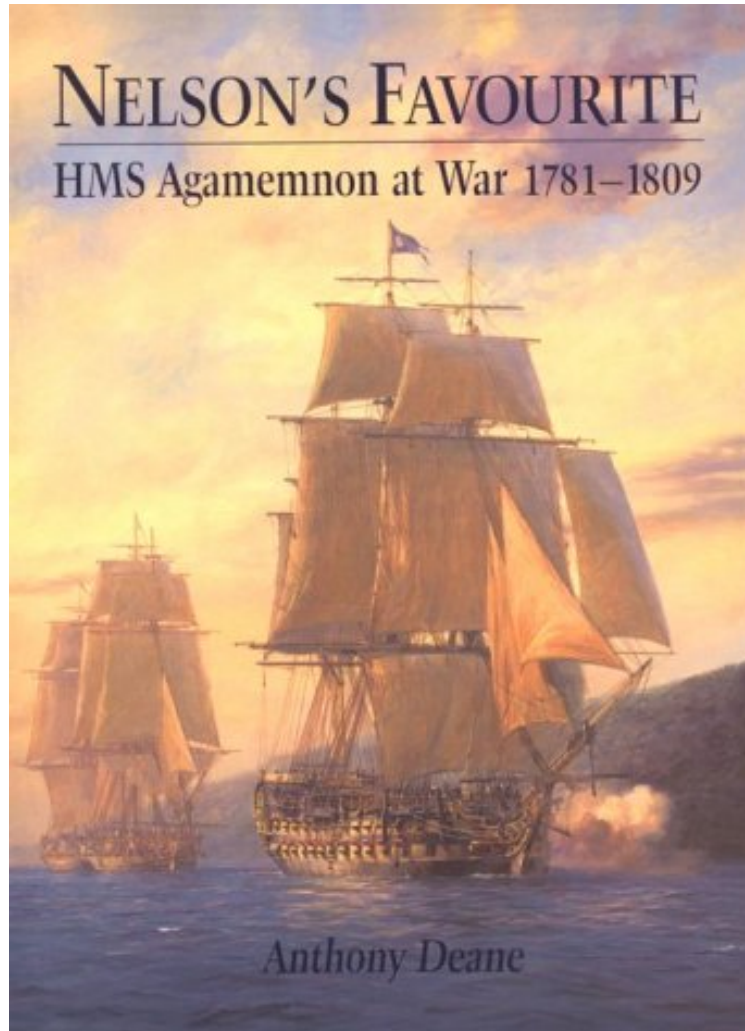


[Free] Nelson's Favourite: HMS Agamemnon, 1781-1809

## Nelson's Favourite: HMS Agamemnon, 1781-1809

*Anthony N. Deane*

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**Anthony N. Deane : Nelson's Favourite: HMS Agamemnon, 1781-1809** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Nelson's Favourite: HMS Agamemnon, 1781-1809:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Don Farr good book, no problems 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating information. Lots of excerpts from original letters and ... By Scot Fascinating information. Lots of excerpts from original letters and documents. Very well written. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Good primary sources mixed with sloppy writing By lightseconds This book has some good parts and some bad parts. I think the best parts are the excerpts from primary sources. The author has selected excerpts that shed light on parts of British naval history from these wars that are interesting, but not often written much about. I particularly enjoyed the discussion of the mutinies in 1797 that occurred at Spithead, the Nore, and elsewhere. They're

mentioned in many other books on these subjects, but not often discussed in depth (probably because Nelson was not present at them). There are also some excerpts from the *Agamemnon's* log in an appendix that give an account of the day-to-day activities of the warship. On the other hand, sometimes the research is not good. The worst example I've noticed of this is the discussion on punishment in the British navy (pp. 41-43). The author begins with a discussion of keelhauling and marooning, two of the most sensational seagoing punishments that are known. Yet keelhauling, as the author admits, seems to have died out in the British navy at least by 1750 (by 1720, according to other secondary sources). My admittedly cursory research into the subject has not turned up any solid evidence that it was in fact practiced in the British navy, aside from old stories and rumors, none of which name specific sailors, ships, or officers involved. Several sources, such as Falconer, refer specifically to the Dutch navy as using this punishment. But in any case, it seems to have been out of practice in the British navy at least 30 years before the *Agamemnon* was launched, if it was ever used there in the first place. Then there's marooning. The author lists two examples of sailors who were marooned: Alexander Selkirk in 1704 (not 1719, as the author says) and Robert Jeffrey in 1807. Selkirk was serving on a privateer, not a navy ship, and of course was rescued more than 50 years before the *Agamemnon* was launched. Jeffrey, on the other hand, was a sailor in the British navy who was indeed marooned on the island Sombrero by his captain, Warwick Lake. But this was an illegal act, which Lake apparently tried to conceal by claiming that Jeffrey had deserted. When Lake's commanding officer, Alexander Cochrane, found out, he ordered Lake to return to the island and recover Jeffrey. (It turned out that Jeffrey had been rescued earlier by an American vessel.) Although Lake was promoted soon afterward, he was later court-martialed and dismissed from the service for these actions, while Jeffrey was eventually given back pay from the Admiralty and a monetary settlement from Lake. In fact, the Admiralty was apparently embarrassed enough by the incident that it sent two vessels to determine the Jeffrey's likelihood of survival on the island, as evidence in Lake's court-martial. But Deane, the author of this book, does not mention any of these details about Jeffrey's case. The omission of the details suggests that Jeffrey's ordeal was a legitimate but rarely-used punishment, rather than the illegal and anomalous abuse of power that it seems to have been. So, on the whole, it seems that it was misleading to suggest that keelhauling and marooning were legitimate punishments that happened with any frequency. On the other hand the practice of so-called starting (casual beating of sailors with pieces of rope or light rods) was common practice and a real problem in the British navy at the time. It seems to me like an error of judgment to include sensational punishments that apparently did not occur on the *Agamemnon* while ignoring an endemic, brutal disciplinary practice that probably did happen on the ship. The author also sometimes takes too much poetic license with history. For instance, at the end of the book, after an admirably thorough description of the court-martial for the loss of the ship, he writes this: "The strain of the day lifted almost visibly from the shoulders of the assembled men. Respectful murmurs of congratulations were heard all around; there was a humbled shaking of hands. Captain Curzon got to his feet and smiled. He picked up Rose's battered sword from the table, and holding it by the scabbard, held the hilt toward the shaken man. Rose reached for the sword with bowed head, no doubt overwhelmed in his moment of absolution." (p. 290) This is the author's writing. It is not a quotation from a primary source. Did the author almost see the strain almost visibly lifting from the men's shoulders? How could the author know that the congratulatory murmurs were respectful? Who shook whose hands, and how does the author know that it happened humbly? How does the author know the condition of Rose's sword? Did the author see Rose's head bowed when he reached for the sword? This passage would have been fine in a novel, but it's out of place in a book that's supposed to be facts. I'm surprised that Deane and his editors let it stay in the final copy. Despite these flaws, this book has many good parts to it. But it should only be read by somebody whose knowledge of this period of British naval history is so thorough that they can easily fact-check the many unsourced claims that the author makes. Readers may be interested in "The Sea Warriors," by Richard Woodman. It, too, describes parts of the story of the British navy of this time that are interesting, but not often told. It is nowhere near as rich in primary sources, but I think that the factual accuracy is more reliable there, although I haven't scrutinized it very closely.

Anthony Deane's account of the 28 year career of Nelson's favourite ship the *Agamemnon* describes life and death in the Royal Navy when the ships were made of wood and the men of iron. For three of the most crucial decades of British naval history, the *Agamemnon* was at the centre of events, fighting at the Saintes, Copenhagen and Trafalgar. She later served in the West Indies, was present at the Battle of Santo Domingo, and later in South America, where she was wrecked off the coast of present-day Uruguay in 1809. As well as telling the story of the ship, this book provides information on the operations of Britain's "wooden walls", accounts of conditions of life at sea, and full histories of all the campaigns the *Agamemnon* was involved in.