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978-1-108-07701-9 - Naval Chronology: Or, an Historical Summary of Naval and Maritime Events from the Time of the Romans, to the Treaty of Peace 1802: Volume 1

Isaac Schomberg

Excerpt

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# SUMMARY

OF

## NAVAL & MARITIME EVENTS.

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*V O L. I.*

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ROMANS.

**M**ANY ancient historians are of opinion that the Britons were possessed of a naval force previous to the landing of Julius Cæsar, as they were frequently engaged in war with their neighbours. The construction of their vessels and maritime skill must have been very rude and imperfect in these remote ages; some authors assert that their coasting and fishing vessels were made of wicker, and covered over with hides.

About the year of our Lord 288, they began to see the necessity and advantage their country would derive from having the command of the sea, which at this time was much infested by pirates; and in order to extirpate them, Maximian, the Roman Emperor, gave the command of a large fleet to Carausius, a Menasian of mean descent, but a man of enterprising genius, who, instead of performing the service with which he was entrusted, employed his time in plundering these robbers. Maximian dissatisfied with his conduct, and jealous of his consequence in the fleet, had formed a plan for his assassination. Carausius being informed of the emperor's designs, had art enough to persuade his followers to second his resolution of landing in Britain, where the powerful fleet which he brought, secured him a welcome reception from the Britons.—Maximian, after many fruitless attempts to defeat Carausius, was obliged to acknowledge him Emperor of Britain. After making peace with the Scots and Picts,

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Carausius

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Carauſius turned his attention to the encrease of his navy, and made a treaty with the Franks, (who were at this time powerful at ſea) by which it was ſtipulated to form a junction of their naval forces, againſt the Romans, and ſail into the Mediterranean. The Romans greatly alarmed at this formidable confederacy, purſued every neceſſary meaſure for proſecuting the war with vigour. Maximian equipped a fleet upon the Rhine of a thouſand ſail, while Conſtantius marched into Gaul, and beſieged Carauſius in Boulogne, where he ſo compleatly blocked him up, that Carauſius apprehenſive of falling into the hands of the Romans, forced his way through the camp with a few brave followers, and made his eſcape to Britain in a ſmall veſſel.

Conſtantius ſtationed his ſquadrons ſo judiciously on the coaſts of Britain, Spain and Gaul, that they prevented the junction of Carauſius and the Franks, and then ſailed for the Mediterranean, where he totally defeated the latter.

Carauſius being thus baffled in his hope of uniting his fleet to that of his allies, was employing his time in ſtrengthening his navy, and preparing for the defence of Britain, when he was murdered by Alecſas, an officer of high rank, and his intimate friend, after a reign of ſeven years, during which time he maintained the dominion of the ſea. Alecſas aſſumed the regal power, but was ſoon after defeated and killed in a battle with the Romans.

Britain having again fallen under their power, the Romans appointed officers to the civil and military departments, fortified ſeveral of the ſea-ports, and greatly encreaſed the marine.

A.D.

430

The Romans, too much engaged with wars at home, withdrew from Britain, and left it to ſtruggle with its powerful enemies.

443

In the reign of Vortigern, a number of Saxons having been driven from their country by an ancient law, (headed by Hengiſt and Hoſa, two brothers) took refuge in Britain. Vortigern received them very hoſpitably, and being enamoured with the daughter of Hengiſt, he put away his own wife and married her, which ſo enraged the Britons, that they depoſed him, and placed Vortimer his ſon upon the throne: this young prince having raiſed an army and equipped a fleet, defeated the Saxons in four battles, who at length fled to the Iſle of Thanet, where he purſued them, defeated their fleet, and obliged them to quit the kingdom.

Vortimer

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## NAVAL CHRONOLOGY.

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Vortimer was soon after poisoned by the intrigues of his mother-in-law, and Vortigern recalled the Saxons, who established themselves firmly in Britain for above 300 years.

Offa the eleventh king of the Mercians, a wise, valiant, and enterprising prince, being engaged in a war with the Saxons, who were in alliance with the princes in Wales, baffled the efforts of uniting their forces, by throwing up a strong entrenchment, which began from the mouth of the river Dee, and running along the mountains, ended at the fall of the Wye near Bristol, which still bears the name of Offa's ditch. The Saxons being thus precluded from a possibility of joining their allies, applied to Charlemagne King of France for assistance, who wrote to Offa, commanding him to desist from his enterprises; but this magnanimous prince disregarded the threats of Charlemagne, and applied himself closely in raising a powerful fleet as the only means to secure his dominions from foreign attempts. Offa had made himself so formidable, that Charlemagne found it necessary soon after to negotiate a peace with him; this evidently shews how necessary it was in those early ages, for Britain to maintain her consequence by the superiority of her navy.

The Danes first landed in England, but the intrepidity of Offa obliged them to quit the island. 787

Offa died after a glorious reign of thirty-nine years, soon after which the Danes landed again in the north of England, where, after having pillaged and laid waste the country, they sailed to the south west coast. 795

Egbert, who was then king of the West Saxons, fitted out a fleet to oppose the Danes, and having fallen in with 35 of their ships off Charmouth, totally defeated them. Two years after they again landed in Wales, where they were joined by the Britons. King Egbert landed a powerful army on the Welch coast, attacked and completely routed their united forces, obliging the Britons to fly to their mountains, and the Danes to their ships. It is said that Ethelstone, son to the king, and who afterwards ascended to the throne, commanded the British fleet, and in a most bloody battle off Sandwich defeated the Danes, took nine of their ships, and drove the other from the coast. The ill success they met with in their repeated attempts to invade Britain, did not by any means check their perseverance and enterprising spirit; for not long after they

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appeared

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## NAVAL CHRONOLOGY.

A. D. appeared on the coast with a fleet of three hundred and fifty  
 833 fail; they landed and took Canterbury, and several other  
 to towns, and after successive invasions, London. The Danes  
 851 from this period remained in quiet possession of a great part  
 of the coast; until the reign of Alfred the Great.—The  
 maritime knowledge of this illustrious prince, and the num-  
 erous victories he gained over his enemies, are fully de-  
 tailed in several naval histories\*.

871 Alfred constructed ships, or rather galleys of a much lar-  
 to ger size than any that had been yet seen, and capable of row-  
 901 ing above sixty oars †. With these galleys he entirely freed  
 the channel of a nest of daring pirates, with which the coast  
 of Devonshire and the Isle of Wight had been infested.

Alfred is supposed to be the first who sent to discover the  
 utmost extent of the Arctick regions, and the possibility of a  
 passage on that side to the north-east: this voyage, some  
 writers tell us, was undertaken by Other, a native of Hal-  
 goland, who was directed by Alfred to survey the coast of  
 Norway, and Lapland. On his return he gave a clear de-  
 scription of those countries and their inhabitants, with an  
 account of the whale fishery. The king soon after sent  
 Wolfstan, an Englishman, to explore these northern re-  
 gions, whose relation corresponded with that of Other.—  
 To point out the degree of perfection that navigation had  
 made in his reign, it may be observed, that the Christians  
 being in great distress at St. Thomas's, on the peninsula of  
 India, Alfred sent out vessels to their relief. This expedition,  
 which succeeded beyond his hopes, opened, in all proba-  
 bility, the great source of commerce now resulting from  
 that quarter of the world.

## EDWARD.

901 At the death of Alfred, his son Edward succeeded to the  
 throne, who paid great attention to his navy, and defeated  
 the Danes in many sea engagements, particularly on the  
 coast of Kent, where he had collected above an hundred  
 fail, and in a most bloody action dispersed and drove on

\* See Kent's *Biographia Nautica*, vol. 1. page 16 to 21.—Camp-  
 bell's *Lives of the Admirals*, vol. 1. page 39 to 47.

† The Abbe Raynal is of opinion that this, together with the ef-  
 forts of Charlemagne, in France, and some cities of Italy, with a view  
 to repel the attacks of the Arabs and the Normans, occasioned the re-  
 vival of naval skill in Europe.

shore

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## NAVAL CHRONOLOGY.

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shore the greatest part of the Danish fleet, killing their king, and most of their chiefs\*. A.D. 001

## ATHELSTON.

Athelston succeeded his brother Edward, and was not less attentive to the support of his navy; he defeated the combined fleets and armies of the Danes and Scots, in which battle five kings and seven Danish chiefs were killed †. 938

## EDGAR.

Edgar the Great mounted the throne, whose naval force is said to have consisted of three thousand six hundred sail, which was formed into three divisions; one on the east, another on the west, and the third on the north coast of his kingdom. In order to secure his dominions from foreign attacks, and keep his sailors in constant exercise, Edgar embarked every year after Easter on board the fleet stationed on the east coast, and sailing to the west, visiting all the creeks and harbours in the Channel, from the Thames to the Land's End, from thence going on board the western fleet, and steering to the north, round Ireland and the Hebrides, he there met the northern fleet, and returned with it into the Thames: by thus surrounding the island with his fleet, he preserved the dominion of the sea. 957

Edgar's naval superiority was such, that when he held his court at Chester, he caused the Kings of Scotland, Cumberland, Isle of Man, and five petty Kings of Britain, to row him in a barge, which he steered himself from Chester, along the river Dee, to the abbey of St. John the Baptist, where they bound themselves to defend his rights by land and sea. In his edicts he always asserted the dominion of the sea †.

At the death of Edgar, the navy of Britain was so much diminished, that the country was soon laid open to the invasions of the Danes, and the seas were filled with pirates. It at length became so far necessary to establish a naval force, that a law was passed compelling every proprietor of 1005

See Kent's Bio. Naut. vol. 1. page 21, Cam. Admirals, vol. 1. page 47.

† See Kent's Bio. Naut. vol. 1. page 21. Cam. Admirals, vol. 1. page 48.

‡ "I Edgar, Monarch of all Albion, and Sovereign over all the adjacent Isles, &c."

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## NAVAL CHRONOLOGY.

- A.D. three hundred and ten hides of land, to furnish a stout ship  
 1008 or galley of three rows of oars, and the proprietor of every eight hides, to provide a coat of mail and helmet; this raised a fleet of seven hundred and eighty-five sail, which  
 1017 were employed unsuccessfully, and suffered to decay in the harbours, until the reign of Canute, when the continued wars between the Danes and Saxons compelled him and his successors to support a marine; but as nothing worthy observation occurred during these reigns, it will be necessary to pass on to the landing of William Duke of Normandy, who after the famous battle of Hastings, fixed himself on the throne of England.

## WILLIAM I.

- 1066 The great attention he paid to his navy, rendered him formidable to the Danes, who made frequent attempts to invade the kingdom\*. This prince, considering Kent as the key to England. established the Cinque Ports†, which in case of any emergency, were obliged to furnish fifty-two ships, with twenty-four men in each, for fifteen days.  
 1100 The Goodwin Sands were first formed, which had hitherto been dry land, the property of Goodwin Earl of Kent. They were occasioned by a violent inundation of the sea, which rose to an unusual height, and swept away the inhabitants, cattle, &c. They have ever since been overflowed by the tide, and prove often fatal to mariners‡.

## HENRY I.

- 1170 America is supposed to have been first discovered by Maddock, a Welchman, who sailed due west for a considerable time, till he arrived at a large, fruitful, and pleasant country; he returned home, and from the favourable report he made of it, prevailed on many of his countrymen to accompany him; they embarked in ten ships, but were never more heard of§.

\* See Cam. Adm. vol. 1. page 76 to 84. Kent's Bio. Naut. vol. 1. page 47 to 54.

† Dover, Hastings, Hythe, Romney and Sandwich; Winchelsea and Rye were afterwards annexed to them, and since that time Seaford has been added.

‡ See Anderson's Origin of Commerce, vol. 1. page 137.

§ See Cam. Adm. vol. 1. page 195. Anderson's Origin of Commerce.

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## NAVAL CHRONOLOGY.

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It had been hitherto the custom, if a ship was stranded upon the coast of England, for her and the cargo to become the property of the lord of the manor, unless those who had escaped from it, returned within a limited time; but Henry ordained, that every wreck, having any living creature on board, should continue to be the property of the owners. A.D. 1170

## HENRY II.

In consequence of a ship being wrecked on the coast, near one of the manors of Battle Abbey, and the atrocious conduct of the savage inhabitants to the unfortunate crew, the king enacted, in amendment to the preceding law, that if on the coasts of the English ocean, or of Poictou, or of the island of Oleron, or of Gascony, any ship should be distressed or endangered, and no man escape from thence alive; yet if any beast should swim to shore, or be found in the ship alive, the goods should be delivered by his bailiffs, or the bailiffs of those persons on whose lands the ship was driven, into the custody of four men of established character, in order that they might be restored to the owners, if demanded by them, within the term of three months. 1174

## RICHARD I.

Richard I. surnamed Cœur de Lion, succeeded his father Henry: he entered into a treaty of alliance with Philip of France, to unite their forces on an expedition to the Holy Land. Richard's naval armament consisted of more than one hundred large ships, and fifty galleys. As the naval laws which he established for the government of this fleet are very singular, I shall insert them for the information of my readers. 1190

“ Whosoever committed a murder on board a ship, was sentenced to be tied to the person of the murdered body, and thrown into the sea.

“ A mariner or soldier killing another on shore, was adjudged to be fastened in like manner alive to the corpse, and buried with it in the earth.

“ Whosoever was convicted by a legal evidence of having drawn a knife, or other dangerous weapon, with an intention to strike any person, to the shedding of the least blood, was condemned to lose his head.

“ Whosoever struck any person with his hand, although

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A. D. “ no blood might have issued from the part so stricken, was  
1190 “ sentenced to be thrice plunged into the sea.

“ The same punishment was inflicted on players at any  
“ unlicensed game.

“ Whosoever addressed any reproachful language to any  
“ other person, or vented curses against him, was for every  
“ such contumely or curse, fined an ounce of silver.

“ Whosoever was lawfully convicted of stealing, was  
“ sentenced to have his head shorn, covered with boiling  
“ tar, and feathered; and afterwards to be driven, with  
“ these marks of punishment to the next landing place, and  
“ there left.”

This formidable fleet was separated on its voyage to Mar-  
seilles, in a gale of wind, but at last, joined Richard at the  
Tyber, from whence he proceeded to Sicily, where he  
compelled Tancred King of Messina to give him 60,000  
ounces of gold and four large galleys; and on his sailing  
from Cyprus he increased his fleet to 250 ships and 60 gal-  
lies; from thence on his passage to Ptolemais, he fell in  
with a ship belonging to the Saracens, of a most extra-  
ordinary size, which he attacked and took; she was de-  
fended by 1,500 men, 1,300 of whom King Richard or-  
dered to be drowned, the remainder being persons of dis-  
tinction, he kept prisoners.

1191 After having obliged the city of Ptolemais to surrender,  
and destroyed the fleet of the Infidels, he was acknowledged  
captain-general of all the Christian forces in Asia, where he  
performed those heroic exploits which have been the won-  
der of all succeeding ages.

1192 On Richard's return from the Holy Land, he was ship-  
wrecked on the coast of Istria, in the Adriatick, and with  
difficulty saved his life; here he took the name of Hugo,  
and attempted to travel through Germany in disguise, but  
he was discovered and seized by Leopold Duke of Austria,  
who to revenge himself for some former quarrel, threw  
Richard into prison, and detained him for fifteen months;  
he then sold him to Henry VI. of Germany; his subjects,

1104 however, ransomed him soon after for 300,000l. Richard  
had scarcely embarked from Antwerp, before Henry re-  
penting of having suffered him to depart, sent a strong party  
to arrest him, but fortunately he escaped from his pursuers,  
and arrived safe at Sandwich on the 20th of March.

JOHN



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## NAVAL CHRONOLOGY.

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## JOHN.

To show that England claimed the sovereignty of the sea, it was so early as this reign enacted, that if any commanders of the fleets should meet with those of foreign nations at sea, the masters of which refused to strike to the British flag, such ships or vessels, if taken, should be deemed good and lawful prizes, though the state to which they belonged was at peace with England\*.

A.D.  
1200

Philip of France, jealous of the maritime power of the English, equipped a fleet of near seventeen hundred sail, with which he intended to invade England; but being desirous of subduing the Earl of Flanders, he proceeded with this fleet to Gravelines, and from thence to the haven of Dam. King John had entrusted the command of the English fleet (consisting of five hundred sail) to the Earl of Salisbury, who attacked that of the French, took three hundred sail, and drove one hundred on shore. Philip was under the necessity of destroying the remainder, to avoid their falling into the hands of the English.

1213

## HENRY III.

The French having invaded England, Hubert de Burgh, governor of Dover Castle, discovering a fleet of eighty stout ships standing over to the coast of Kent, put to sea with forty ships, and having gained the wind of them, ran down several of the smaller ships, and closing with the others, threw on board a quantity of quick lime, which blowing in their faces, blinded them so effectually, that they found themselves obliged to bear away; but being instantly boarded by the English, they were all either taken or sunk. Several sea actions were fought during this reign, but of no great moment; and the Cinque ports withdrew themselves from their allegiance†.

1217

## EDWARD I.

In this year the first mention is made of an admiral in France.

1286

See Cam. Adm. vol. 1. page 112. Kent's Bio. Naut. vol. 1, p. 96.

† See Cam. Adm. vol. 1. page 120 to 125. Kent's B.O. Naut. vol. 1. page 106 to 119.

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## NAVAL CHRONOLOGY.

**A.D.** It was in this year that the office of the admiral of the  
 1286 English seas is first mentioned, where William de Lagbourne was styled Admiral de le mer du dit Roy d' Angleterre, at an ordinance made at Bruges concerning the conduct of the ships of England and Flanders.

1293 A remarkable and bloody action was fought between the English and Norman fleets, in consequence of a quarrel originating in the death of an English seaman, who had been killed in a Norman port. Depredations were carried to such a length on both sides, that at last the nations agreed on a certain day to decide this dispute with their whole force; accordingly the 14th of April was the day fixed upon, and a large empty ship was placed in the middle of the channel between the two coasts, to mark the spot for the engagement. The two fleets met, and after a most severe conflict, the victory was obtained by the English, who carried off above two hundred and fifty sail\*.

1295 Edward refusing to do homage to Philip of France, the latter declared war, and made preparations to invade England. The King, to prevent any descents on the coasts, besides three formidable fleets which were to protect his own kingdom, equipped another, consisting of above three hundred and thirty ships, with an army of seven thousand troops, under the command of the Earl of Lancaster, who failed to the mouth of the Garonne, where having landed the troops, he took Bang and Blaye, and afterwards sailing for Bourdeaux, took that town and Bayonne.

Edward was the first monarch who granted letters of marque or reprisal, in consequence of a ship having been taken and carried into Lisbon, by some Portuguese armed vessels†.

1296 A French fleet, consisting of three hundred sail, under the command of Mathew de Montmorenci, and John de Harcourt, assisted by Sir Thomas Tuberville, a traitor to his country, landed at Dover, and reduced it to ashes; but the English soon compelled them to fly to their ships, with considerable loss.

1297 King Edward embarked at Winchelsea, with above fifty thousand men, on board a powerful fleet, for the invasion

See Cam. vol. 1. page 129. Kent's Bio. Naut. vol. 1. page 168.  
 § App. Chap. IV. No. 1.

† See Harvey's Nav. Hist. vol. 1. page 105.

of