



TUDOR MYSTERY CHEST



This is an activity designed to build your pupils' knowledge about the Tudors and test their detective skills, giving them practise in looking at and working from evidence.

Explain to the class that the mystery chest has been found at Hurst Castle. Their job is to use their detective skills to work out:

- Who owned the chest?
- When that person was alive?
- What job that person did?

Ask your pupils to unpack the chest and try to identify the objects one by one. Then put everything together and invite pupils to use the evidence to see how much they can say about the person who owned the chest. Remember, every suggestion must be backed up by evidence.

For example:

'I think the owner can write *because there is a quill in the box*'
'The owner's job makes him thirsty *because he carries a leather bottle*'.

Here are a few questions to help the discussion:

- Is the owner a man or a woman?
- Is the owner of the chest rich or poor?
- Can he/she read and write?
- Are there any clues as to how the owner was dressed?
- Was he/she religious?
- Did he/she live in a clean and comfortable place?

So who did the chest belong to?

The chest contains some of the possessions of a Master Gunner at Hurst Castle. He would have been the man in charge of the guns and gun crews, and the stores to keep them supplied with powder and shot. He would be a man of moderate wealth and probably able to read and write.

Tudor Mystery Objects

Buckle: Made of bronze, this is probably from a belt.

Candles: Made from beeswax these were expensive and used carefully. They were made by hanging a length of string over a pole suspended above a vat of liquid wax. The wax stuck to the string making the candles in pairs.

Coin: Elizabeth I, this means the chest cannot have been left before her reign.

Dice: Gambling and games with dice were popular in Tudor times. Unsuccessful attempts were made to ban dice because they encouraged gambling. They were not allowed in the Tudor navy.

Feather: Ostrich feathers were expensive. They were imported from Africa (Australia hadn't been discovered yet).

Horn beaker: Cow's horn was used for cups as it would not break if dropped.

Ink pot: Ink was made from oak galls (a small growth on oak trees) and gum arabic (the sap from a type of Acacia tree).

Leather costrel: For water or weak beer.

Linstock: This held a piece of rope soaked in cordite which acted as a slow-burning fuse. The gunner could light the gunpowder without getting too close to the cannon.

Pomander: Filled with sweet-smelling spices, the pomander protected its owner from the foul smells common in the Tudor period.

Quill: Goose feathers needed to be trimmed and sharpened with a penknife before they could be used to write with.

Rosary: Although the Reformation in Henry VIII's reign had made England a Protestant country, the old customs were still carried out by many people. The beads were used to count a series of prayers.

Rush-light holder: A rush dipped in animal fat was held in the 'jaws' of the rush-light holder. It could also hold a candle for special occasions but rush-lights were much cheaper.

Shot: Iron shot for a small cannon.

Shot gauge: For measuring the size of the shot before loading it into the cannon. If it was too big and got stuck, the cannon might explode.

Trencher: Wooden plates were common in the Tudor period. This one has a small hole for salt (salt was expensive). The square trencher has given us the expression 'a square meal'.

Tudor cap: Velvet was made from silk. It was an expensive material and ordinary people would not have worn it.

Wooden comb: One side for hair (and nits) and the other for the beard.