

# Raising the Mary Rose

Notes from a talk by Philip Baker at the meeting on 24 June 2009.

Philip Baker was one of a large team of volunteer divers who worked on the wreck of the Mary Rose, during his holidays and in his spare time, over a three year period. Philip surprised most people in his audience when he explained that each diver working on the project spent a limited time underwater and the average time for a dive was only 25 minutes. The divers worked about 40 feet down. A grid of pipes had been placed just above the wreck so that each diver could concentrate on working a small section of the grid, taking care to measure and identify everything they found within that small section. They recorded their finds while they were still under the water using waterproof paper and a wooden pencil. Prince Charles was one of the volunteers and he dived on the wreck about 8 or 9 times.

Philip showed the audience photographs of the artefacts that he, and others, found on the wreck and explained how these artefacts had been analysed and preserved. Items originally made from iron had perished over the years, but many wooden ones remained intact. The most interesting aspect of Philip's talk was when he gave us an understanding of how our 16<sup>th</sup> century ancestors would have lived and worked. The details of their everyday lives became apparent when he explained the conclusions drawn by the teams of experts who had studied the items found on the wreck.

The audience were amazed by the talents of the craftsmen who had made these items without the benefits of the technology that has developed over the centuries. Wooden bowls and tankards that had been retrieved from the wreck were made in perfect proportion. More fascinating, if somewhat macabre, finds included the horrific "tools" found in the barber/surgeon's chest and even the remains of head lice found on a comb.

## About The Mary Rose.

Henry VIII set about an intensive programme of naval rearmament soon after he inherited the throne. He named one of these new ships after his favourite sister, Mary, and the family emblem, the Tudor rose. The Mary Rose was completed around 1511 and subsequently took part in a number of battles soon after her launch. After many years of active service, the Mary Rose was subject to a substantial refit in 1536 but was later sunk on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1545 during an engagement with a French invasion fleet just two kilometres from Portsmouth harbour. She was not sunk by enemy fire, but met her fate soon after setting sail following a combination of events. The main cause of the disaster was the lack of stability of the ship resulting from design faults and overloading. After the refit, the lower guns were only 18 inches above the water level and on the day the ship went down, the usual crew of 240 had been increased by a large numbers of soldiers until there was a total of 700 people on board, overloading the ship. There is still much debate about the reasons why, but water came inside the ship and she quickly went down. Not only was the ship lost, but no more than 20 people survived the disaster.

Between 1979 and 1982, the ship was excavated and the remaining hull was prepared for recovery. During the excavation, 25,000 "finds" were brought ashore, including timbers that had become detached from the main wreck. The remains of the Mary Rose were brought up on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1982 and work has continued ever since to preserve the ship, plus all the items found at the wreck site. The remains of the ship and many of the artefacts now form an amazing exhibition which is open to the public at Portsmouth Naval Docks. The exhibition hall includes film shows of each stage of the recovery, a reconstruction of part of the ship and an explanation of 16<sup>th</sup> century social history. It is well worth a visit if any members are in the vicinity of Portsmouth.

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