

Local



Texas A&M University employees Jim and Bobbe Baker during the summer from a sunken warship off the coast of England. Staff photo by Dave Einsel

A&M couple retrieves sunken ship artifacts

BY STEPHANIE WILLIAMS
Battalion Reporter

Two Texas A&M University employees spent five weeks this summer working on an excavation of an English warship that sank over 400 years ago.

In 1545, during the reign of Henry VIII, the flagship, Mary Rose, mysteriously sank near Portsmouth as she went to battle the French navy.

Jim Baker, a staff member for the environmental engineering division of the civil engineering department, and his wife, Bobbe, a photographer for the Texas Agricultural Extension Service and Experiment Station, helped archaeologists off the England coast in the warship excavation. She is a graduate student in anthropology.

Margaret Rule, director of the Mary Rose excavation, met the Bakers at an Underwater Archaeology Conference in New Orleans. She asked them to join the archaeology team and participate in the project that has been underway for two years.

With Jim having past experience in computer graphics and his wife having experience as a former freelance photographer, Rule said, the husband and wife team would have a great deal to offer the excavation.

"The computer technology used in the excavation helps map the wreckage," Jim said, "by graphic coordinances which determine where the artifacts of the ship are located."

The decks and internal structures are weak, he said, and need to be mapped out before the divers remove them.

"This is one of the most exciting excavations going on now," Jim

said, "because the ship carried the latest weaponry and had the latest designs for that time."

"Other artifacts discovered in the wreckage," Bobbe said, "were leather pouches, balance scales, wooden pocket sundials and navigational instruments."

She said photographing such rare artifacts often requires using a variety of different films, such as infrared, to bring out the details of eroded print on the inside of a book cover.

Documentation of artifacts and computer graphics were not the only work done by the Bakers.

They spent weekends on assignment for Braniff Airlines, photo-

graphing and writing about their travels in Southern England.

"But it wasn't all work," she said. "We were able to see the Royal Wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana while in England."

The recovery of the Mary Rose is time consuming and an expensive project, Jim said, but most of the work has been financed by the Mary Rose Trust, a fund created and headed by Prince Charles.

Next summer the remains of the Mary Rose will be completely removed from the water and displayed in Portsmouth, Bobbe said. "It was an honor to be a part of it," she said.

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