

## The Champagne Schooner

**In the beginning of July 2010 a group of divers from Åland and Sweden found a previously unknown shipwreck at a depth of approximately 50 meters in the southern part of Åland's outer archipelago.**

The ship's carvel-built hull was revealed to be almost intact except for the stern, where the transom had fallen away. The cargo hold seemed to be empty. Just behind the main-mast on the port side a brick oven with cooking pot was found. Behind this lay navigational instruments, plates and a kettle. In the stern, starboard of the rudder stock, the divers saw a number of bottles, which looked like they were made for sparkling wine. The divers took one bottle from the wreck for further investigation.

In order to protect the wreck the Government of Åland quickly introduced diving restrictions in the vicinity. At the end of July, under the supervision of the Åland Board of Antiquities, further dives were made on the wreck and a number of artifacts were salvaged.

Today we know that the ship is a carvel-built, two-masted schooner with a circa 21.5 meter long and 6.5 meter broad hull. The technical details and artifacts found onboard made it possible to date the ship to the beginning of the 1800s. Amongst the finds in the wreck were two octants, a ceramic vessel and several plates, manufactured by Rörstrands porcelain factory in Sweden during the period 1780-1830. In the future it might be possible to date the wood in the hull using dendrochronology.



The champagne in the salvaged bottle was of a sensationally good quality. Sommelier Ella Grüssner Cromwell-Morgan was lyrical after having tasted it: "very ripe fruit, tones of golden raisins and a clear aroma of tobacco. And, despite the fact that it was so amazingly old, there was freshness to the wine. It wasn't debilitated in any way; rather it had a clear acidity which reinforced the sweetness. Finally, a very clear taste of having been stored in oak casks."

Determining the age of the champagne and its origin is no simple undertaking. It has been suggested that the producer might have been the champagne house Maison Juglar, which had already ceased production by the end of the 1820s.

No archive references to the ship's origin or sinking have yet been found. The ship was most likely wrecked when she had come in to the old sea-lane leading from the Åland Sea to the island of Björkö. The final destination for the cargo of champagne is unknown – it can have been destined for some trading house or even the imperial court at St Petersburg.

The salvage operation has represented a major technical challenge, in which it has been important to use the correct technique to raise each bottle from a depth of almost 50 meters without pressure or temperature changes affecting the contents or the seal.

The sunken ship is an ancient monument and the cargo belongs to the Government of Åland. Having gathered as much information as possible it will be up to the Government of Åland to decide what to do with the champagne.

**Source:** Åland Board of Antiquities

**More information and images:** [www.museum.ax/museum/champagneleasen](http://www.museum.ax/museum/champagneleasen).