

Normandy Wreck Week

15th September

The diving week begins.

Mild morning chaos. Got to the dive centre and the paperwork began. We started the hunt for a medical for Roger, with the list of doctor' phone numbers we had from Catherine. One retired, one on a day off, one not answering, then finally got one but no appointment till 1630. Kept going, and another doctor gave me a phone number of a different one, and eureka, a 1230 appointment. We could make the afternoon dive.

Drove to the doctors at Creully. On the way we went past a small house with "Crepon Dump" written on the outside walls. An information board outside the building was used for ammunition and fuel storage before it was moved towards the beach. Again moving that down this small country lane, what is a small house today, still bore the marks that revealed its history in the war, not forgotten. Creully was a beautiful small town with a chateau on a hill on the approach. A tower of the chateau is called the BBC tower to this day. It was used to broadcast news during the war. A small church with a statue of a soldier took centre stage in the village square. Here I discovered 'yarnbombing'. No I had not heard of it before. Where have I been! The monument or bits of it are covered in knitting! Apparently through the summer, you can join the knitters every Saturday on the beach at Arromanche where they group and knit together, to make a cover for the mulberry that sits up on the beach. They aim to finish it by Armistice Day!



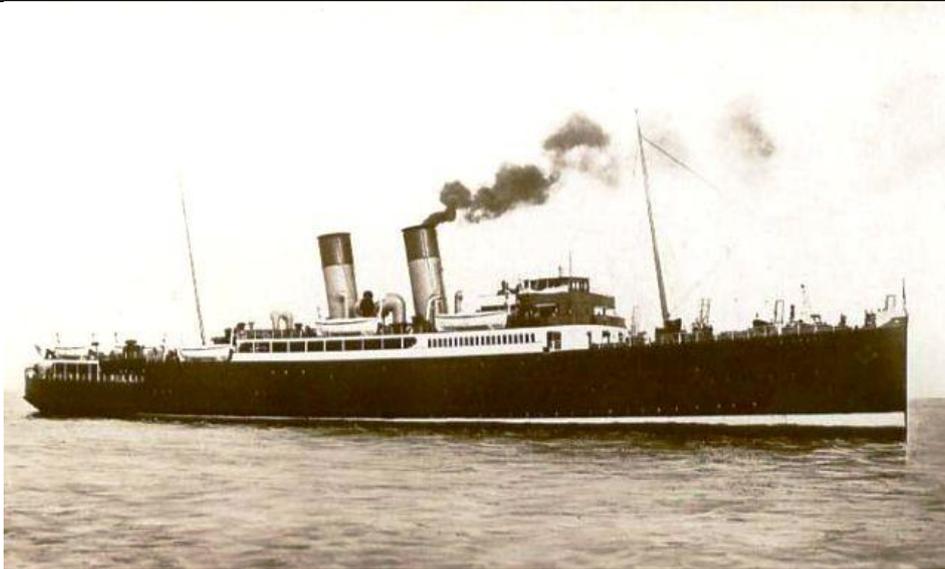
CAKE! Fantastic small bakery. Rum-baba for Roger, with a pipette of rum that you added yourself, solid chocolate mousse for me, and TWO cakes for Dawn, custard slice and a rhubarb and fruit slice. Bloody lovely! Coffee at a historic hotel in the square to which Dawn planned to return to eat frogs legs. Nasty cruel habit, should be banned!

Unfortunately, our diarist had missed our first dive - on the SS Amsterdam. This is a rather broken up wreck, which we dived in disappointing vis as you can see in the photos below. Nevertheless, a number of the more robust fixtures and fittings could still be identified.

SS Amsterdam. A British Hospital Ship

Description

Originally a cross-channel ferry, the Amsterdam was converted to a troop carrier at the outbreak of the war. After delivering troops to the beach as part of the US Rangers assault on the guns at Point De Hoc, she returned to UK and was converted to a hospital ship. Whilst leaving Juno beach in thick fog on 7 August 1944, with over 260 casualties, 60 medical staff and 102 crew, she struck 2 mines. Although the medical staff worked selflessly, 55 casualties perished (including 15 Germans), along with 30 crew and 10 of the medical staff, just 11 minutes after hitting the mines. The survivors were rescued within 40 minutes in the thick fog, each casualty being supported in the water by a sound man.



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Length	107m
Beam	15m
Tonnage	4200
Approx Depth	23m

Doctors done. Back for diving. Dawn ate sardines for lunch, which she regretted as she brought them up on the boat an hour later. Regurgitated sardines... nice. Interesting journey out. Nearly there and Mark nose-dived off the boat, woolly hat, sunglasses, at least the suit was zipped up. Why? No idea.

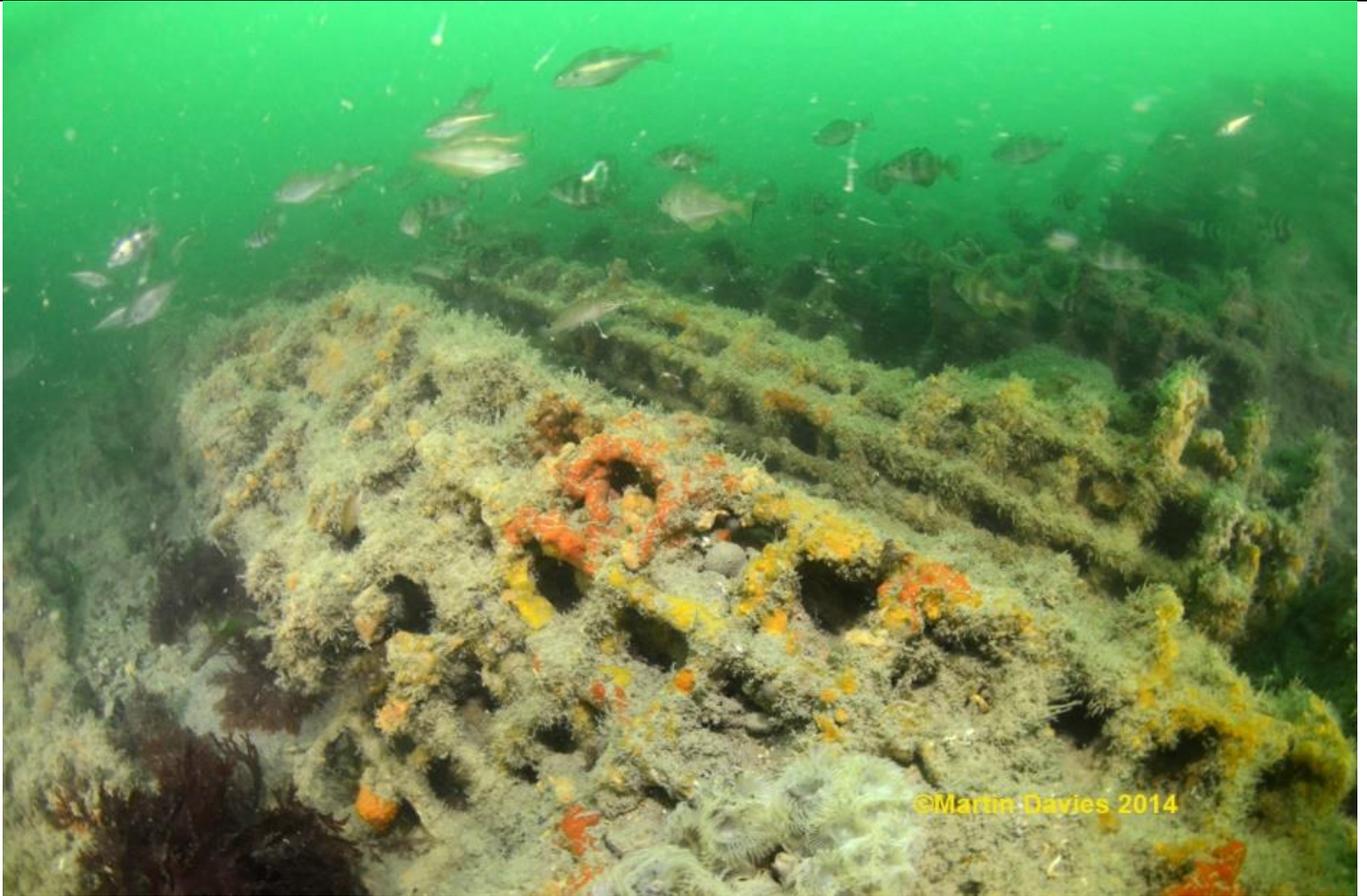
We dived 'the Harpagus' (the Whisky). Sunk in 1944 by a mine, it is famous for its distinctive bottles of whisky that are rarely found now. Myself, Roger and Dawn dived as a three. Dawn did not seem to appreciate me being distracted by the fauna on the gravelly cobbly substrate, when the wreck seemed to be off in a slightly different direction. I could see loads of the wreckage, I just had a nice bit of the gravel as well. Best of both worlds. For the biologists out there, there was a dense covering of foliose hydroids and bryozoans, *Vesicularia spinosa*, patches of *Flustra foliacea*, *Sertularia*, *Halecium*, and the sponges *Mycale*, *Ciocalypa penicillus*, *Suberites*, and *Dysidea fragilis*. Huge shoals of *Trisopterus luscus* (bib) Lovely dive. Dive time strictly limited to 45 mins. Ours was 46. Beatings imminent.

SS Harpagus. A British Armed Merchantman

<p>Description</p>	<p>The Harpagus made several successful trips resupplying the Normandy beach-head, but on 19 August 1944, struck a mine just a mile and a half from the Mulberry B harbour at Arromanche. The ship broke into 2 pieces. The aft section was later refloated, towed back to UK where a new 190ft fore-section was built onto the stern. The new composite ship was then relaunched as the Treworlas. In 1960 she grounded in the Persian Gulf. On her return to Falmouth she was declared a constructive total loss and sold for scrap. She was towed to Briton Ferry in Sept 1960, where she was broken-up.</p> <p>The original sunken fore-section lies at about 19m and is an excellent dive with many bottles and other cargo strewn about in the wreckage. This is why she is also known as the Whisky wreck!</p>
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No suitable pre-sinking picture of the Harpagus found.





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Length	130m
Beam	17m
Tonnage	7300
Approx Depth	19m

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