The Warship Hazardous Project Site Report - October 2010

Introduction

Weather conditions deteriorated at the end July this year, as opposed to the end of September as in previous years, however there was a small window of opportunity towards the end of October which allowed a dive over the site before the Council boat launching facility closed for the winter.

The shingle movement along the coast from an easterly direction through out the year continues unabated; this again has made the slipway at Bracklesham unusable for long periods during south-westerly weather patterns. As stated previously, 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, this year however we have had an extension of those facilities to the end of October.

At time of writing this report, it is hoped that we will be able to visit the site during the winter months if we have some settled weather, as one of our team has a hard boat complete with cabin, which is moored at Sparkes marina, Hayling island, close to the entrance to Chichester harbour.

Weather permitting this will make visits to site through the colder months somewhat more bearable.

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 nine 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 3rd July was set aside for the rescheduled trench excavation planned for, but aborted over the last two years on the site.

Weather conditions early in the year were quite good through April, May and June therefore the first dive on site for this year was conducted on the 11th of April in reasonable visibility of two metres plus, (See "Diver Observations" written by Licensee) No damage i.e. bent datum's were observed in and around the site at this time, however a number of pins appear to be missing altogether, there was considerable sand movement into the site noted again on this first dive, it is believed this had taken place over winter, although there were no particularly bad storms in the area.

Sand movement and overburden in the area of the main site, made it impossible to carry out the rescheduled excavation in the time allotted.

Year 2010 Objectives

Continue monitoring variations in seabed levels and timber degradation, using points remaining from those set up in 2002 plus those set up in 2009.

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.

Raise additional funding to complete evaluation excavation and associated post-excavation work. 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, and determine whether newly exposed material is within the protected area.

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



Figure: site plan and diver trail overlain on swath bathymetric survey results. Yellow line = 2008 sand movement from the south to the north. Red line = 2009 sand movement from the south to the north. Blue line = sand movement from the south to the north as at 17th October2010.

Field work

8 days of diving have taken place on site this season, at these times monitoring of seabed levels and timber degradation were carried out where possible, however, due to continued increased sand overburden levels throughout the site generally, this work was limited.

A number of loose artefacts were recovered from the area of gullies uncovered north west of the main site, diver trail cables were found to be completely buried under sand overburden.

Most datum points around the site have been lost or buried by sand overburden; two new baseline points were established near a section of frames and planking north east of the main hull, in preparation for planning.

Results

As previously stated, weather conditions were reasonable for the early part of this year, however August and September were plagued with bad weather and poor vis, this has resulted in a number of dives being aborted due to low visibility on site and/or bad weather.

Re-scheduling of diving dates had limited results, due to team members other commitments.

However it was possible to carry out sweep searches of various areas in the Northwest quadrant of the protected area, both visually and with metal detectors.

Limited monitoring of seabed levels was carried out; due to increased sand levels within the main site area this season it was deemed unnecessary to add new monitoring points to those remaining from the originals placed in 2002, although the area of frames and planking, that was completely uncovered and now being re-covered north east of the main hull, has been planned using one metre square planning frames and is being drawn up for adding to existing site plans. This area will also be used in the future to monitor timber degradation and seabed levels until it re-covers.

Eleven artefacts were recovered from the northwest quadrant after positions were recorded and a number of new timbers have been identified measured and recorded in the same area.



Figure: recovered artefact (from gullies)

The sea bed movement noted over the last two years, south, east and west of the main wreck site, has now increased throughout the whole of the main site, almost completely covering the diver trail. (see fig. 1).

Members of the team continued searching the area of clay gullies uncovered in the north western extremes of the restricted area last year, along with recording various large ships timbers and possible sections of spar. In all eleven artefacts were recovered, however it was seen that the remains of a large doubled sheaved rigging block uncovered in previous years, has degraded further since last year, leaving only a small amount of the timber cheeks and the concreted iron hook.

The seabed movement has increased in this area substantially and in many places the sand has been removed down to the clay fossil beds, more sections of timber, (possibly spar) and iron concretions are being uncovered along with shoe buckles, sections of pewter plate and lead etc. Further evaluation, along with metal detector searches of this area will be required in the coming season to recover artefacts that are covered only by 25 to 50mm of overburden at most, if these are not to be lost for ever.

The majority of the wet stored artefacts from previous seasons have now been processed and packaged; those remaining along with new recoveries will undergo further processing over winter.



Figure: recovered artefact (from gullies)

Additional cabinets are being constructed and added to the display at Earnley, when completed they will enable 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 planned for excavation in the central area of the site had to be re-planned as a survey and search, which was carried out over two of the planned four days, due to issues suddenly discovered at the eleventh hour, regarding the use of un-coded boats and HSE divers, poor visibility also hampered work once again; however it was still possible to carry out forty two dives totalling nearly fifty hours under water over the two days, all carried out from

fully coded hard boats with all dives controlled by two dive marshals, this time was spent undertaking searches of the north west quadrant of the protected area, planning an area of exposed timber still remaining visible on the main site and the taking of high quality video footage in both areas.



Figure: divers waiting to enter the water.

With the acquisition of a hard boat, by one of the team members and side scan sonar equipment purchased at his own expense, it is hoped to carry out some wider area electronic surveys around the site over winter, with a view to searching for anomalies in this wider area around the site, If conditions are not favourable for diving, ground proving will be undertaken next year.

The licensee asked questions at a Parish Council meeting last autumn; reference the poor condition of the public slipway at Bracklesham that hinders launching for the project team boats; this has been followed up by a letter to the District Council. The awaited answers were evasive and un-helpful, other options offered would involve the team in even greater expense than already incurred.

Observations

11th April 2010. Written by lain Grant.

This was the first dive for the season, the first programmed dive in March was cancelled due to excessive rain over a number of weeks, causing much surface water run off into the bay, visibility in the area from Selsey in the east to Chichester harbour in the west was reported as zero.

Surface conditions were good with a light north easterly wind, water temperature was 10 degrees C, underwater visibility was a surprising 2 metres +, although the previous weekend it was reported as ranging from zero at Selsey to half a metre at Poole in Dorset!

A major increase in sand overburden was noted all over the site, particularly over the southern end as far north as a line between the cannon ball mound and the pile of three cannon.

Various measurements were taken for future monitoring and were as follows: Top of the three cannon pile to seabed = 900mm Top of cannonball pile to seabed = 770mm M9 to seabed = 630mm, increase of 120mm since the 13th September 09 M10 to seabed = 680mm, reduction of 10mm since 13th September 09

Further monitoring will be carried out over future visits, however there appears to be widespread increases of overburden in the main area of the site and stretching south, east and west around the outside of the remaining hull.

At this stage the hoped for excavation in July, seems unlikely, very disappointing as this work should have been carried out several years ago, during a long period when artefacts and their context was being regularly moved around the site.

Should we get another sudden change in conditions, it is feared many more artefacts and valuable information will be lost for ever.

The author of this document, at aged sixty two may well not have enough diving years left to complete the project!

At this time the diver trail, appears to be completely covered.

Dive undertaken on 17th October 2010 recorded sand levels as follows: Top of the three cannon pile to seabed = 700mm Top of cannonball pile to seabed = 700mm M9 to seabed = 600mm M10 to seabed = 550mm

Artefacts

Eleven artefacts were recovered this season after their positions were recorded; these are currently in wet store awaiting processing.

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

Diver Trail

Due to the huge sediment movement over the winter and continued through the summer months, the entire site is now covered with sand to a depth of one metre+ in places (See blue line on site plan showing extent of sediment coverage from the south). This has made it impossible to run the diver trail this season.

Website

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

We will continue to add material as time allows.

Research and Fundraising Initiatives

Following the changes to the sand levels on site it was not possible to undertake the evaluation excavation that was to be funded through a grant from English Heritage (with previous preparatory and associated work funded through a Heritage Lottery Awards for All Grant). Instead a revision order to the English Heritage funding was agreed to enable the revised survey work, with additional funding being made available through HWTMA's Interreg IV funded Archaeological Atlas of the Two Seas Project.

As part of the current phase of English Heritage funding a report is being developed outlining the results of the survey work against previous results, in particular the implications of the seabed movements back into the site. Additionally the funding will result in the production of an Updated Project Design for the next phase of work on the Hazardous Archive – Assessment. It is expected that English Heritage will continue to fund the agreed program of work which will involve the following phases: Assessment, Analysis and Publication.

It should be noted that while it appears sand is moving back across the site there is the potential for this to be reversed and the site to again be exposed and under threat. Should dives early in 2011 reveal sand is moving away from the site with artefacts and structure exposed then plans will need to be formulated to enable rescue recording, which is likely to include excavation.

Further potential research is being followed up through contacts with French maritime archaeologists via the Archaeological Atlas of the Two Seas project.

Excavation

As previously stated the excavation could not take place due to increased sand levels across the site, although we believe there is a requirement for a continued excavation licence, to allow for recovery of artefacts in the area of gullies before complete loss occurs.

Diving Schedule

Diving operations were carried out on eight separate days. This resulted in 4705 working minutes underwater by Twenty one divers.

Plans for 2011

Continue monitoring variations in seabed levels and timber degradation, using points remaining from those set up in 2002 plus those set up in 2009/10.

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.

Re-open diver trail if conditions allow.

Continue developing site exhibit at Earnley Gardens.

Continue web site development.

Raise additional funding to continue work on site and artefact conservation.

Continue development plans for specialist analysis of the object collection.

Continue metal detector search in area of gullies for further artefacts as conditions allow.

Carry out further electron surveys of surrounding area of site as conditions allow.

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