

SUMMARY

This report summarises the work undertaken on the *Coronation* Offshore and *Coronation* Inshore designated wreck sites (located off Penlee Point, Plymouth) during the period 26th October 2010 – 7th November 2011.

Further work is required to establish the extent of the debris trail in order to produce a complete site plan, to understand the level of seabed erosion, and act accordingly.

The license was authorised by the Secretary of State, under the Protection of Wrecks Act (1973). The assistance provided by Alison James, Mark James and Mark Dunkley of the English Heritage Maritime Team is gratefully acknowledged.

The continued support of the current survey team and particularly Peter McBride and Mark Pearce Visitor's Licensee and Visitor Coordinator is also appreciated.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Coronation was a second rate 90 gun, British warship built in 1685 at the Naval Dockyard in Portsmouth. The vessel took part in the Battle of Beachy Head in 1690 and was lost a year later (1691) in a gale off Penlee Point, near Plymouth, Devon. The exact reasons for her loss are still unclear.

In two primary locations, *Coronation* is thought to lie Offshore at Latitude 50° 18.57' North, Longitude 004° 11.98' West and Inshore at Latitude 50° 18.96' North and Longitude 004° 11.57' West. These coordinates are that of the designated positions and have been supplied by the Department of Culture Media and Sport.

On 8th December 2010 a survey licence was granted to the author (for both sites) to continue the work commenced under the previous licence.

2.0 SITE IDENTIFICATION & ASSESSMENT

2.1 Diving Logistics

The *Coronation* Offshore site is located directly in the path of one of the main sailing routes in and out of the Port of Plymouth (located in Plymouth Sound), and lies within waters controlled by the Queens Harbour Master (QHM) / Ministry of Defence (MoD). The net effect is that there are a multitude of small and medium sized pleasure craft and police boats travelling over the site – particularly on weekends – with the attendant risk to divers. Extra vigilance and a suitably trained boat skipper is required on this site.

The Penlee Point area is subject to relatively strong tidal currents particularly on Spring tides. Although the two sites are approximately 800 metres apart, the Offshore site is approximately 684 metres south west of the Inshore site, with the result that the periods of slack water are considerably shorter on the Offshore site.

Due to the primary aim of the *Coronation* wreck Project for 2010-2011 being the installation and opening of the *Coronation* Diver Trail no large scale survey work has been undertaken on either of the designated sites. Although through the visitor scheme we have identified new artefacts and additional items of interest within the designated areas and surrounding undesignated area. The core survey team have

completed a total of 81 survey dives in this reporting period. However there have been 974 licenced visiting divers to the site for non-survey dives (several visitors diving twice or more at the sites).

2.2 Condition of Site

Until recently it was still believed that all that remains of the *Coronation* at the Offshore site is a scattering of guns and two large intact anchors, identified as Anchors A and B on the site plan prepared by Peter Holt in 1997, a broken anchor (Anchor C) and a large quantity of guns scattered across the Inshore site.

Observation of the guns confirms that not all of the guns are stable, and appear to be actively corroding. This has been re-confirmed during this reporting period with several “fins” and “fizzing” of the guns being observed. A BSAC First Class Diver examination team conducted a Project Dive as part of the examination process and recorded accurate data and compiled a comprehensive report on their findings. Annex A has details.

3.0 GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY & FLORA

The seabed in the survey area is composed of undulating natural rock (with some steep pinnacles) with small pockets (gullies) of sand. A variety of seaweeds are attached to the rocks on the site but in the licensee’s opinion this does not obstruct the artefacts from view on the offshore site. The inshore site can be almost unworkable when the summer growth of kelp has become established. This year this was the case as early as the last week in March.

The 2007 & 2009 multibeam survey data show that the Offshore site lies upon a raised area of rocky seabed that is separated from the Inshore site by a deeper ‘channel’ that is in places covered in sand. These sand filled gullies are diminishing and so giving the opportunity for new artefacts becoming exposed and subsequently recorded. Several items including the gun from 2010 now designated Gun 20, a large cylindrical object possibly an additional damaged gun (further exposure is required to positively identify this object) and a lead gun apron found in close proximity to Gun 14 were recorded in this reporting period. Several small items have been photographed by visiting divers but due to the mobile nature of the site on investigation by the survey team the items have been lost to the sea. This is an area of concern as valuable artefacts that are appearing are being lost very soon after exposure. This is not as a result of surface recovery.

3.1 Seabed Erosion

The movement of sand from the site reported in 2007, 2009 and again in 2010 has been visually confirmed this year and the sediment monitoring system at the Offshore site has been monitored at regular intervals to confirm this process of erosion and the mobile status of the seabed at the site. Other areas of concretion have also been exposed on the Offshore site along with several items of later period maritime debris.

4.0 PUBLIC OUTREACH, EDUCATION & DISSEMINATION

The recommendation (Ward, S. 2008, *Coronation Inshore and Offshore Licensee’s Site Report*) to commence a broader outreach programme in the local area has been

developed and this year saw the installation of a permanent “Diver Trail” at the Offshore site. The *Coronation* wreck Project website was developed and went live in September 2010, and has received 7108 hits since opening (as at 27 Oct 11). The sites have also seen a dramatic increase in interest and 974 named divers have been granted licences to visit the sites this year. On several occasions groups of divers in excess of 20 per group have arranged dive weekends specifically to visit the sites and conducted more than one dive at the site during their visit. The Diver Trail booklet at Annex B is used as an underwater guide for the visiting divers.

Mr Mark Pearce Visitors Licensee has again been actively seeking external sponsorship and support for the research at the sites and has secured the use of a Sonar Bell to aid the location of the site by visiting divers. Lowrance, Mount Edgecumbe Estate, Polar Bears dive suits and several local dive charter business’ have provided on-going support and sponsorship to the project. Local media and International diving publications have also published articles on the site and the work being carried out by amateur diving enthusiasts. A total 11 separate articles have been published within this reporting period.

English Heritage funded the installation of Public information signs about the *Coronation* and these were installed by the *Coronation* Wreck Project team at Penlee Point, Fort Bovisand and the National Marine Aquarium. These have been received very well and have resulted in numerous contacts from the public for further information on the site. These contacts have been from both divers and non-divers.

The author of this report also gave a presentation at the NAS annual conference entitled “*Coronation* 1685 the opening of a closed site”. The presentation appeared to be well received.

4.1 Illegal Diving / Interference - Education Campaign

There was one reported incident of illegal diving on the sites this year, however on investigation the report proved false. Diving is still continuing in the intermediate undesignated area between the two sites. This area has confirmed artefacts within and is an area of concern. As previously stated in other reports it may be prudent to reclassify the area into one all-encompassing rectangular / trapezium shaped site especially with the interest in the sites due to the diver trail and the proof that seabed erosion is active and artefacts are being exposed and lost to the sea.

The MoD Police continue to support the Licensee and have visited divers at the site to confirm their validity of being there.

Local diving operators continue to advertise ‘HMS *Coronation*’ as a local dive site. Plymouth Diving (<http://www.plymouthdiving.co.uk/index.aspx>) for example appears to advertise the site as one of four accessible sites under 20m depths, without mentioning the site’s protected status (<http://www.plymouthdiving.co.uk/Content/DiveSites/Coronation.aspx>) or licensing requirements. However the majority of local operators now fully support the *Coronation* Wreck Project and offer official visits to the site coordinated through the website.

The location of the current Licensees place of work (Plymouth University Diving & Marine Centre) has permitted effective monitoring of the site and the cooperation of the QHM and the Coastwatch Station staff at Rame Head is acknowledged.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The ever changing nature of the seabed across the area presents exciting opportunities to further increase our knowledge of the site. The uncertainty of the contents of the intermediate site and surroundings combined with the increased diver activity and visitor recording sheets gives great opportunity to develop the knowledge of these sites. It is hoped that the team can now extend the research area and the following work is recommended:

1. Continued diver survey of the Offshore site to complete the 1997 plan and enlarge it to include exposing artefacts. This must also include detailed recording of those artefacts in line with Wessex Archaeology's 2003 recommendation (Black 2003).
2. Diver survey of the intermediate site and the corridor between the two designated sites to ascertain the extent and nature of the debris linking the two sites.
3. The sediment monitoring system installed on the offshore be accurately monitored and recorded at regular intervals to ascertain seabed erosion, and confirm the depth of sediment in the gullies.
4. Continue the search for the unaccounted for Best Bower anchor and cannon, using side scan sonar and diver survey techniques.
5. A corrosion monitoring system be investigated and to be installed to determine the exact nature and extent of corrosion of the guns and anchors on the site, and monitor accordingly.
6. Cataloguing of the existing material and documentary archive. Most of the archive currently resides with a previous licensee Peter McBride. It is thought that this would follow the protocols and procedures developed by Kevin Camidge on the Charlestown project, funded by English Heritage. This work is ongoing and permanent residence for the artefacts has been agreed at Mount Edgecumbe House.
7. On-going liaison with Plymouth University to combine their training requirements for survey techniques with the requirements of the team to record the intermediate site area.
8. Maintain the momentum and outreach activities that the Diver Trail has commenced this season.

6.0 REFERENCES

- Black, J. 2003, *Coronation Offshore, Penlee Point, Plymouth: Designated Site Assessment: Full Report*. Wessex Archaeology, Salisbury (unpublished).
- Ward, S. 2006, *Coronation Inshore and Offshore Licensee's Site Report*, Nautical Archaeology Society, Portsmouth (unpublished).
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- Crook, R. 2009 *Coronation Inshore and Offshore Licensee's Site Report*, Plymouth (unpublished).
- Crook, R. 2010 *Coronation Inshore and Offshore Licensee's Site Report*, Plymouth (unpublished).

Annexes

- A. BSAC First Class Diver Examination – Project Report
- B. Diver Trail Booklet