

Information sheet no 049

Mary Rose

In 1509 Henry VIII began an intensive programme of rearmament. The *Mary Rose* was one of the warships built and named in honour of Henry VIII's sister, Mary Tudor (later Queen of France and Duchess of Somerset). The *Mary Rose* was 600 tons with an armament of about 20 heavy and 60 light guns with a crew of four hundred. The crew comprised of sailors, soldiers, gunners and archers.

In 1513-14, the *Mary Rose* was the flagship of Sir Edward Howard during the first French war and also served in the second French war of 1522-5. The ship was rebuilt in 1536 and up-rated to 700 tons and fitted with new cast bronze muzzle-loading guns.

On 19 July 1545 disaster struck when the ship sailed out to engage the French fleet during the third French war. *Mary Rose* sank two kilometres from the entrance of Portsmouth harbour in 14 metres of water. Water had poured through the lower decks' gun ports causing the ship to sink in a short space of time with the loss of nearly all the crew. The crew was made up of 200 mariners, 185 soldiers and 30 gunners. One eyewitness account claims that there were 700 men on board, including the Captain Sir George Carew. Henry VIII watched his prized ship sink from Southsea Castle.

In 1836 the divers John and Charles Deane discovered the site of the wrecked ship and recovered a bronze demi-cannon gun. *Mary Rose* was not located again until 1965 when a group of divers led by Alexander McKee searched for the ship on the sea bed using sonar equipment. In 1967 the *Mary Rose* Committee leased the area where the ship lay and began a programme of exploration and survey. The team that undertook this work were made up of volunteer divers, scientists and archaeologists. From 1971 a series of limited excavations outside the ship were undertaken to determine how much of the ship had survived. It was then decided that the ship should be totally excavated and recorded. To do this, the *Mary Rose* Trust was formed in 1979. Over 600 volunteer divers and many more volunteers on shore helped with the work. The ship was excavated, recorded, and decks, cabins, and bulkheads were surveyed and brought ashore timber by timber. In total over 25,000 finds were brought ashore.

From January 1982 preparations were made for the recovery of the ship's hull, and on 11 October 1982, the *Mary Rose* was raised. The hull of the ship was placed in a specially made steel cradle designed to conform to the shape of the hull and lined with air bags. Wires were attached to the hull so that it could be lifted off the sea bed and onto the steel cradle. Once the hull was in place, the whole structure was lifted up out of the water using a large lifting frame and lowered onto the deck of a barge ready to be towed into Portsmouth harbour.

The ship was then placed in an environmentally controlled ship hall, with a temperature maintained below five degrees and a humidity of ninety-five percent. The hull was sprayed with recycled chilled fresh water to prevent the timber drying out, and to control levels of fungi and bacteria. Sprays could be turned off for only four one hour periods each day and this allowed reconstruction work, archaeological research and regular checks on the condition of the timber to be taking place.

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In 1995 the stabilisation of the waterlogged wood of the hull began. This would allow the hull to be kept in a dry controlled museum environment and so no longer need to be continually sprayed with water to preserve it.

The hull is on display alongside the artefacts retrieved from the seabed in the new purpose built museum next to HMS *Victory* in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard.

For more details contact the *Mary Rose* Trust, Porters Lodge, College Road, HM Naval Base, Portsmouth or visit their website: www.maryrose.org