

SEADIVE ORGANISATION

Secretary
Advisory Committee for Historic Wreck Sites
DCMS
Room 306
2-4 Cockspur Street
London
SW1Y5DM

11th October 1999

Dear Sir,

Please find enclosed a report for the work carried out on the protected wreck sites on the Goodwin Sands, for which I am Licensee.

My team and myself are prepared to continue on-going survey efforts on the ***Stirling Castle***, ***Northumberland*** and ***Restoration*** sites for the year 2000 and therefore wish to re-apply for survey licenses.

Yours Faithfully

Robert Peacock

Survey report 'Stirling Castle' 'Northumberland' and 'Restoration' sites 1999

Summary

The increasing level of exposure of the ***Stirling Castle*** over the last year is giving serious cause for concern. The rate of deterioration of freshly exposed cultural material is rapid with evidence of a number of fragile artefacts being exposed and destroyed within as little as 48 hours. This dramatic uncovering prompted the team to divert all available survey resources being concentrated on The '***Stirling Castle***', and it became the focus of attention for the very successful "Project Man O War", involving NAS members, the ADU and an archaeological diving team from the USA. A few fragile artefacts were raised under licence in conjunction with the ADU at the end of the diving season.

No work was carried out on the Designated Protected Wreck Sites ***Northumberland*** and ***Restoration***. However, they do not appear to be suffering the same level of exposure as that of the ***Stirling Castle*** and remain relatively stable.

As requested at the licensee meeting in March, an updated code of practice has been rewritten & approved by NAS, MAHS, ADU, & implemented on all sites successfully.

Programmed survey work on '***Stirling Castle***' site ran from 12th May through to 27th September, varying weather patterns restricted main survey impute to June & July.

The end result of this seasons work has been the collection of a large amount of valuable data which is being used to help produce the first ever accurate and detailed site plan of the ***Stirling Castle***. Fortunately, the level of detailed surveying work undertaken, including 300 minutes of high quality video footage, has meant that a number of artefacts were recorded before they were damaged or removed by natural forces. Unfortunately, the process of exposure and material deterioration appears set to continue over the winter.

Stirling Castle

Site environment

The level of exposure is similar to that when the wreck was first discovered in 1979. The sandbank on the starboard side of the wreck appears to have moved to the Northeast approximately 200 meters, causing a significant reduction in seabed levels over the whole site, but especially at the stern along the port side. Sediment levels have been continually dropping throughout the season and 3.8 meters of rudder & outer hull planking were seen exposed during the project in July.

The situation has also been aggravated by scouring action, which has increased as a result of the exposure of substantial areas of wreck structure. This in turn has increased damage as a result of trawl/gill netting becoming snagged.

Three-gun ports are visible on the port side towards the stern. The area of hull exposed here is 17m long by 3.3 m high with very little marine growth attached. One gunport has a cannon run out through it and the two gun ports aft of this have guns lying inboard, which are on their associated carriages.

Diving operations

The first dives on the site concentrated on removing winter flotsam trawl nets and gill nets etc. Permanent mooring points at the bow and the stern were then established.

The Project Man O' War for two weeks in July was timely and successful. Eight NAS members submitted work carried out on the *Stirling Castle* for their NAS Part II qualifications. The main survey team of 26 NAS qualified survey divers, initially focused on the bow to begin with, establishing datum's and recording exposed artefacts and structure and then, after the two week project had finished, moving on to the stern area to gather more measurements for the site plan.

Six strong American MAHS team concentrated their efforts on recording the hull structure and features at the stern.

Valued support for project given by local authority, Thanet District Council. Also by East Kent Maritime Trust & BSAC 106.

Project man o war received extensive media coverage, Internationally, Nationally & locally. From the press & television. Two associated documentaries, By the BBC & National Geographic are in preparation.

Archaeological Material

Artefacts present and well preserved on site included:

- a) Large copper cauldron;
- b) 3 boxes of muskets;
- c) Copper candlestick;
- d) Copper, sieve style kitchen utensil;
- e) Large quantities of wooden ships pulleys & rigging blocks;
- f) Wooden platter
- g) Quantities of stowed rope
- h) Wooden log reel
- i) Box of glass

Entire outline of bow areas exposed, on the gun-deck From no 3 forward gun port on the Port-side to no 3 gun-port starboard side.

Large sections of upper deck planking over crossbeams complete with cannon & carriage, seen as collapsed onto gun-deck between mid-ships & bow.

Complete stem post with rudder attached, exposed from wip-staff socket to seabed.

The main cross beam below the stern gun-ports, tilted to port by 20 degrees has pulled away from the outer hull diagonal planking on both port & starboard sides.

Early on in the season, a partly exposed large wooden log reel was discovered in the bow area. This reel would have been used to calculate the speed of the ship to aid the process of dead reckoning. Technologically important shipboard instruments of this type are rarely seen on wreck sites of this age and indicates the high level of preservation and true archaeological potential that exists on this site. From its fragile nature it was clear that this artefact had not been exposed for long and was in fact becoming progressively more exposed as the season went on. Evidence from the pattern of barnacle growth on it also suggested that it had been exposed at least once before but not to the same extent.

Archaeological Operations

As a mitigation strategy, temporary stabilisation of the log reel was advised by the ADU . While consideration was given to the conservation and housing of this and a number of other artefacts considered at risk of being lost. However this could not be implemented due to adverse weather conditions and very poor visibility on site throughout August and the majority of September.

In late September with all facilities in place for the preservation of the wooden log reel (and also the copper alloy utensil) and after the application for an excavation licence had been made and approved, a plan to raise these artefacts was put into operation in conjunction with the ADU. Adverse weather conditions prevented the ADU boat *Scimitar* from travelling to the Kent coast, so both teams used *Tusker II* as the diving platform.

The first attempt at raising the artefacts was aborted after difficulties were experienced in getting the pre-prepared artefact containers down to the wreck. At this time the log reel was still intact and more delicate material had been exposed in the immediate vicinity, including a well preserved turned wooden plate. Video footage of this dive, the first footage taken since the end of July, shows that the reel had now become completely exposed.

The following day, despite marginal conditions, ADU divers and team members arrived on the site ready to retrieve the artefacts. Unfortunately, a storm during the night with gusts of wind above 40mph and strong tides had resulted in the loss of the reel (all bar a piece of one cheek and a spindle) and the previously mentioned wooden plate. The ADU and team members retrieved the remaining pieces of the reel along with the copper utensil and a newly exposed candlestick.

The artefacts are now undergoing first aid conservation prior to their being transferred to the Thanet Archaeological Group for full conservation.

Once conservation has been completed it is hoped that the artefacts will be put on display at the Ramsgate Maritime Museum along with others from the ***Stirling Castle*** raised in 1979.

Recommendations

The continuing and rapid exposure of the *Stirling Castle* warrants a full review of current site management strategies. It is vital that efforts are made to evolve both a long term and short term site management plan if the full archaeological potential of this important wreck is to be fully realised. Immediate action proposed:

- Overall site survey work should be stepped up so that the loss of valuable archaeological information through exposure is minimised. Planning should include the deployment of more technological survey methods (ie Peter Holts Merlin system) to speed up the rate of information processed.
- Placement of substantial “Protected Wreck” marker buoy over the site to prevent stray trawl/gill netting activity from further damaging the site. This would also serve as a visible focal point for harnessing essential localised support for site protection.
- Archaeologist and site supervisor to be appointed to the team and given the task of developing an overall long term site management plan as well as short term strategies. Also available to serve as archaeological advisor to site Licensee. Up until now the ADU has played the role of archaeological supervisor to the site in the absence of suitable persons in the immediate area. It is felt now that a more localised and readily available archaeologist is appointed in view of the situation with the *Stirling Castle* and the ADU's busy schedule.

- Site “warden’ to be appointed, equipped and sufficiently supported to be able to provide a constant site security and monitoring presence. [Maybe establish links with coastguard radar monitoring system, which will alarm when vessels stop in designated circles and have the facility for someone to travel to the site quickly to check it out]. This would be necessary to help prevent illegal diving practices on all Goodwin Sands protected sites but, in addition, be able to serve as a point of contact or guide for future visitor schemes to the Goodwin Sands sites along the same lines as that at the Duart Point wreck site in the Sound of Mull. Job creation-funding possibilities here.

Robert Peacock
11th October 1999