

Morris Bells Recovered from Davy Jones Locker or Crotals from the Deep



Mike Heaney wrote a short note to *'The Morris Dancer'* in 1990 establishing the correct name for morris bells as **crotals**, following earlier observations in 1981 and 1984 (1-3). The bells are also variously known as "coarse bells", "horse bells", "enclosed bells", "jingle bells" and "cluster bells" but for the purist, it's a **crotal**.

This essential ingredient of the morris was an imported item, and Mike refers to Dietz's *The Port and Trade of Early Elizabethan London* (4) to note that they were being unloaded in the port of London in 1568. Wilan's *A Tudor Book of Rates* records that in 1582 the bells were worth 5 shillings a gross, and John Forrest has remarked on the constancy of this value for more than 75 years (5).

The attached photograph illustrates the goods under discussion. I took it in the excellent Maritime Museum in Dubrovnik. The exhibit shows morris bells contained in wooden casks ca. 25 x 12 cm. They were recovered from the cargo of an unknown merchant ship that sank ca. 1690 in the Drevine region off the coast of the Koločep Islands. The cargo was contained in 47 wooden crates and was mostly made in Venice and Northern Europe. They are remarkably well preserved for having spent over 300 years in Davy Jones's Locker.

It is always nice to see history realised and particularly so in this case, since the Museum is housed in the very solid Fort of St. John, thus ensuring that our morris bells also survived the 2000 bombs, shells and missiles rained on Dubrovnik by Serbian forces between 1991 and 1992. I wonder if there is any connection between CROtal and CROatia?

Sem Seaborne
Icknield Way Morris Men
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1. *The Morris Dancer* Vol. 2, No. 11, 1990, 194
2. *Ibid.* Vol.1, No. 10, 1981, 16
3. *Ibid.* Vol. 1, No. 19, 1984, 18
4. *London Record Society* 1972, pp. 45,49,51,68,82
5. *The History of Morris Dancing 1458 - 1750*, John Forrest, James Clark & Co., Ltd. Cambridge 1999