



Wessex Archaeology

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIVING INVESTIGATION
'THE KING'

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology Ltd. (WA) was commissioned by the Port of London Authority (PLA) to embed an archaeological diver within the PLA dive team to carry out a series of dives on the wreck site known as the 'King' to assess the condition and stability of the site, after a reported recovery of cannon from the site.

The archaeological investigation took place on the 30th October 2007. The diving operation comprised a total of 1 hour 47 minutes on the wreck site in zero visibility.

One of the objectives of the investigation was to establish the presence or absence of cannon on the site.

A series of artefacts were recovered and the divers noted that there was an abundance of loose material on the river bed in a remarkably well preserved state. This has the implication that they were recently disturbed. No cannons were identified during the investigation. However, visibility was very poor and no acoustic tracking system was utilised and therefore the extents of the diver's search area is uncertain.



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Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by the Port of London Authority and we would like to acknowledge the staff from this organisation for their help, advice, and knowledge throughout the work.

Wessex Archaeology are particularly grateful to Nicola Clay for commissioning the work, and Peter Steen for enabling the operation to take place.

Wessex Archaeology is indebted to the professionalism of the Port of London Authority dive team, particularly Kevin Leadbetter the dive supervisor.

Dietlind Paddenburgh from Wessex Archaeology undertook the diving investigation and drafted this report. The illustrations were prepared by Karen Nichols. The report was edited by Stuart Leather, who also managed the project on behalf of Wessex Archaeology. Steven Webster provided additional quality assurance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 1.1.1. Wessex Archaeology Ltd. (WA) was commissioned by the Port of London Authority (PLA) to embed an archaeological diver within the PLA dive team to carry out a series of dives on the wreck known as the 'King' to assess the condition and stability of the site.
- 1.1.2. The site has previously been subject to several archaeological diving investigations. The most recent prior to this investigation was undertaken by Nigel Nayling from the University of Lampeter in May 2007, who also dived the site as part of the PLA dive team.
- 1.1.3. However, since Mr Nayling's dive there have been reports of salvage from the site. Divers, allegedly working on a non-commercial basis, reported the recovery of two bronze cannon from the site, and three cannons from a site further out in the estuary to the Receiver of Wreck (RoW). The PLA have considered the possibility that all five cannons originate from the 'King'.
- 1.1.4. As a result of this salvage operation the PLA considered it appropriate as guardians of the river with a moral responsibility to the nation's heritage to undertake this diving investigation.
- 1.1.5. This document is the report of the archaeological diving investigation undertaken on the 30th October 2007 and includes the methods employed, and the results of the diving investigation and their archaeological implications.

2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

2.1. AIM

- 2.1.1. The aim of the diving investigation was to assess the condition and stability of the site of the 'King' post intrusive salvage operations.

2.2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.2.1. The objectives were to:
 - establish whether any cannons remained on the site;
 - identify exposed archaeological features;
 - assess the risk of destruction or salvage of exposed archaeological features.



3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1.1. The nature of this operation was that of a response to the salvage upon the site and the methodology reflects this. The intention was for an archaeologist to spend one day diving the site.
- 3.1.2. The diver's location and orientation were derived through compass bearing and distance line.
- 3.1.3. The site was located using the global satellite navigation system onboard the diving support vessel. The vessel's anchor was positioned within proximity of the site and the anchor line was used by the diver to access the site. A search line was secured to the anchor line.

3.2. DIVING TEAM STRUCTURE

- 3.2.1. The diving contractor was the PLA and all work was conducted under the PLA's Diving Project Plan (DPP) and Risk Assessment (RA). The WA diver formed part of the PLA dive team. The WA DPP and RA was appended and formed part of the PLA DPP and RA.

3.3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING

- 3.3.1. Archaeological recording was limited to visual and touch inspection of the site, and the retrieval of exposed and vulnerable small artefacts lying upon the riverbed.
- 3.3.2. The recovered artefacts were transported to the PLA's passive holding store for underwater finds where they were photographed.

4. RESULTS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

- 4.1.1. The diving operation was undertaken on the 30th October 2007. Two dives were undertaken at Low and High slack waters. A total dive time of 102 minutes was achieved.

4.2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

- 4.2.1. The site was abundant with artefactual material. The distribution of the artefacts can be placed into broad zones from within the wreck site.
- 4.2.2. At the eastern end of the site a mixed material comprising broken timber, various types of metal components, and organic material was observed.
- 4.2.3. The metal components included pipe and pole like objects and lead sheeting, which may either be material from the scuppers or hawseholes. Organic material was also present and included concreted rope, and leather.
- 4.2.4. Towards the middle of the site a number of bricks were encountered as well as a metal cleat which was free from concretion, and a metal ring approximately 0.9 metres in diameter. A three metre long beam was also observed.



- 4.2.5. At the western extent wooden structure was observed protruding from the river bed which appeared to be planking. There was also a wooden wheel and musket butts as well wheels that are thought to be from gun carriage. An object was also noted that could not be identified. It was semi-circular in shape, made of wood with open ends and had poles protruding from the sides. It was approximately 8-10 metres long. The poles were in the order of 0.2 metres diameter and 1 metre high.
- 4.2.6. A rounded wooden beam was also observed with dimensions approximately 6 metres long with a diameter of 0.25 metres. This could be some form of shaft or part of the rigging.
- 4.2.7. Modern rope was also identified on the site. The PLA dive team confirmed that at no stage they had left anything on the seabed including rope.
- 4.2.8. The artefacts on the seabed were lying on the seabed, not buried and easily moved. It is interesting to note that the ease in which artefacts could be removed from the seabed was not reported in previous dive reports on the site.

4.3. RECOVERED ARTEFACTS

- 4.3.1. The following items have been recovered from the site and removed to the PLA passive holding facilities at Denton Wharf
- wooden part (handle) of a gun (**Plate 1 Figure 1**)
 - wooden wheel (gun carriage?) (**Plate 2 Figure 1**)
 - piece of perforated leather string (probably part of a shoe/boot) (**Plate 3 Figure 2**)
 - piece of rope, concreted (**Plate 4 Figure 2**)
 - lead pipe (**Plate 5 Figure 3**)
 - flat brass ring, diameter c. 0.12m. (**Plate 6 Figure 3**)
 - piece of lead (**Plate 7 Figure 4**)
 - wooden deadeye (**Plate 8 Figure 4**)

4.4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

- 4.4.1. The general nature of the wreckage can be attributed to the sinking of the vessel and subsequent salvage attempts in the 1960s when a large grab was used to recover material from the site (Pers comm. Peter Steen). However, the good preservation of material that is lying loose on the river bed would suggest that there has been recent extensive disturbance of the site. This material is vulnerable to damage and loss through natural process and salvage.
- 4.4.2. It is important to note that there is most likely extensive vessel remains buried within the river bed.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1. No cannons were identified during the diving operations. However, conditions were not ideal and therefore there is the possibility that cannons are on the site but have



not been located. Underwater visibility was zero and no acoustic tracking device was utilised to ensure that the divers reconnoitred the whole site.