

NAVAL RESERVES – THE BACKGROUND

The principle of having a Naval Reserve started in the reign of Edward the Confessor. In 1049 mention was made in records of the inclusion of 42 of 'the people's ships' with 'the King's ships' – the people's ships being manned by the Lithsmen of London. In the eleventh century, the Lithsmen and Buscards developed into the Corporation of the Cinque and London Portsmen. These were effectively the volunteer naval reservists of the middle ages.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries many Royal ships and others used for exploration and trade were manned by volunteers. Several of Drake's Officers on the Golden Hind were 'Voluntary Gentlemen', and Sir Richard Grenville of the Revenge was perhaps the most famous of them.

In 1793 in the campaign of the Duke of York in Flanders, a force of fishermen, longshoremen and volunteers was recruited and placed under the command of Lieutenant Home Riggs Popham RN.

The first suggestion of naval volunteers as a distinct force was made by Captain John Cochrane RN in November 1794 when he offered to raise a Brigade of Naval Volunteers in the Port of London.

Early in 1798, the by then Captain Home Riggs Popham RN suggested raising a Naval Volunteer Force and in March, the King in Council approved the formation of the Corps of Sea Fencibles from the inhabitants of coastal towns, ports etc, under 'Officers of His Majesty's Navy assisted by inferior officers'.