

Whaling Journal of Robert Jarman (1811-1889)

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Robert Jarman's publication of 1838 is a whaling journal that does not correspond to contemporary works, as R. Warneke notes in the introduction to the republished edition of 2009. The title is also concise and brief, mentioning only the purpose of the voyage, the ship and the captain. Jarman's work represents a peculiarity for various reasons, because such records of simple crew members are hardly preserved anymore. This (social) difference is also evident in the writing style as well as the content and language. At the same time, Jarman's report is one of the earliest publications, which have dealt with South Sea whaling – even from the perspective of an "ordinary seaman". The impressions, exertions and experiences he had gained on the three-year disciplined and hardscrabble journey had made him an adult man whose horizons had been "immeasurably" widened by his stay in exotic places.

Jarman's descriptions were published in August 1838 by his father, who provided interesting details about the origin with a "Preface". Accordingly, the following notes had apparently not been written with the aim of a later publication, but rather in order to fulfil the wish of his closest fellow men to document his experiences on the ship. The manuscript had also been read by "several very respectable individuals" (without giving any names) in the run-up to the publication, who had encouraged and advised him to publish it. At the time of publication in August 1838 Robert Jarman was already at sea again, so that the father must have mainly taken care of the manuscript and the publication. During the same period, the Suffolk-based newspaper "The Suffolk Chronicle; or Weekly General Advertiser & County Express" of September 1838 contained an advertisement for the publication, which was probably placed by his father to promote the book. Only two months later, the same newspaper prints a review by an unnamed author:

[...] This is plain but interesting narrative of a young sailor, upon the adventures of his first voyage. The volume is written in an observant spirit, without either affectation or display, and is likely to obtain many readers among those persons to whom that part of the world visited by the Author, an object of interest. The work is printed at Beccles, and reflects the highest character upon the provincial press of that town.

In contrast to the American whaling operation, relatively little is known about the recruitment methods of the British whaling business. There are various reasons that led a young man to spend a few years as a simple sailor on a whaler. Next to demographic and structural reasons, it was until the 19th century used for the crew to be recruited on a whaling ship mainly through personal networks, contacts and from the seamen's own more or less immediate relatives. Individual motivations were sometimes connected with social interests. Some followed the calls of their brothers or fathers and went to sea with or after them. Others, on the other hand, went on board to escape the family circle at least for a few years or even forever. For some, whaling offered a welcome opportunity to escape "bourgeois society and its constraints," while others hoped for subsequent social advancement and prestige in their closer and more distant circle of acquaintances by hunting the seas.

Probably the most important selection criteria taken into account by recruitment agents in the recruitment process included in particular "physique, height and [the] health" of an applicant. While the recruitment process for ordinary seafarers turned out to be uncomplicated, the recruitment of higher positions, such as harpooners, officers and captains, which were crucial to success, proved to be all the more complex. Whether a hunt was successful or not depended crucially on the skills of the harpooner, the leadership qualities of the officers or the skills of the captain.

Preference was therefore given to those people who, in addition to several years of experience from previous voyages, also brought along letters of recommendation from their former captains or were able to prove themselves in interviews with the shipowner.

After the end of his career at sea, Jarman helped in his father's business, where he not only gained first experiences before his time as a sailor, but also worked together with him on his first publication in 1838. In the following years he was obviously very successful, as he soon expanded his business "as a collector of rates and taxes, stamp distributor and insurance agent". Already in 1854 he seemed to bear the British noble title "ESQ".

Whaling Career of Robert Jarman

Period	Position	Ship	Captain	Owner	Cargo
1831 – 1834	Seamen	Japan	John May	Bennett & Co.	2400 barrels
1834 - 1837	Officer ?	Japan	William Hill	Bennett & Co.	550 casks
1838 – 1841	Officer	Japan	James McClellan	Bennett & Co.	168 tons
1841 - 1844	Captain	Kent	M. Smith / Jarman	Bennett & Co.	195 tons
1845 - 1848	Captain	Favorite	Robert Jarman	John Wilson & Co.	1400 barrels
1849 - 1851	Captain	Kent	King / Jarman	John Wilson & Co.	296 casks

In the British newspaper Kentish Mercury, the "Greenwich Literary Institution" thanks Robert Jarman for the subsequent provision of an edition of his 1838 publication in their library: „The following books have been presented to the library since our last report: [...] ‘Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas’ by Robert Jarman, ESQ.“ By whom and when Jarman was presented with the ‘ESQ’ title is not apparent from the sources. Even after finishing his maritime career, he was a representative of the local "Shipwrecked Fishermen & Mariners’ Royal Benevolent Society" and stood up for the interests of seafarers and their families before he died in 1889 at the age of 77.

Further Sources:

Jarman, Robert: A Journal of the Voyage in the South Seas, in the “*Japan*”, employed in the Sperm Whale Fishery, under the command of Capt. John May, Beccles / London 1838, in: National Library of Australia, Canberra, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-52763944/view?partId=nla.obj-88252098#page/n1/mode/1up>, [last Access: 21.1.2018].

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Historical Newspapers

Greenwich Literary Institution, in: Kentish Mercury, 4th February 1854, p. 4.

Just Published, in: The Suffolk Chronicle; or Weekly General Advertiser & County Express, 8. September, 1838, p. 2.

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