



Choose a Chest – Tools and Clothes Carried in Sea Chests

The shopping list in the journal for the *Choose a Chest* exhibit belongs to a cabin boy.

With limited space on board, it was important to limit the amount of luggage carried on a ship. All crew were expected to carry their belongings to fit into a sea chest. Chests usually carried issued or personal clothing, a New Testament, etc, depending on the status and duties of the owner. Different crewmembers carried different tools, depending on their duties. For example, **surgeons** may have carried trepanning tools for drilling holes in skulls as well as their socks and underwear!

Chests were often made of pine with iron handles and were generally stored in the galley. The crew would eat in the galley and used the chests as seats during meal times. An image of a sea chest carried on board HMS *Resolution* II can be viewed at:

www.nmm.ac.uk/searchbin/searchs.pl?exhibit=it3082z&axis=962157413&flash=false

Cabin boys usually served as apprentice sailors, in addition to acting as servants to the Captain and Officers. Boys at sea were either press ganged, joined voluntarily or came through the Marine Society. The boys taken on through the Marine Society were issued with clothing and possessions such as: 1 Felt hat with a cockade and quality binding; 2 Worsted caps; 1 Blue kersey-jacket, with blue horn-buttons; 1 Pair Drawers, ditto; 1 Pair of canvas-trousers; 2 Pair of yarn-hose; 2 Pairs of shoes; 2 Handkerchiefs; 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ check-shirts; 1 Ticken mattress; 1 Ditto pillow; 1 Blanket; 1 Coverlet; 1 Paper, containing 7 needles, 5 balls of worsted, 2 Ounces of thread; 1 New Testament; 1 Seaman's' monitor; 1 Dr. Syngé's Christian Knowledge; 1 Knife; 1 Pair of buckles; 1 Pair of buttons and 1 Havre-sack.

Midshipmen were ranked between cadet and sub-lieutenant and were involved in navigating, as well as more general duties. They may have carried simple navigational tools, bed linen, clothing, cutlery, writing materials, knives, etc. A general inventory of a midshipman's sea chest may have been: three uniform jackets, a surtout coat and a watch-coat, three pairs of white trousers and waistcoats, 3 pairs of nankeen trousers and 3 kerseymere waistcoats. Two round hats with gold loop and cockade, 1 glazed hat, hanger and belt, 18 linen shirts frilled, 12 plain calico shirts, 3 black silk cotton stockings, 6 white, 6 worsted, 2 pairs of strong shoes and 2 pairs of light ones. 6 towels, 3 pairs of sheets and pillow cases, 2 table cloths, a mattress, 3 blankets and a coverlet. A set of combs and clothes brushes, a set of toothbrushes and tooth powder, a pewter wash hand basin and pewter cup. A set of shoe brushes and a dozen cakes of blacking, or half a dozen bottles. A quadrant and small day and night glass. A silver tablespoon and teaspoon, a knife and fork and a pocket knife and penknife. A logbook and journal with paper, pens and ink, and a number of suggested books including Robinson's "Elements of Navigation" and a bible and prayer book.

The ship's **naturalist** needed instruments for collecting and preserving specimens such as scalpels, specimen bottles, a press for plants, and maybe some preserving fluid such as alcohol.

The ship's **artist** was required to sketch plant and animal specimens, so they would have carried paper, and drawing tools such as oil paints, water colours, charcoal, pencils, ink, etc.