

# **The Warship Hazardous Project Site Report**

## **November 2012.**

### **Introduction**

This year the early April start that we had hoped for did not materialise, due to the poor weather conditions which did not improve until late in May, the summer generally has been poor, although the weather has been warm there has been considerable rain, this has caused a lot of fresh water run off into the Bay making visibility under water generally poor. Strong south westerly winds have prevailed as opposed to past years when the summers have seen mainly light winds from the north.

The shingle movement along the coast from an easterly direction through out the year continues unabated, even though both the Environment Agency & Bunn Leisure are carrying out major sea defence work east of the site. This work is programmed to continue well into the coming year, it remains to be seen what effects this work will have on the wreck site & its surroundings. The slipway at Bracklesham remains unusable for long periods during the predominant 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 & tractor powered launching facility, the slipway is inoperable for normal boat launching & recovery, severely restricting easy access to the site even if weather conditions are favourable, the extension of those facilities to the end of October has not been forthcoming again this year.

Launching from Chichester harbour is neither economical nor practical during “out of hours times” adding another two hours & considerable fuel expense to the diving day.

Various avenues have been explored to see if it was possible to put pressure on the District Council to improve this public access to the sea, however it appears that there are no funds available for this work.

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, if it became uncovered this year. Therefore ten site working/diver trail weekends were scheduled for the season with two additional ones in October if there was an extension to council launching facilities. It was decided to use as many weekends as possible through the year, when not diving & team members were available, to carry out work on the artefact display, to continue work on the archive & to further process the wet-stored artefacts towards drying & packaging.

Weather conditions proved to be even worse than last year & no diving was possible until the 27<sup>th</sup> of May when underwater visibility proved to be good & water temperature slightly above average for the time of year (*See “Diver Observations” written by Licensee*) No damage was observed in & around the site at this time; however the considerable sand movement into the site noted last season has continued, (*see fig. 1*) this ingress appears to have continued throughout the winter again as last year. Although there was some increase in storms in the area over the winter/early spring resulting in the loss of the site marker buoy in January, sand levels generally appear to have increased.

Sand movement & overburden in the area of the main site, made it impossible to carry out any “diver trail” visits again this year, as most of the site is covered with sand overburden to similar levels first observed by the author in the early 1980’s.

### **Plans for 2012**

- 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.
- Carry out further planning of areas / artefacts exposed due to continued erosion & sea bed movement.
- 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 & artefact conservation.
- Continue development plans for specialist assessment and analysis of the object collection.
- Continue metal detector search in area of gullies for further artefacts as conditions allow.
- Carry out further electronic surveys of surrounding area of site as conditions allow.
- Continue raising public awareness of Hazardous & the project with presentations etc.



## **Field work**

Due to the generally poor weather conditions, only 4 days of diving have taken place on site this season, at these times visual monitoring of seabed levels within the main wreck area were carried out, this showed increased sand overburden levels throughout the site.

No loose artefacts were recovered from the main site area, however one recovery was made in the gullies north east of the main site, the diver trail cables were found to be completely buried under sand overburden save a short section just north of the beak, this was due to a very localized scour in that area.

Most datum points around the site have been lost or buried by sand overburden;

The site marker buoy was lost from site during a storm in January.



**Figure 2** *Towing the new buoy to site.*

## **Results**

As previously stated, weather conditions were very unstable at the beginning of the diving season & generally poor for the most part this year, with strong south-westerly winds, this has resulted in over 50% of planned dives being aborted. Underwater visibility was reported as being very poor in the bay mainly due to fresh water run off, this was worse close in shore; this resulted in a number of diving dates being cancelled. It was not possible to re-schedule due to team members other commitments & a boat engine breakdown which put our rib out of commission for a month.

The replacement site marker buoy funded by English Heritage, was ordered, sign written & made ready for re-positioning, however weather conditions meant that the first site visit was not until the 27<sup>th</sup> May & at this time we were unable to locate the broken riser chain from the mooring.

It was not possible to revisit the site again until late July, at which time the riser was located & uncovered back to the joining shackle. The buoy was finally re-sited on the 28<sup>th</sup> July (*see fig. 2*).

No monitoring points were measured, due to time restraints, it was noted however that the movement of sand into the main site is continuing, to the point that we now find the entire frame ends on both the east & west sides of the hull buried, leaving the beak & the end of a breast hook only above the sand level, part of the cannon ball mound & the top of the three large cannon are also still visible.

There is continued movement of the sand overburden, to the north of the site down to the clay fossil beds, this area appears to be moving east wards, but showing signs of filling back in to the north west of the site. This condition could be affected in the future by operations eastwards along the coast approximately one mile, by both the Environment Agency & Bunn Leisure.

The work involves building large rock revetments, & replenishing the beach between with thousands of tons of sand & shingle, dredged from beyond the Isle of Wight, also opening up an area of coastal defence to form an inland flood plain.

Future monitoring on & around the wreck site may well show up some major changes to sediment levels.

One artefact was recovered from north east of site (*see fig. 3*), this was found at the end of the diving day, in worsening sea conditions, the artefact was found standing on the clay beds. It was only possible to fix a “position approximate” before recovery of the artefact due to conditions & lack of breathing air.

This position when entered on Site Recorder shows it to be at least 10 metres out side the protected area of the wreck site, in the north east quadrant.



**Figure 3** Glass onion bottle, with parts of oyster shell attached, most likely from past uncovering.

In view of the continued movement of seabed material north of the main site, the amount of shipwreck material, i.e elements of ships rigging & small artefacts located just inside the protected area in that quadrant & now one artefact recovered from outside the area, it may be deemed necessary to increase the protection area in the future.

Although it was not possible to carry out a lot of work underwater, a considerable number of hours were devoted to improving the artefact displays, maintenance work on the display building & signage, also work on wet stored artefacts has been progressed, in some cases to packaging & storage, time was spent fabricating tanks (*see fig. 4*) to enable the treatment in PEG of elements of a gun carriage recovered from site previously & held in wet store, these wood artefacts have now been placed in PEG & will be monitored over time (*see fig. 5*).

The development of a digitised site database is continuing, some of the unproductive diving time has been spent checking & collating information from nearly thirty years worth of hard copy, ready for adding to this database and will be further added to this winter. In particular survey measurements to all recovered artefacts to date have been extracted from the original records in readiness for entry.

Team member Dave Johnston spent a considerable amount of time evaluating the MMO information with a view to ascertaining if we would be required to apply for a licence. A set of specific questions relating to potential activities on site & whether they would require licensing or not was submitted. The response from MMO was that they did not really know specifics & therefore we should apply for a license to cover all potential activities, the on line application was started but the requirement to identify all nature conservation areas in the vicinity proved to be a massive undertaking. Given conditions on site & the (as yet unfulfilled) promise from the MMO to engage with the archaeological diving community it was decided not to proceed at this stage. Additions & improvements to the web site are on going. A poster describing recent project advances was displayed at the 2012 NAS conference.



**Figure 4** Taking measurements for tank fabrication.



**Figure 5** Adding Peg to gun carriage axle tank.

## **Observations**

### **Diver Observations 27<sup>th</sup> May 2012.**

Written by Iain Grant

This was the first dive of the season, due to the very poor weather condition so far this year.

Weather conditions were good with a flat sea, water temperature was 15degrees centigrade & underwater visibility was between 3 & 4 metres.

The project for the day was to relocate the ground chain & riser for the site marker buoy, which broke adrift & was washed ashore early in the year, during a winter storm.

An approximate position was marked with a sinker & marker buoy, two divers carried out a circular search from this position, unsuccessfully.

A diver was then detailed to moor the rib on the mooring strop attached to the pile of three cannon on site, a search was then carried out by divers in a westerly direction, the east end ground chain anchor was located. The chain was followed under the sand using an underwater metal detector to a point where the signal disappeared.

Just short of this position a small excavation was carried out by hand fanning to establish the direction of chain travel & depth of over burden, this was estimated to be 4 to 500mm in depth, it is also believed that this position is past the centre of the ground chain total length, therefore it will be necessary to search the area again on our next visit to locate the riser.

A short dive around the site by the author showed an increase in overburden around the cannon ball mound, yet to be measured, north east of the beak a short length of the diver trail cable was visible, implying local erosion of the overburden in this area a measurement of 520 mm was recorded at M9 although all the frame ends between there & the cannon ball mound were buried. A small amount of erosion around the cannon pile on the west side of the site was noted (not measured at this time) no appreciable change was noted from there to the beak on the east side. The south end of the site appears little changed from last year.

There was no time to visit the area of the gullies at this time, so it is not possible to say if there are any changes there. No loose artefacts were seen in the areas afore mentioned.

### **Addendum**

Comparisons noted between last seasons last dive & this years first recorded dive on site.

*Dive undertaken on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2011 recorded sand levels as follows:*

1. M9 to seabed = 580mm

*Measurement recorded at the same point 27<sup>th</sup> May 2012:*

1. M9 to seabed = 520mm, an increase of some 60 mm of sand overburden.

### **Artefacts**

One artefact only was recovered this season (*see fig.3*), from outside the protected area & at present is in wet store awaiting the start of cleaning, recording & conservation work.

### **Diver Trail**

As last year, due to the continued sediment movement over the winter & continued through the summer months, the entire site is now covered with sand to a depth of over one metre in places (*see fig 1*). This has made it impossible to run the diver trail this season & I suspect for a number of years to come, unless there is a major change over winter.

## **Website**

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

We will continue to add material as time allows.

## **Looking to the Future.**

As mentioned earlier in this document, major works in progress along the coast to the east of the *Hazardous* wreck site, by the Environment Agency & others, could have considerable side effects in the area as a whole & in particular on the wreck site.

Therefore it should be noted that Warship Hazardous is on the *English Heritage At Risk Register South East* (English Heritage 2010), where it is listed as having 'extensive significant problems', with the trend being 'significant decline' (EH 2010: 84). Although the movement of sand over the main wreck site during the past few years has temporarily reduced the risk for some of the seabed archive, it is likely that future movements of sand will re-expose artefacts and structure. Should this occur then a further Recording Phase of work will need to be formulated to enable rescue recording, which is likely to include excavation.

## **Diving Schedule**

Diving operations were carried out on four separate days. This resulted in 777 working minutes underwater by seven divers.

## **Plans for 2013**

- Continue monitoring variations in seabed levels, using points remaining from those set up in 2002 plus those set up in 2009/10 adding further if required.
- Carry out further planning of areas / artefacts exposed due to continued erosion & sea bed movement.
- Survey and recover artefacts exposed by erosion and under threat of loss or damage.
- Continue with conservation of artefacts in wet storage at present & those in chemicals, under guidance from Paul Smith.
- Re-open diver trail if conditions allow (*unlikely*).
- Continue developing site exhibit at Earnley Gardens.
- Continue web site development.
- Raise additional funding to continue work on site & artefact conservation.
- Continue metal detector search in area of gullies for further artefacts as conditions allow.
- Carry out further electronic surveys of surrounding area of site as conditions allow.
- Continue raising public awareness of Hazardous & the project with presentations etc.

## **Licensee**

## **Archaeological Adviser.**