The Port Royal Earthquake

More than 300 years ago Port Royal in Jamaica was a rich city. It was at the end of a long narrow beach with the sea on both sides. At the other end of the beach was the mainland. Port Royal was the capital city of Jamaica. Now it is just a quiet fishing village.

In charge of Port royal was Sir Henry Morgan (1635-1688). Some people call him a pirate. But a pirate attacks any ship. He wants to steal money and treasure. Sir Henry Morgan only attacked Spanish ships. The English ruled Jamaica. The English were at war with Spain. The English government said Sir Henry Morgan could attack Spanish ships. He was helping in the war.

Port Royal became rich. It had big warehouses. They were full of treasure. Then the war ended. "You cannot attack Spanish ships now," said the English government. But many of the sailors of Port Royal did not stop. They became real pirates. Other pirates came to join them. Soon Port Royal was the pirate headquarters. It was a wicked city.

It will not take long to read this story. In the same little amount of time Port Royal was destroyed.

On the morning of June 7th 1692, it was hot. It was nearly dinner time. Servants were working. Housewives were working. They were getting the dinner ready. The men were resting from the heat. They could smell the dinner cooking. The nice smell drifted out to sea.

Suddenly there was a noise. It was like thunder. It rumbled across the mainland. The ground shook and shuddered. A great earthquake pushed up the streets. The houses toppled and fell. In two minutes most of the town was gone. It just slid into the sea.

Great waves flooded across the harbour. Some ships sank at once. Others were carried right into the town. Some streets and buildings did not sink. They were more inland. Instead they were flooded by great waves. Port Royal's buildings were grand. But they had lasted only 37 years.

One man had a narrow escape. The earthquake swallowed him up. Then the earth quaked again. It threw him up and into the sea. He swam about for a long time. Then a boat rescued him. His name was Lewis Galdy. He had come to Port Royal from France. He had to escape from France. France was ruled by a cruel king. The king would not let people worship God freely. Only the King's way of worship was allowed. Lewis Galdy did not want to worship in the king's way. He wanted to worship God in the way the Bible says we should. He ran away from France. He made his way to Port Royal. Because Port Royal was ruled by the English he was free.

Today, the old city of Port Royal is under the water. About 40 years ago there was an ex-ped-i-tion. The expedition went to find things from the old city under the sea. An inventor made a special ship. It was called the *Sea Diver.* From the ship divers went down. They went to explore to sunken city.

They found crockery, they found money, they found pipes, they found jewellery. These things tell us what life in Port Royal was like. They found a watch. It had stopped at seventeen minutes to twelve. That must have been the time the earthquake struck.