

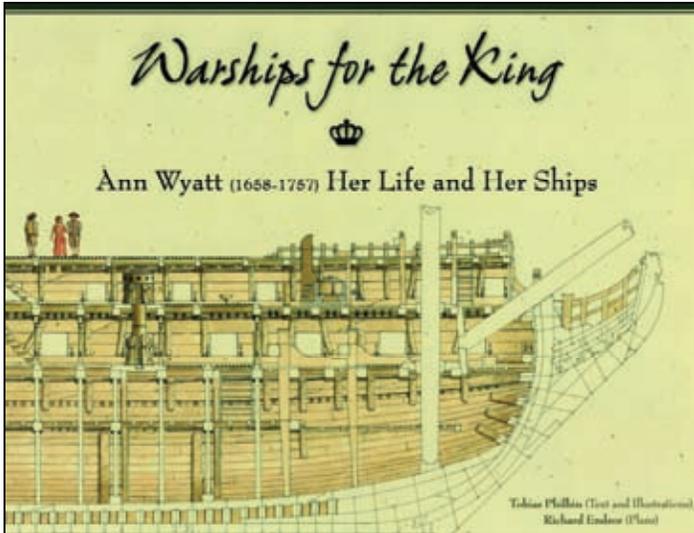
Warships for the King

Ann Wyatt (1658—1757) Her Life and Her Ships

Text & Illustrations by Tobias Philbin

Plans by Richard Endors

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After reading *Warships for the King* this writer couldn't help but feel considerable admiration for Ann Wyatt. Beginning her life as a self-educated farmer's daughter, she would eventually achieve an existence of reasonable wealth, and end her days living in a 120 room house. A possible contemporary painting of her indicates that she was an attractive woman. However, she was also intelligent, possessed remarkable drive, and was very lucky. She would live to the age of 99 (1658—1756), which was quite an accomplishment in seventeenth/eighteenth century England where plague and pestilence were common.

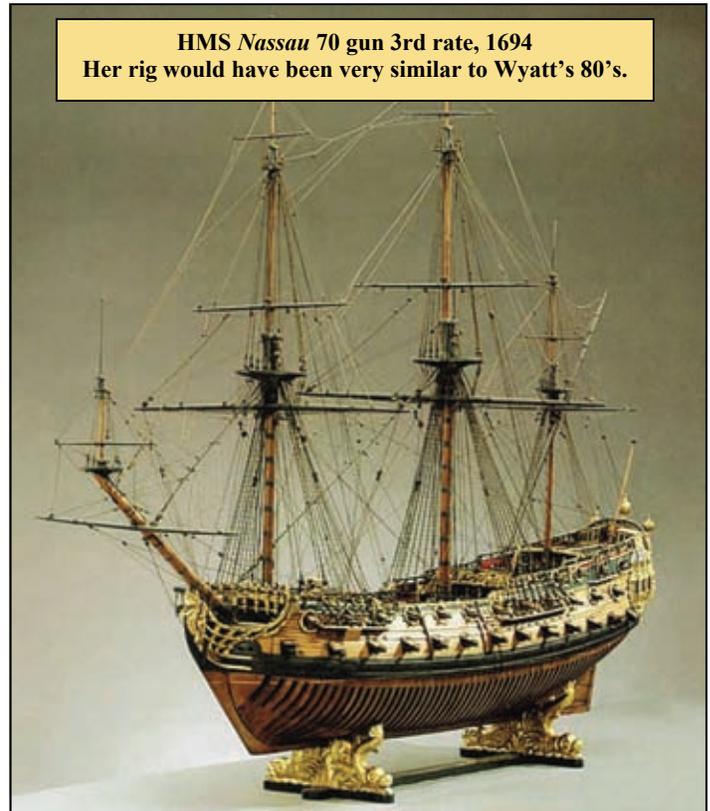
Author, Tobias Philbin, does a remarkable job of reconstructing what Ann's life was like during one of the most turbulent periods in English history. She witnessed the last years of Cromwell's protectorate, the reigns of Charles II and James II, as well as the "Glorious Revolution" that would bring William III and Mary to power. These events, and Ann's marriage to shipbuilder, William Wyatt, would set her life on a most remarkable path.

In 1688, King Louis XIV of France declared war on England. This particular conflict would become known as the War of English Succession. King William's fortunes did not go well, and reached low ebb in 1690 when the combined English/Dutch fleets were soundly beaten at the Battle of Beachy Head. As a result, invasion became a real possibility.



In order to reestablish numerical superiority, an ambitious twenty-seven ship building program was enacted by Parliament, which would be a boon to the Wyatts' business.

The town of Bursledon where the Wyatt yard was located, although quite small, contained all the prerequisites for building large, heavy warships. The site had excellent geology, nearby woods, tidal water, and a location far enough upriver to protect the yard from coastal raids by the French. William Wyatt also had a reputation for building sound merchant vessels.



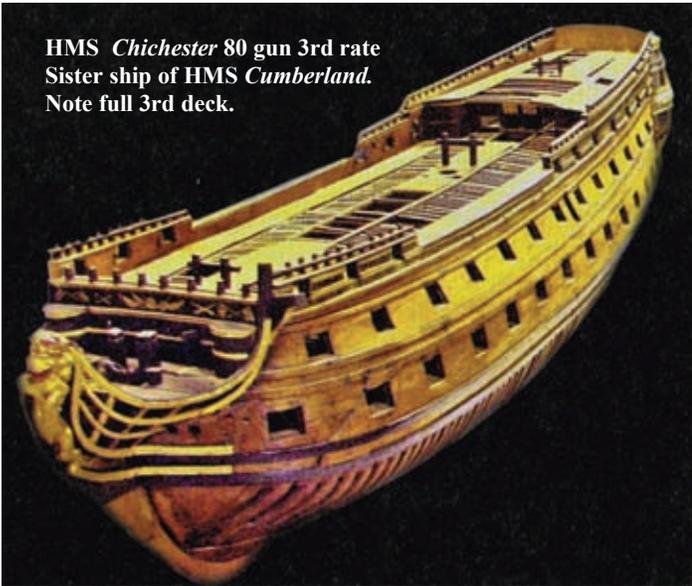
The Wyatt yards would eventually be responsible for providing seven vessels for the war effort. However, William Wyatt would die before the first two, *Devonshire* (80) and *Winchester* (60), were completed. The author states that Ann's involvement in the Wyatt business, prior to William's death, can only be surmised. She must have been known to the Admiralty, since they endorsed her continuing the construction of the ships. Completion of these vessels was critical to national security. So, arriving at this decision was no small matter.

Archival research indicates that she would go on to sign contracts for three more vessels, *Lancaster* (80), *Winchelsey* (32) and *Cumberland* (80). Philbin feels that there is enough circumstantial evidence to indicate that Ann was also involved with two other ships, *Salisbury* (48) and *Seaford* (24).

The first seven chapters discuss all of this, as well as Ann's second husband, Michael Brixey, and her daughter's marriage into nobility. Much of Ann Wyatt's life is pieced together through indirect evidence and analysis. Never the less, it is all plausible and well written.

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Although the seven Wyatt ships are discussed in Part I of this book, it is primarily in general terms. Part II devotes a chapter to each vessel. The 3rd rate *Devonshire*



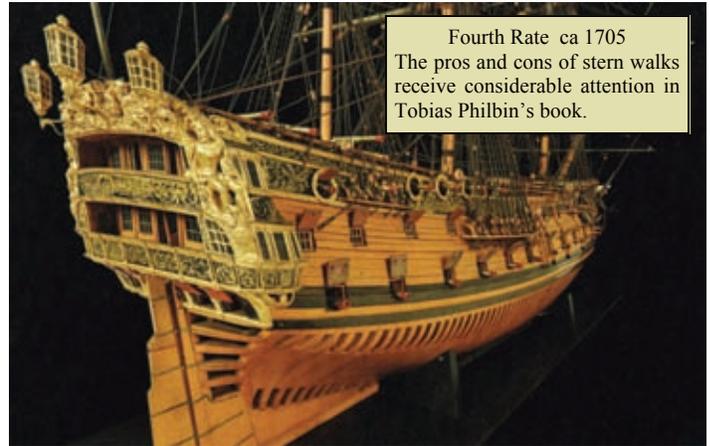
HMS *Chichester* 80 gun 3rd rate
Sister ship of HMS *Cumberland*.
Note full 3rd deck.

is first, and Philbin takes the reader on a theoretical tour of this newly launched ship with contemporary sketches, plans, drawings and photos. Various points of interest are noted around the exterior of the ship as well as below deck using contemporary models and modern technology.

Throughout the book, the author provides considerable insight into the dealings between the Wyatt's and the Admiralty. This includes points on construction, protection for workers from press gangs, piracy, and timely payment for services and material. Numerous letters are reproduced in a Baroque style that lacks punctuation, and contains many archaic terms, which are explained by the author.

As each Wyatt vessel is discussed, the reader is presented with unique design features, and the pros and cons of those designs. The vessels' operational histories, and ultimate fates are also outlined. Tobias Philbin feels that the 80 gun 3rd rates were especially flawed.

Due to the weight of their canons, these ships were subject to hogging, leaks and instability. The introduction of a full third deck helped to stiffen these vessels, but they could still be crank in a rough sea. HMS *Cumberland* (80), which represents the apex of Ann Wyatt's career as a shipwright, had a full third deck, and was arguably the best vessel to come out of that class.



Fourth Rate ca 1705
The pros and cons of stern walks receive considerable attention in Tobias Philbin's book.

Consequently, it is appropriate that, as an added bonus, a set of plans for HMS *Cumberland* are provided in a rear pocket of this book. These plans, which were drawn by Richard Endors, author of "The Restoration Navy", are drawn to a scale of 1:96, and can be the basis for a very nice model.

The book concludes with an appendix that contains the original contract for the *Cumberland*. This can be especially helpful for the modeler who needs information on the vessel's scantlings. Various paint colors for the ship are also specified.

After reading "Warships for the King", there's no doubt that this writer came away with a better understanding of life in England during this remarkable period. If your interests include these types of vessels, then reading this work by Tobias Philbin will definitely enhance your modeling experiences. This book is highly recommended.

Reviewed by
Bob Filipowski

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