



East Hoathly & District Preservation Society

Ditty Box Yarns

Presented by Cdr Roger Paine RN.

Fri 08th Apr 2016

The speeches given to the society are presented in a wide variety of styles, which typically reflect the nature of the topic for that evening. Roger Paine's presentation was definitely at the humorous end of the scale as he recalled events of the earlier part of his working life.

After leaving school he joined the navy as a rating and spent the following 28 years working his way up the ranks, before leaving holding the rank of Commander. One of the first things that a new recruit gets is a ditty box, in which all personal belongs and odds and ends are stowed. They appeared in the 1890s in the form of a wooden box, made by apprentices. Later, they were replaced by leather attaché cases in the 1930s, with the owner's initials being embossed on the front. A ditty is also the name for a collection of stories, which gives rise to the title of the talk.

Speaking from memory, with the aid of a few notes but no slides, he recalled various incidents that occurred during those years, some of which aren't repeatable in polite company (most notably the sea shanties).

One particular yarn took place during the Iceland cod war that began in September 1973 and involved aggressive approaches by their Navy toward British trawlers. The RN was sent in for support but [HMS Lincoln](#) was damaged and had to head back to Chatham for repairs. Returning to the yard after pub crawl, a fellow sailor noticed something on the ground that would help protect the ship from further assaults: a 200ft piece of railway track. After due approval, it was mounted across the forecastle with about 50' overhanging each side. The nickname HMS Porcupine soon followed. Following the next mission to the disputed fishing ground, it was decided to paint said rail red since HMS Lincoln was the only RN ship to bear red painted gunnels. It was a tradition dating back to 1693 when the first ship of that name claimed the right to mount her guns on 'Lincoln Scarlet' in memory of [Robin Hood](#), who purportedly favoured the colour. A race between a rating and an officer was set up to compete for a case of beer, so Officer Paine volunteered. All went well until he dropped the paint brush into the sea and had to clamber back for another, that delay led to the loss of the race, and the beer. Clutching to a rail wobbling over the sea by one's inner thighs, with paint pot in one hand and brush in another, was particularly uncomfortable and the resulting damage led to suspension of "domestic duties" for several weeks after he arrived home.

Numerous other tales from Roger that evening left everyone in no doubt that life in the Royal Navy had its ups and downs, with humour and stories to match, to live on for many years to come.