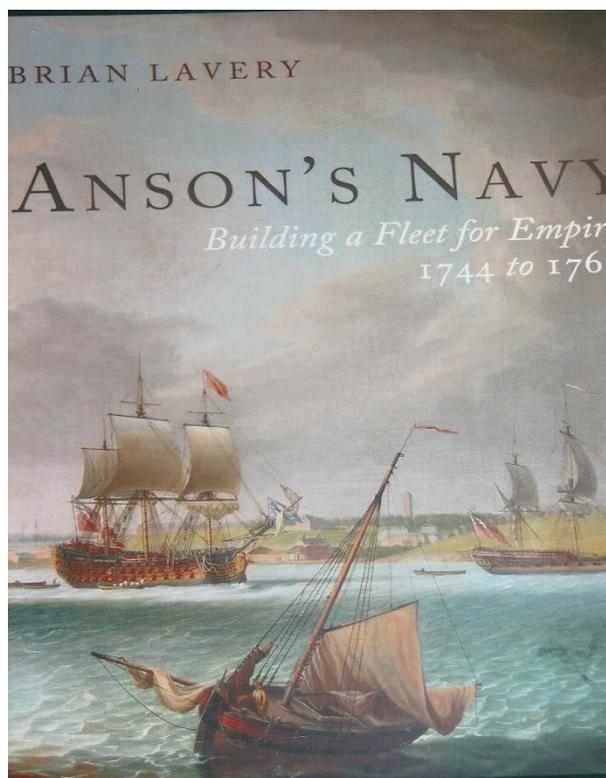


**BOOK REVIEW****ANSON'S NAVY ~ BUILDING A FLEET FOR EMPIRE 1744 TO 1763****BY BRIAN LAVERY****PUBLISHED BY SEAFORTH PUBLISHING A DIVISION OF PEN & SWORD BOOKS****ISBN 978 1 3990 0288 2 (H/B)**

This excellent volume provides a comprehensive examination of 18<sup>th</sup> century warships and the Royal Navy. Noted 18<sup>th</sup> century commentators recorded the importance of the Royal Navy to the nation in protecting its seagoing trade and against her enemies in times of war. To be able to fulfil this duty the navy required warships built to current specifications, equipped, and manned by competent officers and men. It was recognised from lessons learnt in the Dutch wars of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and against Spain and France in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Royal Navy would have to adapt their tactics and strategies if they were to successfully challenge rival naval fleets. Reforms were not an easy option but Admiral of the Fleet the Right Honourable Lord George Anson (1697-1762), knew they were necessary and was instrumental in their introduction into the Royal Navy.



George Anson entered the navy as a junior officer and participated in actions during the War of the Spanish Succession. He undertook a global circumnavigation and commanded the victorious fleet at the First Battle of Finisterre 1747 during the War of the Austrian Succession. Anson, like other successful seagoing naval officers in times of conflict were able to supplement their income from prize money becoming richly endowed. Anson became Member of Parliament for Hendon and joined the Admiralty Board in 1744. In 1751, he became First Lord of the Admiralty. During his tenure Great Britain became involved in the Seven Years War (1756-1763). The Seven Years War was a conflict between Great Britain and France. Issues emanating from the War of the Austrian Succession and colonial rivalry against France and Spain in North America and the Caribbean led to a long and costly war.

The author provides the reader with detailed information about Britain's system of government, administration, relationship with the monarchy and its governance of the population. The gradual growth of Britain's empire, impact of the industrial revolution and consequent effect on society is given full consideration. Also explained is the operation and organisation of the Admiralty, the Navy Board, its officers, and people of prominence.

One of the problems which Anson had to overcome was an out of date, early 18<sup>th</sup> century system, known as the 'Establishments' which was the accepted template for warship design, their fixtures, and fittings. These constraints compared unfavourably with rival European navy's designs, deployment, and their seagoing fleets organisation. Anson considered that if these new innovations were introduced, they would strengthen the Royal Navy. He also introduced other reforms amongst which were a revision the Articles of War to improve discipline in the Royal Navy, rooting out corruption, uniforms for commissioned officers, transfer of the Marines from the Army to the Navy and rating warships based upon the number of guns carried.

For those who have little knowledge of 18<sup>th</sup> warships, this book gives a step-by-step explanation of how these ships were built, constructed and fitted out from the drawing board to completion. The author has given meticulous attention in describing practically everything that was necessary to make these wooden sailing vessels into a ship of war. Careers of naval officers, some of them famous are related and give an insight into their lives and duties during times of peace and in war. A fundamental requirement for seagoing officers was their ability to navigate the seaways and oceans with basic navigating aids and to be able to maximise the sailing qualities of their vessel in all weather conditions. A significant difficulty which the navy had to overcome in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the recruitment of seaman. There were volunteers, others were press ganged into a harsh disciplined and service, many of whom had no knowledge of the sea or ships. All aspects of the living conditions for officers and crews are carefully delineated and described.

Warships could not remain at sea indefinitely and had to be serviced and maintained in dockyards or naval bases, not only in the United Kingdom but overseas in Great Britain's expanding empire. The main dockyards had victualling yards, hospitals, and ammunition depots. Fully outlined are the duties of Admirals and their support staff, at home, abroad, and at sea. The story of Admiral Byng, who was executed for failing in his duties is movingly conveyed. Trade and commerce were valuable assets to the economy supported by a merchant fleet which transported cargoes to and from Great Britain across the world, relied upon the Royal Navy for its protection.

Closely considered and examined in the narrative are Great Britain's 18<sup>th</sup> century allies and enemies. The navy developed a strategy to combat French aggression by blockading her channel, Atlantic and Mediterranean ports by forming the 'Western Squadron' which Anson briefly commanded in 1758. There was an ever-present fear of a French invasion which occupied the minds of 18<sup>th</sup> century politicians, the naval and military hierarchies. The tactics of single ship to ship action and large fleet engagements with the enemy are explained. Surprisingly, amphibious operations were a significant factor during the Seven Years War. A graphic account is referred to about the notable and successful sea borne assault by the Army and Navy in their capture of Quebec in 1759.

Brian Lavery has produced a compelling and knowledgeable book on 'Anson's Navy' during the period 1744 to 1763. Anson orchestrated naval reforms, some of which he did live to see the profound effect they would have upon the navy in the following decades. Admiral Anson died in 1762. He had to battle against a conservative political establishment reluctant to finance reforms in times of peace to meet the challenges of inevitable European conflicts. He laid the foundation which his successors could build upon for the Royal Navy to rule the seas and embellish its naval traditions. The author gives his considered assessment of 18<sup>th</sup> century British society, its history and of Anson and the navy. He has an extensive knowledge of maritime history and has researched primary and secondary archival material and sources. Extracts from letters written and comments by naval officers of their experiences at sea in peace and war enrich the content of the book. Accompanying the text are colour, black and white plates, drawings, plans, notes, bibliography, and index.

Roger Coleman