

09/07/2020



Dear Club Members,

Fifty years ago was a day known as Black Tot Day. On 31st July 1970 the British Royal Navy officially ended the policy of giving seaman their rum ration. This tradition had been in place since 1655. In the 17th century beer was the daily drink for much of society, water was often of uncertainty safety, but by brewing small beer, with an alcohol content below 1% you had a safe drink, particularly for those doing physical work, who would be needing to consume vast amounts of liquid. Evidence from the time suggests that as much 10 pints (5.7 litres) was drunk by labourers.

With the establishment of the Royal Navy in 1546, the question of supplying with sailors with enough liquid was a key issue. Supplying ships in home waters was not too much of a problem. Regular supply runs could restock ships with beer brewed onshore. However as the Royal Navy was used to establish the British Empire the need to have an alternative to home brewed beer led to the navy using rum and brandy as an alternative. In 1655 half a pint of rum (approximately 11 units in a modern measure of alcohol) was made equivalent to the ration of beer, and understandably the sailors much preferred this to beer. Drunkenness became a big issue on board ships, with sailor saving up their rations, and using them for gambling. The alcohol was served neat, the Ships Purser would issue the ration, and would be required to prove that the alcohol was of undiluted strength. He would do this by taking a measure of alcohol, and mixing it with gunpowder. If the rum was at 57% ABV then the gunpowder would still ignite. This led to the use of the term Naval Strength as a way of describing the strength of alcohol, with 40% ABV being the more common strength for modern spirits.

In 1740 Admiral Edward Vernon changed the rules, and the Rum now had to be mixed 4:1 with water, and would be issued twice a day. It is from Vernon that we get the name commonly used for this drunk, he was known as "Old Grog" due to coats he wore, made from grogram cloth. This cloth was of a coarse texture, and comes from the French *gros*, meaning thick and coarse. Grosgrain ribbon comes from the same derivation. The drink that "Old Grog" introduced, therefore became known as Grog. In the cases of long voyages, when fresh food had run out lime juice was also added to the mixture to try and prevent scurvy, which led to one of the nicknames for British sailors as Limeys.

By the 19th century continued discipline problems had led to rising opinion amongst those in charge of the Navy that the rum ration needed to be eliminated. This process began by halving the ration in 1824, and a further halving in 1850. This 70ml measure remained in place throughout the 20th century. Finally in 1969 the Admiralty Board came to the conclusion that the issuing of an alcohol ration to sailors on active duty was no longer appropriate. The complexity of machinery had increased dramatically, and sailors were no longer just responsible for providing the physical manpower for the raising and lowering of sails. Six months later the last rum ration was issued to British Sailors. Alcohol was still drunk on board though, with general sailors issued with cans of beer, and officers had access to a well stocked bar!

The rum itself came from plantations in the Caribbean, if wool was the source of Britain's wealth during the Medieval period then sugar took its place in the 18th century. The sugar was grown in plantations that were farmed by slave labour. The Royal Navy played a key part in establishing, and maintaining the British Empire. They were often responsible for oppressing native populations to capture new territories for the British government, and providing military support to existing colonies.

Our colour this month is inspired by a Mojito cocktail... one of my favourite summer drinks, that owes a lot to a sailor's ration of grog. The Rum and Lime juice are the same, though the addition of mint and soda water wouldn't be met with much enthusiasm by the sailors of the past!

Happy Spinning

Katie

Further Reading-

Black Tot Day-

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Tot_Day

http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_8859000/8859506.stm

History of the rum ration-

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rum_ration

<http://www.therumauthority.com/rum-101/the-plantations-the-navies/>

Sugar Plantations in the Caribbean

<http://www.discoveringbristol.org.uk/slavery/routes/places-involved/west-indies/plantation-system/>

<http://www.understandingslavery.com/index.php->

option=com_content&view=article&id=309_plantation-life&catid=125_themes&Itemid=221.html

<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/slavery-caribbean>

<https://www.bl.uk/west-india-regiment/articles/an-introduction-to-the-caribbean-empire-and-slavery>

<https://runaways.gla.ac.uk/minecraft/index.php/slaves-work-on-sugar-plantations/>

A Minecraft world to introduce students to the landscape of Slavery in the Caribbean-

<https://runaways.gla.ac.uk/minecraft/index.php/download/>

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label

70% 19 micron Merino

15% Giant Himalayan Stinging Nettle

15% Mulberry Silk