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## Poole Logboat



### Poole Logboat, 295BC

One of the first objects that visitors see when they walk into Poole Museum is a large section of oak trunk, carved into the shape of a boat. The Poole logboat is not a conventionally beautiful object, but it almost invariably provokes strong reactions in visitors, not least because of its size - at almost 10 metres long, it is the largest logboat ever found in southern Britain.

Poole Harbour has always shaped Poole's development and identity, a large, mainly shallow harbour populated by five small islands. It was close to one of these islands one day in 1964 that a group of men dredging the harbour pulled up a large portion of a logboat from the water. Unsure of what to do with it at first, they brought it to Poole Museum. It was soon identified as an object of considerable archaeological significance.

Yet this was only half of the boat. Four weeks later, divers from the local sub aqua club went back to the find spot to see if they could find the rest of the boat. Miraculously, they did, pulling up the bow of the boat, which had been separated from the rest by a long, diagonal split.

Now the whole boat had been found, apart from the transom board, and was being looked after by Poole Museum Service. Yet it would be another forty years until the logboat would be ready to go on display. After many years of attempting to conserve it without success, conservators from York Archaeological Trust came up with the idea of preserving it in sugar. This involves soaking waterlogged wood in a sugar solution until it has completely impregnated the wood, and then drying this out in very controlled conditions. This was the first large waterlogged wooden object to be preserved in this way. Conservators and volunteers spent days removing thousands of sugar crystals from the surface, which had formed over the boat's surface as the boat was dried out.

Radiocarbon dating has revealed the boat to be Iron Age, dated to around 295 BC. This date is unusual - very few prehistoric logboats have survived. Damian Goodburn, ancient woodwork specialist, has commented: "It is easy for prehistory to be reduced to the study of flintwork, pottery, postholes and burials until spectacular finds such as the Poole boat are seen."

Whilst the use of logboats in Britain appears to have died out in the medieval period, this type of boat is still being made in places as diverse as Africa, North America and the Pacific Islands. Use of these boats stretches back thousands of years into the past, right up to the

islands. Use of these boats stretches back thousands of years into the past, right up to the present day. Yet while the idea of making a boat in this way spread across the world, it is unlikely that the boat itself has ever left the shallow waters of Poole Harbour, as the design is not suitable for sailing deeper waters.

Find us 

Poole Museum Service  
4 High St, Poole, Dorset, BH15 1BW

Email us 

[museums@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:museums@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)

Call us 

01202 128 888



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