



First showing for Mary Rose's treasures



In a remarkable coup, a Croydon school rather than an accredited museum is the venue where some of the most extraordinary survivals of Tudor life – relics from the wreck of Henry VIII's warship Mary Rose – can be seen by the public for the first time.

The exhibition, which is at Whitgift School until August 7, has 250 objects from the wreck about 80% of which have never been seen public before, but which will be part of the new Mary Rose museum being planned for Portsmouth Harbour.

As well as the reconstructions of the faces of the ship's bosun and a gunner, there is the full skeleton of the ship's dog, a mongrel that appears to have spent its entire life on board and was probably mostly engaged in keeping down the rat population.

The Mary Rose sank suddenly in 1545 as the French fleet was attacking the English in the Solent, killing all but a few of its complement of over 400. The ship, named after Henry's favourite sister, remained on the ocean floor until marine archaeologists raised it in 1982, and they have been bringing remarkably preserved treasures to the surface ever since.

The exhibition, at the new £10m conference centre of Whitgift School which stands on land once owned by Henry VIII, has an array of objects which portray every aspect of shipboard life in the early Tudor navy.

There are rare yew bows and their arrows –

contrary to popular belief, English yew was not the best favoured because it was too difficult to bend, and European wood was the most sought after. There are guns and different types of shot, including the rare and fearsome canister shot, a box packed with pebbles which would scatter its deadly cargo on impact. There is a basket-hilt sword, daggers and knives.

There are fresh-minted gold coins and silver groats, as well as worthless jettons,

used as counters.

Clothes were found in excellent condition, including shoes which could be worn today, a jerkin, woollen hose and a leather mitten. A comb still has nits trapped in its tines.

The officers put their own arms on the pewter dining ware they used, and although below decks the wooden bowls belonged to the king, they also had the marks of their seaman users. There is a great wooden tankard, and tankard lids were also marked by their users.

Medical equipment includes a large syringe, and bottles still have the medicines used on board.

Music was clearly important in the king's navy. And there is a drum, a unique fiddle with its bow, a shawm - complete with its reed and the only surviving example of its type - and a tabor pipe, a kind of flute played whilst banging a drum.

And there are early navigational instruments, including a compass, dividers, a chart stick and sounding weights used with lines to measure water depth.

There are also items of rigging and tools, and the complete side of a sailor's wooden trunk.

Surprisingly, only six years after the Reformation, there are personal rosary beads, as well as other items of jewellery.

Whitgift School's headmaster, Dr Christopher Barnett, persuaded the trustees of the Mary Rose to allow him to be the first to show many of the items as part of the celebrations marking the 500th anniversary of the accession of Henry VIII, and also of the commissioning of the Mary Rose.

"It is the most fantastic story, and these finds are unmatched for their quality and what they can tell us about the navy in the 1540s" he said.

Hidden Treasures from the Mary Rose is at Whitgift School, Nottingham Road, Haling Park, Croydon CR2 6YT, from April 7 to August 7, www.maryrosehidden-treasures.org.