GREAT STAUGHTON AND ITS PEOPLE

HOW A HUNTINGDONSHIRE VILLAGE LEFT ITS MARK ON ENGLAND'S HISTORY

by

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'Our ideal possession of the Peruvian treasures'

In the chancel of the church of St Andrew, affixed to the wall opposite the impressive organ is a modest but elegant plaque commemorating Rev. Richard Walter MA. The plaque describes Walter as 'author of the well-known *Voyage Around the World*'. Walter was sometime Fellow of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge; Chaplain of Portsmouth Dockyard (1745–1785) and Chaplain of *HMS Centurion* in Commodore Anson's Expedition. Richard Walter's account of his voyage around the world with Lord Anson was an immediate best-seller when it was published in 1748, running to four editions in that year alone and attracting several hundred wealthy subscribers.

A VOYAGE ROUND THE WORLD, in the years 1740–4 by LORD ANSON, COMPILED From Papers and other Materials of the Right Honourable GEORGE Lord ANSON, and published under his Direction, by RICHARD WALTER, M.A., Chaplain of his MAJESTY's Ship the Centurion.

The years since have done nothing to diminish the book's appeal to the general reader or its influence on later authors of stirring adventures on the high seas. *A Voyage Around the World* turned out to be an epic adventure of fortitude and resolve in the face of ferocious tempests and mountainous seas; of crews ravaged by typhus and scurvy or driven by desperation to mutiny; and above all the decisive yet compassionate command of Commodore George Anson. There were compensations: sojourns in tropical paradises, the discovery of hitherto unknown territories, surprise at the sight of unfamiliar flora and fauna and most enticing of all, the expectation of fabulous riches to be plundered from the Spanish ships transporting gold and treasure from Mexico and Peru to Spain.

Richard Walter was born in 1716, (there is some dispute about the date), the son of a London merchant. It is known that he was admitted to Sidney Sussex College Cambridge at the age of eighteen on 3 July 1735. Three years later he graduated with a BA degree, was elected to a fellowship and ordained deacon by the Bishop of Norwich in June 1740. Quite what inspired this 'puny, weakly man, pale and of low stature' to embark on a perilous, voyage around a globe that was beset by England's fiercest enemy, the mighty Spanish empire, is a question to which Walter gave a positive response: 'a voyage round the world promises a species of information of all others the most desirable and interesting, since great part of it is performed in seas with which we are as yet but very imperfectly acquainted'. There was another, more commercial and political purpose; 'if faithfully executed, the more important purposes of navigation, commerce, and national interest may be greatly promoted'. What Walter omitted from this list of virtuous objectives was the prospect of plunder, or as Walter put it: 'our golden dreams and our ideal possession of the Peruvian treasures'. In other words: piracy.

In 1740, the British Admiralty had conceived a grand plan for an expedition around the world which would have three principal objectives: first, to bolster British trade interests in the South Seas; secondly, to disrupt and attack Spanish possessions on the South American trade routes; and thirdly to capture Spanish galleons laden with fabulous quantities of Peruvian silver. The military justification for this 'enterprize' was the war that had broken out with Spain when the unfortunate Captain Jenkins suffered unauthorised surgery to his ear at the hands of Spanish coastguards in what became known as 'The war of Jenkins' ear'.

The 'generous and good-natured' George Anson, a veteran of twenty years' experience, was chosen to lead the expedition. He was appointed Commodore of a fleet of six ships being brought together at Portsmouth. The flagship was *HMS Centurion*, with a crew of 400. The other five ships were the *Gloucester* (300 crew), the *Severn* and the *Pearl*. Smaller were the *Wager* and the *Tryal*. Two merchant ships called 'pinks', *Anna* and *Industry*, carried provisions and other supplies.

The departure date was to be June 1740 from St Helens (now Spithead). The omens were not good. The 500 fit and capable fighting men who were supposed to crew the ship were actually inmates of the Chelsea hospital 'the most decrepid and miserable objects' pressganged into reluctant service, according to Walter's account. 'Most sixty years of age … or upwards of seventy', he noted gloomily and 'all those who had limbs and strength to walk out of Portsmouth deserted'.

Delayed by bad weather, the fleet did not put to sea until forty days later, on 18 September 1740. The delay meant that the fleet would be forced to navigate the treacherous passage round Cape Horn at the height of the ferocious winter tempests. Their first stop, however, was Madeira, held by England's oldest ally Portugal, where the fleet took on provisions. News came that the French had got wind of the expedition and had alerted the Spanish authorities who duly sent Admiral Pizarro with a squadron of gunships to lie in wait for Anson's fleet. For Walter, this first halt was an opportunity to satisfy his curiosity about the customs, people, flora and fauna of the territory. In Madeira, he enthused over its fine wines and its verdant scenery: '[The hinterland of Fonciale (Funchal)] is … cultivated and interspersed with vineyards: and in the midst of this slope the merchants have fixed their country seats, which help to form a very agreeable prospect.' After a week on the island Anson, mindful of the threat from Admiral Pizzaro, ordered the fleet to depart on 3 November 1740. Pizarro, however, was in no mind to pursue the English fleet. He forecast that the rounding of Cape Horn would, as Walter wrote, 'effectually baffle all our designs'.

The fleet headed for the Isla de Santa Catarina (St Catherine's), a Portuguese outpost off southern Brazil. On 16 November, one of the 'victuallers', *Industry*, requested permission to leave the fleet, having discharged its duties. Even at this early stage of the voyage, the fleet was beset by a serious health problems, as typhus (ship fever) and dysentery took hold. An infestation of flies and rotting food did not help matters. Walter wondered why all possible remedies were not investigated 'for maintaining a ship's crew in health and vigour'. He went on: 'it is surely obvious that our ships can be kept sweet and clean by a constant supply of fresh air'. It was not, in Walter's view, wilful neglect by the Admiralty, but the result of 'a settled contempt and hatred of all kinds of innovations, especial such as are projected by landmen and persons residing on shore'. It took a further month until 21 December for the fleet to reach the safe haven of St Catherine's Island, where Anson hoped to pick up fresh water and provisions and put the sick ashore for treatment (there were eighty sick crew from the *Centurion* alone). There was repair work to be undertaken on the ships; rigging to be overhauled, decks and sides to be caulked, masts to be secured. The ships had to be thoroughly washed and cleaned with vinegar 'for correcting the noisome stench on board, and destroying the vermin'. A month was spent repairing *Tryal*'s broken mast.

Taking advantage of this unexpectedly lengthy sojourn on the island, Walter went off to explore: 'the island is truly luxuriant, producing fruits of many kinds spontaneously. Here is no want of pine-apples, peaches, grapes, oranges, lemons, citrons, melons, apricots, nor plantains … [and] a great abundance of two other productions … I mean onions and potatoes.' Fish were plentiful, 'exceeding good, and are easily catched'.

After a month on St Catherine's, the fleet set sail on 18 January 1741 bound for the island of St Julian located at the eastern end of the Straits of Magellan and the last major port of call before the passage around Cape Horn. For Walter, this was 'an hostile, or at best, a desart and inhospitable

coast with a boisterous climate'. In a fierce storm, the *Tryal*'s mast again broke and the *Gloucester* was forced to take her in tow. When the fleet finally made landfall at Port St Julian on the Patagonian coast on 19 February, it was to discover there was no fresh water and little salt. Once again, much of their time ashore was occupied in repairing the storm-damaged fleet and shortening the mast of the *Tryal*.

Walter again took the opportunity of continuing his engaging travelogue. He noted that the countryside was bare of wood but rich in pasture and quoted the words of a previous traveller to these parts; 'he never saw a stick of wood in the country large enough to make the handle of an hatchet'. There were, however, abundant quantities of cattle brought over by the Spanish and Walter was horrified to learn of their brutal treatment at the hands of the horsemen as they brought down and killed the unfortunate beasts. He was however, much more impressed with the gauchos' use of a piece of equipment, which the English 'generally denominate a lash. … It is made of a thong of several fathoms in length and very strong, with a running noose at one end of it.' The gaucho is mounted on a horse and, grasping in his right hand the 'thong' which he has carefully coiled, he rides towards the cattle. When they get sufficiently close to the herd, 'they throw their thong at him with such exactness that they never fail of fixing the noose about his horns'. Walter marvelled at the skill involved: the whole process 'performed with a most wonderful and almost incredible dexterity'. Was this the first description of the lasso? One other creature caught his observant eye which a previous traveller had 'whimsically likened … to little children standing up in white aprons'. It was a penguin.

The passage around Cape Horn would be perilous and Anson foresaw that the ships might be separated. Should this occur, he ordered that the fleet should set a course for the island of Nuestra Senora del Socorro (now the island of Guamblin) at the southern tip of Chile, and await the rest of the fleet. If, after fourteen days, the fleet had not regrouped, the remaining ships should proceed to the island of Juan Fernandez. If all went well, the fleet should, in accordance with Admiralty instructions, seize the Spanish port of Baldivia (Valdivia) in southern Chile. The fleet left St Julian on 27 February setting a course for 'Streights le Maire' (Straits of Magellan). With 'the brightness of the sky and the serenity of the weather', the crew were in high spirits. With little wind to help them, they reached Cape Virgin Mary on 4 March, the northern boundary to the Streights le Maire. On 6 March they sighted Tierra del Fuego and on the following day they entered the Streights le Maire, passing through this boundary between Atlantic and Pacific without problem. But the earlier optimism of the crew turned out to be misplaced. A violent storm nearly cast the ships onto the rocks of Staten-land and it took all Anson's skill to navigate the fleet to safety. Walter's narrative sounds a sombre note of foreboding: the entire fleet was 'ignorant of the dreadful calamities which were then impending … ready to break upon us; ignorant that the time drew near when the squadron would be separated never to unite again, and that this day of our passage was the last chearful day that the greatest part of us would ever live to enjoy'.

As if the weather and the raging ocean were not enough, a new horror swept through the crews already ravaged by typhus and dysentery: scurvy. Walter graphically describes the effects on the men: 'they have become so feeble that they are unable to make the slightest of movements … resolved to get out of their hammocks, have died before they could well reach the deck'. Walter recounts the astonishing case of one old man: 'wounded above fifty years before at the battle of the Boyne, for though he was cured soon after … on his being attacked by the scurvy, his wounds, in the progress of his disease, broke out afresh, and appeared as if they had never been healed'. For two weeks, capricious winds, flurries of snow and hail and tumultuous seas prevented the orderly setting of the sails, causing the ships to drift out of control.

Sleep was almost impossible and would often be attended by a deluge of freezing seawater flooding the decks and penetrating the sleeping quarters. A violent storm, almost a hurricane, was followed by a dense fog that enveloped the fleet. The firing of the ship's guns was the only means of communication between the ships. The *Wager* and the *Anna* pink both suffered damage to their rigging in the storm and the *Gloucester* reported that its mast had been broken in the violent winds. Three days later on 3 April came the storm of all storms, a violent combination of raging seas and venomous winds, which continued for three days. Altogether, the storms had lasted for forty days and when the weather abated, the spirits of the men were buoyed by the hope that they were approaching the calmer seas of the Pacific Ocean. Their hopes were to be brutally dashed.

The next disaster to hit the hapless fleet was a navigational error. During the night of 13–14 April, the captain of the *Anna* was alarmed to note the steep cliffs of Cap Noir barely two miles distant. According to their charts they should have been proceeding northwards along the coast of Chile, instead of which they now found themselves back where they had started and almost 300 miles off course. Adding to the collective dismay, the *Pearl* and the *Severn* had not been sighted since 10 April and were presumed lost. Then the *Wager* too was lost from sight and there was 'the uncomfortable prospect of ending our days on some desolate coast'.

On 8 May, the *Centurion* reached the first proposed rendezvous, Socorro (Guamblin) island. It was not before time, as scurvy was continuing to take its toll of the crew. Nor did the storms abate; the Pacific Ocean was not living up to its name. A ferocious hurricane on 22 May caused such mountainous seas that it was feared the ship would founder, but despite the loss of sails and damage to the masts, the *Centurion* struggled through. By the end of May, 43 sailors had succumbed to scurvy. Anson anchored on the island for two weeks, hoping that the other ships in the fleet would make an appearance but his hopes were not realised. He therefore set sail for the third of the agreed rendezvous, the island of Juan Fernandez, deeming a landing and the possible ransacking of Baldivia, amongst potentially hostile forces, too risky.

Anson's troubles continued to multiply. Once again, the Admiralty charts were to prove faulty. They showed the island of Juan Fernandez lying some 150 miles west of Valparaiso in Chile. In fact, the island is located nearly 400 miles west. In attempting to correct this error, Anson ordered the fleet to set a course eastward and the coast of Chile duly came in sight. Realising his error, Anson changed course and headed westward. It took nine days to get back to his original starting point. The nine days delay cost the lives of eighty men, but it also had a fortunate result. The Spanish squadron, alerted to Anson's successful passage around Cape Horn, had redoubled their efforts to find the English fleet but were foiled by Anson's unwitting navigational misjudgement. On 9 June, with a crew of little more than 200 men, the *Centurion*, alone amongst the fleet, reached the safety of the island of Juan Fernandez. It was not until several days later that the *Tryal* struggled into the harbour. Out of its eighty-six crew, forty-six had died, and only the captain, his lieutenant and three seamen were left standing.

HMS Centurion spent three months in the safe haven of Juan Fernandez, a time for recuperation, re-provisioning and burying the dead, an onerous task as an average of six men were dying every day. The disease was slowly stemmed as the sailors' diet was uplifted from rotten meat and stale bread to fresh fruit and vegetables and a steady supply of meat. The other ships were still missing but relief came on 21 June when the *Gloucester* was sighted but strong gales prevented her from anchoring for a further month. The casualty rate amongst its crew was horrific: 254 were dead, leaving only ninety-two sickly men to crew the ship. Many of the sick were to perish on the island.

As was now his custom, Walter lost no time in exploring the island, with its excellent climate, lush vegetation, springs and waterfalls. He noted in particular the great variety of vegetables, including 'water-cresses and purslain, with excellent wild sorrel and a vast profusion of turnips and Sicilian radishes'. The terrain was difficult and hilly. One of the sailors, pursuing a goat, lost his footing and was 'dashed to pieces on the rocks below'.

Throughout his narrative, Walter constantly brought out the generous nature and humanity of the Commodore whom he always referred to as Mr Anson. Walter recorded how, to express his gratitude for their safe deliverance, Anson took some seeds and set rows of peach and apricot trees for the benefit of future travellers to the island, which, according to later testimony, were gratefully appreciated years later. The change in the sailors' diet had a significant beneficial effect on their health. Fish were plentiful, 'above all, a black fish which we most esteemed, called by some a chimney-sweeper, in shape resembling a carp'. Seal was a welcome addition, providing fresh meat and the fattest of them 'afforded us a butt of oil'. Walter was particularly impressed by the size and ferocity of the sealion, 'from twelve to twenty feet in length, and from eight to fifteen in circumference', he noted admiringly. Their hearts and tongues made for 'exceeding good eating'. The most famous earlier inhabitant of the island was next to capture Walter's attention: the Scotsman, Alexander Selkirk, allegedly the inspiration for Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, who had spent four years on the island forty years previously.

Spirits were lifted on 16 August when, to general astonishment and delight, the victualler *Anna* pink sailed into the harbour, apparently in fine fettle and with a remarkably healthy crew. The ship had become detached from the fleet and as a result of bad weather had found shelter for two months on the island of Inchin (off the southern coast of Chile), where there was an abundance of fruit, vegetables and meat, and plentiful water, thus allowing the crew to recuperate. The *Anna* pink itself however was not so fortunate. Upon inspection it was found that the she was holed below the water line and incapable of being made seaworthy. Anson ordered her to be destroyed and the crew transferred to the *Gloucester*. Three of the ships were now accounted for. What had become of the *Severn*, *Pearl* and *Wager*? It was to be several months before Walter learned their fate.

One of the most dramatic episodes of the whole voyage was the fate of the *Wager*, which reads like the preliminary sketch for a tale of sea-faring derring-do that a Conrad or an O'Brian might have penned. The severely damaged *Wager* became detached from the squadron off Cap Noir and desperately sought a safe haven. *Wager*'s captain, David Cheap, was seriously ill and confined to his cabin. His decision to head for Socorro, to rendezvous with the rest of the fleet, met with opposition from two of the crew, his lieutenant Robert Baynes and the gunner John Bulkeley, who believed the island of Juan Fernandez would be a more sensible destination. Cheap overruled them. What happened next was a shipwreck, a mutiny and a desperate voyage by fifty-nine of the crew in a makeshift boat piloted by two of the mutineers. They reached Rio de Janeiro four months later on 28 January 1742 and eventually made it back to England. David Cheap and the remainder of his crew were not so fortunate; it was not until 1744 that they managed to reach English shores.

In September 1741, the expedition was one year old and for Anson and Walter it was an appropriate moment to assess the lessons of the voyage thus far. The numbers were staggering. Walter wrote: 'We had buried on board the *Centurion*, since our leaving St. Helens, 292, and had now remaining on board 214.' Of the 961 men on board who set out from England, no fewer than '626 were dead before this time'. With only 335 crew remaining, it was impossible to crew the *Centurion* let alone the other ships. The *Severn* and *Pearl* had abandoned the voyage, setting a course back to Rio de Janeiro, which they eventually reached on 6 June. Six months later, they set sail for England.

At the beginning of the month, a Spanish man-o-war approached the *Centurion* believing that the English ship was an escort vessel. Anson ordered the decks to be cleared to give the guns a clear shot at the enemy. The supposed man o' war turned out to be a mere merchantman, the *Nuestra Senora del Monte Carmelo*, commanded by Don Manuel Zamorra. Anson brought the *Centurion* alongside and a whiff of grapeshot at the Spaniard's rigging was enough to force the Spanish ship to surrender. The *Carmelo*'s cargo included 'sugar, and great quantities of blue cloth made in the province of Quito [and] some tobacco, which, though strong, was not ill flavoured'. Slightly more interesting was the discovery of 'twenty-three cases of dollars, each weighing upwards of 200 lb. averdupois'. 'The prize', as captured ships were called, was immediately brought under English colours. Perhaps more valuable than the booty was the news that Admiral Pizarro had been forced to return to Rio de Janeiro having suffered the loss of two of the ships in bad weather. With the threat of Pizarro now removed, Anson realised that the chances of capturing a Spanish treasure ship were now greatly enhanced.

Intelligence received from the *Carmelo* indicated that the main channel for the *galeons* was the sea route between Callao (Lima) and Valparaiso in Chile and Anson therefore despatched *Tryal* on a reconnaissance mission off the coast of Valparaiso. On 19 September, the *Centurion*, towing her 'prize' the *Carmelo*, left the island of Juan Fernandez to join *Tryal* in the hunt for plunder. A second 'prize' was swiftly captured, the *Arranzazu*, a Spanish merchantman with a healthy cargo of £5,000 of silver but the cost was high. The *Tryal* was so severely damaged that she had to be scuttled. The *Arranzazu* was duly designated as a frigate in his Majesty's service and became *Tryal II* (or *Tryal*'s *prize* as Walter named her). The next 'prize' to fall victim to the predatory English fleet was the *Santa Teresa de Jesus* bound from Guayaquil to Callao. The booty was meagre, amounting to no more than £170 worth of silver. The rather more interesting cargo was ten passengers, including three women, one of whom was a 21-year-old 'of singular beauty'. Having been taught that falling into the hands of the enemy would certainly result in brutal treatment from a set of sailors 'who had not seen a woman for near a twelvemonth', the three women took steps to conceal themselves and it was only with the greatest difficulty that they were persuaded to present themselves to their English captors. Walter, keen as ever to show Mr Anson's humanity, noted the captain's order 'that the women should receive no kind of inquietude or molestation whatever' and he instructed the ship's pilot to stay with the women throughout the voyage, as 'their guardian and protector'.

In terms of booty, the area was proving lucrative for Anson's fleet. On 10 November the *Centurion* was a few leagues south of the island of Lobos de la Mar where they were to rendezvous with the *Gloucester*. A hapless Spanish ship strayed into Anson's net and after a brief struggle yielded to the brute force of the English ship. The prize was *Nuestra Senora del Carmin* laden with 'steel, iron, wax, pepper, cedar, plank, snuff, rosarios, European bale goods, powder-blue, cinnamon, Romish indulgencies', all of which were of little interest to Anson's men. Their possible disappointment at the meagreness of the haul was swiftly assuaged when the value was ascertained as amounting to 400,000 dollars.

Of more value to Anson was the intelligence brought by an Irishman 'and papist', John Williams, lately a visitor to Paita (in north-west Peru) who revealed that the town's treasury was concealed at the custom house. The town was defended by a fort equipped with cannon and run by a small garrison and a raid on Paita would neatly combine two Admiralty objectives; to secure treasure and inflict serious damage to an important Spanish port. Paita was a stopping-off point for ships from Acapulco, Sonsonnate, Realeijo and Panama to take on provisions, notably fresh water, before continuing their passage to Callao. The town's inhabitants, numbering some 200 families, were principally Indians and black.

Unaware that the town treasury had been moved to a secure hide-out, Anson decided to launch a night attack with fifty-eight well-armed men. The 'English dogs' were quickly spotted and the hue and cry raised. Anson's men stormed the town, making as much noise as possible to give the impression that the raiders were several hundred strong. The ruse succeeded and in fifteen minutes it was all over. The governor, fearing for his life, had leapt out of bed half-naked and fled into the hills, leaving his hapless seventeen-year-old bride, whom he had married three days before, to the tender mercies of the invaders, who 'carried [her] off in her shift'.

The crew went through the town, looting whatever they found. Lieutenant Brett was astonished to discover the men draping themselves in women's gowns and petticoats over their own greasy and worn clothing. They 'eagerly seized these glittering habits, and put them on over their own dirty trowsers'. The proceeds of the raid were prodigious despite the bulk of the town treasury having been spirited to safety; wrought plate, dollars and other coin amounted to £30,000 together with jewellery and trinkets whose value could not be calculated. It was the biggest haul of booty that the expedition was to make on that coast. The last act of the English pirates was to set ablaze the entire town, apart from the two churches, a gesture that was possibly a nod to Walter's sensibilities.

On leaving the bay of Paita, Anson's men seized six small Spanish vessels of which all but one, the *Solidad* were scuttled. The *Solidad* became the third prize to be incorporated in Anson's squadron, which now consisted of six ships: *Centurion*, *Tryal II*, *Carmelo*, *Teresa*, *Carmin* and *Solidad*. *Gloucester*, meanwhile, still on patrol off the coast of Valparaiso, had not been idle. She had captured two Spanish ships, one of which seemed to be of no monetary interest until the boarding party noticed that the ship's officers were dining off silver plate. The cargo, mostly cotton, was innocent enough but subsequent delving revealed that the innocent cotton package was hiding £12,000 in silver doubloons, causing the Gloucester's crew to be 'agreeably surprized'.

Amply rewarded though they had been from the capture of Spanish merchant ships, Anson was steadfastly focused on the ultimate prize, the capture of the *Manila galeon*, which was expected to arrive in Acapulco from Manila sometime in January 1742. It was now November 1741 and Anson reasoned that he had more than enough time to intercept the *Spanish galeon*. He urgently needed water and food and on 5 December the fleet sailed north to the island of Quibo, situated at the mouth of the Bay of Panama.

As was now his custom Walter wasted no time in exploring the island. He was amazed by the prodigality of wildlife: huge flights of 'parrots, parroquets and mackaws'. Monkeys and guanos provided a plentiful supply of food. Turtles, weighing up to 200 lbs were stored alive on the ships and were 'generally esteemed … to be the most delicious of all eatables'. Turtle eggs, carefully excavated from the beaches, were an additional delicacy. The dense woodland also concealed a deadly flying snake that fell from the boughs onto its prey, killing it with its deadly poison. What especially fascinated Walter were the pearl divers from Panama who dived for pearl-bearing oysters, staying under water so long that blood issued from their ears and mouth.

Time was pressing and on 12 December *Gloucester* and her two prizes re-joined the squadron. In a council of war, Anson issued fresh instructions to his captains about the strategy for intercepting the *Manila galeon*. They were to station themselves to the north of Acapulco, patrolling the seas eight to ten leagues from the shore, until 14 February, a little over two months away. From there they were to rendezvous with Anson at the islands of the Tres Marias. Should *Centurion* not be at the appointed place, the rest of the fleet were to steer a course for Macao on the Chinese coast. Once again, the weather intervened. The trade winds, which they confidently

expected would speed them to Acapulco, failed. Walter mournfully recorded: 'we began at length to despair of succeeding in the great purpose we had in view, that of intercepting the *Manila galeon*'.

In an atmosphere of gloom and despondency, they reached the northern approaches of Acapulco on 26 January 1742, fearing that the great prize had already eluded them. A light was seen and the thought that this was the *galeon* raised spirits but it proved to be a false alarm, the light being a warning beacon on the shore. Even worse news followed. The Admiralty charts proved yet again to be at fault; Acapulco lay 150 miles to the north. Furious, Anson ordered a frantic change of course, fearful that they may literally have missed the boat. Upon finally arriving at Acapulco, they learned that the treasure ship had actually docked on 9 January and was being prepared for the crossing of the Pacific, with its departure set for 3 March. It soon became clear to Anson that the Spanish knew of his arrival and were in no hurry to release a ship full of treasure into the arms of a welcoming English pirate. The supposed day of departure of the *Manila galeon*, 3 March, came and went. Easter Week followed when no labour was permitted. By 15 March despondency was beginning to set in. Finally, news reached Anson that the Governor of the town had postponed the sailing of the treasure galleon until the following year.

Before Anson could change his strategy, he was forced to take on water and provisions at the port of Chequetan in Seguataneo bay in Mexico. For Walter, it was an irresistible opportunity to put his feet on *terra firma* after four months at sea. Amongst the varied fauna, it was the torpedo fish which captured his attention. When touched, it imparted a numbness to the limbs. This anaesthetising effect even passed through the walking cane with which Walter prodded an expiring example of the fish.

Realising it was futile to remain off Acapulco, Anson ordered the fleet to steer a south-westerly course to catch the north-east trade winds that would take them across the Pacific to Macau, Canton and China, the route that the Spanish galleons would follow. It took Anson seven agonising weeks to find the usually reliable trade winds. Further disaster followed when *Gloucester*, having suffered irreparable damage to her mast, was scuttled and set ablaze. 'Thus perished his Majesty's ship the *Gloucester*', is Walter's laconic journal entry. More distressing still, scurvy reappeared, despite the best efforts of the surgeons and a much-improved diet of fish and fruit. So serious was the situation that recourse was had to 'Mr. Ward's pill and drop', the most notorious quack medicine of the eighteenth century. Mr Ward's 'remedy' proved ineffective; a dozen men were dying of the disease every day.

The fleet's intended destination was the island of Tinian. On 27 August, despite being buffeted by strong winds, they reached the island. The major discovery the indefatigable Walter made on the island of Tinian was bread-fruit or rhymay as it was called by the Indians. When baked it had the taste of bread and potato and it proved popular with the crew. There was also plentiful beef, hogs and poultry. Anson was wracked by scurvy and took to a tent on the island to recover. Their pleasant stay on the island was rudely interrupted by a new drama when a violent storm on 18 September drove *Centurion*, with only a skeleton crew, out to sea, feared lost. After nineteen days of acute despair, *Centurion* managed to struggle back to its anchorage.

It was 21 October before Anson and *Centurion* were able to set sail for Macao. On 3 November the island of Formosa came into view. Two days later, they were within sight of the coast of China and on 9 November, a Chinese pilot offered, for 30 dollars, to guide them into the Portuguese colony of Macao where they anchored on 12 November. Although nominally independent, Macao relied on the goodwill of the Chinese to survive. At first the Chinese authorities were reluctant to accede to Anson's request for provisions. However, the threat of the *Centurion*'s array of cannon persuaded the Chinese to alter their stance.

Macao was a significant destination for Richard Walter, for it was here that he elected to return to England on one of the ships belonging to the East India Company. He was not alone. Four other officers took the decision to head home. The memorial plaque in St Andrew's Church gives the erroneous impression that Walter circumnavigated the globe with Captain Anson. He did not. Why he decided to leave when potentially the most thrilling part of the adventure was about to occur, he does not reveal but perhaps two years of tumultuous seas and ferocious storms may have taken its toll on his 'puny, weakly' frame.

On 10 March Anson learned that a large Spanish galleon accompanied by two other ships had been sighted off the Grand Ladrone, part of the Mariana group of islands east of the Philippines. The now repaired *Centurion* weighed anchor from Macao on 6 April 1743 with a plentiful supply of provisions and a healthy crew, strengthened by the recruitment of twenty-three lascars. To put inquisitive Spanish man o' wars off the scent, Anson announced at Macao that he was intending to head for Batavia outside the channel normally used by the Spanish treasure ships. So persuasive was Anson that his intention was believed. So when he announced to his assembled crew his plan to capture the large Spanish galleon, 'they expressed their approbation, according to naval custom, by three strenuous cheers'.

Anson's true destination was Cape Espiritu Santu where he proposed to lie in wait for the *Manila galeon.* He arrived there on 31 May and immediately ordered the topsails to be taken down to avoid the ships being seen by lookouts on the Cape. The *galeon* was expected in June and Anson's crew were in a state of feverish excitement, eagerly watching every day for the appearance of a Spanish flag that would bring them a fortune beyond their dreaming. The days passed. Anson ordered the men to practise loading and firing the cannons. He selected thirty of his best marksmen, directing them to take up their positions high up on the masts. On into June they waited. 11 June, an empty sea. 19 June, would the *galeon* ever appear? The Spanish themselves were aware of the possible danger and the Governor of Espiritu Santo ordered two gunships to be fitted out, one with thirty-two guns, the second with twenty, and two sloops equipped with ten guns each. This fleet was ordered to make a pre-emptive attack on *Centurion*, but the onset of a monsoon forced them to withdraw to port.

On 20 June, after three weeks of anxious expectation, a sail was sighted. As it drew nearer, eyes were strained to confirm whether it was the *galeon* and whether it had a protective shield of Spanish warships. *Centurion* moved in closer to identify the ship. It was the *Manila galeon* herself, the *Nuestra Señora de Covadonga* (Walter calls her *Nostra Signora de Cabadonga*) and she wasted no time in loosing off a threatening salvo from its thirty-six guns. Anson's strategy was to edge closer to the Spanish ship until it was within range of pistol shot, keeping to leeward to prevent the Spanish boat from taking advantage of the wind direction to head for safety in the port of Jalapay, some seven leagues (twenty-five miles) distant.

Gradually Anson manoeuvred the *Centurion* abreast of the *galeon*, where he could put the next stage of his strategy into operation. With insufficient crew to man all the guns, Anson organised gangs of ten or twelve men continuously loading the guns whilst two of the crew moved from gun to gun keeping up a constant fire, thus preventing the Spanish, whose tactic was to lie on deck when they saw a broadside being prepared, from resuming their gun positions and re-loading. Meanwhile, Anson's select band of snipers positioned high up on the masts picked off any Spanish officer unfortunate enough to find himself exposed on deck.

As it had done so often, the weather took a hand. A sudden squall of wind and rain just after noon obscured momentarily the *'galeon*'. When it cleared, *Centurion* had moved closer to the Spanish vessel and at 1 pm, the Spanish crew could be seen hurling overboard cattle and lumber, a task

that a brisk fusillade from the *Centurion*'s cannons quickly interrupted. Anson manoeuvred the Centurion to the bow of the Spanish ship, training her guns at the enemy's masts, at the same time preventing the Spanish ship from returning fire. Anson's snipers continued to pick off any remaining officers or crew on the deck of the Spanish vessel. More cannon shot followed from *Centurion*, setting the Spanish ship ablaze. The end was not long in coming. Commodore Anson, sensing that the Spanish were now routed, ordered his men to desist from firing and with that signal, the capture of the *Nuestra Señora de Covadonga* captained by General Don Jeronimo de Montero, was complete.

It had taken less than two hours to secure a treasure that amounted to a million and a half dollars. Philip Saumerez and ten men were sent over to inspect the damage. It was considerable; they were met by the horrific sight of 'carcasses, entrails and dismembered limbs'. Sixty-seven Spanish sailors had been killed, eighty-four wounded. On *Centurion*, there was one fatality, with two more dying later of their wounds and seventeen injured. When the Spanish prisoners saw the age of the sailors who had captured them, they were outraged to have been defeated by 'a handful of boys'.

On 11 July 1743, with the help of two Chinese pilots, the *Centurion* and her prize, the *Nuestra Señora de Covadonga*, came to anchor off the city of Macao. During that long month, Anson had carefully assessed the treasure. It was a vast haul: 1,313,843 pieces of eight, 35,682 ounces of virgin silver, as well as some cochineal and various other unimportant trophies. According to Walter, the value of the haul was around £400,000. The crew of the Spanish ship had managed to destroy other valuables and merchandise with an estimated value of £600,000. When *Nuestra Señora de Covadonga* left the port of Acapulco, it was carrying a treasure valued at in excess of £1,000,000. To his chagrin, Captain Anson learned that there was a second treasure ship, which had left Acapulco much earlier than usual and had he not been delayed in Macao, he could have added further bounty to his already fabulous hoard.

Before he could set sail for England, Anson faced frustrating delays, bureaucratic problems and the machinations of the Chinese authorities who effectively controlled the port. It was not until 10 December 1743 that the *Centurion* finally set sail for the last hazardous stage of a journey that had begun nearly four years previously. Two days later in Macao, the *Nuestra Señora de Covadonga* was sold for a paltry 6,000 dollars.

The *Centurion* reached Cape Town on 11 January 1744, where she remained for three months. When she put to sea again on 3 April 1744, Anson learned that England was at war with France and French naval squadrons were patrolling the Channel. A fortuitous bank of fog allowed the *Centurion* to give any inquisitive French ship the slip and thus after three years and nine months at sea, Captain Anson brought what remained of his fleet back into its home harbour, to tumultuous acclaim. The casualty list made grim reading: of the original crew of *Centurion*, *Gloucester*, *Tryal* and *Anna pink*, only 188 survived. Altogether of the original 1,900 crew of all seven ships, a mere 500 lived to tell the tale to their descendants.

The treasure from the *Covadonga* was paraded through the streets of London, greeted by vast crowds. Anson became a national hero, in the mould of Sir Francis Drake. When the spoils of the voyage were finally distributed, after several acrimonious legal battles, Anson received £91,000. During the nearly four years that the circumnavigation took, Anson's wages amounted to £719. For the crew, the bounty was generous. They each received £300, twenty years' wages for an ordinary seaman. Anson's subsequent career was eventful. From 1751 to 1756, and then again from 1757 to his death in 1762, Anson was First Lord of the Admiralty. He undertook a wholesale

reform of the navy, tightening discipline and insisting on uniforms for commissioned officers. It was he who began the process of making the Royal Navy the most powerful naval force in the world.

For Rev. Richard Walter life in England was a much more tranquil affair. In 1744 he obtained his MA and in March 1745 he was appointed chaplain of Portsmouth Dockyard, a post he held until his death in 1783. On 5 May 1748 he married Jane Sabbarton of St Margaret's, Lothbury, in Gray's Inn chapel and the couple had four children. The plaque in St Andrew's Church records that Richard Walter died on 10 March 1783 at the age of sixty-seven and was buried in this church, the manor at that time belonging to his family. In the same grave rests his wife Jane, who died in December 1813 aged ninety.

Walter's reputation received a severe dent in 1761, when he was seriously ill. It was claimed that *The Voyage Around the World* was actually the work of one Benjamin Robins (1707–1751), a gifted mathematician and scientist and an acknowledged authority on military ballistics. The case for Robins hinges on the inclusion in the narrative of detailed geographical co-ordinates and the lengthy discourse on inconsistencies in world temperature values, scientific skills which were beyond Rev. Walter's competence. Six years after the death of her husband, Jane Walter issued a fierce rebuttal to the claims of Robins: 'During the time of Mr. Walter's writing that voyage, he visited me almost daily previous to our marriage and I have frequently heard him say how closely he had been engaged in writing for some hours … as his lordship overlooked every sheet that was written … and I have frequently seen Mr. Walter correct the proof-sheets for the printer.' There is one indisputable fact about the *Voyage*: Walter was there, Robins was not.

Richard Walter MA, Chaplain of the *Centurion*, gave his own verdict on his stirring voyage: 'That though prudence, intrepidity, and perseverance united are not exempted from the blows of adverse fortune, yet in a long series of transactions they usually rise superior to its power, and in the end rarely fail of proving successful.'