

Cross-curricular – History

- 1 Look at the picture and the title of the article.
What do you think you will learn?

- What happened to the Mary Celeste
- When it happened
- What is mysterious about the story

- 2 Read the text and check your answers.



THE MYSTERY OF THE *Mary Celeste*

One of the best-known historical mysteries is the strange story of a ship called the Mary Celeste. It was over a century ago that this ship was found floating in the Atlantic Ocean without her crew. The ship herself did not appear to be damaged in any way, but the fate of the sailors and passengers has never been known.

The Mary Celeste started life in Canada in the 1860s as a ship called Amazon. After an accident, she was repaired and given a new name. In November 1872, she left for Europe with a cargo of alcohol. There were seven seamen on board as well as the ship's captain, Benjamin Briggs, Briggs' wife Sarah and their little daughter Sophia Matilda.

Nobody knows what happened between that day in November and December 4, when another ship discovered the Mary Celeste floating towards Gibraltar. The captain's log was found, undamaged, and the last thing he had written in it was dated November 24. Nothing in the log suggested that anything awful had happened, but Captain Briggs, his family and the whole crew had disappeared.

At first, it was thought that there had been a pirate attack. However, this is not likely to be true, because the pirates would have taken the ship's cargo of alcohol, which remained untouched. Another mystery was the fact that the single lifeboat had not been used. Wouldn't Briggs have put his wife and daughter into a lifeboat if they had been in danger?

In a famous short story based on this event, the writer Arthur Conan Doyle changed the name of the ship to the Marie Celeste. He called the story 'J. Habakuk Jephson's Statement' and added many fictional details. He made it more colourful by describing half-eaten breakfasts on the table and tea still warm in the cups.

Fact was mixed with fiction and the legend of the ghost ship was born. People have even suggested that creatures from outer space must have visited the ship. We do not know, and perhaps we never will.

WORD BOOSTER

Match the words and definitions.

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|------------|--|
| 1 cargo | a written record of what happens on a ship |
| 2 fate | b small boat on a ship that is used in emergencies |
| 3 lifeboat | c someone who steals things from ships at sea |
| 4 log | d things sent by ship, plane, train or truck |
| 5 pirate | e the things that happen to someone in their life |

- 3 Choose the correct alternative.

- We know / do not know for sure what happened to the crew of the Mary Celeste.
- The writer tells / does not tell us what cargo the ship was carrying.
- We definitely know / do not know that the captain's log was found.
- We know / do not know for sure that people had been hurt on the ship.
- We definitely know that the ship's cargo was / wasn't stolen.
- The writer tells / does not tell us what happened to the Mary Celeste.

- 4 Explain the following names in your own words. What or who were they?

- Amazon, Mary Celeste and Marie Celeste
- Benjamin Briggs, Sarah and Sophia Matilda
- Arthur Conan Doyle and J. Habakuk Jephson

- 5 Answer the questions.

What do you think could have happened to the crew of the Mary Celeste?

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