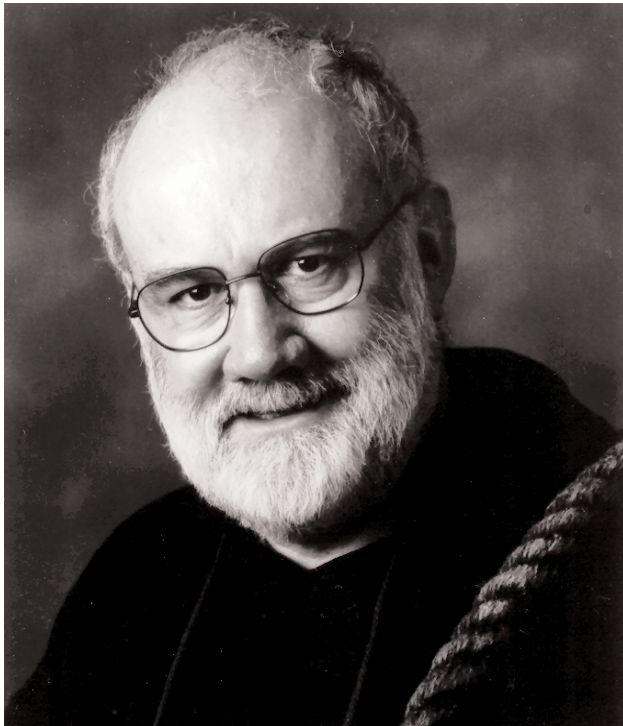


JULIAN STOCKWIN

Sailing on a **NEW TACK**

“... last year Kathy and my agent Carole Blake suggested I turn my hand to writing a non-fiction book ...”

English novelist Julian Stockwin, creator of the Thomas Kydd Sea Adventures, has tacked in a new direction with the launch of his first non-fiction book, *Stockwin's Maritime Miscellany: A Ditty Bag of Wonders from the Golden Age of Sail*. Stockwin revealed the story behind this turn in his writing career in a recent interview with *Quarterdeck*:



Julian Stockwin

How and when was the idea for *Stockwin's Maritime Miscellany* born?

In the course of research for the nine Thomas Kydd books that have been published to date (and the ones that are in the works) I found I had gathered a huge amount of fascinating details and maritime lore that did not fit into the plots. I squirreled all this surplus-to-requirements material away, together with other maritime snippets that I came across in the course of reading or talking to various experts.

All this was really just for my own personal enlightenment and delight, but then last year Kathy and my agent Carole Blake suggested I turn my hand to writing a non-fiction book based on this vast reservoir of material. One would be a rash man indeed to go against those two strong-willed ladies. And it sounded like fun!

Carole soon had the enthusiasm of the leading publisher of general non-fiction books in the UK, Ebury Press, and their Publishing Director Carey Smith, who was very keen

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on the idea of a miscellany about the Golden Age of Sail. A meeting in London with Carey followed and the *Miscellany* project was born.

I must say it's been a juggling act writing both my annual Kydd installment and the *Miscellany* in one year, but it's been hugely enjoyable, especially the hunt for additional information on some arcane fact or another that I had salted away.

The caption under the main title is “a ditty bag of wonders from the Golden Age of Sail.” Please explain what a ditty bag is for our readers.

A ditty bag is a small bag that was used by seamen in the days of old to store small items and personal treasures. I wanted to convey that the *Miscellany* was a collection of sea lore from the

Golden Age of Sail that most spoke to me. Each sailor's ditty bag differed from his messmates' ones so it seemed an appropriate description for my eclectic collection.

Did the initial concept change much as you've gone on?

My original idea for the book was a compilation of facts, feats, superstitions and maritime misfortunes. I also thought it would be nice to intersperse these with 50 salty sayings, phrases inherited from the sea and very much in use today, such as “high and dry” and “first rate.”

In discussions with Carey Smith

and her assistant editor Vicky Orchard there were some additions that they felt would be useful to readers – a short introduction to each of the five sections of the book and a foreword by me. They also felt it would be helpful to list my pick of the 25 top maritime museums and historic ships – and a few other additions were agreed along the way.

Who do you see your *Miscellany* particularly appealing to?

I hope both nautical novices and old salts will find it enjoyable. It's the kind of book you can flick open and

“A ditty bag is a small bag that was used by seamen in the days of old to store small items and personal treasures ...”

find something you didn't know or be reminded of something you had forgotten. Or, of course, you can read it cover to cover. And I hope that some of my huge admiration for those iron men in wooden ships is transmitted along the way.

Did you have much influence on the book design and layout?

From the start I felt the book should have black and white illustration, contemporary to the times if possible. We were consulted at each stage of the design, but I have to say I felt it all came together from the start thanks to Ebury's vision for the

book.

Is the material all from your rich store of sea resources?

A lot is, yes, but I also did extensive reading to supplement what I had in my personal library. I probably have 500 books on the period now, and a vast database in which I record information from other sources such as visits to libraries and archives.

Were you responsible for sourcing the delightful illustrations in the book?

Kathy and I sourced several hundred we liked and Ebury's designer then chose the ones he felt worked best. We are very pleased with the finished product. I particularly wanted to include an illustration of explorer

Matthew Flinders's cat Trim, which was done by the Australian artist Annette Onslow. She very kindly gave permission to reproduce the illustration in the book, but the painting was in an art exhibition in Sydney at the time, and she had to arrange for it to be taken down after hours and scanned for me.

What has your wife and literary partner Kathy's role been?

As usual, Kathy has been a true partner for this book. Her main role, apart from keeping me on course with deadlines and helping source illustrations, has been on the

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editorial side, polishing the manuscript before I sent it to Ebury. A good test of the appeal of a potential item in the book was often over a gin and tonic at the end of the day – I'd say to her "Did you know that ..." and if it brought a smile to her face or an expression of amazement I knew it was right for inclusion in the book. And I have her to thank for suggesting the book's dedication:

*"But this learned I
from my dear mother –
The kiss of a seaman's
worth two of another"*

It was written in the seventeenth century and seemed so right for the *Miscellany*.

Putting you on the spot, please pick three favorite items from the book.

That's hard, because by the nature of the book all the items are incidents or facts that personally to me exemplified the spirit of the Golden Age of Sail. But if I had to pick three it would be Richard Grenville's *Revenge*, Drake's wedding, and the *L'Orient* coffin.

Grenville probably holds the record for battling against overwhelming odds, 53:1. Despite this, his little ship *Revenge*, separated from the rest of the English fleet off the Azores in 1591, stood and fought for two days. The twist in the tail is that shortly after the Spanish captured *Revenge* and put a 200-man prize crew aboard her, she sank with the loss of all hands, thus living up to her name.

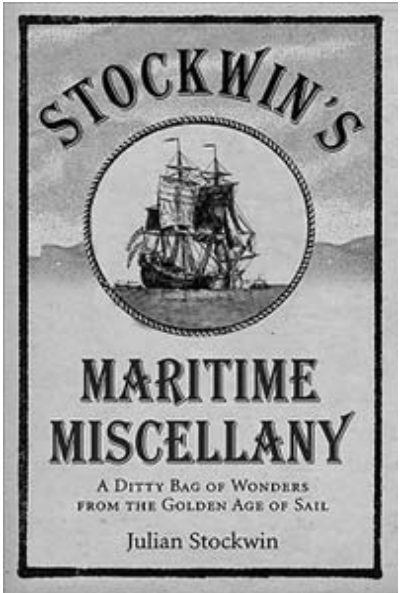
The *L'Orient* coffin was fashioned from timber from the mast of the French flagship that blew up at the

NONFICTION

Stockwin's Maritime Miscellany

By Julian Stockwin

Lt. Cdr. Julian Stockwin shares his love and knowledge of the sea in this entertaining collection of maritime stories and little-known trivia. Featuring nautical facts and feats, including superstitions at sea, the history of animals on the waves – until 1975 when all animals were banned from Royal Navy ships – and how the inventor of the umbrella helped man the British Navy, it is packed with informative tales. Focusing on the glory days of tall ships he explores marine myths and unearths the truth behind commonly held beliefs about the sea, such as whether Lord Nelson's body was really pickled in rum to transport it back to England after his death at Trafalgar. Interspersed throughout are salty sayings showing the modern words and phrases that originate from the mariners of old – "cut of his jib," "high and dry," "the coast is clear," "first rate" and "slush fund." Accompanied by nostalgic black and white line drawings, *Stockwin's Maritime Miscellany* is a charming gift-book guaranteed to appeal to the sailing enthusiast, but also amuse and will inform even the staunchest landlubber.



UK HARDCOVER | 224 PAGES

Battle of the Nile. It was presented to Admiral Nelson by one of his famous Band of Brothers, Captain Hallowell, with a covering note saying "when you are tired of this life may you be buried in one of your own trophies ..." Was there ever such a macabre gift? Nelson's officers were horrified, but he, however, took it in great part, and had it standing upright against the bulk-

head of his cabin, behind the chair he sat on for dinner.

The life of the great Elizabethan mariner Francis Drake generated a wealth of fact and fable and one of my favourite Drake legends is the one about his fiancée. While he was harrying Hispanic ships, she, fearing him dead, gave her hand to another. As the wedding party entered the church, a cannonball fell just short

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of the building, like a shot across the bows of the bridegroom warning him that Drake was very much alive. The shocked bride called off the wedding and in due course married Drake.

How different has working on the *Miscellany* been from writing about Kydd?

In some ways, chalk and cheese. With a novel of 100,000 words you have quite a bit of scope to develop plot and characters, etc. With the *Miscellany* I was limited to no more than a few hundred words for each item, so I had to select one or



Julian Stockwin aboard the sailing vessel *Earl of Pembroke* on a voyage in the Irish Sea.

two aspects of a certain topic which I felt really stood out or which illustrated a particular characteristic of the period. This was quite a challenge when dealing with some of the great men of the Golden Age of Sail like Cook, Nelson, and Sidney Smith. Many books have been written on each of them alone!

Is there a sequel in the works?

Not yet, but I've enjoyed working on this *Miscellany* so much that I would love to do more books in this format. There's certainly no shortage of material!