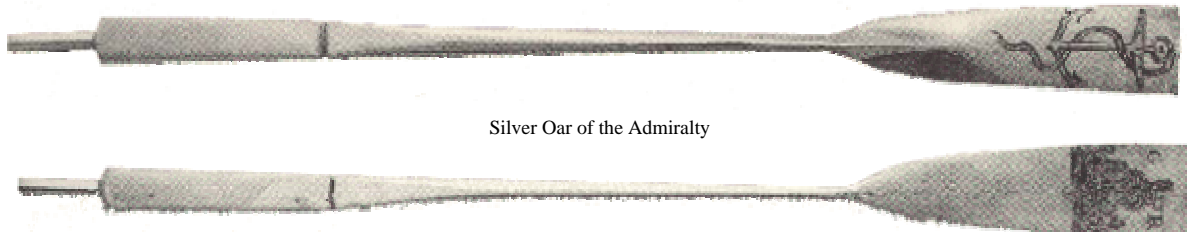


A PIRATE'S LEXICON

Admiralty Oars

also: known as: Silver Oars.

In the colonies of America, pirates fell under the jurisdiction of the Admiralty Courts of the Americas. Around 1701, these courts introduced a sterling silver oar as a sign of their authority. The oars were about two feet long. On one side, an Anchor, the symbol of the admiralty was etched. On the obverse was the Royal Crest of the English Throne.



Silver Oar of the Admiralty

Brace

A brace is two or more of some type of firearm or artillery. For instance Blackbeard was known to carry of brace of pistols (numbering six). Or there were eleven cannons aboard with braces of four stardbord and port, another brace of two aft, and one cannon in the bow. Typically, a brace is thought of as numbering just two, but I guess pirates couldn't add very well and commonly called any grouping of similar firearms or artillery a "brace".

Ear Rings

It is almost impossible to see a Pirate movie without seeing ear rings. Naturally the question has often arisen, did real pirates wear ear rings? Surprisingly, the answer is yes.

While I'm sure Hollywood was trying to make leading men such as Erroll Flynn and Douglas Fairbanks look suave and exotic, real pirates were piercing their ears for a more practical purpose. It was believed that piercing the ears with such precious metals as silver and gold, improved one's eye sight. This was the main reason pirates performed such a ritual. It must also be noted that most other sea faring men also indulged in the practice.

While for years this was considered an old wives tale, today the art of acupuncture lends some credence to the practice of ear piercing. The ear lobe is an acupuncture point for several eye ailments. It is quite possible that the practice of ear piercing may have been brought to the west from the oriental trade routes.

Now another source says they used the ear-ring as for payment when they crossed over to the next world (when they died). Now this sounds logical considering the superstitious of mariners but it has one problem. A fellow pirate may quickly pull your payment from your ear lobe as soon as send a perfectly good ear ring with you to Davy Jones.

Of course a final reason may simply be "fashion statement" on the wearers part. As pointed out by many people, pirates (at least the successful ones) were a colorful lot.

Master

a professional mariner responsible for all aspects of sailing and maneuvering a ship.

Pilot

an experienced mariner responsible for plotting courses for ships of the fleet, particularly through coastal waters.

Hogshead

A large cask usually used for shipping wine and spirits. So next time sing *15 men on a dead man's chest, yo ho ho and a **hogshead** of rum!*

Careen

Careening was a necessary part of nautical life. For reasons, which will be explained, it was one of the most hazardous tasks facing a pirate crew.

As is well known, as ships cruise the ocean, their bottoms quickly become covered with barnacles. These barnacles affected the ships speed and mobility. These two characteristics were highly respected among pirate captains, for they knew above everything else that if they were to be pursued in would be speed and mobility that would save them above any amount of firepower they might possess.

Barnacles posed another problem. If they were not removed, periodically, they would also cause irreparable damage to the hull by eating away the wood or weakening the seams between planks. This meant that if the ship were at sea, far from land, it could go down. The threat of barnacles was taken very seriously.

Often ships are [dry docked](#) after a long ocean voyage, in order that the hull can be scraped free of barnacles and repaired.

Pirates rarely had the opportunity to dry dock. When a ship could not be dry docked, sailors had to devise other ways to clean the bottom. It was practically impossible to clean the bottom of a ship while in the water. The best alternative was careening.

Careening involved finding a suitable shallow bay where the ship could safely be run aground, thus exposing as much of the hull above the water line as possible. Then the ship would be unloaded as

much as possible. The crew would then need to careen or turn the ship over on one side using block and tackle, and manpower.

The crew would try to pull the ship over enough to expose the keel or bottom of the ship. Then they would commence scraping that side of the ship, free of any barnacles. Then any damaged planks would be replaced or repaired. Following this step, if possible the bottom of the ship would be covered with paint, pitch or some kind of protectant.

Once the one side was done, the crew would careen the ship to the other side and repeat the process.

The task was labor intensive and time consuming. Pirates were sitting ducks while careening their ship. They were often not armed well enough to stand a major ground assault and with their ship run aground they could not take on another ship. An example of how dangerous careening could be see the entry on [Captain Lowther](#) in the Pirates Who's Who of the Caribbean.

Having the ship run aground for a long period of time was dangerous, so the pirates did several things to reduce their risks.. First they would look for secluded cays that offered good protection and cover from the sea, basically hiding from prying eyes. Such a place was known as a carenage. Another strategy was to careen only one side of the ship at a time in order to cut the length of time on shore by half.

Of course pirates could also swap ships in order to avoid careening. However this was seldom done. Many pirates preferred sloops because of their agility and speed and would often become attached to their ship, usually not giving it up unless it was in need of repair.

Drydocking

Dry docking involved removing a ship completely from the water, at a docking facility. The purpose to clean and repair the hull and completely over haul the ship before or after an ocean voyage.

Dry Docks consist of a basin like depression where a ship could be floated in and then with a series of locks, the water is drained from the basin leaving the Ship sitting on a frame for support.

Fathom

A nautical unit of measurement equal to approximately six feet. Sailors didn't go around carrying rulers in their back pocket so they used their bodies instead. For instance to measure fathoms, a sailor would grab a line (rope) and pulling it between outstretched arms the distance from tip of left index finger to tip of right index finger was approximately one fathom or six feet. (If the sailor was six feet) The following are other common approximate measurements of a six foot tall person.

- *The distance from tip of nose to tip of an outstretched arm: **one yard (three feet)***
- *The distance from elbow to tip of finger: **one cubit (18 inches)***
- *Length of human foot: **one foot (12 inches)***
- *Breadth of human hand: **one hand (4 inches)** -- used chiefly in measuring horses*
- *Middle knuckle of index finger: **1 inch***

League

A league is a nautical unit of measurement equal to approximately three miles. So 20,000 leagues under the sea would be 60,000 miles. Jules Vernes must have been a deep fella.

Prize

.Prize is the main object of desire. This typically refers to a major object of great worth.

This was often a particular ship, that the crew would be seeking, for instance a Spanish Galleon laden with gold from the Main.

It may also be a target of opportunity, if the crew was just trolling the coastal waters looking for anything that might come along. Or it could even be a sea port or inland town that the pirates had decided to raid.

Don't confuse it with such terms as plunder or booty. The pirate would plunder a prize and then divide the booty into lots among themselves. All in all such words are probably more common among the swashbucklers of the Silver Screen but they are part of the myth of piracy.

Press

In Naval terms, it was a way of conscription. People were pressed into service with the Royal Navy as well as other navies in time of need. Typically this meant finding a person who was somewhat inebriated, hitting them over the head and then having them wake up aboard ship and out to sea. This also led to the phrase **Press Gang** which was a group of sailors led by an officer or boatswain who would force people into naval service.

To add to the confusion: Press or more correctly Pressing was a form of torture in which heavy weights were placed on a person's body in an effort to get them to confess to a crime. Sometimes the confession part was unnecessary. A person would be pressed as simple torture as means to pass the time until he was executed.

Quarter

A quarter can be a room, aboard a ship but more often in pirate terms quarter meant mercy. The pirate would run up the Jolly Roger which meant they were going to attack and show no mercy or quarter if fired upon. The captain of the other ship, could **strike** or lower their own flag meaning they were not going to fight. If the ship were to strike its colors then quarter was given and the ship was looted but personel were not harmed.

Shiver Me Timbers

I have no record of actual pirates saying this and I'm not sure when the term became common use in any navy. With that said, it is hard to see a nautical movie from the 1930s-1960s not using the term. A variant of the phrase (shiver my timbers) is used in the classic **Treasure Island**, by Robert Louis Stevenson

"I thought so," cried the cook; "this here is a p'inter. Right up there is our line for the Pole Star and the jolly dollars. But, by thunder! If it don't make me cold inside to think of Flint. This is one of HIS jokes, and no mistake. Him and these six was alone here; he killed 'em, every man; and this one he hauled here and laid down by compass, shiver my timbers! They're long bones, and the hair's been yellow. Aye, that would be Allardyce. You mind Allardyce, Tom Morgan?"

At least one source says it is an expression of surprise. Timbers were the largest main support beams for the decks and ribs of a sailing ship. Only violent movements, such as heavy seas or a collision, could cause them to shake (or shiver). This term came to be used for any deed or action that was deeply surprising to a sailor or caused great fear. I guess a landlubber's equivalent would be an event that would send "chills down one's spine" (the spine being the main support of the human body)

Rum

Rum is a distilled alcoholic beverage made from fermented molasses. At one time it was all the rage in the Colonies as well as Caribbean because of its inexpensive means of production.

Most of the distilled beverages from Europe were more expensive, especially with the import taxes. This meant that rum was more readily available in the islands and the colonies as well as on board ships doing business in these areas. (Up until recent years most Navies had a liquor ration for all personnel onboard ship)

Because water had a tendency to go bad onboard ships, due to bacterial growth, rum and ale was often drunk in its place. A dram (a small amount) of rum was often added to a sailor's water ration to kill the taste of the rancid water. This was called *grog*

Rum would often be the downfall of many Pirate crews. There are several accounts of pirate ships easily being boarded because the ship was too drunk to fight. One of the pitfalls of a democratically run ship was weakened code of discipline, which typically meant a complete disregard for sobriety. Even Bartholomew Roberts, the tea totaling pirate was unable to stop his crew from drinking.

Grog

Water and rum mixed together was often called Grog. A dram (a small amount) of rum was often added to a sailor's water ration to kill the taste of the rancid water.

Windward and Leeward

Leeward and windward are words used to describe wind direction. *Leeward* is with the wind and *Windward* is against the wind. Still confused? Say you're standing outside on a windy day. The wind is blowing in your face. You are facing Windward. If you started walking in that same direction you would be walking windward. If the wind is blowing on your back then you are facing leeward. If you start walking in the same direction you are moving Leeward. This becomes important with tides. A leetide is when the wind and the tide are both going the same direction. A windward tide is when the tide and the wind are moving in opposite directions.

Wench

Usually when the term wench was used during the golden age of piracy it simply meant a young woman. From today's perspective the word wench is thought have been used to describe women who worked in taverns and/or brothels. This is not actually the case.

Wench dates back to around 1290 and is word that simply meant a young girl or woman. At times it was used as a term of endearment used chiefly in addressing a daughter, wife, or sweetheart.(Far from today's idea of the word)

At other times it was used to describe any kind of female of the rustic working class (laborers, the poor). When referring to whores or mistresses the word wench would be modified with a noun such as common wench, light wench, wench of the stews, or wanton wench.

Davy Jones' Locker

Davy Jones' Locker is a nautical term that dates back to at least 1751 (first known written reference to the word). It is quite possible that the term existed orally among sailors before this date. Since it's first historical mention, the meaning of Davy Jones has changed very little.

Davy Jones was sailor slang for the evil spirits of the ocean. Davy's Locker or Davy Jones' Locker was the Deep ocean's bottom. To be sent to Davy's Locker was to perish at sea. To send someone to Davy Jones was to kill them.

The phrase Davy Jones appears in much of the popular nautical literature. There is no reason not to assume the term was common among sailors for many years. Other variations of Davy Jones' Locker are:

- To be in Davy's Grip: To be close to death, or frightened.
- To have the Davies or the Joneses: To be frightened
- To see you to Davy Jones: To threaten to kill some one
- Awaken Davy or Awaken Davy Jones: To cause a storm

Weigh Anchors (Anchors Aweigh)

The term is often confused. It means to raise the anchor from the water and store in its proper location so the ship or boat can move. You "drop anchor" once the ship stops moving or to slow the ship.