

## Researching, Protecting and Managing England's Marine Historic Environment

by Alison James, Historic England

The first presentation of 2018 was given by Alison James a marine archaeologist working for Historic England, a public body that looks after the English historical environment. Although attendance was lower than normal due to the University students having not returned to Plymouth after their Christmas break, an Egyptian surveyor working for Fugro Egypt attended the presentation. He had arranged his return home from New York after hearing of the lecture, arriving in Plymouth just before it started and returning to London by train at 5am the next day to travel to Paris! His efforts were fully rewarded as Alison gave a fascinating and enthusiastic account of her role responsible for the fifty-three wreck sites currently protected under the 1973 Protection of Wrecks Act that lie within 12 nautical miles of the English coast (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Protected Wreck Sites (August 2017)

Although a diver, Alison's responsibility at Historic England involves management of the protected wreck sites with any site work put out to contract to organisations like Wessex Archaeology. Other areas of marine work Historic England are involved in include marine planning, and maintaining a record of the marine historic environment. Being conscious that her audience included hydrographic surveyors, Alison emphasised the importance of Hydrography to Historic England in identifying new wreck sites, monitoring subsequent changes, understanding the environment and providing the all-important baseline data, which includes the use of Multi Beam plots (Figure 2) and Geophysical equipment.

Following the 2009 Marine and Coastal Access Act, Historic England provides advice on sites of possible archaeological significance, such ports and wind farm constructions, and the development of Government Regulations. Historic England also work with partner organisations such as the Maritime and Coastguard agency to identify Heritage Crime taking place at offshore sites that include objects of historic value, preventing theft, damage and stopping illegal access.

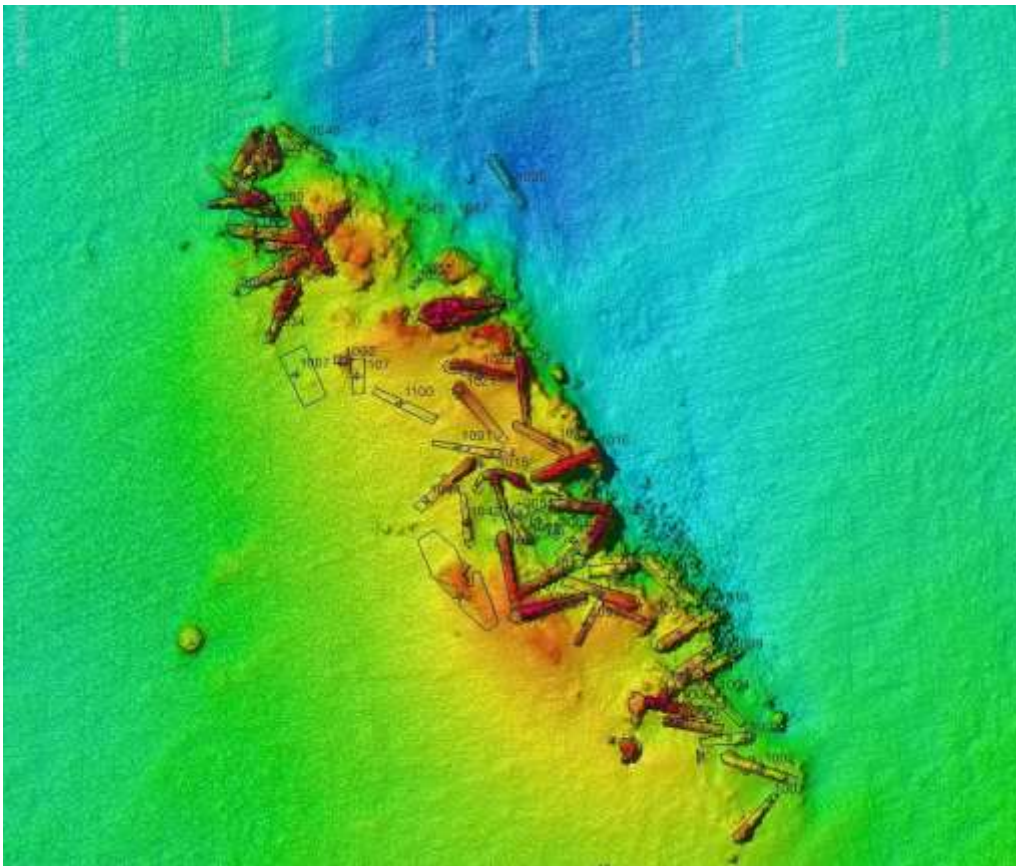


Figure 2: Normans Bay protected wreck site with site plan superimposed  
(Source: MSDS Marine and the Nautical Archaeology Society)

The fifty-three sites protected since the Protection of Wrecks Act range from Bronze Age cargos, the *Mary Rose* Tudor site to a 20th century Royal Navy vessel, after taking into account their historical and archaeological importance. Considerable care is given to defining site boundaries, taking into account access and what work needs to be carried out. Although survey work is contracted out, Historic England believe it very important to continue to use local volunteers who may have been working on the site for many years, effectively becoming custodians and having free access as licensees. Unfortunately, this raises new problems as the licensees on all the sites are getting older and a major challenge for Historic England is to attract younger volunteers to take on this important role.

There is no one management approach that is suitable for all the sites and key to their successful management is the ability to develop, adapt and employ approaches that are appropriate for each site to ensure their potential is fulfilled. The preferred approach is to facilitate preservation in-situ in line with the Annex to the UNESCO Convention, which the UK Government have adopted as best practice. However, the management approach by Historic England varies according to the needs of each site that are clearly identified in site specific Conservation Management Plans. Approaches include mitigation of risk through community involvement, ongoing monitoring work, excavation of high risk sites and public enjoyment on more robust sites. It is anticipated as new sites are identified, researched and protected, and as the management of existing sites progress, that new approaches will need to be developed to ensure that sites are managed appropriately so their significance is maintained for future generations to enjoy.

Alison described the work carried out over some of the fifty-three sites that space limits being reported in detail. This included Bronze Age sites at Moor Sand, Salcombe, the Erme and Langdon Bay that included artefacts but no ship structure, and a 17th century merchant vessel in the Swash Channel discovered in 2004 when quick reaction by Historic England using Bournemouth University allowed the site to be stabilised and removed from their Heritage at Risk register. She covered work carried out on the *Amsterdam* at Hastings (Figure 3), a 1749 Dutch East Indiaman that led to the creation of the Protection of Wreck Act (which your reporter mistakenly thought came from finding the *Mary Rose*!), the *Invincible*, the *Holland 5* submarine and

the 1665 *London* wreck in the Thames Estuary (Figure 4). Alison ended her review with the 1740 *Rooswijk* wreck currently being worked on in conjunction with the Dutch Cultural Agency that was covered in an earlier presentation by Alex Hildred.



Figure 3: The wreck of the Amsterdam on the beach at Hastings at low tide

Historic England review six to ten new sites each year and Alison is particularly keen to find a Viking wreck site, although they are currently budget limited. They are also very anxious to develop links with local divers familiar with wrecks sites on the North East and North West coasts of England.

Alison closed her very interesting presentation emphasising she could be contacted at any time, including weekends, should anyone come across a new wreck site during their work that may need protection, notwithstanding that she has to fit this in with being a parent of two young boys. She highlighted that you can visit protected wreck sites on dive trails designed by Historic England to enhance visits (Figure 4). Alternatively, non-divers can visit sites virtually without the need to get wet or leave home that completely hooked her sons, although your reporter thinks it would be impossible to persuade them to hand over their 3D virtual headsets! <https://historicengland.org.uk/get-involved/visit/protected-wreck-dive-trails/>.



Figure 4: Example of a virtual dive trail from the London wreck  
(Source: Cotswold Archaeology and ArtasMedia)