

PRACTICAL SEAMANSHIP 1777

A copy of a *Treatise on Practical Seamanship* by William Hutchinson, published in 1777, was recently presented to the Wellington Division of the Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve, HMNZS Olphert, by an old member of the Division, Lieutenant-Commander I. L. Thomsen, RNZNVR (RET'D), for long Director of the Carter Observatory. He in turn obtained the book, which is in first class condition, from Dr L. J. Comrie, a New Zealander who became Superintendent of the Nautical Almanac Office in Greenwich. The volume will be held on permanent loan by the Turnbull Library, where it will form a useful addition to an already good selection of works on early seamanship.

When this book was published, Hutchinson would appear to have been approaching sixty years of age. He was born at Newcastle-on-Tyne, and served his apprenticeship as a cook on a collier working between the North East of England and London; and he claims that seamen brought up in this hard school 'are the most perfect in working and managing their ships in narrow, intricate, and difficult channels, and in tide ways'. From there he graduated to the East India trade and was in command of a privateer in the Mediterranean as a young man. He was also at sea, presumably in command of East Indiamen, during the Seven Years War which began in 1756. In 1760 he came ashore as Dock Master at Liverpool, and was so employed when his book was written.

A letter received from the Secretary of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board quotes Picton's *Memorials of Liverpool* as follows:

'Captain William Hutchinson was a remarkable man . . . of varied qualifications and pursuits, amongst other things the inventor of reflecting mirrors for lighthouses, the first of which he erected at Bidston in 1763. In 1794 he published a treatise on naval architecture. From January 1768 to August 1793 he continued a series of observations on the tides, the barometer, the weather, and the winds, the MSS of which are in the Athenaeum and Lyceum Libraries in Liverpool. From these were obtained data by which the Holdens, father and son, calculated the tide-tables. He was also the founder of the Marine Society. He died February 14, 1801, and is interred in St. Thomas' churchyard, Liverpool.'

Perhaps the main interest of Hutchinson's *Treatise* in New Zealand, is the insight it gives into the early training of Captain James Cook, who joined his first collier in 1747; Hutchinson would have preceded him by only a few years. It is a little disappointing that Cook is not mentioned at all, but although published in 1777, there are indications