

Around Dover Museum

Dover Replica Bronze Age Boat on Loan to Prestigious Exhibition in France

Vronni Ward – Dover Museum

We have the great honour of lending Dover's very own replica Bronze Age boat to the National Archaeological Museum at Chateau de Saint-Germain-en-Laye on the outskirts of Paris for their temporary exhibition entitled, *Les Maitres du Feu: L'age du Bronze en France 2300 – 800 J.C.* (*Masters of Fire: The Bronze Age in France 2300 – 800BC*).

The 2012 Reconstruction Project

In 2012, a team of archaeologists and volunteers brought to life a half-size replica of the Dover Bronze Age Boat, one of the oldest seagoing vessels in the world. This endeavour not only shed light on ancient boat-building techniques but also underscored the challenges of reconstructing prehistoric technology. The opportunity to build the half-scale replica

came after six years of consultation and negotiation, culminating in 2011, in an international partnership of cross-channel institutions, proposing a project to study the Bronze Age archaeology of the Transmanche zone.

The interregional European funded project, 'BOAT 1550BC', was an outstanding example of European liaison, involving archaeologists and educationalists in France, Belgium and the UK. The project created a travelling exhibition in the three partner countries, an innovative and ambitious programme of education and outreach, and the construction of the replica.

The replica was designed by Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, a Danish nautical archaeologist



Replica Bronze Age Boat in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

and Richard Darrah, an ancient woodworking specialist and experimental archaeologist from Norfolk. The boat was constructed by a team led by Richard Darrah, project-managed by Peter Clark of Canterbury Archaeological Trust with Paul Bennett MBE FSA former Director of Canterbury Archaeological Trust and the present Chairman of the Dover Bronze Age Boat Trust. He was responsible for boat construction as an onlooker and part-time volunteer.

Challenges and Setbacks

The construction faced immediate challenges as at its maiden launch in Dover Harbour, the vessel began to take on water and had to be quickly retrieved. The leakage was attributed to the modern materials and tight construction time which left insufficient time for thorough water testing.

Refinements and Successes

Undeterred, the team revisited the construction, this time adhering strictly to Bronze Age techniques. They replaced modern materials with authentic ones – using moss mixed with animal fat for caulking and willow withies for stitching. The refined replica demonstrated stability and manoeuvrability, participating in events like the Great River Race on the Thames and various maritime festivals across Europe.

Legacy and Educational Impact

The replica stands as a testament to the value of experimental archaeology. It not only provided practical insights into ancient shipbuilding and navigation but also engaged the public in Britain's rich maritime heritage. The project highlighted the complexities of reconstructing ancient technologies and the importance of meticulous adherence to historical methods for successful outcomes.

Sadly, Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, after whom the boat has been named, did not live to see the boat completed. Richard Darrah saw the boat tested on the Swale and launched in Granville Dock. Richard steered the boat for the first time into Dover Harbour. Richard passed away in 2017 and Peter Clark in 2021, after crewing the boat on many of her voyages.

Recent Renovations

Paul Bennett and Terry Buchan along with other volunteers have worked tirelessly to make the replica boat ship-shape for her journey to France, so she looks her best for visitors to the French National Museum. The replica boat starts her journey across the Channel on a DFDS ferry on Monday 26th May for display from 13th June until 9th March, 2026. We wish her 'Bon Voyage' and a safe journey.

Museum News

Our new 2025/26 temporary exhibition opening in June at the museum is 'Museum in Miniature: An exploration of miniature versions of things from life that people have produced and enjoyed'. The exhibition includes models and miniatures from our collections ranging from architectural models to children's toys. We open: Monday to Saturday 9.30am to 5.00pm. Open Sundays in the summer (April to September) 10.00am to 3.00pm. Admission is FREE. Tel: 01304 201066 Visit www.dover.gov.uk/museum

After its £10.5m renovation, the Maison Dieu is now open seven days a week Monday to Friday 9.30am to 3.30pm and at the weekends 10am to 4pm, so visit free of charge and see the stunning Connaught and Stone Halls. The Roman Painted House is free to visit and open on Saturdays 10am to 4pm and more frequently during school holidays.