

Before the Mast: Life and Death Aboard the Mary Rose (The Archaeology of the Mary Rose)

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The Mary Rose carried a crew of naval officers and sailors, a fighting force of gunners and soldiers, a Barber-surgeon, several ship's carpenters and skilled navigators. Of nearly 500 men, fewer than 40 survived the sinking on 19th July 1545. Trapped by netting, or below deck, they stood little chance, and their bodies and belongings went to the bottom of the sea. Excavation of the hull and contents produced a huge collection of objects that together make up a detailed picture of what life was like on board.

Before the Mast explores how the men of the Mary Rose lived, through their surviving possessions; how they were fed; their music and recreation, medicine and provision for illness and injury, as well as working practices: carpentry and maintenance, stowage, navigation and ship's communications. The personal possessions of the crew included religious items, books, fishing lines and weights, sewing kits, money, hair combs, jewellery, knives, musical instruments and many items of clothing. The Barber-surgeon, who had his own cabin, brought on board a fine chest filled with canisters, bottles and pots of ointment and medicines, a variety of surgical instruments and a fine set of razors. Another cabin nearby was clearly occupied by the ship's carpenters whose toolkit included planes, adzes, axes, hammers and drills, as well as pitch pots and special mallets for patching up leaks in the ship's hull. The ship's navigators had the best in sixteenth century compasses. The ship's galley was in the hold and this area in particular produced many examples of wooden and pewter plates, bowls, pots, bread troughs, and tankards, as well as barrels and baskets still containing beef, pork, fish and fruit. The volume also includes an analysis of the human remains providing evidence for the stature and age range of the men most were under 30 their health, and injuries sustained.

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Editorial Review

Review

This volume (the entire series of five even more so) is a celebration of the science of archaeology and its critical place in our understanding of the past (*The Northern Mariner/le marin du nord*)

About the Author

Julie Gardiner is the series editor of the Archaeology of the Mary Rose and Reports Manager at Wessex Archaeology.

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