

A painting of a three-masted sailing ship, likely a privateer, with tan sails and a red flag, sailing on a grey sea. The ship is the central focus of the image.

***WOODES
ROGERS***

***LIFE ABOARD
A BRITISH
PRIVATEER
IN THE TIME
OF QUEEN
ANNE***

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Woodes Rogers

Life Aboard a British Privateer in the Time of Queen Anne

**Being the Journal of Captain Woodes Rogers, Master
Mariner**

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CHAPTER I. FROM KING ROAD, BRISTOL, TO CORK IN IRELAND.

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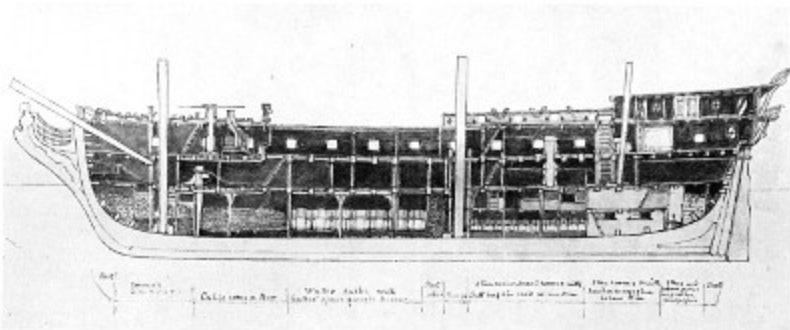
MANY a modern *Setting out* 1708
pleasure yacht would *from King Road.*
exceed the tonnage of
the frigates "Duke" and "Dutchess," the "Duke" being 320
tons, with 30 guns and 117 men, and the "Dutchess" only
260 tons, with 26 guns, and 108 men. "Both ships," says
Rogers, "well furnished with all necessaries on board for a
distant undertaking weigh'd from King Road Bristol August
2nd 1708 in company with the 'Scipio,' 'Peterborough
Frigate,' 'Prince Eugene,' 'Bristol Galley,' 'Berkley Galley,'
'Bucher Galley,' 'Sherstone Galley,' and 'Diamond Sloop,'
bound to Cork in Ireland." These "galleys" must not be
confounded with the lateen rigged vessels of that name in
the south of Europe; being simply small, low, straight ships
of light draught easily moved by oars or sweeps in calms. In
Rogers' time a ship was said to be "Frigate built" when she
had a poop and forecastle rising a few steps above the
waist, and "galley built," when there was no break in the line
of her deck and topsides. But the use of oars was not
confined to these Bristol[2] galley built ships, for Rogers
speaks of using them on several occasions in the "Duke"

and "Dutchess." While in old draughts of small vessels of this class, of even a later date, row-ports are often shown.

Between the Holmes and Minehead the little fleet came to "an Anchor from 10 to 12 at night, when all came to sail again, running past Minehead with a fine gale at S.E. at six in the morning." No time was lost before an attempt was made to add to the number of the fleet, for the same day, at 5 p.m., the "Dutchess," like a young hound, breaks away from the pack in chase of what seemed a large ship, which they lost sight of again at 8 o'clock. But "having been informed at Bristol that the 'Jersey,' a French man-of-war, was cruising betwixt England and Ireland, the ships sailed all night with hammocks stowed and cleared for a fight. Though it was well for us," says Rogers, "that this proved a false alarm, since had it been real we should have made but an indifferent fight, for want of being better manned."

After parting company *Arrival at Cork. An incompetent Pilot.*
with three galleys and
the "Prince Eugene," the fleet, on the 5th of August, "finding they have overshot their port, come to an anchor at noon off two rocks, called the Sovereigne's Bollacks, near Kinsale; at 8 p.m. they weighed again with a small gale at east, which increased and veered to northward." At this time Rogers had a Kinsale pilot on board who, he says, "was like to have endanger'd our ships by turning us into the next bay to the west of Cork, the weather being dark and foggy." "Which," says Rogers, "provoked me to chastise him for undertaking to act as pilot without understanding his business better." On the 7th the "Duke" and "Dutchess" anchored in the Cove of Cork, and remained

there, more or less weather bound, until the 28th, the entries in Rogers' log varying little beyond telling us that on the 11th, "it blow'd fresh and dirty weather:" while on the 12th, "it blew fresh and dirty weather, on which day there clear'd and run near forty of our fresh water sailors." In whose place "came off a boat load of men from Cork, that appear'd to be brisk fellows but of several nations; so I sent to stop the rest till we were ready, our ships being pester'd." On the 28th the weather was fine enough to "Careen clean and tallow the ships five streaks below the water line." Nothing marked the smart privateersman and seaman of those days more than his constant care in keeping the bottom of his ship perfectly clean. Indeed, Captain Rogers never seemed happier than when he had one or other of the little frigates held over for scraping and cleaning, in some quiet bay, so nearly upon her beam ends, as to bring her keel almost out of water.



Section of Eighteenth Century Frigate, showing space occupied by hemp cables and other stores.

When shipping the rest of his crew before sailing from Cork, we get a taste of Rogers' foresight and policy. For he tells us, "we have now above double the number of officers usual in privateers, besides a large complement of men;" adding, "we took this method of doubling our officers to

prevent mutinies, which often happen in long voyages, and that we might have a large provision for a succession of officers in each ship in case of mortality."

It must, however, have been a sore trial to a tarpaulin seaman, like Rogers, to have to note at the same time, "that in order to make room for our men and provisions, we sent the sheet cable and some other store cordage on shore, having on board three cables besides, and being willing rather to spare that than anything else we had aboard."

In a small frigate quite a fourth part of the hold was, before the introduction of chain cables, occupied by the cable tier or room; and when one considers, not only the space they filled, but the difficulty of handling them, and the care required to keep them from chafing when in use, and from damp and rot when stowed away, it is astonishing that ships returning from long cruises ever had an anchor or cable left which they could trust.

Among the troubles attending the use of hemp cables, that of firing in the hawse holes and at the bits, or timbers they passed over in running out, was one; and each time the anchor was let go men were stationed with buckets of water to prevent this.

It was while victualling *Many weddings* *The crew at*
and shipping men at this *among them.* *Cork.*
time that a side-note
appears of the "Strange behaviour of our men at Cork;" alluding to the fact, "that they were continually marrying whilst we staid there, though they expected to sail immediately." Among others, a Dane was coupled by an Irish priest to an Irish woman, without understanding a word

of each other's language, so that they were forc'd to use an interpreter. "Yet," says Rogers, "I perceived this pair seem'd more afflict'd at separation than any of the rest; the fellow continu'd melancholy for several days after we were at sea." Whether the Irish bride shared her Danish husband's depression is, of course, not related by Rogers, who goes on to say that "the rest, understanding each other, drank their cans of flipp[3] till the last minute, concluding with a health to our good voyage, and their happy meeting, and then parted unconcern'd."

Though the chief command of the *Names of the expedition* fell to Woodes Rogers, master *officers*. mariner, yet, as was the case in most of these private ventures to the South Seas, several of his officers were men with no claim to the name of sailor, who had either money invested in the ships, or interest with the owners. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that "the second Captain of the 'Duke,' and captain of the Marines, was one Thomas Dover, a doctor of phisick," or that this Captain Dover's first lieutenant was "his kinsman, Mr. Hopkins, an apothecary." On the other hand, Rogers had cleverly secured as his master the celebrated William Dampier, also rated "Pilot of the South Seas," "he having," as Rogers says, "already been there three times and twice round the world." This was no doubt poor Dampier's last venture at sea, for though Rogers mentions his name once or twice in consultation during the cruise, he is altogether lost sight of toward the end of it. Among the other officers, "the third mate, John Ballet, was also designated surgeon, having," says Rogers, "been Captain Dampier's doctor in his

last unfortunate voyage;" while two young lawyers have their names upon the ship's books, "designed to act as midshipmen."

Including boatswains, gunners, *How the crew* carpenters, &c., there were on board the *was made up*. "Duke" thirty-six officers, and of the rest of the crew, we are told that "a third were foreigners, while of Her Majesty's subjects many were taylors, tinkers, pedlars, fiddlers, and hay-makers, with ten boys and one negro; with which mix'd gang we hope to be well manned as soon as they have learnt the use of arms, and got their sea legs;" which, says Rogers, "we doubt not soon to teach 'em and bring 'em to discipline."

It was the 1st of September before the "Duke" and "Dutchess" left the Cove of Cork with twenty merchant vessels, under convoy of Her Majesty's ship "Hastings," "both of us," says Rogers, "very crowded and pester'd ships, their holds full of provisions, and between decks encumbered with cables, much bread, and altogether in a very unfit state to engage an enemy, without throwing many stores overboard." Nevertheless, on the 2nd, the two little frigates stand out from the fleet to chase a sail to windward; and Rogers is glad to find that they sailed as well as any in the fleet, not even excepting the man-of-war, so that, he says, "we begin to hope we shall find our heels, since we go so well tho deep and pester'd."

The chase, however, proved an inoffensive "French built Snow,[\[4\]](#) of Bristol, joining our fleet from Baltimoor" (Ireland).