



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 shroud attachment, and backstay/forestay.

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 eyelets were **turnovers**, where a brass ring was firstly sewn in place over a hole punched in the sail, the turnover was then hammered in place using a rawhide mallet and dies. It made an immensely strong eyelet.

Ferrule (or crimp). A brass ferrule, or sleeve, which when crimped, or made off, on 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 (American; vang). Apparatus fixed at base of mast to facilitate/control mainsail boom movement, & adjustment of. More correctly 'gooseneck' is applied to a fitting that can be raised through 90 degrees (on a full size yacht).

Line. A cord travelling from, and made off to, a sail or boom, 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, generally 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 wire shrouds. Modern rigging screws are often single ended with one end using a wire hook which hooks into a deck fitting such as a deck eye, or shroud plate allowing fore and aft adjustment.

Sheet. Cordage, and which runs from a sail winch to control the sails.

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. A plate with securing holes at each end, and drilled with a series of holes to enable a shroud wire (via a rigging screw) to be attached.

Spreader. A fitting used on a mast, to 'spread' the shrouds to stabilise and resist side thrust of the mast; generally sited at the half way point on the mast.

Upon sails (and sailcloth).

Gaff sail. A four sided mainsail/mizzen used on a barque, barge, or lugger, or similar.

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 **gaff sail** the **top 'edge'** is the **head**. **A gaff sail is four sided**.

The **fore corner** of the sail (at the foot) is the **tack**. The after corner is the **clew**. The top corner is the **head**.

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).

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

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

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 are the edges running along the full length of a **bolt** of cloth and of course there two outer edges. Where a cut edge occurs on the 'biase' of the cloth it receives a separate piece of cloth which sewn on that edge and which is cut from the length, i.e. with the '**warp**'.

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** is 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, or in days past sometimes felled, or flaked. Today sails are manufactured from synthetic material. The **sails** rigged on a yacht are termed a **suit of sails** (not a 'set' as often called incorrectly).

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.

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Tabling. Where an edge of a piece 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 **halliard**, 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 '**beaftan**' 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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