

## EPIC VOYAGES OF HISTORY

David Clark gave us a talk featuring five memorable voyages. Some made by intrepid explorers and navigators and some which ended in disaster.

David Clark is an expert model maker and displayed a dozen examples of his work.

The first voyage he described was that of Sir Francis Drake who set off with a fleet of five ships from Plymouth in 1577 to circumnavigate the earth.

His ship, The Pelican, later renamed Golden Hind, was the only ship to complete the voyage. Others were either lost at sea or turned back. In the course of the voyage he captured from the Spanish, huge quantities of gold, silver and jewellery, the equivalent of half a billion pounds in modern terms. As the Spanish would be awaiting his return, he attempted to return via the Northwest Passage but gave up and continued across the Pacific to land in the East Indies. He then continued across the Indian Ocean around The Cape of Good Hope to Sierra Leone and then on to land in Plymouth in 1580.

The second voyage was that of the Mayflower. The religious group escaping religious persecution which became known as the Pilgrim Fathers, left for America from Falmouth on 5th September 1620. The enterprise got off to a poor start as its sister ship the Speedwell had to abandon after becoming unseaworthy. It took Mayflower, 70ft long, with 102 passengers and a crew of 30, around 65 days to make it to Plymouth Rock. Conditions on board must have been horrendous. After their first winter 51 had died and the rest were in poor health. A famous voyage but exactly a great success.

The voyage of the Bounty under the command of William Bligh to Tahiti in 1787 was the second voyage described Bligh has been depicted as a bad captain but in fact he was a very experienced sailor having been sent to sea aged seven. On the Bounty he was the only commissioned officer. Their journey to collect breadfruit was delayed by bad weather around Cape Horn and when they arrived found that breadfruit were out of season. Discontent among the crew grew and led by Fletcher Christian they mutinied on 28th April 1789. Bligh and 18 loyal supporters were set adrift in a lifeboat intended for 12. Bligh's expertise as a navigator enabled them to survive a voyage of 3618 miles to Timor, having only lost one man during the journey. Bligh later became governor of New South Wales and ended his career as a Vice Admiral in 1817.

The fourth voyage he described was that of the Lutine. Originally a French ship she was rebuilt as a 38 gun frigate in 1759. She sailed from Yarmouth in 1799 carrying one and a half million in gold bars intended to pay Russian soldiers fighting Napoleon in Holland. Again bad weather played its part and Lutine ran aground and due to strong currents and shifting sands the ship was swallowed without trace. Only 2 members of the crew survived and the gold, in spite of many attempts, as never been recovered. The ship was insured by Lloyds of London for £100 million in modern terms. The bell from the ship (The Lutine Bell) is no longer rung when a ship is lost at sea.

Finally he related the events that led to the death of Lord Kitchener aboard the cruiser HMS Hampshire on 5th June 1916. He was en route to Archangel to bolster relations with Russians. Departing from Scapa Flow the ship was sailing up the west coast of Orkney. HMS Hampshire sailed into a mine field and only 12 men survived. 650 men plus Kitchener and his staff of 12 being among them. The loss was a huge blow to the people of England. All sorts of rumours including security leaks, plots to get rid of Kitchener and the strange fact that none of his staff were among the survivors.

This last account ended an evening filled with tales of endeavour, courage and sheer bad luck.

John Preston