TOP TREASURE

Find this at

SHIPWRECK CENTRE
& MARITIME MUSEUM

Education Contact:
museum@maritimearchaeology.org

Questions

- What do you think it is?
- Can you describe it?
- What do you think it is made from?
- How big do you think it is?
- What do you think it was used for?

FACT FILE

Marmaduke the Merman

What is it?

A 19th Century ‘merman’.

Basic facts

Size: about 20cm long.

What is it made from?

It is probably a taxidermy monkey and fish joined, and with features enhanced with papier-mâché and real reptile claws.

Significance

Mermaids and mermen are a significant part of folklore history. They are some of the most enduring historical hoaxes. Originally made in Asia to trick European tourists and sailors, mermaids were popularised by P.T. Barnum in the 1830s with the exhibition of his ‘Fiji Mermaid’. While he later admitted his mermaid was fake, Barnham brought this style of mermaid to a public audience.

Mermaids were often made by locals in countries like Japan and would be sold to western sailors. In the 19th century there was a strong interest in the macabre and supernatural. When displayed in an 1820s fair, this Merman brought in an audience that paid $2 per adult, or $1 per child.

How old is it?

Probably from the 19th Century, there is some evidence that it was used in a fair in the 1820s.

Other facts

We don’t know exactly where the merman at the Shipwreck Centre came from, but many similar objects originate in Asia. It was rumoured to have been ‘caught’ off the coast of China.

In the 1900s he was known as Ringo the Man-Fish.

There are mermaids in several museums in Britain. They were often sold to sailors who transported them around the world. They vary greatly in size, material, techniques and quality and each is unique.

Why don’t you?

- Research some of the strange real life creatures that can be found in the deepest parts of the ocean. Watch these videos then create a fact file about what you think are the most amazing deep sea creatures: tiny.cc/deep-sea and tiny.cc/dragon-fish.
- Can you create your own fantastical undersea creature? Take parts of real life creatures and use your imagination to join them together in new ways. You could make a collage or draw a picture of your creation.

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