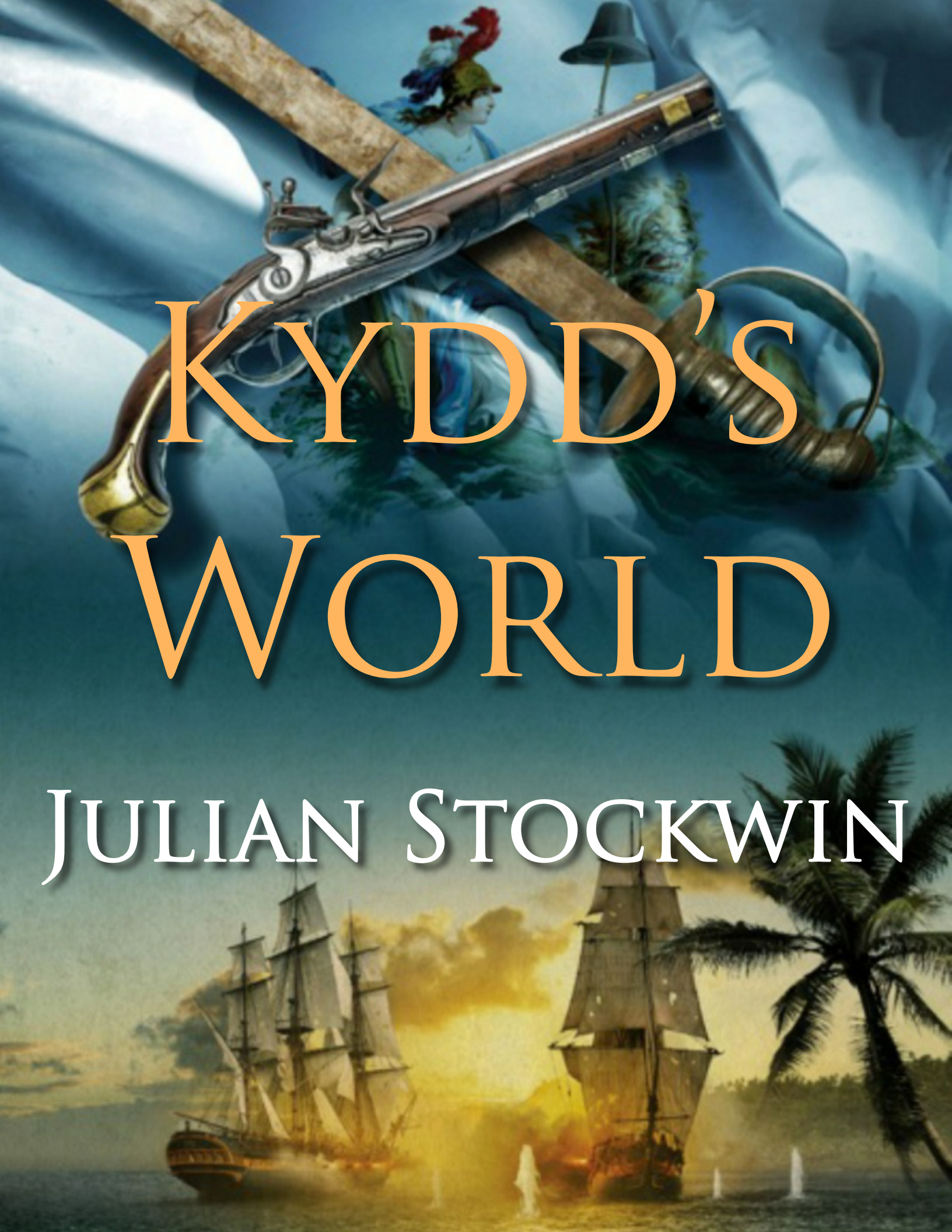




KYDD'S WORLD

JULIAN STOCKWIN





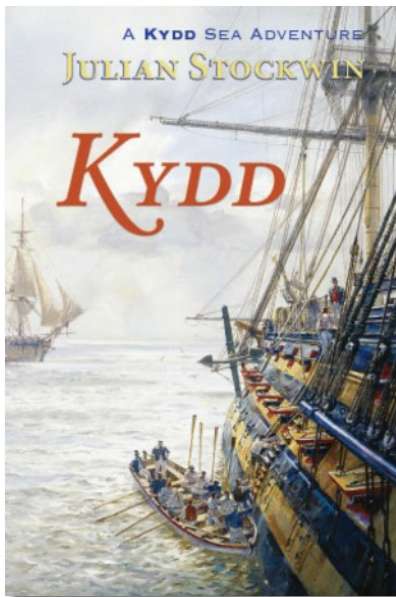
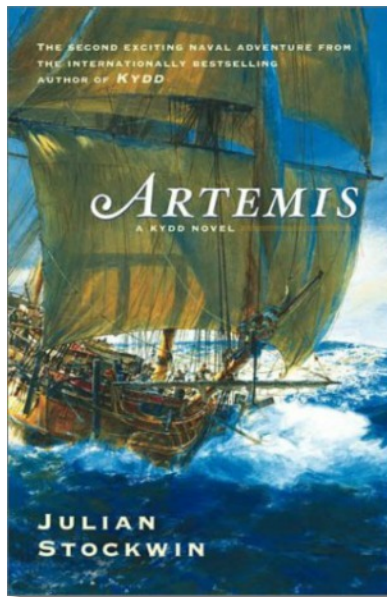
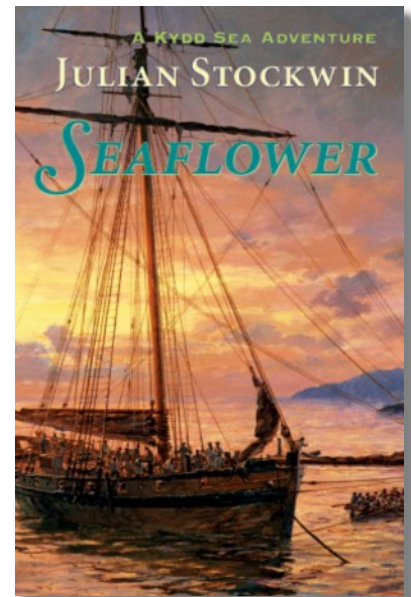
ONCE UPON A TIME, not so very long ago, I was a software designer. I'd just signed off on my biggest and most fraught project. As I sank into an armchair, my wife, Kathy, thrust a large tumbler of whisky into my hand and looked me straight in the eyes. "Sweetheart," she said, "get a life!" Her suggestion: that I write. And about the sea . . .

Once I'd overcome the initial shock and decided to give it a go, I realised there was a lot of sense in what she said. As far back as I can remember, I've been bewitched by the sea. Going to a decent grammar school was wasted on me; on the school bus I'd gaze out across the Channel at the low, grey shapes slipping away over the horizon on voyages to who knows where, taking my imagination with them.

In the late 1950s, the sea seemed to be much more a part of our shared consciousness. As a young boy I remember the thrilling real-life drama of the *Flying Enterprise*, when Captain Kurt Carlsen refused to leave his

sinking ship and, with First Mate Dancy of the ocean salvage tug *Turmoil*, heroically fought to bring her within sight of port before she tragically sank. Then, too, London Pool was packed with ships flying the red ensign, and it was also the time of the very last of the square riggers. Theoretically, you could still sign up outward-bound on a commercial voyage.

The only member of my family to have any connection with the sea was a distant relative we called Uncle Tom. A gentle, quietly spoken old man, he'd been around the Horn in square sail, and whenever I could I would sit spellbound and listen to him talk about life



before the mast on the seven seas.

My father thought he'd knock all this nonsense out of me, and sent me to a tough sea-training school at the tender age of fourteen. It didn't work; there was no contest – Latin and algebra or splicing and boat-handling! So at age fifteen, I joined the Royal Navy. And forty years later, I sat down to write about the sea.

I'm "Old Navy" with a deep respect and admiration for the service, so it had to be the Navy I'd write about. I chose Nelson's time, the great climax of the age of sail and a magnificent canvas for sea tales. This was an era when the sea was respected and wooed by men who didn't have steam engines and brute force. I also wanted to bring the sea itself into a more prominent role, but was as yet unsure how to achieve this.

I soon realized that there were things from my time in the Navy that I wanted to bring to my writing; small things, but evocative even to this day – a shimmering moonpath glittering on the water, the sound of voices from invisible night watchkeepers, the startling rich stink of the land after months at sea, the comfort of a still hammock when the ship rolls about it, the unreal beauty of an uninhabited tropical island in the South Seas.

There were the darker memories, too. Savage storms at sea when you feel the presence of nature like a wild beast out of a cage; close inshore in a gale when you wonder if a mistake at the helm will end with those black rocks suddenly bursting in. I was duty watch in

the Royal Australian Navy carrier *Melbourne* the night we collided with and sank *Voyager*; there from the sea-boat I saw men's courage at work while eighty sailors drowned.

But to achieve that more prominent role for the sea, it seemed logical to take the perspective of the men who actually did the job out there on the yardarm, serving the great cannon or crowding aboard an enemy deck, rather than of those shouting orders from behind. So the lower deck it was, and then I came across some surprising statistics. Unlike the army, where commissions were bought, all naval officers had to qualify professionally, and scattered among these were no more than a couple of hundred common seamen who made the awesome journey from the fo'c'sle to the quarterdeck, thereby turning themselves into gentlemen. Some became captains of their own ships; remarkably, some victims of the press-gang even became admirals. How could it be so? Just what kind of men were they? I began to write my story . . .

Julian Stockwin

THE AGE OF FIGHTING SAIL



Detail from the fine art print “Victory in Pursuit of Nelson” by John Chancellor, which hangs in the Stockwin home.

*Dark, heaving, boundless, endless
and sublime.*

The image of eternity.

THAT’S HOW THE POET BYRON described the sea. Throughout history man has found something primeval, powerful and deeply fascinating about Neptune’s Realm. However it was the Age of Fighting Sail, from 1793 to 1815, that in many ways was the pinnacle of man’s relationship with the sea.

The man-o’-war was the moon rocket of its day, a complex, self-contained community of 800 or more men. Day and night it could move faster than a man could run on land and was far taller than most buildings ashore. Despite its sophistication, however, this was before the age of steam and man still had to woo the sea, winning her over with sheer skill and muscle power.

This was a time when the officers and men of the Royal Navy often endured very long periods of time at sea with little respite. On March 19, 1801, Captain Richard Keats assumed command of HMS *Superb*. For

the next four years and five months, he would spend only one night out of his ship. Nelson was on blockade duty for two years and three months without setting foot off HMS *Victory*, and Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood once kept at sea for 22 continuous months, never stepping ashore.

From 1793-1815 Britain stood basically alone. At one time or another she fought every major power and most of the minor, and very often all of them at the same time. During these twenty two years, the Royal Navy lost 166 ships to the enemy in all, big and small. And in return, the enemy hauled down their colours over 1,204 ships. A winning ratio of better than 7 to 1 consistently, and usually against great odds. This includes losses of only five sail of the line to 139 of the enemy, including nine first rate battleships; and 17 frigate losses against 229 of the enemy. These figures reflect what Horatio Nelson called “the habit of victory,” which made Napoleon’s ambitions impossible.

The Kydd Series is Julian Stockwin’s tribute to the officers and men of the Royal Navy during the Age of Fighting Sail.



Oil painting by Thomas Gainsborough – Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London: NPG 881

Admiral Edward Vernon . . . “Old Grogham”

DRINK . . .

SINCE THE EARLY DAYS of sailing ships, the most readily available liquids to take on voyages were water and beer, both of which could only be stored for a short time before they became unpalatable. The beer issue was a gallon a day per man.

Vice Admiral William Penn’s fleet conquered Jamaica in 1655 and it was here that rum was first issued on board ships of the Royal Navy. The spirit was also known as “rumbustion.”

Rum has the advantage of keeping well, even improving with age. When abroad, captains of ships were allowed to replace beer with fortified wine, sometimes brandy, but neither was available in the West Indies. Rum, however, was, and became a popular alternative to beer for ships serving in this part of the world, even though the Victualling Board back in England had not officially sanctioned its use.

From 1655 until well into the eighteenth century, the issue of rum very much depended on individual captains. In 1731 it was officially decreed that if beer was not available then each man was entitled to a pint of wine or half a pint of rum or other spirits.

In 1740 Admiral Edward Vernon (nicknamed “Old Grogham,” because of the boatcloak he wore made of that material), decreed that the rum issue would be diluted 1:4 and thereafter the drink was called grog. By 1793 the dilution was usually 1:3.

From Vernon’s time to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, two issues of grog per day remained the custom whenever beer was unavailable. But the use of rum gradually became more widespread as did the issuing ritual. In Kydd’s day, the ship’s fiddler played “Nancy Dawson,” the signal for cooks of messes to repair to the rum tub to draw rations for their messmates. This was always done in the open air due to the combustible nature of rum!

Rum acquired the nickname “Nelson’s Blood” after 1805, when legend has it that Nelson’s body was preserved in a keg of rum. Historians now discount this, it was French brandy.

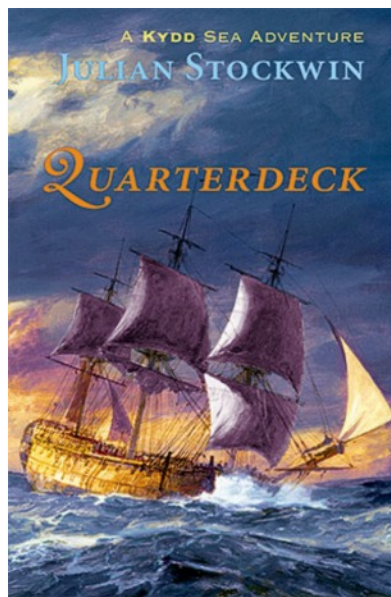
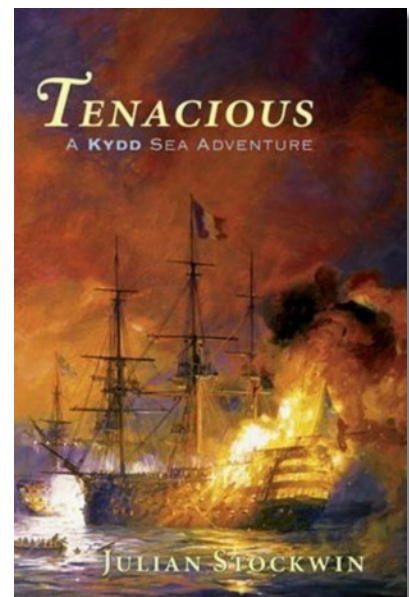
The American Navy ended the rum ration on September 1, 1862 but the practice continued in the British Navy for over a century. On Friday July 31, 1970, rum was issued for the last time in the British Navy. The day was to become known as Black Tot Day.

SHIP’S ROUTINE . . .

IN KYDD’S TIME the ship’s day began at noon, when the ship’s position was fixed by a solar sighting. The day was divided into seven watches (one of the afternoon watches was divided into two in order for men to be able to be rotated in their duties).

Watches were measured by a four-hour sand glass kept at the door of the captain’s cabin, and then into “glasses,” measured by a half-hour sand glass timer. When it emptied the midshipman of the watch turned it and the sentry rang the bell, once for the first half hour, twice for the second and so on.

Between four bells and six bells in the morning watch



(6:00 AM and 8:00 AM) the watch below were woken to wash and scrub the decks. At eight bells hands were piped to breakfast; most captains allowed one glass (half an hour) for breakfast. At noon the issue of grog was to the tune of “Nancy Dawson” on the fife and drum and the pipe of “up spirits” from the bosun’s mate.

Ship routines followed both Navy tradition and the custom of the individual ships. Some had regular days for training men in seamanship or for washing and cleaning. Usually Thursday was “make and mend” – in the afternoon the men were allowed to repair and adorn their clothes. Most seamen took great pride in their appearance.

The only official requirement was for church to be rigged on Sunday. After the captain’s inspection, a church pennant was hoisted at the peak and the service conducted. Often the captain gave the men Sunday afternoon to themselves, “wind, weather and the malice of the enemy permitting.”

BATTLE STATIONS . . .

THE RAISON D’ETRE of the man-o’-war was to protect the Empire and British interests by engaging the enemy, either singly or in line of battle in Fleet action.

Various preparations were made an hour or so before battle. The galley fire was put out and if there was time the men would be served a meal; letters home were writ-

ten and wills exchanged; clean clothes were put on to try to avoid infected wounds.

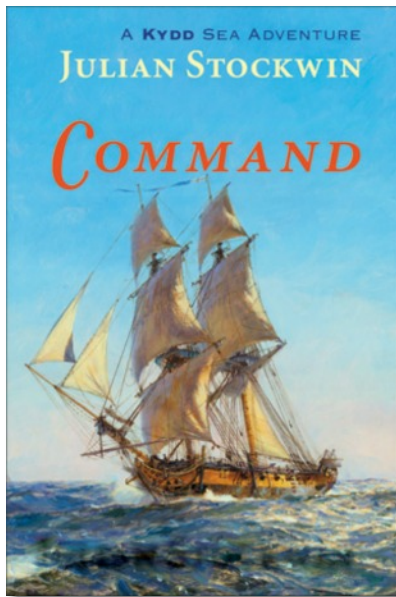
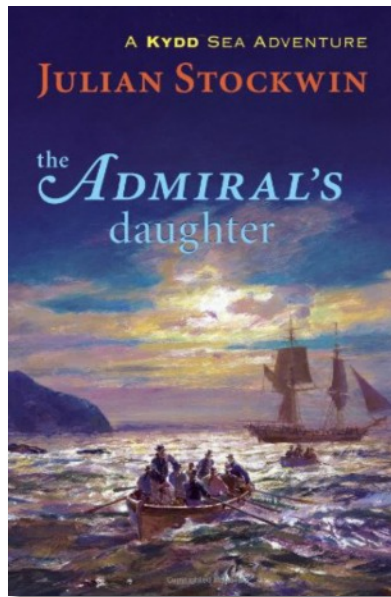
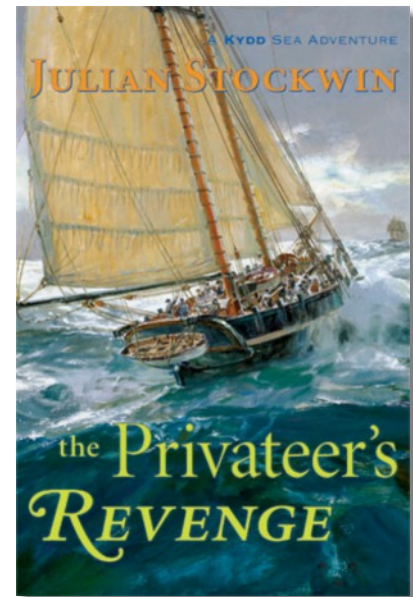
When the Captain ordered “clear for action” everything bar the guns were cleared away from the gun-decks. Above decks, boats, which could shower deadly wood splinters if hit, were either secured or towed astern; officers’ cabins were cleared and their belongings stowed in the hold. The rigging was secured, splinter nets were laid out. Decks were sanded and wetted. Scuttlebutts of water and vinegar were placed at various points where the seamen could quench their thirst in battle and arms chests were deployed on the centreline for easy access by boarders to their weapons.

Below, the surgeon and his mates prepared for their grisly tasks in the cockpit, the midshipmans berth. Instruments were sharpened, tubs placed nearby to collect the “wings ’n limbs” following amputations.

FOOD PREPARATION . . .

THE GALLEY PROVIDED hot food for the entire ship, up to 950 men and officers. Due to the risk of conflagration, however, the galley fire was put out in rough weather or during action. This meant it could be some time before another hot meal was available.

The galley was generally found near the foremast on the gun deck. It was a very small area, considering the number catered for.



The crew ate in groups of 8-12, which were called “messes.” Each man would take his turn as mess cook and collect the day’s rations from the hold to prepare for cooking for the noon meal. The main diet of seamen was salted beef and pork, along with biscuit, peas, oatmeal, sugar, butter and cheese. For example, each man on Thursdays was entitled to a pound of bread, half a pound of dried peas, a gallon of beer (or substitute), and one pound of salt pork. The prepared food was taken to the galley to be cooked (each mess marked their food with a tag). The mess cook was also responsible for washing up the utensils and generally cleaning the eating area after the meal. He was entitled to an extra issue of rum for his trouble.

In the galley, the seamen’s food would be boiled in two large kettles; there were facilities for roasting and other methods of preparation for the captain and officers.

The mess cook also carved and served the meal. To ensure fairness, one of the other men was blindfolded, a portion of the meat was carved, the blindfolded man called out a name and the portion went to that man and so on, until it was served. However this was not always followed, younger mess members were sometimes bullied and deprived of the best victuals by older men. (This method of sharing rations fairly is part of survival training to this day.)

On the days when raisins were issued along with flour and suet, the mess cook was ordered to whistle

while he prepared the “duff” (steamed pudding) so that he couldn't sneak some raisins into his mouth!

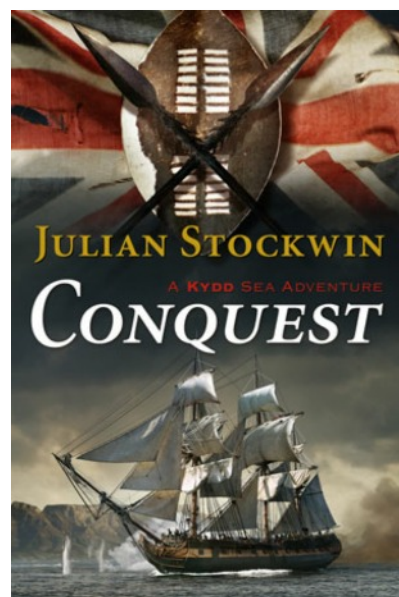
The galley was cleaned by the cook’s mate, under the supervision of the cook. Sand was used to scour the vast kettles, which were inspected each morning for cleanliness.

SUPERSTITION AT SEA . . .

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT MEN who follow the sea are the most superstitious on earth. The eighteenth century sailor was no exception. He believed in mermaids and mermen, sea monsters and ghosts – and Fiddler’s Green, an enchanted place that was the final resting place of sailors, where waited countless willing ladies, rum casks that never emptied and always a fair wind and flying fish weather. In apparent contradiction, it was also said that every keening seagull carried a sailor’s soul, the screech of the bird was the mournful cry of the dead man.

The origin of these superstitious beliefs are lost in time but there are probably two broad causes – the tendency of man to look to the supernatural for causes of strange phenomenon – and the love of travellers to exaggerate mysterious occurrences.

Weather lore abounded at sea. Seamen were particularly anxious about squalls, for example. It would certainly bring bad luck not to follow the advice of the old ditty:



*When the rain's before the wind,
Strike your tops'ls, reef your main
When the wind's before the rain,
Shake 'em out and go again.*

This has actually been proved to be based on sound meteorological principles. There were many other superstitions about weather. Whistling at sea was banned; it would tempt fate. This was especially to be avoided when the weather was threatening to get dirty.

Many superstitions from Kydd's time remain to this day. The injunction never to sail on a Friday is known to sailors in today's fleet. Mysterious faults in the engine room have been known to develop and not be rectified until the next day.

HAMMOCKS . . .

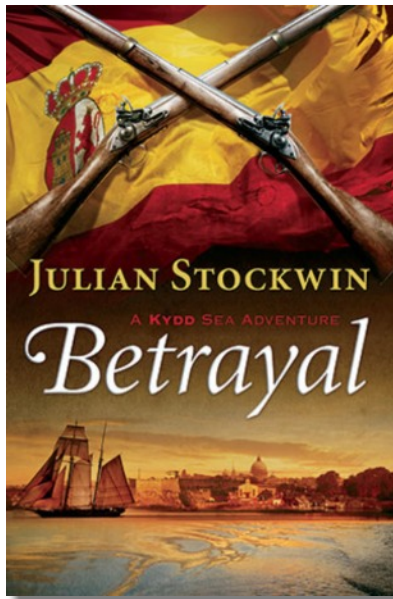
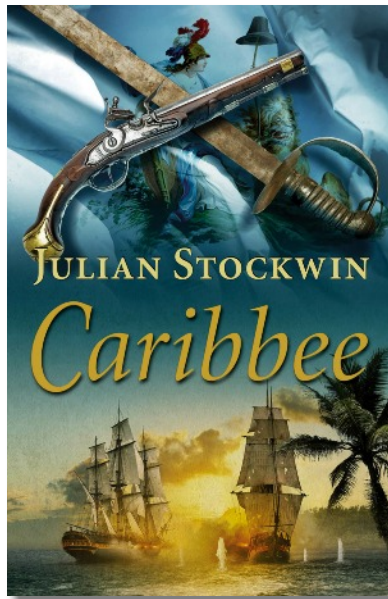
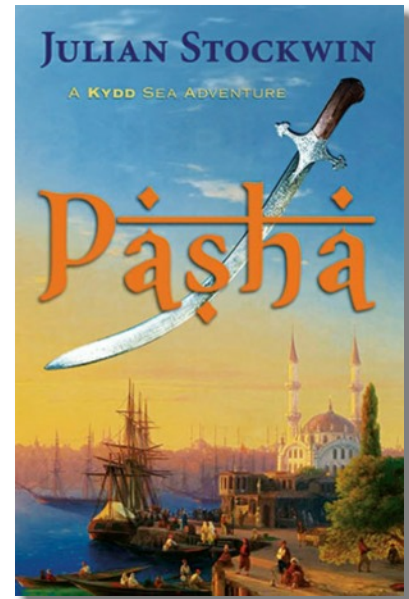
WHEN COLUMBUS LANDED in the Bahamas in 1492 he found that the natives used nets of cotton stretched between two posts as beds. They called them "hamacs." This was changed to "hamaca" by the Spanish. Hammocks in the British Navy stem from the age of Drake, when they were widely adopted. Hammocks were on issue in the service until quite recently, and Julian Stockwin spent much of his sea-time in a hammock. He says that a hammock stays still and the ship rolls around it!

Hammocks were slung fore and aft, with the Marines aft between the men and the officers and petty officers at the side. Each hammock was slung at a numbered peg so that the sleeper was always in the same place near his station in an emergency. The official allocation of hammock space was 14 inches per man or 28 inches per man for a petty officer but with the two-watch system half the crew was on deck at once so each man had twice that. It is worth noting that this is actually more room than in today's double bed!

By the time Kydd joined the Navy each man had two hammocks, one in use and one to be cleaned and drawn on Saturdays. They were made of canvas six feet by three feet and in each there was a mattress (made of flock or chopped-up rags), a blanket and a coverlet. Hammocks belonged to the Navy Board and the men either brought bedding with them or bought it from the purser. If a seaman died at sea he was sewn into his hammock with two roundshot at his feet – and the last stitch through his nose. (Officers slept in cots slung from the beams of their cabins.)

Each morning hammocks were taken down and lashed with seven half hitches representing the seven seas. They were put in special netting at the side of the ship to act as protection from musket balls and splinters when under enemy fire. Hammocks could serve as life preservers; thrown to a man overboard they would keep him afloat for several hours.

WHO'S WHO IN GEORGIAN ENGLAND



THESE TEN FASCINATING real-life person-ages from Kydd's world were a "Who's Who" in Georgian England:

Admiral Richard Howe (1726-1799)

Nicknamed "Black Dick," Howe was a courageous and respected Royal Navy officer. He was said never to smile unless a battle was about to begin

Thomas Cochrane (1775-1860)

A daring and successful naval captain, who was known as "The Wolf of the Seas" to the French.

Horatio Nelson (1758-1805)

Tragically killed at the Battle of Trafalgar, he was an inspirational leader and probably the greatest Royal Navy officer in history

Matthew Flinders (1774-1814)

Navigator and cartographer, he was one of the most important naval explorers of his day. He was the first to circumnavigate Australia and identify it as a continent.

King George III (1738-1820)

The first Hanoverian monarch to be born in Britain, his keen interest in agriculture earned him the nickname

"Farmer George."

The Prince of Wales (1762-1830)

"Prinny" would become George IV and leave a great legacy of art and culture to the nation.

Napoleon Bonaparte I (1769-1821)

By 1811, the Emperor of France had gained control of much of Europe and only England firmly resisted him. By 1814 his empire had crumbled.

Arthur Wellesley (1769-1852)

The 1st Duke of Wellington's greatest victories were during the Peninsular campaign, forcing the French out of Portugal and Spain. He also defeated Napoleon at Waterloo.

Jane Austen (1775-1817)

The novelist was an astute chronicler of human foibles and the vagaries of English class and society.

William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806)

His prime ministerial tenure was dominated by major events in Europe, including the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars.

SALTY SAYINGS

SO MANY WORDS AND PHRASES in common use today can be traced back to the language of seafarers. The richness of the English language owes a great deal to Jack Tar!

Batten Down the Hatches

Prepare as best we can in a dangerous situation. Battening down the hatches is the process of securing the deck openings, or hatches, against the effects of bad weather. This is done by securing protective canvas over the hatch cover by means of battens, flat pieces of wood, which were firmly hammered into cleats. An open hatch could of course cause a disastrous ingress of water.

Bow and Scrape

Being excessively servile to someone else or trying too hard to please. In Kydd's day, an officer's cocked hat was known as a "scraper" (after its similarity to the cook's wooden slush scraper for his coppers). When greeting a superior officer, it was customary for the junior officer to remove his headgear and bow.

Chock-a-Block

Completely full, packed extremely close-fitting. Aboard, when the sails were pulled in tight so that the ship could sail as close to the wind as possible the blocks (pulleys) would be pulled "hard up" together until they could go no further. This was called "chock-a-block" or "chock full."

Coast is Clear

An absence of anything that might hinder activity. It first appeared in print in 1531, describing a vessel which had safely cleared the coast, and was later used in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*. In the heyday of smuggling, a boy led a white horse along the cliff as a signal that there were

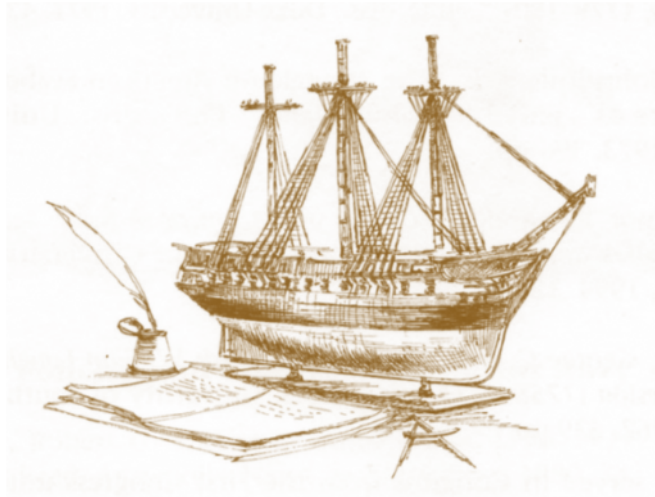
no Revenue men about, and it was thus safe for the smugglers to land their contraband cargo.

Deliver a Broadside

A crushing remark that ends all further discussion; an all-out verbal attack. On sailing ships, a broadside was the firing of every cannon, which could be brought to bear on the enemy from one side. In a three-deck ship-o'-the line with fifty guns or more a side, this meant a considerable weight of ironmongery!

Fall Foul of

If you fall foul of someone, you are rubbing him or her up the wrong way and headed for trouble of some sort. To fall foul of something at sea means to become entangled with it, such as an anchor becoming fouled by something on the sea bottom. And if a ship has a 'foul bottom', her way through the water is seriously impeded by seaweed and barnacles growing on the hull.



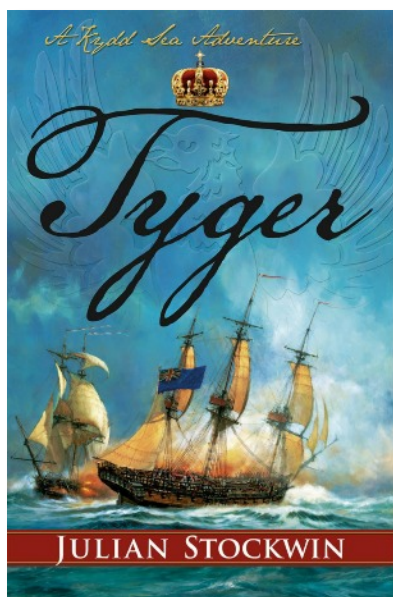
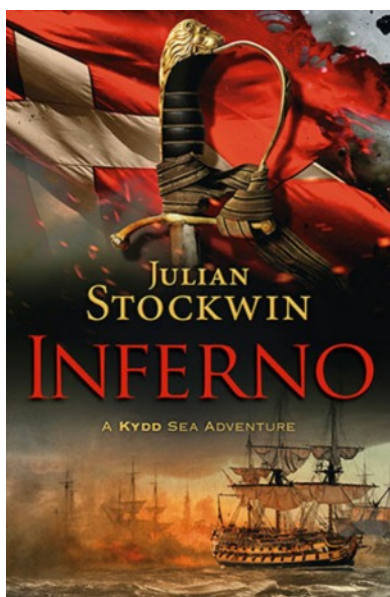
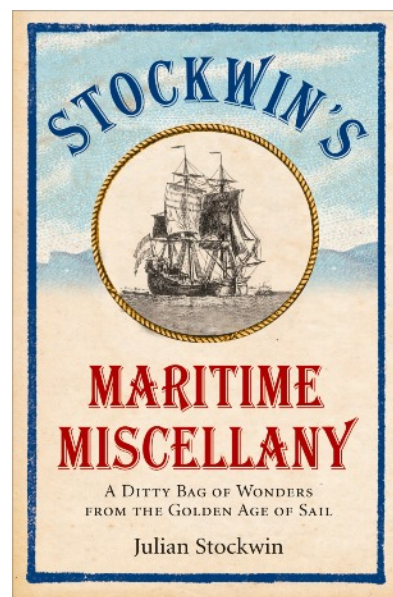
Flimsy

Weak, without substance, not up to the task.

In Kydd's day a certificate of conduct was issued in the Royal Navy by the ship's captain to a midshipman or an officer on his transfer to another ship. The certificate was written on thin ("flimsy," probably derived from "film," as in a thin layer) paper. When a midshipman appeared before a board for examination for lieutenant he was expected to produce his flimsies as evidence of previous good character and conduct.

Keelhaul

If we talk about the someone being keelhailed, he receives a savage rebuke for some action. Fortunately the experience of being keelhailed today is somewhat less



severe than in the past! The practice was not actually an official punishment in the Royal Navy, although it was reportedly used by some Royal Navy captains and merchant marine captains. In the Dutch Navy, it was legally permitted, and not formally abolished until 1853. The term is from the Dutch kiel, keel and halen, haul. The unfortunate victim of keelhauling was suspended over the water by a rope attached to his back with a weight on his legs. Another rope fastened to him lead under the ship's bottom and through a block at its opposite yard arm. He was then hauled under the ship to the opposite side of the vessel to the other yard arm. If he didn't die from drowning, he would likely be torn to pieces from barnacles on the ship's hull.

Keep Aloof

Stand apart from, be indifferent. The origins of this phrase probably derive from the old Dutch word "loef," meaning windward. It was adopted by English sailors in the sixteenth century. The luff is the leading edge of a sail and 'to luff' is to point a ship further into the wind. The helmsman of a ship in Kydd's day cried 'aluff', if a gale threatened to blow the ship too close to shore. Luffing the ship would head her into the wind and thus

keep her away from harm.

Knows the Ropes

Someone who has skill and experience in his job. Aboard ship, rope was put to hundreds of uses, supporting yards and masts, and in hoisting, lowering and trimming the sails, to name just a few. Running aloft, as well as fore and aft, ropes were secured at the end to a belaying pin on rails along the length of each side of the ship. Interestingly, most ropes are called "lines" by seamen. Only a small number were called ropes, including the bolt rope, the boat rope and the man rope. In HMS *Victory* there were over 26 miles of hemp used for the standing and running rig-



ging. It took years of experience to understand the function of, and be able to locate and control, the multitude of ropes aboard ship. This skill was considered so important that discharge papers were once marked 'knows the ropes', thus constituting an honourable discharge.

Lifeline

Something that is regarded as a source of salvation in a crisis. In Kydd's day in foul weather ropes were rigged fore and aft along the deck of a ship to provide a secure

handhold, something for a sailor to grab onto in heavy seas to prevent him from being washed overboard. In extremely rough weather, a sailor would grab the line and wrap it around his arm for extra security – and then hang on for dear life! Lifelines aloft were stretched from the lifts to the masts to enable seamen to stand securely when manning yards, as in a salute to an admiral, etc.

Loose Cannon

Unpredictable, likely to cause trouble or embarrassment. Cannon were secured with breeching, some of the strongest ropes found in a ship. They were mounted on wheels so that they could be quickly moved in and out of gunports, but this meant that if they got loose they could career all over the decks, doing great damage to the ship and injuring men. In fact, in a rolling sea, a cannon (which weighed up to three tons) could get up enough momentum to smash through the side of the ship.

Losing Bearings

If someone has lost his bearings, he does not know where he is. The saying is often used metaphorically to indicate mental bewilderment. A ship's position when in sight of land was determined by the intersection of the compass bearings of two objects ashore. If one of the objects was obscured, those aboard would have lost their bearings and the position of the ship would be unknown.

No-man's-land

Something is neither here nor there. Many think it dates from the First World War, but it goes back much further in time. Falconer, in his *Universal Dictionary of the Marine*, 1769, gives us this definition of the term: "... a space between the after-part of the belfry and the fore-part of a ship's boat, when the said boat is stowed upon the booms, as in a deep-waisted vessel." These booms are laid from the forecastle nearly to the quarter-deck, where their after-ends are usually sustained by a frame called the gallows, which consists of two strong posts, about five feet high, with a cross piece, reaching

from one to the other, athwart-ships, and serving to support the end of those booms, mast and yards, which lie in reserve to supply the place of others carried away, etc. The space called no man's land is used to contain any blocks, rope, tackles, etc., which may be necessary on the forecastle. It probably derives its name from its situation as being neither on the starboard nor larboard side of the ship, nor on the waist or forecastle, but, being situated in the middle, partakes equally of all those places.

Over a Barrel

In a position where someone has little choice over their fate. Before the development of modern resuscitation techniques a near-drowned person was placed face down over a barrel, which was then rolled vigorously back and forth in an attempt to revive him by draining the water from his lungs. The victim was not given any say in this treatment; his survival – or not – was out of his hands.



Plenty of Scope

Room to move, sufficient wherewithal to carry out a task. The word "scope" is from the Greek *skopos*, meaning to mark or aim and is the length of cable run out when a vessel rides to its anchor. It is the amount by which a ship swings about its anchor, its freedom of movement.

Press On

Push ahead with all speed in order to get a task completed as soon as possible. At sea, a captain would often crowd on as much canvas as conditions would allow to complete a voyage speedily. Thus rigged, the ship would be said to be under a "press of sail."

Shipshape & Bristol Fashion

Neat and in good order. In the heyday of sail, Bristol, in southwest England, had a worldwide reputation for efficiency in shipbuilding and repair. As Bristol has a large tidal range, ships had to be strong enough to withstand this buffeting, and all the goods and equipment on

board had to be very securely stowed to prevent accidents or damage. Admiral W H Smyth in *The Sailors Word Book* (1867) defines it thus: “. . . said when Bristol was in its palmy commercial days, unalloyed by Liverpool, and its shipping was all in proper good order.”

Sling your Hook

If someone is told to “sling your hook” elsewhere it indicates they are unwelcome in the present company and should seriously consider a quick departure. In Kydd’s day, each seaman was issued with at least one hammock, often two so that one could be cleaned and dried in turn. Hooks were placed under the upper deck beams for fixing the hammocks. The seamen were certainly crowded by today’s standards. Five hundred men had to berth in an area of 6000 square feet aboard a 74-gun ship-of-the-line, for example. Tensions sometimes arose between neighbours. “Sling your hook elsewhere” was an informal invitation to move away from the complainant. This was easier said than done, however, as it had to be sanctioned by the first lieutenant, who had to ensure that men from the same part-of-ship were kept together so they could be easily mustered in an emergency.

Son of a Gun

A bit of a rough diamond, but a good guy nevertheless, or, interjectionally, to express surprise or disappointment. In Kydd’s day, “wives” of seamen were allowed on board in harbour, and occasionally at sea. As the gangways had to be kept clear, the only place where women in labour could give birth was in the spaces between the guns on the gundeck. Thus a male child born on board was known as “a son of a gun;” collectively they became “sons of the sea”:

*Begotten in the galley and born under a gun
Every hair a rope yarn, every tooth a marline spike
Every finger a fishhook
and his blood right good Stockholm tar.*

Slush Fund

A reserve fund, often used for political bribery and corruption. One of the perks of the sea cook was the fat skimmed off the cooking liquor as meats were boiled. This murky fluid was solidified and then sold to the purser for making candles. It was also used in merchant ships to grease standing rigging. The slush fund came in handy to pay for such items as extra rum rations or tobacco.

Spin a Yarn

At worst, lying outright; at best, stretching the truth. Aboard even the smallest ship in Kydd’s day there were miles and miles of rope, which needed regular maintenance and repair. Spun yarn was the basic material used for this. Often, a group of sailors got together for the

task, swapping old sea stories as they worked. The tales were usually embellished in the telling. And quite often, the work took a little longer than strictly necessary. From this we get the variant saying “spin it out;” if someone spins something out, like the sailors taking extra time on deck with their rope-work, he or she is stretching out a task beyond a time that would be considered reasonable.

Square Meal

A pretty substantial repast. In Kydd’s day sailors ate their food off square wooden plates, which had a raised edge called a fiddle. This design was partly to stop food falling off the plate, partly to set a limit on the amount of food taken. If a sailor overfilled the plate he was said to be “on the fiddle,” and could be punished, but he always insisted on a square meal.

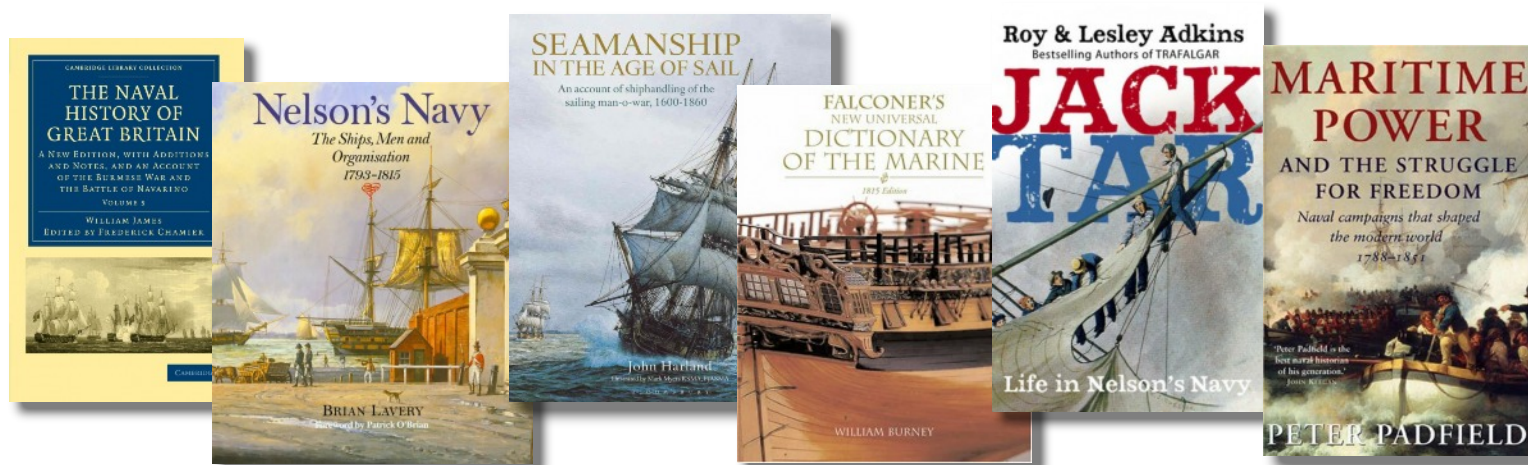
Windfall

An unexpected stroke of good fortune.

At sea, a ship close in to land could sometimes encounter a strong gust of wind blowing down and away from high land. Canny captains would take this into account to maximise their speed.



GOING FURTHER



READERS WANTING TO DELVE deeper into the fascinating Age of Fighting Sail might find some of these reference books that Julian Stockwin has selected to be useful. They all take pride of place in his personal library and are much-thumbed.

Naval History of Great Britain

by William James

A comprehensive six-volume set that covers the operation of the Royal Navy during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. In the first volume James examines events as the naval events at Toulon in 1793 where Sidney Smith burnt half of the French Mediterranean fleet, Howe's victory at the Glorious First of June and the Royal Navy's role in colonial expeditions. Each volume provides an unsurpassed historical record of Kydd's Navy, both on the national and international scale.

Nelson's Navy

by Brian Lavery

This work, which has been reprinted many times, deservedly remains a classic. Beginning with a background on the wars with France and naval administration, Lavery covers the design and construction of ships, training and organisation of officers and men and life at sea. It is in the latter that Lavery excels in his description of a world far removed from the hardships and cruelty that is often attributed to life on the lower deck.

Seamanship in the Age of Sail

by John Harland

This book partners well with Lavery's *Nelson's Navy* for any

serious student of the period. *Seamanship in the Age of Sail* came out in 1984, and is a classic of its type. Every aspect of handling a man-of-war is detailed and illustrated with superb line drawings by Mark Myers. The book is designed by Geoff Hunt.

Falconer's Universal Dictionary of the Marine

by William Falconer

This 1815 edition is one of the enduring classics that have come down to us from Nelson's time, wonderfully recreated from the original in its full detail. It contains marine technology, data on technical aspects of shipbuilding, fitting and armaments, and the Navy's administrative and operational practices.

Jack Tar: Life in Nelson's Navy

by Roy and Lesley Adkins

A fascinating age of sail compilation from husband-and-wife writing team Roy and Lesley Adkins. With their backgrounds in archaeology, they dug deep into the historical archives to find personal letters, diaries and other manuscripts of the times that shed light on their chosen subject matter: the sailors who manned the ships of the Georgian navy. We see Jack Tar at work and play, through his own words.

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by Peter Padfield

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