William Bourne Encyclopedia Article

William Bourne

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William Bourne

fl. 1570s

English mathematician who published the first detailed description of a submarine. In *Inventions or Devices* (1578), Bourne provided a design for an enclosed boat that could be submerged and rowed underwater. Made of a wooden framework encased in waterproofed leather, Bourne's planned submarine was to be lowered by means of hand vices, which would contract the sides and reduce its volume. Although a craft similar to Bourne's design appeared in 1605, it sank due to errors in construction. The first builder of a workable submarine was Cornelius Drebbel (1572-1633) in 1620.