

Thomas Kydd's Ships

by Julian Stockwin

Editor's Note: Julian Stockwin (left) has a special affinity with the sea – and ships. And this relationship shines throughout his Thomas Kydd series and particularly appeals to readers. The sea is almost a character in itself in his books and each ship has her own distinctive personality. Quarterdeck asked Julian to describe some of the main ships in the series in which Kydd serves. (Illustrations are details from cover art for the Kydd novels by British marine artist Geoff Hunt, which are available as fine art prints.)

Duke William



Duke William, which first appeared in *Kydd*, is 1900 tons, 175 feet long with a 50 foot beam and draught of 16 feet. She carries 98 guns. A 2nd rate, she's smaller, shorter and slower than a 1st rate ship-o'-the-line. *Duke William* is based on the real *Royal William* which was built in 1719, an

old ship indeed, but Britain needed everything that floated. *Duke William's* slow and stately, a pig to sail in fleet order because she sags to leeward and is slow in stays. In a way this was good as Kydd's first ship, as nothing happens fast aboard and there's room to make mistakes, whereas in a small ship there's no spare hands and everyone must pull their weight. As she was always part of a fleet there was no chance of independent cruising for prizes. Not a ship to love, but like an old mare she plodded along gamely.

Artemis



Artemis, which appears in the book of the same name, is 937 tons, 120 feet long with a 38-foot beam and a draught of 11 feet. She carries 32 guns. A classic frigate, I based her on *Nymphé* of Pellew fame, but by this time these vessels were really getting obsolete and ill-matched against the new French heavy frigates.

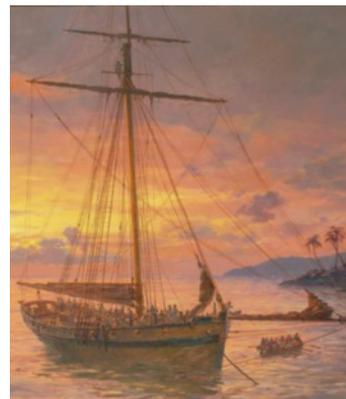
Lighter frigates like *Artemis* were flightsome (or eager to sail

off course), and needed careful handling. They could be very fast in the right weather, but could not stay with the fleet if it came on to blow. She was certainly a ship to love for she responded quickly to the helm, leaned into the wind and flew, but was not a comfortable ship in heavy seas or for long voyages.

Trajan

Trajan, which appears in *Seaflower*, is 1770 tons, 150 long with a 47-foot beam and draught of 19 feet. She carries 74 guns. She's a workhorse line-of-battle ship – like the ones in a fleet action at the centre of the fight – but in the Caribbean she was waiting for a Trafalgar that never came. Built in Britain, she was not well suited to life in the tropics and rot made its way into her vitals and she was condemned. Not a move up for Kydd after *Artemis*, but a willing enough vessel.

Seaflower



Seaflower, appearing in the book of the same name, is 203 tons, 72 feet long with a 25-foot beam. She carries 16 six-pounder guns. She is classed as a cutter; these were usually clinker built (planks overlapped like a rowing boat), which were easier to repair but limited their strength. She could be used anywhere for all kinds

of tasks: against privateers, dispatches, anything that would release a more important frigate. I used the actual ship in my story; she had an impressive amount of service, was captured, recaptured and saw out the war to be finally sold at its end. Her character is rather like a large yacht, fore-and-aft rigged as a cutter, but she mounted eight guns a side and needed to

Ship's Boats

In Kydd's day ship's boats were used for many purposes such as 'cutting out' attacks, carrying men and stores ashore, moving the ship by means of cables and anchors, communicating between ships, and sounding shallow water channels. The four main types of ship's boats were launches, barges, pinnaces and cutters – all with separate functions.

† The launch was the largest boat and was well equipped for carrying heavy loads. It had a windlass to assist in raising anchors and a davit, a small wooden crane, for retrieving the anchor buoy. Generally the launch was rowed by 16 oarsmen, eight on each side.

† The barge was narrower, and often longer than the launch. It was mainly used for carrying naval officers ashore. It was usually rowed with twelve oarsmen, six on each side.

† The pinnace was slightly smaller than the barge and had fewer oars.

† Cutters were good sea boats. They were used to provide speedy ship to ship communication, amongst other tasks. Ship's boats were designed for both rowing and sailing although some were more suitable at one than the other. Pinnaces and barges were used primarily for rowing, cutters were better at sailing.

Some ships had other types of boats, such as the jolly boat



Ship's boats detail from marine artist Geoffrey Huband's fine art print, "Passage to Mutiny."

(essentially a small cutter) and a gig (a light, narrow boat built for speed).

Ship's boats did not often function as lifeboats; they could not carry many crew and lowering a boat took too much time to try to save any unfortunate sailor who fell over board. Most could not swim.

If a ship needed to be towed all boats were used. The English method of towing was to have the boats in single file ahead of the ship, connected with a tow cable. Becalmed ships sometimes had to resort to kedging, the ship's boats used in warping the ship from one position to another.

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home 70 men. She did so in very Spartan conditions, which were made worse by her rig, which gave her a considerable heel-over compared to the stately lean of a square-rigger. Yet her small size, throwing men together, with a considerate captain, made for a close bond.

Teazer

Teazer, Kydd's first command appears in *Command*, and is



280 tons, 76 feet long, with a 28-foot beam, and a 13-foot draught.

Carrying 16 six-pounders and carronades, she is a brig sloop, the most numerous class of ships in the Navy, with the highest ratio of guns to tonnage of any ship. She is employed in the greatest range of tasks, as well – dispatches, trade

protection, special operations and carriage of important

passengers. Malta-built, she is unusually snug compared to her more utilitarian British-built brethren. One of her class was Nelson's first command, and like Kydd he was well served by her handy brig rig, much more maneuverable than a ship-sloop, which was really a miniature frigate without the power.

L'Aurore

L'Aurore is 850 tons, 132 feet long, with a 33-foot beam and 18-foot draught. Carrying 32 twelve-pounder guns, she's classed as a light frigate of a kind quickly going out of fashion as being too slender in the frame against the newer 18-pounder frigates. A fine entry forward with a full run aft, she had a tendency to be wet over the bows and to roll badly when sailing large, but was exceptionally fast in light winds. Her light spars allowed her to stay unusually close to the wind. She was weatherly, but limited in staying power in foul weather. She was comfortable, but her smaller hold always gave her captain anxiety for endurance in deep-sea voyaging.

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