



Glossary of Terms

Below are new words for our Glossary of Terms based on AB Barlow's activities the last couple of weeks. To see all the terms from AB Barlow's past activities, please scroll down to page 2.

Belay – to make fast or tie off a line

Belaying Pin – a wooden or metal pin to which lines are secured aboard ship

Boatswain/Bosun – officer in charge of a ship's deck department. Supervises the hands working on deck and sees to some aspects of ship maintenance

Cleat – a piece of hardware with a 'horn' at either end, often affixed to a ship's deck, rail, or to a dock, to which line can be made fast

Coiling – the act of placing a line or rope into a series of loops for ease of storage

Cordage – a general term for line or rope

Figure Eight – twisting line into the shape of the number '8.' Also, a type of knot often used as a stopper knot

Gantline – a line rove through a single block on a mast used for raising sailors, tools, pieces or rigging, or other necessary items aloft

HMS Beagle – a Royal Navy 10-gun brig-sloop famous for conveying naturalist Charles Darwin around the world

Idler – any member of a ship's company not required to stand regular watch. In many navies, this often included warrant officers, such as the surgeon, gunner, and cook

Kink – an undesirable twist or bend in a line

Lay – the way in which a rope's strands are twisted together (for example, a rope that is laid right-handed has its strands twisted together to the right)

Line – a piece or rope being employed for a specific task aboard ship (for example, a sheet or halyard)

Locking Hitch – a simple knot used for making a line off to a cleat or belaying pin

Pin Rail – a rail - either free-standing or build into a ship bulwark - that holds belaying pins

Seamanship – the skills and techniques used in handling a ship at sea

Steward – in navies of the 17th – 19th centuries, a member of the crew assigned to work as a sort of servant or helper for senior officers

Storm Glass – a discredited meteorological device thought to predict weather based on the crystallization of its contents

#tallshiptuesdays



Words from Previous Glossary of Terms

Aft – near the stern; toward the rear of the vessel

Aft Cabin – often called the captain’s cabin, a large cabin at the stern of the vessel

Anchor – the device by which, when dropped to the bottom, the vessel is held fast

Battle of Trafalgar – a major naval victory for the British over the combined forces of the French and Spanish during the Napoleonic wars

Binnacle – a box near the helm containing the compass

Boarding Pike – a long-handled spear-like weapon used for repelling an enemy boarding party

Boom – a spar used to extend the foot of a fore-and-aft sail or studding sail

Bow – the front of the ship, the rounded part of a vessel forward

Bowsprit – a large and strong spar, standing from the bow of a vessel

Cask – a barrel used for storing provisions aboard ship

Chafing Gear – pads, mats, ropes and other materials tied around pieces of rigging to protect them from rubbing on spars and other parts of the rig

Deck prism – a prism of glass fitted into the deck to allow light into the compartment below

Dirk – a very short sword, traditionally carried by midshipmen in the Royal Navy

Docking – the act of poking holes in biscuits prior to baking to prevent them from rising and to allow the moisture to escape

Dunderfunk – a foodstuff made of pounded biscuit, molasses, beef fat and water mixed together and baked brown in a pan

Fore – toward the front of the vessel, used to distinguish the forward part of a vessel or things in that direction

Foxes – pieces of scrap line made by twisting together several strands or yarns

Guns – armament with a naval carriage; the original *Providence* had 12 four-pound guns and 14 small rail guns

Gunwale – the top edge of a ship’s hull

Hand, Reef & Steer – traditional qualifications of an able seaman, to hand is to take in or furl a sail and to reef is to shorten sail and to steer is to take a turn at the helm

Hardtack – one of many names for an unleavened biscuit made of flower and water, and sometimes salt, eaten at sea by Sailors

Helmsman – the Sailor stationed at the ship’s helm (wheel) in charge of steering and keeping a straight course

Jibboom – the boom rigged out beyond the bowsprit to which the tack of a jib is lashed



Main deck – the largest deck on a vessel

Main hold – cargo hold, also holds provisions, spare parts and sailors

Marline – light, two-stranded line; often tarred and used for seizing

Marlinespike – a tapered metal spike used to separate strands of rope, untie knots and as a handle for hauling away on seizings, whippings, etc.

Mast – a spar set upright from the deck to support rigging, yards and sails

Merchant Service – the industry concerned with commercial shipping ventures (i.e., non-military)

Midshipman – the most junior commissioned officer rank in many navies

Port – the left side of a vessel, looking forward, used in place of “larboard”

Purser – officer-in-charge of the ship’s finances, including purchasing provisions such as biscuits, salt, meat and rum

Quarter Deck – raised deck toward the stern where navigation and command of the vessel take place

Rating – denotes a Sailor’s rank, responsibilities and rate of pay (i.e., able seaman, ordinary seaman, boy, etc.)

Rigging – the lines and ropes that hold the masts, spars and sails

Sail Making – the work of mending, replacing and sewing sails; the sail maker would often advise on how best to set and trim sails

Scotch Coffee – burnt biscuit dissolved in hot water

Sea Chest – a large box used by Sailors to hold their worldly possessions; sea chests were much more common in the merchant and whaling services than in the Navy, where space was limited, and Sailors generally used sea bags instead

Seizing – method of binding two ropes or objects together involving wrapping them tightly with line

Shrouds – a set of ropes reaching from the mastheads to the vessel’s sides to support the mast

Spar – the general term for all masts, yards, booms, gaffs, and other such timbers

Spike Hitch – a simple knot for transforming a marlinespike into a handle for pulling line tight

Splice – weaving together to strands of separate ropes to form one longer rope

Starboard – on the right side of the boat, looking forward

Stern – the aft end of a vessel

USS Constitution – the oldest commissioned naval vessel now afloat; one of six frigates authorized by the Naval Act of 1794; the ship is also known as Old Iron Sides

Tiller – a bar of wood or iron put into the head of the rudder, by which the rudder is moved to steer the vessel

Watches – division of labor aboard ship; the ship’s company is broken into several (usually three) watches, which take turns sailing the ship, standing by and resting



Weevils – small beetles known to infest ship's biscuits

West Indies – the Caribbean, including the Greater Antilles, Lesser Antilles and the Lucayan Archipelagos

Whipping – a type of binding used on the ends of rope to prevent them from fraying or unraveling

Windlass – the machine used in merchant vessels to weigh the anchor

Yards – long spars affixed horizontally across the masts, which hold up the ship's square sails