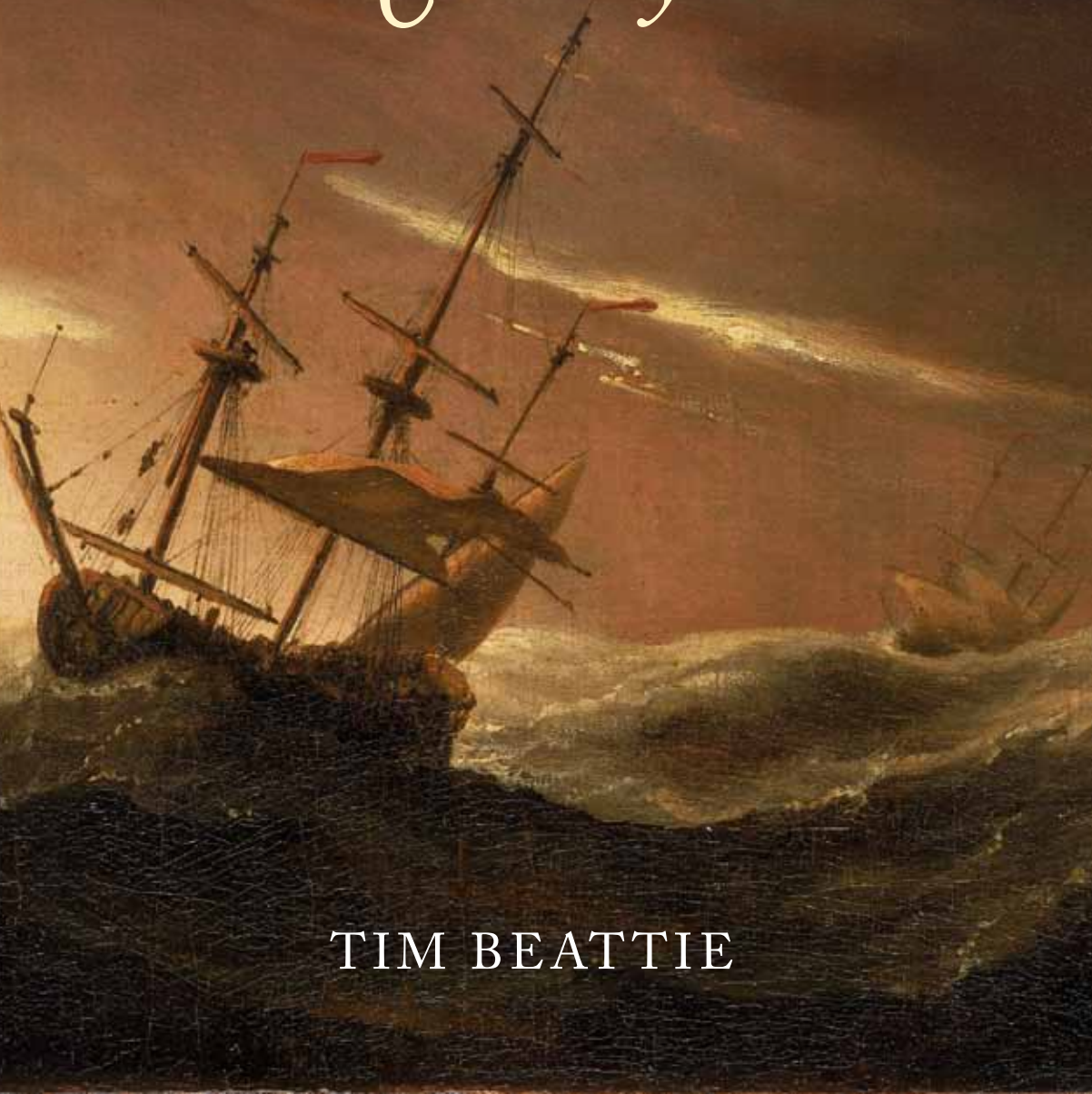


*British Privateering
Voyages of the
Early Eighteenth
Century*



TIM BEATTIE

BRITISH PRIVATEERING VOYAGES OF THE EARLY
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Tim Beattie

THE BOYDELL PRESS

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First published 2015
The Boydell Press, Woodbridge

ISBN 978 1 78327 020 0

The Boydell Press is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
and of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mount Hope Ave, Rochester, NY 14620–2731, USA
website: www.boydellandbrewer.com

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

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To Sue

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Names of places are spelt as in contemporary British accounts (e.g. Conception not Concepción).

Preface and Acknowledgements

Despite the efforts of the participants to paint them as 'noble undertakings' the three voyages described here were, above all, treasure hunts and consequently subject to the exalted expectations, dashed hopes, deceits, frauds and fierce battles at sea and at law which traditionally accompany such exploits.

One of the many delights of the National Archives at Kew, where much of the primary material relating to these voyages is to be found, is that research itself takes on the character of a treasure hunt. Materials are arranged using a taxonomy which has, as its indivisible unit, the 'document'. Researchers unfamiliar (as I was) with this use of the term may be surprised to find that the document they have ordered consists of two large boxes, full to the brim with hundreds of individual books, letters and vellum sheets. The documents relating to these three voyages are just such a treasure trove, and Donald Jones, who conducted a bibliographical study into the primary material relating to Woodes Rogers's expedition, described them as 'the real monuments of that remarkable voyage'. Anyone who has been lucky enough to open the boxes in the National Archive, detect the faint aroma of Stockholm tar and observe the wonderful variety of materials, from scraps of paper or parchment bleached by tropical sun, to cloth, vellum or board bound books, betting slips, IOUs and chancery bills of complaint, can only agree.

The history revealed in these papers is an unfamiliar one for those of us nurtured on tales of the triumphant progress of the British navy (punctuated by a few blips) through the eighteenth century. The heroes of these voyages were, for the most part, merchant mariners 'of desperate fortune', as Daniel Defoe put it, but they were remarkable seamen as well as being determined, resourceful and ingenious. What they did, in small, worm-ridden, leaky and unhandy ships, buffeted by fierce storms, navigating great distances through poorly-charted waters with primitive, inaccurate instruments, is quite remarkable and deserves to be better known.

I would like to thank Mike Duffy for mentoring, correcting, suggesting amendments to and most of all encouraging my efforts, Peter Sowden for guiding me through the stages from proposal to publication with patience and good humour, the anonymous reviewer who offered encouragement, invaluable advice and useful leads, and Glyn Williams for his helpful comments. I would also like to thank Ben Beattie for the maps and Jonathan

Preface and Acknowledgements

Barry for invaluable background material on eighteenth-century Bristol and for correcting spellings and other solecisms to which tyro historians are prone. I am not sure that you can thank a library but I can at least sing the praises of the Bartlett Library in the National Maritime Museum Cornwall, which constantly astonishes with its eclectic collection of maritime books and journals (including a complete set of the *Mariner's Mirror*), its helpful volunteer staff and the rather wonderful museum attached to it.

Tim Beattie

Abbreviations

BL Add. MSS	British Library Additional Manuscripts
BL IOR	British Library India Office Records
EIC	East India Company
HCA	High Court of Admiralty
MS	Manuscript
NRS	Navy Records Society
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
SSC	South Sea Company
TNA	The National Archives
VOC	Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company)

Introduction

This is the story of the extraordinary impact of three privateering expeditions into the South Sea which set out from England in the first twenty years of the eighteenth century. They were privately funded, costly and ambitious long-distance voyages which carried great risk for their investors but promised great reward. The first expedition, which sailed in 1703, was led by William Dampier, and the second (and by far the most successful) by Woodes Rogers in 1708. The third, which set out from Plymouth in February 1719, is usually named after George Shelvocke, captain of the *Speedwell*, though this was not how it was described at the time.

The reports on these ventures would excite the imaginations of politicians, projectors, journalists and poets for much of the eighteenth century. They contributed greatly to the swelling enthusiasm for the South Sea Company and by extension to the subsequent catastrophic collapse of confidence in the practicability of its ambitious plans. They fascinated the major intellectual and literary figures, including Addison, Defoe and Swift (but excepting Doctor Johnson, who remarked on a newly published book of voyages to the South Sea: 'a man had better work his way before the mast than read them through'), and became a source for some of the greatest literature of the period, including *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

More recently the importance of their contribution to British maritime and cultural history has been subject to question. It is customary now to dismiss these expeditions as having, at best, a marginal part to play in the history of the British navy in the eighteenth century. David J. Starkey has suggested that they were out of their time:

Essentially it was an anachronistic activity, an attempt to seek the treasures which had drawn the Elizabethan adventurers to the New World. It was a form of enterprise confined to the Anglo-Spanish wars of the first half of the Eighteenth century.¹

Thus the buccaneering spirit which may have inspired these expeditions was backward looking and soon to be supplanted by the more sophisticated

¹ D.J. Starkey, *British Privateering Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century* (Exeter, 1990), 48.

attractions of trade supported and defended by a commanding navy. Whether or not they were anachronisms, they have been considered, as a whole, to be somewhat unsavoury failures. N.A.M. Rodger notes, in reference to Shelvocke's voyage, that 'There were some survivors from the usual squalid tale of greed, strife and betrayal, but the voyage yielded no financial or military profit.'² Jonathan Lamb is equally trenchant, citing 'Rogers's sad catalogue of mutinies, plots, wild gambling, detentions, late payouts and failed contracts' as typical of all the voyages.³ This is severely to undervalue their remarkable maritime achievement. The voyages were indeed beset by strife, intrigue, mutiny and betrayals, but what was being attempted – the circumnavigation of the world and the capture of a treasure ship – was so challenging and with so few precedents that it is scarcely surprising that, although carefully planned and well supplied, they encountered the same problems as Magellan, Drake and Cavendish had done before.

The three expeditions were interconnected; one cruise led to another, spurred on by the predecessor's failure (the next would be better managed) or success (there was more where that came from), but only one, Rogers's, completed the intended circumnavigation, carried off the Manila treasure ship and produced a handsome return for its investors. William Dampier, the most famous name of all those involved, was appointed commander-in-chief of the first expedition and, almost as soon as he had returned from that, was made 'Pilot of the South Seas' on the second. He took with him as surgeon on both expeditions his friend John Ballett. Alexander Selkirk went out master of the *Cinque Portes* on the first expedition, was marooned on Juan Fernandez island and picked up four years later by the second expedition; Simon Hatley sailed as third mate of the *Dutchess* on the second voyage and second captain of the *Speedwell* on the third, in which he was accused by George Shelvocke of shooting an albatross in an incident that was famously exploited by Coleridge in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Perhaps the most unlucky of all these double voyagers was John Clipperton, who was by some accounts a good seaman but deserted the Dampier expedition in despair at the antics of its commander. He returned fifteen years later to command the third expedition only to find that his fellow captain, George Shelvocke, was intent on undermining the voyage and betraying his owners. Clipperton died, it was said, of drink and despair months after he returned home from this last voyage.

Given that these were the first voyages of their kind for over a hundred years and were never repeated (Anson's 1740 voyage was a naval expedition), it is necessary to look for the particular historical conditions which nurtured them. John Campbell, a near contemporary chronicler, is in no doubt of their significance in terms of British maritime trade and holds them up, whatever their outcomes, as examples to be emulated. His work is dedicated (in a

² N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (London, 2004), 228.

³ Jonathan Lamb, *Preserving the Self in the South Seas, 1680–1740* (Chicago, 2001), 195.

Introduction

possibly conscious echo of Woodes Rogers's dedication of the account of his voyage to the merchant venturers of Bristol) 'To the Merchants of Great-Britain' who backed these bold expeditions.⁴

That the voyages carried risks is evident. In every case the investors underestimated the total time taken by the expedition, allowing provision for eighteen months to two years when in fact it was more than three years in each case before the survivors, with or without ships, returned. This long wait before any possibility of financial return, coupled with the very large setting-out costs, marks out these three expeditions as exceptional examples of British mercantile enthusiasm.

The voyages were significant events embedded in and expressing the mercantile and political ambitions of the age; they represented, in their operation as privateers on a cruising voyage and in their organisation, management and conduct, the values and developing ambitions of British merchants. They were recognised and supported by important contemporary figures, attracted considerable investment and influenced state policy and naval strategy in the South Sea.

They were more successful than has hitherto been acknowledged because they achieved a better financial return than has previously been understood, and they were, collectively, an example of exceptional maritime endeavour which, though recognised at the time, has since been overshadowed by an overemphasis on the trials and controversies that accompanied them.

The printed narratives which grew out of the voyages were of wide and lasting cultural significance in that they contributed to the growing demand for knowledge about the world, led by organisations like the Royal Society but enthusiastically supported by a substantial educated readership, and they nourished a developing discourse about humanity and (to adopt Alexander Pope's contemporary poetic dictum) the proper study of mankind. Their influence was sustained and extended through their reproduction in several voyage anthologies, which in turn provided source material for British strategic thinking throughout the eighteenth century. They adopted styles and approaches that were to be taken up in eighteenth-century literature (in particular by *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*) and which evolved through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries into a peculiarly British novel form.

⁴ John Harris, ed. John Campbell, *Navigantium Atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca: Or, a Compleat Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London, 1744–1748), dedication.

Privateering in the Early Eighteenth Century

A total of 1,441 vessels were licensed by the High Court of Admiralty to operate as privateers in the wars of 1702–13 and 1718–20.¹ There were periods in the eighteenth century – particularly during the American Revolutionary War – when there was even greater privateering activity, but there was never a time when it was to be more respectable and valued than during the reigns of Queen Anne and King George I. Indeed for much of the eighteenth century privateering was considered an important and honourable activity that contributed greatly to the country's maritime achievement. At the start of the War of the Spanish Succession public prints made clear what they considered to be the nation's priorities. The *Observer*, which offered itself as the spokesman for merchants and traders, pronounced: 'In a War at Sea, the chief Care ought to be the Security of our merchant Ships, by providing sufficient Convoys, and next to that, the encouragement of Privateers.'²

Newspapers printed letters of 'instruction' from borough electors to their MPs: 'You will contribute your utmost assistance for the Encouragement of Privateers in relation to the prizes they shall take or any other Naval Forces for the annoying of the Enemy, and serving the Trade and Commerce of this Nation.'³ The relative strength of British and French privateering activity was much discussed and the supposed disadvantages suffered by the British privateer decried:

It's true the *French* Privateers have a great advantage over our *English* in several respects: we have double their number of Ships, and they have five times the number of Privateers; when we have taken a prize, we are a long time plagued in the court of *Doctors Commons* to get her condemn'd; and when that's done we wait on the *Prize Office* about Kings Quota; many times our lading is no prize, by reason it must be either burnt or staved ... whereas nothing is burnt or staved for the French.⁴

¹ Starkey, *British Privateering Enterprise*, 89 and 113.

² *The Observer*, 29 April 1702.

³ *Flying Post or Postmaster*, 27 December 1701.

⁴ *The Observer*, 29 April 1702.

The achievements of privateers were often compared favourably to the sometimes uncertain performance of the navy. In the early stages of the war, privateers were thought vital to make up for the deficiencies identified in the management of the navy: 'For my part, Sir, I am no Judge in Sea Affairs, tho I know so much, that of late our Navy has been under an ill-management.'⁵ The navy was also subject to the satirical gaze of Grub Street. *The Wooden World* was just such a squib which delivered a complex mixture of admiration and ridicule; thus 'It's Old Nick's Academy, where the seven liberal Sciences of Swearing, Drinking, Thieving, Whoring, Killing, Cozening and Backbiting, are taught to full perfection', but it is also 'the mighty Guardian of our Island, defending us all round from foreign Dangers as watchfully as a Mastiff in an Orchard'.⁶ The conceit of the *Wooden World* is that it is a series of paintings whose subject is 'the most glorious piece of creation, called a *Tar*', and the author asks for the reader's indulgence since 'fam'd Kneller, no doubt, when first he touch'd the pencil, brought forth such imperfect productions'.⁷ Each chapter is devoted to a portrait of a particular naval figure – the purser, surgeon, gunner, etc. – but it is clear from the preface addressed 'To the Reader' that the chief targets are the sea officers, and the chief hero is the poor, put-upon sailor. The author admits that 'we have some captains in the Navy, as much the glory of our Isle, as are the Ships they command'; but places them firmly in the minority. Most captains, he maintains, are similar to the one in his portrait:

A Leviathan or rather a kind of Sea God, whom the poor Tars worship as the Indians do the Devil, more through Fear than Affection ... But this ruler of the Roast, has so little Christian Honesty, as to force sailors not only to work, watch and fight, but even to starve too, for his sole Advantage.⁸

This proud, ignorant, avaricious and cowardly gentleman is a far cry from the noble picture painted by the nineteenth-century naval novelists such as Chamier and Marryat, and some are inclined to dismiss it as an uncharacteristic view. There is no doubt, however, that the navy was not universally admired at this time. The uproar which followed the death of Benbow in 1702 was long-lived and may have encapsulated a popular discontent with some aspects of naval behaviour. In the contest for supremacy between the 'tarpaulins' and the 'gentleman', Benbow epitomised the tarpaulins. Though

⁵ *The Observer*, 15–19 August 1702.

⁶ Anon. [Ned Ward], *The Wooden World Dissected* (London, 1707), 2. In the Introduction to his own *Wooden World*, N.A.M. Rodger dissociates himself from this forerunner, on the grounds that the author, Ned Ward, was a publican who had little knowledge of the navy and his book 'does not deserve to be used as evidence'. It is here for the picture it reveals of how some people perceived, however inaccurately, the navy of their time. The fact that it was reprinted three times is an indication that it was received with interest.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 'To the Reader'. 'Fam'd Kneller' is Godfrey Kneller, court portrait painter to all the monarchs from Charles II to George I.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

probably not as humble of birth as believed at the time, his rise through the ranks (via service in merchant ships) was achieved by demonstrations of courage and seamanship, whereas the officers who failed him in battle owed their place, so it was maintained by some, to birth and interest. Whatever the truth of the case, Benbow's death, and the trial and execution of Kirkby and Wade for deserting him in battle, generated ballads and broadsides that contributed to an enduring myth of the true British sailor. Sam Willis makes a strong case for Benbow as 'the first true English naval hero', a figure created as much in the pages of the burgeoning popular press as in the reality of early eighteenth-century naval conflict.⁹ It was a reputation which still flourished in 1757 when George Shelvocke Junior attempted to gild his father's career in the navy by describing him as 'bred a Seaman under Captain Benbow'.¹⁰

The character of the sailor, as exemplified in 'Jack Tar', emerged in its full panoply in the time of Queen Anne:

Character of an English Seaman, and peculiar to the English Nation.

Jack is a very generous fellow when he has money; will take up with the first trull who falls in his way, and be steady to the last farthing, provided she does not literally pick his pocket. Jack is a great stranger to the passion of fear as he is a stranger to the tender feelings of humanity; yet if a brother falls overboard, he will be the foremost to man a boat, in a dangerous sea, to save a man's life ... Let the weather be ever so bad, or the danger ever so great, Jack will obey orders, if he be a thorough seaman, and go aloft, though he is almost certain the mast will go overboard with him.¹¹

A WANDERER

The contrast between the noble Jack Tar and the autocratic and venial officer is evident. Tobias Smollett spent two years as a surgeon's mate in the navy and provides a fictionalised account of his experiences in his satire, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*.¹² The navy of Smollett's satire is peopled by tyrannical, incompetent and foppish captains, ignorant and vicious surgeons and, in the likes of Tom Bowling and Jack Rattlin, a few fine seamen. Furthermore his witness to the siege of Cartagena in 1744 is a picture of lost opportunities and incompetence which does the navy no credit. His description of the appalling conditions suffered by sailors confined in the insufferable heat of a ship's sick bay is a well-known indictment that should not be dismissed as the unreliable account of a satirist. Smollett was, unquestionably, there. By way of contrast it

⁹ Sam Willis, *The Admiral Benbow: The Life and Times of a Naval Legend* (London, 2010), 318.

¹⁰ George Shelvocke, *A Voyage Round the World by the Way of the Great South Sea*, 2nd edn (London, 1757), preface, ii.

¹¹ The origin of this passage is obscure. It appears as front matter of the ECCO digital copy of a first edition of *The Wooden World* and is followed by some manuscript matter on the same theme. It is possible that the material was included because it was found interleaved with the particular copy used for making the digital version. It is similar in spirit to the sketch provided by Ned Ward in section 14 of *The Wooden World*.

¹² Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (London, 1748).

may be noted that the one well-run vessel sailed in by the hero is a privateer commanded by the heroic Tom Bowling.

The ideal of the British mariner as a descendent of Drake – a swash-buckling hero who fought the Queen's enemies as a privateering adventurer – seems therefore to have survived, somewhat diminished, through the first half of the eighteenth century. At some point – or rather over some period – the public perception changed. Over a time of fluctuating fortunes and mixed success, opinion, not just of the importance but the overall competence, of the navy to do the job assigned to it began to crystallise, and at the same time the enthusiasm for privateers as a second line of maritime defence began to fade. N.A.M. Rodger records a catalogue of complaints about privateers in the Seven Years War, who were accused of 'atrocious conduct' and being 'little better than pirates'.¹³ By the mid-nineteenth century Frederick Marryat produced a portrait of a privateer who lacks morality, discipline or courage and is, by comparison with his naval characters, contemptible.¹⁴ In this he is merely echoing the view of many officers in the navy of his time who saw privateers at best as competitors for prize money, at worst as a 'stain upon the nation's character'. Nelson remarked that 'the conduct of all privateers is, as far as I have seen, so near piracy that I only wonder any civilized nation can allow them'.¹⁵ The public image of the privateer had thus, by the end of the eighteenth century, become tarnished.

It is therefore not surprising that privateers have become, in the eyes of the general public at least, indistinguishable from buccaneers and pirates. Historians, too, have found it difficult to distinguish between privateers, pirates, corsairs, freebooters and filibusters. Even now a respectable biography of Woodes Rogers is given the title *Spanish Gold: Captain Woodes Rogers and the Pirates of the Caribbean*, presumably to be sure of attracting those interested in pirates but uncertain about the role of privateers.¹⁶ N.A.M. Rodger suggests that 'When writers describe privateering as "legalised piracy" they are ... betraying a weak understanding of both law and history, which makes it difficult to think clearly about piracy'.¹⁷ The voyages described here took place at a time, however, when privateering based in Europe was, by and large, a respectable and highly valued activity, and the connection of these three voyages to buccaneers, pirates or the special case of the Caribbean privateers was a glancing one. Rogers and Defoe dismissed sentimental perceptions of the buccaneer current in their own time as being based on 'romantick Accounts' put about by the buccaneers themselves, but Dampier spent much of his seafaring life up to the publication of *A New Voyage* with the buccaneers of the Caribbean and the South Sea and he almost certainly

¹³ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (Fontana, London, 1988), 185–186.

¹⁴ Frederick Marryat, *The Privateersman* (Boston, 1866).

¹⁵ Starkey, *British Privateering Enterprise*, 260.

¹⁶ David Cordingly, *Spanish Gold: Captain Woodes Rogers and the Pirates of the Caribbean* (London, 2011).

¹⁷ N.A.M. Rodger, 'The Law and Language of Private Naval Warfare', *Mariner's Mirror* (February, 2014), 5–16.

sailed with the pirate captain Avery.¹⁸ Shelvocke was accused of betraying his owners and sailing under the 'Jamaica discipline' of the buccaneers. It has recently been suggested that the ostensibly respectable owners of the Rogers voyage devised a constitution for its governance based on the radical democratic principles adopted by many pirates.¹⁹

Private Men of War

In the opening pages of his account of the 1708–11 cruising voyage Woodes Rogers describes his ships as 'Private Men of War', a term that preceded 'privateer' by a number of years and which more precisely describes the status of such ships.²⁰ J.W.D. Powell identifies three kinds of armed merchant ship:

- 1 Hired ships, which were private ships taken into the navy for a period and which were manned by naval officers.
- 2 Private ships of war, further sub-divided into 'letters of marque' and privateers.
- 3 Merchantmen 'upon their lawful occasions' armed for defensive purposes only.²¹

The second category, since it is most germane to this book, needs further explanation. A letter of marque was not just the piece of paper or commission signed by the Lord High Admiral or his deputy which gave the named captain of a named vessel the right to attack the vessels of named enemy countries. It was also applied metonymically to the vessel itself which, since 1695, would often be described as 'a letter of marque'.²² The term was normally applied to those merchantmen whose primary purpose was trade but which had obtained permission to attack enemy merchantmen should an opportunity arise. An interesting example of this was the *Whetstone*, one of whose owners was Woodes Rogers, which obtained a letter of marque in 1707, had eleven prizes condemned in the same year, but cleared from Africa in 1708 with 270 slaves for Jamaica.²³ Slavers needed to employ sufficient people to control the slaves during the middle passage and were well armed. The *Whetstone* had

¹⁸ Joel H. Baer, 'William Dampier at the Crossroads: New Light on the "Missing Years", 1691–97', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 8 (December 1996), 97–117, provides an account of Dampier's connections with Avery.

¹⁹ Lamb, *Preserving the Self*, 167.

²⁰ Woodes Rogers, *A Cruising Voyage Round the World: First to the South-Seas, thence to the East Indies, and Homewards by the Cape of Good Hope. Begun in 1708 and finish'd in 1711* (London, 1711), 2. Page numbers cited in references are, unless otherwise stated, taken from the version edited with an introduction by G.E. Manwaring, Seafarer's Library (London, 1928).

²¹ J.W.D. Powell, *Bristol Privateers and Ships of War* (Bristol, 1930), xv–xvi.

²² Powell, *Bristol Privateers*, xvi.

²³ W.R. Meyer, 'English Privateering in the War of the Spanish Succession 1702–1713', *Mariner's Mirror* LXIX (1983), 435–446; B. Richardson, *Bristol, Africa and the Eighteenth Century Slave Trade* (Bristol Records Society 38, 1986), 13. Ships were described as 'condemned' when they had been judged as lawful prizes in the Admiralty Prize Court.

16 guns, which was substantial for a merchantman at this time. It would thus have made sense to employ their superior manning and firepower to take up whatever opportunity offered itself on the outward or homebound voyages.²⁴

The privateer proper was a ship possessing a letter of marque whose principal aim was to seek out and capture or destroy enemy merchantmen. These were the additional forces that 'formed an effective constituent of England's naval power'.²⁵ Some privateers, such as Rogers's *Duke*, were purpose-built, but many, such as Dampier's *St George*, were converted merchantmen.

Those private investors wishing to set out a privateer obtained a letter of marque or commission by making a declaration to the Lord High Admiral. The declaration would usually state the name of the ship, tonnage, number of guns, quantity of munitions, size of crew and names of the commander, lieutenant, gunner, boatswain, carpenter, cook, surgeon and owners. In recognition of the special status granted by the letter of marque, officers under the captain were often given the title lieutenant rather than mate. Owners were obliged to sign a bond (as much as £3,000 in the case of the Dampier voyage) indemnifying the crown against any breaches of the conditions of the letter of marque. This was to ensure that privateers only attacked ships from those countries named in the commission.

Cruising Voyages

William Dampier's orders, according to William Funnell, the voyage's chronicler:

were to go into the River of *Plate*, to *Buonas Aires*, to take two or three *Spanish* Galleons which Captain *Dampier* gives an account are usually there: And if by that Expedition we got the value of 600000 Pounds then to return again without proceeding further: But if we missed Success there, to cruize upon the Coast of *Peru*, for the *Valdivia* ships.²⁶

The 'Scheme of Voyage' presented on Shelvocke's return set down the aims of his expedition in similar terms. It began: 'Voyage to the South Sea, to cruise on the Spaniards under his Majesty's Commission with two ships'.²⁷ The words 'cruise' (spelt interchangeably with *cruize*) and 'cruising' appear to have been in use for only a few decades before these voyages. The first reference quoted in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is in 1651: 'G. CARTERET in Nicholas Papers (Camden) I. 236 "Van Trump is with his fleete crusinge about Silly"';

²⁴ Kenneth Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1993), 49.

²⁵ Starkey records that between 1702 and 1711 there were 1,260 prizes condemned to the navy and 956 to privateers; *British Privateering*, 89; Meyer, 'English Privateering in the War of the Spanish Succession', 436, claims that privateers took more ships than the navy.

²⁶ William Funnell, *A Voyage Round the World* (London, 1707), 5.

²⁷ George Shelvocke, *A Voyage Round the World*, ed. W.G. Perrin, Seafarer's Library (London, 1928), xii. Page numbers are taken from this edition unless otherwise stated.

and in the more specific predatory sense meant by Dampier and Rogers, in 1668 in the play *She Would if She Could* by George Etherege: 'Two men-of-war that are cruising here to watch for prizes'. 'Cruise', 'cruiser' and 'cruising voyage' had, by the turn of the eighteenth century, diverged somewhat both from their Dutch original and each other. At this time also the navy had begun to apply the term cruiser to smaller warships that could be detached from the line to patrol independently in search of enemy merchantmen or privateers. The Act (Anne 6) of 1708 entitled the 'Cruizers and Convoys Act' is the first official use of the term in this context, for it required the detachment of naval ships from the line or from convoy duty to patrol areas of the British coast in order to defend trading ships from the depredations of French and Spanish privateers. Rogers's use of the term cruising voyage in the title to his book seems to be unique, but its meaning is clear and goes some way to define the particular aims of Dampier's and Shelvocke's voyages as well as Rogers's. They were all cruising voyages in that the ships embarked with the aim of patrolling an area of the South Sea and taking what opportunities for plunder presented themselves. Implicit in the connection with naval usage is the assumption that such voyages were undertaken by warships (Rogers describes his ships as 'private men of war') licensed to attack enemies of the crown. It might, therefore, be mistaken to describe Drake's circumnavigation of 1578–1580 as a cruising voyage, since his right to plunder the Spanish colonies (with which Britain was not at war) was, to say the least, questionable. Neither were voyages of exploration such as Frobisher's or trading expeditions like Narborough's cruising voyages. That of Cavendish, however, probably could be so described, since it carried a commission to attack enemy ships in time of war.

Contemporary usage, therefore, enables us to define a cruising voyage as being an extended predatory expedition with more or less loosely defined objectives put in the form of instructions to the captains by its owners. The instructions would often be precise about the directions to be taken and the seas to be patrolled, to the point of directing the ships to take a specific route into the South Sea, but their statements of objectives were couched in terms that gave the captains considerable flexibility as to targets.

The Prize of all the Oceans

The intentions of Dampier, Rogers and Shelvocke – to enter the South Sea by the southwest route, plunder the coasts and shipping of Spanish South America and, if possible, take a treasure galleon – were nearly identical. There were precedents for such enterprises, the most famous being Drake's circumnavigation of 1578 which brought back sufficient plunder, according to some sources, to double Queen Elizabeth's yearly revenue.²⁸ The only other successful

²⁸ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, Volume One, 660–1649* (London, 1997), 245.