



Bristol
safety

Our Story

The inspiration behind the business name and logo is a nod to local history and an acknowledgement of the work undertaken to improve the safety of crews, vessels and their cargo.

While we may be familiar with the term '**Ship-shape and Bristol fashion**' it isn't a widely used phrase outside the UK and even there less so than in earlier times, so a little background may be in order.

Bristol has been an important English seaport for more than a thousand years. The city is actually several miles from the sea and stands on the estuary of the River Avon.



Bristol's harbour has one of the most variable tidal flows anywhere in the world and the water level can vary by more than 30 feet between tides. Ships that were moored there were beached at each low tide. Consequently they had to be of sturdy construction and the goods in their holds needed to be securely stowed.



The problem was resolved in 1803 with the construction of the Floating Harbour. There's no absolute proof that the term 'Bristol fashion' originates with that geography but the circumstantial evidence seems very strongly in favour of it.

'Ship-shape and Bristol fashion' is actually two phrases merged into one. Ship-shape came first and has been used since the 17th century. If something is 'ship-shape and Bristol fashion' it is in first-class order.

It is recorded in Sir Henry Manwayring's *The sea-mans dictionary*, 1644:

"It [the rake] being of no use for the Ship, but only for to make her Ship shapen, as they call it."

Bristol fashion was added later and is first seen in print during Bristol's heyday as a trading port, in the early 19th century; for example, this extract from John Davis' *Travels of four years and a half in the United States of America*, 1803:

...says I to the girl, "this is neither ship-shape, nor Bristol fashion."

Admiral William Henry Smyth's 1867 *The Sailor's Word-Book: an alphabetical digest of nautical terms*, which is a treasure trove of nautically inspired phrases, has a definition of the phrase:

"Said when Bristol was in its palmy commercial days - and its shipping was all in proper good order."

Sources:

<https://bristolcitydocks.co.uk/>

<http://www.bristolfloatingharbour.org.uk/>

<https://wordhistories.net/2017/10/18/shipshape-bristol-fashion/>

<https://phrases.org.uk/meanings/ship-shape-and-Bristol-fashion.html>



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