

World Oral Literature Project

voices of vanishing worlds

Accession Form for Individual Recordings:

<i>Collection / Collector Name</i>	Mr Neil Lanham
<i>Tape No. / Track / Item No.</i>	Gunner on the Atlantic Convoys
<i>Length of track</i>	1 hr 5 mins & 1 hr 7 mins
<i>Related tracks (include description/relationship if appropriate)</i>	The Disappearance of the Squire's Ham Village Life Gamekeeping Tales Lord Sainsbury's Gardener
<i>Title of track</i>	Gunner on the Atlantic Convoys
<i>Translation of title</i>	/
<i>Description (to be used in archive entry)</i>	<p>That wise man of storytelling, Walter Benjamin, in his 1936 essay 'The Storyteller', maintained that 'the archetypal storytellers were seafarers and farmers. The seafarers collected experience on their voyages, and in new and distant places. The farmers collected experiences at home, close to earth, staying put, mining the soil. True storytellers were craftspeople who were employed in their handcraft. Their stories were like their practical lives, they were handcrafted, sculpted, moulded, hammered, forged, carved, sewn, woven with ultimate care and savvy. The storytellers had a practical interest when they told their tales and their stories were filled with counsel and wisdom. Counsel woven into the stuff of lived life is wisdom, the communicability of experience has decreased. The art of storytelling is moving towards its end because the narrative side of truth, which is wisdom, is perishing.'</p> <p>It is rare therefore to nowadays find people like Dick, with the natural ability to share the 'experience in story' that Benjamin talks of. Dick nevertheless answers all of Benjamin's criteria, both in tales from his experience as a gamekeeper in this farming community but also here as the seafarer returning with his tales of his 'practical interest' in his voyages on the high seas and the 'distant lands' of India, New York, Argentina, Wales, Scotland, Manchester Ship Canal, Casa Blanca, Cornwall etc. Dick, as you will learn, volunteered at 18 for the Royal Navy becoming a Naval Gunner on DEMS (Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships) and here he tells of his experiences not just hopping round the coastline but risking life and limb. It was his duty to cross the Atlantic sailing via Iceland and Greenland to avoid the German U-boats in 90-ship convoys when this country was almost out of oil, taking coal to</p>

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It is rare therefore to nowadays find people like Dick, with the natural ability to share the 'experience in story' that Benjamin talks of. Dick nevertheless answers all of Benjamin's criteria, both in tales from his experience as a gamekeeper in this farming community but also here as the seafarer returning with his tales of his 'practical interest' in his voyages on the high seas and the 'distant lands' of India, New York, Argentina, Wales, Scotland, Manchester Ship Canal, Casa Blanca, Cornwall etc. Dick, as you will learn, volunteered at 18 for the Royal Navy becoming a Naval Gunner on DEMS (Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships) and here he tells of his experiences not just hopping round the coastline but risking life and limb. It was his duty to cross the Atlantic sailing via Iceland and Greenland to avoid the German U-boats in 90-ship convoys when this country was almost out of oil, taking coal to Argentina where they were so short that they were burning grain on the steam trains and then bringing back the much needed wheat for bread that this country so badly needed.

But these are not nostalgic reminiscences that go nowhere. These are all brought out as a story with a conflict, a purpose and point that passes 'wisdom'. The sad story of the nurses that Dick's ship had conveyed to South Africa only for every one of them to be lost at sea when torpedoed, carries a message that even today Dick says brings a lump to his throat.

When Dick was entertained in Buenos Aires by an English home there was a purpose - a reason

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Notes and context

(include reference to any related documentation, such as photographs)

Dick Ruggles is a natural storyteller with a dialect typical of the North Essex/West Suffolk Border.

Walter Benjamin (The Storyteller-Illuminations) described the typical Storyteller as the artisan/farmer who stays at home or the traveller who returned with stories. Dick Ruggles is both. He is a keeper and custodian of the inherited tradition of his area (called Seanachie in Ireland). His stories are as passed on (some from his mother etc and some are folk tales) or from his experience of life – nothing whatsoever taken from Literacy or outside interests.

He has a typical local technique of

- 1. Framing his stories at first from afar (e.g. 'I was sitting having me sandwiches at the time when old so and so....')*
- 2. Using formula: local sayings, proverbs.*
- 3. Strong use of dialogue to bring forward the players in this play of life.*
- 4. Playing pranks for the sake of relaying it in story*

He was recorded close to his face to show every possible gesticulation. (See The Anthropology of Gest. Marcel Jousse). Fourteen hours recorded in total.