

Mersey Built

The Role of Merseyside in the American Civil War

by Robert Thorp

VERNON SERIES IN WORLD HISTORY

"The author has created an exciting amalgam of American maritime history and British business and commercial intrigue with a compendium of appropriate British shipbuilding of the day. These unlikely components are welded into a fascinating journey through the American civil war period. Well worth reading for those of diverse interests."

Alex Urquhart
Senior Lecturer Emeritus in Naval Architecture
The Robert Gordon University, UK

Summary

'Mersey Built' chronicles the little-known commercial battle that raged between North and South during the American Civil War. The South relied on Europe for its military supplies, which the North tried to stop with a naval blockade of all Southern ports. The South retaliated by destroying Northern merchant ships on the high seas, using war ships, secretly procured from British shipyards and smuggled out of Britain by sympathetic British captains using British crews. The Charleston-based business empire headed by George Trenholm provided a conduit for Confederate finance with its Liverpool branch acting as bankers for the Confederacy's procurement agents. Merseyside, with its extensive docks and numerous shipyards quickly became the epicenter of Confederate operations in Europe. Several British businessmen bought ships specifically to run supplies through the Union blockade, leaving relationships between the United States and Britain strained, close to breaking point.

The book relates the history of Trenholm's commercial empire, its pre-war expansion into Liverpool and the pivotal role it played in supporting the Confederate war effort. The involvement of other Liverpool-based entrepreneurs and their successes and failures in blockade-running is described. Background histories of the Merseyside

ship builders who constructed warships and blockade runners for the Confederacy are included as well as several mini-biographies of the Liverpool-based captains who smuggled out warships and braved the Union blockade. Details of each ship built on Merseyside for involvement in the Civil War are listed. The role of the United States consular service and its extensive, Liverpool-based, spy ring is described, as are the efforts of the United States ambassador in London to influence British government policy on neutrality.

The author, a direct descendant of a Liverpool ship builder, and a blockade-running captain, brings new insights and previously unpublished facts to light in this fascinating chapter of history.

About the author

Robert (Bob) Thorp is a graduate of Reading University and has had a long and successful career in the international oil and gas industry. His interest in Merseyside's role in the American Civil War stems from ancestral links to Liverpool ship builders and master mariners. He is the great-great-grandson of William Cowley Miller whose company built the C.S.S. Florida, the seized gunboat Alexandra, and a number of purpose-built blockade runners. He is also the great-great-grandson of Miller's son-in-law, Captain James Alexander Duguid, who was the delivery commander of the C.S.S. Florida and captained several blockade runners, not least of which, the Lucy, was one of the most successful runners of the war. Bob has become internationally recognized as an authority on the Mersey built ships employed by the Confederacy and has been invited to present papers on the subject at The American Civil War Museum in Richmond, Virginia (2003) and at the prestigious McMullen Naval History Symposium at the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland (2015). His book is the culmination of more than thirty years of research and contains many facts and insights not previously published.

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With a foreword by Stephen Chapin Kinnaman

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