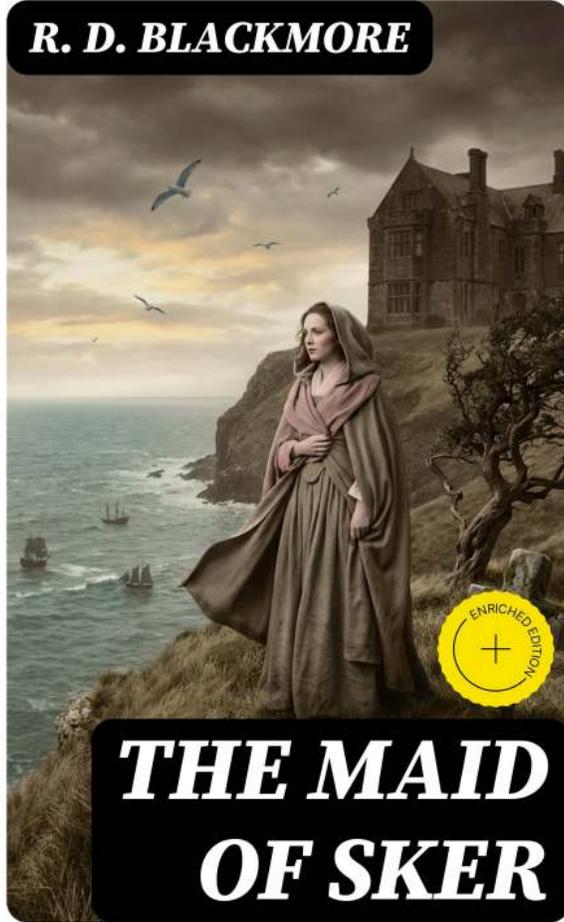


R. D. BLACKMORE



**THE MAID
OF SKER**

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The Maid of Sker

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Olivia Whitlock

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Introduction

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Poised between the tidal certainty of the sea and the shifting sands of personal origin, *The Maid of Sker* pursues the uneasy truth that a life can be steadied by love and community even as its beginnings remain obscure, tracing how a coastal people negotiate duty and desire, rumor and record, hospitality and suspicion, while storms, shipwrecks, and shorebound economies test their resilience, and showing how a single presence discovered on a beach can ripple through households, parishes, and ports, compelling a long reckoning with the names we claim, the names we are given, and the debts we inherit.

R. D. Blackmore's novel belongs to the Victorian tradition of historical romance and adventure, composed with the patience of a storyteller who looks backward from the nineteenth century toward an earlier British past. First published in the 1870s, it moves along the coastlines and estuaries associated with South Wales and the Bristol Channel, attentive to villages, manor houses, inns, and the hard work of seafaring and trade. The book takes its title from Sker, a real coastal locale in Glamorgan, and uses that maritime world as stage and atmosphere, balancing intimate domestic scenes with encounters shaped by tides, law, and local custom.

The premise unfolds from a fateful coastal discovery that entangles ordinary households in questions of responsibility and origin, and from there into journeys by road and water

where a tangle of kinship, patronage, and rumor demands patient untangling. Blackmore crafts a narrative that shifts from hearthside conversation to brisk incident, maintaining a tone that is genial, observant, and alert to sudden danger when weather, law, or human pride turns rough. The reading experience is immersive rather than hurried, guided by a reflective voice that values character and place, favors exact description, and lets suspense gather through accumulation rather than shocks.

At its heart, the book considers identity—who confers it, who contests it, and how it is lived. It traces the pressure points where class expectations, legal forms, and personal conscience meet, especially when an individual's beginnings cannot be neatly certified. Community bonds and neighborly obligations, sometimes warm and sometimes wary, serve as both refuge and trial. Nature itself presses on the story, with shoreline, shoals, and season structuring choices and chances. Underneath runs a meditation on memory and recordkeeping: how stories are preserved, altered, or suppressed, and how an account of the past can protect the vulnerable or expose them.

Readers will notice Blackmore's care with cadence and idiom, the leisurely curve of chapters that allow aside, anecdote, and local color to settle before events turn. He relishes technical detail where it matters—food on a table, gear on a boat, the gossip that passes along a lane—and he draws regional speech without caricature, using it to lend warmth and precision. Descriptive passages of weather and water are central, not ornamental, organizing mood and meaning. The voice sits close to lived experience rather

than grand history, creating a texture of modest heroism, stubborn decency, and the practical resourcefulness of coastal life.

For contemporary readers, the novel's concerns with belonging and documentation resonate in an age attentive to migration, records, and the stories families tell themselves. Its depiction of communities negotiating custom and law invites reflection on how institutions can shelter or constrain. The coastal economy it portrays, vulnerable to storm and fortune, mirrors present anxieties about precarious work and environmental risk. The book's insistence that identity emerges not only from blood but from sustained care and mutual duty speaks to debates about kinship, guardianship, and the ethics of responsibility. It rewards patience with a humane vision of home made and home found.

Approached as a spacious, place-rich tale rather than a breathless chase, *The Maid of Sker* reveals its strength in the slow illumination of character and the steady surfacing of motive. The plot offers mysteries without relying on sensational exposure, and its satisfactions come from seeing decency tested, shrewdness deployed, and trust earned. Blackmore's craftsmanship—clear scene-setting, supple rhythms, and a quietly moral intelligence—makes the novel an inviting companion for readers who enjoy historical settings grounded in material reality. It matters now because it shows how communities can hold complexity without cruelty, and how steadfast care can anchor uncertain beginnings.

Synopsis

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R. D. Blackmore's *The Maid of Sker* is a Victorian historical novel told as the life-story of an elderly Welsh fisherman, whose plain, humorous voice frames a wide circuit of adventures. Set chiefly along the south Wales coast and moving into England, the narrative looks back to the later eighteenth century, when sea, weather, and local customs shape daily survival. At its heart lies a single devotion: the narrator's determination to protect a mysterious child and learn who she is. Around that thread, Blackmore layers scene-painting, folklore, and bustling incident, creating a slow-building inquiry into identity, duty, and belonging.

It begins on a night of wreck and tempest, when a ship comes to grief near Sker and a baby girl is snatched from peril. The village is stirred by the marvel and by gossip about her unknown origin. The fisherman takes charge of the foundling and, with stubborn kindness, shields her from clamorous curiosity. As she grows, signs of breeding and education rouse speculation that her birth stands above her present lot. Yet every lead dissolves into hearsay. The child's presence draws friends and malcontents alike, testing the narrator's prudence as he balances affection with the need for secrecy.

Blackmore dwells on the rhythms and hazards of coastal life—nets, tides, and markets, but also the blurred border between honest livelihood and contraband. Local authority

proves capricious, embodied in domineering clergy and magistrates whose zeal masks private designs. The fisherman's blunt sense of right collides with such powers, especially when the child's safety conflicts with schemes tied to wrecks and trade. Rumor hardens into threat. A feud ripens that is less a duel of wits than a contest of perseverance, with neighbors divided between quiet decency and coercion. The girl's uncertain name becomes a lever for others' advantage.

Dragged by circumstance into wider currents, the narrator is swept into naval service, where press-gangs, discipline, and storm teach harder lessons than the home surf. His sea-time broadens the book's compass: ships at war, ports humming with gossip, and a chain of acquaintances who later prove unexpectedly useful. Letters, half-truths, and chance meetings keep the foundling's mystery alive even at a distance, while the narrator's steadfast memory of her checks the lure of roving. Returning to Wales, he finds old balances shifted and enmities less patient, forcing him to weigh caution against the duty of openly seeking answers.

The search grows methodical, leading from parish registers and family whispers to London offices where identity can be made, unmade, or deferred by paperwork. Blackmore turns the rustic guardian into a wary traveler in corridors of patronage, where politeness cloaks calculation. Tutors, physicians, and lawyers cross the path, each revealing a sliver of the past while suggesting that evidence alone cannot secure protection. The girl, now poised between childhood and womanhood, acquires manners and

accomplishments that invite admiration and peril in equal degree. Offers of placement or alliance promise safety yet threaten to erase the truth of her beginnings.

Pressures converge in plots to remove the girl from her champion or to recast her history to serve others' claims. Abduction narrowly avoided, false witnesses groomed, and sudden benefactors appearing with too-tidy narratives thicken the air of intrigue. The fisherman learns to distrust easy certainties and to marshal proof with patience. A decisive inquiry gathers threads from coast and capital, church and Admiralty, exposing misdeeds that have rippled outward for years. Without resolving every tangle in advance, the book steers toward a reckoning that balances compassion with law, asking what a name, a fortune, or a family truly confers.

The Maid of Sker endures less for a single revelation than for its cumulative portrait of character under pressure and place under change. It marries the homely steadfastness familiar from Blackmore's earlier success with broader social vistas—smugglers' coves, quarterdecks, chancery rooms—showing how common lives intersect with distant authority. Its questions about birth, merit, and guardianship remain pointed without cynicism, and its Welsh settings, rendered with care, give ballast to the romance. By closing with dignity rather than sensational surprise, the novel affirms constancy as a form of wisdom, leaving the larger arc of justice to complete itself beyond the page.

Historical Context

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The Maid of Sker was published in 1872, when Victorian readers showed strong appetite for regionally grounded historical romance shaped by Walter Scott's example. Blackmore sets his narrative in the Georgian era, chiefly along the coast of Glamorgan in South Wales and the waters of the Bristol Channel. The title invokes Sker House, a prominent landmark near the buried borough of Kenfig, long associated with local legend. By choosing this time and place, the novel situates personal fortunes amid maritime communities, manorial estates, parish institutions, and coastal hazards, inviting readers to consider how local custom and law operated before industrial change transformed the region.

South Wales's low, sandy coast between Porthcawl and the Mumbles was notorious in the eighteenth century for shifting bars and shoals. Sker Point and the Kenfig Sands claimed many vessels in rough weather, long before the Mumbles Lighthouse was first lit in 1794 under Trinity House. Coastal trade linked Swansea, Cardiff, and Bristol to smaller havens, and pilots, fishermen, and wreck officials formed a distinctive maritime workforce. Inland, the remnant dunes hid the site of medieval Kenfig, engulfed by sand after the fourteenth century. Blackmore's scenes draw on this hazardous littoral geography, where seaborne commerce, wreck law, and survival frequently intersected.

Under George III's long reign (1760–1820), Wales shared the English legal and administrative framework but retained the Courts of Great Sessions until 1830. Parish vestries managed poor relief under the Old Poor Law, while the Church of England remained established in Wales alongside a rapidly expanding Nonconformist presence. Gentry estates and manorial rights structured rural authority, with houses like Sker historically tied to families such as the Turbervilles. Local markets, quarter sessions, and assizes regulated everyday disputes and crime. The novel's legal tangles, property questions, and clerical personages mirror this institutional lattice, showing how authority moved from manor and parish to crown courts.

High taxes on tea, spirits, tobacco, and textiles fuelled extensive smuggling around the Bristol Channel in the eighteenth century. The Crown relied on Riding Officers ashore and revenue cutters at sea to combat contraband, while coastal communities often balanced subsistence and loyalty against enforcement. The Commutation Act of 1784 reduced tea duties and altered smuggling patterns, but brandy and tobacco remained lucrative. Night landings, hidden stores, and mounted convoys were common tactics. Blackmore's episodes of clandestine trade and confrontation align with documented practices, using smuggling to explore tensions between local economies, national revenue policy, and the limits of state reach along remote shores.

Georgian coastal life was shaped by recurrent war. The American War of Independence (1775–1783) and the subsequent conflicts with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France (from 1793) brought privateering, convoy systems,

and heavier patrols to the Channel. Naval manpower demands sustained impressment, a legal practice that empowered press gangs to seize eligible seamen, provoking resistance in many ports. Volunteer corps, beacons, and signal stations multiplied amid invasion scares, notably in the 1790s. Blackmore uses this militarized backdrop sparingly but effectively: its presence explains the movement of ships and men, the anxiety of maritime households, and the mixture of opportunity and peril that wartime trade generated.

Eighteenth-century Wales experienced a powerful religious and cultural revival. Calvinistic Methodism spread from the 1730s through leaders such as Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland, prompting a surge in chapel building and lay preaching. Simultaneously, antiquarian interest nurtured Welsh-language literature and custom; in 1792, Iolo Morganwg inaugurated the Gorsedd on Primrose Hill, emblematic of renewed national consciousness with roots in Glamorgan. Ballads and harp airs circulated widely, and the area around Sker House carried its own tales and songs. Blackmore's attention to Welsh speech, music, and custom engages directly with these currents, presenting regional identity as a durable counterweight to external pressures.

Over the later eighteenth century, turnpike trusts improved roads in South Wales, knitting coastal settlements more tightly to inland markets. Regular packet boats crossed the Channel, while small craft serviced fisheries, notably the oyster grounds off Oystermouth and the Mumbles. Swansea's copper-smelting industry, established earlier in the century, expanded with coal and ore

shipments, foreshadowing the town's nineteenth-century moniker "Copperopolis." Yet much of Glamorgan outside the industrial pockets remained agrarian, governed by seasonal labor and parish rhythms. The novel's journeys by road and water, its marketplaces, and its working harbors accurately reflect a region poised between traditional rural economies and growing commercial integration.

Writing from a Victorian vantage in 1872, Blackmore applies documentary habits—topographical precision, dialect transcription, and attention to offices and courts—to a Georgian canvas. The result critiques and commemorates its era: law appears both protective and blundering; gentry authority both paternal and partial; coastal enterprise both indispensable and criminalized. Maritime danger and revenue policy illuminate how national imperatives met local necessity, while Welsh religious and cultural resilience temper anglicizing pressures. Without relying on sensational politics or melodrama, the book uses credible events and institutions to test character and community, offering a historically grounded meditation on belonging, legality, and the costs of state and market expansion.

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CHAPTER I. FISHERMAN DAVY A FISH OUT OF WATER.

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I am but an ancient fisherman upon the coast of Glamorganshire[1], with work enough of my own to do, and trouble enough of my own to heed, in getting my poor living. Yet no peace there is for me among my friends and neighbours, unless I will set to and try—as they bid me twice a-day perhaps—whether I cannot tell the rights of a curious adventure which it pleased Providence should happen, off and on, amidst us, now for a good many years, and with many ins and outs to it. They assure me, also, that all good people who can read and write for ten, or it may be twenty, miles around the place I live in, will buy my book—if I can make it—at a higher price, perhaps, per lb., than they would give me even for sewin[2], which are the very best fish I catch: and hence provision may be found for the old age and infirmities, now gaining upon me, every time I try to go out fishing.

In this encouragement and prospect I have little faith, knowing how much more people care about what they eat than what they read. Nevertheless I will hope for the best, especially as my evenings now are very long and wearisome; and I was counted a hopeful scholar, fifty years ago perhaps, in our village school here—not to mention the Royal Navy; and most of all, because a very wealthy gentleman, whose name will appear in this story, has

promised to pay all expenses, and £50 down (if I do it well), and to leave me the profit, if any.

Notwithstanding this, the work of writing must be very dull to me, after all the change of scene, and the open air and sea, and the many sprees ashore, and the noble fights with Frenchmen, and the power of oaths that made me jump so in his Majesty's navy. God save the King, and Queen, and members of the Royal Family, be they as many as they will—and they seem, in faith, to be manifold. But His power is equal to it all, if they will but try to meet Him.

However, not to enter upon any view of politics—all of which are far beyond the cleverest hand at a bait among us—I am inditing of a thing very plain and simple, when you come to understand it; yet containing a little strangeness, and some wonder, here and there, and apt to move good people's grief at the wrongs we do one another. Great part of it fell under mine own eyes, for a period of a score of years, or something thereabout. My memory still is pretty good; but if I contradict myself, or seem to sweep beyond my reach, or in any way to meddle with things which I had better have let alone, as a humble man and a Christian, I pray you to lay the main fault thereof on the badness of the times, and the rest upon human nature. For I have been a roving man, and may have gathered much of evil from contact with my fellow-men, although by origin meant for good. In this I take some blame to myself; for if I had polished my virtue well, the evil could not have stuck to it. Nevertheless, I am, on the whole, pretty well satisfied with myself; hoping to be of such quality as the Lord prefers to

those perfect creatures with whom He has no trouble at all, and therefore no enjoyment.

But sometimes, taking up a book, I am pestered with a troop of doubts; not only about my want of skill, and language, and experience, but chiefly because I never have been a man of consummate innocence, excellence, and high wisdom, such as all these writers are, if we go by their own opinions.

Now, when I plead among my neighbours, at the mouth of the old well, all the above, my sad shortcomings, and my own strong sense of them (which perhaps is somewhat over-strong), they only pat me on the back, and smile at one another, and make a sort of coughing noise, according to my bashfulness. And then if I look pleased (which for my life I cannot help doing), they wink, as it were, at one another, and speak up like this:—

"Now, Davy, you know better. You think yourself at least as good as any one of us, Davy, and likely far above us all. Therefore, Davy the fisherman, out with all you have to say, without any French palaver. You have a way of telling things so that we can see them."

With this, and with that, and most of all with hinting about a Frenchman, they put me on my mettle, so that I sit upon the side-stones of the old-well gallery (which are something like the companion-rail of a fore-and-after), and gather them around me, with the householders put foremost, according to their income, and the children listening between their legs; and thus I begin, but never end, the tale I now begin to you, and perhaps shall never end it.

CHAPTER II. HUNGER DRIVES HIM A-FISHING.

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In the summer of the year 1782, I, David Llewellyn, of Newton-Nottage, fisherman and old sailor, was in great distress and trouble, more than I like to tell you. My dear wife (a faithful partner for eight-and-twenty years, in spite of a very quick temper) was lately gone to a better world; and I missed her tongue and her sharp look-out at almost every corner. Also my son (as fine a seaman as ever went aloft), after helping Lord Rodney[4] to his great victory over Grass the Frenchman, had been lost in a prize-ship called the Tonner, of 54 guns and 500 Crappos, which sank with all hands on her way home to Spithead[3], under Admiral Graves. His young wife (who had been sent to us to see to, with his blessing) no sooner heard of this sad affair as in the Gazette reported, and his pay that week stopped on her, but she fell into untimely travail, and was dead ere morning. So I buried my wife and daughter-in-law, and lost all chance to bury my son, between two Bridgend market-days.

Now this is not very much, of course, compared with the troubles some people have. But I had not been used to this matter, except in case of a messmate; and so I was greatly broken down, and found my eyes so weak of a morning, that I would not be seen out of doors, almost.

The only one now to keep a stir or sound of life in my little cottage, which faces to the churchyard, was my orphan grandchild "Bunny," daughter of my son just drowned, and his only child that we knew of. Bunny was a rare strong lass,

five years old about then, I think; a stout and hearty-feeding child, able to chew every bit of her victuals, and mounting a fine rosy colour, and eyes as black as Archangel pitch.

One day, when I was moping there, all abroad about my bearings, and no better than water-ballasted, the while I looked at my wife's new broom, now carrying cobweb try-sails, this little Bunny came up to me as if she had a boarding-pike, and sprang into the netting hammocks of the best black coat I wore.

"Grand-da!" she said, and looked to know in what way I would look at her; "Grand-da, I must have sumkin more to eat."

"Something more to eat!" I cried, almost with some astonishment, well as I knew her appetite; for the child had eaten a barley-loaf, and two pig's feet, and a dog-fish.

"Yes, more; more bexfass, grand-da." And though she had not the words to tell, she put her hands in a way that showed me she ought to have more solid food. I could not help looking sadly at her, proud as I was of her appetite. But, recovering in a minute or two, I put a good face upon it.

"My dear, and you shall have more," I said; "only take your feet out of my pocket. Little heart have I for fishing, God knows; but a-fishing I will go this day, if mother Jones will see to you."

For I could not leave her alone quite yet, although she was a brave little maid, and no fire now was burning. But within a child's trot from my door, and down toward the sandhills, was that famous ancient well of which I spoke just now, dedicate to St John the Baptist, where they used to scourge themselves. The village church stood here, they

say, before the inroad of the sand; and the water was counted holy. How that may be, I do not know; but the well is very handy. It has a little grey round tower of stone domed over the heart of it, to which a covered way goes down, with shallow steps irregular. If it were not for this plan, the sand would whelm the whole of it over; even as it has overwhelmed all the departure of the spring, and the cottages once surrounding it. Down these steps the children go, each with a little brown pitcher, holding hands and groping at the sides, as they begin to feel darker. And what with the sand beneath their feet, and the narrowing of the roof above, and the shadows moving round them, and the doubt where the water begins or ends (which nobody knows at any time), it is much but what some little maid tumbles in, and the rest have to pull her out again.

For this well has puzzled all the country, and all the men of great learning, being as full of contrariety as a maiden courted. It comes and goes, in a manner, against the coming and going of the sea, which is only half a mile from it; and twice in a day it is many feet deep, and again not as many inches. And the water is so crystal-clear, that down in the dark it is like a dream. Some people say that John the Baptist had nothing to do with the making of it, because it was made before his time by the ancient family of De Sandford, who once owned all the manors here. In this, however, I place no faith, having read my Bible to better purpose than to believe that John Baptist was the sort of man to claim anything, least of all any water, unless he came honestly by it.

In either case, it is very pretty to see the children round the entrance on a summer afternoon, when they are sent for water. They are all a little afraid of it, partly because of its maker's name, and his having his head on a charger, and partly on account of its curious ways, and the sand coming out of its "nostrils" when first it begins to flow.

That day with which I begin my story, Mrs Jones was good enough to take charge of little Bunny; and after getting ready to start, I set the thong of our latch inside, so that none but neighbours who knew the trick could enter our little cottage (or rather "mine" I should say now); and thus with conger-rod, and prawn-net, and a long pole for the bass, and a junk of pressed tobacco, and a lump of barley-bread, and a maybird stuffed with onions (just to refine the fishiness), away I set for a long-shore day, upon as dainty a summer morn as ever shone out of the heavens.

"Fisherman Davy" (as they call me all around our parts) was fifty and two years of age, I believe, that very same July, and with all my heart I wish that he were as young this very day. For I never have found such call to enter into the affairs of another world, as to forget my business here, or press upon Providence impatiently for a more heavenly state of things. People may call me worldly-minded for cherishing such a view of this earth; and perhaps it is not right of me. However, I can put up with it, and be in no unkindly haste to say "good-bye" to my neighbours. For, to my mind, such a state of seeking, as many amongst us do even boast of, is, unless in a bad cough or a perilous calenture, a certain proof of curiosity displeasing to our

Maker, and I might even say of fickleness degrading to a true Briton.

The sun came down upon my head, so that I thought of bygone days, when I served under Captain Howe, or Sir Edward Hawke, and used to stroll away upon leave, with half a hundred Jacks ashore, at Naples, or in Bermudas, or wherever the luck might happen. Now, however, was no time for me to think of strolling, because I could no longer live at the expense of the Government, which is the highest luck of all, and full of noble dignity. Things were come to such a push that I must either work or starve[1q]; and could I but recall the past, I would stroll less in the days gone by. A pension of one and eightpence farthing for the weeks I was alive (being in right of a heavy wound in capture of the *Bellona*, Frenchman of two-and-thirty guns, by his Majesty's frigate *Vesta*, under Captain Hood) was all I had to hold on by, in support of myself and Bunny, except the slippery fish that come and go as Providence orders them. She had sailed from Martinique, when luckily we fell in with her; and I never shall forget the fun, and the five hours at close quarters. We could see the powder on the other fellows' faces while they were training their guns at us, and we showed them, with a slap, our noses, which they never contrived to hit. She carried heavier metal than ours, and had sixty more men to work it, and therefore we were obliged at last to capture her by boarding. I, like a fool, was the first that leaped into her mizen-chains, without looking before me, as ought to have been. The Frenchmen came too fast upon me, and gave me more than I bargained for.

87 A panel convened at a coroner's inquest in Britain to examine sudden or suspicious deaths and return a verdict about the cause, often influencing legal and burial outcomes.

88 A guinea was a British gold coin used in the 17th–18th centuries; 'of Queen Anne' refers to coins struck during her reign (1702–1714) and these gold guineas were a common high-value currency in that period (worth about one pound and one shilling after early-18th fixes).

89 A series of inlets on the west coast of what is now Vancouver Island (British Columbia); the late-18th-century Nootka Crisis involved contested British and Spanish claims and diplomatic tensions over the Pacific Northwest.

90 An alternate spelling of the Bastille, the royal fortress and prison in Paris stormed on 14 July 1789; its fall was an early and symbolic event of the French Revolution.

91 A personification promoted during the radical phase of the French Revolution (the 'Cult of Reason') used in public festivals as part of anti-religious and dechristianizing measures in the 1790s.

92 Refers to impressment, the practice whereby men were forcibly enrolled into naval service (often by press gangs) in 18th-century Britain — a legal but controversial method of recruiting seamen.

93 A rocky islet and long-standing navigation hazard off the southeast coast of Ireland (County Wexford); a lighthouse was later constructed there in the 19th century to warn shipping.

94 A ship's name in the passage; Bellona was a common name for British warships (taken from the Roman goddess of

war) and here denotes the narrator's vessel rather than a specific historical ship unless further identified elsewhere in the text.

95 The orlop-deck is the lowest deck of a large sailing ship, typically used for stowing cables and stores and sometimes for sick berths and workrooms in 18th–19th century warships.

96 Reference to the biblical prophet Jonah, who according to the Bible was swallowed by a 'great fish' (often called a whale); the name became a common nautical metaphor for someone thought unlucky or as if inside a sea monster.

97 A multi-tailed whip historically used for corporal punishment in the Royal Navy and other services; the implement typically had nine knotted cords and was used for flogging as a disciplinary measure.

98 Short horizontal ropes tied between the shrouds to form a ladder up a ship's mast, used by sailors to climb the rigging on square-rigged sailing vessels.

99 An alternate spelling of 'peruke' or 'periwig,' meaning a wig worn by men in the 17th–18th centuries; large, powdered wigs were fashionable among officers and gentlemen in that era.

100 A harbour and town in Jamaica long known (from the 17th century onward) as a major naval and commercial base in the Caribbean; in maritime literature it is often associated with sailors, naval activity, and tropical waters.

101 A headland off the southwest coast of Portugal and the site of a major naval battle on 14 February 1797 when

the British fleet defeated a Spanish squadron; the name here refers to that action.

102 The name of a Royal Navy ship mentioned in the narrator's service; in the late 18th century such names usually refer to a large warship or ship-of-the-line used in fleet actions.

103 Cuthbert Collingwood (1748–1810), a senior Royal Navy officer who served with distinction in the same era as Nelson and later commanded at Trafalgar; here he is named as the ship's captain.

104 A captured enemy vessel referred to as a prize from the action off Cape St Vincent; the name likely corresponds to a Spanish or allied ship taken in that engagement.

105 A title held by Admiral John Jervis (1735–1823), commander of the British fleet in the Mediterranean at this period; the text notes he was formerly Sir John Jervis.

106 Admiral Horatio Nelson (1758–1805), the celebrated British naval commander whose daring tactics and leadership are central to the late-18th/early-19th-century naval history invoked in the chapter.

107 A traditional English feast day (St Swithin) observed on 15 July; it is often used as a dated reference in historical and literary texts.

108 An island off the Egyptian coast near Aboukir Bay, close to Alexandria, and the anchorage area associated with the 1798 naval engagement known as the Battle of the Nile.

109 Refers to Aboukir Bay, the site of major British naval actions in 1798 and 1801; here it is used figuratively to describe blunt or heavy-handed military-style tactics.

110 A coroner is a local official who holds inquests into sudden or unexplained deaths; Coroner Bowles is the named official in the narrative who conducted the original inquest.

111 Named in the text as the active local magistrate (a justice of the peace) to whom the coroner referred the inquiry; magistrates handled local legal and administrative matters in 19th-century England.

112 French loanword 'bonne' means a maid or nursemaid; in the passage it denotes the woman who cared for and watched the infants (their 'guard').

113 A sandbar at the mouth of the Taw/Torridge estuary near Barnstaple in North Devon, historically a navigational hazard for shipping and small boats.

114 A group that seized (impressed) men into naval service; press-gangs were used by the Royal Navy in the 18th and early 19th centuries to recruit sailors, sometimes by force.

115 A small sailing vessel (a yawl) used by maritime pilots to carry them between ship and shore; here it denotes the small craft the narrator hired to cross the channel.

116 A coastal town on the north coast of Devon, England; historically a fishing and small-port community and, by the 19th century, an occasional seaside stopping-place.

117 The Tawe is a river in South Wales that flows through the city of Swansea to Swansea Bay; in 19th-century literature it often denotes the local tidal estuary the characters observe.