

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Seth LeJacq

JVN // Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness. Every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me, oh, so curious. Now you'll find today that it's very hard for me to slip out of my Blanche Devereux voice. And when I introduce to you, the topic of today's conversation, you will understand why. Earlier this year, we took our maiden voyage into British Naval History. Our guest, Dr Meaghan Walker taught us all about slop clothes and the sinking of the Titanic. We also asked about queer sailors and this week we are getting some answers. Because, you know, every episode I always ask about gay stuff. Today's episode is going to be all about gay stuff, which is—well, it's what I'm anticipating and like I said, we're going to get some answers. So let's welcome to the show Dr. Seth LeJacq, who is a historian whose research looks at sexual and gender diversity in the British Navy from the 15th century to the 19th century. Dr. LeJacq is currently a Caird Fellow at the National Maritime Museum, researching queer sailors. How are you? Are you slaying your day? You're absolutely fucking gorgeous. We're so excited that you're here. Tell us everything.

SETH LEJACQ // I am doing wonderful. I'm so excited to be here. Thank you so much for having me today.

JVN // You know, we know that good stories have good characters, and one of yours is Edward Rigby. Can you introduce us to Edward? What was his story? Was he vers, top, bottom? What was going on? Do we know from the historical writings about Edward's... "life"?

SETH LEJACQ // Captain Edward Rigby was a fashionable, well connected young naval captain at the end of the 17th century. So he was a queer naval captain. We know that he desired other men. We know that he had sex with other men. And we've actually got a portrait of him that survives from around this time period, which I'm showing to you right now.

JVN // He's giving us volume and body, you guys. The wig is wiggling, it is really tall. He's snatched, he's giving us hand on hip.

SETH LEJACQ // Exactly.

JVN // He is giving me vers queen, I feel. Maybe he was a blouse sometimes.

SETH LEJACQ // So, yeah, he, he was a young naval captain, a dashing young naval captain. He had a really successful career that was totally derailed in 1698. So what happens is a moral reform organization that had emerged in London, The Societies for the Reformation of Manners, set up an entrapment plot to catch him. We don't know all the details, but one day that year, he tried to pick up a man in St. James Park, here in London. And that man was connected to this moral reform organization. And so they set up a meeting in a tavern a couple of days later. And the man goes to the meeting, but he brings along some backup with him and he has them hide in another room. They meet together in the tavern, apparently Rigby makes a move of some sort. And this man calls out this predetermined code word that they had set up ahead of time. The men rush in, they arrest Rigby, and he's put on trial. This was scandalous for a bunch of reasons. One of them is that this dashing naval captain is found guilty of a sex act with another man. But the thing that seems to have been even more scandalous was the guy who was sent to entrap him, he reported that Rigby didn't just try to sleep with him. He also apparently made this really heated and, and pretty effective argument in defense of same-sex desire and having sex

with men. This was so outrageous that the reports on the trial actually censored parts of it. They, they weren't willing to print everything that was in there.

JVN // Wait, because Edward made such an impassioned defense of, like, [BLANCHE VOICE] man on man love?

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah. And he, he points to medical explanations. He says there are historical reasons to think it's good to do. He points to religion. He points out a lot of people believed at the time. And this seems to have been true that a lot of famous people, a lot of famous men had same-sex sex, including—a lot of people thought—the royalty of Britain and other countries. And so he said, and I, I love this line. He said, "Is it not what great men do?" Apparently. And that's a pretty good question. Don't great men do it?

JVN // That is so cute. He was, like, an original outspoken advocate for gay sex!

SETH LEJACQ // He definitely understood himself to have some sort of identity connected to having same-sex desire and he was able to make an argument for it. He was able to articulate this being a real thing and being something that you could defend.

JVN // Oh my God, I love. It really does go to show though that these conversations are just so incredibly not new. I just think that's amazing. So what does his life tell us about queerness in the British Royal Navy? I'm also really interested in that turning point of the 1698. Like, what brought on that change? Were they just, like, "These guys are wearing too cute outfits and fucking each other out in the open? We can't have that!" Like, was that, like, the American Family Values Association of, like, London at the time, you know?

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah, I think we could compare it to kind of moral crusaders today, right wing moral crusaders, religious moral crusaders, because that is what was driving them. This was a moral reform movement that was going after a lot of things, female sex workers, Sabbath-breaking blasphemy. Other stuff like that. One of the planks of that was periodically cracking down on the kind of same-sex underworld that existed. It seems to have had to do with changing religious ideas, beliefs about the city, about masculinity and what was appropriate for men to do. One of the really fascinating things about the Rigby story is he didn't get in trouble in the Navy. He got in trouble in London. And he only got in trouble because this organization worked really hard to catch him. Getting caught and punished was actually really uncommon at this time. Most men who had same-sex relationships, who had sex with other men didn't get caught, they didn't get in trouble. He's kind of the exception that proves the rule.

JVN // So does that say, too, that, like, the people within the Navy were, like, kind of chill with it too because even if you weren't having same-sex relationships, they were just, like, "Yeah, that's what they do."

SETH LEJACQ // It seems—and what my research has shown—is that the higher ups and ordinary sailors in the navy seemed to have been willing to look the other way, to only use minor punishments when major ones would have been called for, if you followed the law really strictly. Rigby himself seems to have thought that at sea, you were pretty safe having sex. One of the pieces of the argument that he supposedly offered to this, to this man, the guy who was entrapping him, was him telling a story about seeing two very powerful men having sex at sea and not getting in trouble.

JVN // I just am fascinated. So you found a lot of evidence of queer relationships in the Navy. Can you share some of these archival finds with us? Like, is there any surviving, like, love letters or was it more just, like, sex?

SETH LEJACQ // It's a lot of sex. A lot of the evidence that we have deals with sex in particular. But there are reasons for that. The criminal law focused on sex acts in particular. So it wasn't illegal to be somebody who desired other men. It wasn't illegal to be in a romantic relationship with a man. What the law banned was sex acts, particular sex acts. So every time you had a sexual interaction, that's when you broke the law in these relationships. And for that reason, most of the records that we have focused really closely on that. But I've really been looking in my research for as much evidence as I can of things like pleasure, affection, romance, and love. And so you can find quotes like this one. So one man supposedly called another man, "My dear, my life, my soul," which is this really beautiful statement. Whether or not this person actually said it, these sailors clearly understood that men could love each other in this way and talk to each other in these deeply romantic ways.

JVN // Did we find that in a letter—or did you find that in a letter?

SETH LEJACQ // No, I found this in a trial record. So this is people characterizing what this relationship was like. Now, the thing that was actually illegal, what was being alleged here, again, was a sex act. That's the thing that's illegal. But in these trials, we often find witnesses talking about men's relationships and going beyond just the sex acts. One way for them to describe these relationships was to talk about these emotional bonds that men had. And so this one man supposedly said to another one, we don't know if this is true, exactly. We need to be skeptical of legal records, but this shows that, that sailors thought that men talked to each other this way and they could understand the idea of men having romantic relationships.

JVN // And so obviously these queer relationships were, well, it wasn't legal—like, you couldn't have sex, but that was really what was illegal. But the rest of it, I guess, was technically not illegal. It was, like, the sex itself was, but they weren't really socially acceptable, right?

SETH LEJACQ // It's a complicated question. Let's think about it a couple of different levels, right. So technically under the law, any erratic contact between men is illegal. And that's the case from the 16th century on. And of course, these laws last for a really long time, sodomy laws in the United States weren't overturned. You know, this was during your and my lifetime. This, this is a recent thing. So that was the case. It was a, it was illegal to have any erratic contact. Sometimes even men would get in trouble just for soliciting sex, just for making a pass or asking somebody to sleep with them. The law saw different degrees of seriousness. So certain sex acts were more serious up to the level of being a hanging crime. So technically, any sexual contact was illegal. Now, the question of social acceptance is a much more complicated thing. We find a lot of examples, and a lot of evidence of stigma and denunciations. We find that in the church. So religious leaders will say, "This is a terrible thing." The law of course said this was illegal. Medical writers sometimes talk about it being a bad thing.

But we also find a lot of evidence that seems to show tolerance and acceptance. There are periodic crackdowns against the queer subculture in London, for instance. But there are long periods where it's allowed to go on even though people are clearly aware that it exists. In individual cases, there's a ton of evidence. I and other historians and other scholars have found people looking the other way, not recognizing relationships or sexual activities as actually falling into this "dreaded category" that was often called sodomy or buggery at the time. And some people were just willing to let it pass. There are a lot of cases that people have found and, and I've discovered some of these in which a community clearly knew that a man regularly had sex with other men and they let it go. It might be something that was notorious in the community. And if that person got in trouble later, people might bring up a

lot of examples of it. You can find trials like that. But clearly, there was some sort of practical tolerance.

JVN // Because if there wasn't, there would be, like, just way more trial records of, like, way more gays getting put on trial. And really, there's, like, a kind of a handful, like, there's not so, so many?

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah, I mean, one of the things that's really fascinated me in my research is I worked really hard to try to find every trial record that I could in the Navy in the 18th and 19th centuries where a sailor was put on trial for a same-sex act. Men who testified in these trials and administrators who wrote about this in their letters and reports and other things. They were very clear that they understood that sexual relationships went on with some frequency and that only a very, very small proportion of them were punished. And in fact, they're often clear that they don't want them to all be punished and it wouldn't be possible to punish all of them. So, the method that they used in cracking down was just punishing, making examples of a very small proportion of cases.

JVN // So that's kind of what sailors were risking is, like, you just don't want to be one of the ones that gets caught. But people were still willing to take the risk.

SETH LEJACQ // Clearly, they were willing to take the risk. Yeah. And not even caught because one of the things that I've documented in my work is even people who were caught and reported, even *they* were unlikely to go to trial if they got punished. It was at a much lower level.

JVN // What would those punishments be like?

SETH LEJACQ // A whole range of different things? So it could be everything from a non-physical punishment. I found one case in which a captain he, he reported back later, he made a sailor wear a sign. I don't remember exactly what it said. It's something like, "I am a wretch."

JVN // "I love dick," or something?

SETH LEJACQ // Maybe that's how you're supposed to read it. Yeah. It seems like frequently men were put in irons. What that referred to is you'd be shackled in place on deck for a certain amount of time. So there'd be a period where you were, you were locked up on the ship. You might be flogged, flogging a dozen lashes or maybe a couple dozen lashes was considered a, a minor punishment. And that was something that a captain could give to a sailor for any kind of misbehavior, for getting drunk, for being off duty for, for doing something wrong, including clearly same-sex acts. I and, and other historians have found lots of examples of that. Another thing that was clearly very common, both for common sailors, working-class sailors who made up most in the navy, and for officers as well is when they suspected that they had committed a sex crime or done something wrong or they had evidence of it, often captains and higher level administrators would just kick you off of your ship or kick you out of the navy instead of reporting you for trial. So there were lots of ways to avoid trials. And it's clear from the research that I've done and that other people have done that, that was much, much more common than a trial. Trials really were very unlikely.

JVN // What would happen if you got kicked out of the Navy for being gay?

SETH LEJACQ // You'd be out of the navy. It would depend where you were, where you were kicked out, what your circumstances were. It could be a really bad thing. If you were overseas, you were at a port, maybe you didn't speak the language. You didn't have a lot of resources. Common sailors tended to not have a lot of money on them. It wasn't an easy

thing to get expelled from the Navy in that case. For officers, it seems like in many cases they were able to work out "accommodations." They sometimes call them that in the records where they would get transportation back to England or they'd be able to take some of their money and leave or other officers would help them escape, sometimes help them escape from under guard.

JVN // Does it seem like in your research that, like, there was more gay stuff going on, like, at sea because they were just, like, all together and, like, a bunch of horny guys get together and like they just get lonesome or something. Whereas, like, maybe there wasn't as much sex like on land? Or do you think there's just gay sex everywhere?

SETH LEJACQ // Men were definitely having sex with each other on land and at sea, it's really hard for us to know how common this is. But the people in the navy themselves, officers and administrators thought that it was happening a lot and they, they would say with some regularity, "It's, it's becoming more and more common. This is something that's becoming more frequent." Women were sometimes present on ships and sex work, female sex workers were brought out to ships in port when men weren't allowed shore leave. That, that was a regular practice, but this was a single-sex institution, and the men were often alone together at sea and they themselves clearly believed at least in some cases that that did cause men to sleep together more frequently, that that promoted same-sex relationships.

JVN // Wait, they said it did or, like, it did?

SETH LEJACQ // They said it did. It, it would stand to reason that it did as well. Right. I mean, any historian of sexuality can tell you this and we just know this from living, right? People have sex with the people that they live with. So, if you're living in that sort of institution, at least some of the people were gonna have sex with each other. That, that seems to be just a constant of human experience. Right?

JVN // Okay, I'm obsessed. So when we learned about our first naval ship, our, like, British naval history episode with Dr. Meaghan Walker, she gave us an MTV Cribs style tour of a naval ship in her episode. Where are we stopping on your MTV Cribs tour? Like, intimacy at sea for queer life? Like, where would it go down? Was there, like, a dark room on the ship? No.

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah. So, first of all, I love the idea of MTV Cribs on a ship. I think that should be, like, a real show. You should do that because ships are really fascinating. I would watch the hell out of that. So from my part of that tour, let me take you to a couple of different spots. I want to start with the places where sailors slept. I actually, I wrote a paper that's coming out later this year and I got really interested in this. Where, where did men supposedly have sex together? So I went through all the trials that I found, a few 100 trials. And I counted every single place that somebody supposedly had sex, which was a big undertaking. What I found is that the most common places by far that sailors mentioned were the places where they slept. And that makes a lot of sense, right. People have sex where they're sleeping. But there was also a huge range of different places. And what's really clear from this evidence is that sailors believed that it was possible to have sex and get away with it on their ships.

And you could find a private place, even though these ships are notorious for not having privacy, people lived so packed on top of each other. They still think it's possible. I found this quote that I really loved when I was doing that. I ended up using this as the title of this paper, one sailor. He said, it's possible on a ship to go find—and this was the quote, he says, "some sly corner to have sex in." And I love the idea of a sly corner. So even on a ship that's really closely packed together, apparently you can find some sly corner. So where you

slept on a navy ship had everything to do with where you were in the hierarchy. How high up you were or low down you were. So common sailors, that's most of the people who serve on these navy ships, they slept below decks in hammocks, hanging in groups. And you can kind of get a sense of what this looked like and how closely packed together they were from this picture. This is a, a famous image in naval history. This is the Hammock plan on a ship, HMS Bedford.

JVN // From 1775?

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah, that's when the plan is from. And so you can see they're packed in there like sardines and a tin. People did not get a lot of space. According to naval regulations, you were only promised 14 inches of width. So just a little more than a foot to hang your hammock in, and let me show you, too, what the hammock actually looked like. We can get some sense here because one of the really interesting things, this doesn't seem like it would give you much privacy, right? But when sailors talk about it, they actually act like you can be private in a hammock and you can get away with having sex with somebody in a hammock.

JVN // Because it hung down so low? So, like, the edges, like, because you're all, like, hanging deep down. So you can't really see?

SETH LEJACQ // That does seem to have been part of it. They acted like this is kind of this little bag that you're in and you can't necessarily see what's going on. You might need to tip the person out or cut the hammock down to actually figure out who's in it. So what a hammock was like at this time is the hammock itself contains a mattress. You can see here. The mattress might be full of wool or chopped up cloth or something like that. And then you'd have a blanket, maybe a coverlet and a pillow as well. And we know also that sailors sometimes shared hammocks for nonsexual or *supposedly* non-sexual reasons. That's actually not too surprising. Same-gender bed sharing was totally common, totally accepted at this time. Men would share beds with other men frequently. Sometimes if you were traveling or in, in the right circumstances, you might share a bed with a stranger. Even in the navy, there were a lot of good reasons that.

You might do that you might share a bed because somebody was visiting your ship and didn't have a place to sleep. Maybe another sailor didn't have their own mattress or their own hammock or the bedding that they needed. And we, we know that this happened with some regularity because we found some examples where, where officers banned hammock sharing on their ships. And the fact that they did that probably tells us something, right? Something was going on, or they were worried about something. It also seems like there was a kind of social code that maybe you weren't really supposed to look into someone's hammock or look too closely at what was going on. This, part of this might have been to do with the fact that when women were allowed on these ships and when female sex workers were brought out for men, this was the place they were going to have sex with them and they wanted some sort of privacy. So that's what sleeping circumstances were like. And that's where common sailors slept. Do you want me to tell you about officers as well?

JVN // Yes!

SETH LEJACQ // Most officers lived in, in very small cabins. The picture that I'm showing you here shows what they slept in, which was hanging cots. This cabin is not realistic at all. The cabins were much smaller and usually they didn't have permanent wooden walls. Most cabins had canvas walls that could be struck when a ship went into battle. So they don't allow a huge amount of privacy. They're very small. An officer will be squeezed into it and it doesn't have permanent walls or walls that provide full protection as you go higher up in the hierarchy, you get a nicer space, you will get wooden walls, maybe doors that close and

lock. So a captain on a ship will usually have a suite of rooms or compartments. If an admiral is at sea, they'll get a nice set up as well, but nobody has a ton of privacy.

JVN // I mean, I have some questions but I—how gross was it at sea? Like, wasn't it kind of super gross? Like, you're pretty dirty at sea?

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah. I mean, it was much harder to wash, and standards of cleanliness were different as well. This is something that's changed a lot over time. I think by some of the standards that some of us might use today, people might have been gross. But those same standards were in place on land as well. People were having sex in a lot of different settings and the kind of cleanliness that they thought was appropriate is really different than, than we think about. This is something that historians have looked at a lot.

JVN // Yeah, like, what goes along with the territory in 1700s sex? Like, fuck me! Even just, like, making out, like, the dental. Like, maybe they didn't make out as much because how nice is your breath? You know what I'm saying? Like I just feel like it was like, and like your toenails and stuff like fuck. Like, I bet it was, like, hard core, maybe a lot of sock wearing, wearing shoes.

SETH LEJACQ // There's a kind of famous old book about the Caribbean Buccaneers, the pirates who were active in the Caribbean by a historian called B. R. Berg. And he's a section that's always stuck with me where he asked these exact questions. He thinks that how, how clean were people and what would it have been like to have a same-sex relationship and have sex with another man and see if you were a, if you were a pirate, for instance.

JVN // What'd he say?

SETH LEJACQ // He seems to think it's, it's pretty gross.

JVN // I think we are very much already fully on board. Like, this is, like, probably my favorite episode of all time. I'm really there and now I'm even getting more on board. I'm sure you guys are too, like—sea daddies. The term sea daddy comes up and, and I—just tell us more. Who is considered a sea daddy? You know, on a navy ship? Who—hairy chested big Ulysses S. Grant style beard and 'stache, or something? Like, what was it?

SETH LEJACQ // I, I can absolutely picture it. I think that's wonderful. Yes, I, I love sea daddies. Isn't this great? So sea daddy was a term—and, and it is a term, this is still used today. This is still a role that people talk about and that people inhabit.

JVN // He holds you when you're scared. When it, when it gets too scary on the sea, you go to sea daddy. Hold me, sea daddy, I'm so scared!

SETH LEJACQ // When the waves are really, really big. Yeah, sea daddy is an older, an older, more experienced sailor who acts as a mentor to a younger one. Going to sea has often relied on kind of apprenticeship-like relationships. So you'll first often go to sea when you're young to learn the ropes, in the time we're talking about to literally learn the ropes where that, that's where that expression comes from in English, right? And the people who teach you that are older men. And they'll often take on a kind of paternal mentorship relationship. Lord Nelson, you know, Britain's most famous naval hero, he had to see daddy in the time period that we're talking about, paternal relationships, fatherhood, whether it was literal fatherhood or kind of metaphorical fatherhood, fictive fatherhood—we might say, if we're using academic terminology—was really important for thinking about and structuring communities. The fatherhood relationship was one of the most important ones in this society. And so hierarchical relationships were understood in terms of fatherhood. You will often find, for instance, sailors talking about their captain and captains talking about

themselves as the father of the ship. They think about it in explicitly those terms, they're kind of daddies in their own way as well.

JVN // Was there other, like, intimate, like, even if it wasn't sexual, but just like other like power dynamics at sea? Other than that?

SETH LEJACQ // There were all sorts of different ones. So sailing vessels had strict hierarchies and then these were military vessels as well. So there was a strict, very finely graded military hierarchy, too. So everybody stood in a kind of great chain, from the very bottom ships, boys, the, the kind of lowest status people up to the captain or even someone more senior than that if you had an admiral at sea, for instance. And a lot of those relationships became intimate and we can find kind of startling intimacy in them. I've been really interested in the research I'm doing in the relationships between officers and their servants, for instance. So officers had servants. They were often ships' boys or they were low status, adult sailors and they did really intimate work. They would dress the officers, they would move in, they would move through and sometimes sleep in their cabins, these tiny little cabins in a lot of cases. They would take care of their bodies, in some instances, I found cases where officers had their servants cut their corns—corns on their feet, fan them when it was hot.

There's one fascinating one I've done some research on where an officer had a ship's boy rub his belly basically because he said he had a liver complaint. And so he needed this boy to, to kind of rub him to make him feel better. That case clues us into a kind of disturbing aspect of this. And this is an important piece of the history as well. It's clear that these relationships often became abusive. There was often sexual abuse or sexual exploitation, transactional sex, maybe survival sex going on in them. And one of the really interesting things I found in my research is that it was *those* sorts of relationships that really bothered the naval authorities. Voluntary, consensual relationships, especially ones between men around the same level in the hierarchy. We find very few trials that involve those. Almost all of the trials that the navy held were abusive or exploitative, or at least that was the allegation and most of them involved young sailors. So ship's boys or adolescents. And that was what seems to have really, really bothered the authorities. That's what they went after other types of relationships. They didn't bring them to trial that often there seems to have been more acceptance and more toleration, at least if we're going by what these court martial trials tell us.

JVN // Yes, that makes sense. Well, that's kind of nice. Right. They're trying to protect the young people or something? Right?

SETH LEJACQ // No, I don't think that's it. No, unfortunately. I haven't found any evidence in the records that they seem concerned about the young people. In fact, they're very distrustful of them. Usually it's pretty grim and it's a very difficult history.

JVN // So they're usually fucked up to the young person who is getting exploited and abused *and* to the abuser, like, they both just got fucked?

SETH LEJACQ // It seems to have been that, yeah. They, they don't seem to have had much concern for young people. And at this time there really isn't an understanding of childhood sexual abuse, sexual assault against young people as a particular sort of crime or a more serious crime than other types. There isn't the kind of concern that we often see today for those sorts of relationships. It seems what bothered the naval authorities was the abuse of power on the part of the person who was higher up in the relationship, they wanted to try to tell them, "You're not allowed to do this sort of thing. You're not allowed to abuse your power." Not because it's a terrible thing to do to this young person—

JVN // Because it's disrespectful to the honor of the position or something.



SETH LEJACQ // Right. And it's the wrong way for you to use power and it seems like they were really trying to regulate how their officers and, and even common seamen used power on the ships.

JVN // So that Rigby guy was probably just fucking other officers. He wasn't even doing anything gross. He just, like, right? He's probably was, like, nicer.

SETH LEJACQ // It's, well, it's really, really interesting. So one of the things I found is that officers are brought up on trial for having sex with common seamen and ships boys. They're never brought up for trial for having sex with other officers. I mean, they must have had sex with other officers. And in fact, I have an example, there's a famous example I can tell you about in a little bit, you never find a trial where there's that kind of relationship. That was not the sort of thing that they ever brought up

JVN // Interest! So what about any evidence about topping, bottoming, sea lube? Gay stuff? Was there, like, douches? Like, was there—did you find any evidence of like, you know, getting ready for yo' man or anything like that? Do we call it different things? What was up with that part?

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah, that's such an interesting question. I've never found anything about douches. Exactly. Although I'm a, I'm a medical historian. That's what my background is. And they were very interested in enemas at this time.

JVN // Were they cleaning out their tushies?

SETH LEJACQ // I don't—

JVN // Oh, vaginal enemas.

SETH LEJACQ // No, going in from the back door. That was a huge part of medicine at the time. Enemas or what they, they often called clysters. They were frequently used. There's a lot of interest in medicine at this time in expulsion and what's coming out and in administering medicines that way, in putting water into your body, in that way.

JVN // Interest!

SETH LEJACQ // I have not found any examples of anybody using clysters to clean up before sex. So I don't know about that piece.

JVN // I'm sure they must have, I mean, fuck. But what about topping and bottoming? Did you hear anybody in the trial records about, like, "And he liked getting fucked," or, like, was there anything about, like, topping or bottoming or anything?

SETH LEJACQ // There is a lot that's about that. That's about sex roles because people were having anal sex, clearly. And one really interesting thing that I've found is there are a lot of examples in which men appear to have traded sex roles. So in the terms that we would use today, they were versatile!

JVN // Vers!

SETH LEJACQ // That also suggests to us that in those relationships, those men were interested in giving each other kind of mutual sexual satisfaction. So if both of them wanted to play those roles, they were willing to or that was part of the sexual relationship that they had with each other. They didn't think about it in terms of topping and bottoming. Should we define those terms? Or your listeners probably—

JVN // No, I think these hoes know, I think these hoes know. We talked about it, we learned about on our what's it like to be gay in Taiwan, China, and Hong Kong, we learned that this

is top on Grindr in those places, and this is bottom, and then this is vers. So we know, I think everyone knows.

SETH LEJACQ // Okay, so they didn't, those are not, those are modern terms, modern Western terms in particular, right? They didn't think about them in the same ways, but they were very interested and concerned with who was the penetrating partner and who was the penetrated partner. And there's a lot of cultural stuff around that. The terms that you'll often find in the records, they would talk about it as "active" or "passive." So the penetrating—

JVN // Yes, and in Spanish! Activo and passivo!

SETH LEJACQ // Right, and so you still see this in some discussion in some places.

SETH LEJACQ // I also—just as long as we're fucking talking about it, I resent that because I know a lot of lazy fucking tops. You know what I'm saying? I resent that. And I think women can attest to this as well. Passive? Bitch, there's nothing passive about this. Okay? Nothing! It's very active. Very active. How dare you? I've never yelled at a girl in my life like this. How dare you! We were rooting for you! I'm sick of it!

SETH LEJACQ // I'm absolutely here for this stand, I support you.

JVN // Yes, I just think this is outrageous. These people.

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah. Yeah. And, and the other thing you see a lot in the records is it, it's really gendered. And so what we would call bottoming is, is seen as the woman's role, "playing the woman," they'll talk about it. One fascinating thing I found in the naval records and in other places too is this kind of analogy with sex. Sex between a man and a woman is really powerful. That's the most frequent way that people talk about sex between men as well. So they say they're having sex, the way that a man would with a woman has—the same emotions, the same sexual connection, the same sexual activity. And I found a lot of examples, these many examples we have of men trading sexual roles. If it is seen as the female role, if it makes you more effeminate or feminine, what does it mean if men were playing both of these roles? And how does that affect our understanding of how they thought about it? It's really hard for us to get at how they understood it. What they particularly liked about the sex act that they engaged in we don't have a lot of discussion of that, but it's really fascinating to see.

SETH LEJACQ // Okay, I'm obsessed. So now as we proceed, how did people express gender on these British naval ships? As, you know, we're talking about that. They would say that if you were, you know, "the more passive one," you were giving the woman's role or whatever. Did we ever find any examples of, like, sailors who were transing gender? Like we learned from Jen Manion on our female husbands episode? Like, that whole thing about, you know, like, female husbands. Was there, did a female husband ever get caught up on there or, like, what we would now call, like, a trans guy?

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah. So the Manion book is wonderful and that was a great episode that you did too.

JVN // Thank you!

SETH LEJACQ // I really enjoyed it. And Manion talks in the book about sailors who fit into that female husband role or stories about sailors that followed the kind of female husband script that that book is exploring. We find all sorts of interesting examples in the Navy and in other maritime settings of people who were assigned female at birth in particular, who at some point assumed male gender identities and went to sea and fit a similar sort of model to what Manion is talking about there. So there's one that I've been really interested in, a Navy case from the early 19th century. There was a sailor who at some point lived as a girl

named Elizabeth Bowden and then joined the navy as a ship's boy and lived for the better part of a year as John Bowden. At some point, Bowden's earlier identity was discovered and it seems like the authorities made Bowden live under that original identity, Elizabeth Bowden again. And this was a case that was really well known. Bowden testified in a navy trial and it was widely reported in the papers, the papers often referred to Bowden as the "the little female tar," tar was a common term used at the time to talk about male sailors. And they reported on this case and also described Bowden wearing kind of stereotypical male attire. So people seemed to have been really interested in it.

I found some other really interesting examples that might fit a little closer to the original question that you were asking one that I'm really fascinated by. It's also from the early 19th century just a couple of years before the Bowden one. I don't know completely how to understand this one, but I do think it's a piece of trans history and, and so let me tell you about it and I can tell you kind of what my questions are about it as well. So in the early 19th century, there was a sailor named William Morris, or at least a sailor who signed on under the name William Morris, the sailor clearly used other identities as well, other names. And we don't know how they would have understood their gender identity. So I'll use "they" to help us understand the case. So Morris was a deserter from the Navy. Desertion from the Navy was a really serious crime. The navy had a lot of trouble getting enough sailors to fight its wars and they treated desertion as a much more serious crime than same-sex acts. Actually, they tried way more desertion trials. So Morris deserts at some point and is later recaptured by the Navy. And the Navy decides to make an example of them and put them on trial. And then something really interesting happens. So a court official goes to prep Morris for the trial and Morris says, "You can't put me on trial. I'm not a man and I'm also not a woman. I'm not a sea man. So I'm not, I'm not subject to the naval law here."

And the Navy took this seriously clearly because they sent out three surgeons to inspect Morris's body. They do a surgical exam, they decide Morris is a man, but they do say that Morris has unusual genital anatomy in particular. They say that and this is the line used in the records that I found. They say that Morris has very small testicles. I don't know what to make of that, exactly. But that's the report they send. So the Navy decides, "Ok, this person is a man." They put Morris on trial, Morris has tried for desertion when it comes to the defense portion, Morris expands on this. So again, says, "I'm not a sea man, so I'm not subject to the law," and the way that Morris describes it in the trial is really fascinating. They say, "I was serving on the ship and we had women come aboard, female sex workers and I had a girl," that, that's the term that's used there. "So one of these, one of these women, presumably a sex worker." And Morris says, "The other sailors that lived around me, they made fun of me because I couldn't have sex with this woman. I've never been able to do that." And that this is the thing that makes Morris not a man or a woman.

So we have the trial record, I've found that. And you can find the defense written there and we also have that court official. He wrote up a report on this. It's a really fascinating short document. The court official refers to this as Morris saying that they had "neutrality of gender." It's an interesting phrase that the court official used. I don't know, it might, it might be a joke that they're trying to make there and it's not totally clear what the court official makes of it, either. The trial found Morris guilty. Morris is given a lot of lashes, a flogging, as a punishment. And the report ends with this really fascinating detail. It says that Morris took all of the, all of the flogging, the entire number of lashes that they were, they were sentenced to in one go and, and they laughed at it. That's the final phrase in the trial report in, in the report that this official gave. So it's this really intriguing final piece which suggests that this, this official as well saw Morris as some sort of unusual person. They were able to put up with this really severe punishment in a way that most sailors wouldn't have been able

to take. What do we make of this person? It's, it's really hard to know. Who was Morris? How did they understand their own gender identity? We have no idea at all.

JVN // Maybe intersex. Were they intersex?

SETH LEJACQ // It, it's absolutely a possibility and people at the time had ideas of that and they understood that and they, they understood that gender was more complex than just a simple binary. And examples like that show us that ordinary sailors did as well. A common sailor like Morris, it's really hard to know what to make of this defense, this argument that Morris was making, but clearly Morris understood gender as more than just, "You're either a man or a woman. And that's the only possibilities."

JVN // And also were they ever putting, like, women on trial for, like, witchcraft or something? And they were, like, "And they take pleasure with other women!"

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah, we don't have a ton of legal evidence of that because the law and the authorities were really focused on, on sexual relationships between men. But stuff like that did sometimes come before courts in different places around Europe. And we do have a ton of other sorts of evidence of women having sexual relationships with each other. There's some wonderful history that deals with that.

JVN // Did they do the same, like, passive and submissive thing when they would talk about lesbians, too?

SETH LEJACQ // Yes. Those sorts of terms, it's a really powerful ingrained way of thinking about sex.

JVN // So that's why people still can't understand the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity because they've been confusing it for the longest!

SETH LEJACQ // Right, and the way they thought about that stuff was really different and, and the idea of sexuality that we have today is a really different sort of thing from the way that they understood it. So, you know, you're asking about gay sailors and, and I think that's a useful way for us to talk about it, but of course, they didn't have an idea of gay or sexual orientation in the same way they really thought about it in totally different ways.

JVN // Any transing gender, gender nonconformity vibes?

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah, I mean, let me talk about a kind of range of things because one of the things I really want to show in my research is there's a, there's a real variety of gender expression in these places. And traditionally, historians have sometimes assumed that this was really heteronormative, these communities and, and really gender conforming and that the communities required gender conforming, too, that they were not open to you performing gender in other sorts of ways. And the evidence just doesn't support that at all. We find all sorts of different things. So one thing that I found a lot of evidence of is sailors talking about each other as more feminine or more effeminate. Often that's linked to being younger or having a kind of smaller body, physically, having a higher voice is seen as a woman's voice or an effeminate or feminine voice. Sex roles seem to have had some effect in how people saw each other, like we were talking about before—

JVN // Like they would say, "Oh, I bet he's a big old bottom," or, "I bet he's a big old passive?"

SETH LEJACQ // No, I haven't found evidence of that. Exactly. But if somebody is in that sexual role, other men will sometimes talk about him as the supposed woman. For instance, when they're describing the sex act.

JVN // Oh, they'll be, like, "Two sailors got caught on the ship. And so, and so was this supposed woman or was performing the woman's role?" Like, like, you see that in, like, letters that, like, a sailor would like, write to his family about, like, some scandal on the ship?

SETH LEJACQ // You know, we don't have a ton of documentation. And one of the things that's really challenging from this time period is we just don't have a lot of material from most of the people who sailed. Most of them were common seamen. A lot of them probably didn't write letters. There was a certain level of illiteracy in that case, community and ordinary people weren't seen as important for a long time and there wasn't a lot of documentation. We don't do a great job at archiving, recording people's stories. So we just don't, we don't know a lot. We don't have a ton, especially from common sailors. Some things, like journals, memoirs were sometimes published afterwards, but it's really tough to get at that stuff. So we don't we don't have a huge, huge troves of letters, especially from kind of the ordinary people.

SETH LEJACQ // Okay, so there's two other main characters in your research, Captain Whiffle and Mr Simper. I love these names. Especially because Captain Whiffle sounds like Sniffles—which is, you know, if you know, you know. So can you tell us about the sea queens? Who, who were these queens? What, what were they, what was their deal? Damn. They're looking queenly.

SETH LEJACQ // I know! Oh, they're so wonderful. I'm so excited to tell you about Whiffle and Simper. My, my goal here, these need to be like gay icons. We need to bring Whiffle and Simper back. So let's try to make this happen with this podcast. So, Captain Whiffle and Mr. Simper are these two big sea queens who became popular characters because of a popular novel put out by the Scottish novelist Tobias Smollett, the name of the novel is *The Adventures of Roderick Random*. It's from 1748. It's a wonderful novel. It's absolutely worth reading. It's, it's very readable today. I swear it's what's called a picaresque novel, kind of in the mold of *Don Quixote*. If, if anyone listening has, has read that. It's about the adventures and misadventures of this character Roderick Random, who's a Scottish surgeon, who, who really goes through a whole series of fascinating adventures, including at one point ending up in the navy. This is a really interesting episode in the book in part because Smollett, the author, he himself did the same thing. He was also a Scottish surgeon and he also served in the Navy for a time and he bases this part of the novel on his experiences at sea.

So when Roderick Random, when the main character is at sea, he's on a navy ship and they lose their old captain and a new captain comes aboard and he is this fascinating character. This is Captain Whiffle. And as we've been saying, Whiffle is this huge sea queen. The author describes Whiffle as, as having "meager legs," for instance, and a high squeaking voice, but he is dressed in incredible sumptuous fashion, the kind of finest French fashion. He's glittering in gold and gems. He's got a mask on. He wears a white gloves, he has rings on *over* the gloves with fine stones on them. He's bathing in perfume. He has this whole retinue that comes aboard with him including a, a French valet de chambre who is called Vergette, which is this interesting pun? It, it means both clothes brush and little penis. Being French in this period. And these other things being really obsessed with fashion being effeminate, which clearly this description is supposed to make us think about him. This is all very clearly coded at the time. These are supposed to tell us he's the kind of elite man who is into other men. Mr. Simper comes aboard, Mr. Simper is his personal surgeon and he is also his lover. This becomes totally clear in the book that they're, they're a couple. Essentially, this is supposed to be mocking. The book is making fun of them. And in fact, this author was really obsessed with same-sex relationships and he comes back to it over and over in his writing. It's a really interesting thing.

JVN // For that couple or just, like, lots of same-sex relationships?

SETH LEJACQ // Lots of same-sex relationships. It's something that he wrote about regularly. He's often writing in a way that's nasty. He's condemning. He's saying this is the wrong thing. But the fact he was so interested in it and some of the presentation—

JVN // He was a little repressed homo—yes, some internalized homophobia!

SETH LEJACQ // There's something going on. It's really interesting because even later in the novel. And I think that this, this is important for interpreting what's going on with Whiffle and Simper. We only have them in, in two chapters, and then the book leaves. Interestingly, the book leaves, they don't get in trouble, they're not punished or anything like that. They just sail off. So they continue being fabulous together, I guess. Later in the book though, there's another negatively drawn queer character as well. The, the hero, he's back on land at this point, he meets this kind of predatory noble man, doesn't realize what he's up to. That this guy is, is trying to, trying to sleep with him. And there's a really fascinating scene in which this predatory noble man makes a really impassioned defense of same-sex desire and having sex with men. And it's a pretty good argument. It really recalls the argument that Rigby had made 40 years earlier, and Whiffle seems to have been influenced by Rigby as well. They're both these kind of fabulous sea queens, right? And I've always been really interested in that section. That, that argument ends with this nobleman saying that the best, the best case that you can make, the reason that people would really wanna have, men would really want to have sex with men. He says, he says that it's been told to him that, that it brings—and this is a quote from the book—“exquisite pleasure.” Seems like the author might have been tempted by that exquisite pleasure as well. Even if these were meant to be negative characters—

JVN // They're so fucking fabulous.

SETH LEJACQ // Exactly. And people have been reclaiming queens, you know, for a very long time. These are two queens, we can do the same to! Even if he meant this to be nasty. And it was only about attacking them. We can still really enjoy them. The description of how fabulous his clothing, you know, Whiffle's clothing is, is supposed to be ridiculous, but it sounds like he looked really good. I mean, you can't deny it.

JVN // Yeah, I really, I want someone to play him on Snatch Game, like, it would be amazing.

SETH LEJACQ // Yes, I love it. Yes, they should.

JVN // But speaking of that, like, you know, a modern depiction of someone from, who is queer in the age of sail. What are some modern depictions of queer lives in the age of sail? Like, why do you think people keep returning to this chapter in queer history?

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah, people have told and they keep telling queer stories stories that are open to queer interpretations or literally just explicit queer stories about the age of sail and about the Navy in this period. I have found so many examples. People have been giving them to me. I've been working on this for a long time and people have given me gay romances, like this one I have here, this book *Captain Surrender*, which is such a wonderful title. Dirty jokes, dirty songs. I, I sent you all a song that I'm hoping we can use here: “Backside Rules the Navy,” the American version is, “Asshole Rules the Navy.” But this has been a really powerful and important place for people to imagine queerness, queer men in particular. But queerness more generally in the past, we can think of all sorts of examples I think of from when I was a teenager, for instance, the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies, which were huge and fit into this long lineage of queer sailors or sailors who have kind of interesting gender performance. Those are complicated movies now for a lot of reasons. But I, I worked at a video store when the first couple were out and people were really watching those movies—that was, like, a huge pop culture thing.

So we can find tons of examples. A lot of them are really positive and celebratory, which is something I love about this. There's a lot that has a darker edge as well and we can kind of talk about both pieces. I think there are a bunch of reasons that people think back and imagine this. Part of it is, this is a long time ago. This is a really different world and it's easy for it to become a kind of fantasy space and for us to fantasize about it, it seems really different from the world we live in. Sailors didn't have to deal with cell phones and social media and all this other stuff. It's easy for people to cast themselves back and, and think about it as this kind of wonderful time and place. The fantasy element is very, you know, it's clear why you might fantasize about it, too. You're on a wooden ship, cooped up with maybe a couple 100 other men for a few months at a time or even longer. I can totally see why people would get into that fantasy. There's also, of course, you were joking about this before we started. But, but it's obvious and we should definitely talk about it. There's a very strong connection between sailors and queerness. This has been a powerful thing in gay culture for a really long time.

I'll just jump through some examples because I, I got some pictures that I thought you would like. So we've got things like Tom of Finland sailors, classic gay literature like *The Charioteer*, *The Village People*. *The Village People* had two navy figures, right? You have the, the *Seamen and the Admiral*. All sorts of gay art, tons of stuff like that. So there's this really powerful connection between, between queerness and sailors. It's a historical connection and a powerful cultural connection. And a lot of people have, you know, erotic fantasies about this. The sailor is a masculine icon. This is really deeply ingrained. It also fits into the way that we imagine this particular time period. One really interesting thing is fiction about this time period has been popular for a long time since the 19th century in the late 18th century. And the early 19th, they often focus on really close male relationships until more recently they haven't been explicitly queer, but people have read them in that way and been really interested. So I could walk you through one example that I really like because it's a, an especially popular one and I think a lot of people listening might know about this property and might be interested in, if we've got some time for it.

JVN // Yes!

SETH LEJACQ // So this is this is the series written by the, the author Patrick O'Brien, the *Master and Commander* books. They're also known as *The Aubrey-Maturin* novels. I don't know. Have you ever read these or seen, there was a movie about 20 years ago as well.

JVN // No!

SETH LEJACQ // This is a best-selling novel series. They're, they're wonderful. There's 20 books. It's a big commitment to read the entire thing, and they tell the story of a really close male friendship between a sea captain, a navy captain and a physician and, and his ship surgeon, Jack and Stephen in the early 19th century, in the British Navy. The central relationship is open to queer interpretations. I would say, I don't see it in my reading as being explicitly queer, but these men really love each other and it's about a loving male friendship. And the, the male friendship is central to both of their lives. It's the most important relationship. The author himself clearly thought about the queer possibility there too because he has characters joking about them being lovers in the book. There are scenes where he's clearly playing with it. This will get us back to something we were talking about before Jack is a doctor, right? So he's—Stephen is a doctor, rather. So he's, he's Jack's doctor. There's this incredible scene in one of the books where he, he gives Jack an enema. But in any case, that, that's not even the extent of the queer stuff.

There's much more in there because he included a ton of queer characters in the books. And he also does something really interesting in them. He has a very strong political edge in the books. In the very first book. For instance, one of Jack's officers is in love with him.

He's blackmailed by another character. The book shows us explicitly that the author thinks that that's bad. He shouldn't have been blackmailed. It's a bad thing. There's an incredible sequence later on where there's an officer who's brought up on sodomy charges and Jack and Stephen work together to get him freed and then they celebrate when they get away with it. When they're able to free him. He shows and he models with his characters forcefully from the very first book from the 1960s, that's when he started this series. He shows that human sexual diversity was something that existed in this setting. And human sexual and gender diversity exists everywhere. Of course, he shows that this was something in that setting and he shows that it's something that should be celebrated and protected.

JVN // Cute! I love them! So I think one thing that we come back to all the time on this podcast, and I think it's just so true. And one thing that I'm so grateful for in this podcast is I've learned so much about queer history and our existence through history. And that actually a lot of these conversations have been happening for hundreds of years. And it also makes it clear that, like, you know, popular culture, our education system, there are so many different systems that collude on keeping this history from young people. So what work still needs to be done to explore and reclaim our queer history and this incredible past—like, a million more yous?

SETH LEJACQ // I don't think a million more mes. I think other people need to ask their own questions and do their own research and, and people are doing that as well. So I'm excited to see what other researchers do. We need a lot more research, we need activism, we need people pushing against things like book bannings and these don't say gay bills because the stuff you're talking about is absolutely real. I didn't know this was history either. I didn't know that queer history existed until I was older. I didn't know it was something that historians could focus on or that sources existed or that there even were queer pasts really. So, there's a lot that we need. We're in a really tough moment. There's a really severe backlash, but I actually do feel really optimistic, too. There are a lot of people doing new work. There's never been as much queer history available as there is now. And I keep meeting researchers who are doing incredible stuff and asking really cool questions.

I got to work a couple of times since I've been here. I'm, I'm working at the National Maritime Museum here in the UK in Greenwich. And I got to work a couple of times with the community-led queer History Group. I met all these, these wonderful researchers, people doing creative projects asking questions about maritime history. It's about maritime queer history in particular. It, it, it was really moving honestly and, and I was so excited to learn about things like a drag on polar expeditions about AFAB sailors who assumed male gender identities. I collected some pictures from the group that I want to show you at the end, if we have a little bit of time. So that's what we need. We need people wanting to know their own history, wanting to know our history, asking these questions, creating records, creating archives, building libraries that that's the stuff that's really, that's really gonna, gonna uncover more history and help make sure that people know about it.

JVN // Fuck. Yes. Okay, so speaking of that, you're joining us today from the National Maritime Museum. A place of much gorgeous research. What's it been like to research queer sailors there and, like, what kinds of documents and archives are you exploring outside of, like, legal records?

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah, it's a great question. So the National Maritime Museum is a wonderful maritime history museum here in Greenwich. Have you ever been down here? I know you spend time in London.

JVN // I need—next time I'm coming, I'm coming to meet you. We're gonna come and do a full tour. I must see everything, yesterday.



SETH LEJACQ // Please, please come! And everybody listening, I hope you'll come when you're in London too. It's, it's in Greenwich in Southeast London. It's, it's a free museum. It's an incredible place. There's so much cool stuff. It also has an amazing maritime history library and archive and it's been such a pleasure to get to do this work here. I, I feel really, really lucky. It's been wonderful. It's been challenging, too. I'll be honest doing queer history is, is, is not the easiest thing for reasons that you've talked about throughout our conversation today. We don't have a lot of records or it's very hard to find records in many cases, so often when you're doing queer history and this is the case for lots of topics. It's a kind of needle in the haystack problem. So I've been doing a lot of sifting through. A lot of things I call up don't have what I'm looking for, but that makes it even sweeter when you find something that's really rich. So, one topic that I've been really interested in for a while connects to, to Jane Austen. You know, the great writer Jane Austen. *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, jumping into the lake in the adaptation.

So something I discovered, this was one of my most exciting research finds working on this because I, I really love Jane Austen. Jane Austen had two brothers who were very distinguished naval officers. And one of the things that I found in my research is that both of her brothers served on courts that tried same-sex acts, 10 of them altogether. So they were involved in this. This is interesting for a bunch of reasons. One of them is that there's some interesting potentially queer content in Austen, including in *The Mansfield Park*. There's a joke that some people think might be a naval anal sex joke and I can tell you more about that, if you want to know about it.

JVN // Yeah. What is it?

SETH LEJACQ // It's a little complicated. But let me talk you through and I'm explaining the joke as we go. So I'm gonna totally destroy the joke, right? So there's a character in *Mansfield Park* who's talking about the navy and makes a pun. It says, you know, "Don't tell me about the navy. I know all about rears and vices," right? Rears and vices. And the novel underlines, it says, "This is a pun." For admirals, admirals in the navy. This is a very high level officer. Right. There are various grades of admiral. Two of the lower grades are rear admiral and vice admiral. So it's making a pun on these two grades of admiral. Now, Rears and vices. Of course, your mind goes immediately to what, what kind of vices involve Rears. So it's a, it's an interesting pun. Some people think it may be an anal sex joke. There's a lot of dispute. I've talked about this in a few talks and I wrote a blog post about it once. I get more email about this blog post even now years later than anything I've ever written. So people are really interested in this now finding these cases that doesn't answer the question. Did, was that an anal sex joke? Is that what Jane Austen was doing? Would she have included that in one of her books?

I don't know. I'm not a Jane Austen expert. I'm just a fan. But it is clear that her brothers knew about this sort of stuff and she would have known about it as well because another thing that I've found is that newspapers, magazines, other things they wrote about sex between sailors as well. This is something that was discussed openly by the public. Again, doesn't answer the question. Anyway, I've been really interested in this Austen connection for a long time and I wanted to know more about these cases because these are two really famous officers. Do we know anything about, about what these trials were like for them or what they thought about them? So a couple of weeks ago, there was a researcher here, a Jane Austen researcher here at the museum working on Austen's brothers. Her name is Sheila Johnson Kindred. So I introduced myself and told her about this and she very kindly helped me locate records by both of Jane Austen's brothers from that time period journals and log books that they kept. I was so excited. I said, "Oh my gosh, I gotta check these out right away." So I called them up. I was able to figure out where they were and I discovered

that in fact, her two brothers collectively recorded three of these trials. So there are records in these journals and in one of the logs.

And I was so excited to find this. But the letdown, they don't say much about them. They don't give us any reflections in them. So what did I learn? Not a lot. I learned that the weather was really bad during one of the trials, I learned that Charles, Charles Austen, he was feeling really sick during one of them and, and one day. I know what he had for lunch. He had a, a leg of Cold English mutton. That was his lunch that day. And that's all I learned. He doesn't say anything else about the trials. So I was really crushed that we don't have more discussion of them. So it was a very exciting find. But in the end it didn't tell me a bunch. And that's kind of an illustration of what it's like to do this kind of queer history, a lot. You often don't find any detail or a lot of detail, but it's also really fun and exciting and worthwhile doing this because the next journal I call up might have something incredible in it and I might find those letters that you're asking about. Maybe those do survive and we can find some really cool, sexy wild stuff in those. And that's, that's what can make this kind of research addictive, too.

JVN // I'm obsessed. I feel like one thing that I feel like I've taken away from today is that there has absolutely been sexual orientation and gender expression diversity all throughout history, you know, so many different areas of culture. So what advice do you have for people looking to explore more queer history? Like, when you were in high school and in college and, like, coming into your own, like if, if someone is any age and they're like, "God fuck, I really want to get into queer history," or just they want to become a historian, period. What advice do you have for them?

SETH LEJACQ // This is a wonderful question. Thank you for asking it. Like I was saying before, we are in a moment where there's a lot of pushback against queer topics and queer history. Despite that though, this is a kind of golden age for queer studies and queer history. We have more people doing this stuff and more wonderful resources than we've ever had before. People on the internet, too. I didn't know that this existed. I also wasn't on the internet when I was younger. I grew up without this sort of stuff. So, we had a lot fewer resources even just a few decades ago. One thing I would recommend is seeking out really rich, interesting discussions at places like this podcast. You've done a lot of really incredible queer history here. You, you said before, I'm gonna paraphrase you but you said, you know, "I'm not a historian," or something like that. You absolutely are a historian. You've been seeking into this history. You've been asking experts about it. One of the wonderful things about history is it's open to everyone.

On the document you all sent me. There's a list of recommended linked episodes. Those are great ones, ones like Jen Manion's. There's also a lot of wonderful work by historians, stuff that you can find on social media, you can find YouTube videos, but especially books. There's so much wonderful writing. And so I would say, if it hasn't been censored, go to your local library, your local public library, your school library. If that stuff is available, if you are lucky enough to live somewhere where there's a queer bookstore that has a history section. Absolutely go there. When this episode comes out, I'll put up on my social media a list of queer maritime history books that I recommend.

JVN // Oooh!

SETH LEJACQ // If people are interested, if people are interested in more generally queer history, get in touch with me and get in touch on social media or through my website and I can recommend things and I would also say do your own history. You can actually do this and it's also really important. This is really important in queer history and the history of other minority communities to create our own archives, to create our own libraries, to build expertise, to create our own sources and hold on to them. So methods like, like collecting,

finding finding zines, finding things that people have written using a method that's accessible to everybody where you do structured interviews and then record them and preserve them. It's called oral history. You can look up online guides for how to do oral history and then go out and do your own oral histories. Talk to queer elders in your community, talk to interesting people, you know, talk to your family members and your friends and record their experiences and hold on to it. Do your own history and I'm really excited to see what people come up with and what they do on their own.

JVN // Ready for our last question, which we're also really excited about? Are you ready? What's next for you and your work? And also we're gonna be linking where to follow you on? Because you, are you on the Twitter? Are you on the 'Gram? Are you on the talk? Are you, did you join threads? Are you a Threads queen? What are we gonna, we're learning all your stuff because we gotta follow you. We gotta follow Seth LeJacq forever.

SETH LEJACQ // Yes, I'm on Twitter and I have a website. I haven't, I haven't done Threads yet.

JVN // Are you doing history on 'Tok? On TT?

SETH LEJACQ // No, no, I should!

JVN // Honey, Seth LeJacq, let me tell you something. You got to get on tiktok. OK. The queer historians, they are coming over there. It's like the thing like your, your voice and your research and your academic fucking scholarship work. Get out of here. You know what I'm saying? That's what's next for you and your work is transitioning over there on TikTok. So what is next for you and your work though? What are you researching? What's going on? What are you going to do? What's happening?

SETH LEJACQ // Yeah, absolutely. So I have a book that's coming out later this year. This is a collection of historical documents that are related to this history. It's coming out from the publisher Routledge, here in the UK. It doesn't have the sexiest title. It's called Gender and Sexual Difference in the British Navy. But look for that. It's coming out.

JVN // No, I love it. It's hot. What do you mean? I'm into it!

SETH LEJACQ // You do? Think so? Ok. Alright, now I'm changing my mind now. I'm into it. Yeah, that's coming out later this year. I'm so excited for students, for researchers, for teachers to get their hands on that if you are interested in any of these documents. And I talked about some of the sources that will be in there during the conversation today. Get in touch with me on social media, get in touch through my website. I'm happy to share them. I'm also finishing up work on a book about the history we've been talking about today. So about the queer history of the Royal Navy. Follow me on social media for updates on that. And I've just started a new project. Maybe we could talk about this when I'm a little further along on it. And this is about sexual disease among sailors in the same time period. I'm really interested in that. I'm a historian of medicine, too. And so I've been looking a lot of surgeons' journals and things like that. It's some grizzly history, but it's really interesting and it's really important. So I'm excited to, excited to dive into that some more.

JVN // God, the syphilis treatments, honey! I heard they just poured mercury up your pee hole. You're going to have to come back and tell us about that for sure. We got to hear everything.

SETH LEJACQ // It's wild stuff. Yeah, it's a lot.

JVN // Not the mercury. I thought a Q-Tip was bad. I mean, honey. Wow. Dr Seth La Jaque, get the fuck out of here. You are literally one of my favorite people of all time. I love you so

much. Thank you for sharing your time and your work with us. We love you so much. We're going to see you some more on social, and I cannot wait for this episode. Ah!

SETH LEJACQ // Thank you so much! This was lovely, it was wonderful to be on and to meet you. Thank you!

JVN // You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guest and their area of expertise in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thank you so much to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend, honey, and please show them how to subscribe. We love that story. You can follow us on Instagram @CuriousWithJVN. Our engineer is Nathanael McClure, welcome Nathanael McClure, we love you! Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, Chris McClure, and Allison Weiss, with production support from Julie Carrillo, Anne Currie, and Samantha Martinez.