

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES ON BOARD THE MARY ROSE: SOME OBSERVATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper concerns what can be learned of the nature of religious observance on board 16th-century ships. The 'Mary Rose' affords rich evidence on this topic that has been largely neglected, partly to problems of assigning functions to its artefacts. This paper aims to complement Eamon Duffy's (1992, 2003) achievements regarding our understanding of parish life on land. It will address issues of heritage interpretation as well as wider questions of historical knowledge by asking basic questions about what religious observance might have entailed on board ship in the 1540s, and by offering thoughts on how some of the artefacts might best be classified. This will aid our understanding of a particularly complex period in which England's Reformation was in process, but the country remained largely Catholic. The paper also sheds light on some of the problems affecting heritage sites when considering exhibitions and the presentation of artefacts.

INTRODUCTION

Readers will be familiar with the Mary Rose's sinking in the Solent in July 1545 while engaging the French, and her more recent recovery through the painstaking efforts of many divers and maritime archaeologists such as Alexander McKee and Margaret Rule. Television coverage of the ship's recovery from the seabed in 1982, watched by tens of millions of people worldwide, turned the event into international news and the ship itself into a national treasure. Since 1983, many thousands of people have visited the famous Mary Rose exhibition housed at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. They

are largely presented with the image and relics of a naval man of war, so that military equipment dominates the narrative rather than the more mundane artefacts which record the day-to-day lives of those on board.

This paper seeks not so much to supply answers as to provoke thought. It addresses the deceptively simple question of the nature of religious observance on board the Mary Rose when it went down in 1545. The question is stimulating for several reasons. Much is known about the nature of the Henrician Reformation on land, thanks largely to the work of Eamon Duffy (1992, 2003) and Peter Marshall (1997), yet we know little of religious life on board ship. An enormous number of artefacts have been recovered, yet people may not realise the full range of problems these present for the museum in terms of their identification, classification and interpretation. The topic addresses current interest in the ways in which museums present the past to the public, and how their exhibitions and presentations are fashioned. In today's secular world, religious aspects of life in the past are often neglected, yet they, too, deserve to be interpreted. This paper will thus discuss the nature of some of the artefacts discovered to date and comment on the difficulties of their interpretation in a way that may enhance our understanding of the possible nature of religious observance on board ship.

The research presented here is located within the current historiographical debates sparked by Duffy and Marshall, among others. However it will chiefly concentrate on building a picture from the ship's material culture in answer to our basic questions. The findings should reveal the complexity of the task, the provisional

nature of so many of our conclusions, and the difficulties faced by museum staff. The aim is neither to chronicle religious observance nor to analyse it, but to describe and discuss particular religious artefacts discovered from the wreckage. This in itself is no mean task. To date over 26,000 items have been recovered from the seabed (Allen and Gardiner 2005, 117–27), and of these only 20 have thus far been classified as possibly of religious significance. This group consists of rosaries – or more accurately paternosters – relics, and a fragment of a book, as well as various religious symbols stamped on equipment.

How can historians make sense of the possible religious significance of the artefacts excavated from the Mary Rose? There is currently no exhibition board in the Mary Rose Museum explaining the significance of religion in the 1540s, although there is a case presenting the actual artefacts with a simple commentary. But the task for the museum keeper and the historian should be to explain the significance of these findings to a larger public. This was an era dominated by religion, and yet in some turmoil as to the exact nature of religious belief after a long period of relative certainty. The European Reformation had called into doubt exactly how one was saved, the existence of Purgatory, the balance between the importance of belief over ‘good works’, and the efficacy of the relic and the talisman. Large fissures were opening up between what was taught in the universities, promoted by the state, and the beliefs and practices of the ordinary populace. It is this story that Eamon Duffy (2003, 32–6) relays so movingly in his story of the village of Morebath in Devon. Religion was the ‘glue’ which held society together and it was generally thought to be vital for the people to share the religion of their monarch – ‘God’s representative on earth’. The administering of the sacraments, the rites of birth, marriage and death-bed absolution were thought officially to acknowledge an individual’s ‘civil existence’. Without this vital function they simply did not exist (Linton 2000).

All this calls into question what we might expect to find on board ship in the 16th

century. Would there have been a priest or chaplain? How would services have been conducted, and how many? Would communion have been administered? Thanks to so many films and television documentaries, we are all familiar with the ceremonial nature of a burial at sea, but what else might have occurred on board ship? Would there have been a table set aside to function as an altar? What plates, cups and chalices would have been carried? And what evidence of piety might we expect to find among sailors’ possessions?

CURRENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE RELIGIOUS ARTEFACTS ON BOARD MARY ROSE

The official 2005 publication *Before the Mast: Life and Death on Board the Mary Rose* (Allen and Gardiner 2005) lists 26,000 artefacts recovered from the wreck and itemises the many possessions, both personal and commercial, owned by the ship and its crew. The items this project is most concerned with are those from which we can infer ‘religious’ observance or practice. Andrew Elkerton (Mary Rose Museum: Collections Manager) has admitted, however, that the task of cataloguing is fraught with difficulties, and that many items remain unidentified.

Much material evidence for acts of private devotion survives from the early- to mid- 16th century, emphasising not only the common nature of religious practices but also revealing that, despite Protestant disapproval of religious imagery towards the end of that period, private devotion was hard to police (Foister 2003, 334–5). As far as the Mary Rose is concerned the original work completed by Mark Redknap, on artefacts considered definitely to be ‘religious’, was published in Allen and Gardiner (2005, 117–27). Twelve objects were itemised which unquestionably fell into this category, although others had possibilities. These items not only display the distinct character of Christian devotion within a closed community, but also reflect the religious sentiments of the time incorporated within the designs appearing in books and their leather covers, coins, tankards

and lids. They include 'paternosters' (rosary beads) and 'talismans' excavated from crew members' cabins and personal 'sea chests'. Most of the items were dispersed throughout the ship, but one collection that is more ambiguous than previously thought is that which was found in the barber surgeon's cabin, and this will be discussed in detail below. It should also be noted that the bulk of what has been found and interpreted to date tells us only about the religion of individuals, not, alas, about the nature of communal worship on board ship. Accordingly, this will be a major focus of this paper, for the *Mary Rose* was surely a 'floating parish'.

Paternoster was a term used in the Middle Ages for a set of beads, often a symbolic number, threaded onto a cord. They were subdivided into groups by larger beads usually referred to as 'English Gauds'. The usual formations for the beads were in decades (ten smaller beads and one larger bead). Eamon Duffy (1992, 70–9) describes variations of five and seven 'decade' beads manufactured from materials which were considered both spiritual and expensive, as if to reflect the owner's social status. However, others could be made from simple materials like bone and wood. The string of beads came to represent 'rosary devotion' and their use as a symbol of piety was first introduced in Cologne in 1482, mainly directed at women (Catholic Truth Society 1992, Ch.1). The rosary, however, was also a fashionable item worn around the waist on a girdle or around the neck.

Paternosters in large numbers were found on the *Mary Rose* often still in the pouches that once hung from the sailors' belts, sometimes alongside their combs, corresponding with written accounts of how paternosters were worn (Duffy 1992, 79). Indeed paternoster no. 81A1414 (Fig. 1) was found in a cabin inside a pouch among a few scattered human remains. This illustrates not only the personal importance of such possessions to crew members, but also, crucially, that it was *normal* to own such an item in this particular environment. The excavation team found numerous beads of wood and bone, but also others fashioned from expensive materials like jade, coral and lapis

(Allen and Gardiner 2005, 117–27). From this evidence it may be suggested that the specific materials that paternosters were made of could identify the social status of the person using them, again complementing Duffy's findings (1992, 81). That is, it is possible the crew were using wood and perhaps bone beads, while officers may have sported the more expensive jade and coral. This is important especially if, as seems to be the case, they were 'on display' hanging from belts and girdles, demonstrating the wealth and status of the wearer as well as his religious inclination.

The conservation team have been able to construct seven complete boxwood 'paternosters' from the remnants of the finds, and they estimate from this that many sets of beads would have existed on board. Two sets were found in close proximity to complete human skeletons in the carpenter's cabin, and they were also found on all decks of the ship. It is noteworthy, however, that only one set of beads was discovered in a personal sea chest, suggesting that these items would indeed have been carried by their owners rather than left with other personal items. This evidence, then, appears to imply that the crew openly observed their faith. They were free to display such religious items in full public view, despite the perceived threat of Protestantism.

'Talismans' (carved objects with a religious significance) were brought to the surface in abundance. Some were in the form of coins or pieces of bone attached to other religious artefacts, but for the purpose of this study the bone angels (Fig. 2) are the most revealing. Talismans are used in a similar way to paternosters, and are considered to have 'special' powers. Such objects would have served to sharpen and intensify the religious experience (Foister 2003, 334) and their owners would have believed in their protective powers during times of need. To this day, soldiers and sailors in particular still carry talismans inside uniforms and personal belongings (Royal Naval Chaplain Society 2007), and in many Tudor court paintings the courtiers of Henry VIII (1509–47) and their wives wear medallions or hat badges bearing images of the Virgin

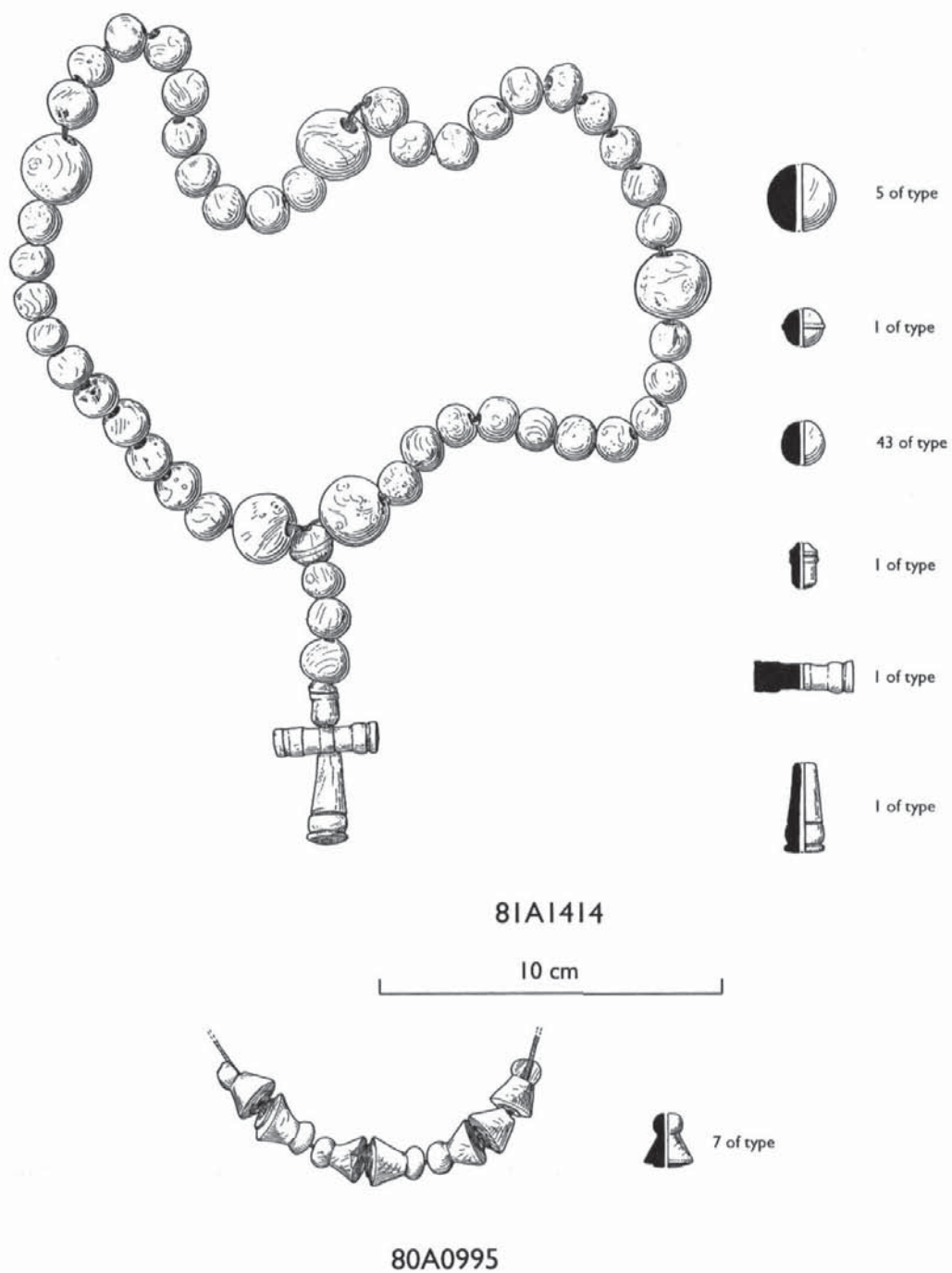


Fig. 1 Boxwood Paternosters (Artefact Nos. 81A1414 and 80A0995)



Fig. 2 Bone Angel (Artefact No. 81A2581)

or other saints (Foister 2003, 335). While a talisman is clearly a matter of individual preference (indeed the piece at Fig. 2 was discovered in a personal leather purse inside a chest which may signify 'private' or individual devotion) rosaries would have been a reminder of the need for prayer at various times of the day.

Duffy (1992, 68) has described late-medieval and 16th-century Catholics as carrying superstitious items in their clothing. Such items were often placed in graves and inside 'caches' in chimneys to protect the household. Indeed Foister (2003, 336) has drawn attention to the multifarious religious images recorded in inventories in various household spaces, including bedrooms, and talismans and iconographies of the saints were also placed in dark corners of houses to help protect the inhabitants.

They were also carried in luggage when travelling. Some of the other talismans excavated from the Mary Rose, unlike the bone angels described above, were neither finely carved nor expensive; they were just simple coins, pieces of carved wood or animal bone. This suggests that the crew member who owned the 'bone angels' was a man of considerable means. More pertinently, it demonstrates that he believed in the perceived power of the artefact and was, again, observing his personal piety.

Many individual examples of talismans and paternosters have been found on the ship. However one collection that has hitherto seemed clear-cut and secular may require closer analysis, with possible religious symbolism in mind. This is the material excavated from the barber surgeon's cabin; bowls, bottles, syringes and pots of medicine. Not all of these objects are necessarily for medical use. For example the bronze bowl (Fig. 3), called in the museum display a 'bleeding bowl' and thus interpreted as being used by the barber surgeon to 'bleed' patients (Allen and Gardiner 2005, 202), may have been categorised as such solely due to its provenance. This type of bowl is more often documented in religious settings, reserved for the use of sacred food. In contrast, the usual bleeding bowls were normally of glazed earthen slip ware, with a notch cut into the side of the rim to allow for the arm to be secured, thus preventing movement. The 'bleeding bowl' in the Mary Rose Museum is made exclusively from bronze, which would be tainted by blood if used for bleeding over a long period of time (Royal College of Surgeons 2007). It is also very small – probably too small for its presumed purpose – with no way of securing the patient's arm.

The barber surgeon's cabin contained another metal bowl larger in diameter, this time complete with the tell-tale notch cut to the side of the rim. This is currently displayed in the museum as a 'shaving bowl'. The Barber Surgeons Society (2007) details bowls of this nature, made from metal and being used for shaving and bleeding patients. This seems to be borne out when we learn that many people visited the barber surgeon in the London

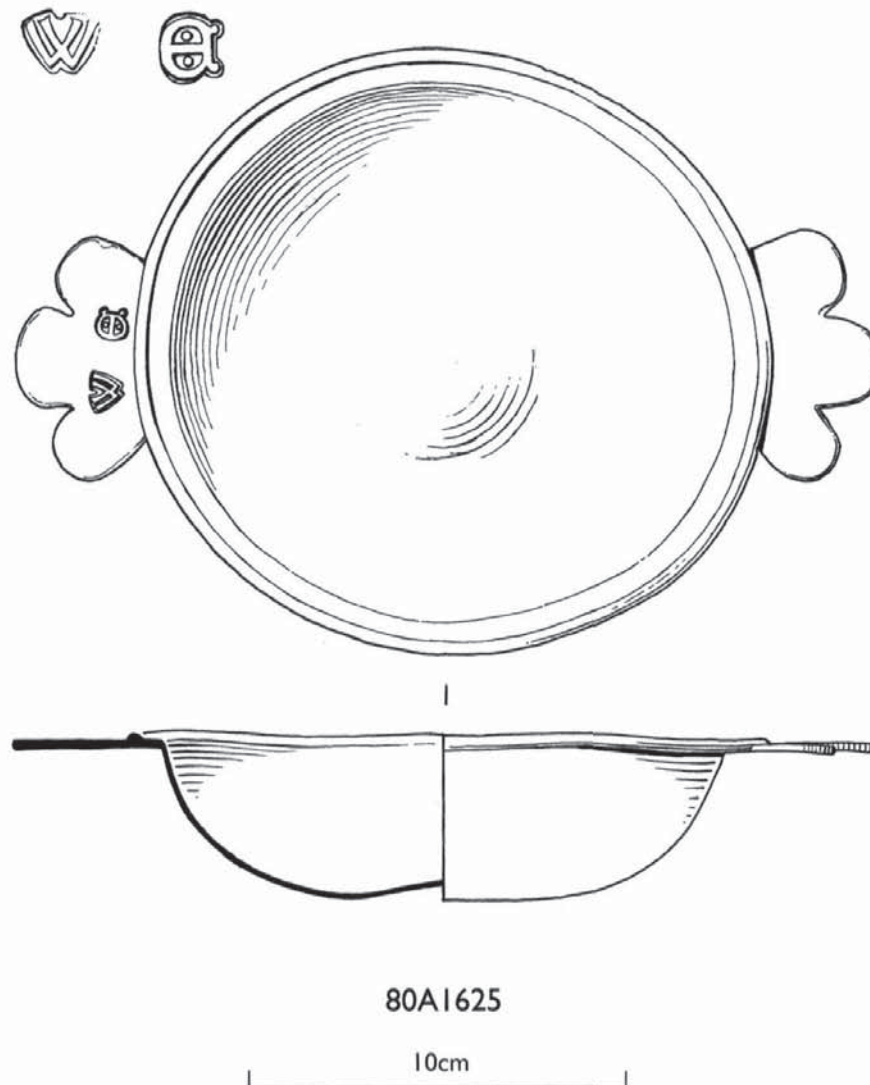


Fig. 3 Bronze 'bleeding bowl' (Artefact No. 80A1625)

streets for quick and relatively cheap medical treatment during the 16th century. In fact their advertising 'logo' was a white and red pole with a metal shaving bowl attached to the top. (The white stripes indicated the bandages and the red stripes the blood.) The bowl signified to passers-by that barbers tasks were offered

and that the establishment was also a medical facility (Royal College of Surgeons 2007).

It is noteworthy that the traditional bleeding bowls on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum's exhibition *Birth, Death and Marriage 1500–1700* (July 2006) looked remarkably similar to the Mary Rose's 'shaving bowl', and

in most cases were documented as being used for both bleeding and shaving patients. They were chiefly made of slip ware and had the significant 'cut' to the rim, with the exception of one small metal bowl excavated from the foundations of an old school in east London (V&A Exhibition, July 2006). This particular bowl did, however, have the tell tale 'notch' cut to the large flat rim exactly like the 'shaving bowl' excavated from the Mary Rose, which suggests that the barber surgeon's other bowl, the 'bleeding bowl' (see above), may have been misinterpreted and warrants further investigation. Indeed it is probable that a ship would not be stable enough to allow for continued use of slip ware due to inadequate storage and breakages from stormy conditions, so that a metal bowl would be more suitable for life at sea. However, it would have to be fit for the purpose, and of the right dimensions and design for shaving and bleeding, which also seems to rule out the bronze so-called 'bleeding bowl' currently on display at the Mary Rose Museum. So here may be a good example of a multifunctional item recovered from the sea bed, and it may be that the barber surgeon's cabin was a storage point for more than medical supplies.

ARTEFACTS REQUIRED FOR WORSHIP AT SEA

At this stage it is necessary to consider what might have been needed for communal worship on board ship. This would presumably have required a table, suitable fine cloth, napkins, a crucifix, an incense burner, candles and candle sticks, a chalice and a paten. The ship's bell might also have been tolled to call people to worship. In seeking to answer such questions artefact items no. 81A1708/1-3 are noteworthy. These are quite elaborate carved oak trestle ends used with a top board which might well have been used in communal worship (although the resulting table may also have been set aside for officers' meals). In the barber surgeon's cabin there was also a small table structure secured to the side wall which could be lowered when in use to place an injured sailor before treatment.

But again, it may have served other functions. This is the only evidence of any kind of table found on board the ship (Allen and Gardiner 2005, 387-9).

As indicated above, it is not suggested here that the bowls and tables in the barber surgeon's cabin were definitely or exclusively used for religious purposes. Instead the aim is to problematise our assumptions (which are grounded in modern, secular Western values) and to question our resultant definitive interpretation of objects that may have had a plurality of meanings in the past. But if we have indeed found tables that may have had multiple uses, what of other evidence of worship? Church plate is notoriously difficult to identify, and here it has been useful to recall visits to museums across Europe where such items are displayed. The Museum of London (*Religion Exhibition 1400-1800*, July 2006), for instance, boasts hundreds of examples of church plate and religious artefacts from the 15th Century onwards which were excavated from small churches and 'lay' chapels. Pertinent for this paper, the museum has various patens and chalices that may be compared with the artefacts excavated from the Mary Rose, made from wood, brass, pewter and silver, which are both simple and heavily decorated. Some pieces incorporate the 'IHS' inscription (*Iehus Hominum Salvator*, Jesus, the Saviour of men/Jerusalem [Hierosolyma]) but others are not obviously stamped with any distinguishable marks, religious or otherwise.

One piece in particular, a small 14th-century paten (a plate used for communion bread) appeared to be made of brass, and was devoid of inscriptions. It was found in inner London, and looks remarkably similar to some of the smaller pewter plates found on the Mary Rose. High altar examples of plate were very ornate, but those from smaller churches or lay chapels were indeed very simple and quite small, perhaps for easier storage. This could suggest that religious items for pre-Reformation domestic chapels might have been very simple and not inscribed, thus causing confusion for categorising early forms of church equipment used on the Mary Rose.

In the context of this paper, the most interest-

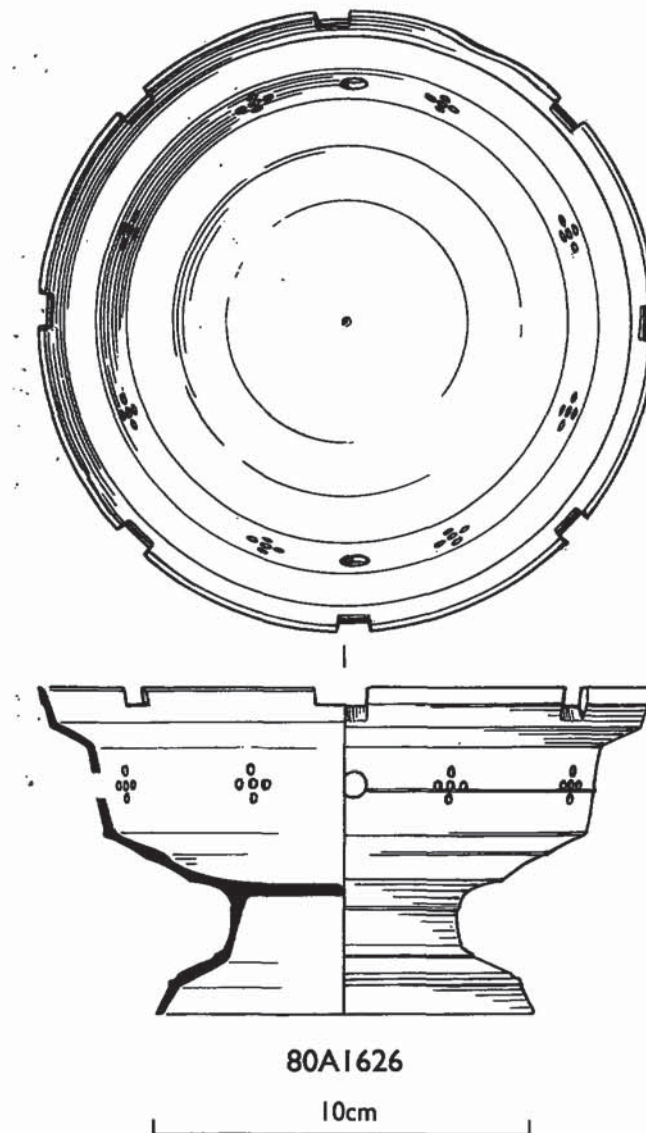


Fig. 4 'Bronze brazier' (Artefact No. 80A1626)

ing item in the Museum of London's exhibition was a 16th-century leather case containing a small glass bottle, chalice and paten which could be carried or packed in luggage for travel. It was recovered from a church in Cheapside with similar items in a poor state of repair. Similarly, the Mary Rose excavations recovered several

small, oddly shaped glass and metal bottles with traces of oils (Allen and Gardiner 2005, 190–1) that were kept with various types of pewter ware inside the barber surgeon's medicine chest and cabin. These smaller items of pewter may have formed part of a communion set, and could have been used with the vials of water and

oil, thus serving as a portable Mass set which could be used for both travel and for use on board. Christopher Hibbert (1987, 186–93) has suggested that early-modern clerics would have owned small cases in order to carry items to enable them to perform the Mass in domestic contexts, where they were employed under licence to officiate. This licence allowed them to baptise the family, give services, receive confession and officiate the Mass which would take place in the family chapel or in another designated part of the house. Portable Mass cases are still in use today (Rev. Dr. Michael Brydon, *pers. comm.*) and remain very similar to that on display in the Museum of London.

The Mary Rose has tangible evidence of some of the components appearing in the Museum of London's leather case, such as a small bottle and pewter flask containing the residue of oils that may have been used for 'anointing' the crew, and several pieces of the correct-sized pewter which perhaps acted as a chalice and paten. They were found inside the barber surgeon's medicine chest (Allen and Gardiner 2005, 190–5) and in his quarters, but unfortunately not in a separate leather case or wooden box that would serve as a carrier (although the medicine chest would have been a convenient place to keep sacred items). All this remains speculation, but the argument is strengthened because the barber surgeon's assemblage also included the shaving and bleeding bowls (above). The herbal medicine located in the same chest contained residues of plant-based oils such as frankincense and grape seed oils (Allen and Gardiner 2005, 189) that were commonly used in medical procedures of the time. However they were also used in religious worship, particularly for anointing at baptism and during the last rites. (Rev. Dr. Michael Brydon, *pers. comm.*).

Another point of comparison is provided by the Chichester Cathedral Treasury (permanent exhibition, 2008) which has an impressive exhibition of historic church plate from Sussex and the surrounding area dating from the 12th century. Some of the 16th-century plate currently on display is made from wood and silver, with various older pieces chiefly

of pewter. One piece in particular, a small paten made of bronze and dated *c.* 1275 was excavated from a small 'lay' church in Chichester. The oldest bronze chalice in the collection is dated *c.* 1375 and was again excavated from Sussex, but is neither stamped with any 'IHS' symbols nor any other religious inscription. Again, it is very simply decorated and quite small. This therefore may suggest that smaller, poorer churches and lay chapels in particular, may have employed ordinary domestic ware very similar to that found on the Mary Rose, for religious use.

Another Mary Rose artefact with possible multiple uses is the 'bronze brazier' (Fig. 4), an item which can also be found in churches and other religious collections (Museum of London, *Religion Exhibition 1400–1800*, July 2006) as a 'purifier'. The Mary Rose Museum currently interprets this object as a warming dish, used to heat and sterilise needles, or to heat infusions. However, the Royal College of Surgeons (2007) suggests that this process would not have been hot enough to sterilise a needle to prevent infection, and that the medical knowledge of the day was not sufficient to have understood this process fully in any case. Purifiers, however, were used in the early Modern period for ridding the air of impurities, as it was believed that 'foul' air carried disease. Similarly in the 16th century, as Duffy (1992, 109–10) points out, in the presence of God the air would have been 'cleansed' with herbs to purify the surroundings for worship. The evidence for the use of purifiers in churches and monastic houses in this context can clearly be seen in wood cuts and paintings of the period. Indeed Sir Christopher Trychay records in the *Morebath* accounts (Duffy 2003, 69) that incense and purifiers were paid for and used in the parish church in common with all Catholic forms of worship to this day. The preferred method was to swing a brass purifier on a chain containing hot coals and frankincense around the church or chapel to cleanse the air before the congregation settled for Mass. Hibbert (1987, 186–93) also intimates that lay clerics employed in domestic chapels did this by leaving small dishes of frankincense to smoulder at the altar.

Both the Museum of London and the Victoria and Albert Museum (as previously discussed) have impressive collections of church furniture and objects used for worship. Among them are a number of purifiers made mainly from brass. They tend to be round in shape, with the bowl raised slightly on a foot, with notches, usually of a religious kind (small and large crosses), cut into the side rim like fretwork for the incense to escape. Some are spherical with lids that hang by a chain from a high point, or can be held by the priest. The Victoria and Albert Museum in particular (Temporary Exhibition; *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, July 2006) had one piece similar to that of the barber surgeon's brazier from the Mary Rose, both in size and style, made of brass and labelled a 'warmer'. It dates from c. 1450 and was reputed to have been employed in the kitchen of a gentle household to infuse herbs for medicine, and was used with hot coals and incense. Although found in the kitchen, this warmer obviously had a variety of uses, demonstrated by the residues of fuel, incense, medicine and foodstuffs that it contained (Ajmar-Wollheim and Dennis, 2006, 334–5). This is thought-provoking in regard to the brazier from the Mary Rose collection.

In October 2007, the National Museum of Prague (*Jewish Silver Exhibition*) displayed similar bowls that also bear comparison with the Mary Rose's artefacts. They are collectively referred to as 'Etrog' bowls and although considered to be a Jewish custom, are used to hold sacred food for worship. They are made of silver and brass and heavily decorated. But again, many were simpler for use in domestic contexts. Many of the bowls were excavated from the Catholic 'old quarter' of Prague, with one very simple piece being found in the foundations of the Bethlehem Chapel dating from c. 1600. Some of the bowls had feet attached to their bases and others were either oval or round in shape, with fine worked handles attached to the side. Many handles were beaten flat, and decorated like the Mary Rose's 'bleeding bowl' (above). In Jewish celebrations within the home, such bowls are primarily reserved for sacred wafers or bread which is blessed before the meal and are used as a reminder of the Passover. This is

interesting considering the uses that may have been intended for the little bleeding bowl.

Similarly, the Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception situated in the centre of Toreviejka, in Spain (visited December, 2007) has similar 'Etrog' bowls made from silver placed on the high altar alongside the chalice used for the mass. Some of these bowls had flatter handles with the initials of the church stamped onto one side of the handle, exactly like the Mary Rose's example. Bowls of this nature can also still be found in parts of Britain, especially in the Scottish highlands made from wood and referred to as a 'porringers'. They were originally used in Gaelic clans as a food container instead of a plate (Wood 2007) and in pagan cultures they were often used for offerings of sacred food in worship.

At first glance, comparisons between mid-16th-century Catholicism and Jewish and pagan traditions may seem like a huge leap of faith. However it must be remembered that many rituals and customs in the Catholic Church, including its most ancient rites, derive from these traditions. As Taylor (2003, 27) reminds us, the 'stoup' in Catholic churches where parishioners cross themselves with holy water on entering the building derives from the Jewish custom of ritual washing of the hands, face, and sometimes the feet. This is a symbolic act of 'spiritual cleansing' before entering the house of God. In the same fashion, medieval chantries, introduced into England during the 13th century, were also derived from various elements of doctrinal theology where institutions come to 'intercede' for the departed soul and ease their progression through Purgatory. Chantries were still being founded in churches and cathedrals until the late 1540s, long after the Mary Rose had sunk, Chichester Cathedral being the prime example (Cindy Wood, *pers. comm.*). Thus doctrinal theology and ritual are fluid rather than static; they change with time and according to the needs of the society in question.

The purpose of the above comparisons, drawn from museums across Europe, is simply to suggest that many items stored in the barber surgeon's cabin may have had non-medical uses,

including consecration for religious purposes. Thus far, claims have been made simply about possible multiple uses of items found in the cabin. But what if the barber surgeon himself was licensed to fulfil multiple roles?

WHO MIGHT HAVE SERVED AS THE CHAPLAIN ON BOARD THE MARY ROSE?

The barber surgeon's quarters contained numerous artefacts kept both inside his medicine chest and loosely within the cabin itself (Allen and Gardiner 2005, 190–201). It contained obvious medical paraphernalia such as syringes, a pewter pestle and mortar, scalpels and pots of herbal medicine. However as suggested above, other artefacts do not seem to fit the medical criteria, nor the domestic category they were placed in. If the objects discussed so far were in fact of a religious nature, what were they doing in the barber surgeon's cabin on board a man of war? Perhaps we need to delve deeper into the range of roles that might be performed by such a figure.

Until 1588 all vessels carried a licensed barber surgeon to administer first aid, tend to the sick and the dying and – as the name suggests – carry out barber's tasks on the men on board (Royal College of Surgeons 2007). The office was licensed through the Church, and each member had to hold a licence to practice their craft. The role was derived from monastic traditions dating from the 12th century, since monks were forbidden to draw blood. Thus, monastic houses employed lay men to undertake the task of barber, shaving and cutting the hair of the monks. The office evolved into a medical position, allowing barbers to administer treatment to the monks, particularly when bleeding patients became a common medical procedure (14th-century medical thought advocated relieving the body of 'bad' blood and evil spirits: Royal College of Surgeons 2007).

Barber surgeons were very much respected, especially by Henry VIII who demonstrated his favour by founding the 'Guild of the Barber Surgeons' which had become two separate guilds

by the late 1540s. Barber surgeons by this time were just one branch of the medical profession; at the top were the physicians and surgeons who were university graduates with up to 14 years training, then came the barber surgeons who had completed a nine-year apprenticeship with a master surgeon. Finally, the apothecaries were the licensed 'chemists' of the time. Henry VIII is recorded as recommending men to particular posts and issuing licences from the crown in such cases (Lambeth Surgeons Register 1500–1800, 2007). Indeed he had paintings commissioned of the Surgeons Guild to celebrate their achievements, including one executed by Holbein (a copy hangs in the Mary Rose Museum).

Interestingly in July 1547, Bishop Stephen Gardiner placed a new incumbent to the parish of Portchester in Hampshire, who appears on the Lambeth Surgeons list of the same year under the patronage of the King (Ecclesiastical Database, www.theclergydatabase.org.uk and Lambeth Surgeons Register 1500–1800). Although this is two years after the sinking of the Mary Rose, the appointment may suggest that Henry had personally appointed the barber surgeon to the vessel for the campaign of 1545. Furthermore in 1513 (Naval Accounts 1513, Mary Rose Trust 2007), there had been 32 Naval Surgeons, one of whom, Robert Sympson, with his assistant Henry Yonge, had served on board the Mary Rose and had indeed been appointed by Henry VIII in that year. It seems highly unlikely that these men served for long periods of time, as their appointments would have been for the duration of the campaign and the Mary Rose was only ever at sea during her 35 years service for a few months at a time.

Unfortunately, there are no records detailing who the barber surgeon was in 1545. However some initials appear on items found in his cabin. They appear to be a 'W' and 'E', although the 'E' could be another letter styled in a specific way such as an 'A'. They are engraved into the handles of the 'bleeding bowl' (like the Jewish 'Etrog' bowls) and the lid of a pewter tankard together with some of the medical tools found. However, the barber surgeon's name was not entered in any surviving records and

no obituary was given in the months after the sinking that would identify him, as had been the case with Sir George Carew, the Mary Rose's Vice Admiral (Banting 2007, Ch. 1). The Mary Rose Museum does have a silk cap found near a skeleton in the barber surgeon's cabin which resembles those in the Holbein painting, and which suggests strongly that the barber surgeon was on board when the ship sank.

It is noteworthy that, according to entries in the Ecclesiastical Database (2007), two incumbents placed at Portchester in Hampshire during the 1540s, both before and after the sinking of the Mary Rose, had initials of a 'W' or an 'E' respectively, although sadly not indicating either a first name or surname using both those letters. This warrants further investigation, but it can be suggested that the barber surgeon was the person responsible for officiating religious services on board the Mary Rose, and that the artefacts found in his cabin can substantiate the argument. The bleeding bowl and the brazier may have had several uses including religious ones, and the bottles of oils found could have been used not only for care of the sick, but also for blessing the dead. This would obviously have been a high priority in warfare, such as in the case of July 1545 while engaging the French, in order to bury the dead with respect and remain in keeping with the Catholic doctrinal theology at the time.

THE EVIDENCE OF NAVAL RECORDS AND SHIPS' LOGS

Numerous naval records and ships' logs are held at the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich. The museum holds records not only for the English fleet but also material on the French and Spanish navies of the early modern period onwards. These documentary records complement what we may deduce from archaeological evidence. Log books usually provide details of the ship and its crew, names, rank, pay, discipline and daily duties. Most important for this article, the logs include details that suggest that religious worship was valued highly on board ship. From a sample of

50 logs, nearly all itemised religious observance as ranked fifth of the 100 point rules of ship board life (Lavery 1998).

Naval records from 1631–1815 documented that worship was to take place on a Sunday at 10am, after breaking the fast at 8am and inspection (Lavery 1998). The crew would be called to worship by the ship's bell and if they lacked a commissioned chaplain onboard, it would be conducted by the schoolmaster or the midshipman. They also stated that if these men were of, 'insufficient character then the captain would preside'. The purser on board HMS Gibraltar in 1731 (Ships Log, Maritime Museum, 2007) documented that; 'Swearing, Blaspheming and taking God's name in vain' would require the irons, and a forfeit of two days pay. Each division on board ship was required by the vessel's particular rules of discipline, to administer prayers and devotions on the Sabbath whilst at sea.

The majority of the records list the times of the service, the appropriate dress code of the crew, their cleanliness, and the prayers and the hymns to be used. They also noted the times when the ship's bell would be tolled to call the men to service and to change the watch. It is noteworthy here that the Mary Rose had a single bell (Allen and Gardiner 2005, 285) very similar to those described in the logs, which was placed at the centre of the main deck thus aiding its acoustics. Indeed these accounts were used in the creation of the Armada scenes for the much acclaimed *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (Kapur 2007), in which the Spanish are seen receiving mass before engaging in battle, having been called to prayer by the ships bell situated on the main deck.

Surgeons' accounts for the ships' logs are itemised in the same fashion, with the rank of the officer and in most cases, the name of the chaplain who appeared to be under his jurisdiction. They also list the patients, their illness, and the outcome of their treatment. More importantly they list the details of the chaplain or first lieutenant who prepared the dead, together with details of who issued the last rights before the surgeon closed the hammock for burial at sea (The dead were sewn into their personal sleeping hammocks to serve as a

shroud; however, no evidence has been found on the Mary Rose of hammocks or any other sleeping equipment, The Royal Navy, Portsmouth Dockyard, 2007) It is also striking to observe the degree of co-operation between the surgeon and the other officers who performed these duties in the absence of a ship's chaplain, albeit under strict codes of conduct.

The earlier Spanish naval records dating from 1588 detail the medical staff and the priests on board ship along with their daily and expected duties (DRO SP12/215/67). The records imply that the responsibilities of the two men were entwined; if the priest was absent then the medical officer would assume his duties, and *vice versa*. Each appeared to be trained to the same level and had junior ranks under their guidance. Juan Martinez, the chaplain of the San Pedro Mayor, earned 10 escudos per month and was listed as one of seven clergy in April 1588 (DRO SP12/215/67/1); he was employed at the Armada Hospital and had 5 men training under him. It was thus possible for the duties of a chaplain to be undertaken by a variety of people, including barber surgeons. Clearly also, the provision for worship on board ship was taken seriously enough for a range of people to act as chaplain should that become necessary.

CONCLUSION

This paper has aimed to provoke thought rather than to supply answers. It has set out to investigate what historians and archaeologists might deduce about religious artefacts excavated from the Mary Rose, a process which has exposed many problems at various levels. Archaeologists, historians and museum curators alike, faced as they are by a large number of surviving artefacts, are attempting to place pieces in a very large jigsaw. Few of the artefacts are self-explanatory, and many pose real problems of interpretation – both on recovery and when later presented as objects in exhibitions. In particular, few people have stopped to think much about possible religious artefacts on what was essentially a naval man of war. This problem

may have at its root our increasingly secular – but also multi-faith – society. This said, there are few documentary sources surviving for the Mary Rose, and the bulk of the artefacts recovered relate to shipping and warfare. In attempting to ask wider questions about society, we are thus forced to extrapolate from limited material, make comparisons with artefacts held in other museums, and ponder carefully what the work of historians working on 16th-century religion might imply for worship on board ship. One should also bear in mind that evidence of Catholicism is by its very nature more visible in the archaeological record than that of Protestantism. That is, pamphlets and books are far less likely to survive than are rosaries and 'talismans' (Dr Simon Roffey, *pers. comm.*). In short, museum curators cannot be blamed for finding their task difficult as they wade through tens of thousands of surviving artefacts.

Ironically, the finds on board the Mary Rose probably add to the confusion of even those visitors who have a smattering of knowledge of this period, and who associate Henry VIII with the Protestant Reformation. But the Church of England did not fully materialise until the 1560s, and historians now agree that the king himself was never anything but a Catholic. At the end of his reign in 1547, two years after the Mary Rose was lost, religious observance was still swinging back and forth. Indeed, Henry's own inventory, like that of his queens and daughter, reveal that they owned many devotional images and jewels (Foister 2003, 335). Thus this paper has contributed to current academic foci, particularly the continuance of Catholic customs and practices during the mid-16th century, a topic addressed in detail for parishes on land by Duffy and others. It has shown that the Mary Rose can be considered as a classic 'floating parish', its crew still observing Catholic piety – exactly what scholars would now expect of a ship that sank in 1545.

One line of research that has proved fruitful is the analysis of the barber surgeon's work and the nature of his equipment, and it has been argued here that we should consider his work in both a medical and a spiritual light. There is documentary evidence that the barber

surgeon – in the absence of a chaplain – may have officiated at religious ceremonies in and around 1588 and beyond. This suggests that the practice may have originated earlier, particularly as barbers were licensed to serve in monastic foundations since the 12th century.

Susan Foister has warned that 'it is easy to underestimate today the extent of the use of ... devotional material, and its significance in ... early 16th-century English life' (Foister 2003, 336). Accordingly, what this paper has hopefully achieved is to provoke thought about what the Mary Rose reveals about religious practices at sea in the mid 16th century, and to demonstrate that, despite difficulties of interpretation, this is a legitimate theme for museum curators to investigate. Those who manned the ship have been shown to have been observing at least personal forms of Catholic piety. This should be of no surprise, given the survival of large numbers of personal artefacts associated with Catholic worship. Yet more research is required before a complete account of religious practices on board this, or other ships of this period, may be offered. More also needs to be done before museum curators can feel that they have adequately presented their findings on this matter to the public. This paper itself represents one way of assisting those responsible for future exhibitions at the new Mary Rose Museum, planned for 2011, by raising a number of matters for

consideration. Future exhibitions may now raise more questions than ever as we anticipate discussion of the role of the barber surgeon, together with the assembly of artefacts under a 'religious' banner, that have hitherto been consigned to obscurity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article began as a dissertation for a BA Honours degree in History at the University of Chichester; a copy is available at the University Library. I am grateful to Dr Amanda Richardson, one of my tutors, for suggesting that the findings of the research should be published. I also thank Dr Andrew Foster for his supervision of my original project, and his enthusiasm for seeing the results published, and Professor Keith Jenkins for his general guidance and support. I am grateful to Andrew Elkerton, Peter Crossman and Simon Ware at the Mary Rose Trust for allowing me close access to artefacts recovered from the ship. I must also extend my thanks to Cindy Wood of the University of Winchester for her information on medieval chantries, and the staff of the Victoria and Albert Museum, The Museum of London, The National Maritime Museum Library, and the archivists at the record offices in London, Exeter, Portsmouth and Chichester, not to mention many helpful librarians.

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 Bronze bleeding bowl 80A1625
 Bronze Brazier 80A1626
 Maltese cross 81A1347
 Pewter jug with stamped initials 81A0651
 Glass bottle 80A1565
 Pair of carved trestle table ends 81A1708/1–3

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