

# Ghost ship

1. Imagine how surprised the crew of the sailing ship *Dei Gratia* were when they discovered a ship sailing out of control towards Gibraltar. There was no sign of any of its crew. Where were the ten people who had been on board this ghost ship? What happened to them? The answer is a mystery. But there have been lots of strange and exciting stories to explain their fate, including alien abduction and even a giant man-eating squid.
2. The ghost ship was found to be *Mary Celeste*. It was built in 1861 and originally named *Amazon*. But it was not a lucky ship! Its first captain died at sea. Later, *Amazon* collided with another ship in the English Channel. Then, in 1867, it was driven ashore in a storm and wrecked. After being rebuilt by its new American owners and renamed *Mary Celeste*, it was used to cargo between Europe and America.
3. In 1872, under the command of Captain Briggs, the ill-fated *Mary Celeste* left New York for Italy with a cargo of 1701 barrels of alcohol. The captain's wife and their two-year-old daughter, Sophie, were on board. Their seven-year-old son, who was attending school, had stayed in England with his grandmother. There was also a cook and six other crew members.
4. When boarded by the crew of *Dei Gratia*, *Mary Celeste* was a wet mess, with over one metre of water in the hold and water between the decks. Food and drinking water were still on board and barrels of wine were in the hold; although nine of them were later found to be empty. The ship's papers were missing as were some navigation instruments and the lifeboat. It was also noticed there were some broken ropes dragging in the water. They sailed the ship to Gibraltar, where an inquiry was later held.
5. At first they thought pirates had attacked the ship, but all the wine barrels were still there. Mutiny against the captain was a possibility, but the crew couldn't have mutinied while drunk because the alcohol wasn't suitable for drinking. It was possible they entered the lifeboat after a huge waterspout poured so much water over the ship they thought it was sinking. *Dei Gratia's* crew was even accused of murdering them to collect a reward for saving the ship.
6. One more likely explanation was that fumes and steam from leaking wine barrels looked like exploding or had even exploded. The crew may have taken to the lifeboat, then tied it to the ship. The ropes they used could have broken in a storm and the lifeboat could have sunk or just drifted away.

