[**Elena**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11386-elena/)

* A Seadog Looking for Crewmates
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_plunderer.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11386-elena/)
* Member
* 389 posts
* Gender:Female
* Location:Bucharest, Romania
* Interests:historical Age of Sail RPGs, music, reading, foreign languages

[Posted March 10, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397196) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397196)

I have a question, but I am not so sure how to ask it... You all have read in books/ seen in movies that captains were allowed to marry a couple while at sea. The most typical scene I remember about this was in James Clavell's "Tai Pan". However, this is around 1850s.

Any mentions if it was valid in 1700s/ Age of Sail? If yes, in what conditions? And only on British ships, or on French too? What did it entail - writing it in the logbook was enough, or what?

[**CaptainB**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11495-captainb/)

* Ship's Master
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_shipsmaster.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11495-captainb/)
* Member
* 191 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:NE Oklahoma
* Interests:Rum, booty, wenches

[Posted March 10, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397197) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397197)

I would think that weddings at sea were rare, if not outright unheard of practice. Seein' as how most o' the population was either Angelican, or Catholic, one would surmise that only the clergy of said churches had the powers to marry a couple. Captains were mostly military men, who had little leeway in the matters of marriage.

But that's not to say that it never happened.

(In modern times, very few Captains have the power to wed people in a legally binding way.)

[**wendy**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/12967-wendy/)

* Bilge Rat
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_bilgerat.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/12967-wendy/)
* Member
* 12 posts

[Posted March 10, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397198) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397198)

Legal marriages had to be performed by an ordained member of the clergy or a Justice of the Peace, even at sea. So unless the captain was also a JP he had no power to perform the ceremony.

Blackbeard, however, was said to have "married" several women aboard his ship - bigamous, illegal, and probably seen as a huge joke on the unfortunate prostitute involved!

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_pyrate_legend.gif
* [Fox](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.  
    
  Shooting pirates.

[Posted March 10, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397202) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397202)

IIRC the laws concerning what constituted a 'legal' marriage had to be re-codified after the GAoP (1750s?) because there were so many loopholes and ambiguities.

That said, in all the thousands of pages of primary and secondary source material I've read I've never come across an example of it actually happening, so it's probably either a later-than-GAoP practice, or a myth.

[**Capt. Sterling**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2648-capt-sterling/)

* Sticky Fingers Sterling Needs a New Hat
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_immortal_pyrate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2648-capt-sterling/)
* Member
* 10,302 posts
* Gender:Pyrate Hunter
* Location:here
* Interests:Killing pirates, haven't met one yet worth keeping alive....

[Posted March 10, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397240) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397240)

Was asked to perform one twice and still cannot find any documentation for a captain doing so in our time frame (gaop)..but there is a wonderful ceremony from the Common book of prayer.

And must agree with Foxe when it comes to loopholes, you might want to take a quick look at Maureen Waller's book 1700, Scenes from London Life for some of the nonsense that went on.

[**capn'rob**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/10470-capnrob/)

* Pyrate Captain
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_pyrate_captain.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/10470-capnrob/)
* Member
* 535 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Morehead City, NC
* Interests:Cruising, power or sail. Music and Maritime History. Pilaging, Plundering and General Mayhem!

[Posted March 10, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397246) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397246)

I've performed marriges aboard my vessel. However they are good for the duration of the Voyage only. Basically, "Till Dawn do us Part!"

[**Elena**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11386-elena/)

* A Seadog Looking for Crewmates
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_plunderer.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11386-elena/)
* Member
* 389 posts
* Gender:Female
* Location:Bucharest, Romania
* Interests:historical Age of Sail RPGs, music, reading, foreign languages

[Posted March 11, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397249) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397249)

On 3/10/2011 at 9:07 PM, Capt. Sterling said:

Was asked to perform one twice and still cannot find any documentation for a captain doing so in our time frame (gaop)..but there is a wonderful ceremony from the Common book of prayer.

And must agree with Foxe when it comes to loopholes, you might want to take a quick look at Maureen Waller's book 1700, Scenes from London Life for some of the nonsense that went on.

**So what do you finally advise me, to use it in my story or not?** It would make for an interesting sidestory and it would solve the problem of somebody who wasn't too keen to be married in church...

What I was saying (that I agree with the loopholes idea) is that I know that for the period around 1500 (but not for later, when I need it) that what we think now as legal marriage and what was happening then was totally different. I read somewhere that in those times it was enough that the man gave a woman the ring and exchange wows and it was considered as binding as in church. This was why there were lots of secret marriages too, especially between people of different social origins, only that their children not to be bastards.

And because the priest was seen as only a witness to the marriage, for a long time marriages weren't performed in church, but at the church's gate, with the priest witnessing and blessing the exchange of wows and the receiving of the ring, because these were considered to be the essence of marriage.

[**Capt. Sterling**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2648-capt-sterling/)

* Sticky Fingers Sterling Needs a New Hat
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_immortal_pyrate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2648-capt-sterling/)
* Member
* 10,302 posts
* Gender:Pyrate Hunter
* Location:here
* Interests:Killing pirates, haven't met one yet worth keeping alive....

[Posted March 11, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397257) (edited) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397257)

Hmmm hard to advise you either way since none of us truly know where your story is going? If you want it to be more on the historically correct side, I would recommend reading some accounts on/from the period, as, in the end you will truly have to make the decision yourself. Waller's book is rather informative, really is a quick read, and most libraries have it. If you are working on something like a PoTC, then basically you are pretty much free to do whatever you like.

You can also find Waller here, for a free trial... <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=58656934>

**Edited March 11, 2011 by Capt. Sterling**

[**Elena**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11386-elena/)

* A Seadog Looking for Crewmates
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_plunderer.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11386-elena/)
* Member
* 389 posts
* Gender:Female
* Location:Bucharest, Romania
* Interests:historical Age of Sail RPGs, music, reading, foreign languages

[Posted March 11, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397277) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397277)

On 3/11/2011 at 7:46 AM, Capt. Sterling said:

Hmmm hard to advise you either way since none of us truly know where your story is going? If you want it to be more on the historically correct side, I would recommend reading some accounts on/from the period, as, in the end you will truly have to make the decision yourself. Waller's book is rather informative, really is a quick read, and most libraries have it. If you are working on something like a PoTC, then basically you are pretty much free to do whatever you like.

You can also find Waller here, for a free trial... [http://www.questia.c...?a=o&d=58656934](http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=58656934)

Thanks, I am definitely not leaning towards PoTC style, but towards something more historically correct (well, with some writers' license here and there, but still, more like Alexandre Dumas, Raphael Sabattini or Walter Scott, ie a considerable degree of accuracy... and something to play around it.)

I will try the free trial version, thank you. **Actually I like to be recommended books, but books I can find online, on google books or Project Gutemberg or something similar to be read online or downloaded for free**, because the part with "most libraries have it" might be valid in US or England, not in my country....[:D](http://pyracy.com/uploads/emoticons/default_biggrin.png)

I have read various books, but my problem was that the accounts about marriages at sea were from 1800s (I gave James Clavell's "Tai Pan" as an example). In some other place I can't remember I read about another kind of quick marriage done in London's prisons in those times... and what I had mentioned above, about marriages at the gate of the church and secret marriages only with the ring, wows and a witness were read in books from about 1500. (And got confirmation in some Catholic extracts too).

[**MarkG**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/10527-markg/)

* Pyrate Captain
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_pyrate_captain.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/10527-markg/)
* Member
* 587 posts
* Location:Ohio

[Posted March 12, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397323) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397323)

On 3/10/2011 at 5:29 AM, Elena said:

I have a question, but I am not so sure how to ask it... You all have read in books/ seen in movies that captains were allowed to marry a couple while at sea. The most typical scene I remember about this was in James Clavell's "Tai Pan". However, this is around 1850s.

Any mentions if it was valid in 1700s/ Age of Sail? If yes, in what conditions? And only on British ships, or on French too? What did it entail - writing it in the logbook was enough, or what?

The answer column The Straight Dope looked this and found that there are no records of captains being authorized to perform marriages. There have been a few marriages performed by captains that were upheld under the principle that a couple who thinks they are married is married. There is speculation that captains could perform marriages in earlier periods but they have not found any documentation, just widespread tradition.

The column is [here](http://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/546/are-ships-captains-allowed-to-marry-people-at-sea).

[**Elena**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11386-elena/)

* A Seadog Looking for Crewmates
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_plunderer.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11386-elena/)
* Member
* 389 posts
* Gender:Female
* Location:Bucharest, Romania
* Interests:historical Age of Sail RPGs, music, reading, foreign languages

[Posted March 13, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397329) (edited) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397329)

On 3/12/2011 at 10:27 PM, MarkG said:

There have been a few marriages performed by captains that were upheld under the principle that a couple who thinks they are married is married. There is speculation that captains could perform marriages in earlier periods but they have not found any documentation, just widespread tradition.

The column is [here](http://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/546/are-ships-captains-allowed-to-marry-people-at-sea).

Yes, this is what I knew too. The "principle" is based somewhere on the early Catholic rules, that if two people exchanged wows and he gave her a ring, they were married, even if not in church. (And the answer in the column is based on records after 1850, when there was a civil registry for person, there were other rules than the Middle Age/ Renaissance ones, when no unified civil registry existed.)

So, I guess if there is a widespread tradition, we might as well go with it, as long as it benefits to the storyline...? (My story happens in 1719, and I am still not sure what to do).

**Edited March 13, 2011 by Elena**

[**Grymm**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/10793-grymm/)

* First Mate
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_1st_mate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/10793-grymm/)
* Member
* 281 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Chilterns UK
* Interests:Stuff

[Posted March 13, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397346) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397346)

The idea that captains could perform marriages onboard was invented as a plot device for a novel so you'd be continuing a noble tradition =o)

[**MarkG**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/10527-markg/)

* Pyrate Captain
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_pyrate_captain.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/10527-markg/)
* Member
* 587 posts
* Location:Ohio

[Posted March 17, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397597) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397597)

On 3/13/2011 at 4:35 AM, Elena said:

On 3/12/2011 at 10:27 PM, MarkG said:

There have been a few marriages performed by captains that were upheld under the principle that a couple who thinks they are married is married. There is speculation that captains could perform marriages in earlier periods but they have not found any documentation, just widespread tradition.

The column is [here](http://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/546/are-ships-captains-allowed-to-marry-people-at-sea).

Yes, this is what I knew too. The "principle" is based somewhere on the early Catholic rules, that if two people exchanged wows and he gave her a ring, they were married, even if not in church. (And the answer in the column is based on records after 1850, when there was a civil registry for person, there were other rules than the Middle Age/ Renaissance ones, when no unified civil registry existed.)

So, I guess if there is a widespread tradition, we might as well go with it, as long as it benefits to the storyline...? (My story happens in 1719, and I am still not sure what to do).

I might add that the puritans considered marriages to be a civil ceremony. When Plimoth Plantation recreates a wedding, they do it was a doorstep ceremony officiated by the governor. You can draw your own conclusions from there.

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_immortal_pyrate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted March 18, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397616) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397616)

On 3/13/2011 at 11:27 AM, Grymm said:

The idea that captains could perform marriages onboard was invented as a plot device for a novel so you'd be continuing a noble tradition =o)

B)

Perfect.

[**Elena**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11386-elena/)

* A Seadog Looking for Crewmates
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_plunderer.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11386-elena/)
* Member
* 389 posts
* Gender:Female
* Location:Bucharest, Romania
* Interests:historical Age of Sail RPGs, music, reading, foreign languages

[Posted March 18, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397623) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397623)

Thank you for the encouragement to do it.

Anyway, it will take some time until we arrive to this.... But it will happen... a sort of "mocked, but somehow legally binding" ceremony (based on the principles above), actually, because the captain will be marrying his mistress to one of the sailors... only for the child not to be illegitimate (and not to have a Spanish family name - as said mistress is Spanish at wartime). He will send that sailor back to France with enough money to forget about having been wed in the West Indies...[:P](http://pyracy.com/uploads/emoticons/default_tongue.png)

[**Dread Pyrate Greyhound**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11490-dread-pyrate-greyhound/)

* Plunderer
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_plunderer.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11490-dread-pyrate-greyhound/)
* Member
* 451 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Ohio
* Interests:Golden Age of Pyracy, Age of Sailing ships (spacifically 1600-1730) Vintage pirate Legos, weaponry in usage during the Age of Pyrates, Fuedal Japan

[Posted March 18, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397625) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397625)

*Captains fulfilled the duties of priests on board, as clergy were consided bad luck, and someone had to 'Commit their bodies to the deep' So in theory, Captains were priests, but like* [CaptainB](http://pyracy.com/index.php?showuser=11495) *said, It wasn't legally binding. ships and the Sea were a whole other world, i would think the marriage would only be considered binding on board ship by other men of the sea. so if pirates were married (ex Anne Bonney & Calico Jack) they were of the sea and to them the marriage was binding, while the rest of the world most likely considered marriage at sea a sham and outrage.*

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_immortal_pyrate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted March 18, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397626) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397626)

On 3/18/2011 at 2:31 PM, Commodore Greyhound said:

Captains fulfilled the duties of priests on board, as clergy were consided bad luck, and someone had to 'Commit their bodies to the deep' So in theory, Captains were priests...

That's a pretty broad leap. If a merchant ship didn't have a surgeon, there is some period evidence that the captain filled in using a whatever books of surgery were at hand. This doesn't mean anyone considered them surgeons. It would be more appropriate to say that, being the most responsible person on the ship, they filled in when there was a necessity. While removal of the dead at sea would be considered a necessity (as the holds of some French ships could attest), marriage at sea is another matter entirely.

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_pyrate_legend.gif
* [Fox](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.  
    
  Shooting pirates.

[Posted March 20, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=397701) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=397701)

Neither am I particularly convinced that clergy were 'unlucky' at sea, at least in the GAoP. The real reason that the captain so often officiated at funerals and Sunday services was simply that many ships didn't carry ministers, and this was probably more to do with the unnecessary cost than anything else. If you can shave your merchant ship crew down to half a dozen men to save on wages, are you really going to employ a minister?

[**Elena**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11386-elena/)

* A Seadog Looking for Crewmates
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_plunderer.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11386-elena/)
* Member
* 389 posts
* Gender:Female
* Location:Bucharest, Romania
* Interests:historical Age of Sail RPGs, music, reading, foreign languages

[Posted May 11, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=399682) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=399682)

[This link](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fleet_Marriage) is also in support of the idea that before 1753, a marriage could be recognized as valid if each spouse had simply expressed (to each other) an unconditional consent to their marriage in front of witnesses. I had heard about Fleet prison too... and the book you gave me the link to was interesting to read too, leading towards the same idea, that before the Marriage Act of 1753, such a secret/ irregular marriage (with or without a priest blessing it) was possible.

[**Daniel**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/352-daniel/)

* Pyrate Captain
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_pyrate_captain.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/352-daniel/)
* Member
* 652 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:McLean, VA
* Interests:History, pirates, fiction, writing, writing historical fiction about pirates, jokes, games, law.

[Posted May 11, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=399685) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=399685)

Elena, this is a very interesting question, and I congratulate you for the good research you have clearly already done.

Have you seen this website of [shipboard weddings](http://www.theshipslist.com/Forms/marriagesatsea.html)? The vast majority are performed by a minister, but there are some exceptions. William Willcocks and Mary Thebder were married aboard the *Young Australian* on July 3, 1864; under the minister name it says "md by Master." Samuel Holt and Ida Timperley were married aboard the *Resolute* on August 6, 1865, and under the minister name it only says "Captain." These are the tiny minority, however; most shipboard couples are recorded as being married by a minister.

You might take a look at Stone's *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800*. It has nothing about captains marrying people (I'd have remembered, I'm sure), but it has lots of stuff about private marriage and marriage law, and besides, it's a gold mine for any novelist who wants to understand how family formed character in the GAoP period. As you point out, the Marriage Act of 1753 put an end to informal private marriages between youngsters without the parents' consent *in England*. The Scottish law didn't change! Thus, after 1753, you saw English kids galloping off to Gretna Green, just over the Scottish border, where they could be legally married.

Regarding clergy on board; I don't know if seamen thought clergy were bad luck, but bad luck or not, the clergy were on the ships anyway. The *very first article* of the Articles of War required captains to "take care that prayers and preaching, **by the chaplains in holy orders** of the respective ships, be performed diligently." Merchant ships of 500 tons or more were *required by law* to carry chaplains. So if a captain was doing marriages, it was probably either 1) on a ship that was breaking the law or Articles of War, 2) on a merchant ship too small to be covered by the law, or 3) on a ship where the chaplain died or was too sick with scurvy or whatever to do his office.

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[Posted May 11, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=findComment&comment=399736) (edited) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/17808-question-about-marriage-at-sea/&do=reportComment&comment=399736)

One additional matter: consider the practicalities of the situation. You're the captain of a ship. It's very important to you to prevent violence and disorder aboard.

Suddenly your mate reports to you that one of the female passengers is pregnant. She says her boyfriend is responsible. The girl's father is livid and threatening to cut off the boy's bollocks if he doesn't marry her. The passengers - or worse, the crew - are taking sides between boyfriend and father. And for whatever reason you have no pastor aboard or said pastor is unwilling to marry the pregnant girl to the boy. You want to defuse the situation quickly.

A natural solution is to call girlfriend and boyfriend on deck and declare, "Do you take this man to be your wedded husband?" Girl says I do. "Do you take this woman to be your wedded wife?" Boyfriend's cooperation is obtained because he doesn't want his bollocks cut off by the father. "By the power vested in me . . . " (actually the captain has no such power, but the participants don't know that) ". . . I now pronounce you man and wife." And if the ship is from a jurisdiction which recognizes common law marriage or private marriage, where the simple exchange of vows is enough, the fact that the captain's pronouncement wasn't even legally necessary to solemnize the marriage will never become relevant.

**Edited May 12, 2011 by Daniel**

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Exactly, Daniel (besides, your list of shipboard weddings is 100+ years later after the Marriage act [;)](http://pyracy.com/uploads/emoticons/default_wink.png)).

But your other points gave me some interesting ideas too, for one of the two weddings I am planning in my story... if there was a priest aboard a Navy ship (and there usually were, I know it) he could perform a perfectly legal wedding... even if finding a subterfuge to announce the bans quicker than it should (the bride being pregnant too, and the supposed father - who isn't actually the one, but the one paid to give her a name for the child- willing to cooperate) [;)](http://pyracy.com/uploads/emoticons/default_wink.png)