**[Mission](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/" \o "Go to Mission's profile)**

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[Posted May 14, 2009](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/15039-errors-propigated-through-the-ages/&do=findComment&comment=356226) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/15039-errors-propigated-through-the-ages/&do=reportComment&comment=356226)

I am reading a book on maritime quarantine, imaginatively called *Maritime Quarantine* (subtitled "The British Experience, *c.* 1650-1900) which is by John Booker. In it, he talks about the problems of interpreting the random spelling and interpretation of such during period in government documents. I thought it was sort of interesting as it adds yet *another* dimension of uncertainty to effective period research.

"But certain problems do exist. for instance, in August 1711 the phrase 'and deals for Denidge goods' follows iron, pitch and tar as part of a particular cargo. The calender [published by the Treasury] interprets Denidge as Danish (placed in square brackets after the word); but the supposed adjective is actually a noun, dunnage, meaning material used as packing or protection on the voyage. The point is significant, not only because Denmark had no stake in this particular Swedish cargo, but because the deals [boards or planks], if only dunnage, were a minor part of the cargo and possibly damaged. In another list of cargoes, the unknown word 'oales' is interpreted as '[?oils]', but recourse to the Privy Council register shows the word to be bales. The real mistake there was by a Treasury clerk, and clerical transcription at both Privy Council and Treasury level was sometimes distinctly careless.'" (Booker, p. 53-4)

He goes on,

"Difficulty in spelling obscure Baltic ports is understandable; more trying are the problems associated with ships' names. Not only is the spelling at time inconsistent between the two levels of evidence, but there are many problems in deciding if a ship with apparently two linked Christian names (a common practice) is actually two different ships of one name each. For instance, in the Treasury calendars, the *George and John* [named after song-writers, no doubt] should be two ships, as should the *Salvatore and Prince*, the *Benjamin Hope* and the *John Thorowgood*. This can be proved from the Privy Council registers. Calendaring, of course, makes another opportunity for error. If it was difficult for contemporary clerks to be certain, it was doubly so for archivists, faced often with an ambiguous text, or evidence of doubt or second thoughts on the part of the scribe. An associated problem was the frequency of certain names, both abstract nouns live *Providence* and *Love* and single female Christian names, such as *Ann(e)* or *Elizabeth*. Even when all the evidence is correct, it can be difficult to differentiate between ships.

In these years before registration, the practice of showing the master's name after that of his vessel was the only way to distinguish between apparently identical ships. Luckily the Privy Council registers do, at times, give masters' names when the Treasury records do not; this means that a *Mary Flower* in one source and a *Mayflower* in the other can be identified as the same ship, and similar comparisons are almost endless. Foreign names were a particular bewilderment for clerks: the Swedish prefix *Hedvig* (as in *Hedvig Sophia* or *Hedvig Eleona*) was sometimes cast as *Headway* or *Headwick*; and *Lady Kerdrant* to a clerk in the Privy Council was *Lady Herdrowt* to his colleague in the Treasury. The Treasury calendars correct *Ufro* to *Jeffrouw*. It would be tedious to extend variants and inconsistencies any further, but it is necessary to draw attention to them as another reason why, in the Baltic period, no absolute list of ships subjected or liable to quarantine can be drawn up." (Booker, p. 54-5)

And those are the ones he knows about...

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[**Sjöröveren**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1062-sj%C3%B6r%C3%B6veren/)

* Plunderer
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* Member
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* Location:Minnesota, Land of 10,000 Lakes and 1 mini-ocean
* Interests:Re-enactment, gradually working my way back from the 19th Century. I figure I'm in about 1700 right now. I specialize in the history of medicine. I like maps, and the general history of geography and geodesy. <br />And in case you're wondering, "Sjöröveren" is Swedish for "the sea rover." And it's supposed to be spelled "Sjörövaren" but I guess it's too late for that!

([IP: 64.131.55.152](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/modcp/ip-tools/&ip=64.131.55.152)) · · 

[Posted May 14, 2009](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/15039-errors-propigated-through-the-ages/&do=findComment&comment=356239) (edited) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/15039-errors-propigated-through-the-ages/&do=reportComment&comment=356239)

What does he mean by the word "calendaring"? It's not a use of the word "calendar" that I have heard used in that manner before. Recording the date that the ship came into port, perhaps?

Dealing with Scandinavian languages must have been especially difficult for the English. If one spells a word how it sounds to an English ear, the spelling will have no resemblance to the original. For example, the Swedish port of Göteborg, (commonly rendered in English as "Gothenburg") is actually pronounced something like "Yoo-ta-boory." So the common English spelling of the city is apparently derived from a written source, probably a map, rather than a spoken source. The example of "Hedvig" as a ship's name was probably recorded from a spoken source, since it is recorded more or less phonetically. "Hedvig" could be spoken as either "Head-wee" or "Head-wick", depending on whether the speaker were Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, etc. It would have most likely have been spelled "Hädvig" or "Hædvig", "Hedwig," "Hedvik" as well as "Hedvig," again, depending on where the ship was from, and from when. It's also worth noting that "Hedvig" is a woman's Christian name, so the examples given, *Hedvig Sophia* or *Hedvig Eleona* may in fact be two different ships as well.

And this only deals with Scandinavian words recorded by an English speaker. Can you imagine the difficulty they would have had with a ship from Poland or Latvia? Or from St. Petersburg, where an entirely different alphabet involved? How about the poor harbor master in Riga, trying to decipher what a captain from Glasgow was trying to say?

This post also brings to mind the seduction of using secondary sources. The researchers whose works we so often rely upon are the ones who have slogged through the handwriting and misspellings of the primary sources, and we take their work at face value, not taking into consideration that they may have made simple mistakes in deciphering handwriting and spelling. A mistake made at that first stage goes on to become part of accepted history, and can be repeated to the point that any future corrections can seem like revisionism. At least this author has the honesty to state this pitfall of research clearly. Something to bear in mind in our own research, whether with primary or secondary sources.

**Edited May 14, 2009 by Sjöröveren**

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[Posted May 14, 2009](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/15039-errors-propigated-through-the-ages/&do=findComment&comment=356245) (edited) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/15039-errors-propigated-through-the-ages/&do=reportComment&comment=356245)

Agreed. I have had a helluva time figuring out what various prescriptions in period medical books mean (they are all in 17th century Latin and many include the compounding problem of interpretation by introducing spelling errors.) Plus, as I have said somewhere around here, you can literally find the same word spelled three different ways on the same page in many 17th and 18th C. books.

I cannot state exactly what he means by 'calendaring' because he doesn't define it; he just uses it. Since it is not actually important to the info I am looking for, I haven't researched it before now. The word does mean 'scheduling' in Britain (according to FreeDictionary). I infer from the text that it means scheduling the ships to go into and out of Quarantine.

The fact that we are now discussing the meaning of a fairly current word proves the original point about different people trying to interpret meanings and foreign words during their time period. 

**Edited May 14, 2009 by Mission**

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Another problem - ship names were often used multiple times. In 1620 there were a half dozen Mayflowers. Two of them had a captain named "Jones" and both visited Plymouth, Mass. The second one only stayed long enough to sell some trade goods at inflated prices. For decades, historians thought that the original Mayflower had returned to take advantage of the Pilgrims. It wasn't until a marriage certificate from the 1620 voyage turned up that they knew that captain's first name and proved that he wasn't the one who sold the trade goods.

Speaking of Pilgrims, they sent a ship full of clapboard back in 1621 but it was taken by French pirates in the Channel.

Mark

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