

Jack Barleycorn

The Guardian, A Brief Biography

Jack Barleycorn is a British expatriate living for some years in Guangdong, China. Aged 34 and single, he worked as consultant for an executive housing and marina project in Gongmuen (Jiang Men 江門), Yin Hu Wan, known as Silver Sands Paradise Garden. He was responsible for supplying boats for the new marina, of which he had to find more than one thousand. His task was to buy thirty representative vessels worldwide, so the Chinese partners boat factories could copy the designs. He also holds a Yacht Master Ocean (Sail) Certificate, making him an ideal choice for the position.

Having already travelled to USA, UK, Italy, and France, logistics and pricing see him looking for boats in Australia. He forms a partnership with an Australian company to supply ten boats of various luxury designs, mainly powerboats such as 65 foot floating offices with hydrofoils, and deep sea fishing boats for sport. During his visit, he also intended to commission a couple of modern sailing boats of between 30 and 40 feet.

Background

Jack was born in the Shires of England to a local father and an Irish mother. He hated school intensely, despite being one of the brightest students. However, he enjoyed working on the farm, and long summer holidays spent in his mother's small fishing village in Eire. Jack was always hanging around the docks, and helping the fishermen land their catches. Most were night trawling, but sometimes he went with them for day trips harvesting lobsters and crabs. It was only natural he would develop a love of the sea.

Leaving school at the earliest opportunity, he took many casual jobs to support his love of motorbikes, and later the girlfriends that came along. Knowing the good jobs demanded a degree he returned to college where he passed his A levels, before going to University reading computers and internet. During college, he met and fell in love with one girl, and later they talked about marriage. However, the relationship dissolved naturally after his education was complete, when they found their lives taking different directions.

Despite being a good team player, Jack was always dominated by his own ideas and expressed them openly to his peers and superiors. Even in those days he was very much a free thinker and individual. This led him into conflict with management who felt threatened by his temerity. Needless to say, he seldom stayed long in any one job.

One summer he took a holiday with a group of close friends and they went sailing for two weeks. Leaving from Newton Ferrers near Plymouth, they visited the Channel Islands, and later France. The holiday was enjoyable, but also re-ignited his love of the sea, and boats in particular. He easily passed the initial Sailing courses, and later completed his basic qualifications. However, to progress he would need to put in a lot of nautical mileage which led to a hiatus, as he began a career as self-employed IT contractor.

These contracts brought him into contact with Neal Podmore, a County politician and member of the Diplomatic corps. They became friends quickly, and after several years often shared a pint together after work in London. One evening Jack mentioned that he was getting itchy feet once more and felt the need for freedom. He said he was considering taking a few months off to finally get his Yacht Masters Certificate. He explained, "The last time I went weekend sailing I was offered a position delivering a new boat to its buyer in the Caribbean. I was not free because of work, but the guy gave me his number and told me they were often on the lookout for experienced crew."

Neal didn't reply, but rose and went to order another round of drinks from the bar. When he returned he opened immediately, "Jackie, we've been mates now for several years. I am also considering moving back home as I am thinking of settling down with Jacqui. With my qualifications, I can easily get a job in Banking, and it will be far easier to deal with my constituency commitments.

"The thing is, I have already opened an English language training school in China, on the mainland a couple of hours from Hong Kong. I could really use someone there I trust for this summer, and later to build us a proper website and database. I need a Brit as office Manager with those skills. Are you interested?"

Jack nodded his head and sat back seriously considering his proposal, because China as a country had always intrigued him. Neal pushed his point, "You have already told me that a round trip to the States would get you the mileage you need for the Yachtmaster Offshore Certificate requirements. I have a feeling a trip to Hong Kong delivering a boat would get you the Yacht Master Ocean, which I know you dearly want".

They toasted with the fresh beers, but Jack did not accept straight away, as there were too many imponderables. Nevertheless, the timeframe was about right and his contract close to renewal. Jack said, "I'll let you know before the week's out."

That weekend Jack went to visit his old friend Dawn in Wales. They enjoyed catching up, and walking in the clean air of Snowdonia. Jack knew Dawn had rented-out her house in Birmingham on a couple of occasions, once taking several years out to tour India and Nepal. She explained the tricks and cons, before recommending a property management company she found most reliable. Then she wanted to know why?

Jack explained, "My contract ends in two weeks time, and I feel trapped. I would be leaving what I know, taking time off to finish my sailing qualifications. Neal's made me this offer..." Immediately, it was like they were back in college, again making bright and impossible plans for the future.

Ali, Dawn's brother who Jack knew well from years before, joined them the next day. He was on vacation in Blighty, and was intent on making the most of it. Jack joined up with him the following weekend, and they went on a night out together, Dawn joining them in London the next day, laughing at their sore heads, still hung-over from the night before.

Jack had not been spending much of his salary, despite earning a lot of money. The following Saturday he was in Wolverhampton looking for a small house to buy outright, and rent immediately. The morning dragged, as there was no housing suitable that was reasonably priced, or did not require a lot of work doing to it. There was just one more estate agent to try before he went for a liquid lunch.

At first, the girl serviced his enquiry with typical results, before the owner came over and took Jack aside. They spoke candidly about his intentions, and she offered several alternatives. One was University housing, but this proved to be overly complicated with the property owner across the other side of the world. Her other suggestion was to buy one or two apartments of the type much sought after by young professional, first-time buyers, in a new development they were sole agents for.

They visited the flats immediately, and while they came with carpets and curtains, kitchen units and sink, and bathroom; she suggested Jack add the basics to almost fully furnished standard. They agreed upon one double bed, because the tenant might use the second bedroom for something else, an office perhaps. Jack agreed to provide a fridge/freezer, oven with hob, three-piece suite, and microwave. The apartments also had a security-coded outside door, and each flat came with one dedicated parking space.

After returning to her office they parted for lunch, and instead of his customary pie and pint, Jack spent the time checking out other apartment rentals. He found many similar going for more than £400 return per month, and some in an adjoining block asking just under £500 per month. They were priced at just over £40,000, meaning that despite agency fees, his investment would be returned in a little over ten years. That was too good a deal to miss. It also provided him with a regular income, given the flats remained occupied. Later, Dawn's agents reassured him this was their speciality, as they were local people, well, from nearby Sutton Coldfield.

Satisfied, Jack returned and put down a deposit on two apartments late that afternoon. He saw his personal solicitor later at early evening, the one that handled his bookkeeping. Norman was an independent local guy, who dealt with all sorts of things, and was very discrete, and reliable. He later learned the man had made purchases in the same development, thanking Jack for the head's-up. In return, Norman made a Will for Jack at zero charge, a small measure of his gratitude.

Jack's contract ended and he said goodbye to London without a backward glance. The quick buy he had been promised in the Midlands, was compromised by surveys and minutiae. He had hoped to complete that weekend, but the best Norman could offer was perhaps one month. Jack read between the lines; it would be the standard six-weeks.

Committing to his new enterprise, Jack called the Captain whose number he had, but there was nothing except a delivery to Bali in one month's time. The dates and timeframes weren't working for him at all. The Captain gave Jack the number of a friend, Captain Roberts, which he called, and was offered a place immediately on a large yacht that was leaving Plymouth with the tide in two-hours time. The logistics were impossible. However, the sister vessel would be stopping in The Solent on Tuesday, and they also needed crew. Jack signed up immediately, bound for Florida two days later.

The trip was a brute; unseasonable waves delayed them and one storm saw the boat running without sail for most of one night and the following day. They ended up almost two days behind schedule, despite using the engines to propel the craft forwards. This was noted in Jack's personal log, and would not incur late delivery charges. After completing the leg, he made contacts with a small manufacturer in Florida, and was soon returning to the Mediterranean delivering another sailing boat.

That leg was much better, and they arrived in Greece one day ahead of schedule. He took a couple of days off on land to find his feet again, before heading to Italy with an Australian guy he had become good friends with on the trip. There was one crew member wanted for a trip back to UK, which he let his friend take; he reasoned he would never have discovered the local Italian options without him, and anyway, Jack had time to spare.

The following day, Jack was offered a trip to Denmark in a few days time, and took it. The crew were mainly Italian and didn't speak much English, but a South African adventurer was onboard, who acted as his interpreter in times of need. Jack learned a bit of Italian on that leg of his journey.

He stayed in Odense for a few days, before learning of a tall ships ensemble in Holland. He took the coach the next day, and soon found passage back to The Solent. Surprisingly, his car was still where he had parked it, so he detoured to Newton Ferrers near Plymouth, and the small fishing village he first set sail from so many years before.

Jack had presumed with his experience, he would gain the Yacht Master within a couple of hours, but it was not to be, as the exam and conditions had changed much over the years. He knew all the knots, but had forgotten some of the flags. He knew the common lights, but some configurations were very strange and new. Then there was being proficient with Morse code, something he had not used since the very early days. His sailing skills, his seamanship were not under question, but the examinations were by then, very difficult.

Jack took the test on the afternoon of the fourth day; the weather was balmy with just enough wind to make conditions perfect. The next day he had to sit a written examination, renewed his VHF Radio license, and retook his First Aid qualification. He passed with a near perfect score, and a commendation.

That night he relaxed with others in the most missable of small communities, tied to the sea, as was their way of life. He enjoyed the company of such sincere and true Britons, leaving the next morning to attend to the regular details of his life. His two-months away having been almost long enough for Norman to sort out a stupid Ground Rent charge of; believe it or not, £2 per year. He was finally due to exchange contracts five days later.

Jack took one of those days following up a good lead from his new friend, Captain Roberts, and was offered a place of rank with a little pay, on a delivery from Plymouth to Melbourne, Australia. Normally people simply worked their passage, but they were well aware Jack wanted his Yachtmaster Ocean Certificate, which required him to be a Captain for a long stretch. Buoyed, he celebrated with friends that evening; he had expected to have to pay them for this privilege.

Jack's business concluded with visits to Norman, the Estate Agents, Dawn, and Neal, plus family and other friends. He set sail ten days later bound for 'the Colonies', and Dawn drove him down, his car already sold, "Jackie, take this and remember me. Wear it close to your heart. It is jade, and look, carved in one piece. See how the white background supports the golden yellow of the dragon relief. I am told it is Chinese, and will bring you luck and fair weather."

"Wow" This is awesome, are you sure? The carving is amazing; how did you come by it?"

"That was strange. I was waiting for Ali's Heathrow connection to arrive; the plane was delayed. I wandered into shops just to kill time, and exiting one, was approached by an old woman. She seemed to be lost in the big city, and didn't know how to reach her hotel. It was nothing, at least if you knew the city. I got her a cab, and as I closed the door, she gave me the pendant. Her words were a bit odd, old worldly, 'This lucky charm is not yours to keep, an amulet for those who seek. Yours is not its power to hold, but for another who ventures bold'."

"Before I knew it she was gone, and I was left holding the pendant. I hadn't really thought much about it since, the style is not something I would wear. However, I got the impression, or was it something she said? That this was a keep-safe of the high seas. And so here it is, for you to wear; it will suit you well. Bend down so I can put it over your head."

Once at sea, Jack got on exceptionally well with the crew, who were all experienced long-haul seamen. The Captain, Phillip Gregg, known as Philly, was a highly qualified instructor, but below Yacht Master Ocean, so he could not test Jack for his Ocean Certificate, merely stamp Jack's personal mileage log. Instead, he recommended a close friend, who would complete the examination upon arrival.

They stopped briefly in Madeira, and then again in Praia, Cape Verde Islands, due to a small technical problem. Jack was handed the Captaincy as they prepared to cast off. He got them to Cape Town with ease, but had an absolute bitch of a leg out into the deeper waters around the Horn of Africa. None of them had ever experienced such hostile seas, they endured, but lost one day in the process.

The crew were ragged, but as temporary Captain, Jack said to Philly, "It is my intention to call an unscheduled stop in Port Elizabeth. The crew are strung out and need twenty-four hours shore leave. I would also make repairs to several sails, and have the engines serviced, if only because that was the most horrific experience I have ever endured."

Gregg looked at Jack and smiled, "That will put us two days behind schedule, and we may face a financial penalty for late delivery."

"I don't really care about that, the crew are my first concern. My second concern is delivering this boat in pristine condition, which obviously it is not. With your permission, we will take a thirty-two hour layover in Port Elizabeth; the tides will be a close call, but it is possible.

"We will take a southern Great Circle route to Australia, allowing us to catch the current, and deploy the largest spinnaker, which should gain us many knots over several days. I think we can pull one day back if the weather is fair to good. I also propose to gain another day by not stopping in Bunbury to discharge Black Water [Effluent], and re-supply. Therefore, in Port Elizabeth we take on extra provisions. This is my plan, and should bring us in on schedule."

Philly smiled and nodded his head, "You get the Black Water situation sorted, and you got the Captaincy straight into Melbourne, and your Ocean Certificate in the bag. Get it right."

Jack took his role, and it worked well, but due to vagaries of wind and current, they spent forty-two hours in Port Elizabeth. However, the extra time was not wasted as people continued working on the boat, restoring her fully ship-shape.

They cast off virtually three days behind schedule, and once at sea and set fair, Jack called a meeting of all crew. "Ladies, we are three-days behind schedule. We will use the Southern Great Circle route, hoist the spinnaker as often as possible, and head directly for Melbourne. We will have a problem with Black Water, as normally we would be pissing over the side before we reach Bunbury on Australia's western coast. Let us begin that way, please..."

Jack dismissed the crew, and made a point of relieving himself on the leeward side of the boat. The message was very clear to all aboard. Jack noticed Gregg chuckling to himself. The man came over and patted Jack's back, but did not say a word.

Jack's first time in the Indian Ocean was a breeze, in more ways than one. The wind was right, and they soon gained one day back, and were closing on two days, when Jack was called to the Captain's station below. "We just lost all electronic aides Jackie." Philly switched off the main computer that ran Sat-Nav, and all sundry systems – they were running Blind!

Jack looked him in the eyes, "You cannot be serious!" A rueful smile appeared on his face, "OK, it's part of the Ocean qualification, and I'm up for the challenge. Hmmm. I've not handled a sextant for many years, although I was always good with my Breton Plotter."

Jack had all the information he needed, but it was mechanical and analogue, not an instantly computed digital display. He immediately fixed their known position, and updated this regularly by position of the sun, and star charts at night; continually correcting their course as they continued towards Australia. Gregg kept a watching brief, switching power back on to check progress, but no information was given to Jack. Meanwhile, the crew hoisted as much sail as possible, and the Black Water tank remained remarkably empty; it appeared the crew had been doing the bulk of their personal business over the side.

The boat passed due South of Windy Harbour at the Southeastern tip of Australia, before Philly called everyone to attention. "Jack Barleycorn, you failed. You are one degree out on your calculations – over 4,000 sea miles. I have never before known anyone get within two degrees of error over such a great distance, and that person was me. You took a calculated risk using the currents and winds close to the 'Roaring Forties', but it worked. Bosun, break out our best Rum!"

Jack's heart was pounding; it was moments before he realised he got it right using medieval equipment. He turned in astonishment, as Philly chinked his glass, "Well done Captain Barleycorn. Bottoms-up. Miraculously the electronic aides are now back online."

Jack shared a tippie with the crew, but continued to act as Captain without a word from Philly. He brought the yacht safely to mooring, twelve hours early, and in great shape. They had time to discharge, provision, and clean before the official handover to the new owner, who was mightily impressed.

A couple of days later Philly inveigled Jack to drift up to Sydney with him; on offer was his long sought after Yachtmaster Ocean. Philly gave the examiner a full report of Jack's captaincy, and the subsequent examination turned out to be one of the easiest of Jack's life. Later he met with his great seafaring pals, Gary and Shirl, who treated him to a night out. They met with many friends, and Jack was introduced to Jeff, who owned several sailing companies, including a shipyard building small to medium sized boats; they got on at once.

By the end of the week, Jack was Captain in his own right, delivering a luxury boat to Tian Jin, somewhere approximate to Beijing. They had a great sailing community, but not much else. Jack was initially disappointed with China; everything was all so new and without substance.

Neal called him just as he was considering heading back to Oz, (Australia). "Jackie, you are not seeing the real China, just the modern developments. Fly down to Guangzhou, (Canton) in two-days time, I want to show you around *Real China*."

Had they not been such firm friends, Jack would have left China; but instead found himself buying a one-way ticket to Canton, and his destiny. He had never known anywhere so hot and humid. Neal was waiting for him, and within the hour, they were in a small town of 200,000 people; Jack noting social dynamics in China registered on a different scale. He met the current Manageress, who was a dream to look at, and had excellent English.

Partially captivated, he decided to stay for the project, then renewed his visa and stayed longer. By the time the contract finished, that part of China had become so paradoxically intriguing, he got a one-year business visa, and stayed just for the hell of it. Every day was new and exciting.

Jack met a Daoist Teacher (Taoist in Mandarin), and he in turn introduced a property developer with big ambitions matched by regional government contacts. King Lurng also owned two boat factories and needed foreign support. In time they met with regional, then local government, and Jack had a new job as Maritime Consultant for a new Marina based City at the very tip of Southeast China.

His brief was exceptionally well paid, even by Western standards; and consisted of commissioning boats for Leurng's shipyards to copy, and advise on Western style Marina's. It was almost an executive position, and with it came the *Beautiful Girls* and many drunken dinners.

Jack usually went home alone, and even with delightful female company, usually slept alone. Perversely, his own biological clock was ticking to its own rhythm, and he sometimes felt the need to settle down and have children. It was becoming a desire, so when Leurng San asked him to leave and buy boats for his shipyards to copy, he set about escaping his personal desires and embraced the larger world once more.

Jack got good or great deals all around the world, and left on his last trip to see Jeff in Australia, which he already knew would be the icing on the cake. Once the order was placed, Jack caught up with Gary, who told him of a floating office going for a song, but it was moored in Tahiti. The wife of the deceased owner wanted rid of it, and the estate settled as quickly as possible. Little did Jack know that that trip would irrevocably alter his life; he was headed into the unknown.

The Tahitians were very friendly, and he was treated exceptionally well. The next day, he was formally introduced to the recent widow, whom left him with her male assistant. The price was very fair; cheap if the boat with only delivery mileage was as good as was stated. Remnants of the regular crew were recalled, and Jack set foot aboard later that afternoon.

It was sixty-seven feet long, wider than most, and with the aid of hydrofoils, could exceed forty knots. It was a floating office, with saloon and lounge before the galley. The rear was an executive apartment, if on the small scale, and the forward portion was for staff and crew quarters. Most stowage was below, set in the hull. It was better than anything Jack had seen, or purchased, and he was set to complete the deal as quickly as possible.

He knew the need for a short sea trial, and this was planned for the following morning. With the new day and tide, they headed out of harbour, first due southwest, the Captain explaining, "There are unmarked sunken hazards should we head directly west. This will be but a short detour to deep water, and ensure safety."

A short time later, the Captain announced from his control desk near the main rear stairs, "We are now headed east, bound for lunch at Malao Island, more than one hundred sea miles distant; but only a couple of hours using the hydrofoils."

The Captain wanted the prospective buyer to relax, but Jack wanted to discover all about the vessel, and apart from it not having sails, he was mighty impressed. Despite cramped headroom, it had a lower dexk that would be ideal for storage, or even extra berths if required. Jack knew the boat would be ideal, and show great 'face' for Chinese businessmen travelling to Hong Kong, and elsewhere.

The leg was going better than expected, but Jack noticed he occasionally scratched the skin below the pendant Dawn had given him. He thought no more of it, because a charming waitress lead him to the saloon. He ordered a beer, and surveyed the internals as a Chinese host or guest might. Given cosmetic changes, and a Chinese style of uniform for the staff, he knew the crewed boat would be much sought after.

The waitress was pleasantly, but not overly flirtatious, and a second beer disappeared with her joining him in light conversation. The boat had begun to rock back and forth, indicating sea swell, and Jack rose to attend the head, before his eyes lit on the clock; they were almost three hours into a two-hour journey. He questioned the captain, who showed him the automatic helm; apparently, they were minutes out from their destination.

"Well, shouldn't you be on deck?" Jack asked of the Captain.

"No need. Everything is controlled from here, I have cameras of our approach, proximity indicators, as well as those for depth. This craft can even dock by itself. Fantastic isn't it."

Before relieving himself, Jack went up on deck to the rear helm, and looked around; there was no land in sight. Approaching quickly were heavy thunderheads of cumulus nimbus, the sea swell aggravated by their approach. A lightning strike seemed to target them, but landed short. His sailor instincts coming alive, Jack knew it was time to batten down the hatches. Turning, he set about the Captain, "Show me the auto-helm. What did you do?"

Jack watched the man, and noticed he did not press the 'activate' button, the readings were of a proposed destination, not an actual one. He checked his magnetic compass; they were headed due south.

A brief argument ensued, where Jack learned the Captain had been on board twenty minutes longer than himself, did not know the vessel at all, and held a local qualification for powerboats; his usual work being inshore fishing and glass-bottomed boats for tourists. Jack activated the true course, which told him it was functioning, but the boat stayed on course. In frustration, he turned the auto-helm off, and ignoring the 'captain', gave orders to secure the ship.

They hit a large wave, and the boat tilted alarmingly, most others losing their footing. Jack turned off the hydrofoils, and ensured helm control was returned to the physical abaft. He donned a seaman's jacket from the safety cupboard, choosing the best one that fitted him., and stuffed useful things inside. He grabbed a life jacket, but was dismayed to see they were all for coastal use; none had a personal locator beacon. He took a safety rope; the clips felt light, but looked OK; it was going to be rough outside, where he was headed.

He tried to turn the ship around, but was locked out; control was set as the normally seldom-used top helm, a position only needed for deep-sea fishing, or for showcasing the incumbent. Jack went up, heedless of his own safety, as lightening strikes continued to target the rear of the vessel.

He spun the helm one-eighty, and the boat came around. Without the hydrofoils, the boat was now slower than the clouds, and Jack cursed. He scratched his chest involuntarily, glancing back as a thunderbolt seemed to target him. He clipped his safety rope onto the rail as he dove for cover.

There was an explosion below, and behind him; followed by the eerie sound of silence.

The engine, and all lights were dead. The helm was unresponsive. Jack found better shelter, and hunkered down until the storm passed; he knew they now lay at the mercy of the oft-wild Pacific Ocean.

As they drifted helpless, people regrouped. Candles, plus a means to cook were the best of it. The boat was a wonder of the latest digital technology, but nothing worked without power. Jack tried his mobile phone, no relay towers nearby. He asked for the satellite phone, as apart from flares, this was their only means of communication. The phone came to life, but died before the S.O.S. call could be made; it was not charged.

Disgusted, Jack took charts and plotters to the upper helm, instructing others to cast bottomless buckets on ropes into the sea; he needed to know the direction of current, and these were a maritime windsock. The captain found the ship's sextant, which was flimsy, plastic, half-sized, and looked like a child's toy. Jack gawped at it, the captain shrugged his shoulders, but took over watch; he was coming to respect Jack in many ways. Four hours later Jack returned to duty up top, it was night, and very black at the dark of the moon. Jack gazed at the stars, and wondered their mysteries. After two more hours, the captain returned with a large bowl of thick, meat and vegetable soup. "How's it going, Jack?"

"Food to fill the far lands. Excellent."

"Our position. Have you any idea?"

"Well, we should be here," Jack pointed at the chart, "But I am sure we are here."

"You mean we are drifting towards those reefs?"

"I do not know so, but I think so. This can only end badly. Captain, issue every crewmember a lifejacket, and man the lifeboats; we do have those, don't we?"

"Aye aye, Jack. You will come with us?"

"No. I have deployed makeshift sea anchors that should drag us east of the rocky reefs. I don't want to lose this boat. Go. Get everybody off, and activate the distress beacon of the life raft as soon as you are at sea; they will come and find you; I won't be far away."

"Bon voyage, 'Captain Jack'. Until we meet again."

Much later, Jack felt the presence in the night, of something large and close. The stern scraped rock beneath, that flung the craft around. The boat came broadside onto the rocks, the hull and starboard side being ripped away, as the boat capsized sideways. Jack clung on, but the force of impact tore his hands from the rail, and he was catapulted into the night. The safety-line caught him momentarily, jarring his body in a whiplash, before the clasp broke and the tensed rope brought the jagged clip remnants back to scar his cheek.

He flung out his hands, his arms, his feet protectively, before the jarring impact of rock upon flesh and bone rendered him unconscious.

The [Missing Chapters](#) picks up directly from this point.

References:

RYA Yachtmaster exam <http://www.rya.org.uk/coursestraining/exams/Pages/Yachtmasterocean.aspx>