

Able seaman - An experienced sailor. This designation took years to earn and was applied to those sailors given the most dangerous and difficult work.

Aloft - Among the higher rigging or on the masthead.

Atlantic slave trade - The abduction, sale, and transport of Africans both to the Americas and within the Americas over the 17th to 19th centuries.

Batten - To fasten down or secure, traditionally with battens, or strips of wood.

Becalmed - Motionless due to lack of wind.

Birch - A rod made of birch wood.

Boatswain - Officer on a ship responsible for hull maintenance and the anchor.

Boil - A swollen place on the skin due to the infection of the tissue, often forming pus.

Botulism - A disease with symptoms including weakness, blurred vision, vomiting, swelling, difficulty breathing, and diarrhea. It is often contracted from improperly stored or prepared food.

Bowsprit - The large spar projecting forward from the bow of a ship. It is commonly used to extend sail area by tying triangular sails like the jib to it.

Brigantine - A two-masted square-rigged ship with a fore and aft mainsail.

Calomel - A compound of mercury chloride often used as a panacea despite the possibility of mercury poisoning. Studies in the mid-19th century demonstrated its negative health effects but calomel remained a popular treatment for decades.

Caned - To be beaten, often with a wood rod or cane.

Captain - Highest-ranking officer on a ship.

Careened - The process of tilting a ship to a 45 degree angle in order to clean and repair the hull, which was very labor intensive. This was most easily done in a special dock to reduce the stress on the hull, but could also be done on a beach which was large and flat enough. Cleaning the ship reduced drag and made the ship faster. The British Navy required captains to careen their ships every four months, but outside of

British waters this could be a more difficult process and more captains opted to careen twice a year. In order to tilt the ship to this angle, all movable had to be removed, lower windows were sealed, ropes were tied to the masts and pulled down.

Careening dock - A floating dock specifically built to tilt ships for the process of careening. It commonly featured a berth for storing all the removable cargo and a machine like a crane for pulling the ship over by its masts.

Cat o' nine tails - A multi-tailed whip, often of knotted cotton cord and which might have knots along the tails. It was a common instrument of punishment at sea.

Crimp - A person who entraps men in port towns and forces them into being sailors. They commonly held debt and sold it to captains, or delivered men to captains in exchange for their advance wages. Crimps often ran businesses such as inns and pubs.

"The Cruel Ship's Carpenter" - A British sailing song from the 18th century also known as "Pretty Polly" or "The Gosport Tragedy." It is a murder ballad recounting the story of a carpenter who seduces then kills a young woman.

Darning needles - Blunter needles used to repair holes in knitted items such as socks.

Duff - A boiled or steamed pudding with dried fruit.

Dysentery - A form of gastroenteritis which produces bloody diarrhea. It often leads to dehydration and is usually produced by poor sanitation.

Emetic - A medical agent which induces vomiting.

Foot ropes - Ropes suspended along the bowsprit or yard. Sailors use them to stand on while working on sails.

Fore - The mast just fore, or ahead of the mainmast.

Forecastle - The forward part of the upper deck of a ship. This was commonly where the crew quarters were.

Fundament - The buttocks.

Furl - The rolling up and tying of sails in order to reduce their area.

Furling line - A rope used in the furling, or rolling up and tying of sails. These would be operated from the deck. This process is done to reduce sail size, which impacts ship speed.

Futtock shrouds - Ropes in the rigging which run from the tops, or platforms on masts, to the shrouds, or larger rigging holding up the masts. Climbing them, sailors would hang upside down.

Galley - The kitchen area of a ship.

"The Golden Vanity" - A British sailing song from the 17th century. It recounts the story of a cabin boy who sinks an enemy ship but whose captain will not retrieve him from the sea where he drowns.

Green hand - Inexperienced sailor. A sailor might be considered green for months or even years. They would be assigned tasks on deck rather than aloft.

Gum arabic - A tree gum primarily harvested in northern Africa. It is edible but was more commonly used in lithography as an ingredient in ink.

Hailing - Saluting or greeting.

Hawker - A person employed to hawk, or sell, wares. They might own their wares or be employed by a shopkeeper. Hawking involved walking through trafficked areas and crying, or shouting, what was available for sale.

Heave anchor - To lift or raise the anchor in order to leave a harbor.

Henequen - A fiber from the leaves of the agave plant which is used to produce rope and twine. The whole agave plant is also commonly called henequen and used to produce alcohols like mezcal.

Hogsheads - A large cask or barrel, the formal unit is equal to 63 gallons.

Hold - The interior space of a ship below deck used for storing cargo. It was commonly locked by the captain to prevent theft.

Hops - A cone-like flower in the hemp family which is commonly used in beer brewing.

Idler - A person employed aboard a ship as a craftsman. These positions routinely included doctor, cook, sailmaker, and carpenter. They were not counted as a member of the crew, not assigned to a watch, and were paid a higher wage.

Impressed - The English Navy (and other militaries) often had labor shortages during times of war and had to force men to serve in its ranks. The navy could legally detain any merchant ship and impress the British sailors aboard. On land, roving press gangs kidnapped sailors, either by force, trickery, or coercion. After being impressed, sailors who were not British could petition to be let back out, but British subjects had to serve their term. Though the Navy typically impressed merchant seamen or fishermen, they sometimes abducted non-sailors. The practice was very unpopular and provoked much protest.

Jack-tar - Slang term for a sailor. Jack was a generic name and tar referred to the pitch which men painted their clothes with to waterproof them.

Jib - A triangular sail extending from the foremast to the bowsprit.

Lance - To pierce an infected place, such as a boil, with a sharp pointed instrument.

Landsman - A person who lives on land. This term was also applied to inexperienced sailors.

Larboard - The left side of a ship. Later in the nineteenth century, this term was exchanged for "port".

Longshoremen - Men who load and unload ships at a seaport. This was a specialized form of labor.

Mainsail - The largest sail on the mainmast.

Marline-spike - A long conical piece of metal used in ropework. It was useful for splicing, untying, and toggling ropes.

Mastheaded - To be sent aloft to the top of a ship's mast as a punishment. This opened the sailor to ridicule and the elements.

Mate - Mid-ranking officer on a ship. Most ships employed at least a first mate, and some also had a second or third. Mates were responsible for the daily running of the

ship and controlled their watches. They might be unpopular, particularly the second mate, and could be demoted by the captain and replaced by a vote among the crew.

"The Mermaid" - A song from the 18th century. It recounts the story of a ship leaving port and eventually sinking.

Mizzen - The mast just aft, or behind, the mainmast.

Muscovado sugar - A type of partially refined sugar with a strong molasses content and dark brown color. It is used to manufacture rum and other alcohols.

Musk - An aromatic substance commonly used in perfume. It was collected from the glands of musk deer and plants which produce similar scents. Now it is primarily produced synthetically.

Mutiny - A revolt among a group of sailors against their superiors in which they refuse to obey orders or attempt to take control of the ship.

Navy - A military force composed of ships and sailors.

Nippers - Young sailors, usually inexperienced.

Ordinary seaman - A sailor with experience.

Pay the devil - The devil was a long seam in the hull of a ship, which needed to be paid, or caulked with tar. The work required squatting in the bilge, which was cramped and dark, making it an undesirable task.

Pearl divers - Men employed to free dive to the ocean floor and collect mollusks. They are taken out in groups and dive repeatedly from a small boat. The work was dangerous and often abusive. In many places, like Brazil and the Arabian Sea, it was the work of enslaved men.

Picker - A person who picks over the garbage of others, whether in the street, dump, or wharf, in search of material which could be resold. This was highly transitory work and its practitioners were held in low regard, though protected by law.

Pimento - A large red chili pepper.

Plaster - A hot, wet paste spread on leather which is then applied to infected areas of the skin. The paste hardens and should rupture the buboes to enable them to drain. This plaster was usually made of either Mithridatium or Galene and was applied three times daily.

Pollywog - A novice sailor who has not crossed the equator.

Port - A harbor town where ships can anchor or dock to load or unload cargo.

Privateers - A private ship licensed by the government of its nation, usually in times of war, to attack enemy merchant ships.

Public houses - Drinking establishments. It is more commonly shortened to pub.

Pustule - An inflammation of the skin with pus.

Quarantined - A method of containing disease which involves keeping potentially infected people, animals, or goods contained and away from others for a sufficient period of time for the disease to manifest. The word comes from the Italian “quaranta” meaning 40 as the quarantine period for plague was 40 days.

Quarter boat - A small utility boat which provides transport from the ship to the shore.

Reef - To reduce sail area by rolling a section and tying it up. This controls the speed of a ship. The process was done between men aloft on the sail and men on the deck pulling ropes.

Rigging - The lines used aboard a ship to access the sails, masts, and spars.

Rigging the pump - Installing bilge pumps to remove water from the ship's hold.

Ringtail halyards - A rope used to hoist sails or flags from the deck. It would be attached to masts and pulled from below.

Rod - A long piece of wood or bundle of sticks used in punishment.

Royals - Small sails flown above the topgallant on square-rigged ships.

Schooner-brig - A two-masted ship in which one mast is square-rigged and the other fore and aft-rigged.

Scurvy - A state of malnutrition with symptoms including weakness, fatigue, sore limbs, soft gums, and the reopening of old wounds. It is caused by vitamin C deficiency over at least a month. In the 18th century scurvy killed more British sailors than wartime action. During this period, several experiments were conducted to determine what might cure scurvy to limited success. Sailors became more convinced of the merits of citrus fruit, but there was only limited clinical evidence for this cure. By the beginning of the 19th century the British navy began to be supplied with lemons and sugar as a daily ration, significantly reducing the incidence of the disease.

Shanties - Songs sung by sailors usually with a strong rhythm to coordinate work among a group. They often operate via call and response. Shanties came to prominence on merchant ships in the early decades of the 19th century.

Shipping master - Officer on a ship responsible for navigation, crew, and cargo. This could be the same person as the captain or a separate position. The shipping master recruited and paid seamen.

Slushing the mainmast - Spreading grease or wax on the masts of a ship to make hoisting sails easier and to protect the wood.

Sloop - A fore and aft rigged ship with one mast and a jib.

Soger - Derogatory term for a lazy or worthless sailor.

“Spanish Ladies” - A British sailing song from the 17th century. It begins: “Farewell and adieu to you, Spanish ladies/ Farewell and adieu to you, ladies of Spain/ For we have received orders/ For to sail to old England/ But we hope in a short time to see you again.”

Sperm oil - A clear or yellowish waxy liquid obtained from sperm whales. It was used as a lubricant and for lighting oil lamps because it burned without odor. It was later replaced by the cheaper kerosene and is now illegal.

Starboard - The right side of a ship.

Stevedores - Men who load and unload ships at a seaport. This was a specialized form of labor.

Steward - A man employed by the captain to manage food for the officers. This might be the same person as the cook or a separate position.

Swabbing - Mopping

Syrup of ipecac - A liquid distillation of the ipecac plant. It is commonly used to induce vomiting.

Tackle - A grouping of ropes and pulleys in a ship's rigging used for hoisting.

Tar - A dark brown or black viscous liquid created by burning and distilling wood, coal, or peat. It was painted onto surfaces and dried, leaving them waterproof.

Tarring the deck - Painting the deck with tar to waterproof it.

"Three Jolly Rogues" - A British song from the 19th century. It goes: "In good King Arthur's day/ When we served under the King/ Lived a miller and a weaver and a little tailor/ Three jolly rogues of Lynn./ Now the miller he stole corn/ And the weaver he stole yarn/ And the little tailor he stole broadcloth/ For to keep those three rogues warm/ Now the miller was drowned in his dam/ And the weaver was hanged in his yarn/ And the devil put his claw on the little tailor/ With the broadcloth under his arm/ Now the miller still drowns in his dam/ And the weaver still hangs in his yarn/ And the little tailor he skips through hell/ With the broadcloth under his arm."

Tincture of rosemary - Literally, a beneficial medicine. A single-herb extraction made of rosemary. It is produced by soaking rosemary leaves in alcohol.

Topgallant - The sails between the topsail and royal sail on a square-rigged ship.

Topsails - The sails above the lower sails on the mast.

Trysail - A triangular sail used in place of a mainsail when winds are high.

Unguent of flowers of sulfur in lard - A salve used to treat diseases of the skin. Sulfur can be antibacterial and fungicidal. Mixing it with lard made topical application easier.

Watches - The unit of labor organization used aboard ships. There were routinely two watches - the starboard and larboard - which rotated in four-hour shifts throughout the night. During the day it was at the captain's discretion whether this four-hour pattern continued or if both watches would work at once.

Waxcloth - A rough fabric waterproofed with wax or paraffin.

Yellow fever - A viral disease with symptoms including fever, chills, nausea, muscle pain. It can cause liver damage, which yellows the skin. Most people recover from yellow fever within a few days, but it can be lethal. Those who have been exposed to yellow fever often develop immunity.