

FACTSHEET: SHIPS AND SAILORS IN TUDOR TIMES

- The ships most often used for long distance voyages in Tudor times were called **caravels**. These were small, light, fast and easy to steer. They weren't often used for trade as they couldn't carry enough cargo. They had a crew of about 30, and most of the men had to sleep on deck - the space below deck was used to store food and supplies.
- The sailors usually had one hot meal a day, but food supplies often ran out. Some fresh food was taken on a voyage, but when it was used up, a sailor's diet mainly consisted of salted fish and meat and ship's biscuits (a hard baked biscuit which could be kept for a long time).
- Rats, maggots and weevils often got to the food before the sailors did.
- Barrels of water and wine were taken on board - the water often went bad and the wine tasted sour.
- Sailors didn't have a chance to wash or change their clothes - it was hard to keep clean on board. The crew were often infested with lice.
- Diseases spread rapidly in the cramped conditions. Some voyages had a doctor as part of the crew, but there was often little to be done to ease the suffering of the sailors.
- One of the most common conditions was **scurvy**. Scurvy is caused by a lack of vitamin C (although this wasn't known by the Tudors). It was a horrible illness causing the sailors gums would bleed and sores would appear on their body. It could result in fever and then death.
- The crew was divided into groups called **watches**. The watches worked in shifts for about 4 hours at a time. The work included: pumping water out of the ship (even the best wooden ships took on some water), changing and repairing the sails, mending holes in the ship and keeping watch for storms, enemies and land.