

one geared more toward a neophyte than the specialist. The book is filled with numerous small details about the ships that have only tangential importance to his subject, which is of a piece with the trivial details that are repeated periodically in the text. A sharper editor's pen would have made for a better book, which is useful as an overview of the initial deployment of TF 58 but lacks the depth of analysis to make it stand out in a crowded field on the Pacific War.

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**Nancollas, Tom. *The Ship Asunder: A Maritime History of Britain in Eleven Vessels***

**Penguin Books, 2022**

325 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index

ISBN 9780241434147 (hardcover) £20.00; 9780241434154 (softcover) £10.99; 9780141992174 (e-book) £9.99; 9781802060492 (audio download, 653 minutes) £13.00

The last few years have seen a flood of glossy, illustrated titles with a standard format – A history of [insert subject] in [pick a number] objects. The device of using material history as a lens through which to view a wider subject has perhaps been a boon to museologists but in general has resulted in a quantity of relatively poor volumes with little more than curiosity value. That is most certainly not the case in Tom Nancollas's *The Ship Asunder*, which, while using material history to frame maritime history, does so in a way that is both intriguing and useful.

Nancollas has Cornish ancestry, and this has informed his perspective on the value of maritime history, although as an historic conservator it is not his primary field of endeavour. This combination of interests led to his previous volume, *Seashaken Houses*, a 2018 history of Britain's rockbound lighthouses. Although the author grounds this book in artifacts, he reminds us of the extent to which ships are perishable things and how little of our nautical past remains. And this absence is not just of the ships themselves, but in coastal places which are "like empty sherry casks, drained of a potency yet still fragrant with the scent" (10).

The success of the volume lies in the degree to which Nancollas is able to nimbly carry the reader from one place and one time to quite another. His skill as a writer makes this volume a hard one to put down although each

chapter makes one frequently pause and weigh the contents carefully. One chapter, which begins with a fragment saved from a derelict fishing boat, is in fact about the changing character, both physical and social (if not spiritual), of a West Country port standing almost alone against the tide of development. Another chapter, ostensibly about the Lloyd's corporate talisman – the *Lutine* bell – is a succinct history of Britain's role in the international slave trade. The story is woven through with carefully and skillfully chosen details, which include the identity of a free Black salvage diver from the late 1500s through the attempts to salvage the *Mary Rose*. This attempt included the use of another of Henry VIII's fleet, the *Jesus of Lubeck*, a vessel which was later used by John Hawkins for transport of slaves from West Africa. Nancollas then traces the truly awful engagement of British merchants, shipowners, manufacturers, and even insurers in perpetuating the slave economy.

This is not a dispassionate book, either on the part of the writer or the reader. The fervour may come as a bit of a shock to someone expecting an arm's-length academic treatment. The passion is not always that of outrage, and it recognizes that the role of the sea in British history is an ever-changing factor, albeit a diminishing force, and that the views of glory, disaster, triumph, and tragedy do not hold constant through time. The book is Nancollas's way of memorializing nautical history in this time and in this place.

Nancollas weaves things, places, people, and ideas together. It is a model for demonstrating how the physical presence of "things" – material history – can re-invigorate the study of nautical history by making it relevant beyond the increasingly narrow focus it appears to be taking. This is a refreshing change from yet another study with more and more details about less and less, whether an obscure naval engagement, a design study of a class of warship, or an examination of the minutia of the sinking of the *Titanic*. This is a book that embraces the art of the figurehead, the design of the propeller, the geography of the shipyard, and the politics of exploration. It progresses from Roman vessel construction through the medieval, Tudor, Victorian and the modern eras with stops at locations throughout the British Isles. These locations are not just at artifact-rich museums, but also at barren headlands where the meeting of land and sea is a human experience. This is nautical history that can be found in Robin Hood's Bay, Chatham Dockyard, and the village of Newlyn in Cornwall, but also in the grounds of the Liverpool Football Club, Oxford, Regent Street, and the City of London.

The book is about objects, but it is also about the absence of objects and how our choices of what to preserve and protect tell us about our values. For example, Nancollas laments the paucity of material evidence of British

slaving, recognizing that the simple toppling of statues is hardly an appropriate gesture of contrition. He suggests a more active approach to recognizing and salvaging shipwreck sites, writing “Every time we bring up a slave-ship or its relics from the deep, toll the Lutine Bell twice, for the arrival of a vessel long overdue” (142).

Unusually for a volume which is aimed at a broad audience rather than academic specialists, the book contains an extensive bibliography ranging from Juvenal and Virgil to the most recent articles and sources, many of them online. Another departure from the popular “show and tell” books is that it has an index, which is actually useful.

This is a remarkably engaging and readable book. It can serve both as an introduction to nautical history and as a refresher of how wide the scope of research on the subject can be.

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**Pinkerton, Gary L. *Paper Diver: How the World's Greatest Underwater Treasure Hunter Never Got Wet***

**McFarland & Co., 2024**

vii + 255 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index

ISBN 9781476694023 (softcover) US\$39.95; 9781476652160 (e-book)

Harry Earl Rieseberg's claims to be a treasure-finding genius from the 1930s to the 1960s illustrate how spurious make-believe, published convincingly, widely, and repeatedly, influences people. This unusual and broad biography by Gary L. Pinkerton, subtitled *How the World's Greatest Underwater Treasure Hunter Never Got Wet*, explains Rieseberg and those he influenced, including Robert Marx, Gilbert Doukan, Robert Stenuit, and E. Lee Spence. Marx describes how, after finding two out of 100 treasure wrecks Rieseberg listed in “all these phony charts and books, [he] ... learned the hard way that seventy-four of those one hundred existed only in the fertile imaginations of the authors.” Marx, a world leader in finding ocean treasure, “became convinced that all the books on treasure hunting at the time by Harry [Rieseberg] types were all complete bullshit. They never even went in the water” (208).

The book's layout is unusual, recognizing a modern appetite for short bites of information. In 255 pages there are roughly 275 subheadings and headings. It is readable, informative and accessible, in chronological order, and illustrated with approximately 30 black and white illustrations. These are