

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.

colourist were the same as those attained by 19th century hydrographers who enhanced their surveys with exquisite views of the coast.

While looking through the pleasurable pages of this book I came to realise that Alan's skills as a water-

Reviewed by Steve Ritchie

Book Review

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

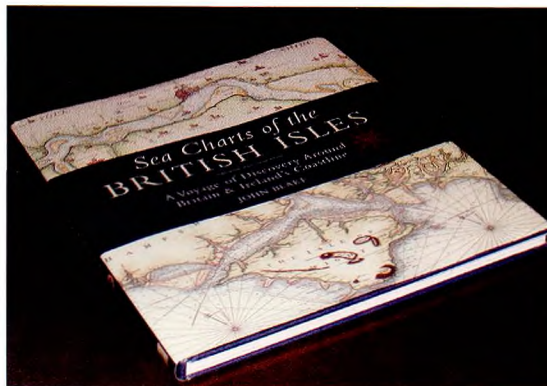
By John Blake, published by Conway Maritime Press in 2005, ISBN1-84486-024-8

John Blake's 'Sea Charts of the British Isles' is aptly described by its 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 progressed from the early 16th to the late 19th century towards the style of charts we recognise today.

The reader is then taken, in six delightfully illustrated 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 southwards, along the East Coast of England to a final landfall in Harwich. Each section of coast is geographically and anecdotally described, somewhat in the style of a modern tourist guide, but nonetheless interesting for that. Chapters are all generous-

ly interspersed with plates copied from archived charts and other material, which illustrate historical facts or interesting features that the author has highlighted. Each illustration is separately supported 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 reference 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

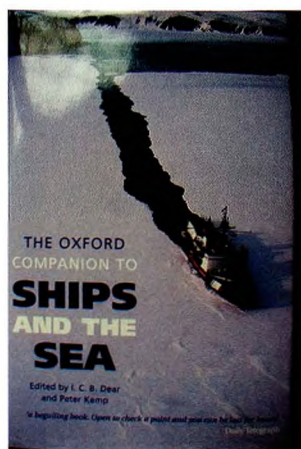
## Book Review

### The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea

By I.C.B. Dear and Peter Kemp, Published by Oxford University Press (Second edition 2005, First edition 1976), ISBN 0- 9-860616-8 / ISBN 978-0-19-860616-1

Since its first edition in 1976 the Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea has been a source of both delight and practical information to its wide spectrum of readers.

These range from professionals 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 English language - of which the sea is an inherent source.

The strength of the book lies in its clarity of explanation, frequently taking a subject which is intrinsically complex yet describing it in understandable terms and clear illustration. Its