

# ***Coronation* Inshore and Offshore Designated Wreck Sites**

## **2017 Licensee's Report**

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November 2017**



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## **SUMMARY**

This report summarises the work undertaken by the Coronation Wreck Project team on the *Coronation* Offshore and *Coronation* Inshore designated wreck sites (located off Penlee Point, Plymouth) during the period 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2016 – 01<sup>st</sup> November 2017.

Further work is still required to establish the extent of the sites in order to produce a complete site plan particularly to the southwest of the offshore area of designation. Monitoring of the level of seabed erosion continues at the offshore site.

The licenses to continue the project's research were authorised by the Secretary of State, under the Protection of Wrecks Act (1973). The assistance provided by the English Heritage / Historic England Maritime Team is gratefully acknowledged.

The continued support of the current survey team and particularly 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. Licences for both sites were granted to the author to continue the work commenced under the previous licences.

## **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.

After installation and opening of the *Coronation* Diver Trail in 2011 the team has focussed on locating additional artefacts both within and outside of the designated

areas. The visitor scheme continues to identify new artefacts and additional items of interest within the designated areas and surrounding undesignated area.

The core survey team in 2017 have only completed a total of 58 survey dives in this reporting period, this is a decrease on the 2016 season and is well below where we would like to have been.

2017 licensed individuals visiting the sites has declined from previous years. Only 95 licensed divers have visited the site in this reporting period with several completing multiple dives in the year. We have seen some returning divers from previous years, which reinforces the current belief that maritime archaeology and access to designated sites is still high on the recreational divers things to do list but this year's visitors tally is a very disappointing figure.

## **2.2 Condition of Site**

The main designated sites remain stable but have again experienced sediment movement off the sites which have revealed additional artefacts. The continued and regular diver activity at the sites has had no obvious affect to the marine life or the main artefacts. 2017 has again been a good year for the Crayfish with many divers reporting regular sightings of the native Crayfish on the sites and surrounding areas.

The improved station marker anchorage system on the diver trail has proved very effective. Unfortunately, four markers have been lost off the site and a large trawl line is littering the site. It maybe that this line has caused the ripping out of the float markers but this cannot be confirmed.

2017 has seen an increase in illegal potting of the designated areas by fishermen from no instances in 2016 to at least 10 reporting's of pots within the designated sites. This activity could also be attributed to the loss of the marker floats and potential disturbance of the artefacts on the sites. Active engagement with the fishermen is an ongoing task although many of the pot markers are difficult to read the owners details. Vigilance and communication with fishing boats in the area is assisting in reminding the fisherman of the sites status.

## **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.

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. This continues to be 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. It is a fair assumption that this procedure is occurring on a much wider area and many artefacts may be being lost to the process. This could be seen as part of the natural wrecking process and history of the site or as a sad loss of heritage.

### **3.1 Seabed Erosion**

The movement of sand from the site reported back in 2007 is still an on-going process. This has only been visually confirmed this year as the sediment monitoring system at the offshore site has been rendered ineffective due the substantial loss of sediment/sand. Some areas are now showing signs of a redepositing of material on the site thus aiding the preservation of the artefacts that have become exposed. Some sand bagging took place in the most vulnerable areas in 2015. Some of these sandbags were replaced in 2016 but no replacement work has taken place in 2017. As a generalisation the site remains a dynamic and mobile site.

### **4.0 PUBLIC OUTREACH, EDUCATION & DISSEMINATION**

The new *Coronation Wreck Project* website continues to be well supported and has received many hits in 2017. Its maintenance is an ongoing issue and the blog page is an area for development in the forthcoming year.

Again in 2017 several groups visiting Plymouth have enquired at very short notice to dive the site. Unfortunately, the new licencing system requiring a licensee to be present has prevented the visitors from being able to dive the site. This is a very big disappointment to the project and the divers themselves. The previous licensing system and management of the visitor's trail worked extremely well and it is requested that this may be reviewed and reinstated.

Early booking of a dive on the site via the website may help this situation but it may be that the management of visitors to the site will have to be taken on by Historic England so that new licences can be issued to every visiting diver group not using a local charter boat. This would seem a time-consuming task and it is believed will still not help with the short notice visitors requests. It is hoped that the current licensing system will be reviewed and amended to support the responsible access to the sites without being restricted by administrative procedures.

### **4.1 Conservation Report / Storage and Display**

The National Royal Navy Museum (NRNM) at Portsmouth expressed an interest in the collection but coordinating a meeting with the director and Mr Peter McBride is once again proving problematic. It is hoped that a favourable time can be found over the winter period 2017/18 for this meeting to take place. This is an area of real concern as the potential for the collection to be split up and spread across the country is believed to be a real threat.

### **4.2 Illegal Diving / Interference - Education Campaign**

There were no reported incidents of illegal diving on the sites this year but problems with pot fisherman depositing their creels on the sites has increased in 2017. The monitoring system of the site continues to work extremely well and the QHM Plymouth and the Coast Watch team at Rame Head are to be commended on their continued vigilance and support. Diving is still continuing in the intermediate undesignated area between the two sites and surrounding area. These areas have confirmed artefacts and still remain an area of concern.

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

The majority of local operators now fully support the *Coronation* Wreck Project and offer official visits to the site coordinated through the website and administered by Mr M Pearce. The Skippers of the Charter boats are now listed as additional Licensees so this does help with visiting divers, but does not address those whom wish to visit the site on their own boats and only hear of the site once in Plymouth.

The information boards provided by EH and displayed at Fort Bovisand, Penlee Point and at the National Marine Aquarium are still in a good state of repair and are regularly visited and read by numerous passing individuals many of which have been totally unaware of the *Coronation* site prior to seeing the information panels. These have been a very positive addition to the outreach programme of the project.

## **5.0 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

The team's activity on the site this year has decreased somewhat compared to 2016 this primarily being down to work commitments and poor weather on the few available days identified to dive the sites. Collaboration with Oxford University's dive club has given the opportunity to utilise the divers and the boat for project work so it is hoped that 2018 will see an increase in active research at the sites.

Dive charter boats remain supportive of the project but it is not financially viable to visit the site with less than 6 divers on board.

The ever-changing nature of the seabed across the area still presents exciting opportunities to further increase our knowledge of the site. It is hoped that the team can now extend the research area and the following work is recommended:

1. Continued diver survey of the sites and the areas to the southwest of the site and the targets identified by the magnetometer and sonar survey commissioned by EH and carried out by MAST.
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. A concerted effort to secure a permanent display of the artefacts from the *Coronation* sites.
4. Continue the search for the unaccounted for Best Bower anchor and cannon, using side scan sonar and diver survey techniques. Reports of a large anchor to the SE of the site has been investigated and will remain a key target for 2018.
5. Maintenance of the Diver Trail and carry forward the momentum and outreach activities that the Diver Trail has generated.

## 6.0 REFERENCES

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