

HM Submarine A1 Licensee Report 2012

by Martin Davies

Overview

This year has been an exceptionally bad year for diving in general; despite this a total of seven dives have taken place on the A1 site over the year. The combination of high winds and heavy rainfall has either meant that accessing the site impossible or when the wind has relented the visibility in Bracklesham Bay where the site is located has been poor and sometimes it has not been worth getting in the water. That said, there has been ongoing outreach opportunities and those visiting divers lucky enough to dive the site for the first time enjoyed the experience.

Diving

This year has seen seven visits to the site and the wreck.

12th May 1 dive – Holborn BSAC

30th /31st May – Wessex Archaeology 3 dives

25 July 1 dive – Southsea BSAC

9th August 1 dive – SC Charters mixed group

31st August 1 dive - NAS dive club

2nd September 1 dive – Southsea BSAC

The first dive on the 12th May was in poor conditions and with visibility less than 2m, the wreck was difficult to see and it was more a feel your way around the wreck. The divers were from Holborn BSAC dive club who has made contact with me and arranged to dive the site, they used their own club boat and manage to find the wreck from the marks given and complete a successful dive.

30th and 31st May

The site was visited by Wessex Archaeology (WA), a diving contractor visiting the site on behalf of English Heritage. WA has been tasked by English Heritage to investigate the hull thickness of A1 and have been using a Cygnus ultrasonic thickness gauge, to gain measurements at various parts of the hull to ascertain the condition of the hull and how much material has been eroded away since manufacture. WA managed two days of diving on the site and collected data from 3 points around the submarine of its hull thickness. A separate report from WA has been produced describing methodology and findings.

25th July

I dived the wreck for the first time and reported that the condition of the wreck was as previous visits. Some fishing line was seen around the stern area of the submarine from rod line fishing which

has subsequently been removed (see Figure 3). A large amount of sediment resides in the forward area of the bow and can be observed from the forward hatches that are open; a large amount of weed has also collected in the hatch area.

9th August

I dived the wreck with a group of divers on the RIB run by Simon Bradburn of SC Charters; the group of local dives reported a good dive in 4mtrs of visibility.

31st August

The wreck site was visited by members of the NAS; the visibility was good around 4mtrs and all dives reported a good dive in reasonable conditions using their own boat.

2nd September

I visited the site again with members of Southsea BSAC, many thanks to Edward Rollins and Doug Carter for their assistance in taking some of the measurements while I was taking photographs. The measurements were of the crack in the conning tower which does appear to be growing from personal memory. From this date onward I intend to measure and monitoring the crack in the front of the conning tower and also a smaller one in the rear more carefully. See figures 4 to 6 for details.

Other Outreach

The wreck has featured in the April 2012 edition of SCUBA magazine as a 'Wrecked' feature. The article, written by myself generated some interest in divers wanting to dive the site. 'SCUBA' is the British Sub-Aqua Club's own magazine and has a circulation around 35,000 readers.

Wreck Condition

The wreck of the A1 Submarine remains a stable and robust site for visiting divers to see, while she is showing signs of deterioration in many areas, the cracks in the conning tower being the most visible.



Figure 1 - Conning tower general view



Figure 2 - Hole in rear casing 49cm long

Numerous holes can be seen in the rear casing one of the largest is 49cm across. The submarine is still very much intact. The build up of sediment inside the wreck remains a concern in the forward

torpedo loading hatch area along with a large amount of seaweed. When I brief divers they are always advised not to enter the wreck. The sediment and mobile silt that is carried in the water column and gives the area its poor visibility seems to be deposited in this area.

Marine Life

The wreck remains a haven for marine life with lots of marine life using the wreck as a home, the most common species being Tom Pot Blenny. Other species that are regularly seen are edible crab, lobster, velvet swimming crab, conger eel, a large shoal or bib or poor cod reside in the summer months. Sponges, hydroids and sea squirts are the next most dominant animals to be seen.

Threats

The wreck this year has not seen any direct major threats. There is a string of commercial fishing pots placed within the 300 metre exclusion zone, but these pots appear to have no owner. They are marked with a small round white buoy which is covered in growth and has been there for two seasons now. Whilst not directly a threat they appear to be illegally placed. WA commented on them in their report and said they were a hazard while that were manoeuvring their boat on site. See figure 5.

The Scour at the bow remains similar to previous years while the seabed around the wreck contains a lot of mobile silt and is very easily disturbed by careless diver fining activity.

Research

No research has been conducted this year.

Conclusion

The A1 is as popular as ever with still much interest in the wreck and I can only see it growing greater next year. The story of HMSm A1 and the wreck today featured in the 2011 BBC television programme, Britain's Hidden Heritage and the 'SCUBA' magazine feature in April 2012 has generated interest this year in diving the site, however the poor weather that has dominated the 2012 season has impacted on the amount of diving and survey activity that was planned.

Martin Davies

Images from 2012 diving on HMSm A1



Figure 3 – Rod fishing gear



Figure 4 - Length of crack is 1.1mrts



Figure 5 Width of crack is 8cm to 11cm

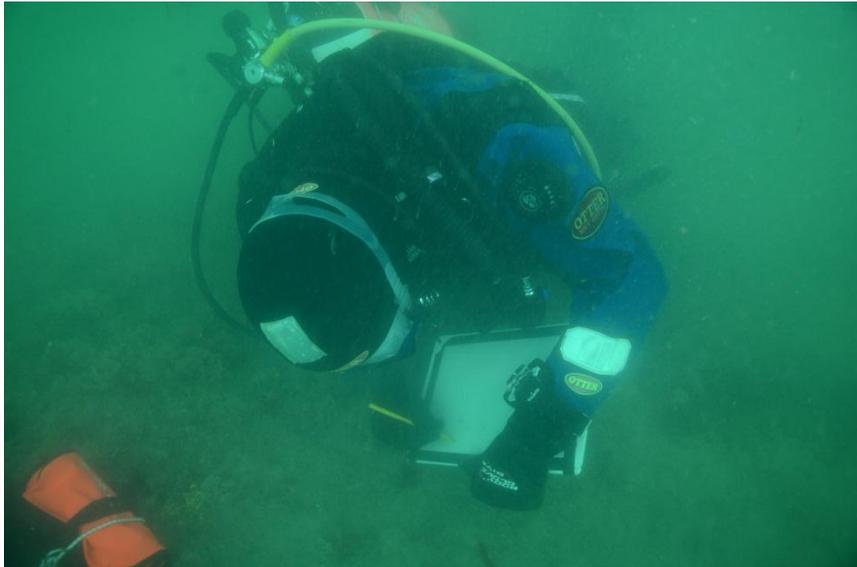


Figure 6 - Doug Carter making notes



Clearly visible is the round white fishing buoy on the site in the foreground and the marker of A1 to the rear.

Figure 7 - Illegal potting with 300m of site – Picture by Mark Beattie Edwards