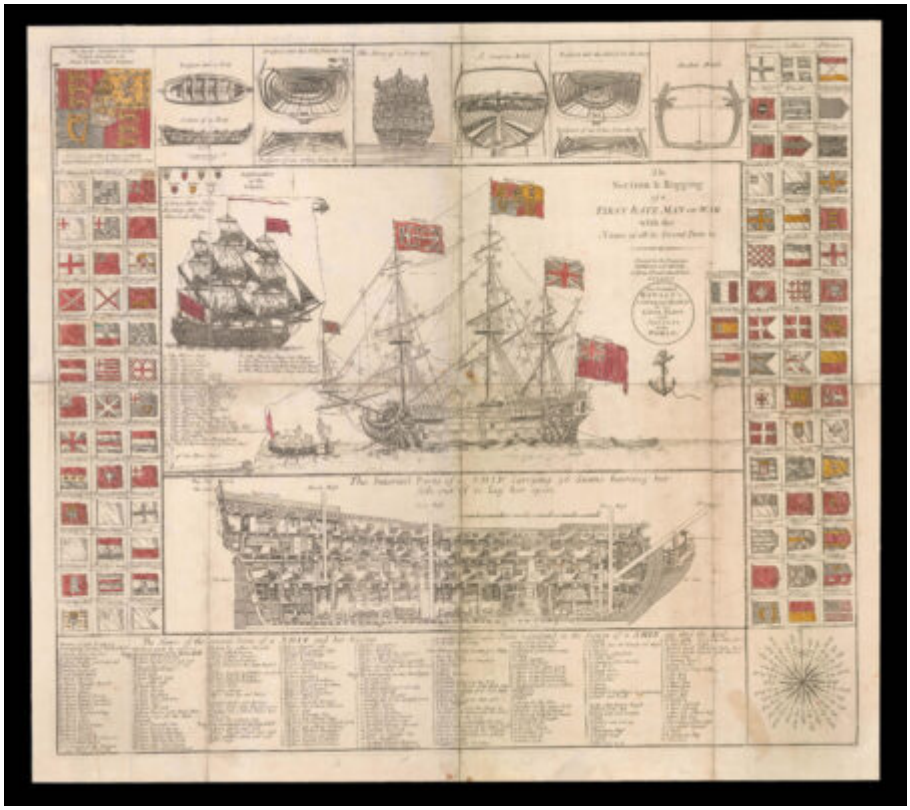

Hand-coloured engraving, backed on linen, minor loss to old folds.

A FIRST RATE MAN-OF-WAR

The Section and Rigging of a First Rate Man of War with the Names of all its several parts &c

Author
[BOWLES, Thomas]

Publication date
[c1801].

Publisher
Printed for the Proprietors Bowles and Carver, No. 69 St Paul's Church Yard,

Publication place
London,

Physical description
Hand-coloured engraving, backed on linen, minor loss to old folds.

Dimensions
500 by 567mm (19.75 by 22.25 inches).

Notes
Rare and detailed engraving depicting an English Man-o-War.

The print depicts a 96-gun English man-o-war (a heavily armed warship). The central image shows the ship at anchor with sails furled, a small rowboat to her bow carries a group of sailors preparing

to board. To the upper left the ship is depicted again, but this time in full sail and marked ‘A First Rate ship Hoisting the Vice Admiral’s flag’. Below the ship has been cut through the keel to reveal her internal parts, and above are six further cross sections of the vessel. An extensive key below lists all the different parts of the ship and her rigging.

To the left and right of the vessel is a table of 91 ensigns, the most prominent of which is the British Royal Standard to the upper left. All the major maritime nations are listed, included the newly formed United States, French, and Batavian (Dutch) Republics. To the lower right is a compass rose.

Publication History

Ship prints such as the present example were hugely popular during the eighteenth century with publishers across Europe producing their own versions. The earliest example that we were able to trace was published in Amsterdam by Peter Schenk, in the early 1700s. The print would later be reprinted by Covens and Mortier, and pirated by Johann Homann in the 1720s in Germany, and in London by Daniel Midwinter in the early 1710s.

The present engraving was first published by Thomas Bowles in the mid 1730s (BL General Reference Collection 85/1882.c.2.(18.)). Although it bears the same title as Daniel Midwinter’s example: ‘A new table of all the names of the principal parts and rigging of a man of war’, Bowles dispenses with Midwinter’s depictions of navigational instruments to left and right borders, replacing them with 88 naval ensigns.

Bowles’ work, though not dated, is dedicated to Admiral Sir Charles Wager, First Lord of the Admiralty between 1733-1742. It is possible that Bowles reworked Midwinter’s plate, however, we have been unable to closely examine Midwinter’s print in order to ascertain this – the only extant example of which is housed in the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington. Bowles’ print would continue to be issued throughout the eighteenth century by subsequent members of the Bowles family.

The Library of Congress hold an example with the imprint of John Bowles and Carrington Bowles, who co-published works between 1764 and 1779. Apart from the imprint the depiction of the ship’s stern has been renamed ‘The Stern of ye Royal George’. HMS Royal St George was launched in 1756. She sank on 29 August 1782 whilst anchored at Spithead off Portsmouth. The ship was intentionally rolled so maintenance could be performed on the hull, but the roll became unstable and out of control; the ship took on water and sank. More than 800 lives were lost, making it one of the most deadly maritime disasters in British territorial waters.

The British Museum holds an example of the present state, bearing the imprint of Bowles and Carver (fl. 1793-1832). The old title and dedication have been erased, with a new title engraved, together with an advertisement for their book on naval flags. Four new flags have been added: the Spanish ensign (introduced in 1785) the French Republic (introduced in 1795); the Dutch (or Batavian) Republic (introduced in 1795); and the United States, bearing 13 stars, and issued from 1777-1795. The British red ensign now bears the red cross of St Patrick following the Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland of 1801. As a result of the union three flags: the Scotch Ensign; Scotch Union Flag; and the Irish Ensign, have been marked “disused”.

Rarity

We are unable to trace another example of the present work appearing at auction since the Second World War; and we have only been able to trace two institutional example of the present state: the British Museum and the National Maritime Museum. The British Library hold an example bearing

the imprint of Thomas Bowles (c 1730), with the Library of Congress holding an example bearing the imprint of John and Carrington Bowles (c 1770).

Bibliography
British Museum 1917,1208.4581.

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 16389

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