TYPES OF WOODEN PERIOD MODEL SHIPS

Models of wooden period ships hold a fascination for many people and the thought of building a wooden period ship model captures the imagination of many would be modellers. While building a model ship can be a very rewarding and challenging past time, it requires a bit of thought and consideration before you jump in.
One of the early decisions that need to be made is what type of model do you want to build. By this I mean how the hull is to be constructed and how the model is to be rigged as not all model ships are the same.
For anyone who has examined a few models, it is easy to identify that there are various types of model ship and numerous methods used in their construction. To some extent, what you want your model ship to look like will dictate what method of construction might be suitable. For those who aspire to build a kit, then the decision is already made for you. For those who want something unique, having an understanding of the types of models and the way that they can be constructed will help with your decision on what to build. The following paragraphs will give a brief explanation of the common types of wooden period ship models.

HULL CONSTRUCTION

Plank-on-bulkhead. By far the most common hull construction used in wooden period ship models is the plank-on-bulkhead method. Many kits use this method of construction as it is relatively simple and cheap for the manufactures to produce. The internal framing made up of the keel and the bulkheads will usually be made from plywood with the outer planking attached to the edges of the bulkheads. This method produces a completely planked hull where you can see the external shape of the hull just as you would see on a real ship but the internal structure is hidden.

Solid hull. A solid hull is one that is carved from a solid piece of wood (or several pieces glued together) to give the shape of the hull. This solid block can be finished with paint or varnish etc, to represent the hull or it can be planked over with thin strips of wood to simulate a planked hull. Again several kit manufactures produce kits on solid hulls but these are generally for small sized models.

Frame hull. Frame models are more about showing the exact appearance and location of the parts that make up a wooden ship; from the keel, the stem, the stern, the frames, the deck beams and all the important decorative elements and fittings. A frame hull is an accurate representation of the construction of

the real ship. For larger ships it is common to see a framed hull completely planked on one side with the other side left open to display the internal structures. For smaller open boats the entire hull would generally be planked. Frame models are often very impressive because they are so complex but they would normally only be attempted by an experienced modeller.

Admiralty model. From the late 17th century the Royal Navy required a specific type of model to be built depicting any new warship design with the purpose of educating those involved in approval and financing of proposed ship building projects. These models became known as Admiralty models. The characteristic feature of an Admiralty model is the framed underwater hull. The hull above the waterline is fully planked, and the decks are generally un-planked in order to show the design of the deck beams. Admiralty models do not show the exact timbering or framing of the hull, but they do show the form of the hull. They usually show detail of the deck furnishings, masts, spars, and general configuration. Admiralty models are very impressive because of their complexity and they would normally only be attempted by a very experienced modeller.

Waterline models. A model built to show only the parts of a ship that sit above the water is known as Waterline model. The hull will usually be from plank-on-bulkhead or solid hull construction but will not include any underwater area. Waterline models are generally only made for small scale model ships and these models are often incorporated into a diorama depicting the ship at sea.

Hull only models. Hull models show only the finished hull with its equipment and decoration (sometimes with, sometimes without guns), they do not include masts or rigging at all. Hull models can employ any method of hull construction and can be an attractive alternative to the ship modeller because of the absence of any rigging. While a hull model does not represent a fully functional ship, it does allow for some complex woodwork to be displayed without the concern associated with constructing the rigging.

Block model. A single block of wood carved to the shape of a ships hull is a block model. There are generally no fittings, decorations or embellishments added. A block model simply displays the external shape of the hull.

Half model. A half model is similar to a block model in that the hull is usually carved from a single piece of wood but in this case it is only one side of the ship from the centreline and is generally mounted on a board for display on a wall. Again there are usually no fittings or decorations added.

RIGGING THE MODEL

There are several ways to present the rigging of a wooden period model ship which represent different configurations. A fully rigged model under sail can look spectacular if constructed and rigged properly but it is sometimes difficult to achieve the balance required between the size of materials being used and the scale of the model. Oversize, inaccurate or poorly constructed rigging can detract from an otherwise fine model ship. Some models look best as a fully rigged ship and others look better with no sails at all. The paragraphs below look at the various options for rigging a model.

Fully-rigged models without sails. A very popular type of rigged model ship is constructed without any sails at all. On some models a full set of sails would overwhelm the rest of the model. Some model makers feel that sails conceal too much of the masts and the rigging. For beginners to this hobby the standing rigging will offer enough of a challenge without all of the extra running rigging associated with sails so some people choose to build their model without sails. Even some kits come without materials for sails. A model without sails can still be quite an attractive piece and is worth considering.

Fully-rigged models with furled sails. For those who want the appearance of some sails without all of the white canvas showing a better method may be to rig the ship with sails furled. This can be a little tricky as model sails are unlikely to roll or fold like the heavy canvas of the real ship so some licence would generally be employed to simulate furled sails with smaller pieces of material rather than trying to gather full sized sails.

Fully-rigged models with partially set sails. There is always the opportunity to compromise and have some sails set while others are furled or simply left off the model. Having an understanding of what sails might be used in what conditions would be helpful to the modeller here although if you are after a desired effect it is really up to the individual as to how this method is approached. Often stay sails and lower (main) sails would be left off to give a better view of the deck etc.

Fully-rigged models with sails set. A model with all sails set displaying the full function of the rigging in all its complexity is a challenge worth pursuing for many modellers. This method does not suit all models and it can be very difficult to get everything to look just right. Generally simple small ships or large scale ships look better with a full set of sails.