

The Warship Hazardous Project Site Report - October 2008.

Introduction

No extension to the licence for the winter period was sought at the end of the 2007 season. Weather conditions deteriorated in September as in previous years.

There has been considerable shingle movement along the coast from an easterly direction through out the year; this again has made the slipway at Bracklesham unusable for long periods during south-westerly weather patterns. At the end of September through to the beginning of April, when the district council close their safety boat office and tractor launching facility the slipway is inoperable for normal boat launching and recovery, severely restricting easy access to the site even if weather conditions are favourable.

At time of writing this report it seems unlikely that we will be able to visit the site again this year unless there is a long spell of settled weather during November, enabling launching from Itchenor in Chichester harbour, one hour and fifteen minutes boat ride from the site.

Approaches made to the management company of a private slipway in the area, with a view to using their facilities, have not proved as useful as was hoped due to a number of circumstances.

This year again it was decided to use one weekend a month, on the best neap tides to work on the site and run the diver trail, with additional trail days added later in the season if conditions allowed. Therefore eleven site working/diver trail weekends were scheduled for this season. It was decided to use as many weekends as possible through the year, when not diving and team members were available, to carry out work on the artefact display, to continue work on the archive and to monitor the wet-stored artefacts.

In addition a nine day period from the 21st June was set aside for the possible trench excavation hoped for on the site.

Weather conditions early in the year were not good and consisted mainly of strong south westerly winds through March and April, therefore the first dive on site for this year was conducted on the 5th of May in poor visibility, (See "Diver Observations" written by the Licensee).

Some damage i.e. bent datum's were observed in and around the site at this time, believed to be caused by commercial fishing activities in the bay area.

Two visits to site were possible in May, however weather conditions in the area deteriorated in June and continued to be poor through July, all of August and a large part of September making site visits few and far between this year.

Year 2008 Objectives

Continue monitoring variations in seabed levels and timber degradation, using points remaining from those set up in 2002.

Set up new monitoring points to increase monitoring coverage.

Continue surveying positions of dummy "artefacts" for ongoing research into environmental effects on site conditions and formation processes.

Carry out further planning of areas / artefacts exposed due to continued erosion.

Survey and recover artefacts exposed by erosion and under threat of loss or damage.

Continue with conservation of artefacts in wet storage at present.

Continue operation of the diver trail.

Continue developing site exhibit at Earnley Gardens.

Continue web site development.

Submit project design to EH for evaluation excavation during the 2008 season.

Submit a further "Awards for All" application to take forward further community site initiatives.

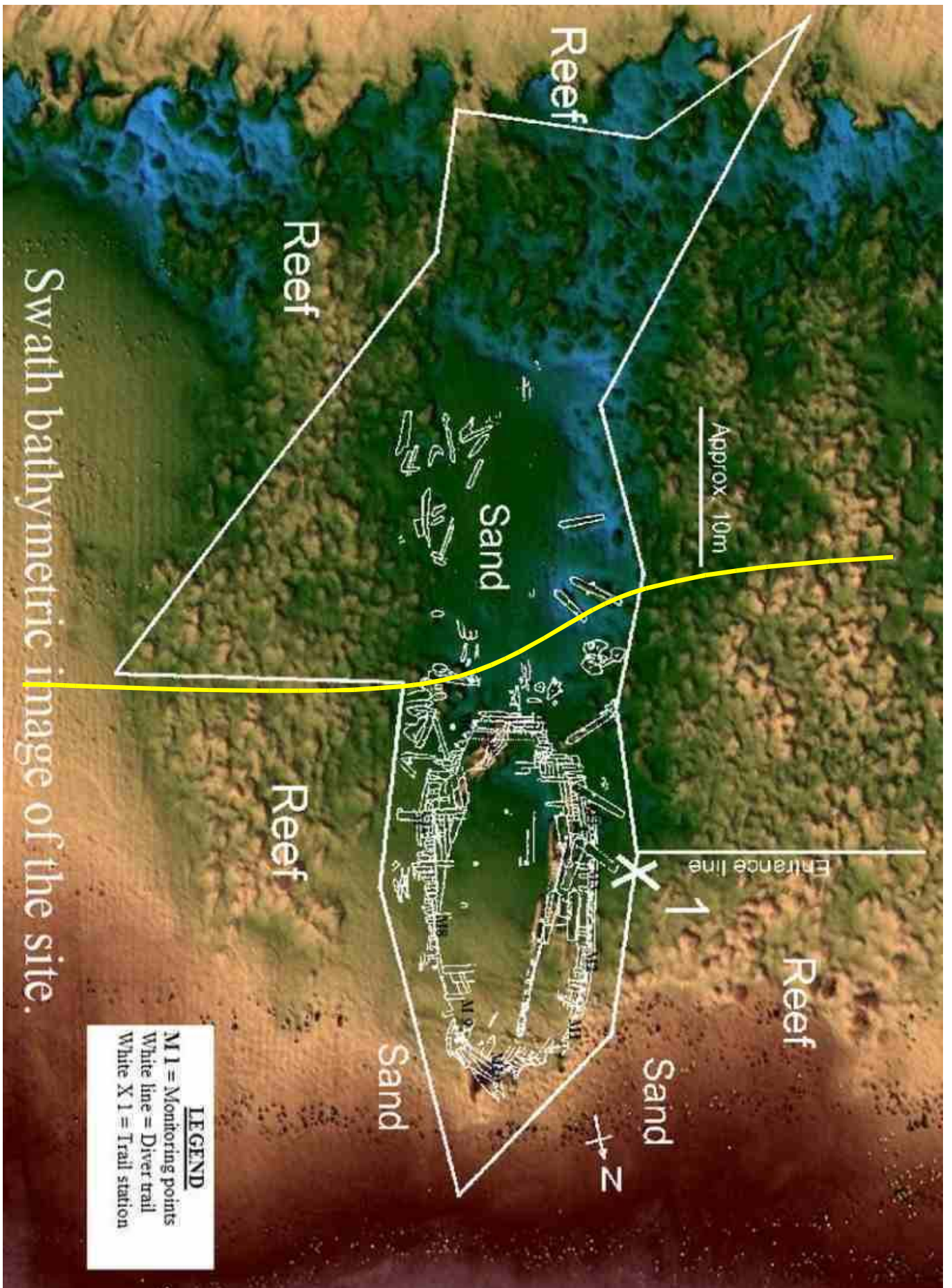


Figure: site plan and diver trail overlain on swath bathymetric survey results.

Field work

Eight days of diving have taken place on site this season, at these times monitoring of seabed levels and timber degradation were carried out, however, due to continued loss of monitoring points through gribble worm activity, this work was limited.

A number of loose artefacts were recovered, diver trail cables were found to be buried under sand overburden for two thirds of the total trail length.

Various damaged datum points were replaced and re-tagged, a number of new datum's were established in preparation for planning to be carried out prior to the trench excavation.

Results

As previously stated, weather conditions have been very poor throughout this year, this has resulted in a number of dives being aborted due to very low visibility on site.

However team members were able to re-establish a number of the datum points lost/damaged through the winter months.

Limited monitoring of seabed levels was carried out; due to insufficient time on site this season it has not been possible to add new monitoring points to those remaining from the originals placed in 2002.

Four artefacts were recovered after positions were recorded.



Figure: copper alloy pin found on site.

Two new datum's were established in the area of the proposed excavation and the area was planned using metre square drawing frames.

Due to massive sea bed movement south and west of the main wreck site, members of the team spent some time searching an area of clay gullies uncovered in the north western extremes of the restricted area. This resulted in the location of the remains of a large doubled sheaved rigging block (see fig 4), some sections of timber, possibly spar, a number of iron concretions and one iron gun. A sample of lead musket and pistol balls and one brass shoe buckle was recovered from this area and placed in wet store for conservation over the winter. Due to the distances

from the main site, these finds were positioned by GPS, drawings and measurements along with photographic recording were carried out on the gun and pulley block.

The majority of the wet stored artefacts from previous seasons have now been processed and packaged.



Figure: animal bone believed to be sheep, found outside main hull structure.

The diver trail was not run this year.

Additional cabinets have been constructed and added to the display at Earnley, enabling a wider range of artefacts to be displayed to the public.

The development of a digitised site database is continuing and will be further added to this winter, along with the updating of "hard copy" site plans.

Improvements to the web site are on going.

The submitted project design for the evaluation excavation was accepted by EH, all preparations were made for the excavation to commence on the 21st June.

This year's application to The Lottery Fund Awards for All scheme was successful.

Observations

5th May 2008.

Wind northerly light; water temperature 12 degrees c, on the ebb tide visibility 0.5m.

As the dive progressed visibility deteriorated, however it was possible to move from the marker buoy, east to the north end of the site. The beak is still undercut as last season although there appears to be additional scouring in the area. West of the beak outside the hull timbers, a large concrete weight approximately 400mm high, placed on the sand to anchor the dredge pipes during the first excavation in the early 90s and subsequently sunk below the sand level, now lies completely uncovered on the clay substrata.

East and north of the hull, appears to have lost, as much as 500mm of sand and general sediment, this appears at its worst approximately halfway between the bow and the cannon ball mound. This area appears to have large sections of hull planking with frames attached freshly uncovered, just east of the protruding hull frames. The area has never been exposed to this depth before.

Various diver trail fixing pegs have also been displaced or loosened, from information point 1 to point 5 on the trail, west, north and east of the hull.

There appears to be some undercutting of the hull on the west side of the hull planking.

Datum peg D8-07 in the centre of the bow section of the hull has been bent over, possibly by a trawl, travelling west to east. No other damage was visible at this time.

All new timbers visible are black in appearance and seem to be highly abraded to a point where some grain seems to stand up on the timber almost like hair. Much of this timber shows evidence of past Torrado worm infestation.

The diver trail cable on both east and west sides of the site disappears below sand on a line between D2 in the east and D34 in the west, the whole of this south end appears to be buried under sand for at least 30metres distance to the south.

There is evidence of a new uncovered fossil bed/cliff in the southeast quadrant.

No small artefacts were observed on the site, however the barrels observed last season inside the hull, are uncovered again by up to 50mm.

It was also observed that the mooring chain for the marker buoy would require replacing this season and the marker buoy needs re-inflating.

Artefacts

Four artefacts loose on site were recovered this season after their positions were recorded, these are currently in wet store awaiting processing.

The new iron gun located in the north west quadrant of the protected area close to deep clay gullies, is of similar size to the small guns located south of the break in the hull, however it is approximately 60metres from them. There are a number of iron concretions in the same area and a large double sheaved block complete with iron hook attached. Further investigation in very poor conditions, revealed a carpet of approximately 100 musket and pistol balls and one brass shoes buckle, suggesting that there may be many more artefacts in and around these gullies.

The processing of artefacts in wet store has continued and many have now been dried, tagged and packaged, only those requiring long term immersion in chemicals remain, along with those recovered this season.

All the dividers/compasses from Hazardous have been made available to a student from Southampton University who is undertaking a research project into navigational instruments, when complete a copy of her work will be added to the site archive.



Figure: large double sheave block complete with iron hook.



Figure: Hazardous Project display, Fort Cumberland National Archaeology Week.

Diver Trail

Due to the vast sediment movement over the winter months, the entire southern end of the site was covered with sand to a depth of one metre in places (**Figure 1** See yellow line on site plan showing extent of sediment coverage from the south). This has made it impossible to run the diver trail this season, therefore a number of bookings had to be cancelled.

Website

Improvements to the website are progressing at <http://hazardousproject.info>

We will continue to add material as time allows.

Research and Fundraising Initiatives

English Heritage – Work to finalise the Environmental Assessment project was completed. Additionally liaison with English Heritage resulted in a successful project proposal to undertake an evaluation excavation on site this season. However this had to be aborted after two days due to extreme weather conditions on site. This work will be re-scheduled for the first suitable tide and weather window next year.

Awards for All – This year's application has enabled the project team to fund additional chemicals for conservation along with professional assistance, a proportion of the funding has been used towards logistical support for the site excavation, funded by EH. The funding is also being used in outreach projects such as the purchase of a projector to assist with lectures to dive clubs and other interested bodies.

Excavation

Summary of June 2008 fieldwork – all tasks leading up to the fieldwork planned for the 21 – 29th of June were completed. All equipment and personnel were mobilised to Wittering. Due to high winds on the 21st and 22nd it was not possible to undertake the initial two days of planned diving which involved a RIB and inflatable. Instead work was undertaken on the artefact collection and setting up the project base and equipment.

Diving on Monday 23rd and Tuesday 24th was undertaken using the hard boat 'Oberon', a RIB and inflatable.

Monday - Due to the stormy conditions over the weekend the visibility on the Monday was very poor, however, the team managed to deploy and install the excavation frame and install datum's around the excavation area.

Tuesday – Calm weather overnight and a suitable wind direction meant that the visibility had improved considerably. Work on site continued with a pre-excavation plan being completed. However, due to further poor weather (including a Met office strong wind warning from the South West which is the worst possible wind direction for the site) being forecast on Wednesday and Thursday a decision was made to postpone the excavation. Although this was disappointing for the team after all the effort and planning that had been undertaken it now means that the excavation can be rescheduled.

The only possible options for rescheduled dates for 2008 were in September, however, due to other commitments, this was not possible and excavation will have to be undertaken early in the 2009 season. One of the principle factors affecting the time of excavation is the tidal cycle, so the most appropriate tides will be selected in the 2009 season with a potential 'back up' date selected.

Diving Schedule

Diving operations were carried out on eight separate days. This resulted in 2867 working minutes underwater by nine divers.

Plans for 2009

Continue monitoring variations in seabed levels and timber degradation, using points remaining from those set up in 2002.

Set up new monitoring points to increase monitoring coverage.

Carry out further planning of areas / artefacts exposed due to continued erosion.

Survey and recover artefacts exposed by erosion and under threat of loss or damage.

Continue with conservation of artefacts in wet storage at present.

Continue operation of the diver trail if conditions allow.

Continue developing site exhibit at Earnley Gardens.

Continue web site development.

Carry out evaluation trench excavation and associated post-excavation work.

Develop plans for specialist analysis of the object collection and material recovered from excavation.

Search area of gullies for further artefacts if conditions allow.

Continue raising public awareness of Hazardous and the project with presentations etc.