

*Updated: 20th December 2023*

Privateering

*“Argent d’guerre n’a pas d’serre”*

(War money has no rest)

An old Guernsey proverb meaning that prize money gained through privateering was often spent quickly.

***What is a privateer?***

In summary, a privateer is a legalised pirate. Although the practice of authorised sea-raiding in Europe dated to at least the 13th Century the word 'privateer' was coined sometime in the mid-17th Century. During periods of war, a monarch (or other delegated authority) could issue commissions (referred to as *letters of marque*) that entitled a private individual or ship to engage in maritime warfare as well as exempting the crew from naval conscription. This included attacking foreign vessels and taking them as prizes, as well as taking prize crews as prisoners for exchange. Captured ships were sold under *prize law*, with the proceeds divided between the privateer's sponsors, shipowners, captains and crew. A percentage share usually went to the issuer of the commission (i.e. the sovereign). Privateering therefore allowed sovereigns to raise revenue for war by mobilizing privately owned armed ships and sailors to supplement state power. For participants, privateering provided the potential for a greater income and profit than obtainable as a merchant seafarer or fisher. However, this incentive increased the risk of privateers turning to piracy when war ended.

It is worth noting the distinction between a privateer and a *Letter of Marque* ship. Although both were in possession of a *letter of marque*, the former was an armed private vessel specifically commissioned to seize enemy ships whilst the latter was a merchant vessel that had the authority to seize enemy vessels should the opportunity arise (or as an alternate source of income if trade was poor).

✪ - Recommend reading.

❖ - Light introductory reads to the topic.

🔑 – This item is located in the strong room. Please speak to a member of staff to access.

**🖳** - Internet resource.

Appleby, J.C. – **“Neutrality, Trade and Privateering”.** *A People of the Sea: The Maritime History of Guernsey.* London: Methuen & Co. Ltd 1986 [LF 387.5 JAM] – p.59

Bonnard, B. – ***Ships and Soldiers: A Military and Maritime History of the Island of Alderney***. Stroud: Fonthill Media Limited, 2013 [LH 355.009 BON] – pp.46, 52, 54, 57, 65, 70 & Chapter 6.

Bromley, J.S. – ***Corsairs and Navies 1660 – 1760***. London: The Hambledon Press, 1987 [GROVES 910.45 BRO] – A socio-economic study of privateering in the mid-17th to mid-18th Centuries. Chapter 16 looks specifically at the Channel Islands in the War of Spanish Succession. For this chapter see also: **“The Channel Island Privateers in the War of the Spanish Succession”.** *La Société Guernesiaise Transactions, 1949 –* p.444.

Bromley, J.S. - **“The Trade and Privateering of Saint-Malo during the War of the Spanish Succession** *La Société Guernesiaise Transactions, 1964 –* p.631

Cataroche, J. – ***The History and Archaeology of Jethou***. Wisley: L&C Press, 2012 [LK 930.1 CAT] – pp.62, 79-81

Cooper, G. – **“The pirates of St. Peter Port”.** *Guernsey Evening Press, 7th July 2006*

✪ Cox, G.S. – ***St. Peter Port 1680-1830***. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999 [LOC 940.253 COX] – p.44

❖ Coysh, V. – ***Bygone Guernsey: Part I***. Guernsey: Guernsey Press Co. Ltd, c.1950 [LOC 940 COY] – “Privateering” p.24

Davey, J. (ed.) – ***Tudor & Stuart Seafarers: The Emergence of a Maritime Nation, 1485-1707.*** London: Adlard Coles, 2018 [GROVES 359.1 TUD] – See index for a general overview of British privateers.

❖ Encyclopaedia Britannica (eds.) – “**Pirates, Privateers, Corsairs, Buccaneers: What’s the Difference?”** *www.britannica.com*, https://www.britannica.com/story/pirates-privateers-corsairs-buccaneers-whats-the-difference

❖ Girard, P. – ***More of*** ***Peter Girard’s Guernsey*.** Guernsey: The Guernsey Press Company Limited, 1990 [LOC 940 GIR] – p.69

✪ Jamieson, A.G. (ed.) – ***A People of the Sea: The Maritime History of Guernsey*.** London: Methuen & Co. Ltd 1986 [LF 387.5 JAM] – A good overview of the relationship between the Channel Islands and the sea.

Jamieson, A.G. – **“The Return to Privateering: Channel Island Privateers, 1739-83”.** *A People of the Sea: The Maritime History of Guernsey.* London: Methuen & Co. Ltd 1986 [LF 387.5 JAM] – p.148

Johnston, P. - **“Privateering Prizes”** *The Quarterly Review of the Guernsey Society, Summer 1996 Vol. LII No. 2* - p.40

Lenfestey, G. – **“Nearly Caught by a Corsair!”.** *The Quarterly Review of the Guernsey Society, Summer 2006 Vol. LXII No. 2* - p.45, accounts of Thomas Austin of his run ins with privateers during the Napoleonic Wars.

Le Pelley, E.J. – **“America has her tokens in island”.** *Guernsey Evening Press, 24th June 1976* – discusses American privateers in local waters.

Le Pelley, J. – **“Six-vessel haul of famous privateer”.** *Guernsey Evening Press, 27th October 1977* – Discusses Captain Le Beir of the *May Flower*.

Marr, L.J. – ***A History of the Bailiwick of Guernsey: The Islanders’ Story.*** London / Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 1982 [LOC 940 MAR] – see ‘privateering’ in index and Appendix XVI.

Marr, L. J. - ***Guernsey People***. Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd, 1984 [LOF 920.02 MAR] – the notorious privateer and corsair, Jean Allaire (1763-1846) (p.2)

✪❖ McLoughlin, R. - ***The Sea was their Fortune*.** Bradford on Avon: Seaflower Books, 1997 [LF 387.5 MAC] - Another good & shorter overview of the relationship between the Channel Islands and the sea.

Meyer, W.R. – **“The Channel Island Privateers, 1793-1815”.** *A People of the Sea: The Maritime History of Guernsey.* London: Methuen & Co. Ltd 1986 [LF 387.5 JAM] – p.173 (see also *La Société Guernesiaise Transactions, 1982 –* p.226)

✪ Morieux, R. – ***The Channel*.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016 [303.48244] – Focusing on the 18th Century with numerous references to Guernsey.

Peyton-Jones, G. – **“Notes on Privateering”.** *The Quarterly Review of the Guernsey Society, Winter 1964 Vol. XX No. 4* – p.81

🔑 Pitts, J. Linwood - **“Bygone Guernsey II. Privateering-Perils & War Risks in the Channel”.** *The Sun, 9th July 1892* [Staff 40D]

🔑 Pitts, J. Linwood - **“Bygone Guernsey V. The Old Guernsey Smugglers and Privateers”.** *The Sun, 6th August 1892* [Staff 40D]

🔑 Pitts, J. Linwood - **“Bygone Guernsey VI. Privateering – Guernsey Letters of Marque”.** *The Sun, 15th October 1892* [Staff 40D]

🔑 Pitts, J. Linwood - **“Bygone Guernsey VII. Privateering – Signing Articles”.** *The Sun, 29th October 1892* [Staff 40D]

🔑 Pitts, J. Linwood - **“Bygone Guernsey IX. The Ethics of Privateering”.** *The Sun, 26th November 1892* [Staff 40D]

🔑 Pitts, J. Linwood - **“Bygone Guernsey X. Privateering – Guernsey Captures and Prizes”.** *The Sun, 10th December 1892* [Staff 40D]

🔑 Pitts, J. Linwood - **“Bygone Guernsey XIII. Privateering – More Channel Islands Captures”.** *The Sun, 14th January 1893* [Staff 40D]

Raban, P. - **“War and Trade in the Mid-Eighteenth Century”.** *La Société Guernesiaise Transactions, 1986 –* p.131

Raban, P. - **“The Economics of Privateering”.** *Alderney Society and Museum Quarterly Bulletin, Vol XXI No 3, December 1986 –* p.16

Raban, P. - **“Clandestine Trade in the Mid-Eighteenth Century”.** *La Société Guernesiaise Transactions, 1987 –* p.303

Raban, P. - **“Nicholas Le Messurier (1731 – 1759) A Guernsey Privateer Captain in The Seven Years War”.** *La Société Guernesiaise Transactions, 1990 –* p.878

Raban, P. – **“The Profits of Privateering: A Guernsey Fleet, 1756 - 1762**”. *The Mariner’s Mirror, Volume 80, 1994*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1994 [located in the St. Aubyn Room, a copy of this article can also be found in the Privateering hanging file]

Rediker, M. – ***Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea***. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987 [910.45 RED] – An academic overview of merchant seamen, piracy and the Anglo-American maritime world between 1700 and 1750.

Sarre, J.W. - **“The Ship L’Invention 1801 – 1805 and Her Prize”.** *La Société Guernesiaise Transactions, 1988 –* p.466. An account of a privateering ship bought by Carteret Priaulx & Co. in 1801.

Sharp, E.W. – **“Great prizes gained by island’s privateers”.** *Guernsey Evening Press, 23rd October 1968*

Sharp, E.W. – **“Letter of marque – legal plunder”.** *Guernsey Evening Press, 21st May 1971*

Sharp, E.W. – **“How privateers ransomed captive ships”.** *Guernsey Evening Press, 24th May 1971*

Sharp, E.W. – **“Admiralty instructions about rebel shipping”.** *Guernsey Evening Press, 11th June 1971*

Sharp, E.W. – **“Severe penalties for privateer pirates”.** *Guernsey Evening Press, 18th June 1971*

Sharp, E.W. – **“How bail system operated”.** *Guernsey Evening Press, 18th June 1971*

Starkey, D.J. – ***British Privateering Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century***. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990 [GROVES 910.45 STA] – The Channel Islands are heavily referenced in the index.

Timewell, H.C. – **“Guernsey Privateers**”. *The Mariner’s Mirror, Volume 56, 1970*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1970 [a copy of this article can be found at LOC 359 TIM]

Timewell, H.C. – **“The Double Dealer**”. *The Mariner’s Mirror, Volume 72, 1986*. Greenwich: The Society for Nautical Research, 1986 [this book can be found in the St. Aubyn Room] – p.81, article regarding the infamous Jean Allaire.

Tupper, F.B. – ***The History of Guernsey and its Bailiwick***. Guernsey: Barbet, 1854 [LOC 940 TUP] – p.335 (an account of privateering from 1666), p.349 (early 1700s privateering and a commission given to Captain Edward Browne in 1702), p.388 (answers to the British commissioner regarding privateering in 1800).

Uttley, J. – **The Story of the Channel Islands**. London: Faber & Faber, 1966 [LF 940 UTT] – p.63

Warren, J.P. – **“Studies in the History of Guernsey: 56. Privateering: 1, The Men and Their Ships”.** *The Star, 12th April 1956*

[L] Warren, J.P. – **“Studies in the History of Guernsey: 46. La Chevauchee de St Michel”.** *The Star, 12th April 1956*

Warren, J.P. – **“57. Privateering (II): Various exploits”.** *Studies in the History of Guernsey* (red scrapbook in staff area) – p.110

Warren, J.P. – **“57. Privateering III: valuable prizes”.** *Studies in the History of Guernsey* (red scrapbook in staff area) – p.112

White, M. - **“The Carteret Priaulx Papers (The Influence of the Napoleonic Wars on Guernsey)”.** *La Société Guernesiaise Transactions, 1963 –* p.447

Wickens, P.L. – “**Capital Dispersal in the Eighteenth Century: Guernsey Privateers in the American Civil War of Independence”**. 1983 [Privateering hanging file]

**🖳** Yon, H. - **“Les Corsaires de la Manche”**. *www.migrations.fr,* http://www.migrations.fr/corsairesprises.htm - In French, details prizes taken by Malouin privateers (includes Guernsey ships, from the 17th Century)

🔑 Uncredited – ***The Channel Islands’ Shipping***[LF 359 CHA] – A handwritten diary of interesting nautical events from 1828 to 1901. Of particular relevance are the notes of privateering in 1779 and 1782.

Uncredited – **“The Capture of a French Privateer”.** *The Quarterly Review of the Guernsey Society, Summer 1985 Vol. XLI No. 2* – p.54, extract from a letter dated 1797 regarding the capture of a French cutter privateer.

**“Letter from Frederick Le Mesurier to his brother Peter while at sea – September 1782 (Part 2).** *The Quarterly Review of the Guernsey Society, Winter 2008/9 Vol. LV No. 3* – p.96, a contemporary reference regarding privateering & how ships were beginning to sail with convoys.

**“Instructions for the Commanders of Such Merchant Ships or Vessels Who Shall have Letters of Marque and Reprisals”.** 1793 [Privateering hanging files] – a copy of the legalities laid out for privateers as determined at the Court of St. James in 1793.

🔑 Letters of Marque – the library has a selection of original letters of marque.

🔑 ***Details of Privateers, fitted out from Guernsey and Alderney, 1778-1782*** [LOC 910.45 PRI – Pamphlets Box B] – Relates specifically to the American Revolutionary War & details the number and value of prizes taken from American, French, Spanish and Dutch ships.

🔑 ***Privateering Papers*** [Folio LOC 359.4 PRI] – Scrapbook compiled by Edith Carey containing a large number of original documents pertaining to privateering, including; receipts, contemporary guides to privateering, crew lists, letters of marque,

🔑 Two 18th Century letters; one regarding a legal dispute over a prize taken by the *Marlborough* and the other a contract regarding the operation of the *New Daphné* [LOC 359.4 LIS]

🔑 ***List of Privateers and Prizes*** [LOC 359.4 - Folio] – Compiled by Ferdinand Brock Tupper in the 19th Century.

**🖳 “Guernsey Letters of Marque”**. *www.thisislandwiki.org,* http://www.theislandwiki.org/index.php/Guernsey\_Letters\_of\_Marque

**🖳 “War of 1812: Privateers”**. *www.1812privateers.org,* http:// https://www.1812privateers.org/ - a great resource regarding Anglo American War in which Guernsey privateers participated.

**The Raban Collection:** Located in the Tomlinson Room this collection compiled by Canon Peter Raban contains a large amount of information on privateering including; files containing declarations of letters of marque, prize papers, prize court sentences and other legal documents as well as card indexes of Guernsey privateers operating during the American War of Independence (1777 – 1783) and Guernsey ships receiving letters of marque (1793 – 1801 and 1803 – 1815).

**Groves Collection:** For other books on privateering that are not specifically about the Channel Islands please browse the Groves Collection located in the St. Aubyn Room on the 1st floor. Privateering has a 910.45 shelf number but see the shelf guide for the shelf numbers of other related maritime topics such as trade.

**🗁 Hanging Files**: Ask a member of staff to see our hanging file containing numerous pieces of information and documents regarding privateering including; privateering signals, a list of ships between 1739 and 1748 with letters of marque, lists of some of the 18th Century Guernsey privateers.

**🖳 Priaulx Library Website:** Search our website at *www.priaulxlibrary.co.uk* for numerous interesting articles on privateering.

***Guernsey French Terms:***

Privateer aen capre

A person owning shares in a privateering vessel armateur

A privateer’s prize prinse

***Piracy & Smuggling:***

For the related subject of piracy and smuggling please see our separate reference guide.