

## Applying Social Networking to Maritime History

Social networks are, perhaps surprisingly, a great place to explore maritime history. Sites like **Facebook**, **Pinterest**, **LinkedIn**, **Tumblr**, and others, all have hidden (and sometimes not-so-hidden) spots where maritime history, in many different forms, hides out. Where that is, and how one finds it, varies a great deal, however.

With more than one billion active users around the globe, nearly everyone is now familiar—at least in passing—with **Facebook** (<http://facebook.com>). Facebook can be a great place to receive a regular feed of occasional maritime information and



news by following feeds from businesses, museums, groups, and individuals—including the **National Maritime Historical Society**. “**Down to the Sea in Ships**” (use Facebook’s search box to locate it; or <http://facebook.com/search.php> if you’re not logged in) is a perfect example of how Facebook can improve your day; the feed provides regular and fascinating vignettes of maritime history, and you can find lots more interesting content just by looking at the pages that similar sites follow. One example is “**Sailing Merchant Vessels of Ireland and Britain**,” at <http://www.facebook.com/sailingmerchantvessels>. Many businesses offer Facebook pages that provide interesting content beyond just promotional spots: museums, for instance, often have very interesting Facebook feeds that range from what’s going on at their institution to posting images and content from their collections. These pages are accessible whether you have a Facebook account or not.

**LinkedIn** (<http://linkedin.com>) is very similar to Facebook. It is smaller—with about 175 million users—and focuses much more on professional interests than does Facebook. LinkedIn’s discussion pages are unique to LinkedIn but are also only visible to their users. In many cases, any LinkedIn members may view a group discussion, but they cannot participate until they request to join the group and are approved by the group leader. Others, such as the **Naval History & Heritage Command** group, are open groups, and do not require approval for membership.

Like Facebook, **Twitter** (<http://twitter.com>) has received lots of press. With more than half a billion active users, its 140-character “tweets” are famous, if potentially overwhelming (because of their quantity, rather than their brevity). Try searching Twitter by using its search box in the top right corner, rather than trying to follow the never-ending stream of tweets. One can track just a few interesting individuals or businesses, but I find Twitter’s feature

of adding others to my stream to be frustrating and confusing. Museums and organizations, such as the **UK National Maritime Museum** (@NMMGreenwich) and the **US Navy Historical Foundation** (@USNavyHistory), or authors like **Nathaniel Philbrick** (@natphilbrick) and **Julian Stockwin** (@julianstockwin), can provide interesting and informative news and insights for those who enjoy the Twitter experience.



**Pinterest** (<http://pinterest.com>) is a new and fast-growing photo-sharing site where people “pin” images that they like to their own “pinboards,” which are then visible to all. You need an account to pin images, but you don’t need one to view or search the site. Pages like <http://pinterest.com/ezthetic/sh-p/> show many interesting and varied images of, in this case, ships—as curated by the user “ezthetic.” From the home page, use the search box in the top left corner to find images of absolutely anything, often brought together through curious and random themes.



More images are available at **Tumblr** (<http://tumblr.com>), a photoblog site where people mostly post images that are of interest to them personally. These images are nearly always collected from elsewhere, but can occasionally lead to more relevant sources. For instance, a search for “maritime” turned up a good-quality image of Anchor Line’s *Caledonia*, from user “unseensight.” The original source of the image, however, the **Scottish Maritime Museum’s Flickr** page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/scottishmaritimemuseum/>, provided many more images useful to my research than the feed from “unseensight.”



While navigating these sites looking for maritime topics, be aware that the word “ship” in the online community is also a word used by fans of literature and film franchises to discuss their favorite imagined relationships among fictional characters. Not to worry: I, too, was thoroughly confused when this turned up in my search results, until I researched it to figure out what was going on. When explored with care, the world of social networks can provide one with a new view of maritime history—it can also be strange and overwhelming.


Suggestions for other sites worth mentioning are welcome at [peter@shipindex.org](mailto:peter@shipindex.org). See <http://shipindex.org> for a free compilation of over 140,000 ship names from indexes to dozens of books and journals. ⚓

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