

Marine archaeologists discover Danish warship destroyed by Nelson's fleet 225 years ago

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More than two centuries after it was blasted apart by Admiral Horatio Nelson's fleet, a Danish warship lost in one of Europe's most brutal naval battles has resurfaced - not in legend, but beneath the murky waters of Copenhagen Harbour. Working in thick sediment and almost zero visibility 15 metres (49 feet) beneath the waves, divers are in a race against time to unearth the 19th-century wreck of the Dannebroke before it becomes a construction site in a new housing district being built off the Danish coast.

Denmark's Viking Ship Museum, which is leading the months-long **underwater excavations**, announced its findings 225 years to the day since the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801.

"It's a big part of the Danish national feeling," said Morten Johansen, the museum's head of maritime archaeology.

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The battle that gave us "turning a blind eye"

In April 1801, Nelson's British fleet attacked Denmark's navy as it formed a defensive blockade outside Copenhagen Harbour. The clash lasted hours and left thousands dead or wounded, becoming one of Nelson's most famous victories. The assault aimed to break Denmark's alliance with northern European powers including Russia, Prussia and Sweden.

In the Battle of Copenhagen, Nelson and the British fleet attacked and defeated Denmark's navy as it formed a protective blockade outside the harbour. Thousands were killed and wounded during the brutal hours-long naval clash, considered one of Nelson's "great battles." The intention was to force Denmark out of an alliance of Northern European powers, including Russia, Prussia and Sweden. At the centre of the fighting was the Danish flagship, the Dannebroke, commanded by Commodore Olfert Fischer. The 48-metre (157-foot) Dannebroke was Nelson's main target. Cannon fire



Archaeologists unearth Danish warship, sunk by British admiral Nelson 225 years ago

tore through its upper deck before incendiary shells sparked a fire aboard.

"(It was) a nightmare to be on board one of these ships," Johansen said. "When a cannonball hits a ship, it's not the cannonball that does the most damage to the crew, it's wooden splinters flying everywhere, very much like grenade debris." The battle also is believed to have inspired the phrase "to turn a blind eye." After deciding to ignore a superior's signal, Nelson, who had lost sight in his right eye, reportedly remarked: "I have only one eye, I have a right to be blind sometimes."

Nelson eventually offered a truce and a ceasefire was later agreed with Denmark's Crown Prince Frederik. The stricken Dannebroke slowly drifted northward and exploded. Records say the sound created a deafening roar across

Copenhagen.

Excavating history in total darkness

Now, fragments of that moment are emerging from the seabed: cannons, uniforms, insignia, shoes, bottles - and even part of a sailor's lower jaw, possibly belonging to one of 19 crew members never accounted for after the battle. But the excavation faces an unusual deadline. The wreck lies within the future site of Lynetteholm, an ambitious artificial island and housing mega-project scheduled for completion by 2070.

Marine archaeologists began surveying the area late last year, targeting a spot thought to match the flagship's final position. Experts say the sizes of the wooden parts found match old drawings. Dendrochronological dating, the

method of using tree rings to establish the age of wood, match the year the ship was built. They also say the darkened dig site is full of cannonballs, a hazard for divers navigating waters darkened by clouds of silt stirred up from the seabed.

"Sometimes you can't see anything, and then you really have to just feel your way, look with your fingers instead of with your eyes," diver and maritime archaeologist Marie Jonsson said. Archaeologists hope their discoveries may help reexamine the event that shaped the Scandinavian country and perhaps uncover personal stories of those who went into battle on that day 225 years ago.

Check out the video above to learn more about the underwater excavations.