

Terminology of yacht parts, fittings, sails & sheets etc.

Some of the obvious, and not so obvious, parts encountered on model yachts (and full size yachts).

Bowsie, flat. Small drilled 'plate' through which runs a line, or cord, for adjustment of that line. Pre-war bowsies were often made in ivory, some were made in a fine plywood; today hard plastic is used.

Bowsie, ring. A circular version of the flat bowsie, usually for larger yachts such as the A-class.

Deck eye. An eye on a horizontal plate with fixing holes, located on the deck. Normally used for accepting backstay/forestay attachment, also shroud attachment on smaller yachts.

Eyebolt. An eye, at the end of a threaded spigot, or bolt.

Eyelet, sail. A sail eyelet is a brass part, in the shape of a 'funnel' before compression, and when pressed into a hole in a sail it makes a firm metal ring. It is then used to facilitate making off a line (or on occasions a wire hawser in full size practise). Larger/stronger eyelets used on laying up covers for full size boats, were **turnovers**, where a brass ring was firstly sewn in place over a hole punched in the sail or sheet, the turnover (eyelet) was then hammered in place using a rawhide mallet and dies. It made an immensely strong eyelet.

Ferrule (slang, crimp). A brass ferrule, or sleeve, which when made off on one end of a wire, secures/attaches it by means of a loop made in the wire to a fitting or line.

Head crane. A crane which fits into the head (top) of a mast, usually to accept a backstay (and in some cases to accept the mainsail hoist).

Kicking strap, gooseneck fitting (American; vang). Apparatus fixed at base of mast to facilitate/control mainsail boom movement, & adjustment of. More correctly 'gooseneck' is only applied to a fitting that allows the mains'l boom to be raised through 90 degrees (on full size yachts).

Line. A cord travelling from, made off to, a sail or boom or rail, to facilitate adjustment, control, tensioning.

Mast foot. A fitting, or insert, to the base of the mast, either a fixed fitting, or to facilitate some kind of lateral adjustment.

Pulley. A grooved wheel or disc, running between a pair of cheeks, to accept travel of a line, or sheet, to change its direction of travel.

Rigging screw. Turnbuckle, otherwise bottle screw (double ended), which has a threaded body with adjustable eye at each end, used to adjust tension of wire shrouds. Modern rigging screws are often single ended with one end threaded and the other using a swivelling wire hook which hooks into a deck fitting such as a deck eye, or shroud, or chain, plate.

Sheet. Cordage, line, and which on a model runs from a sail winch to control the sails, and on a full size yacht a line to adjust a sail.

Sheet lead. Tube, housed in a seating plate to allow sheet line to be guided from below deck to above deck.

Shroud. A wire (or on small yachts, a cord) **side stay** to a mast, for supporting/stiffening same. Forestay and backstay are self-explanatory.

Shroud plate (or chain plate). A deck plate, with securing holes to screw into deck, and drilled with a series of holes to enable a shroud wire (via a rigging screw) to be attached with fore/aft adjustment.

Spreader. A fitting used on a mast, to 'spread' the shroud wires to stabilise and resist sideways thrust of the mast; generally sited at around the halfway point on the mast. Two sets of spreaders may sometimes be used.

Upon SAILS (and sailcloth).

Bermudan rigged (triangular) sails. The **foresail** is also known as the **jib**. The **mainsail** is the sail aft of the mast.

The **fore corner** of any Bermudan sail at the foot is the **tack**. The after corner is the **clew** or **clue**. The top corner is the **head**. The **leading edge** of any sail is the **luff**. The **after edge** is the **leech**. The **base** is the **foot**. The very **top** is the **head**.

On a **Bermudan** sail the **after edge** (leech) often has a curve, or **roach**, which requires battens (stiffeners).

Gaff sail. A four-sided mainsail/mizzen used on a barque, barge, or lugger, or similar. The **top 'edge'** is the **head**. Hindmost corner of head of sail is the **peek**. Foremost corner of head is the **nock**.

A 'turned' and strengthened **sewn edge** of a sail is termed a **'tabling'** (a 'hem' is something to do with dressmaking!).

A **bolt rope** is a rope sewn on the tabled edge of working sails (such as those on gaff rigged vessels), to strengthen that edge. In days past they were hand-sewn in place (using a needle and palm).

A **flying jib**, in full size practise, would be made in two parts, and will have an upper and a lower **gore**, each gore then being sewn together at the bisection (of the angle at the clew). The lengths of cloth on a full size sail are sewn together along the **selvedge** to make a sail. The selvedge is the edge/s running along the full length of a **bolt** of cloth and of course there two outer edges.

Raising, or hoisting, a sail may be referred to as **"raising the canvas."** Pulling, or **heaving on the sheets** to tighten the sails in stiffening weather conditions would be referred to as **"hardening down the canvas"**. Sails are set **hardened down** in stiff weather. **Hatches** are **'battened down'** in worsening weather conditions.

A sail was sewn from **cotton cloth** (or sometimes jute in days past). **'Canvas'** is cut off a bolt; a roll of cloth is referred to as a **'bolt'**. A bolt is supplied rolled, felled or flaked. Today sailcloth is loomed in synthetic material.

Sails, of any number, on a vessel of any size and type, are termed, in nautical parlance, a **suit** (not a 'set' as all too often referred to erroneously).

Battens, or stiffeners, are slats of wood let into pockets sewn on the **leech of a sail** where there is a curve, or **roach**, which has to be supported in order that the roach may **stand**. On model sails we use plastic stiffeners and on synthetic sails they are fixed using double-sided self-adhesive tape.

Palm. A leather 'palm' which fits the hand and with a steel insert which facilitates passing a sail maker's needle through the sailcloth.

Tabling. Where an edge of the of sailcloth is turned over and sewn it is termed a 'tabling.' When an edge cut on the bias is to be tabled, a separate piece of cloth (cut along the warp) is sewn to it. That tabling is then termed a '**false tabling**'.

Warp. Threads stretched **lengthwise** in loom. Those crossing the warp, i.e. running across the cloth, are the **weft**.

Throw us a 'line' (knowing the ropes).

In maritime terms a rope is something that lays on the deck or quayside. As soon as it is on board ship and made off to a **yard**, or a **sail**, it ceases to be 'rope'. When attached to a sail it becomes a '**line**'. When made off to a sheeting winch it becomes a '**sheet**'. A **halyard**, or **haliard**, is a rope or tackle for raising or lowering a sail, yard etc. It is not a term used relating to model yachts unless of a scale vintage vessel of the particular style.

Which side is port?

Port is left; **starboard** is right. **Aft** (or abaft) is at the rear of the vessel; **for'ard** is to the front; the **bow** is the forward end of a vessel and the **stern** is the after end, or **transom**. Port in times past was called **larboard**. A nice little ditty, easy to remember, "there is no **red port left** in the bottle".

A little history.

The word '**Larboard**' may well derive from the Middle-English 'Ladebord' deriving from 'laden' meaning that side of the ship presented to the quayside, the side where goods were 'laden' on board. In the 16th century '**port**' came to replace the old word 'larboard' but it was not until the 1840's that the Royal Navy officially abandoned the term larboard in favour of port.

'**Starboard**' was the side of the ship where the rudder was set (before rudders were set centrally). It comes from Old-English (Anglo-Saxon) '**Steobord**' and that descended from Old Norse '**Styri**' from the verb **Styra**, literally 'steering' (at the helm) and the word '**Bord**' meaning board, being the side of the ship. Hence the invitation '**come aboard**'.

'**Aft**' comes from Middle-English '**baft**' meaning at or near the stern, in turn derived from Old-English '**beaefan**' meaning 'rear'. Hence **go abaft**, reverse the vessel.

Thwartships (athwartships); referring, for instance, perhaps to a timber which is laid across the deck at right angles to the centre line of the vessel (beam to beam); the timber is thus set "**thwartships**" – i.e. *set that timber **athwart*** (the vessel).

Lights. A red light is set on the port side of a vessel, and a green light on the starb'd side. Running lights at bow and stern are set facing forward only and are white.

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Model (and full-size) sailmakers. Established 1932. 92 years.



Traditional sailmaking terms.

As annotated by my late father in his copy of the book "Sails and Sailmaking", by Robert Kipping (1898).

These notes are taken from those annotated on the back page of the above book and are of particular interest to a sailmaker and of course to anyone who wishes to know more about his model sails (and lines etc) and particularly *gaff rigged sails* of a certain period.

After-leech. Hindmost edge of sail.

Boom. Rail to which foot of sail is attached (3 sided sails).

Clues. Lower corners of square sail or after of irregular 4-sided sail.

Courses. Main sail.

Earings. Upper corners of square sail.

Fore-leech. Foremost edge of 4-sided sail.

Head. Top of sail.

Gaff. Rail to which head of sail is attached (4 sided sails).

Gore. Amount which a sail is out of "square" - measured on leech.

Latteen sail. 3-sided, spread by yard.

Leech. Edge of sail.

Nock. Foremost corner of head of sail.

Luff. Foremost Head of sail.

Peek. Hindmost corner of head of sail.

Reef points. Short lines attached to sails for temporary shortening of sail.

Sheet. Rope fixed to sail at foot.

Shoulder of mutton. 3 sided [sail] spread by Mast.

Staysail. 3-sided [sail], spread by stay.

Stays. Ropes which raise staysails.

Tack. Foremost corner at foot of sail.

Yard. Cross-piece on Mast.

Other notes of interest appended on other pages.

Earing cringle. (Metal or rope) Eye made of in bolt rope in corner [of sail]

Reef cringle. (Metal or rope) Eye made in edge bolt rope.

A mention of some text in the book appertaining to four-sided sails and which may be of interest as the particular terminology probably is not now generally known.

The **heads** of most four-sided sails, and fore-leeches of lateen sails, are attached to their respective yards, gaffs by rope yarns, called stoppers, or by a lacing; and the upper extremities are made fast by earings.

The **staysails** are extended upon stays between the masts, whereupon they are drawn up or down; and their lower parts are stretched out by tack and sheet.

The **mainsail and foresail** have a rope, and a large single block, or chain, made fast to each clue. The ropes or chains, called tacks, lead forward to the chess-trees and bumkins; and the block receives a thick rope from aft, which is termed the sheet.

I have made no alteration to my Father's notes, these are exactly as written by him in the very early 1930's. They are of course terms in use in the first half of the 20th century and were also current, and hark back, to earlier times. The exact meaning of some terms may have altered over the ensuing years, but as I say, these were in use previously – and would have been well known normal usage throughout the 1800's.

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Making your own sails then heed this Cardinal RULE.

**Upon the matter of luffs, leeches and warps.
A vitally important rule to remember.**

**The after edge of ANY sail is called the LEECH.
The WARP threads of the cloth run its LENGTH.**

The luff is the leading edge of ANY sail, the leech is therefore the trailing edge of any sail and of course the foot is exactly that, it's the edge at the foot. If the sail is a gaff type and four sided, then luff and leech are exactly as the Bermudan sail, as is the foot, but the "top" edge is the HEAD. The foremost corner of the head edge (against the mast in the case of a mains'l) is termed the NOCK (coined in olden days and probably because it 'knocked' against the mast, so easy to remember!).

The Cardinal rule is that the LEECH of any sail *MUST* always follow (run parallel with) the WARP of the cloth.

The warp runs down the LENGTH of the piece, or bolt, the threads can be longer than 4,000 metres when loomed, whereas the weft threads run across the WIDTH and are only the width of the cloth. The SELVEDGE is the edges of the piece of material and run with the WARP of the cloth. With Dacron cloth it can be (but is not always) marked with a faint blue line some 1/2" from the very edge and running down the selvedge.

Whilst the cloth is being loomed the WARP threads are under considerable tension, as you will fully appreciate when you watch a loom working, hence the warps inherent strength and resistance to stretch.



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