

A Model of an English Brig of War

NOTES AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIK A. R. RONNBERG, JR.

Navy board models, admiralty models, and dockyard models are the most common terms applied to ship models built in the naval dockyards of European nations and used for a variety of official purposes. Design study, training, and presentation as gifts are among the most popular reasons advanced for their coming into being, but there is so much variation in the style of their construction from country to country that the models built for each navy must be considered in light of the needs and traditions of the country in question. Thus, Swedish dockyard models cannot be fairly compared with those of France or England, just as those of France differ markedly from England's.

English dockyard models are the best-known, most admired, and most notorious of the type, due to their beauty and fine workmanship—and their frequent and well-publicized appearances in the fine arts market. In most other maritime nations, ravages of war and stricter government ownership have limited the circulation of such models; only in England have they survived in such numbers as to circulate widely and attract the attention of collectors.

The subject of this pictorial essay is a latecomer to the English dockyard model tradition, and an unusual one by comparison with the ships of the line which we normally think of as subjects. For this very reason, a dockyard model of a brig is a very significant find and a welcome opportunity to flesh out our knowledge of a lesser type of warship. Moreover, this model conforms to a class of naval brig described in contemporary literature, so we can compare it with published descriptions and learn something about the variations which vessels of this design could have.

After first seeing this model in a dealer's gallery and not being sure of what it was, I quickly found that it matched very closely the design of an English naval brig described by Petrejus in his book on the brig of war *Irene*.¹ The model was loaned to me for study and photographing, during which time I compared it with Petrejus' description and with plans in Steel's *Naval Architecture*.² Another of Petrejus' sources was a model of a *Cruizer* class brig of war in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, which I was able to locate in that museum's catalog

of ship models.³ Petrejus' reconstruction of *Irene*, *ex-Grasshopper*, 1806, also a *Cruizer* class brig, was based in large part on the plans of the 382-41/95-ton brig in Steel and assumed to be *Raven*, 1804. Figures 22 A-F (pp. 25, 26) in Petrejus are line-for-line tracings of Plates XII, XIII, and XIV in Steel, while the plans of *Irene* (Figures 571, 572, pp. 260, 261) show a hull of nearly identical form, but with a number of minor differences in the sheer, the bulwarks, and the deck layout.

Of the sources consulted, the plates in Steel bear the strongest resemblance in form and the fewest differences in detail. Steel's plans, originally to scale $1/4" = 1'$, matched the model's length, beam, and overall depth as closely as one could expect, after allowing for paper shrinkage in the folio plates. Petrejus' modified plans for *Irene* were also very close in these respects.

The plates in Steel are reproduced here for comparison with the photographs of the model, with Petrejus' plans of *Irene*, and with the National Maritime Museum's model of the unidentified brig. In addition, the following description is from the text in Steel:

We now turn to another class equally worthy of commendation: namely, the New Brigs of war, built from the Navy Board Draughts in the year 1804, of which copies may be seen in plates XII, XIII, and XIV, of this work. An inspection of these will be sufficient to give the reader an idea of the superior qualities of this vessel. He will perceive, from the general contour, or figure, that she is admirably adapted for a good sea boat, as well as a good sailer; that her upper works are light, and all unnecessary top-hamper avoided. Having a snug stern, and, apparently, every good quality that can be expected in a vessel of this description. The lower deck, as shown on the plan, is so fitted with scuttles, that the contents of the hold may be shifted with much less trouble than usual. The other fittings are equally praise worthy, being peculiarly adapted to the comfort of every officer and every seaman on board.

One of these vessels, the *Raven*, upon being fitted for sea, at Woolwich, under the directions of her very ingenious and active commander, Captain William Layman, had, agreeably to his recommendation and wishes, among other alterations, the two foremost ports closed up, and the guns taken away. In lieu of which was fitted amidships, immediately before the foremast, a sixty-eight pounder carronade upon a fixed traverse carriage, so as to fire in almost every direction clear of the gunwale, upon the plan shewn in plates 13 and 14 [XIII and XIV]; and in lieu of the two stern chasers, a carronade of the same power, upon an inclined plane abaft. The wonderful accession of force derived from these alterations, and the

¹E.W. Petrejus, *Modelling the Brig-of-War "Irene"*, Hengelo-Holland, 1970.

²David Steel, *The Elements and Practice of Naval Architecture*, London, 1805 (Facsimile reprint: London, 1977).

³A.M. Waite, *National Maritime Museum Catalogue of Ship Models, Part 1: Ships of the Western Tradition to 1815*, London, n.d.

great advantages to be derived from them in chase, in clearing an enemy's coast, &c. are too obvious to need a comment.⁴

Close inspection of Plates XIII and XIV shows the pivot mount for the 68-pound carronade on *Raven's* fore deck; the stern mount is not shown in any of the plates. Steel also printed the contract for building *Raven* by a merchant shipwright; this is reproduced in its entirety in Petrejus, also in Davis, *The Built-Up Ship Model*.⁵

Comparison of this model with the brig model in National Maritime Museum shows a number of differences: the latter has a short hurricane deck over her stern in place of closets at the quarters; she carries two boats hung from quarter davits, but no yawl boat from stern davits; her arrangement of hatches differs somewhat and her captain is mounted amidships, instead of abaft the main mast. All of these are minor variations which might be expected within any class of warship of any rating. The NMM model otherwise seems to be the same hull design, though perhaps from a later date.

Comparisons aside, our brig model has many features which raise questions about its original appearance and use. The hull is framed, but the bottom is completely planked over with boxwood and fastened with fine brass nails or wire. The only open strakes are to be found on deck, revealing a complete deck frame, probably of pearwood. Barely visible inside are bulkheads and a lower deck, suggesting that the model was fitted with cabins, storerooms, and other accommodations. This made me regret very deeply that I did not have fiber optics attachments

for my camera. Still better would have been access to X-ray or CAT scan equipment, which would have provided details of construction as well as interior views. But if this model's interior was so elaborately furnished, why was it then all planked over?

Another inconsistency is the figurehead, which is dissimilar both in the quality of workmanship and material with the rest of the carvings of the head. It has the look of a subsequent addition, as if hastily added to make a prototype model a representation of a specific vessel.

The model has been re-rigged within the last two or three decades, as there is no trace of old linen rigging, and the existing rigging contains synthetics in several places. All of the blocks and deadeyes look original, as does the metal hardware—mostly brass wire hooks and brass thimbles. Unfortunately, it would be difficult to determine the age of the spars and fittings without removing them for samples of wood, and the present rigging is no help at all in determining when in the model's history the spars and rigging were added, [continued on p. 205]

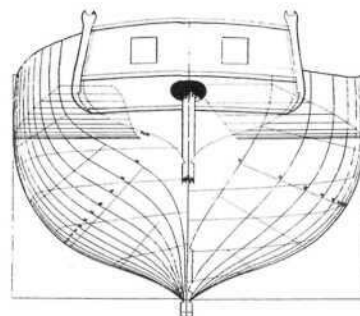
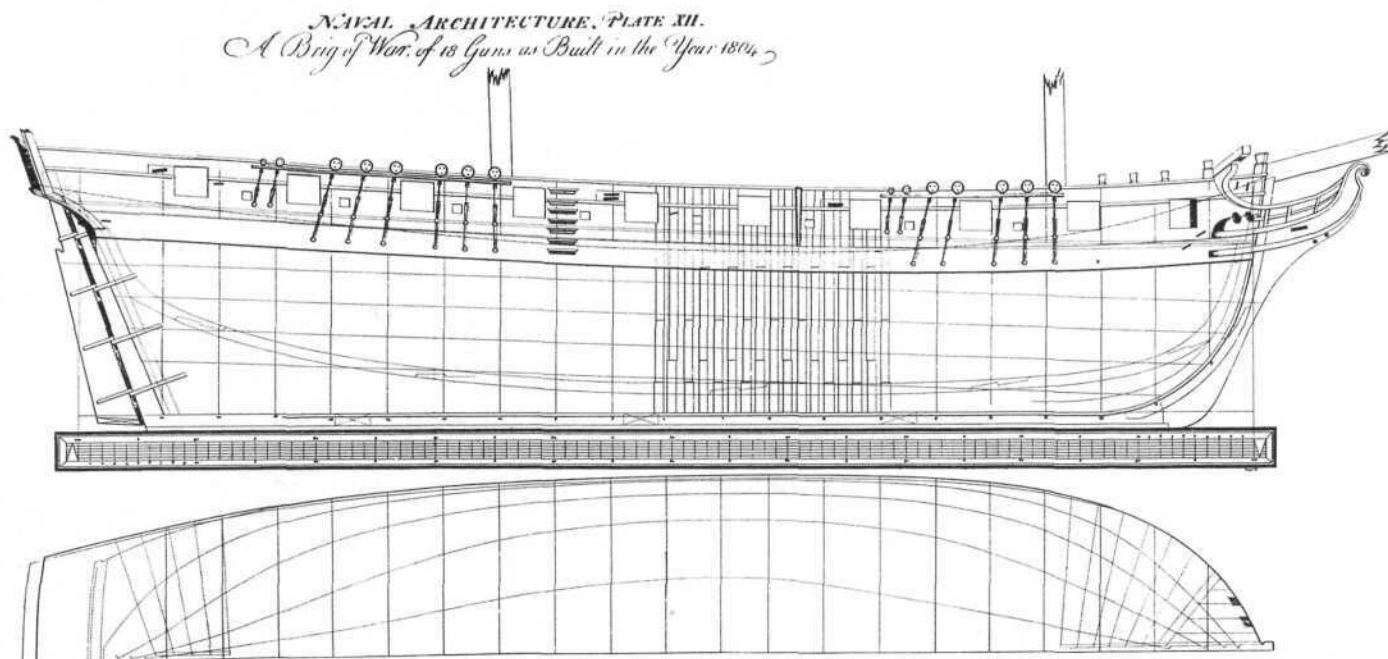


Plate XII from Steel, *The Elements and Practice of Naval Architecture*, 1805. Above: Hull sections from the left quarter of the plate. Below: Hull profile and water lines from the light three-quarters of the plate.

⁴Steel, *Naval Architecture*, pp. 179, 180.

⁵Charles G. Davis, *The Built-up Ship Model*, Salem, Massachusetts, 1933 (numerous reprints).





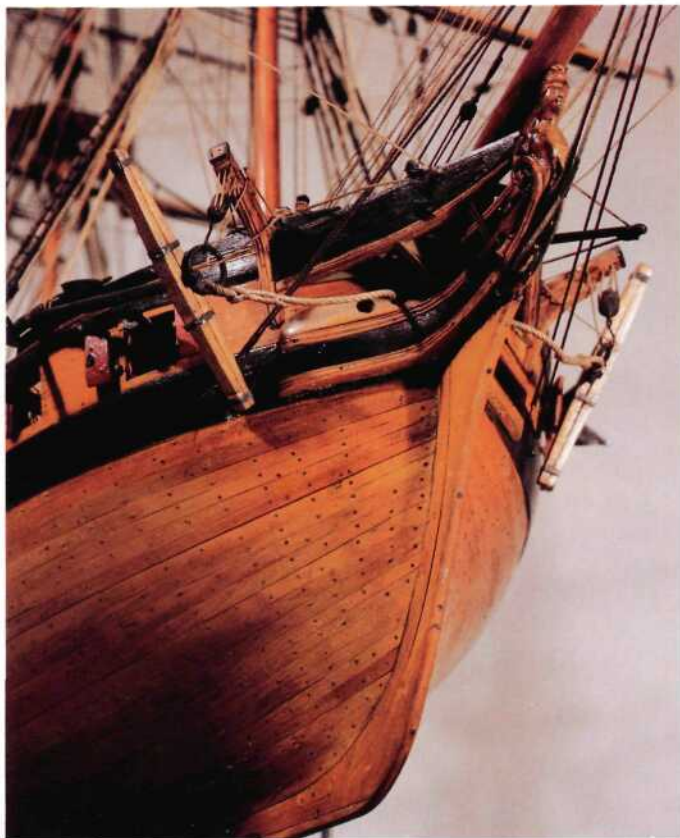
Model of an 18-gun Cruiser class brig of the Royal Navy. Vessel unidentified, scale 1/4" = 1' (all photos: Erik A. R. Ronnberg, Jr.)



Fore channels, starboard side



Forecastle deck and beakhead

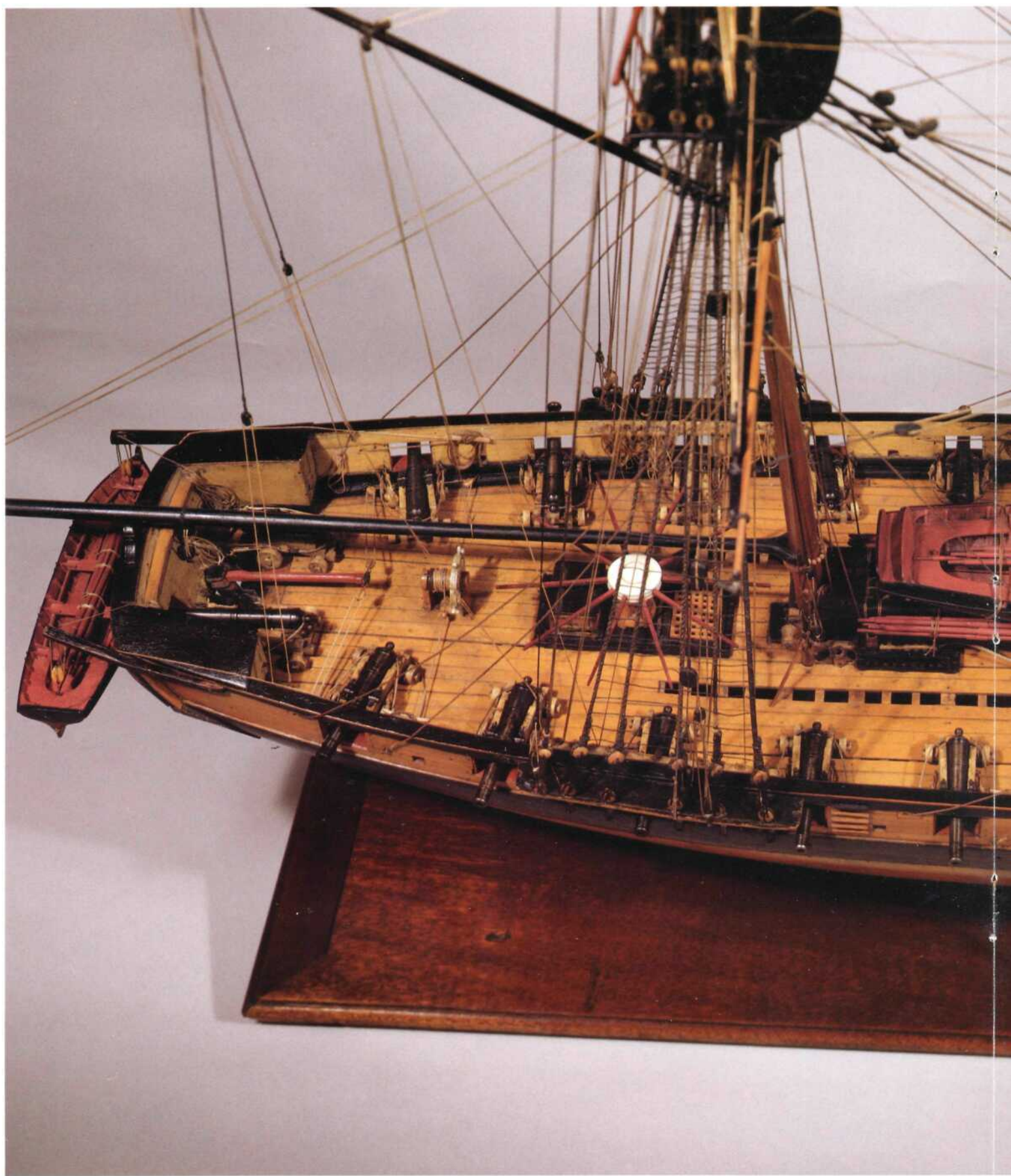


*Above: Beakhead and stem planking
Right: Stern and yawl boat*

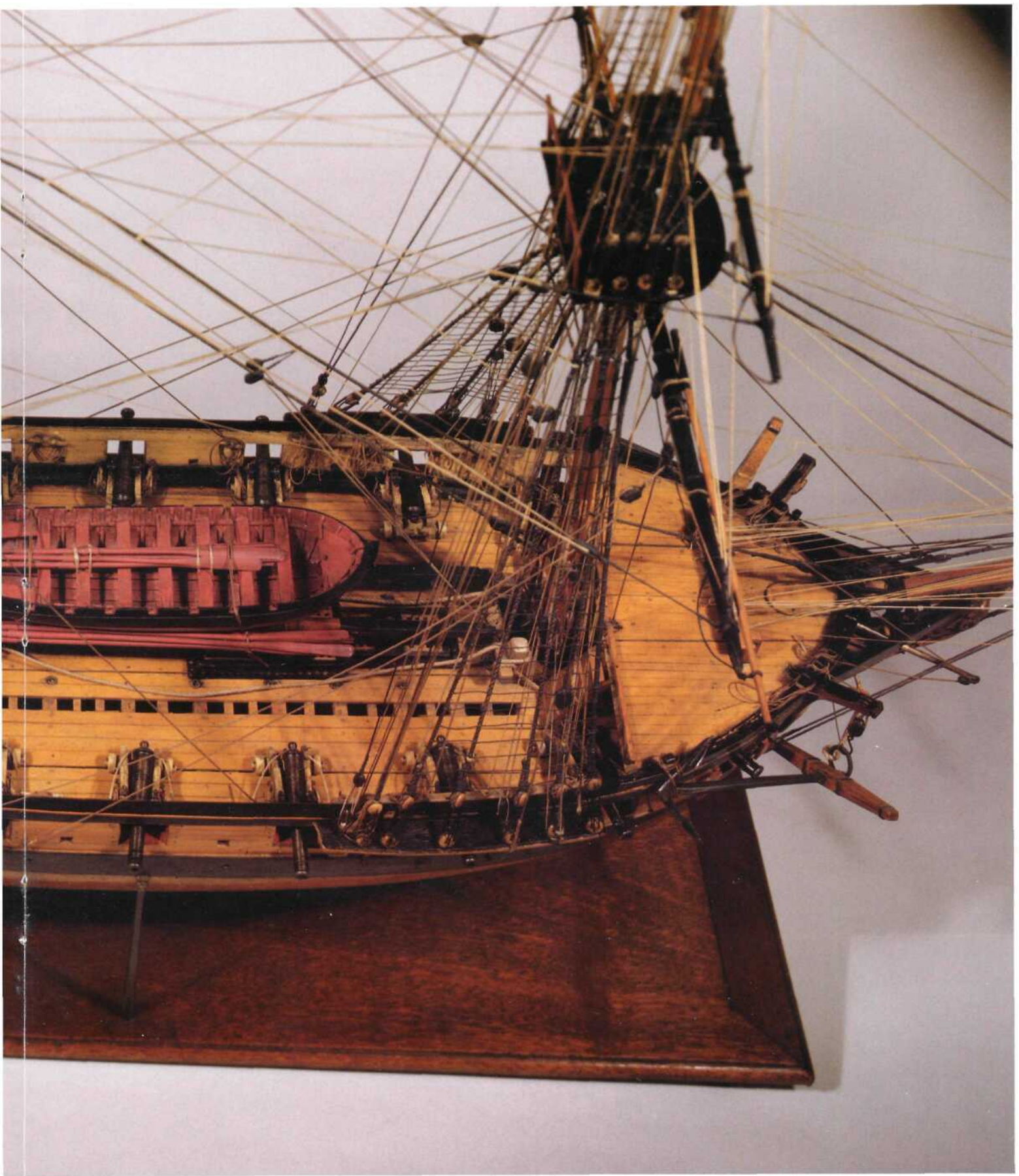


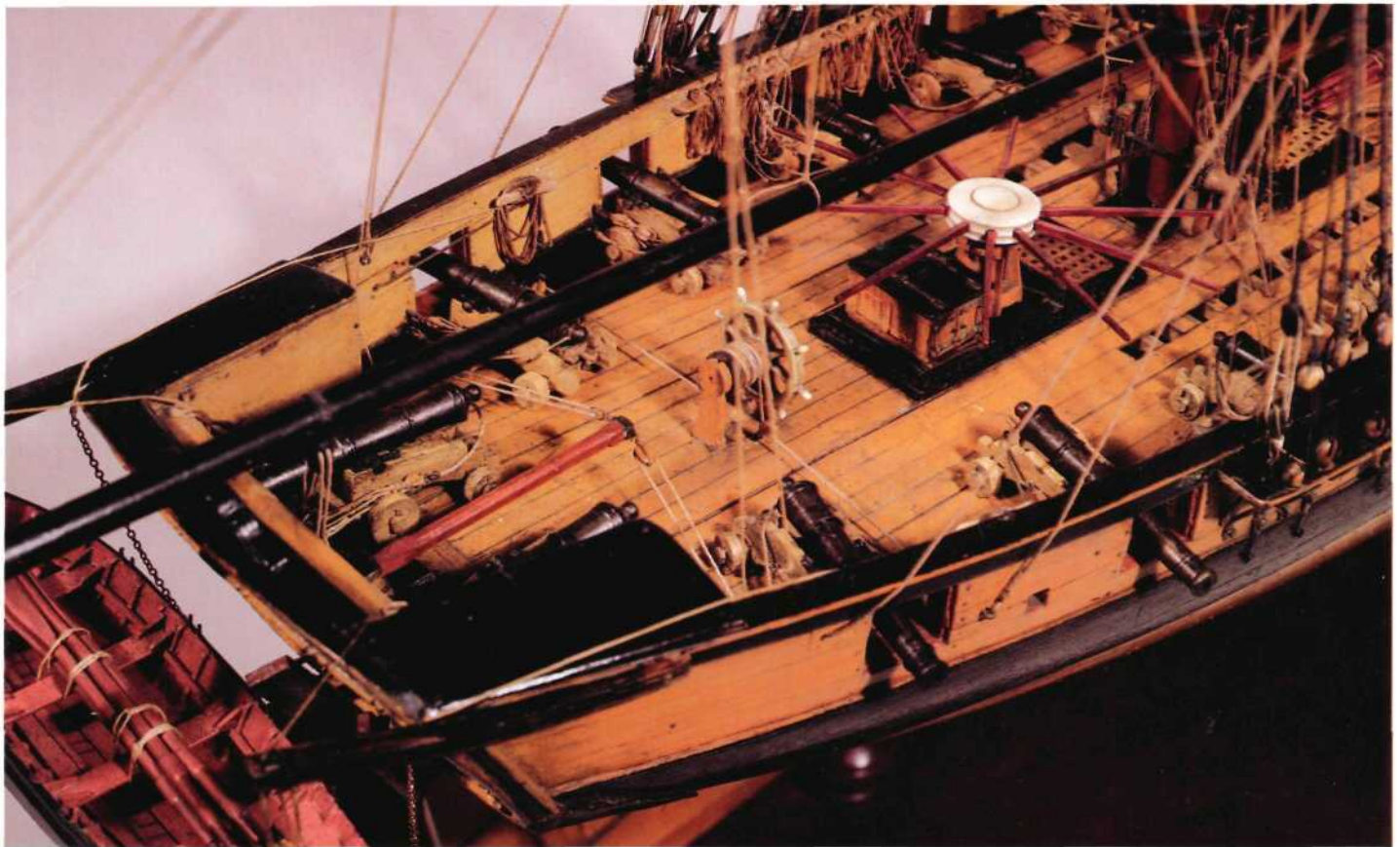


Fore rigging, starboard side

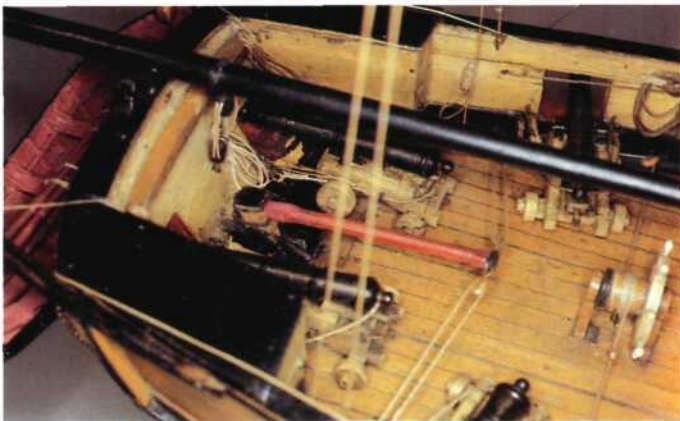


Deck view, model of Cruizer class brig, vessel unidentified.

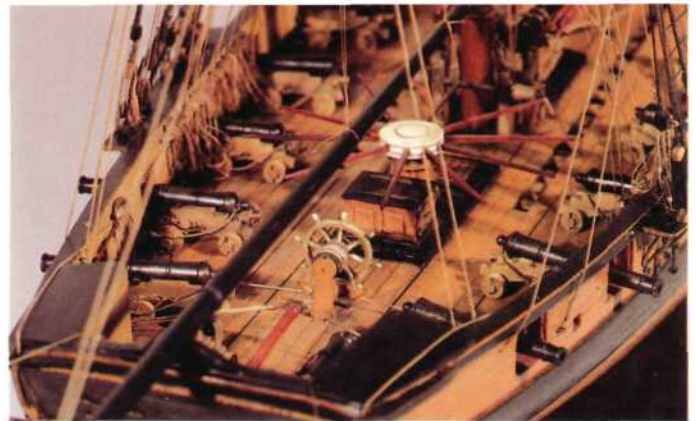




Starboard quarter and port bulwarks



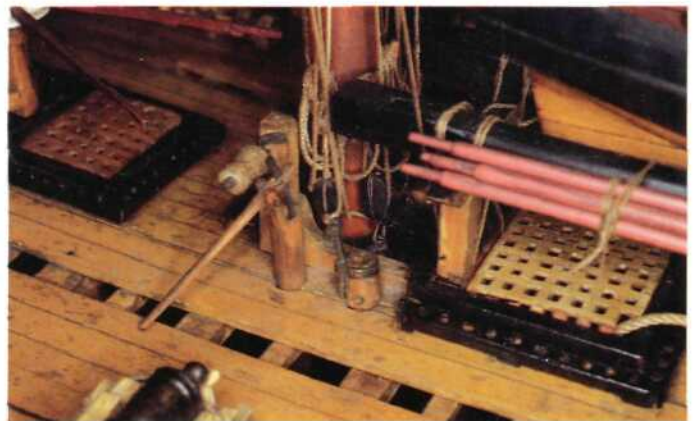
Tiller and stern armament



Steering wheel and capstan, both of ivory



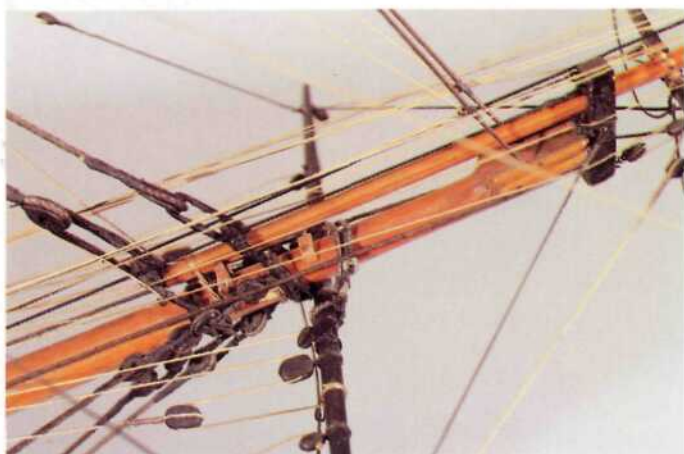
Capstan and companionway to the after cabins



Log pumps at the main mast



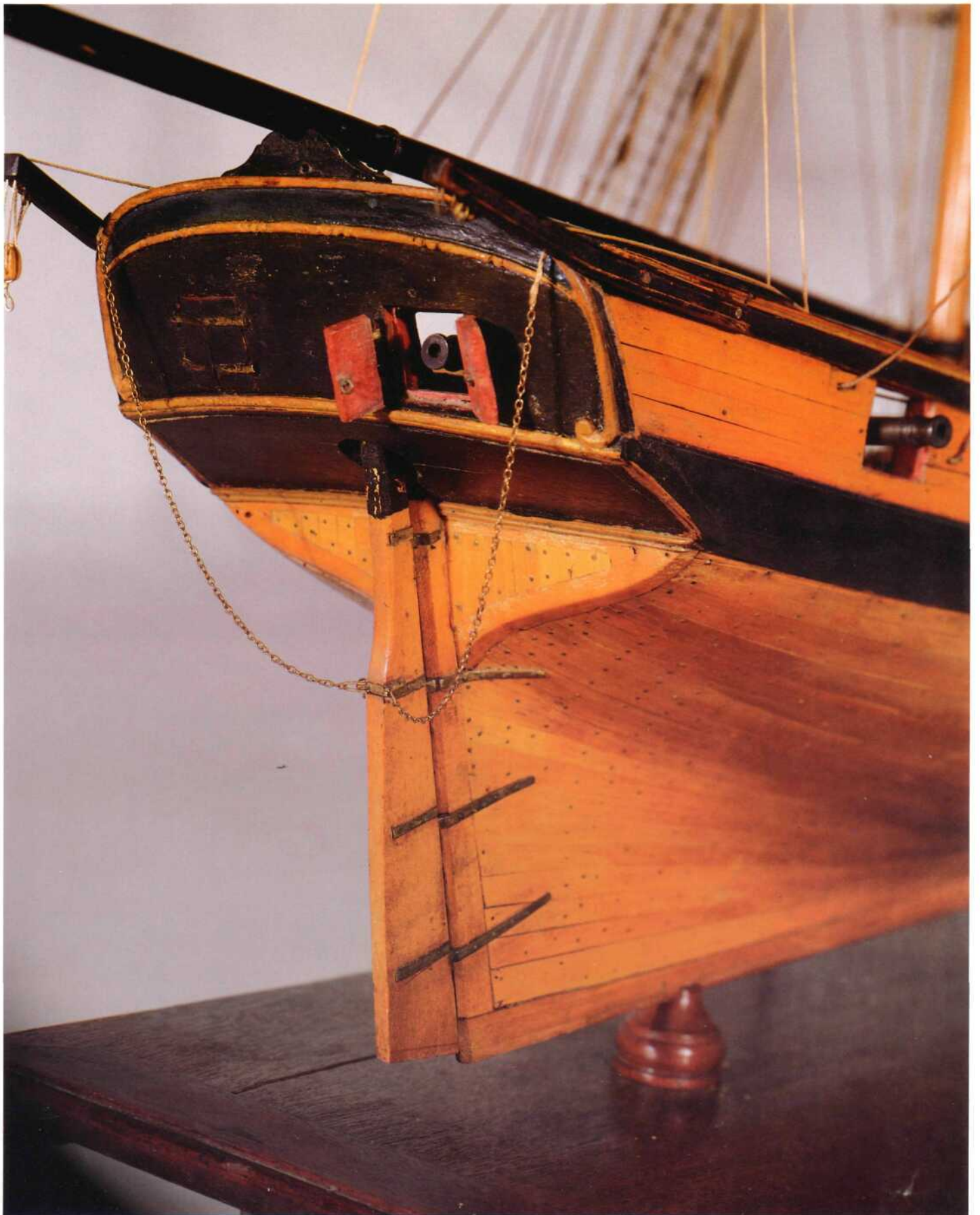
Fore mast, starboard side



Bowsprit and Spritsail yard

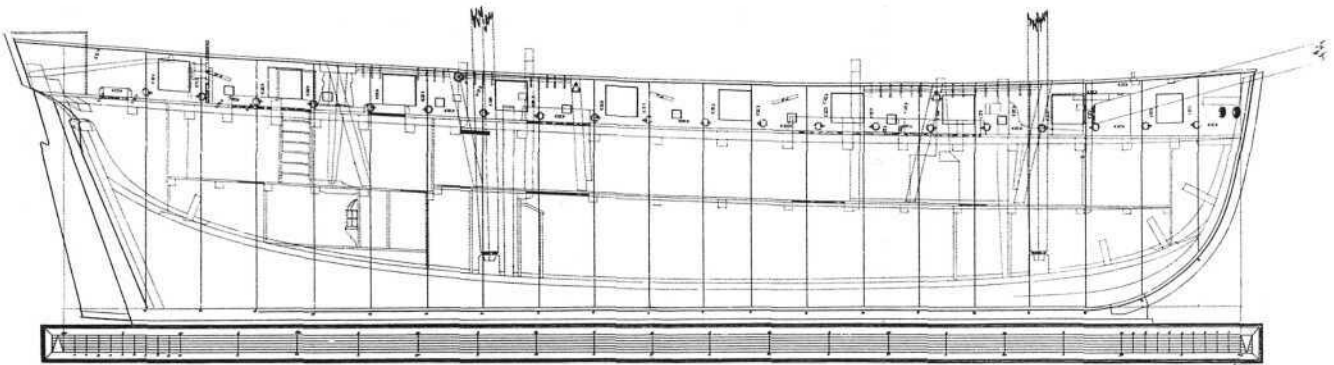


Main topmast and yard, looking forward



Stern view, yawl boat removed

NAVAL ARCHITECTURE PLATE XIII.

Inboard Works of a Brig of War, Built in the Year 1804.

NAVAL ARCHITECTURE PLATE XIV.

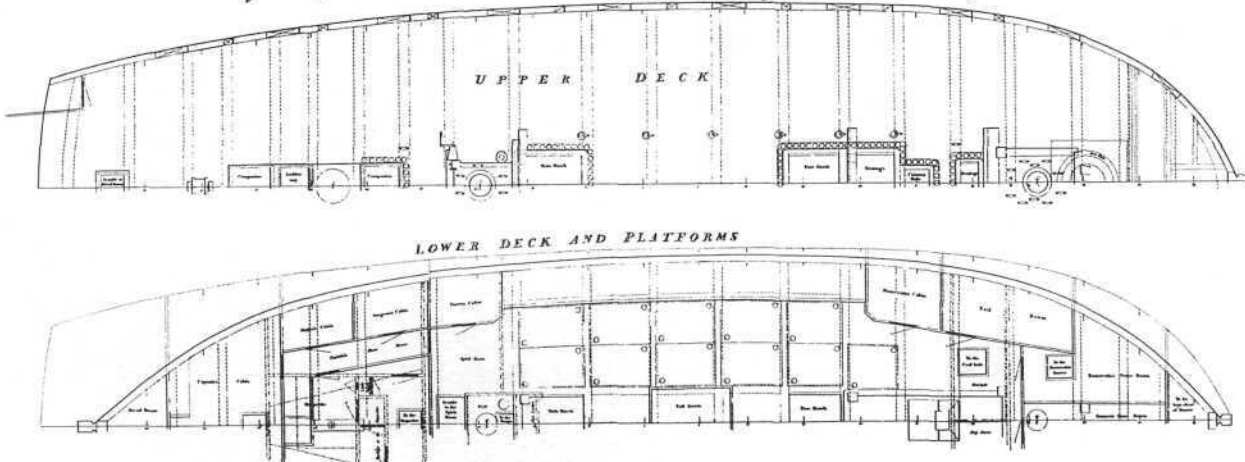
Plans of the Upper Deck, Lower Deck, and Platforms of a Brig of War, Built in the Year 1804.

Plate XIII, inboard profile, and Plate XIV, deck plans, from Steel, *The Elements and Practice of Naval Architecture*, 1805.

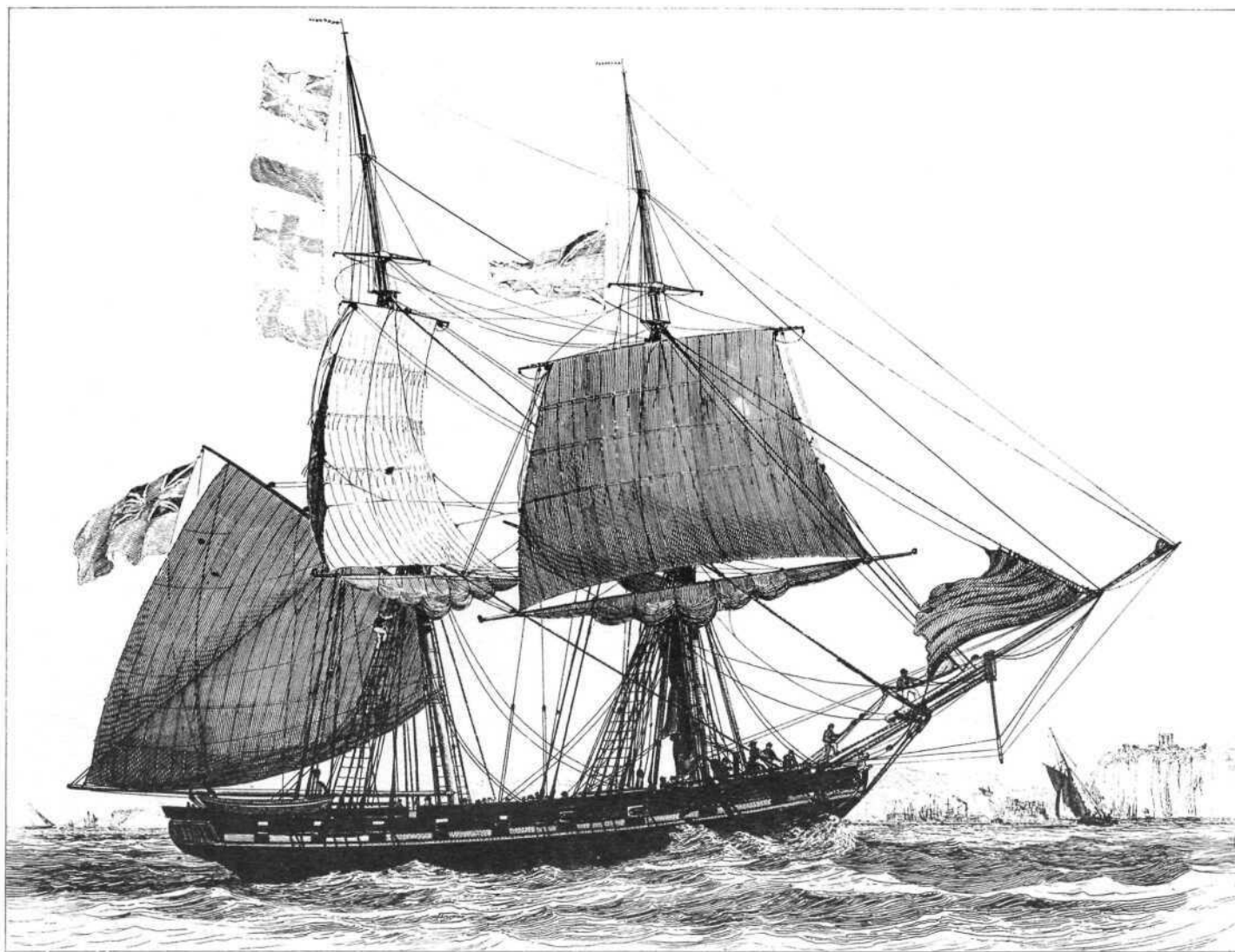
[continued from p. 196]

One scenario for the model's history is that it began as an unrigged hull, unplanked and with open sections in the frame, and used as a study model for interior and hold arrangements. Given Steel's description of *Raven's* lower deck and its scuttles for access to the hold, the planning of such features might well require a model for study. Dockyard models made for this purpose are common to many countries, several of which have survived in France, Sweden, and Spain (by my incomplete reckoning). This model might be a disguised English example, planked over and rigged after it had fulfilled its original mission. If so, it is not hard to speculate why this was done. Probably, it was presented as a gift to a naval officer who had distinguished himself in war service on board a brig of this design. If the figurehead were a clue to the vessel's name, and a brig of this class had seen exceptional war service, it might be possible to identify the vessel and the model's likely recipient.

The metalwork on this model is quite outstanding for its fine workmanship and detail. The anchors, gun

barrels, and fore tack boomkins are made of iron or steel, finely finished and blue-toned, not painted. Only the slightest traces of rust have appeared on some guns. The remaining metal work is brass, mainly in the form of wire (for chain plates, eyebolts, hooks and fastenings. All seems to be original to the model (at the time of its rigging, at any rate), except the chain for the rudder, which is relatively new. It is a surprise to see iron fore tack boomkins instead of the wooden versions in all other sources, but this might well have been a distinguishing characteristic of the vessel represented. Likewise, an armament of 22 long guns differs from the 16 carronades and two chasers specified for *Raven*, but this too may have been an authorized exception to standard practice.

The ivory steering wheel and capstan head are about the only fittings which have an unnatural, contrived appearance. The rest of the model has mellowed beautifully with age. The paint and varnish are in excellent condition, though I would not be surprised if the latter had been renewed. The painted surfaces show signs of scrubbing, particularly the bulwarks inboard. The red paint in the boats, the



THE WOLF, BRIG OF WAR (LATER OF THE ROYAL NAVY.)

making Signal, & laying to, &c. a FLEET OF DORIES.

Drawn & Etched by W. Cooke 1828

English brig of war Wolf, the seventh plate in E. W. Cooke's book of etchings of shipping and craft, 1829.

sweeps, and the capstan bars has faded to a magenta color, but the red on the masts, the gunports, and the tiller has retained its original hue. This difference may be a clue that the faded color belongs to parts made at a later date, when the hull was completed and rigged.

Contemporary artists' depictions of English naval brigs are neither common nor convincing likenesses (at least the ones I've seen) of brigs of the *Cruizer* class. A watercolor sketch attributed to François Geoffroi Roux, of HM brig *Wasp*, bears a very close appearance, save for the number and arrangement of gunports. The sketch is a copy of earlier paintings by Antoine Roux, Senior, which is hopeful for dating the vessel back to the first decade of the 19th century, but leaves speculation to run loose over possible errors in making the copy.⁶ Eager to put my copy of National Maritime Museum's *Concise Catalog of Oil Paintings* to good use, I scoured it for likenesses

of *Raven*, *Grasshopper*, and their sister brigs, but to no avail.⁷ The catalog lists only oil paintings, so the reams of watercolors, drawings, and prints in NMM still hold promise—to someone with access to them. I found some consolation in E.W. Cooke's 1828 etching of *Wolf*, apparently a later development if not of an altogether new design.⁸ She is handsome nonetheless, and gives a hint of the wonderful sight these brigs must have presented in their natural element, under sail.

// am grateful to R. Michael Wall, Director of the American Marine Model Gallery, for making this model available for study and photography.—E.R.]

⁶Philip C.F. Smith, *The Artful Roux: Marine Painters of Marseille*, Salem, Massachusetts, 1978, pp. 68, 69.

⁷(Staff of the National Maritime Museum), *Concise Catalogue of Oil Paintings in the National Maritime Museum*, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1988.

⁸*Sixty Five Plates of Shipping and Craft, Drawn and Etched by E.W. Cooke*, London, 1829, Plate 7.