



Video transcript

Discovering Captain William Kidd through primary sources

What I really wanted to understand was what led you to look in *Colonial America* for this material. Did you already know it would be there, or were you exploring more speculatively?

In reality, it was a mixture of both. A few years ago, I read *Captain Kidd and the War Against the Pirates* by Robert Ritchie. That was one of the first major sources I came across, and it helped establish Captain Kidd as the ideal case study for my project.

Following Ritchie's work, I explored the sources he had used and then turned to *Colonial America* to see if I could locate them myself. I also cross-referenced this with records in the *Calendar of State Papers*.

However, when I began exploring *Colonial America* and *Colonial Caribbean*, I found far more material than I had expected—much of which I don't think historians have given enough attention to. Many aspects of Kidd's story remain relatively unknown. He is generally remembered for two things: his unusual name and the enduring myth of buried treasure. What I wanted to uncover was the reality behind those narratives.

As I worked through the Colonial Office records, I developed a key principle: always look out for underlying agendas. The individuals producing these documents were often writing with their own ambitions in mind. For example, within *Colonial America*, when piracy is discussed, one word appears repeatedly: "infested". Phrases such as "the sea is infested with pirates" or "our town is infested with pirates" were often used to attract attention from Whitehall. This language was deliberate and strategic.

AM's resources have therefore been valuable not only for reconstructing Kidd's story, but also for analysing how different individuals wrote about piracy. There are clear contrasts in perspective, and no single, universal definition of piracy—interpretations were highly subjective. This is an area that I think historians will examine much more closely in the future, particularly now that these resources are accessible to a much wider audience through AM Quartex.