

The *Mary Rose*: What's here, what isn't here, and why were they there?**Jeremy Montagu**

What's here is easy: two fiddles, one bow, three tabor pipes, one tabor, one still shawm, and half a dozen or so calls. To these we'll come back.

What isn't here can only be speculation, and of course what survives after four hundred years underwater is a matter of luck, but there are several instruments one might have expected to find that there's no trace of, for instance a trumpet or two, a lute, maybe side drums, and to these, too, we'll return.

As for why what's here was there, we can only guess, but that's half the fun of work like this.

But for what's here, let's take the easiest first, the calls. These show surprisingly little difference from the modern bosun's call, examples of which you can buy in the various shops here. The only differences are that the *Mary Rose* calls are all silver, and that the gun, the tube that leads to the buoy or ball, is straighter than the modern British ones on sale here, more like an American one today. These calls were used for two purposes: to signal instructions to the crew, just as they are today, and as badges of rank. And incidentally, they are always called calls and never pipes – the signals, the tunes if you like, that one blows on them, those are the pipes. What were found in the *Mary Rose* are two big ones, much the size of a modern call, which we might assume were for normal use, and three small ones (two and a bit, to be more exact), which would work but which are perhaps more likely to have been badges. But even though they were short, one of them only 4 cm long, the buoys are almost the normal diameter, so that they would produce much the normal sound. The length of the gun doesn't affect the pitch – it's only a tube to carry the air to the buoy. What controls the pitch is the volume or air-capacity of the buoy. The reason that I say these might have been badges is that with something only 4 cm long, how do you hold it? Anyway, we know what the calls were, we know why they were there, just as they still are on modern ships, and we know what they were for, again as on modern ships. The most interesting thing about them is how little the calls have changed in so many years. A modern bosun would be perfectly happy using one of these calls, and *Mary Rose*'s bosun would be just as happy with a modern one.

With the rest we start asking more questions.

All save two of the instruments were found in the orlop, described as the storage area.

The two exceptions were on the main deck and these two were the highest quality of all, very much upper-deck quality. One of them is a tabor pipe and the other is the still shawm.

The pipe and tabor was a one-man band, the main dance band of the Middle Ages, and it's one that survived in this country into the late 19th century, and one that is still widely used in parts of southern Europe, especially in France and Spain. The pipe was held in one hand and the drum or tabor was played with the other. This works because the pipe has only three holes, one for the thumb and two for the fingers. The four lowest notes are not used, but by starting an octave higher, one can play tunes by opening the holes in turn and blowing harder for the next group of notes. Modern tabor pipes from southern Europe may be shorter than the *Mary Rose* pipes but they work in the same way.

The pipe that was found on the main deck has the most famous maker's mark that we know of in this period. It looks like a pair of exclamation marks side by side, or the track left by a rabbit in snow or mud, so it's often called the rabbit's foot mark. Nobody is sure whose the mark is, but it is thought to be Italian or English, perhaps from a family of makers which worked in both countries, and perhaps an Italian family who settled here and who worked for Henry VIII's court. There are instruments with this mark in many museums. There are recorders in this country in the Bate Collection in Oxford, in the Edinburgh Collection of Historical Musical Instruments, in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, and there are recorders, cornetts, and crumhorns in places like Vienna, Verona, and so on. So this we can say without doubt is an upper-class or upper-deck instrument.

The other is the still shawm or *douçaine*. It is called still, as meaning quiet. The normal shawm was a loud and raucous instrument, because it has a conical bore, one that gets wider. The still shawm has a cylindrical bore, the same diameter all the way down, which makes it much quieter, and also lower in pitch.

This instrument is by far the most important of all the *Mary Rose* instruments to instrument historians. All these instruments are rare, but this one is unique. We had many written references from the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries to *douçaines* and to still shawms, and one tantalising description from the 1480s, sufficiently vague that no one was quite sure what it added up to, but no surviving instrument. At last this instrument appeared from the sea bed, and an American, Herbert Myers, who read the first published description of it, said that he thought it might be a *douçaine*. Then Charles Foster, who made the copy that's on display here, showed us his first reproduction, which he was able to make,

with a bit of guesswork, just from those same details that Herbert Myers had seen, that it did exactly what Tinctoris had said it did in the 1480s, and now it is recognised as the answer to all our questions of what was a still shawm. What's more, we now know that this *Mary Rose* shawm is an improvement over Tinctoris's instrument. Dr Foster has proved, with a more recent copy, which he made after he was able to examine the instrument here and measure it properly, that because it has a little-finger hole for the upper hand as well as the normal number of holes and the keys for the lower hand, it has a wider range than Tinctoris's, which was limited with a gap in its compass. If any of you are clarinetists, Tinctoris's instrument behaved like a clarinet would if it didn't have the lowest keys on the foot; whoever the genius was who invented this one, had added the equivalent of those keys to fill the gap. It's beautifully made, with carefully made keywork and fontanelles or sleeves to protect the keys, and it is clearly a top-quality as well as a top-class instrument. But what was it doing here? Still more, what was a **bass** still shawm doing here? It's not the sort of instrument that was ever used by itself. These instruments were normally played in consorts, or ensembles, usually of different sizes of the same instrument, like a recorder group or a string quartet. But this was found alone. It is at the same pitch as the tabor pipe, so perhaps it was used with that and with one of the fiddles. We shall never know for sure and this is one of our more tantalising questions.

Two more pipes and one tabor were found in the orlop. One of the pipes again has a maker's name, E. Legros, a name, presumably French, for which we have no other record, and it too is at the same pitch as the two upper-deck instruments. The other pipe was badly damaged and although much the same size as the Legros, it seems to have been more than a tone lower in pitch and it was not as well made. It was well looked after, though, for it had split at one time, and two silver bands had been fixed round it to repair it. So even though these two tabor pipes were found in the orlop, the facts that one had a maker's name, usually only found on the better instruments, and that the other had been repaired with silver, rather than a lapping of string, shows that even if they were on the lower deck, they were not lower-class instruments but must have been simply put down there for storage and safe-keeping, thanks to which we have them today.

The tabor was a small drum, although it's difficult to be sure of its dimensions because it's not complete. We think we've got two edges, top and bottom, and if so it was about ten inches high, between 25 and 27 cm, but we've not got both side edges so the diameter is a

guess; probably about a foot, 30 cm. Whether it was painted all over we can't be sure, though some traces of what looks like paint survive. Certainly it was roped, which is how one tightens it up to make the skins tight enough to play, and all tabors had a snare, a strand across the struck head to make a buzz. It was made of oak and it had its own calf-skin leather case, some of which survives because it was tanned. The drum heads didn't survive because vellum, which is animal skin that hasn't been tanned, dissolves in sea water over the years.

The Legros pipe had its own case, a wooden tube covered with leather, which is one reason why it survived so well, and inside that pipe was a stick which we are almost sure was a tabor beater; Dr Foster kindly made a copy of it for me. It is much lighter than the tabor beaters one sees in pictures, which look more like miniature clubs, but it works well, and it allows one to play a basic rhythm and also to decorate it with bouncing strokes such as one uses today on the side drum. Whether this beater belongs to the one tabor we have, we don't know; we presume that there must have been two other tabors, since it is probable that each pipe had its own tabor. The tabor we have was found closer to the less good of the two orlop pipes, not to the one with the beater. Part of another drum case was found, but no more tabors.

The fiddles were both found in the orlop, one of them with parts of a leather-covered case. They are a bit old-fashioned for their time. The violin was already coming into use in England by this date, and the viol had been around for several decades. Both these, violin and viol, were made out of separate pieces of wood, an arched top plate or belly, a back plate, also arched, and the two joined together by thin curved pieces of wood, glued to each, to form the ribs. The fiddles however, like the one from Plock in Poland, which is of similar date, and which it was found down a well, had the back and sides carved out from one solid piece of wood and a flat or flattish belly glued over the top. On the Polish one, the neck and the peg-plate are the same piece of wood as the back, but on the *Mary Rose* fiddles there must have been a separate neck because we only have the bodies – the necks have come unglued and have vanished. Both the fiddles were quite well made, the inside carefully smoothed. Even though they were old-fashioned, they weren't rough home-made jobs.

One of them certainly had a fingerboard. Mary Anne Alburger, who has done the research on them, just as Charlie Foster did on the wind instruments, found a thin slip of wood which exactly matches a pale patch on the belly of one of the fiddles, and we are sure that this was a fingerboard. If we are right and it was, the neck must have been quite short, hardly as long as

the width of a hand. We can tell this by subtracting the length of the pale mark from the length of the wooden slip, for the fingerboard must run over the whole of the neck. We've not found any trace of any bridges or tuning pegs, though one of the fiddles has marks on the belly which could be those left by the feet of a bridge. Each has a projection at the bottom of the body on which a tailpiece could be hooked.

The real puzzle is the fiddle bow. Although bows were already being used, the one that we have, and which was recently recognised in the stores as a bow, is very rough and crude. Not a curved or bent piece of wood, but simply cut out from a piece of plank with one end thicker than the other to make a head. If this belonged to either fiddle, it was much cruder than they were.

2007 was the 25th Anniversary of the raising of the ship, and I was asked to go down and talk about the instruments at the celebratory conference. While I was there I was shown a very small photograph of a stick and asked if this might be another bow. There was no way of telling from the photo, so next morning we went into the store and fished it out.

Undoubtedly it is a bow. This time it is a straight stick with what seems to be an integral horn-shape frog, though because there is twine around the stick immediately above and below the frog, and a hollow beneath it, it does look to me as though it must be a separate piece of wood attached to the stick. The top of the frog is grooved with a channel to carry the hair, and at the back of the frog there is a hole drilled through it, right through the stick, with what looks like the remains of a peg in the hole to retain the hair.


The point end of the stick is broken off so there is no way to tell how long it was nor how the hair was attached at that end. Nor can we be sure that the stick was always straight, for 450 plus years under the sea doesn't do any bit of wood much good. I suspect that it after it had broken it was tossed into the bow and was replaced for immediate use by the crude one described above.

I obtained a good drawing of the bow with my thanks to Andrew Elkerton. The top picture shows the back of the stick, with the remains of the retaining plug in the hole.

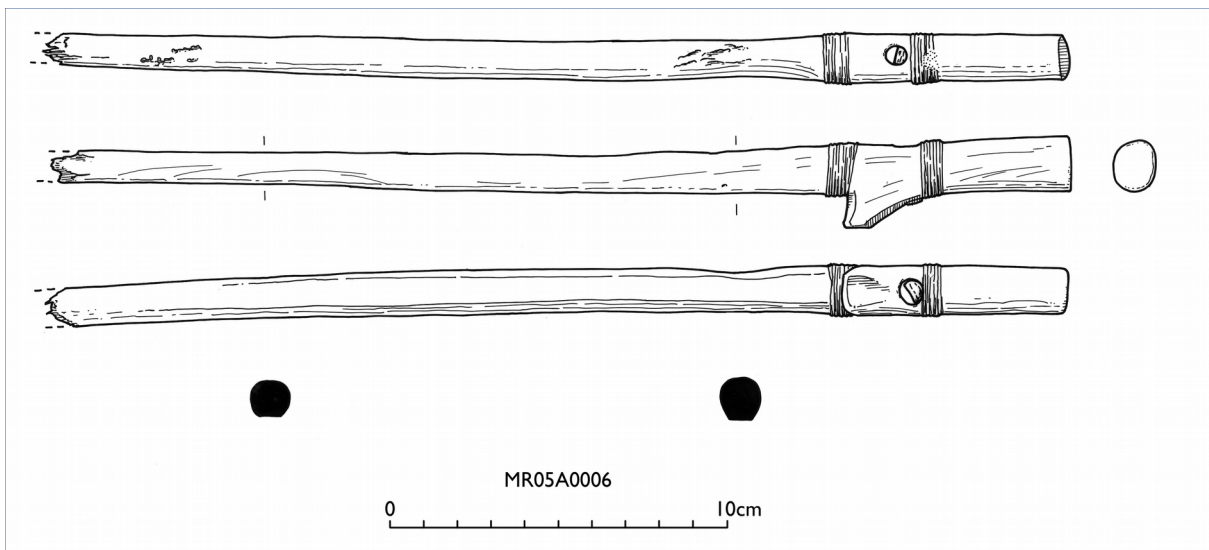
The middle picture is, obviously, the profile. As I said before, it is said to be one piece of wood and if so, maybe the cord lashing is simply to prevent any risk of the frog splitting off the stick. However, the bow is still in conservation and when that is complete, maybe we will know more.

The bottom picture shows the stick with the frog facing us, and again the hole with its

plug. What it doesn't show is the curved groove on the face and back of the frog, which is clearly a channel for the hair and which is what made me say, the moment I saw it, 'yes, it is a bow'.

The top surface of the channel looks like this: , but I can't find any symbol on this machine that would show the vertical sides!

Drawing courtesy of and copyright The Mary Rose Trust, 2008.



There were instruments that weren't there or haven't been found. Weren't there any folk instruments, the equivalents of our mouthorgans, concertinas, and so on? If these were all upper-class instruments, officers' instruments perhaps, didn't the crew, the ordinary sailors, have any? For that matter, didn't the soldiers, the archers and the gunners, have any instruments? One or more of the tabor pipes could have been theirs – armies march in step, and pipe and tabor could have provided the rhythm for that as easily as for dancing. The normal marching instruments, though, were fife and side drum, and those we don't have. There was a fragment of one side drum stick, but it looked more modern than Tudor times. It's difficult to be sure and it is rather heavier than a modern military stick, though not quite so large as a pair of eighteenth-century sticks in my collection, so it might be from the *Mary Rose*. In fact I got worried about it while preparing this talk – I had dismissed it as modern but I'm going to have another look at it this afternoon to see if I want to change my mind. We're still working on all these instruments! It was only while working on the broadcast that

some of you may have heard recently that Mary Anne and one of her colleagues found the bow among the unidentified bits of wood in the store.

Certainly one or more of the calls could have been a gunner's, for they used them as well as bosun's, because the call is one of the few instruments whose sound can pierce through the noise of a cannonade.

What about trumpets, though, the army's main signal instrument and one that was also often used on ship-board? This is something that we could have expected to find. If there had been any on the *Mary Rose* they would probably have been on the quarter deck, though, and might have managed to swim ashore, or they could have been found by one of the earlier salvage attempts. Or they could still be on the sea-bed, or maybe there never were any on board.

It would be surprising if none of the officers had a lute on board, for this was the favourite instrument of the period, just as today one could not go on board a ship of that size without seeing two or three guitars lying around. Maybe none of the *Mary Rose* crew were lutenists; maybe there's one or more still down there, maybe lutes were so fragile and made of so many pieces of such thin wood, all glued together, that they just came apart and broke up. The same applies even more to the cittern, also a favourite instrument, which was rather tougher than a lute and a bit less likely to disintegrate.

However, while we may have some idea what the instruments that were there were used for, we can't do anything useful about those that weren't.

So what were the ones that we have used for and why were they there? We can only guess, of course. The still shawm was certainly for some sort of chamber music, Radio 3 if you like. The tabor pipes were certainly for dance music, though that can be Radio 3 as easily as 1 or 2 – the officers danced to elegant music, pavans and galliards, while the men may have danced to folk tunes, but for sure both danced, and as we have seen all three pipes were respectable instruments. Dancing has always been popular on board ship. What about the fiddles? They were probably dance music instruments, too. The tradition of the fiddler sitting on the capstan while the crew trudged round to raise the anchor is well established in tales of the sea-farer of many periods, and there are many other jobs where the crew must work in unison, hauling ropes of any sort, to hoist sails and to trim them, and so on, and in all this type of work, music provides the rhythm to keep people working together. This, as well as entertainment, could be the explanation for the tabor pipes, the tabor, and the fiddles. So why

were they in storage in the hold? Had they been struck down there as soon as the anchor had been raised and the sails set? Or were these the posh ones, kept for special occasions, and more ordinary ones were used at sea and didn't survive? We don't know.

My final niggle remains the douçaine. Mary Anne and Charles have recorded it with tabor pipe and fiddle, and there are some contemporary Dutch illustrations of such an ensemble, but I'm not wholly convinced. I think there must have been some other instruments, maybe other sizes of still shawm, maybe recorders, maybe viols. It's one of the fascinations of archaeology, whether on land or sea, that almost everything we find raises as many questions as it answers.

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To take

American bosun's call

Eivissa tabor pipe

Bombarde

still shawm

reed

water pot

tabor

tabor beater

normal tabor beater

disintegrated violin

Plock fiddle

rebec bow