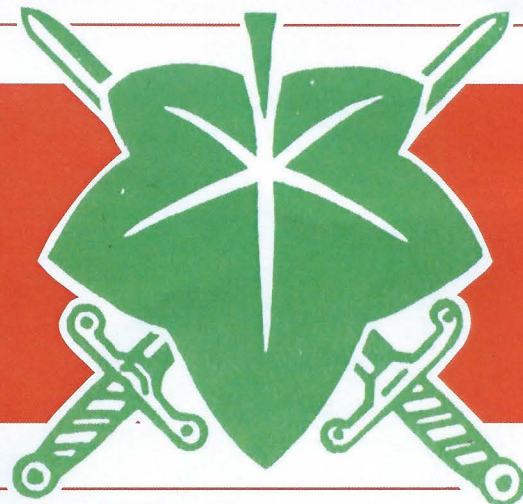


THE FORMATION SIGN

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To Lead Others to Him



Having found this photo on a well-known, online auction site, The Editor wanted to know exactly what a Royal Navy Lay Reader was. Realising that there could be a link with Army Scripture Readers he approached the Soldiers' and Airmens' Scripture Readers Association (SASRA) to see if they could help and now wishes to thank to **Mark Powell**, SASRA East of England & North London Area representative for his invaluable assistance.

In an article written in 2014 Mark noted a record of a Royal Naval Scripture Readers' Society in *A Seaman's Life On Board A Man-of-War* published in 1881. Founded in 1860 at the initiative of two Naval Chaplains, the book describes it is as 'a society for supporting some 14 to 16 Scripture Readers who, selected by a committee in London, are sent on board ships when in port with the consent of their Captains... Their pay varies from £60 a year and upwards. A Chaplain who knows his work... will be glad of the supplemental aid of a loyal and well-trained Scripture Reader, their chief use being among small Men-of-war which are seldom if ever pastorally visited by Naval Chaplains, even at Portsmouth and Devonport. They usually act under the general control of some Chaplain afloat or on shore. It is hardly desirable that Scripture Readers should be appointed per-

manently to vessels going to sea, but if a Petty-Officer on board receive a small allowance for such duties, he should be specially selected by the Chaplain, or be responsible to the Chaplain of the flagship if there be none on board.

By the 1870s with both the Army and Royal Navy Scripture Readers based at 4 Trafalgar Square the work of the RNSRS is described as 'To convey the Word of Life to the seamen and marines of Her Majesty's fleet through the instrumentality of the Scripture Reader... to befriend Sailors and... support those who already knew of His saving grace'. Not necessarily having had naval or military experience, Naval Scripture Readers from differing denominations were deployed to home and overseas stations under the watchful eye of the chaplain although they did not go to sea. During World War I when, like other organisations working with the services, a uniform and badge were adopted, many Naval readers left to join the colours and the YMCA offered to supply readers and religious literature for distribution by the RNSRS. Recruiting publicity in the 1920's recorded that 'A Scripture Reader must be aged between 25 - 35, hold a Bishops license as a Lay Worker, have had some training and be a regular communicant'. Renamed The Royal Naval Lay Readers' Society in 1930, by 1961 what was now The Royal Naval Licensed Reader Society, was asking for the Church Army's help and there is talk of amalgamation. The Society was removed from the Charity Commissioners register in 2011 as it no longer operated.