

## ABOUT ANGUS

### Getting Started

Angus Konstam was born in Aberdeen, Scotland (January 1960), but he was brought up in Orkney, the islands off the north coast of Scotland. It was an idyllic and stunningly beautiful place to grow up, and Angus had an extremely happy childhood. Although he was no great student, he discovered an aptitude for English and History than have remained with him ever since. Many writers blame their career choice on the influence of their school teachers, and Angus is no exception. In 1978 he accepted a naval scholarship, and spent a year at the Royal Naval College in Dartmouth before going on to Aberdeen University, where he studied History.

After completing his degree he returned to the Navy and spent a year at sea, as he put it “swanning about all over the Caribbean”. Little did he know that this involved visiting many of the places he would later write about in his pirate books! He left the Navy in 1983, and the following year he began a M.Litt (Masters) in Maritime Studies at St. Andrews University, a course which combined history with maritime archaeology. He already was an experienced diver, so this seemed a fantastic opportunity to kick-start a new career in the underwater archaeological line. Together with many of the graduate students Angus spent two perfect summers, one excavating the remains of an Iron Age Crannog (or lake dwelling) in Loch Tay, Scotland, and another working with a local diving group who were investigating the late 17<sup>th</sup> century “Bronze Bell Wreck” in Cardigan Bay, in Wales. However after completing his Masters thesis on Renaissance Naval Artillery, Angus only managed to find one job offer – a temporary position working on an archaeological dig in the River Thames, paid by the Royal Armouries, the national museum of Arms and Armour, which was then located in the Tower of London. One thing led to another, and he soon became a full-time museum curator, thereby swapping his diving gear for a jacket and tie!

Angus never really decided to become a writer. The profession chose him. It all began while he was working in the Royal Armouries. The Tower and the Kremlin decided to swap exhibits – a “Treasures of the Tower” being shown in Moscow while “Treasures of the Kremlin” came to London. At the same time the curators of both museums were encouraged to exchange information, and to examine each others’ collections. This ended up with Angus studying the 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian military. A mutual colleague introduced him to a historian working for Osprey Publishing, who turned out to want someone to write a book about *Peter the Great’s Army*. The result was two small (15,000 word) Osprey books which first appeared in 1993 – the first easily-accessible account of the foundation of the Russian army to appear in English. The same Russian sources provided material for three more Osprey books; an account of Peter the Great’s victory at *Poltava, 1709* (1994), and a two volume account of the *Russian Army of the Seven Years War* (1996). Angus has been writing ever since.

### The Key West Pirate Phase

By that time Angus had left his job as a Senior Curator of Weapons at the Royal Armouries and moved to Florida. However much fun the job might be, ten years is long enough for anyone. With the museum relocating from London to Leeds, Angus was casting his net out. He was already known as something of an expert on artillery, particularly guns from shipwrecks. In 1994 he flew out to Florida to look at three collections of naval artillery; one owned by a private collector, one by a salvage company and the third by a museum. As a result the museum offered Angus a job. In the summer of 1995 Angus became the Chief Curator of the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum in Key West, Florida – a world away from the grey, overcrowded streets of London. For the next five years he worked alongside the Director, Dr. Madeleine Burnside, helping her to transform the museum from a popular local attraction into a fully-fledged maritime museum, with a vibrant program of travelling and temporary exhibits, and a permanent collection which was the envy of many larger institutions. One of these temporary exhibits was on Pirates, and provided Angus with his next historical avenue.

The subject of piracy first attracted Angus when he toured the “Pirates: Fact & Fiction” exhibition which ran at the National Maritime Museum in London in 1992 – a show curated by David Cordingly and John Falconer. It was the first time anyone had tried to strip away the myths behind piracy, to reveal the grisly underneath. David went on to produce his seminal piracy book *Under the Black Flag* (1995). A year or so later when Angus designed his own Florida exhibition he drew inspiration from the British show. However, Key West lies in what were once pirate-infested waters, so for *Pirates! : Pirates and Piracy of the Americas* (1997) Angus was able to apply an American perspective to the subject. The research he undertook for the exhibition resulted in a string of four small pirate books for Osprey; *Pirates* (1998), *Buccaneers* (2000), *Elizabethan Sea Dogs* (2000) and *Privateers and Pirates* (2001) – all covering a different historical period of piracy in American or Caribbean waters. Three of these books were later bound together into a new title, *Pirates: Terror on the High Seas* (2001).

It was around this time that Angus was approached by Iain Macgregor, a commissioning editor then working for an Anglo-American book packager called Prima. Iain knew Angus as he once worked for Osprey, and he knew he would be the ideal person to write two larger 70,000 word history books, both on maritime subjects. This resulted in the publication of the beautifully-illustrated 75,000 word books *The History of Pirates* (1999) and the *History of Shipwrecks* (1999), both for Lyons Press in New York. These were Angus’ first large projects, and both proved very successful, being chosen for the History Book Guild in the States, and being translated into several languages. Today both books are also in print in Britain, published by Mercury Editions. In fact, since it was first published *The History of Pirates* has sold over 65,000 copies! Almost by accident Angus had become a successful author.

## Coffee Table Histories and Ospreys

In 1999 when *The History of Pirates* first came out the British part of Prima was bought by its leading employees Roger Kean and Oliver Frey, who founded their own packaging firm called Thalamus. The association between Angus and the Thalamus has been going on ever since. The beautiful English market-town of Ludlow might be a world away from centres of publishing but the enthusiasm of the Thalamus directors' has ensured that they remain players in the international publishing game. Before leaving Florida Angus wrote three more books for Thalamus; *Historical Atlas of Exploration* (2000), the *Atlas of Medieval Europe* (2000) both published by Facts on File in New York, and *Atlas of the Celtic World* (2001) published by New York's Facts on File. For these Angus was able to draw on his academic training in Medieval and Early-Modern History, and while both books received critical acclaim, the *Atlas of Medieval Europe* proved by far the most successful.

Since his return to Britain in early 2001 Angus has written five more books in the "Historical Atlas" series, all designed by Thalamus and published in New York. Although this meant leaving his main historical base of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, by this time Angus was seen as a first-rate historical researcher, able to produce a highly-readable historical account of what could often be a turbulent and confusing period of history. These later titles were the alarmingly topical *Historical Atlas of the Crusades* (2002) and the *Historical Atlas of Ancient Greece* (2003) for Facts on File, the *Historical Atlas of the Viking World* (2002) for Thalamus, the *Historical Atlas of the Napoleonic Era* (2003) for Lyons Press, and the *Historical Atlas of the Renaissance* (2004) for Checkmark Books. Angus has recently completed his 11<sup>th</sup> large general history book for the boys at Thalamus – *A House Divided: Reformation and Catholic Backlash*, which is due to be published in late 2006.

During this time Angus maintained his close association with Osprey Publishing, and has since become one of their most prolific authors, with over 30 titles under his belt. Osprey produce several types of books, including 25,000 word Campaign Histories (such as *Poltava, 1709*), and smaller 15,000 word "New Vanguard" titles, which told the story of a particular technical aspect of military or naval history. Angus became Osprey's "naval expert", working closely with editors Marcus Cowper and Simone Drinkwater to produce a string of no less than 13 naval titles between 2001 and 2005. Several of these were on warships of the American Civil War, a subject which came to fascinate Angus during his period in Florida. He travelled extensively, gathering information, taking photographs and visiting the places where it all happened. The results were *Confederate Ironclad and Union Monitor* (2001), *Mississippi River Gunboats of the American Civil War*, *Union River Ironclad and Confederate Raider* (2002), *Confederate Blockade Runner* (2003) and *Confederate Submarines and Torpedo Vessels* (2004). The first two books were later bound together along with Angus' Campaign book *Hampton Roads, 1862* (2002) and combined with additional work by Angus to produce the 60,000 word book *Duel of the Ironclads: Monitor & Virginia at Hampton Roads, 1862* (2003), a book which has proved to be one of the most successful "bind-up" titles that Osprey have produced.

## New Avenues

Angus wrote six more titles in the Osprey “New Vanguard” series, four of which were from within his normal area of specialisation in the “Age of Fighting Sail”, while two more reflected a new interest in the naval history of the World Wars. The sailing era titles were *British Napoleonic Ship-of-the-Line* (2001), *The Renaissance War Galley* (2002), the *Pirate Ship* (2003) and the *Spanish Galleon* (2004). Since completing his M.Litt (Masters) Thesis on Renaissance Naval Guns in 1986, Angus has had an abiding interest in guns at sea, and the development of the sailing warship. In fact the war galley book led to another Osprey title based on the same body of research – the Campaign book *Lepanto, 1571* (2003), covering the great Renaissance galley battle fought for control of the Mediterranean.

What seemed more unusual was the development of an interest in more modern aspects of naval warfare, and the production of two more well-received Osprey New Vanguard titles; *British Motor Torpedo Boat, 1939-45* and *British Battlecruisers, 1939-45* (both 2003). However, for a former Royal Naval officer, and someone brought up within sight of the great British wartime anchorage of Scapa Flow in Orkney, this new departure was hardly a surprising one! This new interest led to a new publishing association, this time with the commissioning editor Simon Forty, who then worked for the London-based packager and publisher PRC, later part of Chrysalis Books (now Anova). Two years before he asked Angus to write the pre-WW1 part of *Warships: From the Galley to the Present Day* (2001). After the Ospreys appeared Simon approached Angus and asked him to take on a book about U-Boats, as the acclaimed U-Boat author Jack Mallam-Showell earmarked to write it was unable to work on the project. At first Angus was reluctant, but after visiting Jack and being presented with bulging files filled with (German language) notes and records, he agreed to take up the challenge. The result was *7<sup>th</sup> U-Boat Flotilla: Dönitz's Atlantic Wolves* (2003), published by Ian Allen in London. Since then Angus has written two other Second World War naval titles at Simon's behest; *PT-boats: US Navy Torpedo Boats* (2005) for Ian Allen, and *Hunt the Bismark* (2003), published by the prestigious Naval Institute Press of Annapolis, Maryland.

For years, Angus' main contact at Osprey was Lee Johnson. Back in 1993 when Osprey was part of Reed Books, Lee ran the whole thing – in charge of editing, production and taking authors to the pub. Once the company expanded Lee took charge of the Campaign series, and he and Angus joined forces to produce a string of titles in the series – a regular production line of eight more titles following in the wake of *Poltava, 1709*. first came *Pavia, 1525* (1996) – the research for the book based on work Angus undertook for the Royal Armouries' new museum in Leeds. It contained a radical re-examination of the battle based on contemporary evidence and illustrative sources which turned the existing histories of the battle on their heads. Since its publication all subsequent books about the battle have followed Angus' interpretation of events. was in charge of producing the Osprey Campaign series of books. Next came *San Juan, 1898* (1998), brought out as part of the centenary celebrations of the Spanish-American War. Next came *Spanish Armada, 1588* (2001), a return to Angus' roots as a early-modern naval historian, followed by *Hampton Roads, 1862*(2002) and *Lepanto, 1571* (2003) which has already been mentioned, *Guilford Courthouse, 1781* (2002), *Fair Oaks, 1862* (2003) and *Seven Days Battles, 1862* (2004). Another Osprey book in an American Civil War vein was *American Civil War Fortifications: Coastal Forts* (2003), a title in Osprey's fortification series.

## A Tale of Two Cities

The good working relationship with Simon Forty (now half of the London-based packagers Compendium Publishing) led to participation in several larger multi-author books in 2002; *The Civil War: A Visual Encyclopaedia* and *The Great War: A Visual Encyclopaedia* published by PRC, and *Lock & Load: Weapons of the US Military* produced by Sterling Publications. This was an extremely busy period for Angus, as he also took on a major “partwork” project, *Victory at Sea*, which involved writing weekly 2,000 word articles on naval history over the next two years – a caucous of work which grew into a 200,000 word romp through naval history from the Ancient Egyptians to the Nuclear Age.

In 2003 Angus decided to sell his house in London and move somewhere else – he just didn’t know where. He finally settled on the Scottish capital of Edinburgh, where he moved in November 2003. After just a few weeks there he swore he couldn’t understand why he spent so long living in London! In 2004 Angus teamed up with another former Osprey editor, Sean Barrington, who worked for Chrysalis Books (and now called Anova). Over the next twelve months Angus wrote two small 25,000 word military history guides for them; *The Pocket Book of Civil War Battles* and *The Pocket Book of Civil War Weapons* (2004), plus a larger 60,000 word book on strange and inexplicable maritime tales, a book called *Ghost Ships: Tales of Abandoned, Doomed and Haunted Vessels* published by the Chrysalis import, Greenwich Editions (2005). It proved so successful that Chrysalis asked Angus to write another “ghost” book, this time for Thunder Bay Press in San Diego, California. At first Angus was extremely reluctant, but Sean proved very persuasive, and the result was the 60,000 word supernatural tome *Civil War Ghost Stories* (2005). Angus approached both books as a sceptic, and managed to shoot down many well-established ghostly myths – but had to admit that in both subjects there were a handful of instances where the events described had no logical explanation. During the same time Angus also wrote a small educational book for children called *America Speaks: The Birth of a Nation – Merchants* (2005), the first part in a ten book set published by Scholastic in Connecticut covering various aspects of American colonial history, drawing on contemporary sources.

2005 was something of a watershed year. Angus had just teamed up with a literary agent, Mark Stanton, a partner in the Edinburgh-based literary agency Jenny Brown Associates. “Stan” helped Angus secure a contract from Wileys in New York to write a full-length 120,000 word biography of Blackbeard the Pirate, a book that took the best part of a year to research and complete. Fortunately Angus had been collecting pirate references and source material since that exhibition in Florida, and so the process was more of an enjoyable piece of detective work than a gruelling search for information. You can see the result for yourself: *Blackbeard: America’s Most Notorious Pirate* is due to be published in June 2006, its launch coinciding with the release of “Pirates of the Caribbean 2”!

Since completing Blackbeard Angus has been working on the manuscript of a book on the *Salerno Campaign* of 1943 for Pen & Sword, and an Osprey book on Celtic Fortifications. Of course there are plenty of other new irons in the fire, but you’ll have to check back to see what these are going to be. Suffice it to say that Angus is working on another large maritime book, this time based in his favourite historical period of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.