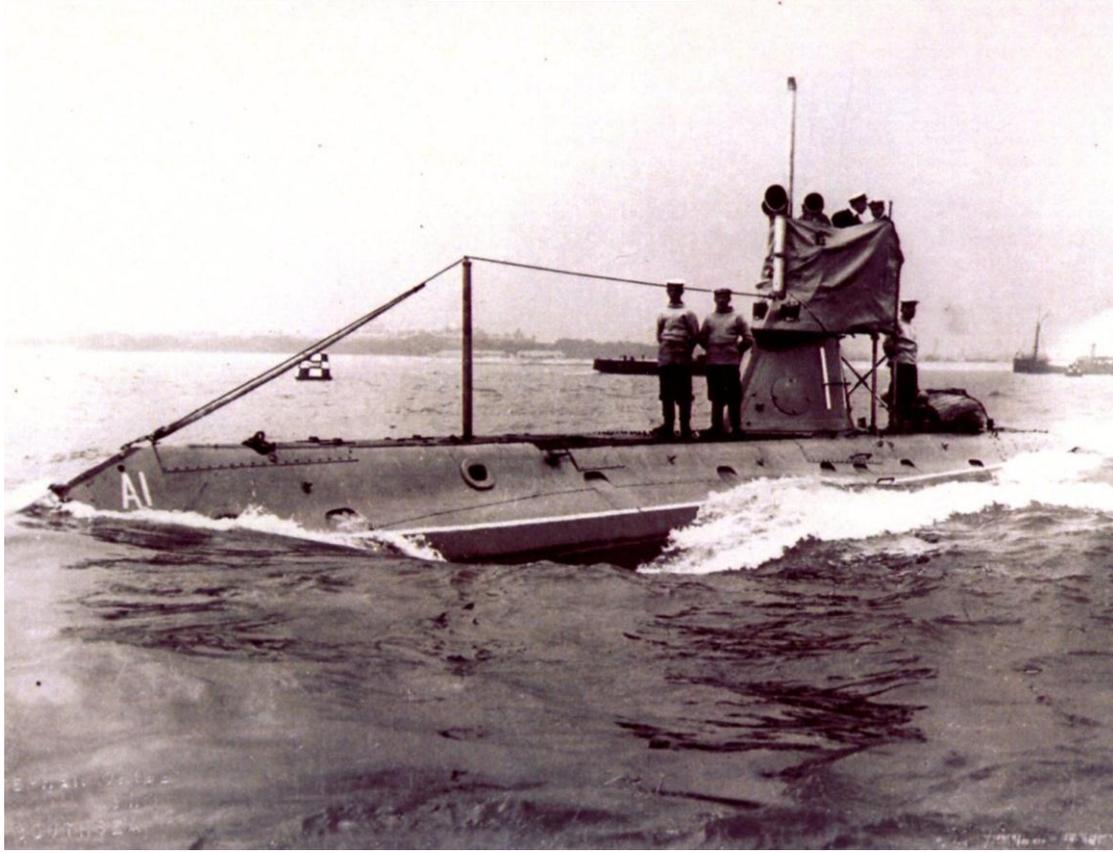


## A1 REPORT 2008



This year has seen a record number of dives cancelled due to either high winds or bad visibility and has limited the opportunities to dive on the wreck, 3 of 6 planned dives took place and no opportunities for RIB diving presented themselves.

3 dives completed

1 NAS Heritage day  
2 Southsea Sub Aqua Club dive (SSAC)

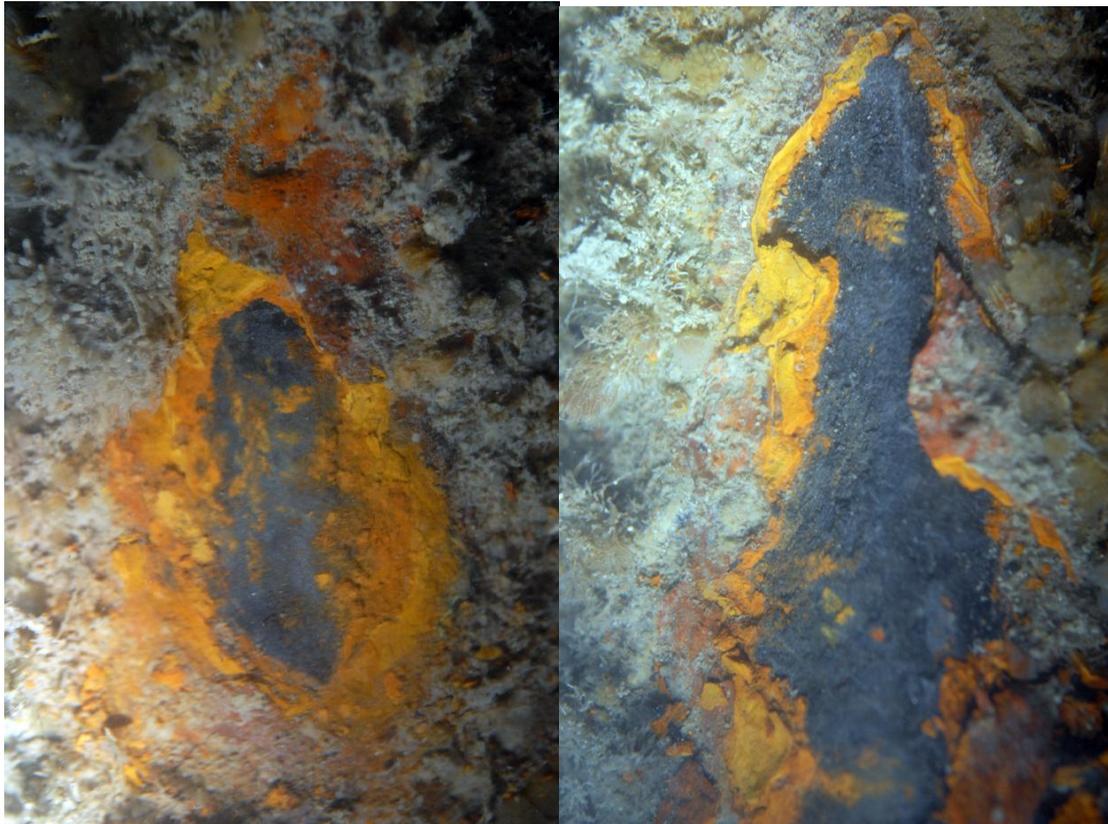
Poor weather forced another heritage day to be cancelled. (There was also concern about the empty spaces on this dive.)

NAS continue to support and promote access to the wreck through their Heritage days that they offer to all.

### **SSAC dive 15<sup>th</sup> May 08**

12 divers took part in this evening dive. For me it was an opportunity to look over the wreck generally and record/photograph some of the marine life present on the wreck. On this initial dive of the season the site was clear of obstructions and there was no evidence of any tampering with the site. There seemed little change in the condition of the wreck and its structure from previous years, however two areas of exposed metal around the Bow torpedo

tube hatch were observer with no real indication of how or what had caused the damage to the wreck. See photographs below.



One can only speculate on the cause of such damage, it may well be just natural decay of the metal that has dropped off with the marine growth attached leaving freshly exposed material underneath that I have captured in the photographs above, if that is the case then it is evidence that the site is in decay.

### **NAS Heritage Day 25 July 08**

This involves a full day, made up of a visit to the RN Submarine museum at Gosport followed by a dive on HMS A1. It is difficult to arrange suitable dates as the tide is critical and there needs to be sufficient time for a visit to the submarine museum. There are very limited opportunities to arrange the event during the summer months when the visibility is generally at its best on the site.

This event was attended by 10 people and the day counts towards their Part 3 Qualification. In addition a freelance writer for Sports Diver attended the day and subsequently a full feature was published in Sport Diver magazine which promoted diving on the site.

I took the opportunity to examine one of the anomalies recorded in the Wessex Archaeology report and found it to be a large boulder around 10m from the starboard bow. I was also able to video the wreck on this

opportunity. As a result of leaving the wreck and doing a sweeping search more items of debris have been observed in the seabed that look as if they were part of the main structure.

### **SSAC dive August 08**

12 divers took part in this evening dive. For me it was an opportunity to look over the wreck generally and record/photograph some of the marine life present on the wreck which is more prolific during this time of year. There are a number of creatures that are always in regular spots on the wreck, some images are shown below.



“Colin” the conger lives around the conning tower and is generally very shy.



### **Licensee duties**

**Unauthorised diving** This year I noticed on the Wightdiver schedule that a local dive centre had made a booking to dive on A1 but I had not been approached as Licensee about the dive. I alerted English Heritage and Mark Dunkley dealt with this situation although at the time it was claimed to be a mistake/misunderstanding.

## Research

Through extensive research a number of files have been identified at National Archive and Naval Historical Branch which may provide more detail of how/why A1 sank and I intend to visit the National Archives at Kew and the Naval Historical branch next year to investigate.

## Raising awareness

HMSm A1 appeared on the 'Heritage at Risk' register which was published this summer. As a result this was featured by the local Portsmouth 'News' newspaper who reported that the wreck was in danger from divers removing artefacts. Whilst this may have been the case a number of years ago I have seen no obvious evidence of divers removing items from the wreck since becoming Licensee. Indeed many of the more valuable/attractive items have been safely recovered by the wreck owner Martin Woodward and are on display at the Shipwreck Museum on the IOW. In my view this negative view portrayed by the newspaper has failed to recognise the more constructive efforts to monitor such wrecks and puts divers in a bad light.

**DISREPAIR:** Decline blamed on divers taking items from wreck of historic vessel which was sunk twice

# Submarine in dire straits

by Matt Jackson  
Defence correspondent

THE wreck of the first British-made submarine is in dire straits at the bottom of the Solent, according to a new report.

English Heritage says the A1, built in 1903 and sunk twice with the loss of 11 submariners by 1911, is in 'significant decline'.

Divers have been blamed for speeding up the natural decay of the historic vessel by visiting the site and taking items away with them.

The English Heritage 'At Risk Register' also lists Gosport Railway Station and nine other sites in the area as badly needing help to prevent them falling into disrepair.

The Vickers-built A1 lies two miles south of Chichester harbour and is in such a poor condition naval experts fear for her future.

George Malcolmson, archivist at the Royal Navy Submarine Museum in Gosport, said: 'It stands to reason that if the wreck is lying under the sea it will rust, but there

have been other problems with her.

'Over the years divers have taken fittings from her and so she is not in an ideal condition.

'She is of great maritime importance because, unlike Holland 1, she was built in this country.

'If money were no object I would be calling for her to be raised to the surface as quickly as possible.'

Mark Dunkley, a marine archaeologist from English Heritage, put together a list of wrecks around the

UK coast. He said: 'The report says A1 has extensive problems and her future will be one of significant decline.

'The site has been subject to unauthorised dives and a chain of shellfish pots was fixed by an unknown diver to the vessel's hull, causing abrasive damage.

'We want to reduce each year the number of protected historic shipwrecks on the register to ensure their value and significance is maintained.'

On March 18, 1904, the submarine collided with the steamer *Berwick Castle* during exercises and all of her crew were killed.

She was salvaged and repaired, serving until 1910.

She sank for a second time in 1911 while operating under automatic pilot as a submerged target.

In 1999 she became a protected site.

Jillian Haimes, 69, is the granddaughter of submariner Albert Fleming, who died when A1 first sank in Portsmouth harbour in 1904.

She said: 'I am so sad to learn that she is in this condition. Obviously there will be wear with her being below the water but I never thought it was this much.

'I imagine it would cost a lot of money to raise her up but she is a cornerstone of the Royal Navy.'

*matt.jackson@thenews.co.uk*

Sites listed as in 'Poor' condition by English Heritage: Fort Fareham, Newgate Lane, Fareham; Fort Elson, Military Road, Gosport; Main gate and two lodges, Clarence Victualling Yard, Gosport; Gilkicker Fort, Fort Road, Gosport; Workshops, Boilerhouse, Guardrooms and Engine Room, Haslar Gunboat Yard, HMS Dolphin, Gosport; Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth; Hilsa Lines, Hilsa, Portsmouth; Block Mills, No 6 Dock, Portsmouth Dockyard; Horse Sand Fort, Portsmouth.

**TIMELINE – FIRST BRITISH-MADE SUBMARINE**



The A1 in service, and as she is now on the seabed in the Solent

In contrast the feature in Sports Diver Magazine by Patrick Shier provided not only a good report on the wreck, but the NAS Heritage Day overall, including the visit to the Submarine Museum and briefings etc. The overall report was

constructive and a good advert for this type of event which not only allows divers to visit the wreck but seeks to educate them in the historic significance of the wreck and why it has been designated as a protected wreck under the 1973 legislation.

Below is an extract from Sport Diver.



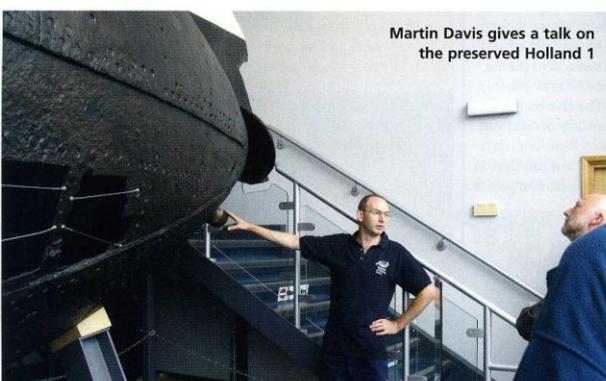
Every month, Sport Diver explores shore and boat diving sites around the UK coastline which are suitable for all levels of certification in a bid to promote British diving to newly qualified divers.

# The first of a new era



You may need to wade through some red tape to dive the first British designed-and-built submarine, but Patrick Shier reckons the experience of diving the A1 is worth the effort.

Text and photographs by **Patrick Shier**



**Martin Davis gives a talk on the preserved Holland 1**

**T**he A1 has been a protected wreck under the 'protection of wrecks' act since 1998 and, as such, gaining permission to dive this historical monument is not easy. Although Martin Woodward of Bambridge Maritime Museum on the Isle of Wight is on paper as the owner, legislation has put custody of her in the hands of English Heritage and the current licensee, Martin Davis.

I decided to apply for my own visitor's license to dive the A1, but unfortu-

nately had the application turned down. The reason I was told was that the Secretary of State's advisory committee did not want to issue multiple licenses. I was advised that I could dive the wreck on one of the Nautical Archaeological Society courses, or to liaise directly with Martin Davis, who holds a surveyor's license and who would be willing to allow me to join him on one of his trips.

In for a penny and in for a lot of pounds, I paid the £75 to join the NAS

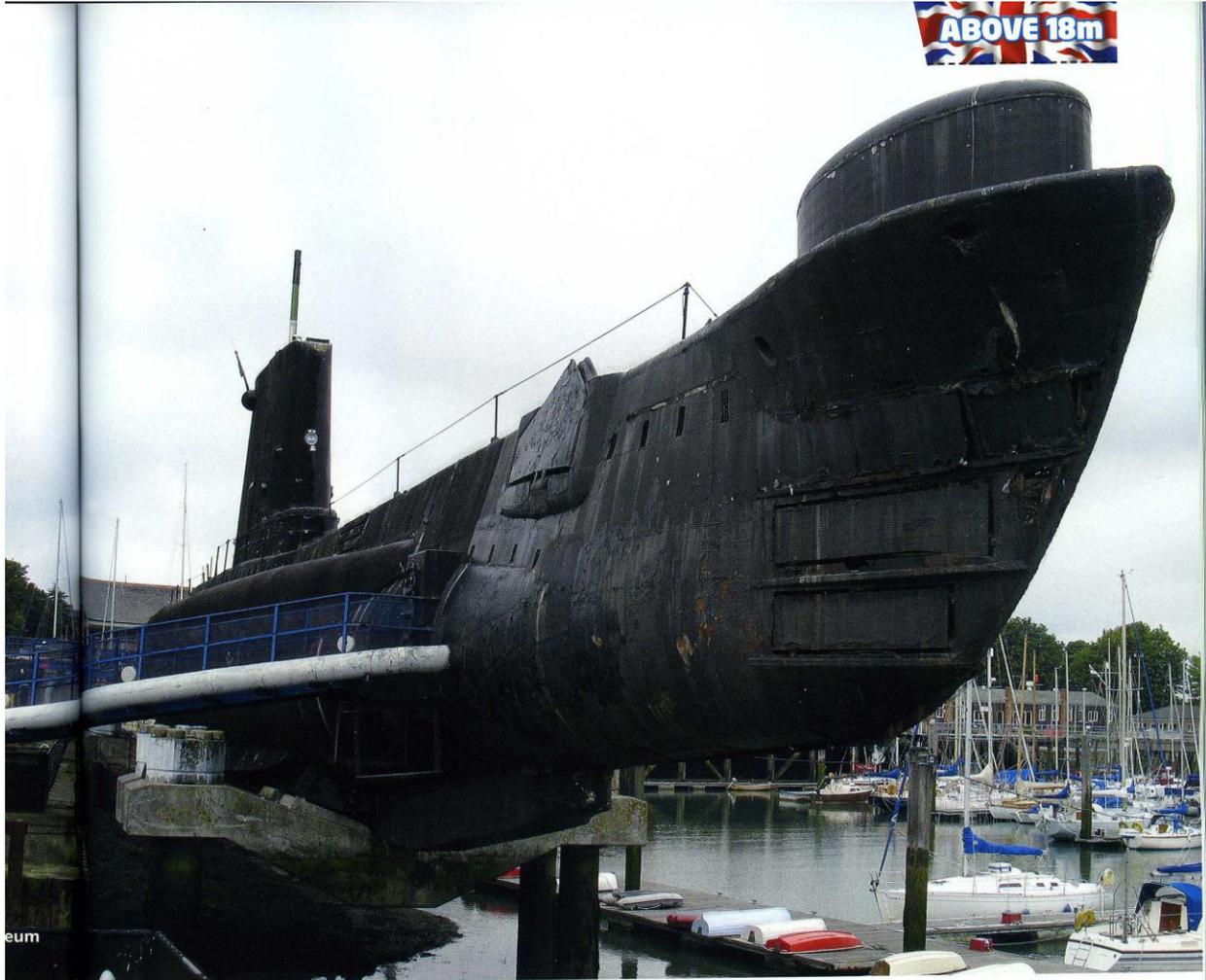


Visitors to Gosport Submarine Museum can visit the restored HMS Alliance



The conning tower is in good condition

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[www.sportdiver.co.uk](http://www.sportdiver.co.uk)



for a day and, although I thought I was being ripped off, as the day progressed I learnt a lot, had a fun day out and, most important of all, had a fantastic dive. The day began at 8.30am at the NAS headquarters at Fort Cumberland in Portsmouth, where we were introduced to Mark Dunkley of English Heritage, who gave an interesting talk on the role of English Heritage, and Martin Davis, who explained his role and how he saw the future for the A1. Then once all of our kit was on the dive boat we left for the second session of the day, a tour round the Submarine Museum at Gosport. Here we learnt quite a lot from the talk given by Martin Davis as we walked around and examined the preserved wreck of the Holland 1. Then came an interesting talk and a tour of the archives by George Malcolmson, the archivist of the museum. At 1.30pm it was back onboard the boat and on our way to our final destination, the wreck of the A1.

**THE DIVE SITE**

From the Submarine Museum at Gosport we had about a half hour journey to the dive site, which gave us plenty of time to kit up and buddy check. The wreck is lying in just 14m of water in Bracklesham Bay near Selsey. Once at the site and while Dave Wallace, skipper of Top Gun, expertly placed the shot-line on the bow of the sub, Martin gave us the dive briefing. Then with all divers ready, we dropped into the water two by two and made our descent down the line. Visibility wasn't brilliant, perhaps two to three metres, but within seconds of our descent we came into contact with the sub. The sub is sitting upright and is in surprisingly good condition for its age. We were diving on a high tide with just a little current running across the wreck from the east. The bow, like the rest of the sub, is completely covered in fauna. Individual dead man's fingers can be found scattered along the wreck.

Directly below us as we reached the sub is the torpedo tube, and here you are able to look inside and, although covered in silt, you can still make out some of the fixtures of the vessel, so have that torch ready.

As we made our way along the top of the sub, we came across a small oblong section just forward of the conning tower and in the centre of the wreck that was completely open and which again allowed us to see inside. Swimming backwards and forwards over this section of the wreck and obscuring our visibility even more was a huge shoal of bib. As we glanced inside the sub we could see that it is nearly full of silt, so I wouldn't advise that you attempt to gain access. You can still make out the pipe work and some of the handles, which is surprising as this shallow wreck was plundered on a regular basis by trophy hunters before the protection order was put in place.

**ABOVE 18m**

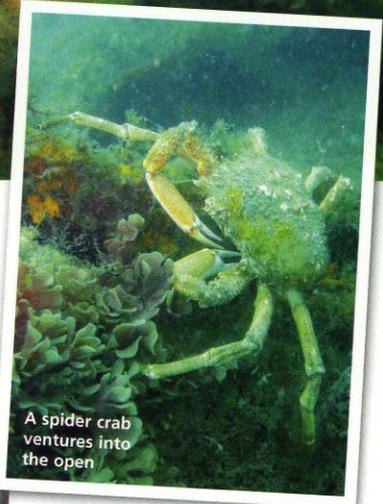


Patches of hornwrack have colonised the wreck

Moving on we came to the conning tower that, again, is completely covered with marine growth of one kind or another. There are patches of a bryozoan called hornwrack that has made its home on certain sections of the wreck. The hatch of the tower is missing and you can see a little way into the sub, but the entrance is narrow, so I wouldn't advise that you try to enter. You will find at the forward section of the conning tower a tear that is around

four to five inches wide. Here we found tompot blennies, lobster and spider crabs sheltering.

Now the Specialties that I would advise for this dive are Wreck Diver, so that you can map the dive and gain a better understanding of the NAS course, Drysuit, to keep you warm, and Digital Photography, so that you can record the moment that you spent on the very first British-designed-and-built submarine.



A spider crab ventures into the open



Divers must apply for a license to dive the A1

Moving on towards the stern we found that the sub was descending deeper into the seabed and about two thirds back is completely covered with sand. No one is sure whether or not the propeller is still in place, or what condition the stern of the sub is in, however with all the sand packed tightly around the sub and the silt inside her, I was told that these two factors are protecting her from further erosion. Although you only get 45 minutes to dive this wreck before the tide starts to pick up pace, it is possible to navigate the wreck a number of times and see it all on the one dive.

All too soon it was time to end our dive and return to the surface. Like all UK dives, it is mandatory to carry a DSMB just in case you lose sight of the wreck, or do not use the shot line for



ABOVE 18m

**The sub is sitting upright and in a surprisingly good condition**

A shoal of bib obscures the view inside this open hatch

your ascent. Once everyone was back onboard the boat, we had a 30-minute trip back to harbour before we could debrief.

Everyone, including myself, enjoyed the course and the visit to the Submarine Museum, and although I thought that applying for a license was just bureaucratic nonsense and that you should not tar every diver with the same brush, I fully understand why these wrecks are being protected. ■

### HOW TO GET THERE

#### DIRECTIONS

To dive the A1 submarine is not easy, the best way to gain access to her is via the Nautical Archaeology Society based at Fort Cumberland, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO4 9LD or via their website: [www.nauticalarchaeology-society.org](http://www.nauticalarchaeology-society.org) or by telephone 02392 818419. They will let you know when the next trip will be and where to meet.

### NEXT MONTH

Patrick Shier heads across the Irish Sea to Ireland, diving Pat McGee's Reef off Donegal, a scenic 10m dive.

## THE HISTORY OF BRITISH SUBMARINES

Although submarines have been designed and built since 1578, it was only during the 1890s that the American Navy felt confident enough to purchase submarines for use in warfare. The submarines were known as Holland subs, as they were designed and built by John Holland, an Irish revolutionary who wanted to build a vessel capable of taking on the might of the Royal Navy. Holland obtained funding from the Fenian Brotherhood, an Irish revolutionary group dedicated to achieving Ireland's independence from the UK.

As America became more confident with the sub's design and performance, the UK took notice and began to place orders for their own flotilla. It was ironic that something that was originally designed to destroy the Royal Navy was being sold to them so that they could better defend themselves. As the submarines became more popular, John Holland was banished from the brotherhood for not being a committed revolutionary.

With the first submarine delivered to Britain, the Royal Navy began to design their own version of the Holland. Designed and built by Vickers of Barrow-in-Furness, the HMS A1 was launched on 9 July 1902. Although designed on the Holland submarines, the class A1 was larger, faster and has a bigger conning tower.

The A1, however, had more than its share of bad luck. While she was being delivered to the submarine base at Gosport, the crew had to abandon ship – salt water had managed to come into contact with the battery acid producing chlorine gas. Then on 18 March 1904, she was returning to port after a routine operation when the SS Berwick accidentally hit the conning tower as the sub was surfacing – the sub was lost with all of her crew. Almost immediately, work began to refloat the sub, but it was some weeks later before all 11 crewmen could be laid to rest. Repairs were made and the conning tower modified and she was put back into service. Rather than have just one hatch at the entrance to the tower, another water-tight hatch was placed at the base, which had it been in place when the accident occurred would probably have saved the lives of the crew. The next incident turned out to be the last. While being used as an unmanned submersed target, her pressure hull was damaged due to a controlled explosion. Although the Navy searched for her, the exact location was unknown and remained a mystery for over 70 years. A fisherman snagged his nets on the wreck and asked divers to investigate, where it was found to be a completely intact submarine.

## Summary

A1 continues to be a robust site and despite press speculation about its condition, the submarine is still reasonably intact and has suffered little over the last 3 years that I have been observing it. There are a few signs of deterioration and the two photographs taken earlier in the year perhaps should be taken as a warning that the structure is starting to dissolve and crumble. The metal is over 100 years old and has resisted the elements of the Solent extremely well. The amount of sediment build up inside also remains a concern, as the structure weakens through age the weight of the sediment inside will accelerate the inevitable break off of the bow from the main structure.

Next year I am looking into preparing a more detailed site plan of A1 and the debris field that surrounds it.

It is also planned to start monitoring specific areas of the wreck such as the crack in the conning tower to try to get an idea of the speed of deterioration, these will become control points that can be measured on an annual basis.

Working in conjunction with Seasearch, I will be arranging a much more detailed survey of marine life on the wreck, discussions have already taken place with Seasearch and dive are being planned.