THORPE HAMLET HISTORY GROUP

Article 20 : NAUTICAL SAYINGS AND TERMS THAT HAVE ENTERED COMMON USAGE

A version of this article was published in St. Matthew's Church Magazine.

"All squared away" means when everything is packed away and safe prior to going to sea. Originally it comes from the time of old square-rigged ships when you were clear of a harbour an were running before the wind.

"I'm pooped." We say this when wee are tired through putting all our efforts into a task or work. It originally meant when a ship was running before the wind. With strong winds and a following sea a wave can break over the stern of the ship (where the poop deck is located) causing a lot of damage.

"Keep on an even keel." Today this means keep your life and emotions controlled and on track. Its original meaning was when loading a ship correctly kept it upright with no list as this could cause it to capsize.

"That's taken the wind out of their sails." We say this when something is said or done to stop someone short or slightly shock them, but it comes from when two ships were sailing close together and the sails of the ship to windward stopped and blocked the wind reaching the other ship's sails.

"They are on the right tack." We say this when something is doing something correctly. It comes from when a ship was on the right tack for passing another ship or sailing round a headland.

"We are all in the same boat" comes from when there was dissension on board a ship and the captain needed all the crew to work together.

That's enough of my old squit if I "show a leg". "It's all plain sailing" from now on and if you give me a bit of "leeway" I will try not to leave you "all at sea", because "it's any port in a storm" when you are "a bit groggy" or even "free sheets to the wind". I don't want to be thought of as a "waster" as I want to leave you all "ship shape" and "Bristol fashion" as I wait "for my ship to come in" so don't "tar me with the same brush" or we will all end up in "Davy Jones locker".

These sayings are all from seafaring, there are far more. I wonder how many there are from other trades and industries. If you know any from the shoe industries please write them down and let Thorpe Hamlet History Group know.