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**At a loose end** –  unoccupied.  Nautically, loose ends are unattached ones which are not doing their job. “Tying up loose ends” is used to mean finalising details of a matter as a sailor makes fast the loose ends to ensure the boat is shipshape.

**Batten down the hatches** – prepare for trouble. Battening down of walkways and hatches was done when bad weather was imminent. Ships hatches were often open or covered with a wooden grating. When bad weather was expected the hatches were covered with tarpaulins and edged with thin wooden battens to stop them from blowing off.

**Between the devil and the deep blue sea** – faced with two dangerous alternatives. The derivation seems obscure, but try this one. The “devil” is the seam between the deck planking and the top plank of the ship’s side. It would have to be watertight and would need filling or caulking regularly, which would require a sailor to stand on the very edge of the deck or even be suspended over the side. A dangerous place to be.

**Chock a block** – crammed tightly together to prevent movement.  Chocks are wedges used to secure moving objects and a block and tackle is a pulley system used on sailing ships to hoist the sails. A possible derivation is that when two blocks of rigging tackle were so close together they couldn’t be tightened further, it was said they were “chock-a-block”.

**Cut and run**– run away. It is possible that it derives from ships making a hasty departure by cutting the anchor rope and running with the wind.

**Full to the gunwales** – full to the brim or packed tight. Pronounced “gunnels”, it is the upper edge of a ship’s side in large vessels and the piece of timber extending round the top side of the hull in smaller craft. It probably first referred to heavily loaded ships.

**Get underway** – begin a journey. The “under” is likely to have meant “on the” and the “way” is the forward progress of the ship through the water so it actually means “on their way”.

**Give a wide berth** – a good distance. Originally a berth was a place where there was sea room to moor a boat. The meaning of “berth” was probably “bearing off”. Sailors were warned to keep a wide bearing off something they needed to keep away from. It could also refer to anchoring a boat far enough away from another so that they did not hit each other when swinging with the wind or the tide.

**Hard and fast** – rigidly adhered to – without doubt. A ship that was “hard and fast” was beached firmly on land. Land was known as “The hard” as in Buckler’s Hard.

**Hand over fist** – quickly and continuously. It describes the action of hauling on a rope using alternate hands, so it is probably nautical. In the 18th century though, it had a different meaning –“making steady progress”.

**In the doldrums** – in low spirits or feeling drowsy or dull.  In 19th century the word “doldrum” meant a “dullard or dull fellow” so “the doldrums” was a general state of low spirits. In the middle of the century the word was used to denote the state of ships experiencing becalming in the area just north of the equator, between the Trade Winds. The name was then used geographically to refer to the area itself rather than the state of the ships.

**Keel over** – to fall over - also a sailor’s term for dying. When the boat’s keel comes out of the water it is very likely to capsize. To be on an even keel – calm and steady. The boat would float upright without listing.

**In the offing** -  imminent or likely to happen soon. “Offing” is that area of sea that can be seen from land, so when a ship was seen to be “in the offing” it would be expected to dock before the next tide. The adjective “off” in a sailing context means “away from”.

**Knowing the ropes** – understanding the principles. In square rigged ships there were miles of ropes in the rigging and the only way of keeping track of their functions was to memorise where each of them went. It took and experienced sailor to “know the ropes”.

**Log book** – an official record book.  An early way to measure a boat’s progress through the sea was to throw overboard a wooden board or “log” with a string attached. The rate at which the string was paid out as the ship moved away from the log was measured by counting knots in the string. These measurements were recorded in a book, the “log book” and from here we also get “knot”- the unit of speed at sea.

**On your beam ends** – hard up or in a bad situation. The beams were the horizontal timbers of a boat. If the end of these beams were touching the water you were in imminent danger of capsizing.

**Ship-shape and Bristol fashion** – in first class order. The derivation could be that Bristol has one of the most variable tide flows anywhere in the world and the water level can vary by more than 30 feet between tides. Before the harbour was built boats moored here were beached at low tide so they had to be of sturdy construction and their cargoes well stowed. On the other hand it could refer to Bristol’s high standards of equipment and service, when it was the major British west-coast trading port, before the growth of Liverpool.

**Sling your hook** – to leave or clear off. Those who believe it has a nautical origin think it refers to the sailors pulling up the anchor before leaving.

**Pipe down** -  a request for silence. The boatswain’s pipe was used to give signals to the crew of sailing ships. “Piping down the hammocks” was the last signal of the day, to go below decks and retire for the night. Also when an officer was “piped down” he was dismissed.

**Three sheets to the wind** – very drunk. In sailors’ language, a sheet is a rope. If three sheets are not attached to the sails as they ought to be, the sail will flap and the boat will lurch around in a drunken fashion. Sailors had a sliding scale of drunkenness. Tipsy was “one sheet”, whereas falling over was “three sheets”.

**Making Headway** – going forwards”.

**Giving Leeway** – A sailing ship naturally moves in the direction of the wind even if the sails drive it forward. This is leeway. To give leeway is to keep clear of another ship or in life to allow a little discretion to someone.

**Parts of a Sailing Ship**

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| Keel | The principal piece of metal or timber at the lowest part of the ship, running fore and after; it is the foundation from which all the other parts rise to form the ends and sides of the ship |
| Stem | Rises from the fore part of the keel to form the bow |
| Stern post | Rises from the after part of the keel to form the stern |
| Body post | Rises from the keel before the stern post. The space between it and the stern post is called the screw-aperture |
| Ribs | A figurative expression for the framework which, resting on the keel, forms the sides of a ship |
| Keelson | An internal keel, lying fore and after above the main keel and lower pieces of the ribs confining the floors in their places |
| Knight heads | Two strong uprights, one on each side of the upper part of the stem, to strengthen the bow and support the bowsprit |
| False keel | An additional keel below the main keel. By offering greater resistance, it prevents the ship being driven so much sideways through the water away from the wind. It also protects the main keel, should the ship take the ground |
| Gripe | A projection forward at the lowest part of the stem; by exposing a larger surface it prevents the foremost part of the ship, when sailing with the wind on one side, from being driven sideways away from the wind, and therefore effects the turning power of the ship |
| Bilge pieces | Long pieces of wood or iron affixed to the outside of the ship’s bottom, in a position to offer resistance to the water as the vessel rolls, and thereby lessen the motion |
| Garboard strakes | The lowest planking outside, nearest to the keel, running fore and aft |
| Bends | The thickest outside planking, extending from a little below the water |
| Counter | The afterpart of the bends, the round of the stern |
| Run | The narrowing of the afterpart of the body of the ship below the water |
| Limbers | Gutters formed on each side of the keelson to allow the water to pass to the pump-well |
| Limber boards | Form a covering over the limbers |
| Double-bottom | In some iron ships the frames and girders are covered in with iron plates, forming literally an inner ship, the space between the inner and outer ships being termed the double bottom; this method of construction gives great strength, and safety in the event of damage occurring to the outside skin |
| Water-tight bulkheads | The name applied to the sides of the numerous compartments into which it is customary to divide iron vessels |
| Wings | In addition to the safety afforded by the “double bottom” and “Water-tight compartments,” a perpendicular bulkhead is run fore and aft the center portion of the vessel, some few feet from the skin |
| Pump-well | An enclosure round the mainmast and pumps |
| Beams | Horizontal timbers lying across the ship, to support the decks and connect the two sides |
| Shelf piece | Extends all round the ship inside for the beams to rest upon |
| Waterway | Thick planking extending all round the inside of the ship immediately above the beams |
| Partners | Frames of timber fitted into the decks to strengthen them, immediately round the masts, capstans, bitts, etc. |
| Carlings | Short pieces of timber, running fore and aft, connecting one beam to another, to distribute the strain of the masts, capstan, and bitts, among the several beams so connected |
| Knees | Pieces of iron uniting the beams to the shelf-piece and the ship’s side |
| Stanchions | Pillars of metal or wood supporting a beam amidships |
| Treenails | Wooden bolts used in fastening the planks to the timbers and beams |
| Caulking | Driving oakum between the plans, it is then payed (filled in) with pitch or marine blue |
| The rudder | Hangs upon the stern post by pintles and braces, for steering or directing the course of the ship |
| Tiller | A piece of timber or metal fitted fore and aft into the head of the rudder, by which to turn it in steering |
| Yoke | A cross-piece of timber or metal fitted on the rudder head when a tiller cannot be used |
| Wheel | A wheel, to the axle of which the tiller or wheel ropes are connected, by which to move the rudder |
| Helm | The rudder, tiller, and wheel, or all the steering arrangements of a ship |
| The mainmast | The middle and largest mast of the three |
| The foremast | The furthest forward, and the next in side to the mainmast |
| The mizzenmast | The aftermost and smallest mast of the three |
| The lower masts | The lowest pieces of each mast, or those attached to the ship; they rest or step on the keelson at the bottom of the ship (In a screw steamer, the screw shaft prevents any mast abaft the engines being stepped on the keelson. It is then stepped on the lower deck, which is well supported with extra stanchions) |
| The topmasts | The next pieces above the lower masts, and are supported by the lower trestletrees |
| The top-gallant masts | The next pieces above the topmasts, and are supported by the topmast trestletrees |
| The royal masts | The upper pieces, and are a continuation upwards of the top-gallant masts |
| Trysail masts | Small masts placed immediately abaft the lower masts; to which they are connected. |
| The bowsprit | Projects out from the bows |
| The jib-boom | Boom outside of, and supported by the bowsprit, by means of the heel and crupper chains |
| The jib sail | Set upon the *jib-boom* and a stay leading from the fore topmast head to the *jib-boom* end, which is called the *jib-stay* |
| The flying jib sail | Set upon the *flying jib-boom*, and a stay leading from the fore top-gallant mast head to the *flying jib-boom* end, which is called the *flying jib stay* |
| A staysail (stays’l) | A three-cornered sail set upon a stay, and named after it; thus, the *fore-topmast staysail* is set upon the fore-topmost stay |
| A trysail (trys’l) | Set upon a gaff and trysail mast abaft each lower mast, but it has no boom |
| The spanker | Set upon a gaff, the mizzen trysail mast, and boom, abaft the mizzen mast |
| A fore-and-aft sail | Any sail not set upon a yard; that is, one set upon either a stay or gaff – such as the *jibs*, *staysails*, *trysails*, *gaff foresail*, *mainsail*, and the *spanker* |
| Studding-sails (stuns’ls) | Sails set outside the square sails on each side of the ship, and spread at the top upon yards, and at the bottom by booms; they are set upon each side of the *foresail*, *fore-topsail*, *fore-top-gallant sail*, *main-topsail*, and *main-top-gallant sail*. They are named by their respective masts; as the *main-topmast studding-sail*, *fore-top-gallant studding-sail*, etc. |
| A dolphin striker | Used in connection with the martin-gale |
| Spritsail, gaffs, or whiskers | In connection with the jib guys (The name *spritsail* is derived from an obsolete sail, which was in old times set on a yard below the bowsprit.) |
| The flying jib-boom | Boom outside of, and secured to the jib-boom, the heel steps against the bowsprit cap |

The *masts*, *yards*, *gaffs*, *stays*, and *booms* are named the same as the sails which they spread; thus:

* the main-sail is set upon the *main-mast*, and is spread by the *main-yard*.
* the main royal sail is set upon the *main royal mast* and *main royalyard*.
* the spanker sail is set upon the *spanker gaff* and *spanker boom*.
* *studding-sail boom*.
* the main trysail is set upon the *main trysail mast*and *main trysailgaff*.

the fore-topmast studding-sail, upon the *fore-topmast studding-sail yard*, and *fore-topmast*

There are no studding-sails on the mizzenmast, or on either side of the main-sail.

The lower yard on the mizzenmast has no sail set below it, and is named the *cross-jack* yard.

To give more support to the jib and flying jib-booms, *gaffs* are placed on the bowsprit to spread the rigging out in each direction and give it a larger angle.



