I hope you enjoyed piecing together and hopefully solving my Ship’s Cat Conundrum jigsaw puzzle. To put you out of your misery, here are the answers!

I asked you to find the title of the jigsaw. This is hidden in the border of modern-day maritime flags. Each flag represents a different letter of the alphabet, which spell out:

“England expects that every ship’s cat will do its duty”.

The flags used in Nelson’s day were different. Instead of using one flag per letter of the alphabet, they would use groups of, say, two, three or four flags to represent a word. As you can imagine, this would have been extremely complicated for you to decipher, and I didn’t have a clue how to write the word ‘cat’ using the old system. The purists among you were probably moaning that I hadn’t used Nelson’s original flags, but I hope you can see why now!

Staying with the border, we can move on to the cat’s name, which you were also asked to decipher.

Just under the compass is a small scroll of paper with compass positions written on it. These locate the Roman numerals on the inside of the border. Each numeral refers to a letter of the alphabet, so that I = A, II = B, III = C, IV = D, V = E and so on. If you write down the answers in the order shown on the scroll, (West first, then North, etc) you should end up with Horatio, the cat’s name. The cat’s tail also points to a painting of his namesake, in case you hadn’t spotted it.

You will also notice the letters around the same internal border. At first, they don’t make any sense, but if you begin with the E near the top left-hand corner and go anti-clockwise, it spells ‘El Gato Afortunado’ which is Spanish for ‘The Lucky Cat’ – the name of the ship. You could have saved yourself the trouble, as it’s also carved onto the decorative shelf above the cat! Remember, I told you in my instructions that the answer was given twice!

Now we move to the painting itself, and that treasure map. Do you remember I asked you to find fifteen hidden nautical expressions and names? These are in fact the initials on the treasure map.

For example, the first letters on the map are ‘HN5’. This stands for Horatio Nelson. The number 5 refers to the fifth letter of the word or words, meaning that we are looking for the letter T.

Now all you had to do was find the nautical expressions that matched my initials, and then find which letter I was after by referring to the accompanying number. Here they are;

Yo Ho Ho
Avast Ye
Cat of Nine Tails
Horatio Nelson
Horatio Hornblower
Pieces of Eight
Flintlock Pistol
The Golden Hind
Davy Jones’s Locker
Long John Silver
Land Lubber
Black Beard
Walk The Plank
Skull and Crossbones
Dead Man’s Chest

Once you have deciphered the nautical expression and then selected the key letter, you should end up with a location;
Twenty Feet East of the Old Inn Door Cat Island Bahamas

Incidentally, I can't tell you how excited I became when I began to study my world atlas in search of likely treasure islands. I knew I wanted it to be located in the Caribbean, but imagine my delight when I discovered that there really is a 'Cat Island'. I just knew I had to bury the treasure there!

I asked you to tell me the precise nature of this buried treasure. Take a look at the blue and gold carvings on the cabin wall. Next to them is a strip of brown wood, carved with seemingly random letters. Reading from the bottom to the top, it spells Diez Mil Pedazos De Ocho - Spanish again. It translates as 'Ten Thousand Pieces of Eight'. You knew your 'O' Level Spanish would come in handy one day didn't you?

And finally, I mentioned that there were fifteen 'cats' in the picture. Well, there's that huge one wearing a neckerchief for starters. Then there's the Cat of Nine Tails on the shelf, the word 'Cat' in Spanish (Gato) carved on the shelf, and another 'Gato' written around the inner border. There's also a little cat carved on the blue and gold area, which is actually copied from the ornate stern of the Victory, and the maritime flags, which contain the word Cat, remember? There's Cat Island of course, and don't forget the extra six 'Cat of Nine Tails' initials (CONT) on the treasure map. The flintlock pistol's trigger guard has roman numerals engraved on it. The numbers are 3, 1 and 20. The third letter of the alphabet is C, the first is A, and the twentieth is T, spelling, you've guessed it - CAT. Now take a look at the compass. Those tiny dots and dashes are actually Morse code (except for the first one, which is just a picture of an anchor). They spell 'The Ship's Cat', which gives us our fifteenth and final cat.

I hope you've enjoyed the Ship's Cat, and I look forward to testing your skills with my next Cat Conundrum, coming soon!

Just for fun

Now for a few extra details, just for fun!

The small line drawing is of Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard. The white bone is an example of scrimshaw work. Sailors would occupy their leisure time by carving items from whalebone, ivory or wood, so that they could barter with the various islanders they encountered.

The ship in the distance is based on the Victory. Yes, I know it's got a pirate flag and historically, I'm all over the place. Call it artistic licence!

The portrait by the compass is, as I have already mentioned, Admiral Horatia Nelson.

The flintlock pistol is my own. It's Balkan and dates back to the very early eighteenth century. The coins are also mine. They are replicas of a piece of eight and a doubloon, so I'm told.

Geoff Tristram