

Re-constructing the crew of the Mary Rose

May 16 2017



A reconstructed skeleton of the most complete individual skeleton from the Mary Rose to date, alongside a model of him as the archer. Credit: The Mary Rose Trust

For the first time in 500 years, scientists examining human remains from Henry VIII's flagship Mary Rose will be able to determine if any bones come from the same person.

Research by Dr Garry Scarlett, a DNA expert at the University of Portsmouth, should enable museum staff to recreate accurate skeletons of some of the [crew](#).

Only a handful of the ship's 500 crew survived when Henry VIII's flagship was sunk in the Solent in 1545. Remains of about a third of the crew have been found, with the rest lost to the sea.

Eventually, Dr Scarlett's research might also be able to shed light on where some of the crew came from.

Dr Scarlett said: "It's wonderful that science can help find new ways to engage people in the life of the ship, its fateful battle and in history.

"I hope, once we have determined for certain which bones belong with which, some whole skeletons might be able to be reassembled."

Dr Scarlett's earlier research determined the sex of the ship's dog, whose [skeleton](#) was also found inside the ship's hull in 1981. He was also able to identify which modern breed she was most closely like.

Dr Scarlett's latest research is funded by charity The Pilgrim Trust.

His team will work with maritime archaeologist Alex Hildred from the Mary Rose Museum.

She said: "The ability to recreate individuals from bones from DNA analysis rather than having to rely on physical matching has huge benefits; unless key parts of the skeleton of an individual are present it is difficult to associate a skull with a body, or an upper body with a lower body. Only about a third of our 92 partially reconstructed skeletons have skulls, yet we have 179 skulls.

"This technique should enable us to recreate the faces of many more of our crew. Enlarging the number of re-constructed skeletons means we can tell more about them – height, age, provenance, wounds they sustained, diseases they may have had.

"Our museum is dedicated to the men of the Mary Rose, and these techniques inform us about them. Displayed alongside their possessions, the collection is seen within the lives of these men, within the context of the ship which was their home, workplace and sepulchre."

The museum is in Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard, a stone's throw from where Mary Rose was built and about two miles from where she sank defending England from a French invasion fleet larger than the Spanish Armada. She had completed just 34 years at sea and been through three wars.

The museum houses a spectacular cross section of the ship's hull, submerged for nearly half a millennium in mud.

In addition to the hull, the [museum](#) houses thousands of well-preserved artefacts, including weapons, jewellery, furniture and medical

equipment.

The ship was rediscovered by divers in 1971 and excavated between 1979 and 1982 when the hull was raised. Further excavation between 2003 and 2005 revealed significant timbers from the bow of the ship, suggesting that the site still has many secrets to reveal.

Provided by University of Portsmouth

Citation: Re-constructing the crew of the Mary Rose (2017, May 16) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-05-re-constructing-crew-mary-rose.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.