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The Mary Rose

She was 34 years old, and she did not sink on her maiden voyage. The king was watching.

The Mary Rose was built in 1510–11, at the start of Henry VIII's reign, and was one of his favourite ships for 34 years. The earliest reference is a letter of 29 January 1510, ordering "two new ships": the Mary Rose and the Peter Pomegranate, built at Portsmouth. Her maiden voyage as a warship was 17 April 1512.

A name that is not proved

It is often claimed that she was named after Henry's sister, Mary Tudor. The Mary Rose Trust says "no evidence supports this." The fashion was to name ships for saints, and the pairing of Mary with Peter fits that fashion. The badges — the rose for the king, the pomegranate for Katherine of Aragon — celebrated the royal couple.

19 July 1545

In July 1545 a French fleet of over 200 ships entered the Solent. The Trust notes that this was significantly larger than the later Spanish Armada, which totalled 130 ships. Henry was dining on his flagship when the French were sighted, and left hurriedly for shore. He watched from Southsea Castle.

Towards evening the Mary Rose foundered. The only confirmed eyewitness, a Flemish sailor, said she had fired her starboard guns and was turning when a gust caught her sails, pushing open gunports under the water. The Imperial Ambassador, writing on 24 July, said about 500 men were drowned, save about 25 or 30.

Salvage was expected as early as 3 August 1545. It did not succeed then. The Anthony Roll, presented to Henry in 1546, still includes the Mary Rose, "which had sunk the previous year." The ship was raised on 11 October 1982.

A short quiz

1. Did the Mary Rose sink on her maiden voyage?
2. From where did Henry watch her go down?
3. When was she finally raised?

Answers. 1. No — she was 34. 2. Southsea Castle. 3. 11 October 1982.

Sources, checked 17 November 2026: Mary Rose Trust pages, "The life of the Mary Rose," "Why did the Mary Rose sink?" and the official timeline. This typographic sheet has no photographs. tudor.ages.im is independent of the Mary Rose Trust.

ReallyByte — Fun. Educational. Useless.