TO THE BITTER END

MODERN MEANING: TO THE VERY END OF SOMETHING, NO MATTER HOW UNPLEASANT

NAUTICAL ORIGIN: THE CLEAT, OR POST, ON WHICH A

ROPE OR ANCHOR LINE IS ATTACHED WAS OFTEN

KNOWN AS THE 'BITT'. WHEN THE LINE HAD BEEN

LET OUT TO THE FULLEST EXTENT, WITH NO

MORE AVAILABLE SLACK, IT WAS SAID TO HAVE

REACHED THE 'BITTER END'.



DRESSED TO THE NINES

MODERN MEANING: DRESSED TO PERFECTION; WEARING THE MOST FASHIONABLE OR FANCY CLOTHES

NAUTICAL ORIGIN: TO CELEBRATE VICTORIES, RETURNING SHIPS
WOULD APPROACH THEIR HOME PORTS 'DRESSED' IN
BUNTING AND FLAGS. AS MANY OF THE CREW AS POSSIBLE
WOULD LINE UP ON THE NINE PRIMARY YARDS OF THE
DECK AS A SALUTE TO THEIR MONARCH, THUS THE SHIP
WAS 'DRESSED TO THE NINES'.

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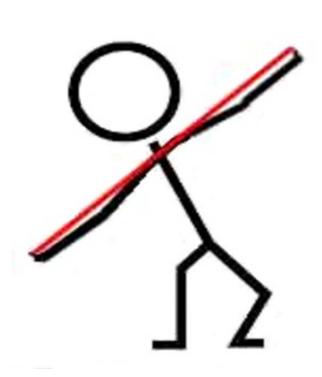
FATHOM IT

MODERN MEANING: UNDERSTAND THOROUGHLY OR COMPLETELY; OFTEN USED IN THE NEGATIVE AS 'CAN'T FATHOM IT'.

NAUTICAL ORIGIN: SAILING VESSELS OFTEN NEEDED TO

MEASURE THE DEPTH OF WATER AS THEY NEARED LAND.

TO DO THIS THEY LET OUT A LEAD-WEIGHTED ROPE, WHICH
SANK. ONCE IT REACHED THE OCEAN/SEA FLOOR, THEY
WOULD HAUL THE ROPE OUT AND MEASURE IT BY ARM'S
LENGHTS (NOW STANDARDIZED AT 6 FEET), CALLED
FATHOMS. 'CAN'T FATHOM IT' THEREFORE MEANS
'UNABLE TO FIND THE DEPTH (OF MEANING)' IN SOMETHING.



HOLY MACKEREL!

MODERN MEANING: EXPRESSION OF SURPRISE OR WONDER

NAUTICAL ORIGIN: BECAUSE MACKEREL IS A FISH THAT SPOILS

QUICKLY, FISHING VESSELS WHO RETURNED TO PORT ON

SUNDAY WERE ALLOWED TO SELL THEIR CATCHES TO

MERCHANTS AND THEY TO THEIR CUSTOMERS. THIS

CONTRADICTED THE 17TH CENTURY ENGLISH 'BLUE LAW'

THAT FORBADE MERCHANTS TO SELL ON SUNDAY BECAUSE
IT WAS THE HOLY DAY.

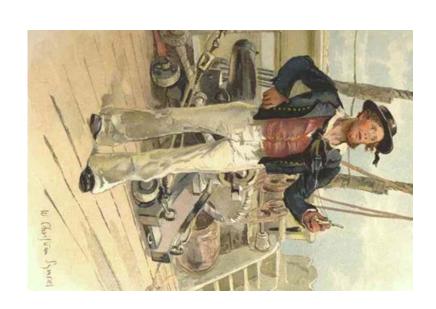
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PIPE DOWN

MODERN MEANING: BE STILL OR KEEP QUIET

NAUTICAL ORIGIN: THE BOATSWAIN WOULD KEEP TRACK OF SAILORS' SHIFTS. AT THE END OF A SHIFT, HE WOULD BLOW HIS WHISTLE (OR PIPE) AND THE OFF-DUTY CREWMEN WOULD GO BELOW DECKS TO EAT, SLEEP AND ENJOY THEIR DOWN TIME.



POOPED

MODERN MEANING: TIRED OR EXHAUSTED; DRAGGED DOWN

NAUTICAL ORIGIN: THE SWAMPING OF THE AFT DECK (THE RAISED 'POOP' DECK) WHEN SAILING DOWNWIND IN HIGH SEAS.



MIND YOUR P'S AND Q'S

MODERN MEANING: BE POLITE OR ON YOUR BEST BEHAVIOR; ALSO MIND YOUR MANNERS

NAUTICAL ORIGIN: SAILORS WOULD GET 'CREDITS' IN PORT
UNTIL THEY WERE PAID. THE BARKEEP WOULD TRACK
EACH SAILOR'S DRINKS ON A CHALKBOARD BEHIND THE
BAR. A MARK WAS MADE UNDER 'P' FOR 'PINT' OR 'Q' FOR
'QUART'. ON PAY DAY, THE SAILORS OWED FOR EACH
MARK BY THEIR NAME AND WERE THUS FORCED TO MIND
(OR PAY) THEIR P'S AND Q'S.



TIDE OVER

MODERN MEANING: USING STOP-GAP MEASURES TO SLOW OR TEMPORARILY RESOLVE AN ISSUE.

NAUTICAL ORIGIN: IN THE ABSENCE OF WIND TO FILL THE SAILS,

FLOAT WITH THE TIDE; FROM IT HISTORICAL CONTEXT "TO

TIDE OUER TO A PLACE, IS TO GOE OUER WITH THE TIDE OF

EBBE OR FLOOD." THE IDEA OF TIDING OVER 'HERE AND

THERE' WAS REPLACED BY THE IDEA OF RIDING A TIDE OVER

AN OBSTACLE. THIS LED TO THE CURRENT MEANING OF

GETTING OVER A PROBLEM.

