

# WRECKS OF BRIDGWATER BAY: A REVIEW OF THEIR STATUS, HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

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*Analysis of the extant archaeological and historic wreck record, as well as c 480 km<sup>2</sup> of marine and terrestrial survey data (aerial photographs, lidar, swath bathymetry and side scan sonar), has allowed a re-appraisal of both the record and the implications of our understanding of the maritime history of the Inner Bristol Channel region. A total of 111 recorded wreck sites (97 shipwrecks and 14 recorded aircraft losses) were investigated and compared with the recently acquired datasets collected as part of the Hinkley Point C environmental assessment. Of these 111, 75% were covered by the new data but only six wreck sites were clearly identified. This clearly shows the vagaries of wreck searches as a result of a combination of the quality of the oral histories recorded in the archive data (particularly in relation to positional information); the actual process of wrecking and associated salvage; and the capacity for post-depositional burial or erosion. Despite this low identification count, a review of the extant record still provides invaluable information on the maritime history of the area, in particular the potential dominance of local trade associated with the Welsh coalfields (trade in both commodities and infrastructure materials) from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century all the way through to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.*

## INTRODUCTION

Although much of Britain's recent seafaring past can be understood from documentary records, the physical presence of wrecks in the coastal zone act to provide an emphatic connection to the

nation's history, invoking strong emotions and interactions that are difficult to generate from the written record alone. Where these are exposed at low tide, they stand as living testaments to a long sea faring history, acting as important monuments within the seascape, and subsequently protected in some cases for their importance as a heritage asset. Wrecks do not, however, often reside within a stable sedimentary system. This is clearly demonstrated within the Inner Bristol Channel where strong tidal currents, high turbidity and a significant degree of exposure to wind generated waves can cause wrecks to translocate, break-up, or intermittently become submerged / exposed due to shifting mud and sand deposits.

For UK waters, records of wrecks are held in (and shared between) a number of locations, most notably the National Monument Records (NMR), United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO) wrecks database and independent researchers archives such as the extensive publications of Larn and Larn (eg Larn and Larn 2000). Each of these contains varying documentation about the history of a wreck and known / expected location. The recorded location of a wreck could have been generated from direct imaging of a wreck during surveying, or simply through oral histories pertaining to the date the vessel sunk / disappeared. This means that the positional accuracy can vary significantly from the centimetric accuracies associated with RTK-GPS, to the decametre resolution of Decca Navigator System (DNS) coordinates, through to "known locations" which could represent vessels that

the south-eastern edge of the Inner Bristol Channel, and includes the lower reaches of the River Parrett (Figure 1). This area is particularly important for the history of British seafaring as, during the Medieval period, Bridgwater became the largest port in Somerset, and the 5th largest in England, focused predominantly on local and coastal trade activities (Farr 1954). The coastline of the embayment extends from the eastern side of Brean Down in the north to Burnham-on-Sea in the south, where it meets the mouth of the River Parrett, and is fronted seaward by the wide intertidal mudflats of Berrow Flats. West of the River Parrett the coastline extends effectively due west from Stert Point, past Hinkley Point and ultimately to the harbours of Watchet and Minehead. This section of coastline is characterised by relatively low lying cliffs, fronted by a bedrock platform of the underlying Lower Lias deposits. The exception to this is the extensive mudflat deposits of Stert Flats that have built out at the entrance to the River Parrett. Immediately offshore the seabed is dominated by the Bridgwater Bay mud patch and Gore Sands, resting upon an extensive bedrock platform.

In the central Inner Bristol Channel the seabed topography is dominated by the Culver Sands; an extensive and migrating sand body that has developed downstream of Steep Holm (for a full description of the offshore seabed geology see Dix *et al* submitted).

Studies of the Bridgwater Bay sediment regime provide a consistent pattern: an inshore core region suffering erosion and sediment loss; a surrounding stable zone of minimal changes; and a zone of rapid accretion along the seaward margin of the Bridgwater Bay mudpatch (Mantz and Wakeling 1983; Kirby and Parker 1983; Kirby 1994; Long *et al* 2002). Erosion of the southern foreshore has been taking place for at least the past 150 years (eg Kendall 1937; 1938; Kirby and Kirby 2008), with cartographic evidence demonstrating the lateral receding of Stert Point by c 0.5 km between 1802 and 1886 (Kidson 1960). Beyond the mud deposits much of the deeper offshore subtidal area is extremely starved of sediment with the exposed bedrock over much of the seabed. The geomorphology of Bridgwater Bay therefore has strong implications for the preservation and location of known (and unknown) wrecks within its boundaries.

## METHODOLOGY

An extensive search of the UKHO wrecks database, NMR, Somerset Sites and Monuments Record (SSMR), and Larn and Larn (2000) for the study area (Figure 1) identified a total of ninety-seven shipwreck records and fourteen aircraft records. This record has been compared directly against the datasets acquired during the Hinkley archaeological assessment process and associated offshore work including: high resolution swath (c 290 km<sup>2</sup>), side scan sonar (c 90 km<sup>2</sup>), lidar (19 km<sup>2</sup>) and aerial photographs of the coastal strip and inter-tidal zone (c 120 km<sup>2</sup>). No magnetometer data was available for the study area.

The shipwreck data represents five broad time periods: pre-19<sup>th</sup> Century, 19<sup>th</sup> Century, early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, World War Two (WWII) and post-WWII. The archive record is dominated by 19<sup>th</sup> Century wrecks which account for 46% [n=45] of the shipwrecks along with the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (20% [n=19]), WWII (9% [n=9]), pre-19<sup>th</sup> Century (11% [n=11]) shipwrecks, whilst the post-WWII records account for only one shipwreck. There are a further twelve wrecks which have no wrecking date assigned but are regarded by the NMR/ Historic Environment Record (HER) as being Post-Medieval. Of the fourteen aircraft records, all bar one are related to WWII. All locations within the following sections are given in British National Grid (BNG).

## RESULTS

### *Pre-19<sup>th</sup> Century record*

There are eleven records of potential wrecks during this period, with the earliest being two records of foundered vessels in 1310 and 1311, both recorded in the Calendar of Patent Rolls (Edward II, 1307-13). Both of these records relate to complaints. The first complaint [NMR 1003061] was by Robert, son of Payn (Lord of the Manor of Stoke Curcy [Stogursey]), who believed he was entitled to the 'wreck of the sea' associated with a ship that had foundered on 'Laverksond' [Lark Sand Spit – at the mouth of the River Parrett] with the loss of all lives sometime prior to February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1310. The

wrecked in the vicinity of an entire embayment several kilometres in size. Combining these intrinsic positional inaccuracies of the historical record with a physically active environment results in a potentially unreliable record thus, when opportunities arise, reappraisal of the known wreck information is vitally important.

Opportunities can often be presented during offshore surveying in advance of infrastructure installations or mineral extraction. One such opportunity, reported here, occurred during a marine archaeological impact assessment, carried out ahead of the proposed offshore construction

work as a part of wider development works at Hinkley Point Nuclear Power Station. Given the large scope of the eventual study area, it was decided that a paper outlining all known wrecks in the area, and whether enhanced information on the wrecks could be obtained, would be of use to the wider community as well as for updating national records.

### STUDY AREA

The area of study reported in this paper is centred upon the Bridgwater Bay embayment, located on

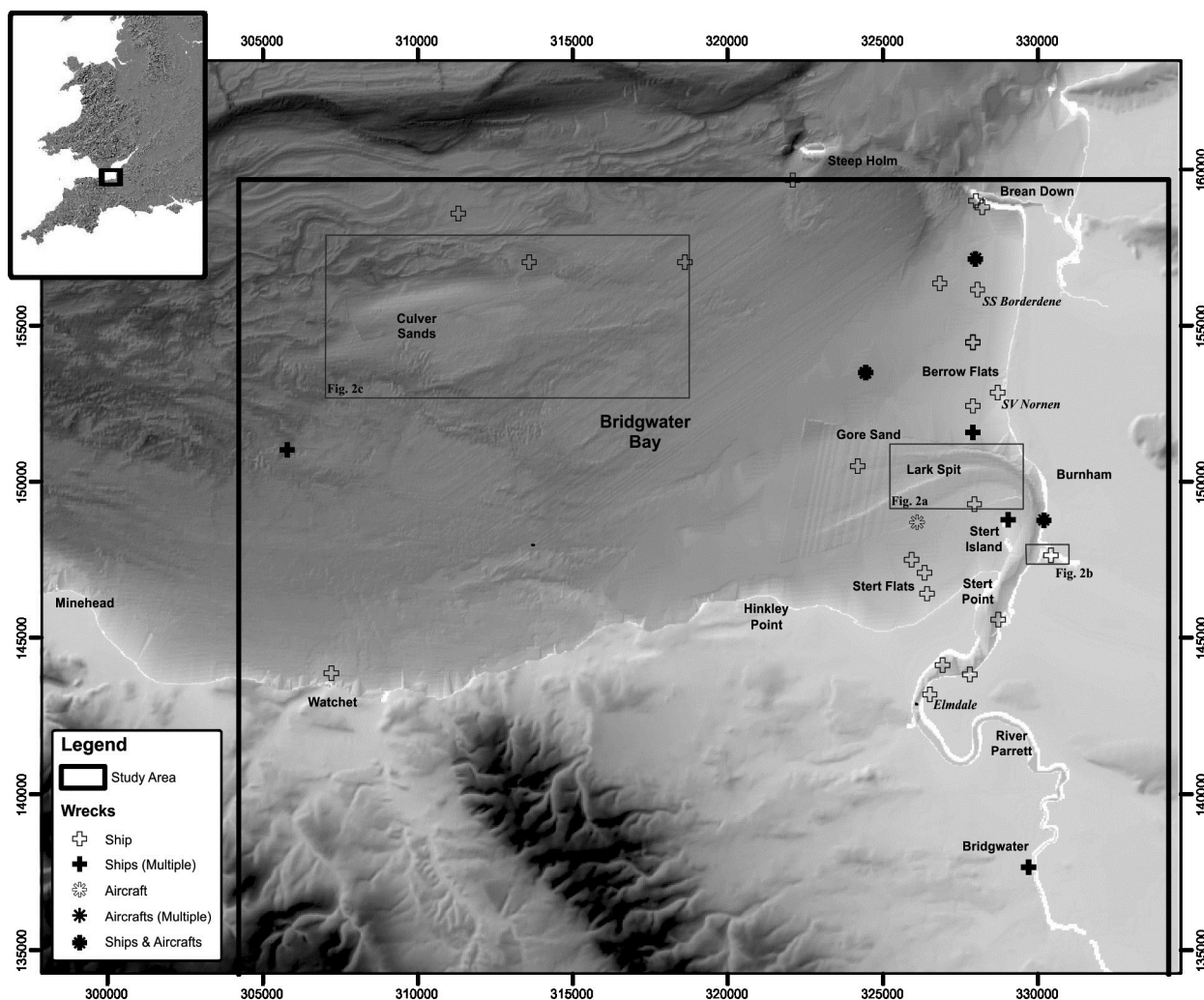


Figure 1: A map showing the location of wrecks recorded in the NMR, Somerset SMR, UKHO wreck record and Larn & Larn (2000). The symbology identifies the significant number of “generic” locations at which multiple wrecks are recorded. Inset panels show the location of Figures 2 and 3. OS Panorama topographic data reproduced with the permission of Ordnance Survey © Crown Copyright (2013). All rights reserved. Bathymetry British Crown and SeaZone Solutions Limited. All rights reserved. Product Licence 032007.016.

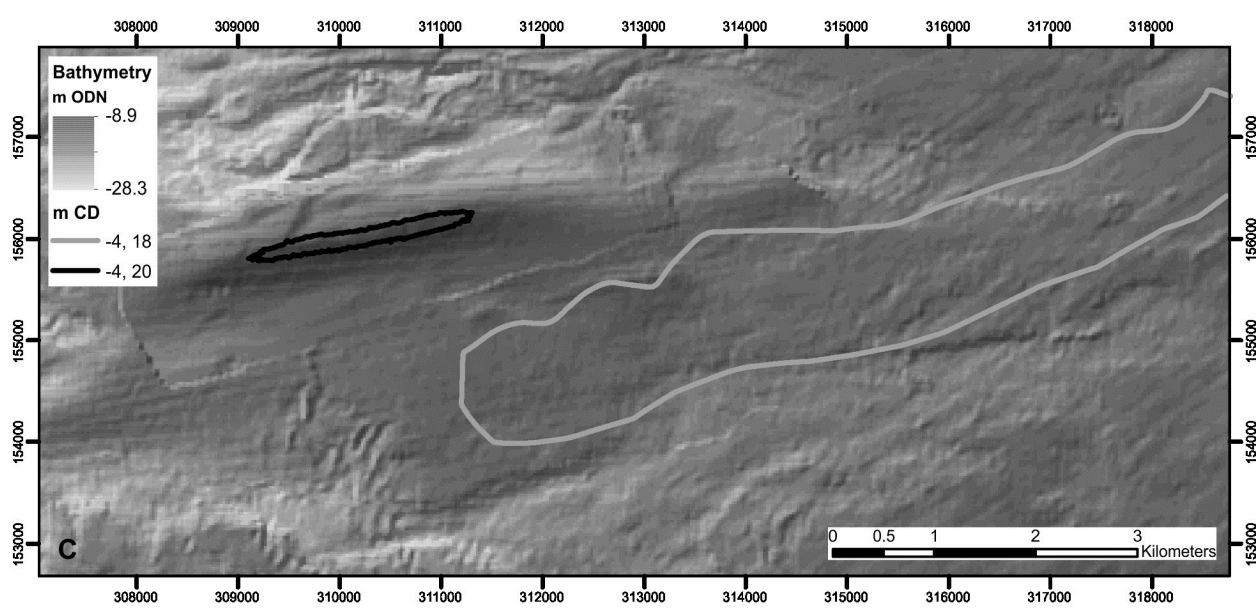
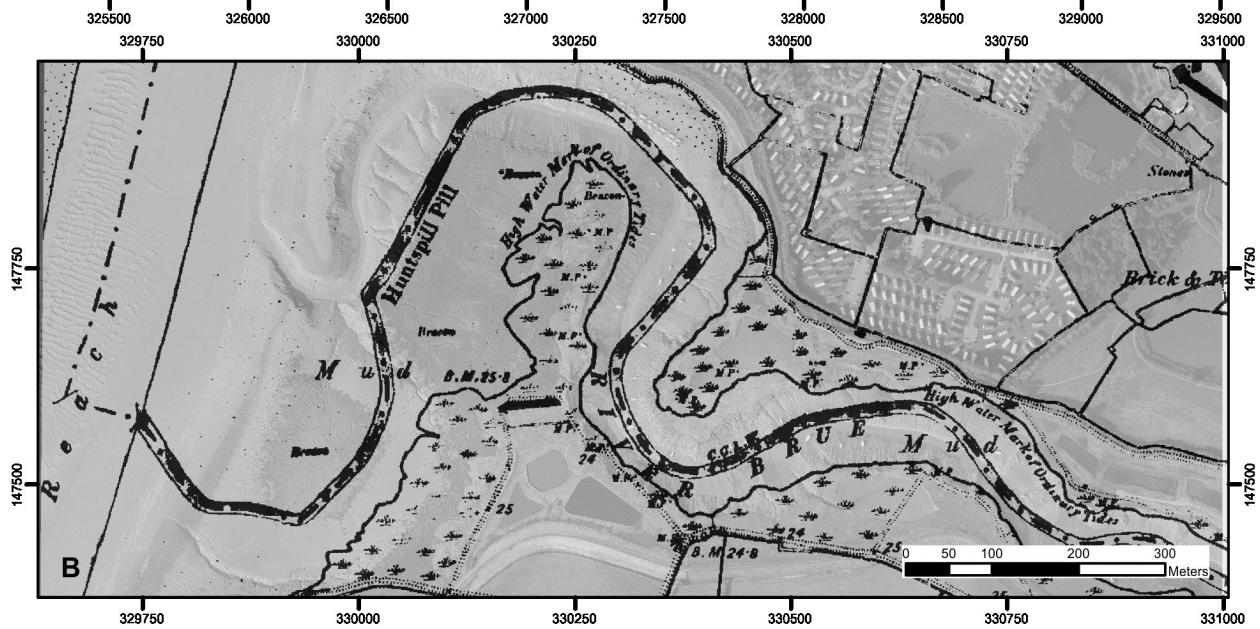
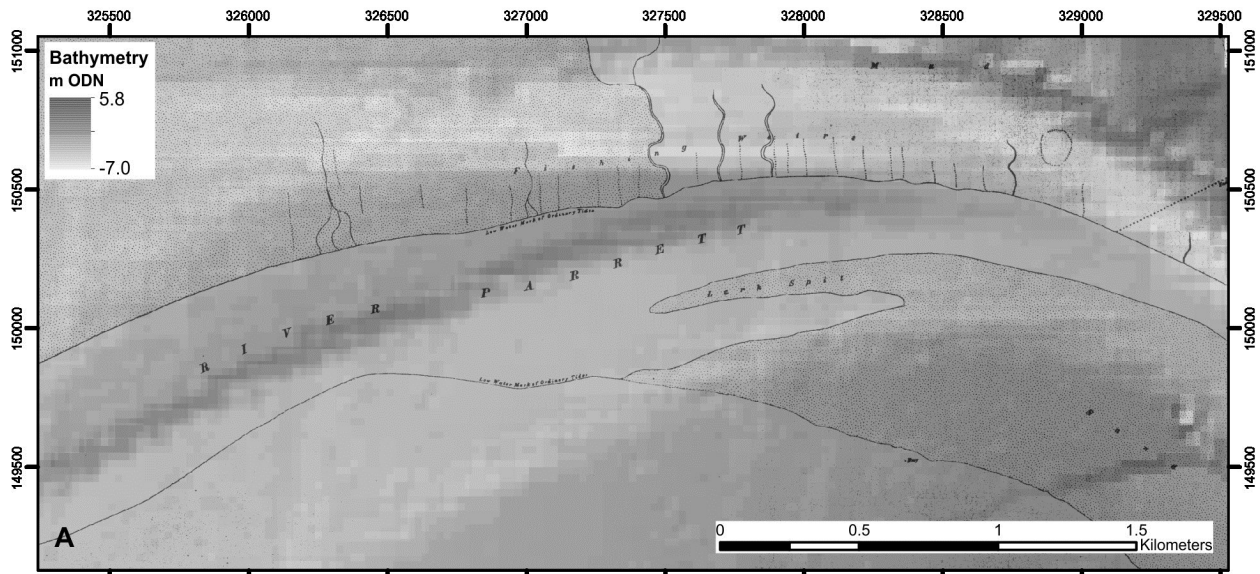


Figure 2: Comparison of OS / Admiralty mapping data against bathymetry / aerial photograph datasets for select features. Panel A) Comparison of the georectified 1888 County Series OS Map overlain on the modern UKHO derived bathymetry showing the migration of Lark Spit over an c. 100 year period. Panel B) Comparison of the 2008 Aerial Photograph of Huntspill Pill with the georectified 1888 County Series OS Map showing the stability of the salting areas at this locality. Panel C) Comparison of the 1795 Admiralty Chart Contour (-4mCD, 18) with the modern UKHO derived bathymetry (-4m CD, 20) showing the late 18th Century Bank has migrated 3.75 km to the north and west. 1888 County Series OS Map © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2013). All rights reserved. Bathymetry British Crown and SeaZone Solutions Limited. All rights reserved. Product Licence 032007.016.

second complaint was by John de Landaf, the owner of the goods on a vessel, sailing from Ireland to Wales, wrecked off 'Dunsterre' [NMR 1003062] and recorded on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1311. The location of the former is incorrectly identified in the NMR (which actually places it at the same locality as the second wreck), but any attempt to locate the Lark Sand Spit wreck will be hindered by the degree of sandbar and channel migration that has occurred over the last 200 years (Larcombe and Fernand 2009), let alone the last 700 years. Comparison of the 1888 County Series OS map shows the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century location of Lark Spit is in the middle of the channel between the current Lark Spit and Stert Island (Figure 2a) hence the potential for remains is low. Corridor based swath data (ie not 100% coverage) has been acquired as far west as Chapel Cleeve, but no viable targets corresponding to the 'Dunsterre' wreck are identified. It is also worth noting that there are anecdotal accounts of a Portuguese vessel wrecked off the north side of Brean Down in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, as evidenced by finds of glass and glazed ware in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, but no actual evidence of a wreck has been recorded [Somerset HER 10137].

The second group of records in this period relate to 18<sup>th</sup> Century wrecks, including a group of five vessels [NMR 1432049/58-61] believed to have been wrecked off Huntspill during the Great Storm of 27<sup>th</sup> November 1703 (Defoe 2005). These were a group of 'colliers and corn-dealers' operating between Wales and Bridgwater which anecdotally came to rest '100 yards on to pasture ground'. The contemporary descriptions would suggest the vessels were blown on to the saltings at the entrance to the River Brue (also called Huntspill Pill) which is the boundary between the parishes of Huntspill and Burnham. Comparison

of the 2008 Aerial Photographs with the oldest digital County Series Ordnance Survey map of 1888 shows the map to be accurately georectified (to  $\pm 6$  m) and the salting areas are still largely intact within the limbs of the large meander at this location (Figure 2b). Interestingly, although this location would be currently exposed to westerly storms due to the separation of Stert Island from Fenning Island, in c 1790 (Kendall 1937) these two were connected by a narrow isthmus of land and so protected from the largest waves associated with the Great Storm, showing the true destructive capabilities of the event.

Finally, there are three mid- to late-18<sup>th</sup> Century wrecks associated with international trade: the *Gambia* [NMR 1383053], which stranded on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1757 near Bridgwater en route to Bristol, having been captured by privateers on her original voyage from Liverpool to the Gambia; the *Albemarle* [NMR 1319643], which is reported in Lloyds List as being lost on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1763 on the 'Culvers' en route from Bristol to Jamaica; and finally the *Governor Bruce* [NMR 1337817] which was travelling from Venice to Bristol when she ran ashore at "Bridgwater" on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1797. The contemporary records suggested she was expected to re-float but there was no subsequent record of her arrival at Bristol.

The poor positional records of the *Gambia* and the *Governor Bruce* make positive identification of these wrecks from geophysics alone improbable. However, through comparison of the contours from the 1795 Chart of the Culver sands with the modern bathymetry it can be demonstrated that since the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century the bank has migrated 3.75 km to the north and west and shortened by 6.5 km (Figure 2c).

Consequently, the potential location of the *Albermarle* would actually be on the southern flanks of the current bank system. Two potential swath contacts are identified in this broad area but again the extent of sediment movement since original deposition make it unlikely they relate to this wreck.

### *19<sup>th</sup> Century record*

The forty-five wrecks recorded during this period are distributed relatively evenly across the decades, with a slight bias towards an enhanced record between 1870 and the turn of the Century. Out of these forty-five wrecks, thirty-three have information on their actual departure and arrival ports. Of these routes, 64% represent trade between Welsh ports (seven for Cardiff; four for Newport; two for Swansea; one for Chepstow; and one for Monmouth) or ports on the Severn (three for Gloucester; two for Lydney; and one for Tewkesbury) to either ports on the River Parrett, primarily Bridgwater, or Bristol. There are also minor records of transport, purely within the River Parrett (one wreck), between ports along the southern coast of the Bristol Channel (two wrecks), between Swansea and Cornwall (one wreck) and wider UK trade with London (two wrecks). Finally, there is some evidence of international trade from Bridgwater (three wrecks: two to Norway and one to Italy), Cardiff (two wrecks to France and Spain) and Bristol (one wreck to USA).

For twenty-five of the records there is also information on the cargos being carried and these show the dominance of coal as the major trading commodity (15 records) from the South Wales coalfields to Bridgwater and Bristol. This appears to be a trend that has continued from the preceding century as evidenced by the analysis of records of quay and keelage duties at Watchet that demonstrated 97% of the craft were active coasters, principally shipping coal (Hussey 2000). These shipments would have fed the demand of

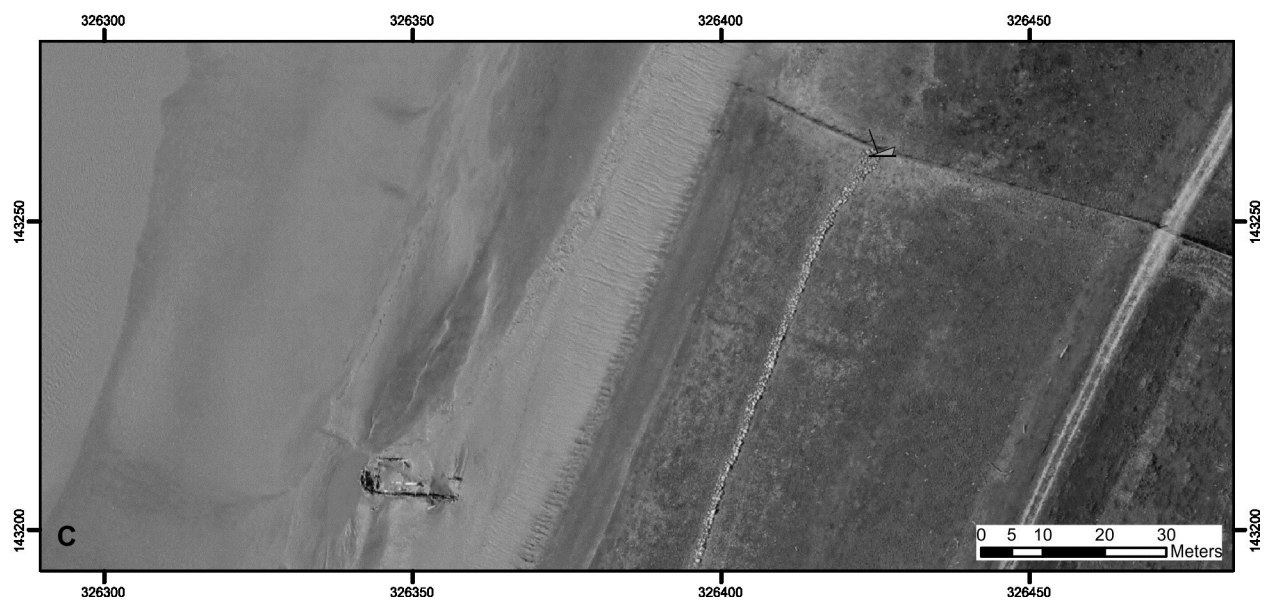
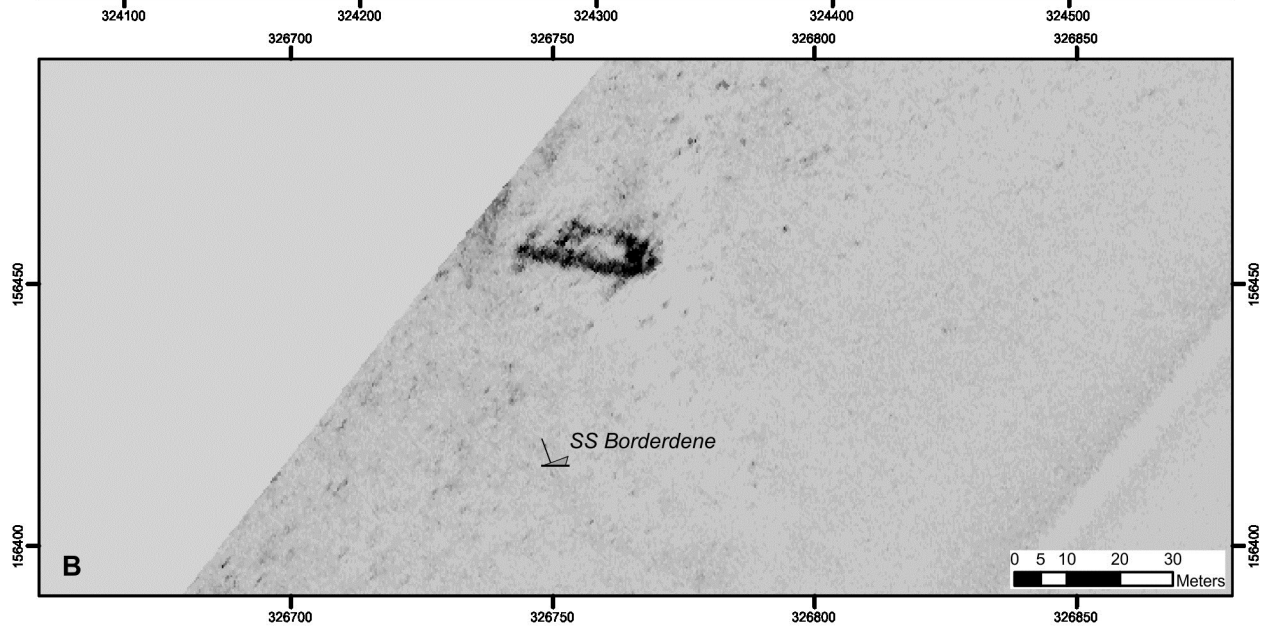
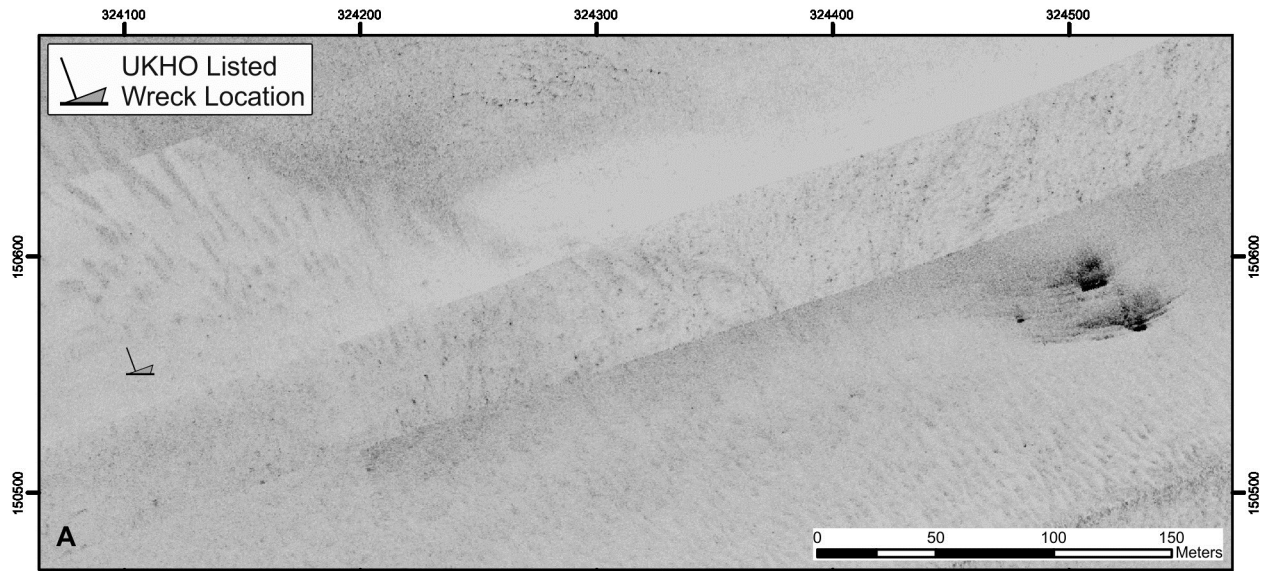
not only local industries but the wider markets of the south-east (including London) and south-west. Initially they would have linked to these English markets via the Kennet and Avon, and Bridgwater to Taunton canals. Indeed the trows, barges and sloops which represent a third of the recorded wrecked vessels were capable of travelling directly through the canals to the destination ports (MOLA 2007). From the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century onwards trade transportation would have migrated towards the Great Western Railway, with major stations at Bristol and Bridgwater. The remaining cargos are split between industrial infrastructure commodities (bricks, iron ore and tin ingots) and agricultural commodities (flour, wheat, potatoes, salt and Spanish esparto grass).

The wreck record strongly reflects local seafaring trade routes, rather than the international trade for which the Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary ports were renowned. This is probably a reflection of both the volume of traffic associated with these short (10-100 kms), but regular, journeys and the sea-worthiness and age of the vessels that were in use on these routes.

Of the forty-five recorded wrecks, twenty-one are covered by aerial photographs at their named coordinates, a further ten are covered by swath bathymetry data at a minimum of 1m bin resolution, and a single site is covered by side scan sonar. The remaining thirteen potential wreck locations have no modern data associated with their recorded locations. Despite this extensive data coverage only two of the wrecks have been clearly imaged. This is due to all, bar two, of the wrecks being so poorly known that their locations are given as generalised coordinates (eg Culver Sands [BNG 305790, 151020]) that aggregate wrecks listed by anecdotal information in to a single, well-known location / area (see Figure 1). The wider area has been searched but no anomalies correspond with any of these individual vessels.

*Figure 3: Side scan sonar / aerial photographs of selected wrecks, shown against the listed location of the nearest recorded wreck in UKHO record. Panel A) Side scan sonar image of a clear wreck structure at the west end of the Gore. This unnamed wreck is c. 410 m due east of the nearest NMR/UKHO record [NMR 1003148/UKHO 12526]. Panel B) Side scan sonar image of the SS Borderdene a steamship mined on the 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1942. Panel C) a 2008 aerial photograph of the wreck of the Elmdale on the eastern bank of the Parrett.*





Of the two clearly imaged wrecks of this period, the first is an unknown wreck (limited available historic information, possibly wrecked 1880) on the west end of the Gore at the entrance to the River Parrett [UKHO ID 12526; NMR 1003148]. A wreck is identified on the side scan sonar 410 m due east of the recorded location (Figure 3a: [BNG 324516, 150583]), but, with no other target within 2.5 km of the imaged target, it is probable that it relates to this record. However the possibility of the burial of one site and the exposure of the other cannot be discarded. The vessel is clearly split into two separate bow and stern sections, oriented NW-SE and covering a total area of 430 m<sup>2</sup>. The bow section is 10 m long and 11 m wide whilst the stern section is 11 m by 11 m.

The second imaged wreck is that of the *SV Nornen* [UKHO ID 12414; NMR 1003025], probably the highest profile wreck in the area. It is located on Berrow Flats having wrecked there on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1897. The *SV Nornen* was a barque, built in La Roque, Bordeaux, in 1876, and originally named the *Mai Pu*. She came in to Norwegian ownership and was renamed the *SV Nornen* in 1887. Whilst en route to Brunswick, USA, from Bristol, in ballast, she came free of her anchorage in Lundy Roads, whilst sheltering from a storm, and was blown up channel to be stranded on the flats. All crew (ten oarsmen and their dog) were ultimately rescued by the Burnham lifeboat, and, after several attempts to lighten and refloat her, the ship was eventually sold as “wreck” by April that year. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century only the ribs remained. Aerial photograph analysis described in the NMR record for the site suggests that the vessel has changed location by up to 60 m between 1954 and 1989 and was totally absent (buried) during WWII. However, comparison of the current recorded locations of the wreck from the UKHO, the NMR and the 2008 aerial photographs used in this analysis give positional variations of up to 280 m, whilst a 1989 aerial photograph position, recorded in the NMR report, coincides exactly with the current centre position [BNG 328700, 153000]. This would suggest that such inferred large movements in the vessel are more likely related to inaccuracies in original positional fixing, georectification and/or conversions from one coordinate system to another, rather than actually reflecting fluctuations of the vessel location.

### *Early 20th Century record*

From the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century until 1915, a total of nineteen wrecks are recorded in the survey area. This record represents a continuation in the routes represented and the cargos carried, with the majority of trips (53%) taking place between South Wales and the Somerset and Gloucestershire coasts, primarily transporting coal, pit props and other construction goods (73%). There continues to be evidence of transport along the North Somerset and Devon coast as well as international routes, with an Italian barque (*Maria di porto salvo*) carrying pit props from Vyborg, Russia, and an English schooner (*Eidsvold*) carrying timber from Gävle, Sweden. There is also the first record of tourism related wrecks, with a British yacht, the *Channel Pride* (1906) and a motor launch, the *Hilda* (1910), both stranding on Brean Down. The dominant type of vessel has changed with ketches being over represented in the record (9 out of 19 vessels). There is also a hiatus in the record with no wrecks being recorded in the area between 1916 and the start of WWII.

Of the nineteen wrecks, fifteen have recorded locations that are covered by either digital aerial photography (12) or swath data (3) with only four wrecks having no modern data associated with them. Again this is related to the poor original geographical data, with all but one having just generic positional information. As with the 19<sup>th</sup> Century record there are no targets identified in the aerial photographic or geophysical data associated with these broad locations. Unfortunately, the only wreck with accurate information is the *Eidsvold* which stranded in the River Parrett, though it is not covered by the available digital datasets.

### *WWII and late 20<sup>th</sup> Century record*

The mid- to late-20<sup>th</sup> Century record is dominated by losses during WWII. Of the nine wrecks recorded between 1939 and 1945, six were sunk by magnetic mines laid by German aircraft, one sank after a collision with a US tanker in thick fog and the remainder foundered under unrecorded circumstances. Again the majority (eight) of vessels were engaged in coal transport from the South Wales coalfields, with the *HMS Oswaldian*



actually being hired as an Auxillary Patrol trawler in May 1940 before being sunk on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August of that same year. Of these potential wrecks only two have no data associated with them. Five are covered by the high resolution swath surveys but have no associated targets at the named locations and two have been potentially identified. Firstly, the *SS Borderdene* [UKHO ID 12418; NMR ID 1002988], a steamship mined on January 13<sup>th</sup> 1942, whilst transporting coal from Newport to Bridgwater, is identified in the side scan sonar survey (Figure 3b) although at a location 39 m due north [BNG 326756, 156457] of the recorded position in both the UKHO and NMR databases. The bow section is clearly visible with an exposed wreck section of 25 m by 8 m. The second vessel to be imaged is that of the *Trio*, which went aground on a meander in the River Parrett on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1939, again during the transportation of coal from Newport to Bridgwater. At the recorded location in the UKHO and NMR databases [ID's 12529 and 1002582 respectively] there is no wreck identifiable in the 2008 aerial photographs but there is a clearly identifiable vessel with similar dimensions to that recorded 300 m to the south-west [BNG 326639, 143955].

There is also a record of thirteen aircraft being shot down over the study area. Of these, nine were radio-controlled De Havilland Queen Bee target aircraft shot down as part of RAF anti-aircraft gunnery training, by A Battery of the 21<sup>st</sup> Royal Artillery Regiment, based at Doniford Camp between April 1940 and August 1942. Although the Titan swath bathymetry does cover the seabed up to 4.5 km off the coast of this location, no identifiable targets relating to this can be seen. This is unsurprising given that the original aircraft were constructed of wood and fabric, were only 7.3 m in length with a wing span of 9 m, with the most likely remnant now being the small engine block, meaning that the potential for easily identifiable wreckage is very limited.

Four additional aircraft crashes, between 1940 and 1943, are also recorded. The NMR record [NMR ID 1400154 – citing Ramsey 1987] describes a German Heinkel bomber (He 111P, 1G+OT) of 9/KG27 Squadron being shot down, on the 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1940, in Bridgwater Bay en route to bomb Cardiff docks. However, an alternative report by Penny (2000) suggests this

flight was actually an armed reconnaissance flight over the West Country and the bomber was actually shot down near Puriton, just east of the Parrett, by Spitfires of 92 Squadron (Blue Section), with only the bombs being jettisoned in the Bay and the crew all being made Prisoners of War. There are certainly no targets within the available data associated with the stated location of the crash site.

The remaining three aircraft wrecks all represent losses during training flights. In December 1940, a de Havilland Tiger Moth Mk II T5422, standard primary trainer, flew in to the sea South of Brean Down [NMR ID 1352721]; whilst on the same day a British Westland Whirlwind Mk.I P6980, single-seat fighter of 263 Squadron, crashed into the sea whilst firing on a sea marker one and a half miles off Burnham-on-Sea [NMR ID 1321921]. However the Operations Record Book for the Squadron describes the loss of the aircraft and Flying Officer Fitton in, or near, Sand Bay, north of Weston-super-Mare and outside the study area. Finally in February 1943 an Airspeed Oxford Mk I twin-engined trainer (DF252) lost both engines and hit the sea wall during a forced landing at Brean Down [NMR ID 1318504]. Again no wreckage material has been identified in any of the modern datasets that may be associated with these losses.

### *Generic Post-Medieval Vessels*

In order to complete an assessment of the record it is worthwhile noting the twelve wrecks within the accessed databases for which there is limited information. Of these, three are recorded only in the UKHO wreck database with only information on their location; two of which are covered by the new datasets, but there is no evidence of any wreck material at or near the quoted location. A further two wrecks are recorded in both the UKHO and NMR databases, but with the UKHO data being the only source for the NMR record and again there is no evidence of wreckage being present at the named positions. A further five are derived from previous interpretations of early aerial photographs taken between 1940 and 1989; of these four are covered by the modern datasets with none showing any presence of a wreck. Two sites have been described in the HER from visual anecdotal records; one on the north-east side of Stert Island and one on Brean Down, but there is

no evidence of wreck material at either location in the 2008 aerial photographic record.

Two wrecks, both identified from previous aerial photographic assessments and within the River Parrett, can potentially be identified on the 2008 images. The first is the wreck of the *Elmdale* [UKHO ID 12528; NMR ID 1002981] which rests in the eastern bank of the Parrett [BNG 326349, 143209] approximately 95 m south-west of the recorded position in both existing databases. The craft has dimensions of 16 m by 6 m and protrudes from the muddy banks in an east-west direction. The current recorded location is actually above the high water mark (Figure 3c). The second potential vessel is less convincing in its identification as there is a 335 m westerly offset between the recorded position of NMR ID 1449409 and the location of a hulk in the mudbank of the Parrett [BNG 327465, 143812]. The north-south orientation is consistent with the original record, but the dimensions of the wreck are significantly smaller; 10 m by 5 m in the aerial photograph compared to 16 m by 8 m in the NMR. Both of these sites would benefit from further investigation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The wreck record provides an interesting record of human activity on the sea, and one which aids our understanding of trade and exchange both at the local and regional levels as well as our understanding of the large scale stories of global trade that tend to dominate the maritime literature. As Parham *et al* (2013, 194) make clear, using the wreck record to pick out the smaller scale story of coastal trade and maritime communities should be a priority for archaeologists working in England. It is through integrating these localised accounts that we can begin to extend our understanding of the maritime landscape within a wider regional context.

An analysis of the available datasets, comprising both extant archaeological records and new geophysical and aerial photographic data, provides an overview of the maritime history of the Inner Bristol Channel region. This review identifies a wreck record dominated by 19<sup>th</sup> Century maritime activity, the majority of which represents localised trade, primarily related to the Welsh coal industry either through direct trade of

commodities or associated infrastructure materials. This is a trend that continues well in to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with 90% of wrecks recorded from WWII being engaged in the coal trade.

Although this picture of local maritime activity can be derived from the archival record, when this record is compared with the more recently acquired geophysical data it becomes quickly evident that only a very small percentage (only six sites out of the potential 111 recorded targets) of the record are actually still clearly identifiable on either the seabed or in the inter-tidal zone of the adjacent coast and banks of the River Parrett. This is despite the extensive coverage of very high quality data.

This low return rate in identifying wrecks is in stark contrast with the public perception of the ability of modern imaging to quickly and easily identify the historical wreck record. In reality, through a combination of the vagaries of the oral histories, particular in terms of positional information; the taphonomy of wreck sites immediately pre-wrecking (ie how much is lost during the wrecking event itself and the immediate post-wrecking period, including salvage); and potentially highly mobile seabed and a coastal strip capable of either enhanced erosion or conversely rapid burial; it is actually quite probable that the amount of accessible surviving material is limited. Consequently, arguments for extensive site specific searches for individual wrecks are significantly weakened, but the importance of gaining access to the increasingly large volumes of data being acquired for a range of offshore developments is clearly demonstrated. This in turn enables the focusing of limited heritage conservation resources on those wrecks that have been identified and are demonstrably at threat. The acquisition of this new data also provides the opportunity to update the UKHO record (using form H102), taking advantage of the vastly improved spatial precision that current geographical positioning systems provide compared to those that were available at the time when the vessel was lost / first recorded.

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