of Venice, a city which had obviously captivated Alan. It seems a pity that in a busy life he did not find time for more overseas ventures.

While looking through the pleasurable pages of this book I came to realise that Alan’s skills as a water-colourist were the same as those attained by 19th century hydrographers who enhanced their surveys with exquisite views of the coast.

Reviewed by Steve Ritchie

Book Review

Sea Charts of the British Isles
A Voyage of Discovery around Britain and Ireland’s Coastline


John Blake’s ‘Sea Charts of the British Isles’ is aptly described by it’s own sub-title: ‘a voyage of discovery around Britain and Ireland’s coastline’.

The presentation of this book is highly pictorial. There are beautiful colour illustrations of charts and views on every page, each with carefully researched notes and original references. It’s 28 x 24cm x 128 page format can possibly be best described as ‘for the coffee table’; the sort of book one would delight at finding in the lounge of a yacht club, wardroom or hotel. Though the author disclaims it as a work of reference, it contains such a wealth of historical fact about harbours and estuaries, navigators, surveyors, cartographers, their sponsors and their methods, that it would also be well placed in a reference library.

Because geology underlies the way these islands were formed and subsequently shaped by the forces of the sea, the book begins with a general geological description of Britain and Ireland. It explains how rock and shoal hazards come to be where they are and then leads naturally on to an historical review of the motivations of war and trade lying behind efforts to pictorially chart the coast of the British Isles. Prominent organisations and individuals who took initiatives to do this are introduced with illustrations of their early
attempts and a summary is made of how this pro-
gressed from the early 16th to the late 19th centu-
ry towards the style of charts we recognise today.

The reader is then taken, in six delightfully illustrat-
ed chapters, on a virtual passage around the
British Isles viewed from the perspective of the
navigator using early charts and plans. The voyage
begins in the Thames before progressing along the
South Coast and then north through the Irish Sea
to describe the West Coast of England and Wales.
Diverting in the fifth chapter to encompass the
whole coast of Eire and Northern Ireland, the next
describes the charting of Scotland and the outer
Isles. The last chapter takes the mariner south-
wards, along the East Coast of England to a final
landfall in Harwich. Each section of coast is geo-
graphically and anecdotally described, somewhat
in the style of a modern tourist guide, but nonethe-
less interesting for that. Chapters are all generous-
ly interspersed with plates copied from archived
charts and other material, which illustrate histori-
cal facts or interesting features that the author has
highlighted. Each illustration is separately support-
ed with short, factual and very well referenced
notes. The book can therefore be read from cover
to cover or dipped into at any point for either refer-
ence or simply enjoyment.

After a career in the Royal Navy, in 1996 John
Blake initiated the licensing of material in the UK
Hydrographic Office archives. Having gained a lot
of inside knowledge from doing this he is clearly
making good use of this experience in his book.
He has made a genuine contribution to the record
and perhaps more importantly, to extending public
awareness of the fine history of hydrography in the
British Isles.

Reviewed by Paul Edge

---

**Book Review**

**The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea**

By I.C.B. Dear and Peter Kemp, Published by Oxford University Press (Second edition

Since its first edition in 1976 the Oxford Com-
panion to Ships and the Sea has been a
source of both delight and practical informa-
tion to its wide spec-
trum of readers.
These range from pro-
fessionals in all
marine fields, through
yachtsmen and other
recreational sea
users, to those who
simply have an inter-
est in the sea, its
people and the Eng-
lish language - of
which the sea is an
inherent source.

The strength of the
book lies in its clarity
of explanation, fre-
quently taking a sub-
ject which is intrinsi-
cally complex yet
describing it in under-
standable terms and
clear illustration. Its