

***Coronation* Inshore and Offshore Designated Wreck Sites**



2024 Licensee's Report

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SUMMARY

This report summarises the developments and work undertaken by the Coronation Wreck Project team on the *Coronation* Offshore and *Coronation* Inshore designated wreck sites (located off Penlee Point, Plymouth) during the period 28th November 2023 – 27th November 2024.

The licenses to continue the project's research in 2024 were authorised by the Secretary of State, under the Protection of Wrecks Act (1973). The assistance provided by the Historic England Maritime Team is, as always, gratefully acknowledged.

The continued support of the current survey team and particularly Mr Mark Pearce the Visitor's Licensee and Visitor Coordinator is also very much appreciated.

The support of Historic England in the approval of 'Project 9378' and subsequent financial support to the team has made a significant and positive impact on the project team's ability to move forward with its objectives.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Coronation was a second rate 90-gun British warship built in 1685 at the Naval Dockyard in Portsmouth. The vessel took part in the Battle of Beachy Head in 1690 and was lost a year later (1691) in a gale off Penlee Point, near Plymouth, Devon. The exact reasons for her loss are still unclear.

In two primary locations, *Coronation* is thought to lie Offshore at Latitude 50° 18.57' North, Longitude 004° 11.98' West and Inshore at Latitude 50° 18.96' North and Longitude 004° 11.57' West. These coordinates are that of the designated positions and have been supplied by the Department of Culture Media and Sport. Licences for both sites were granted to the author to continue the work commenced under the previous licences.

2.0 SITE IDENTIFICATION & ASSESSMENT

The *Coronation* Offshore site is located directly in the path of one of the main maritime transit routes in and out of the Port of Plymouth (located in Plymouth Sound), and lies within waters controlled by the King's Harbour Master (KHM) / Ministry of Defence (MoD). The net effect is that there are a multitude of small and medium sized pleasure craft and police boats travelling over the site – particularly on weekends – with the attendant risk to divers. Extra vigilance and a suitably trained boat skipper are required on this site.

2.1 Diving Logistics

The Penlee Point area is subject to relatively strong tidal currents particularly on Spring tides. Although the two designated sites are approximately 800 metres apart, the Offshore site is approximately 684 metres south west of the Inshore site, with the result that the periods of slack water are considerably shorter on the Offshore site.

2.2 Condition of Site

The main designated sites and surrounding area continue to experienced sediment movement off the sites. There is no evidence of damage or interference with the

sites occurring during this reporting period. During the dives on the sites and surrounding areas a continued increase in the number of Crawfish has been noticed and the general marine habitat continues to appear healthy and in abundance.

The station markers on the diver trail have again proved very effective. In 2024 3 station markers were replaced and the others cleaned and checked for security. As part of 'Project 9378' replacement station markers have been purchased and are ready for installation in the Spring of 2025. Additional stainless-steel heavy-duty Marker Discs have also been installed to aid navigation on the Offshore Diver Trail. The entire Marker Float system will be replaced after the winter storms of 2024/25.

2.3 Diving and Project Activity

Work continues to take place outside the designated areas of the *Coronation* sites with the whole area of interest now extending South West from the Inshore site some 1500m with a search area of approximately 40,000m². Cannon shot and cannon being the key identifiers of the site's extent and link to the artefacts already found within the designated sites.

2024 saw the project team welcome new divers to the core team and have been able to complete additional dives this year. The increased reliability of the project dive boat being significantly improved thanks to the support of HE 'Project 9378' has enabled many more successful project dives to be undertaken. The Dive Support Vessel (DSV) underwent a refit which included a new navigation and safety pack and the fitting of a fuel efficient and environmentally friendly four stroke outboard motor.

A total of 62 survey related dives in this reporting period were conducted with only 14 being before the refit. This increased reliability and efficiency is already proving great value for money and a welcomed investment in the Coronation Wreck Project. Maintenance work on the offshore trail continued with additional cleaning dives of the marker floats on 2 separate occasions in addition to those mentioned in para 2.2.

'Project 9378' has also enabled the purchase of additional survey equipment to enhance the capability of the group. This survey equipment is also available for short term loan to other local like-minded groups to assist in their own projects subject to its availability.

In 2024 the licensed individuals visiting the sites is in keeping with other post covid years confirming the value that established Diver Trails bring to maritime archaeology and in deed the local economy.

During this reporting period 51 licensed 'visitor' divers visited the sites. The furthest travelled visitor this year being a diver from Cyprus. Additional groups are scheduled to dive the sites before the end of 2024 and have not been included in this figure.

2025 will see the Coronation Wreck Project welcome its new designated Professional Maritime Archaeological Advisor to the team. Alison James MCIfA will fulfil the role and takes over from our longstanding and much appreciated Professional Maritime Archaeologist Jessica Berry FSA, FRGS, ACIfA Jessica has been fully supportive of

the project and has provided sound advice as well as additional sponsorship support from the Maritime Archaeology Sea Trust (MAST) where she is CEO. The Coronation Wreck Project conveys its sincere thanks and appreciation for the years of valued support provided by Jess.

3.0 GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY & FLORA

The seabed in the survey area is composed of undulating natural rock (with some steep pinnacles) with small pockets (gullies) of sand. A variety of seaweeds are attached to the rocks on the site but in the licensee's opinion this does not obstruct the artefacts from view on the offshore site. The inshore site can be almost unworkable when the summer growth of kelp has become established.

The Offshore site lies upon a raised area of rocky seabed that is separated from the Inshore site by a deeper 'channel' that is in places covered in sand. These sand filled gullies are changing in depth of coverage and do present the opportunity for new artefacts to appear.

3.1 Seabed Erosion

The movement of sand from the site reported back in 2007 is still being monitored by observation. The rapid decrease in seabed level previously witnessed seems to have reduced and some areas are now showing signs of an increase in depth of material on the site thus aiding the preservation of the artefacts that have become exposed. However, on a wider area the trend seems to be of seabed material reduction. This continues to be an area of concern as valuable artefacts that maybe appearing are likely to be lost very soon after exposure. This is not as a result of surface recovery but from natural loss to the sea. This could be seen as part of the natural wrecking process and history of the site or as a sad loss of heritage.

4.0 PUBLIC OUTREACH, EDUCATION & DISSEMINATION

The *Coronation Wreck Project* website continues to have reasonable viewing figures and interaction. Its maintenance partly funded by 'Project 9378' will see a refreshed experience with greater opportunity for public interaction. Social media sites also play a key part in our outreach programme and receive positive interactions and feedback. A dedicated blogger is still required and enticing a skilful and active blogger is a priority to promote the project. Unfortunately, 2024 did not see the post filled and the project team are actively seeking an individual to increase the audience and subsequent engagement with the project.

4.1 Conservation Report / Storage and Display

On the 6th November 2019 the recorded artefacts of the Coronation collection were transported and taken into the custody of the Devonport Naval Heritage Centre (DNHC) Plymouth. The Centre has reopened its doors to the public and it is pleasing to report that the artefacts are on display in the "Age of Sail" section. The winter months of 2024/25 will see the project team in conjunction with DNHC staff further develop the display.

4.2 Illegal Diving / Interference - Education Campaign

There were no reported incidents of illegal diving on the sites this year. The monitoring of the site continues to work well and the KHM Plymouth and the Coast Watch team at Rame Head are to be commended on their continued vigilance and support. The MoD Police continue to support the Licensee and regularly visit the area of the sites.

The local dive boat charter operators now fully support the *Coronation* Wreck Project and offer official visits to the site coordinated through the website and administered by Mr M Pearce. The Skippers of the Charter boats are now listed as additional Licensees so this does help with visiting divers, but does not address those whom wish to visit the site on their own boats and only hear of the site once in Plymouth. The use of the www.coronationwreck.org website booking system and the good working relationship of project team members and skippers ensures quick communications and access to the site being facilitated.

The information boards provided by EH and displayed at Penlee Point and at the National Marine Aquarium are still in a reasonable state of repair and are regularly visited and read by numerous passing individuals many of which have been totally unaware of the *Coronation* site prior to seeing the information panels. These have been a very positive addition to the outreach programme of the project.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The team's activity on the designated sites this year again has been limited but visitor activity and general interest in the sites remains constant.

The ever-changing nature of the seabed across the area still presents exciting opportunities to further increase our knowledge of the sites. It is hoped that the regular project team will increase and be able to extend the research area and the following work is recommended:

1. Continued diver survey of the sites and the areas adjacent to the sites including the corridors between the two designated sites, the newly found site of concretions and the location of the best bower anchor to ascertain the extent and nature of the debris linking the sites. This is a very large area and it is envisaged will take several years to complete.
2. Continue the outreach and education programme to welcome new and previous visitors to the site.
4. Develop the online experience and carry forward the momentum and outreach activities that the Diver Trail has generated.
5. Maintenance of the Diver Trail.
6. Complete the objectives of 'Project 9378' within budget and on time.

6.0 REFERENCES

Crook R 2022 *Coronation Inshore and Offshore Licensee's Site Report*, Plymouth (unpublished)

Crook R 2022 *Coronation Inshore and Offshore Licensee's Site Report*, Plymouth (unpublished)

Crook R 2024 *HE Project 9378 Project Design and Interim Highlight Reports*. (unpublished)