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Rif Winfield. **British Warships in the Age of Sail, 1793-1817: Design, Construction, Careers, and Fates**, London: Chatham Publishing, 2005. 418 pp.

Review by Charles E. Brodine, Jr.
Naval Historical Center

This highly detailed reference work catalogs and describes the more than two thousand vessels that served in the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars. Individual entries list and summarize the basic data relating to each ship's design, construction, armament, manning, and operations. This data, extracted and compiled from the British Admiralty and Navy Board records, includes such particulars as the names of architects and supervising shipwrights; places and dates of construction; principal measurements and dimensions; number, caliber, and arrangement of guns; dates of major refits and repairs; names of commanding officers; and places and dates of principal stations and operations.

Rif Winfield, an independent scholar and author of *The 50-Gun Ship* (Chatham, 1997), is well-qualified to produce the work under review, having collaborated with the late David Lyon of the National Maritime Museum on two similar reference books, *The Sailing Navy List: All the Ships of the Royal Navy—Built, Purchased and Captured—1688-1860* (Conway, 1993), and *The Sail & Steam Navy List: All the Ships of the Royal Navy 1815-1889* (Chatham, 2004). The latter title Winfield completed for publication following Lyon's death in 2000. Winfield has modeled the content and format of *British Warships in the Age of Sail* on these earlier collaborative efforts with Lyon.

The book itself is divided into twelve chapters. The first six chapters are devoted to rated vessels, first through sixth. The remaining six chapters cover ship-sloops, gun-brigs, cutters, schooners, and miscellaneous and auxiliary vessels. Each chapter is headed by a brief introduction highlighting the particular qualities of the category of vessel under consideration. Within each chapter vessels are described by class, that is, according to a set of common plans upon whose lines they were built. Vessels captured, purchased, or hired into service are grouped with craft in whose class they would most logically fit. The only noteworthy absences from Winfield's compilation are vessels whose provenance is uncertain due to the scarcity or incompleteness of contemporary records.

One of the strengths of *British Warships in the Age of Sail* is the illustrative material accompanying the text. Period paintings, prints, and sketches depict the various categories of Royal Navy ships in peace and wartime activities. Contemporary Admiralty draughts and modern ship plans and models highlight important features of ship design

and architecture. Winfield's captions deserve special mention as they often offer insightful analysis on the build, performance, and capabilities of the vessels pictured. Readers will learn from captions, for example, why sixth rates were often chosen to make voyages of discovery (p. 227); why ship-sloops tended to be employed in secondary roles on distant stations (p. 261); and why captured American schooners were considered highly prized additions to the fleet (pp. 368, 369).

While the publication of *British Warships in the Age of Sail* should be greeted with enthusiasm by naval historians and specialists of this period, a cautionary note about the accuracy of its contents should be sounded. The tables and reference materials in the book's front matter contain numerous mistakes. More than a fourth of the entries in Winfield's bibliography give incomplete or inaccurate information. William Laird Clowes's *The Royal Navy*, for example, is alphabetized under that author's middle name instead of his surname, and incorrect dates are given for the volumes cited. A chronology of events appearing in the front matter has a number of misspellings and wrong dates. Sir John Thomas Duckworth is given as Duckham, the U.S. declaration of war on Great Britain is given as 19 June 1812 instead of the 18th. A table profiling the size of the Royal Navy between 1793 and 1817, and based on figures in William James's *The Naval History of Great Britain*, erroneously reproduces some of the figures for the years 1796, 1798, and 1800. It also conflates two columns of figures ("vessels in commission" and "vessels in ordinary") that James gives for stationary harbor ships into one, thus dropping any distinction between active and inactive ships for this category of vessel. More careful copyediting and fact-checking might have eliminated these errors.

More troubling are the discrepancies in data for ships that Winfield profiled both in *British Warships in the Age of Sail* and *The Sail & Steam Navy List*, books published only a year apart. Sometimes the difference in figures and dates is small, as in the launch date of the first rate *Ville de Paris*, which *British Warships in the Age of Sail* cites as 7 July 1795, while *The Sail & Steam Navy List* gives the date as 17 July 1795. The disparity, though, can sometimes be significant. *British Warships in the Age of Sail* gives 6 November 1794 and £96,381 as the order date and first cost of the first rate *Caledonia*, while *The Sail & Steam Navy List* gives the date and cost as 19 January 1797 and £81,507. Similar inconsistencies appear in figures and dates for the ten other British-built first rates profiled in both books, the only category of vessel for which this reviewer systematically compared figures. A researcher consulting both of these works for information on identical ships, then, is left to puzzle over which volume to use when their data conflict.

One cannot turn the pages of *British Warships in the Age of Sail* without marveling at the sheer amount of information it contains. Few scholars would have the tenacity and patience to compile a reference work of this scope and detail. It will no doubt become the book of first resort for those seeking basic building, technical, and service data on Royal Navy vessels of the Napoleonic era.



The Editors
International Journal of Naval History
editors@ijnhonline.org

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