

History

Great Harry sets sail on a voyage of rediscovery

Simon Tait

This splendid vessel, as all students of the defeat of the Great Armada in 1588 know, was the flagship of Lord Howard of Effingham, from which he commanded the scattering of the Spanish fleet and the saving of Elizabeth's England. It is the print from a woodblock that the British Museum holds; it is clearly labelled *Ark Royal*, Howard's vessel, and has been used to illustrate countless books and articles.

The first *Ark Royal* was a 690-tonne, 38-gun galleon, built for Sir Walter Raleigh as the *Ark Raleigh* in 1587 but acquired by the Crown in part payment of a debt to become the flagship of the Lord High Admiral.

Except that it is not the *Ark Royal*, according to a headmaster and historian, who believes it instead to be Henry VIII's flagship, the *Great Harry*. The clues, he says, are in the flags and in the marine architecture.

"It certainly bears the arms of a Howard, shown very boldly above the waist of the ship," says Dr Christopher Barnett, headmaster of Whitgift School, which stands on land in South Croydon once owned by Henry VIII, "but it is of Thomas Howard, third Duke of Norfolk, Effingham's uncle."

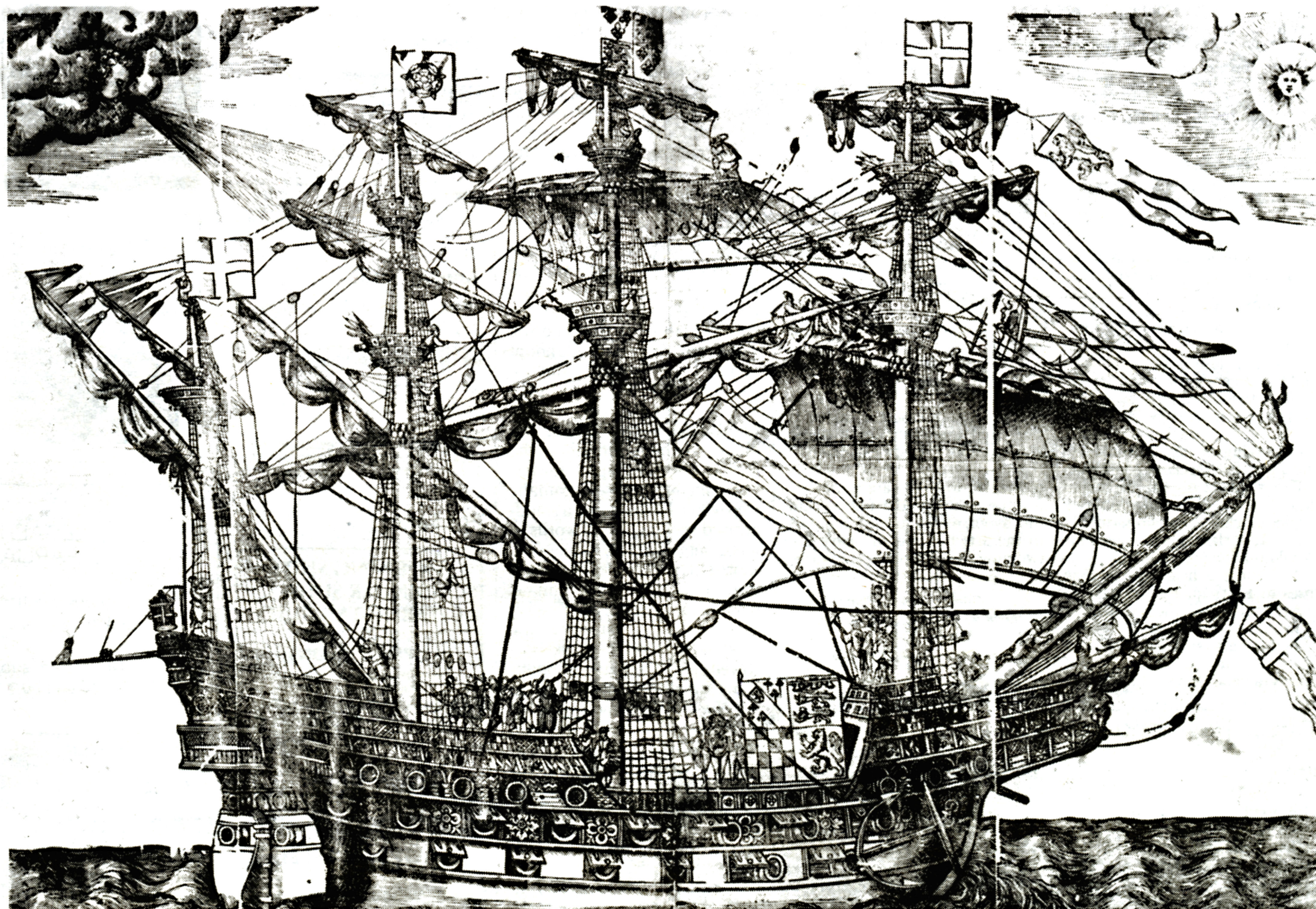
Thomas Howard was Henry VIII's Lord Admiral, but was duke only for a short period in 1524-25 after his accession to the title — more than 60 years before the *Ark Royal* was built. "This ship also flies the Tudor Rose from its mast, common practice in the first half of Henry's reign, but not in Elizabeth's," says Dr Barnett.

The design of the ship and its rigging, too, are wrong for the later part of the 16th century: the ship here is a carrack or "great ship", as the *Great Harry* was, and not a galleon such as *Ark Royal*, and the stern lantern is not the ornate type that Elizabethan warships carried.

"Why this discovery is thrilling," Dr Barnett said, "is that it makes this the oldest and most detailed depiction of the *Great Harry*. Other contemporary depictions, such as by Anthony Roll in 1546, were rather simple sketches, but they bear a striking resemblance to this print."

The British Museum is happy to concede that the attribution of the first *Ark Royal* may be wrong.

"It's rather exciting, and quite plausi-



Not the Ark Royal: this famous British Museum print is clearly labelled Ark Royal, the flagship of Lord Howard of Effingham, from which he commanded the scattering of the Spanish Armada. It is now thought instead to depict a warship 60 years older, the Great Harry, the flagship of Henry VIII's navy

ble," said Sheila O'Connell, curator of British prints at the museum. "The print was probably made in the early 17th century, but it was from a woodcut that was much older, because you can tell that it has already been damaged. It's perfectly possible that it was made much earlier in the 16th century."

Dr Barnett's discovery was made during research for an exhibition of finds from the wreck of the *Mary Rose*, sister ship of the *Great Harry*, which

opens at Whitgift School today. As well as featuring the discovery, the Whitgift exhibition displays key finds from the *Mary Rose*, which sank in July 1545 at the Battle of the Solent with the loss of all but 35 of her crew of more than 400. Thomas Howard was on board when she went down and was one of the few survivors. She was raised in 1982, and the site has been systematically excavated since then. A permanent museum is being built for it in Portsmouth Harbour.

Because of the school's association with Henry VIII and the exhibition standard of its new £10 million conference centre, Dr Barnett was able to persuade the *Mary Rose* Trust to assist him and loan the finds to mount the exhibition marking the 500th anniversary of the King's accession, and also of the commissioning of the *Mary Rose*.

The exhibition's 250 objects, four fifths of which have not been shown before, include clues to life on board in Tudor times, including clothes, weap-

ons, freshly minted gold coins and the crude navigational equipment of the time. One remarkable exhibit is the re-creation of the head of the ship's bosun — identified by his bosun's whistle — from his skull, and one of a gunner and even of the ship's dog.

Hidden Treasures from the Mary Rose is at Whitgift School, Nottingham Road, Haling Park, Croydon CR2 6YT, until August 7, maryrosehiddentreasures.org