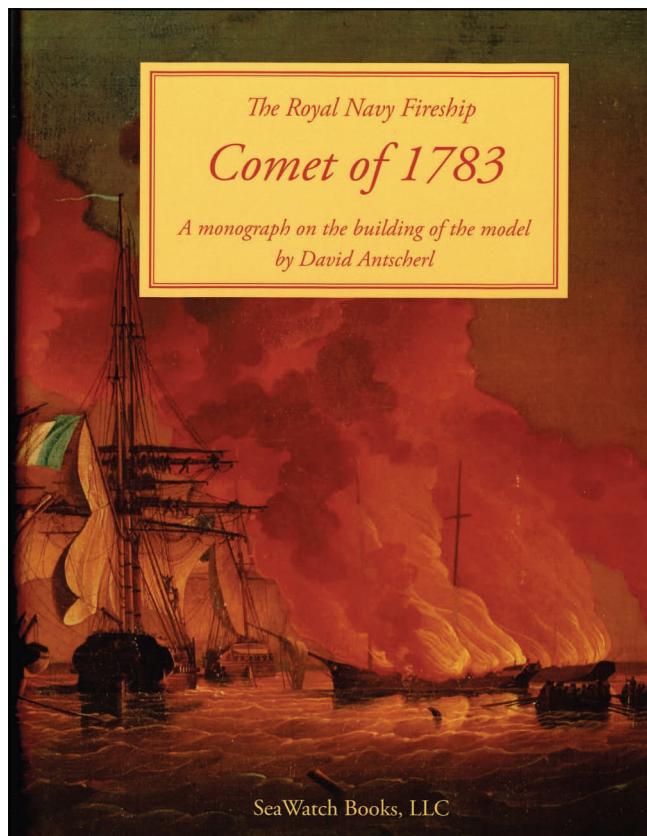


The Royal Navy Fireship
Comet of 1783

A monograph on the building of the model
by David Antscherl

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David Antscherl's newest book, "The Royal Navy Fireship *Comet* of 1783" is unique in many respects. First and foremost is the subject itself. This may be the first work dedicated to this class of vessel, a type highly



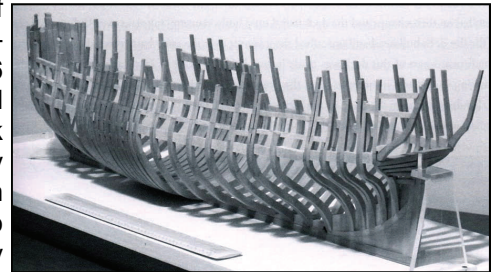
misunderstood by most modelers and history buffs. In the introduction, the author provides a brief operational history of the *Comet*, the men who commanded her, and the ship's ultimate fate. It's interesting to note that several of these individuals would achieve the rank of captain, and command ships-of-the-line.

In addition to this vessel's unique mission and design as a fireship, the author discusses the fine lines *Comet* and her eight sister ships possessed. *Comet* was especially handsome with decorative quarter galleries and painted friezes on her counters

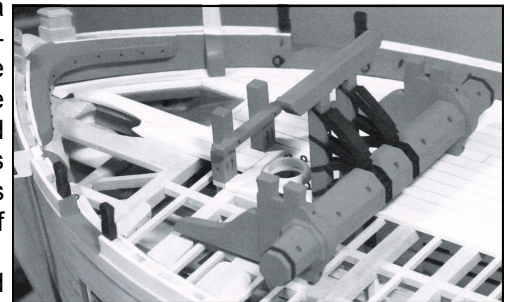


Another unique aspect of this work is that you will not find it to be a stand-alone, from-the-keel-up, how-to, book. The author explains as much in the preface. Mr. Antscherl states that it would have been redundant to describe in detail the construction of this sixth-rate, when the information is available in his previous treatise, *The Fully Framed Model, HMN Swan Class Sloops 1767-1780*. Rather, this monograph is considered an adjunct to FFM, and concentrates on aspects peculiar to *Comet*, as well as modeling techniques not covered in the author's previous work.

As a result, a prelude to Chapter 1 fast forwards the reader to a point where the model is fully framed, and the middle deck and hull are planked over. Proper built frames only appear amidships. The rest of the hull is composed of half frames. However, there are 6 plans provided with this book that will supply you with enough information to build a fully framed model.



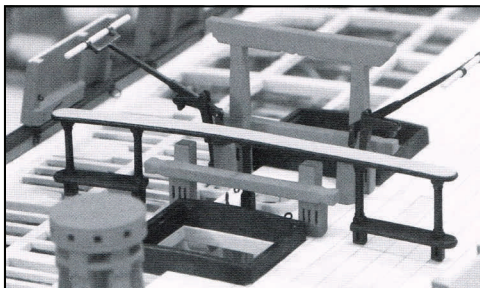
Chapter 1 discusses the fire deck, a place unlike any you may have ever encountered. The forward two thirds of this area is dominated by the fire room, which the author describes as a "huge incendiary device." Fascinating details include fire ports with exploding chambers that cause the ports to swing down when they detonate. There is also a complex grid-work of fire troughs, fire barrels, and hawse chutes peculiar to this class of fireships.



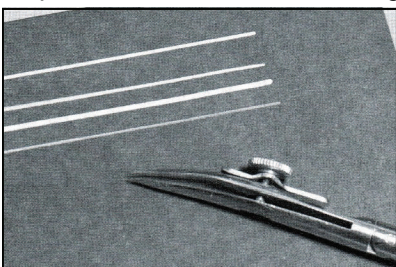
The second chapter is devoted to weather deck details. Again, unique features abound. Most notable is the continuous deck that lacks any type of break, a massive 16-foot windlass located aft of the foremast, and the placement of the gunports for the fourteen 18-pounder carronades. This chapter concludes with an informative note on fixing bolts without the use of glue.

The next segment discusses the lower counters and tafferel, an area that might have most modelers thinking twice about taking on such a project. However, the author's method for painting the friezes will have you thinking otherwise. It's interesting to note that the same technique, suggested by Antscherl, has been discovered on contemporary models.

The next two chapters cover bulwarks, decks, and deck fittings. Antscherl's procedures for drilling the scupper holes and configuring the fixed bulwark blocks is noteworthy. As stated earlier, *Comet's* weather deck does not have a break at the quarterdeck. Never-the-less, a rail existed that created a division, and also served as a location for the main brace bitts — another peculiar aspect of this sixth rate.



In chapters six and seven, the outer bulwarks are addressed, with a considerable number of interesting techniques and subassemblies being described. They include discussions on the fire ports, sheer rails, carronade mounts, trail board carvings, channels and the considerable amount of ironwork employed on this part of the ship. *Comet* had pin striping bordering certain painted areas. The author's use of a *bow pen* to duplicate this ornamentation is just another one of the many innovative ideas found throughout this book.



The next chapter deals with the headwork, which includes two sets of gammoning (an unusual feature for a vessel this size), the lower head rail, seats of ease, and those pesky head timbers. The author points out that



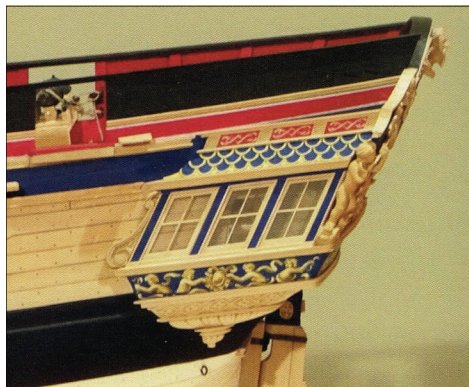
temporary assembly and disassembly of various components was done repeatedly. He offers a 10-point sequence of assembly for the upper headwork, which can be applied to any vessel of this type from this period.

The next three chapters deal with what, admittedly, makes this a beautiful ship, the quarter galleries, stern gallery, quarter figures and figure head. Swan class sloops did not have quarter galleries, so Antscherl describes their construction in great detail.

Where practical, these complex structures are broken down into layered subassemblies. The author's approach

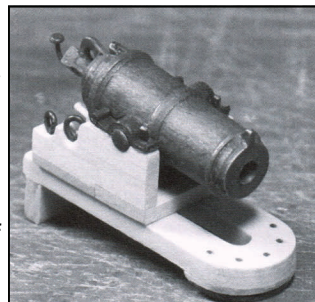
and attention to detail is exemplified while fabricating the gallery roof tiles, which are asymmetrical in shape.

Although carving figures was covered in FFM, David devotes additional effort when describing



his technique for carving the two quarter gallery figures and the figurehead. New procedures, such as the use of a *Maquette*, a study in clay, is outlined. The author feels that this practice can help the modeler visualize the figure more clearly from various angles. Other tips involve the use of a mirror, card templates, and a technique for polishing the completed figures so they resemble those found on contemporary models.

The final chapter deals with armament. *Comet* was one of the first naval ships to be fully armed with carronades. Thus, they were of an early design. The author's research into the type used during that period describes a weapon unique in many ways. He also discusses the shortcomings of this ordinance, and how it posed a threat to the ship itself.



The book concludes with a color section that features eleven photos, and a postscript. This last item describes some features that had not been completed when this book went to press.

One final comment: As stated earlier, the plans provided with this book will give you all the information needed to construct a fully framed hull. However, for further details, draughts must be ordered from the Royal Museums Greenwich's Plans and Photographic Department. The author provides the drawing numbers for *Comet*, as well as other fireships of the period.

This is a remarkable book that provides the modeler with numerous helpful hints and tips, while providing incite into the design of a most interesting and unique warship. The "Royal Navy Fireship *Comet* of 1783" would be a noteworthy addition to any ship modeler's library. This book is highly recommended.



Reviewed by
Bob Filipowski