

Tools of the Trade ~ Accoutrements of the Craft.

When your craft is traditional rigging the appurtenances of the trade are as varied the passing of a sail hank lashing, but there are some tools common to all salty square-rig sailor types who ply the craft of traditional rigging. Here is a sampling of some of the tools I have made over the years as a sailor, bosun, and rigger aboard historic museum ships and sailing ship replicas.

To start with one must have a notebook to keep notes and document the rig. My notebook is a customized three ring binder covered in hand stitched Scottish flax canvas and hand roped with three strand hemp. The closure is a bit of marline plaited up into a round sennit with a 3x4 Turks head and secured around a five strand star knot.



After a notebook, the next item is a tool bag or in sailor parlance a ditty bag. I have several ditty bags ñ one that is a commemorative ditty bag that I began when I crossed the Equator in July 1986 for the first time on HMAV Bounty sailing to Tahiti and two I use for aloft work.



A collection of traditional Maasai weapons and tools is displayed on a wooden surface. On the left is a speargun with a black strap and a green handle. In the center is a spearhead with a woven texture. On the right is a knife with a dark handle and a leather sheath. A red date stamp "FEB 14 2005" is visible in the bottom right corner.



A collection of tools and materials for leatherworking, arranged on a dark brown workbench. At the top center is a light-colored, frayed leather bag with a drawstring closure. Below it, various tools are laid out: a yellow tape measure, several knives with wooden handles, a hammer, a mallet, a punch, a awl, a pair of pliers, and a pair of shears. There are also some small pieces of leather and a black object, possibly a piece of leather or a small bag, on the left side. The tools are arranged in a neat, organized manner, suggesting a professional or hobbyist leatherworker's workspace.

the other bag I made, which is more of a presentation / keepsake ditty bag. I seamed together using Scottish flax canvas from the HMAV BOUNTY replica ñ it is my everyday ditty bag.

For a closer look at the ditty bag & tools:



Scottish flax canvas ditty bag with hemp lanyard with Lignum Vitae bullseye.



Brass and Lignum Vitae heaving mallet



Lignum Vitae serving / seizing boards ñ lower one has an offset lead to serve up to an eye.



Small Purple Heart palm serving board and larger Lignum Vitae serving board.



Small Purple Heart serving board in use.



Offset Purple Heart serving board serving up to a thimble.



Lignum Vitae serving / seizing board with offset lead in use serving up to a thimble.



Lignum Vitae seizing stick clapping on a fiber seizing.



Sailmaker's heaver made out of a bronze bolt with faceted edges to grip the sail twine and a lignum Vitae handle. It works like a capstan and heaves stitches down in heavy canvas. The end has a shallow concave point to seat the head of a heavy needle to push it the last inch or so through the canvas. A very handy tool.

If you find yourself rigging aboard an historic Scottish built sailing ship then a kilt is in order. Here is my splicing kilt showing me using my favorite marlinspike. For working aloft, I always advise removing the Sgain Dubh from the top of your hose sock and leaving it on deck or put a lanyard on it.



My favorite marlinspike is a cabinetmaker's screwdriver with the blade cut off and dressed down to a nice duckbill point. I replaced the pine handles with Lignum Vitae.

These are the rigging tools I most frequently use along with larger 14 to 24 and longer marlinespikes



when splicing large diameter wire. My larger spikes and wire working tools along with serving mallets I keep in one of my rigging boxes.

It is always nice to have photos, paintings, or something on the walls of your rigging loft to remind you that craft is paramount and to not take shortcuts.

Traditional rigging so you don't have to make 300 years of mistakes!

