

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



2022 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 30th November 2021 – 27th November 2022.

The licenses to continue the project's research in 2022 were authorised by the Secretary of State, under the Protection of Wrecks Act (1973). The assistance provided by the Historic England Maritime Team is as always gratefully acknowledged.

The continued support of the current survey team and particularly Mr Mark Pearce the Visitor's Licensee and Visitor Coordinator is also very much 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

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 are required on this site.

2.1 Diving Logistics

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.

2.2 Condition of Site

The main designated sites and surrounding area continue to experienced sediment movement off the sites. There is no evidence of damage or interference with the sites occurring during this reporting period. During the dives on the sites and surrounding areas increased numbers of Crawfish have been noticed and the general marine habitat continues to appear healthy and in abundance.

The station markers on the diver trail have again proved very effective. In 2022 one station marker was replaced as it had been lost to the storms. The annual cleaning and refurbishment programme will be instigated during the early part of spring 2023.

2.3 Diving Activity

The core survey team in 2022 were only able to complete a total of 26 survey related dives in this reporting period. The discovery of a further area of wreck to the South West of the Offshore Designated site 2021 has been a focus of diving activity again in 2022. Maintenance work on the offshore trail continues with the replacement of markers floats required in 2022.

2022 licensed individuals visiting the sites remain low in comparison to pre-covid years, but 2022 has seen an increase in interest and visitors to the diver trail. The increase in numbers although small reinforces the value that established trails bring to maritime archaeology and in deed the local economy. During this reporting period 58 licensed 'visitor' divers visited the sites, an increase on 2021.

Project team members assisted in the installation of an acoustic recording device (F-Pod) for marine mammal activity for 'Research Development UK. Note this is not deposited within the protected sites but in close proximity to benefit from the protection afforded to the *Coronation* sites. It will be raised in 2023 to be cleaned and have its battery changed and data downloaded. It will be interesting to see what if any cetaceans have been in the proximity of the sites.

The team have also collaborated successfully with the *Hazardous* project to determine any similarities in artefacts across the two sites.

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 changing in depth of coverage and do present the opportunity for new artefacts to appear.

3.1 Seabed Erosion

The movement of sand from the site reported back in 2007 is still being monitored by observation. The rapid decrease in seabed level previously witnessed seems to have reduced and some areas are now showing signs of an increase in depth of material on the site thus aiding the preservation of the artefacts that have become exposed. However, on a wider area the trend seems to be of seabed material reduction. This continues to be an area of concern as valuable artefacts that maybe appearing are likely to be lost very soon after exposure. This is not as a result of surface recovery but from natural loss to the sea. This could be seen as part of the natural wrecking process and history of the site or as a sad loss of heritage.

4.0 PUBLIC OUTREACH, EDUCATION & DISSEMINATION

The *Coronation Wreck* Project website continues to have reasonable viewing figures and interaction. Its maintenance remains 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. Hopefully 2023 will see an increase in diving activity at the sites and thereby increase the potential for new posts for the blog.

Engagement with the BSAC Branches of East Cornwall Divers and Plymouth Sound was successful and 2022 saw presentations on the *Coronation* sites delivered to the cohort of local area divers.

4.1 Conservation Report / Storage and Display

On the 6th November 2019 the recorded artefacts of the *Coronation* collection were transported and taken into the custody of the NMRN Plymouth. It was planned that they would be on displayed in the “Age of Sail” section of the museum and be available for public viewing. The museum has been unable to progress with the display due to covid restrictions, staffing and infrastructure issues. It is hoped that the situation will improve and the site and display will be open again in 2023.

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. The MoD Police continue to support the Licensee and regularly visit the area of the sites.

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 and the good working relationship of project team members and skippers ensures quick communications and access to the site being facilitated.

The information boards provided by EH and displayed at 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.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The team’s activity on the designated sites this year again has been limited but visitor activity and general interest in the sites has increased.

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 regular project team will increase and be able to extend the research area and the following work is recommended:

1. Continued diver survey of the sites and the areas adjacent to the sites including 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.
2. Continue the outreach and education programme to welcome new and previous visitors to the site.
4. Develop the online experience and carry forward the momentum and outreach activities that the Diver Trail has generated.
5. Maintenance of the Diver Trail.

6.0 REFERENCES

- Crook R 2019 *Coronation Inshore and Offshore Licensee's Site Report*, Plymouth (unpublished)
- Crook R 2020 *Coronation Inshore and Offshore Licensee's Site Report*, Plymouth (unpublished)
- Crook R 2021 *Coronation Inshore and Offshore Licensee's Site Report*, Plymouth (unpublished)