

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



2019 Licensee's Report

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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 22nd November 2018 – 23rd November 2019.

Further work is required to establish the extent of the sites in order to produce a complete site plan particularly to the southwest and southeast of the offshore area of designation.

2018 identified significant finds that give a clearer picture of the wrecking process and add weight to the current project team's theory of *Coronation*'s wrecking. This has continued into 2019 where significant areas of concretion have been discovered with numerous areas of surface deposited artefacts spread over an additional area. Much of the 2019 season has been spent by the project team diving these areas in addition to the routine maintenance and monitoring dives on the designated sites.

2019 has seen a milestone achievement for the project in that a permanent and appropriate home for the *Coronation* artefacts to be stored and more importantly displayed has been secured. Links with the National Museum of The Royal Navy (NMRN) were established through the links with MAST leading to the homing of the collection at NMRN Plymouth.

The licenses to continue the project's research in 2019 were authorised by the Secretary of State, under the Protection of Wrecks Act (1973). The assistance provided by the 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 2019 completed a total of 70 survey related dives in this reporting period, this is similar to 2018 and is below the figures of previous years. This number which as for 2018 seems unusually low is due to survey efforts being based outside of the two designated sites in response to the identified magnetic anomalies of the MAST survey project in 2016. These dives have proved to be extremely rewarding with the find of what is believed to be the *Best Bower Anchor* located at 50 18.471N 004 10.694W in 2018 and a substantial area of concretion, cannonball (in excess of one hundred) and other assorted artefacts at 50 18.499N 004 12.203W. 58 dives have been conducted also tracing the perceived route of the wrecking process from the Best Bower anchor NW towards the centre point of the Inshore designated site.

The British Sub-Aqua Club First Class Diver examination was also run in Plymouth in 2019 and the team of examination candidates and staff were utilised in this process. The subsequent Project Report from this examination is referenced and has been archived with the Coronation Wreck Project Team.

The site was also the focus for a memorial and reunion dive for two groups of divers whom had met in sad circumstances in Portland in July 2019. One of the group's lost one of its members and members from a Plymouth Branch assisted in the rescue and first aid treatment of the casualty. A presentation on the history of the *Coronation* and joint dive was planned for late August where the two groups could meet up in better circumstances. The event was well attended and was a fitting occasion to remember their lost friend whilst also permitting the enjoyment of the activity that they all had a passion for. An unusual situation but another example of how heritage diving and common interest can have a greater benefit to many.

2019 licensed individuals visiting the sites has declined from previous years but has seen a slight increase on 2018 with 85 licensed divers visiting the site in this reporting period however several have completed multiple visits over the year. We continue to see several returning groups from previous years, which reinforces the current belief that maritime archaeology and access to designated sites continues to be high on the recreational diver's things to do list and is seen as a must do for new members to established groups.

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. 2019 has again been a good year for the Crawfish with many divers reporting regular sightings of the native Crawfish on the sites and surrounding areas.

The improved station marker anchorage system on the diver trail has proved very effective and 2019 has seen no damage to them caused by rogue fishing activities. The interaction in 2018 seeming to have had the desired effect in the discouragement of fishing activities within the designated sites. No formal action has been required and local liaison and better communication seeming to be the most productive method of resolution.

Vigilance and communication with fishing boats in the area is ongoing and the request to QHM Plymouth to publish a LNTM reminding water users of the restrictions placed on activities within designated sites still has not occurred. This request will be addressed again over the winter in time for the 2020 release of the standing LNTM's for Plymouth.

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.

4.0 PUBLIC OUTREACH, EDUCATION & DISSEMINATION

The *Coronation Wreck* Project website continues to be well supported and has seen an increase in its viewing figures and interaction. Its maintenance is an ongoing issue and the blog page is an area for development into the future a dedicated blogger is what is needed to promote the project. The booking of a dive site visit via the

website has improved access to the sites and has reduced the short notice calls to dive the site in 2019.

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 once again proved problematic. This was resolved when Plymouth Royal Navy Heritage Centre was taken under the wing of the NMRN and annexed. A meeting with Hannah Bradbury resulted in the planned meeting with Mr McBride taking place and a plan put in place to donate the *Coronation* collection to the museum. This is a huge move forward for the team and ensures the preservation and security of the collection within Plymouth. It was hoped that a favourable time could be found over the winter period 2018/19 for the collection to be taken into the custody of NMRN (Plymouth). Unfortunately, due to ill health of Mrs McBride and subsequent illness affecting Mr McBride the move had to be mothballed for some time. In September the situation improved sufficiently for the process to be re-established and on the 6th November 2019 the recorded artefacts of the Coronation collection were transported and taken into the custody of the NMRN Plymouth. It is planned that they will be on display in the "Age of Sail section of the museum and be available to be seen during the IMASS conference in February 2020 where the museum will open its doors for conference delegates to visit the whole museum. This has been one of the key objectives of the project for the last 12 years and it is now great to know that the heritage of one of Plymouth's most significant wrecks will be preserved and accessible to future generations of both divers and non-divers.

4.2 Illegal Diving / Interference - Education Campaign

There were no reported incidents of illegal diving on the sites this year. The monitoring of the site continues to work 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 undesignated areas between the two sites and surrounding area. These areas have confirmed artefacts and still remain an area of concern as are the newly located sites which contain many artefacts.

The MoD Police continue to support the Licensee and have visited divers at the site to confirm their validity for 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 use of the www.coronationwreck.org website booking system has reduced this problem to some extent.

The information boards provided by EH and displayed at Fort Bovisand, Penlee Point and at the National Marine Aquarium are still in a reasonable 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. These

information boards are in need of renovation and hopefully a sponsor can be found to fund their refurbishment for 2020.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The team's activity on the designated sites this year is similar to that of 2018. However, the projects activities this year has increased in the expanding undesignated areas that may be associated with *Coronation*.

An unusual and unexpected phenomenon was encountered this year in that several of the concreted cannon balls on the seabed give little or no readings on the survey teams handheld metal detectors. Further investigation of this will take place over the winter months.

Dive charter boats remain supportive of the project but are reluctant to put trips on for less than 6 divers as it would appear not to be financially viable for them.

The ever-changing nature of the seabed across the area still presents exciting opportunities to further increase our knowledge of the 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 sites and the areas adjacent to the sites 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 corridors between the two designated sites, the newly found site of concretions and the location of the best bower anchor to ascertain the extent and nature of the debris linking the sites. This is a very large area and it is envisaged will take several years to complete.
3. A concerted effort to trace and subsequently home and display any further artefacts from the *Coronation* sites within NMRN (Plymouth).
4. Continue the outreach and education programme and hopefully develop the online experience.
5. Maintenance of the Diver Trail and carry forward the momentum and outreach activities that the Diver Trail has generated.

6.0 REFERENCES

- Crook, R. 2016 *Coronation Inshore and Offshore Licensee's Site Report*, Plymouth (unpublished).
- Crook R 2017 *Coronation Inshore and Offshore Licensee's Site Report*, Plymouth (unpublished)
- Crook R 2018 *Coronation Inshore and Offshore Licensee's Site Report*, Plymouth (unpublished)
- BSAC First Class Diver Examination Project Report 2019.

