the Maya word 'Balis', but it was used by the French author Gombauld in 1657 in his book of epigrams, where a short poem describes the love of Cosme for Belize.⁷⁷ A few years later in 1672, Molière would include a female character,

⁶⁶ Today there is still a Maya village near Mérida in the Yucatán peninsula called Walix.

⁶⁷ Diehards will no doubt argue that it could be derived from a different non-Spanish European word other than Wallace. The only serious candidate is 'balise', the French word for beacon. This hypothesis, almost certainly incorrect, will be examined below.

⁶⁸ See Portal de Archivos Españoles (<http://pares.mcu.es/>)

⁶⁹ See Michel Antochiw and Alain Breton, *Catálogo Cartográfico De Belice*. (México, D.F: Centre d'Etudes Mexicaines et Centraméricaines, 1992)

⁷⁰ This is one of the reasons for the confusion in Calderon, *Belice 1663 - 1821*, since his Lámina II (reproduced in Dobson, *A History of Belize*) gives both names in some cases without explaining that one is the name the Spanish thought the British were using for the Belize River.

⁷¹ See Burdon, *Archives Of British Honduras*, 60.

⁷² See Burdon, *Archives Of British Honduras*, 75.

⁷³ The Jefferys map has been reproduced in many places. See, for example, John A. Burdon, *Archives of British Honduras*. (London: Sifton Praed, 1934).

⁷⁴ See George Henderson, *An Account of The British Settlement of Honduras*. (London: C. and R. Baldwin, 1809) and George Henderson, *An Account of the British Settlement of Honduras*. (London: Printed for R. Baldwin, 1811).

⁷⁵ This was still being used thirty years later. See John L. Stephens, *Incidents Of Travel In Central America, Chiapas And Yucatan*. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), Chapter 1.

⁷⁶ Even here there was not complete consistency, since the 1826 addition of the Almanack has a print of St. John's Cathedral at 'Belise'.

⁷⁷ See Jean Ogier de Gombauld, *Les Epigrammes De Gombavld*. (Paris: Chez Avgvstin Covrbé, 1657).

Bélize, in his play *Les Femmes Savantes*. There would be many other such examples in French literature.⁷⁸

By the beginning of the 19th century Belize had become officially a British settlement and there was a yearning among some of the Baymen for imperial trappings. The images in the Honduras Almanack, especially of the Supreme Court, make this clear. Many travelled to Europe as a result of their commercial interests. We will never know for sure, but the Baymen may have been unintentionally influenced by French literature in the transition from 'Balize' to 'Belize'.

In any case, the popularity in French literature of the character 'Belize' helps to explain the use of the name in different places around the world. There is a river named Belize in Sicily. Since the island was taken by the French-speaking Normans from the Arabs in 1072, it is probably of French origin. There is a town called Belize in the Republic of Congo. This French-speaking country was colonized by France in the 1880s before winning its independence in 1960.

There is also a river and town called Belize in Cabinda, the Portuguese-speaking enclave that belongs to Angola but is separated from it by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This has excited the interest of Belizean scholars and even raised the possibility that the slaves brought the name with them.⁷⁹ However, the truth is rather more prosaic. The DRC was a Belgian, and therefore French-speaking, colony while Portugal disputed ownership of Cabinda with the French for many years. The Cabinda Belize and the Republic of Congo Belize are quite close geographically and they are therefore likely to have a common French linguistic heritage.

The French literary character 'Belize' may well be derived from the French word 'balise' meaning 'beacon'. This is certainly the origin of the name of the island at the mouth of the Mississippi River, which owes its derivation to the time before 1763 when Louisiana was a French colony. It is almost certainly the reason why Ephraim G. Squier, a US citizen familiar with all the area around the Gulf of Mexico, preferred 'balise' to 'Wallace' as the origin of the name 'Belize'.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, although ingenious, it is incorrect.⁸¹

Although 'Belize' is almost certainly derived from 'Balis', there have been attempts to derive it from other Maya words. The most important of these was the claim by George Price in 1958 that it was derived from 'Belikin' – two Maya words meaning 'road towards the east'.⁸² Price gave as his source a book by Alfredo García Bauer published in the same year.⁸³ However, García Bauer had in fact lifted the idea from Gabriel Angel Castañeda, who had published an article to this effect the previous year.

⁷⁸ These include a famous love story, written in the 1680s, between Cléante and Bélise by Anne de Bellinzani, whose *nom de plume* was Presidente Ferrand. See Anne de Bellinzani Ferrand et al, *Lettres De La Présidente Ferrand Au Baron De Breteuil*. (Paris: Charpentier, 1880) and Langlois (1926).

⁷⁹ See Iyo and Tzalam and Humphreys, *Belize, A New Vision*, 99.

⁸⁰ See Squier, *The states of Central America*, 576-578.

⁸¹ By coincidence, however, Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (Paris: Baudry's Foreign Library, 1832), wrote of the 'muddy waters' where the Mississippi entered the Caribbean at the island of Belize. 'Muddy waters', of course, is what Thompson claims to be the meaning of 'Balis'. See footnote 61 above.

⁸² See Belize Times, 4 November, 1958. See also Grant D. Jones, *Anthropology and History in Yucatán*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 364, n.105.

⁸³ See Carlos García Bauer, *La Controversia Sobre El Territorio De Belice*. (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1958).

Castañeda subsequently developed his ideas more fully in a book published in 1969 and appropriately entitled 'Belikin'.⁸⁴ Castañeda was a Guatemalan nationalist, who believed passionately that Belize belonged to Guatemala and that the British had no right to be there. One of the targets of his book is the (mis)derivation of 'Belize' from 'Wallace', which he argues was not possible.⁸⁵ However, his rival claim that it is derived from 'Belikin' is a 'just so' story without any foundation at all (he cites no primary or secondary sources in support).⁸⁶ The idea is no longer fashionable, but at least the name lives on in Belize's most famous beer!

1.3. The First British Settlers

Father Delgado's *entrada* in 1677 was not only important in terms of establishing the origin of the name 'Belize'. It was also the first direct evidence of a permanent British presence on the cayes. The men who held Delgado and his party captive included Bartholomew Sharp, a pirate who would go on to acquire fame in the southern seas after crossing the Isthmus of Darien in 1680.⁸⁷ However, there were others and they were not all pirates.⁸⁸ So when had these men (and a few women?) arrived and from where did they come?

We can be fairly certain that there was no permanent British presence in Belize before 1642 and the reasons for this are straightforward. The Bay of Honduras, including the Belize cayes, was guarded by two Spanish forts. The first was at Salamanca de Bacalar and had been constructed by the Pachecos in 1543/4 at the start of their brutal *entrada* into Belize. The second was at Trujillo on the northern coast of Honduras.⁸⁹

The fortress at Salamanca de Bacalar was the most important from the point of view of deterring British settlers. In order to access the fort by boat, the Spanish had to pass through what are today Belizean waters by way of the channels that lead from the ocean through the barrier reef and the cayes. This gave the Spanish a good familiarity with the islands inside the reef and also explains why so many of them were given Spanish names early on.

While the fortress was in full operation, it would have been impossible for the British to gain a permanent foothold. However, Salamanca de Bacalar was sacked by Diego 'el Mulato' in 1642. This man, who was an ally of the British and had visited Providence Island in 1631 (see below), was a renegade Spaniard from Cuba, whose nickname was 'Lucifer'.⁹⁰ His attack, in addition to the usual

⁸⁴ See Gabriel Angel Castañeda, *Belikin. Descripción Monográfica De Veintidós Mil Novecientos Kilómetros Cuadrados De Centroamericanidad Irredenta, Etc.* (Guatemala: Tip. Nacional, 1969).

⁸⁵ See Castañeda, *Belikin. Descripción Monográfica*, 108-111.

⁸⁶ Castañeda's only 'evidence' is that Delgado misunderstood when his Maya guides named the Haulover Creek 'Balis' and that what he should have written was 'Belikin'. The reliability of Castañeda as a source can be gauged from this gem: 'Wallace era escocés, pero debía ser galés. Debe haberlo sido porque su apellido deviene de Wales'. See Castañeda, *Belikin. Descripción Monográfica*, 200.

⁸⁷ Sharp (or Sharpe in some sources) would become a pirate, but as late as 1679 he was still acting as a privateer. Following a successful raid on the Spanish settlements in the Gulf of Honduras, he was able to take his booty back to Jamaica without reprisal by the British Governor. See Haring, *The Buccaneers*, 223-224.

⁸⁸ Winzerling, *The Beginning of British Honduras*, 65-66, claims that the party that captured Delgado included Miskitos. See also Ximenez, *Historia De La Provincia De San Vicente*.

⁸⁹ Puerto Caballos, west of Trujillo, had already been abandoned in 1604 in favour of Santo Tomás de Amatique, but this fort was never significant. There were also fortifications on the Río Dulce leading to the Lago de Izabal, but these were away from the coast and designed to protect the overland route to the highlands of Guatemala.

⁹⁰ Diego el Mulato had to leave his wife in Santiago, Cuba. When his British comrades planned an attack on the city, he asked them to pass on his fond regards! See Kupperman, *Providence Island*.

motive of plunder, may therefore have been a deliberate attempt to deprive the Spanish of a base from which the cayes could be monitored.

The fortress at Bacalar was not totally destroyed and the Spanish did their best to rebuild it. However, it was then sacked in 1648 and again in 1652 by Abraham (Albertus) Blauvelt, a Dutch sea captain whose brother William had already given his name to Bluefields in Nicaragua. From then onwards until 1729, the fortress at Salamanca de Bacalar was abandoned by the Spanish. Meanwhile, Captain William Jackson, of whom more later, had sacked Trujillo with exceptional ferocity in 1642 and rendered its fortifications unuseable for a number of years, so that the Spanish could no longer defend the Bay of Honduras from the south either.⁹¹

The necessary conditions for the permanent occupation of the Belizean cayes by the British were therefore in place by the end of 1642. Furthermore, by this time the Spanish had been forced to accept that their efforts to convert the Maya at Tipu and other settlements in Belize had been a complete failure. Father Fuensalida, who had visited Tipu some twenty years before, was lucky to escape with his life during his *entrada* of 1641 and the northern part of Belize was effectively abandoned by the Spanish until the final conquest of the Itzas in 1697.⁹² Thus, the Spanish had temporarily lost the ability to patrol the cayes and at the same time had given up on attempts to ‘reduce’ the Maya on the Belizean mainland.

If the necessary conditions for a permanent British presence had been met by the end of 1642, this did not automatically mean that the British actually took advantage of the new situation. However, the British footprint in the Americas had also changed by 1642 in a way that favored an attempt at new settlements on the coast of Central America. It is to this that we now turn.

In the 17th century the British regarded their presence in the Americas as a single geographic space within which there were regular contacts and exchanges. Between the settlements in Newfoundland and the plantations in Suriname,⁹³ there was a series of British ‘toeholds’ whose future was still very uncertain. These included the colonies in Massachusetts and Virginia as well as a few islands in the eastern and western Caribbean.

Before the 1640s the British Caribbean settlements included Tortuga (off the coast of Haiti), Providence Island (off the coast of Nicaragua) and Roatán (off the coast of Honduras). All three were covered by the Charter given to the Providence Island Company in 1630 by Charles I.⁹⁴ However, the French drove the British out of Tortuga in 1640, while the Spanish drove them out of Providence Island in 1641 and out of Roatán in 1642.

The British presence in the western Caribbean was therefore reduced to a small settlement at Cabo Gracias a Díos, which had been established in 1633 under the auspices of the Providence Island Company, and even smaller settlements further south along the Mosquito Coast towards Bluefields. Here the British established an alliance with the Sumus/Miskitos, which would endure for many decades and which was based on a mutual hostility towards the Spanish and on the principle ‘my

⁹¹ See William V. Davidson, *Historical Geography Of The Bay Islands, Honduras*. (Birmingham: Southern University Press, 1974), 44.

⁹² See Jones, *The Conquest Of The Last*. And Graham, *Maya Christians*. The southern part of Belize was still largely controlled by the Itzas and their allies at this time.

⁹³ Suriname was a British colony from 1630 to 1667, when it was exchanged with the Dutch for Manhattan.

⁹⁴ The Charter had actually been extended in 1631 to include Tortuga.

enemy's enemy is my friend'. There was also another attempt – this time by individuals rather than the defunct Providence Island Company - to settle on Roatán, but the Spanish drove them out again in 1650.

The refugees from Tortuga, Providence Island and Roatán might have been tempted in an earlier period to return to England. However, the Civil War had broken out in 1642 and would prove to be a long, bloody and costly affair. The attractions of the Central American mainland, despite the threat from the Spanish, must have been considerable if a suitable location could only be found.

These refugees were not the only ones to be interested in a new location. The settlers in North America had not prospered in the 1630s. Their attempts to build an export economy based on tobacco had been undermined by the fall in price and many had taken up an offer to relocate to Providence Island. Indeed, several hundred were on their way when the island was captured by the Spanish in 1641.⁹⁵

Meanwhile, the British colonies in the eastern Caribbean were also undergoing a major transformation. The search for an export staple, including tobacco, had not gone well and many of the indentured laborers from Britain were in difficult economic circumstances. The successful introduction of sugar, paradoxically, would make their situation worse since the plantation owners preferred African slaves to British indentured labour. The British government, at least as far as the Caribbean was concerned, ceased to function after the Civil War broke out and these men with their families were left to their own devices.

It is no surprise, therefore, that when William Jackson arrived in the eastern Caribbean in 1642, he had no trouble recruiting the 1500 sailors he needed for one of the most famous voyages ever undertaken.⁹⁶ The Providence Island Company had been authorized in 1635, following a failed Spanish attack on the island, to issue letters of marque to British sea captains. These 'privateers' were then free to attack the Spanish in the knowledge that they were not breaking any British laws. They were therefore not pirates, although they could be loosely described as 'buccaneers' – the terms often used to cover both activities.⁹⁷

Jackson was the last person to be authorized to engage in privateering activities by the Providence Island Company before its demise. His voyage lasted three years, from 1642 to 1645, and his sailors acquired an exceptional knowledge of the geography of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico (we have already noted how he sacked Trujillo). Jackson would go on to capture Jamaica before leaving to attack other Spanish cities including Campeche. When the voyage ended in the middle of the English Civil War, there must have been many members of the crew who dreamt of returning to the Caribbean.

The republican forces would eventually triumph in England and Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector in 1649. Persuaded by Thomas Gage and others that Spanish defences in the Caribbean

⁹⁵ See Kupperman, *Providence Island*.

⁹⁶ See Vincent T. Harlow, *The Voyages Of Captain William Jackson (1642-1645)*. (London: Offices of the Society, 1923), 13-14

⁹⁷ The word 'buccaneer' is derived from the indigenous word for curing meat in Hispaniola and was originally applied to the European settlers on Tortuga. See Haring, *The Buccaneers*.

were weak,⁹⁸ he launched the 'western design' by which he hoped to capture Hispaniola. The expedition was an utter failure, so its leaders turned instead to the poorly defended Jamaica which Jackson had already shown to be an easy undertaking. In 1655 Jamaica fell to the English, a seemingly poor prize at the time, but one which would prove to be very valuable for the British in the long-run.

British privateers now had a Jamaican base (Port Royal) where they could lay in stores, refit their ships and spend their profits. They took full advantage and Bartholomew Sharp, as well as others of his kind, were frequent visitors. Captain Morgan, perhaps the most notorious, would even become Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica in 1674!⁹⁹

When the monarchy was restored in England in 1660, Charles II gave priority to improved relations with Spain. The result was the 1667 Treaty of Madrid followed three years later by a second Treaty of Madrid (often known as the American Treaty because it addressed the outstanding issues in the Americas between the two powers).

The two treaties were supposed to leave Britain in lawful possession of those parts of the Caribbean that had not been occupied by the Spanish (this obviously included Jamaica, but neither England nor Spain regarded any British settlers in the Bay of Honduras as falling under the terms of the treaty). Perhaps more important for the future of Belize was that England agreed to end privateering and to suppress piracy. Thus, 1670 is a watershed in the history of the British Caribbean, because it meant that hereafter the former privateers would be regarded as pirates if they continued their activities. And this meant that, after a period of adjustment by all concerned, they could not expect a welcome in Jamaica.

For the settlement of Belize by the British, we should therefore distinguish between the period before 1670 and the period after. In the first period, which starts from 1642, there may have been some scope for privateers to make Belize their home but it would not have been easy. The opportunities for laying in stores, refitting ships and spending profits were strictly limited on the Belizean cayes. From 1655, furthermore, Jamaica was a much more attractive base for such activities. Thus, any settlers before 1670 are likely to have been much less glamorous than the privateers (see below).

After 1670, when the former privateers were becoming pirates, Belize may have been more tempting and perhaps this explains the presence of Bartholomew Sharp in 1677. However, settlers in Belize were about to turn to a much more prosaic activity (the extraction of logwood), so this period in Belize's history was likely to have been very brief. Indeed, we know for sure that logwood was being cut and exported by 1680 (see next chapter).

Although we have shown there were many British subjects who might have had an interest in settling in Belize after 1642, we have very little solid evidence. Perhaps the most useful is place names. While the Spanish were content to take Mayan names for the rivers, they generally gave Spanish names

⁹⁸ Gage was an English Catholic who had spent many years in Spanish America. He eventually abandoned Catholicism for the Church of England and wrote a famous book on the 'rottenness' of the Spanish Empire in the Americas that heavily influenced Cromwell. See Thomas Gage, *The English-American His Travail By Sea And Land; Or, A New Survey Of The West-India's Containing A Journal Of Three Thousand And Three Hundred Miles Within The Main Land Of America ... Also A New And Exact Discovery Of The Spanish Navigation To Those Parts ... With A Grammar, Or Some Few Rudiments Of The Indian Tongue ... By The True And Painfull Endeavours Of Thomas Gage ... Anno Dom. 1648*. (London: Printed by R. Cotes, 1648).

⁹⁹ See Haring, *The Buccaneers*, 205.

to the cayes and atolls. Examples are Cayo Casina, Cayo Renegado and Cuatro Cayos. These names either mutated under the British or were later replaced by English ones.¹⁰⁰

In a few cases, however, the English name appeared very early. Examples are Turneffe Island, Glover's Reef and Bluefields Range. 'Turneffe' may be a corruption of 'Terra Nova', the Spanish name for the atoll, but it is noteworthy that 'Turneffe' is the name given to an island off the coast of Nicaragua during the time of the Providence Island Company.¹⁰¹ 'Glover', clearly an English name, may owe its origin to Roger Glover, who had first settled in the British Leeward Islands.¹⁰² 'Bluefields' may owe its origin to Abraham Blauvelt, who sacked Salamanca de Bacalar in 1648 and 1652.¹⁰³

There is also Tobacco Caye, named by the Spanish Cayo Tabaco. Presumably, this is named after the tobacco plant, although it cannot be grown on the island. However, it **was** grown in Virginia, Providence Island and the eastern Caribbean, so it is not impossible that it was named by a British settler in memory of a previous incarnation. Cayo Renegado, or Ranguana Caye, is said to have been the base of the 'renegade' Spaniard Diego el Mulato. And there are many islands, such as Gough's Caye, which probably owe their names to these early settlers even if we cannot be sure who they were or when they arrived.

As for the activities in which these early settlers were engaged, we also have very little solid evidence. There may have been some privateering, although the Spanish would have been wary of sending their ships after 1642 through waters that could no longer be protected from Salamanca de Bacalar or Trujillo. One of the main targets of privateers was the logwood shipped by the Spanish from the area close to Campeche, but there was no reason for these ships to veer south after passing the Yucatán peninsula before heading for Cuba en route to Spain. The privateers, after 1655, generally set out from Jamaica – not Belize - to capture these ships laden with logwood.

More probable is that the activities of the early settlers were similar to those in the Bay Islands between 1638 and 1650, for which we **do** have historical records.¹⁰⁴ These included turtling for the shells and the extraction of pearls from oysters. Both these commodities could be exported in small quantities either to the British settlers on the Mosquito Shore or even as contraband to Spanish settlers along the Central American or Yucatán coast. There was also abundant opportunity for fishing - both for subsistence and also for export if salted. What is clear is that these early settlers stayed on the cayes and did not venture up the Belizean rivers where they would have encountered hostile Maya settlements not subject to Spanish rule.

After 1670 the attraction of the Belizean coastline for pirates would have been greater. However, governors at Jamaica were slow to crack down on piracy and did not do so consistently until the 1680s. A few pirates, such as Bartholomew Sharp, clearly did make use of the Belizean cayes. Edward Teach ('Blackbeard') may also have visited, but this was much later as he was only born

¹⁰⁰ Thus, Cayo Casina was renamed St. George's Caye, Cayo Renegado was corrupted to Ranguana Caye and Cuatro Cayos became Lighthouse Reef.

¹⁰¹ See Newton (1914), opposite 144. The island is north of the Corn Islands.

¹⁰² Winzerling, admittedly not the most reliable of sources, says that Roger Glover had been trading on Nevis before moving to Tortuga. See Winzerling, *The Beginning Of British Honduras*, 54.

¹⁰³ On the Blauvelt brothers, see Kupperman, *Providence Island*.

¹⁰⁴ See Davidson, *Historical Geography*.

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around 1680.¹⁰⁵ The problem for the pirates was that the Belizean cayes could not provide them with their essential requirements. When Port Royal at Jamaica became less welcoming, many preferred to make New Providence in the Bahamas their base as the British governors there were much more accommodating.

Most of the privateers, in any case, opted for a more secure existence after 1670 and many found it in logwood extraction. Their first settlement was at Cabo Catoche at the north-eastern point of the Yucatán peninsula.¹⁰⁶ Later they would establish their camps at Trist and Beef Island in the Laguna de Términos close to Campeche. Only when the logwood at Cabo de Catoche was exhausted did they turn their attention to the coast of Belize. When they started to arrive, probably in the 1670s, they would likely have found a small number of British settlers already scattered among the cayes.

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¹⁰⁵ The claim that the French corsair L'Ollonois spent time in Belize in 1665 is almost certainly false.

¹⁰⁶ Cabo Catoche may have been established as early as 1662 – even before the end of privateering.

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