

Ebony cross-staff

A cross-staff is an instrument which was commonly used as navigation tool on board Dutch ships from the 16th century onwards. It was used to determine latitude at sea. Cross-staffs consist of a metre-long stick with a scale division, along which a bar, placed at right angles, can be slid back and forth.

Usage

In order to determine the latitude, the shipper uses two points of measurement: a celestial body (the sun or pole star) and the horizon. The stick is held towards the face and the cross bar is slid until the two ends correspond with the two points of measurement. The latitude can then be read on the scale division.

Puzzle piece

Two fragments of a cross-staff were found in the Palmwood Wreck. The parts do not fit together but do, however, most probably originate from the same cross-staff. This is presumed by researchers based on the growth rings and indented numbers. The initials of the maker, H.I, are visible on the stick. Who that was is not (yet) known. The year 1626, which is shown on the stick, is a very important puzzle piece in research into the Palmwood Wreck as it demonstrates that the ship sunk after that year.

