

# Submarine A1 Licensee report 2015

By

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## Overview

This year has seen a rise in visitor numbers to the site after last year's fall in numbers due to the poor visibility in the area. The successful implementation of the diver trail created during 2013 has helped promote diving on the site by a rise in inquiries about diving the wreck even if they have not materialised into actual dives. I have made every effort to be on many of the dives and brief divers prior to diving the site. The weather has been generally good with few dives cancelled in the diving calendar overall with long spells of hot dry periods and low winds. Visibility at the beginning of the season during the first dive was about 3m but has never really improved beyond 4m over the duration of the season and whilst this has been acceptable the water has never cleared like on some occasions.

## Diving

The wreck was actually dived on 6 occasions this year the dates are listed below:-

7.5.15 First dive on the visibility was around 3m good condition and on the site all of the places and it was good to from potting or anchoring. either copper or bronze its position was recorded



Figure 1 tompot blenny

what this part is or even whether it is part of the site, I would assume that it is and therefore has been left in situ and recorded. If the material has come from inside the wreck then it is evidence of interference from divers though I would suggest that it is not a recent occurrence. The bronze pipe clamps surprisingly are still on the seabed that were exposed last year and have not been taken from the site yet.

site after the winter storms, and the wreck was seen in nothing had radically changed wildlife was in the usual see that there was no damage A small piece of material was observed at the bow and and photographed, it is not clear



Figure 2 non ferrous metal part near bow

## 2.8.15

This dive I took the opportunity to record a large metal fishing pot possibly used for cuttle fishing that has appeared on the site and is near the stern area of the boat, measurements and pictures were taken and the details sent to Historic England. The rope on the pot was short and it is unclear as to whether it had been cut or abraded. Nothing was seen in the pot apart from sea weed and the door was open. The dimensions are 1mx1m and 450mm tall.



Figure 3 Cuttlefish pot

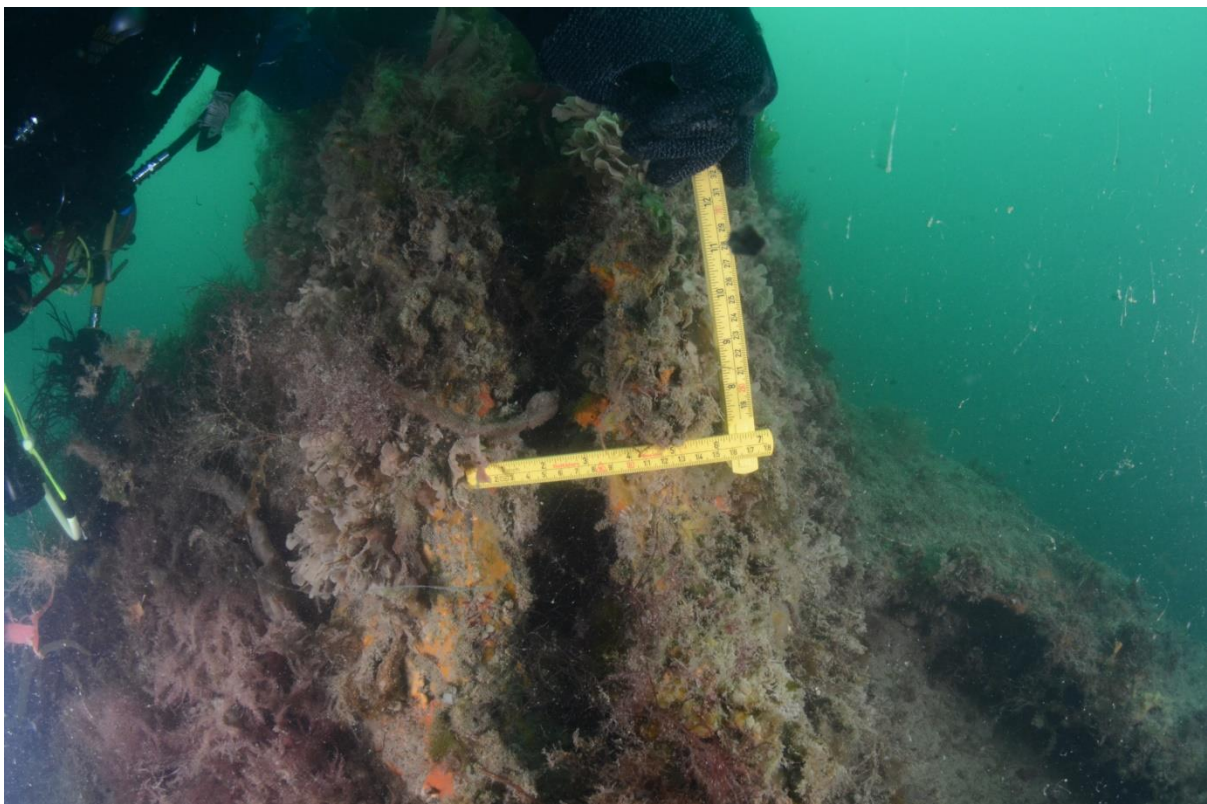


Figure 4 The crack in the conning tower

Seen in the image above the conning tower crack remains constant at present and there has not been any significant opening of it over the previous year, this is however a concern and will be monitored on an ongoing basis.

The seabed scour in the bow area has also been measured on the starboard side and is now around 450mm in places, which is significant. This also more or less represents the depth of the Ampelisca beds that are still very prevalent on the starboard side and near the conning tower on the port side.



Figure 5 measuring the scour

### 6.9.15

Members of Southsea Sub-Aqua club dived the wreck the dive was a general dive to promote the diver trail and members who had not dived the site were briefed and given trail guides to help them navigate around the wreck and see various parts of interest.



Figure 6 Sea Lemon nudibranch

A sea Lemon was observed at the stern, this is the largest nudibranch that we get in the UK and always good to see one. We also visited the area 8m beyond the stern to see the remains of what is thought to be a large navigation buoy; this appears to be a bit more exposed at the moment and is home to a lobster. The presence of the buoy will remain a mystery and while it could have been



Figure 7 Remains of Navigation buoy?

connected to the wreck site in some way many years ago, perhaps as a marker of the site or was actually used to mark the position of the boat on its last journey and was dragged under. It is well buried and now corroded badly on the top so has been down there for a long time. Members of Portsmouth University dive club joined Southsea Sub-Aqua Club for

this dive and enjoyed the experience of diving a historic protected wreck the value of the wet information sheets was demonstrated by many of the students taking a copy underwater and not returning them!

7.9.15

This was the only trip that was achieved with the NAS this year, when we dived the A1 and the Invincible together in the same day. The other 4 dates were blown out due to bad weather so no diving took place and this is typical with between 40 and 50% of planned visits failing over the year.

20.9.15

A group of divers from Dacoram Sub-Aqua Club visited the site and I had positive feedback from the group leader about the experience, I briefed the group at a BBQ the night before on the beach, which was one of the more unusual places I have briefed divers along with some great food and drink. We even got a mention in the back pages of SCUBA magazine as a result of the visit.

1.11.15

The last dive of the season on the site by members of Southsea Sub-Aqua club, this dive turned out to be a very low visibility dive even though conditions on the surface and looked good, at 2m below the underwater conditions were very poor and most divers gave up after twenty minutes. There appeared to be a lot of sediment suspended in the water which not only reduced visibility but cut out most light from the surface.

### **Condition of wreck**

The condition of the wreck seems to be as it has been; no major changes were seen apart from what appeared to be a large removal of silt from the scour in the bow area which was a result of the previous year's winter storms. This still remains clear and has exaggerated the scour. The major dredging operations in the area have ceased for the time being and the large volume of suspended particles in the water column since has reduced to more normal conditions for the site.

### **The Diver trail**

I believe that the diver trail has been a success despite that lack of visitors to the site; the creation of a 3D model backed up with information, stills photography and video gives divers a real feel for what they are about to see and experience prior to diving. I would fully support and endorse this approach for any future projects that may be considered on historic wreck sites and I believe that it very much helps the interpretation of the site underwater.

### **Conclusions**

The planned dredging of Portsmouth Harbour has been delayed this year and is due to start in the New Year. This has meant that conditions on the site have been more normal and

aligned with that of previous years. The wreck remains stable and in similar condition to previous years with no major deterioration of the site. The main observations are to the dynamic environment that the submarine sits in. The movement of the seabed and increased scouring effect from tidal action being the dominant factor in the equation and the marine life that the site supports appears to vary quite a lot. There is a lack of tompot blennies on the site this year, in previous years there have been too many to count, in fact the highest proportion of tom pots on any site in the area to my knowledge. Some of the sponges appear to come and go, for example on the top of the bow area a couple of years ago there was a large colony of shredded carrot sponge that appears to have gone now. I am seeking professional advice on this from marine biologists as this may well be down to water quality and the lack of light penetration that has caused it to die off along with the reduction in marine life.

One of the questions I am continuously asked is whether the propeller and rudder is still on the wreck and what is the condition of the stern that disappears into the seabed. There are still some unanswered questions regarding the sinking and in particular the presence of the navigation buoy that is 8m away from the stern. Is this part of the site and the sinking or is it just pure coincidence, the age and condition of the buoy suggest not. It would be nice to do some investigations in the coming seasons to determine the facts and answer the questions.

The greatest risk that the wreck currently faces is from divers shottng and I believe that a simple cost effective system could be put in place that would benefit not just A1 but other sites also.

### **Aims for next season**

I would like to install a prototype shot line system that could be used by visiting divers to go down and get to the site. This would minimise the risk of a heavy shot weight potentially damaging the wreck, should it happen to not fall on the seabed.

As Photogrammetry becomes more popular and accessible, I believe it would be an enhancement to the current site if a set of images could be taken and processed to expand our portfolio of site imagery and create an accurate up to date 3D representation.

Martin Davies