

MINUTES OF THE 87th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO ON WEDNESDAY 27th APRIL 2016

Present: - Rupert Clark – Chairman & Treasurer
Peter Cole - Secretary.

1. Secretary's Report

Peter gave advance notice that his free Cartwright Archive Exhibition is coming back to Aynho, bigger and better than before. It will be in the Village Hall on Sunday 5th June from 10 am until 8 pm. Further details in the June newsletter.

2. Chairman's Report

The best example of Tudor Aynho is in Nicholas Cooper's book "Aynho", chapter 3.

3. "The Mary Rose – a window into Tudor life at sea" by Bob Foster, volunteer lecturer for the Mary Rose Trust

The Mary Rose belongs in trust to the nation. There are over 20,000 artefacts recovered from the wreck, along with approximately one third of the hull. Our knowledge of Tudor life has been significantly enhanced by the Mary Rose Trust's efforts.

As soon King Henry VIII came to the throne aged 17 he started to build navy warships to help him win back the parts of France lost by his predecessors.

At this time, C16th, large (Capital) ships were extremely cumbersome. It had been the practice to build up structures like mini castles at both the front and rear of a ship. Cannons had only recently been put on board ships, and they had gone into the castles, making them even more top-heavy. If you wanted an advantage over your opponents at sea, you just made the castle taller. They would only have sailed well with the wind full astern.

New ships were designed in Portsmouth without any castles, but with the guns placed all along the side of the ship, just above the water line. They were behind sealable gun-ports, so that these could be shut if there were heavy seas. With a low centre of gravity they were highly manoeuvrable and quicker. None of the other countries had this design. Indeed at the time of the Spanish Armada, some fifty years later, the Spanish still had their unwieldy castles, which is why the English fleet was able to outmanoeuvre them. The design did them little favour trying to sail round Britain, battling the storms and ragged coastline.

The Mary Rose was named after Henry's younger sister. The new ship was 40 feet wide, one hundred and twenty feet long, with a crew of 350 men; a lot of people in a very confined space. It was launched in 1511 and taken round to the Thames to be fitted out. She was made ready as in 1512 Henry invaded France, but it was a stalemate and his army returned home after two years. He made two further attempts to gain a foothold there, but neither was successful. The last one was in 1544.

Realising that by then Henry was becoming an old man of 53 (the average life expectancy in those days was about 37), the French King decided to invade England. 20,000 men assembled on the

north coast of France. By now Henry had established a long line of forts and castles on the south coast of England in preparation for such a contingency. One of these was at Southsea, a mile or so south of Portsmouth.

On Saturday 18th July 1545 Henry went down to Portsmouth to review his fleet. He gave a party on his new flagship the Great Harry. The next day the French fleet advances from the Isle of Wight. It outnumbers the British ships by 4 to 1, too many for the English fleet to engage them full-on, so they line up under the protection of Southsea Castle. Henry and his Court had been sent ashore before the Battle of the Solent commenced. In addition to the 350 sailors on the Mary Rose, an additional 150 armoured soldiers boarded. Her gun ports had been left open, and as she heeled and turned, the extra weight caused water to pour in and she began to sink in about 20 feet of water, with her masts sticking up out of it. About 30 men were saved; probably those in the rigging, but all the rest were lost.

The battle fizzled out, and yet another attempted invasion of England was foiled. Henry was extremely upset at having lost his favourite ship. He gives instructions for two large ships to attach themselves to the masts and lift the Mary Rose up, but all that happens is that the masts are pulled up out of the ship. The ship was now lying on her side, about ½ a mile from Southsea Castle. Gradually with the tide more sands wear away the top side of the ship, leaving the decks pointing upwards. These decks are filled with a very fine layer of silt. It is this that seals in and preserves all the artefacts. More and more silt is layered by nature, so that the entire wreck is lost to sight.

300 years later during the reign of Queen Victoria, a diving suit with a helmet with pumped air is invented. The inventors were called upon to demolish the wreck of the Royal George, which had exploded in the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour, causing a huge obstruction. While they were clearing this local site fishermen told them that there was something further south which was damaging their nets. They took a look at this site, and suddenly found a few bronze Tudor cannons with "Henry VIII" and "Tudor Rose" emblazoned on them. They couldn't find any more, so they dug a large hole where they thought more might be, filled it with explosives and blew it up. After the dust had settled, they went down again, but could still not see any more. They abandoned the search, without marking the exact spot.

In 1965 a local amateur historian and diver, Alexander Mckee, was convinced that remains of the ship were still to be found. He enlisted the help of the local fire brigade, and later divers from the Southsea Sub-Aqua Club. Eventually they found some pewter pots, and later a cannon and over the next few years they began to assemble a huge collection of pots, plates, silverware, etc. By 1979 there were so many artefacts, that there was no doubt that this was indeed Henry's Tudor ship. The Mary Rose Trust was formed, with Prince Charles as its president. He was occasionally allowed to dive on the site to inspect proceedings. A salvage vessel was moored over the site, and yellow pipes were laid across the whole area, dividing it into squares so that groups of people could work in different sections at the same time. All finds were photographed and brought up to the surface to be cleaned and stored in a controlled environment.

The variety of artifacts is enormous but includes rigging blocks, tackle and pulleys, chess pieces. a thimble, a ring and a rosary. Also found were navigational instruments including a protractor, dividers and a pocket sundial. This was less than two inches across, but it had a little compass set

in it so that if the sun was out one could navigate with it and tell the time. Musical instruments were found, a tabor and a bassoon-like horn. There were shoes, with the sole tied into the upper, until this discovery it had been believed that such a thing didn't happen until much later.

A large quantity of combs was found, but at first the significance of these was not realised. Such was the care taken to delicately clean items that in several cases it was possible to see Tudor fleas trapped in combs, so it was confirmed that regular hair combing was needed to remove these tiny pests. At the Museum it is possible to look through a microscope to see a flea in a comb.

All these things have to be carefully washed and dried, and in some cases reassembled as far as possible; for example some cannon are mounted back in their reassembled carriages. Many coins were salvaged including, an "angel". This was a Tudor gold coin, worth about six shillings and eight pence (one third of £1) in Henry's time. This would have been a day's pay for an admiral, a month's pay for a master mariner, and about two year's pay for a seaman. It is believed that half way through his reign Henry called all these back in, melted them down and re-minted them half the thickness to increase his economy.

Some very large elm chests were found. They contained no fewer than 200 longbows made of yew. Throughout the land, including Aynho, every able-bodied man and boy was required to spend some time practising archery in preparation for a military call up. Until these were found, no example of an English longbow had ever survived. There were thousands of arrows too, the iron tips had weathered away, but the goose quill feathers were still intact.

A carpenter's chest included the sort of tools we know today, and a barber's surgeon's kit included a bleeding bowl, and a series of linstocks were recovered. This was a stick about three to four feet long holding smouldering lint to light a cannon. In this way a gunner could reach out to fire the powder without being run over by the recoiling cannon. There were eating materials, but no forks, as these were not used in England until much later, pepper mills, sailors' sewing kits ("housewives"), and chess, dice and backgammon pieces.

It wasn't until 1982 that the remains of the boat structure were raised. Once ashore, the Mary Rose was put into a dry dock next door to HMS Victory and a hall was built around her. The ship was constantly sprayed with water, salt and glycol. This was to prevent the wood from drying out, and to give it some structural strength. They have only just stopped the spraying recently. The ship is now drying out. Shortly the public will soon be able to get right inside her.

Occasionally there is still some diving done on the site, and on 19th July 1984 (the anniversary of her sinking) there was a special ceremony to bury one of the skeletons from the Mary Rose in Portsmouth Cathedral. Placed under a slab of Welsh slate, the reburial commemorates all of her crew. Finally the ship's bell bearing the name and date 1510 was found.

Soon the museum will reopen with the Mary Rose as accessible as it was when it was afloat. Many of the artefacts have been positioned more or less as they would have been 450 years ago. A triumph of British archaeology and public donation.

4. Forthcoming Meetings

May 25th	Recusant Papists of the Aynho District: The secret survival of clandestine Catholics in the C16th – C18th
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For those who are interested the Banbury coach trip firm Star Travel in Broad Street are currently advertising on a full page of the Guardian paper including a trip to the Mary Rose Exhibition on Sunday 11th September. The price is £49.50 per person, to include admission to the Museum.