



# Hull Museums Collections

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## The Ferriby Boats - Europe's Oldest Seacraft



### Europe's Oldest Sea Craft

Europe's oldest sea craft plank built Bronze Age boats were found near Britain's estuaries and the seaways. These find spots show they were trading and exchanging goods and could also sail out to sea. Amber and metal were traded from the North Sea and the channel where prestige goods went ideas followed. Boat builders were technicians, sailors and they were pioneers.

### What did they look like?

The Ferriby Boats were plank built vessels and would have originally been nearly 16m in length with a maximum beam of about 2.5m. They had curved lines, box scarfing of planks to form a keel strake and the planks were fitted together, a sophisticated boat building tradition. Their rectangular planks were stitched together with thick withy (strong flexible willow stems now used in thatching and gardening) twine, the intervals were caulked (process used to seal the seams in wooden boats in order to make them watertight) with moss. Cleated stays and ribs imparted rigidity to the assembled craft.

### The Nuclear Age

In 1951 Radiocarbon dating was developed, it's a scientific method used for samples of which were once alive for example, bone, charcoal, wood and leather. All these types contain carbon and proportion of which is radio active  $^{14}\text{C}$ . The radio carbon dies and decays at a constant rate which can then be estimated and date the sample. Some of the Ferriby boats could not be used for C14 dating but there were other pieces which could be sampled, some wood, twine and the date in 1958 yielded a date in the Later Bronze Age 750 +/- 150 BC. Further C14 dating with the refinements of the method of C14 now produced the most recent dates to Ferriby boat one 1880BC - 1680BC and Ferriby boat two 1940BC-1720BC. Ferriby boat three dated to 2030-1780BC. The Ferriby boats were publicly acclaimed as Europe's earliest sea craft in March 2001.

### The Use of the Ferriby Boats

The Ferriby Boats were a means by which ideas, such as decorative design of pottery, and goods such as Baltic amber and metals, could arrive on the Humber shore. They may more often have distributed sought after commodities such as Whitby Jet, a frequent component of high-status burial assemblages in Northern Britain. The skill, social organisation, and courage of the ancient peoples of North-Western Europe are underlined. The Bronze Age sailors of North Ferriby were equipped to fetch as well as carry. These boats are considered to being part of a boat yard on the foreshore of the Humber, building as well as sailing was involved.