

THE SOUND OF MULL ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

A decade of hard graft in the Sound of Mull by some 200 recreational divers has resulted in the recent publication of the Nautical Archaeology Society's inaugural monograph (Fig.1), comprising a detailed record of the underwater heritage of this nodal 32km-long sheltered sea route on the west coast of Scotland.

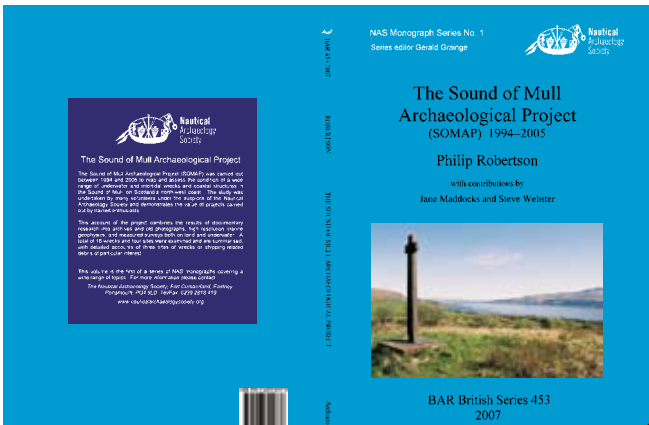


Fig. 1. Cover of the SOMAP monograph
Photo: Graham Dey

Under the auspices of the Sound of Mull Archaeological Project (SOMAP) and in return only for a holiday (of sorts), their efforts have helped to record in detail well known wreck sites like the Belfast-built steamship *SS Thesis* and the Welsh slate schooner *John Preston*; previously unknown sites have been brought to light and catalogued for posterity. And for 1000 or more divers whose preference is only to visit and enjoy the area's underwater heritage, the SOMAP project has facilitated access to protected historic wreck sites hitherto out of bounds to all but the very few.

The brochs, cairns, castles, boat houses, harbours, and fish traps that mark the coastline of the Sound of Mull hint at the importance of the sea throughout 10,000 years of human settlement. The attention of nautical archaeologists turned to the Sound of Mull following the discovery in 1973 by Bristol University of the fifth rate



Fig. 2. The Evelyn Rose Photo: courtesy of Richard Barton

frigate *HMS Dartmouth*, lost in 1690 as the ship mounted an attack against the Maclean stronghold of Duart castle. The subsequent discovery too of the similarly well preserved historic wreck of the small warship *Swan*, below Duart Castle, prompted extensive investigations by the University of St Andrews that have brought to light much new information about naval activity in the Western Isles, and illustrated how the introduction of seaborne artillery rendered castle fortifications, once impregnable, vulnerable to attack from the sea. History records very intense activity by the Royal Navy in the Sound of Mull during the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion, with naval ships collecting intelligence, harassing inhabitants and preventing assistance from reaching the rebels loyal to Bonny Prince Charlie.

The inaugural Sound of Mull Archaeological Project (SOMAP) fieldschool took place in 1994, the brainchild of Martin Dean, head of St Andrews University's then Archaeological Diving Unit (ADU) and Chris Underwood (Nautical Archaeology Society). They perceived that, by harnessing the enthusiasm of the many recreational divers that visit this area and by providing training opportunities to develop skills, it might be possible to develop over time a greater understanding of the numerous other underwater sites thought to exist.

While the fundamental principles of archaeology on land

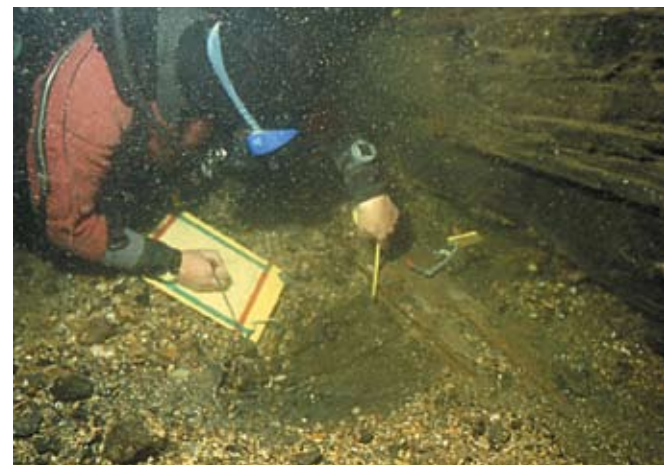


Fig. 3. Recording keelson structure at western end of site
Photo: Peter Pritchard

extend to the sea, recording complex 3D structures using tape measures, drawing boards and photography (the basic tools of archaeological survey) at up to 30 metres depth, presents considerable challenges. Mistakes have been made and lessons learned, but through enthusiasm, skill, and perseverance, the SOMAP participants have succeeded in significantly adding knowledge. They have been assisted by contributions from Historic Scotland, academia and private industry, most notably in the undertaking in 2004, of a major remote sensing project to record all known sites using high resolution multibeam and side-scan sonar.

To the many recreational divers who visit the Sound of Mull, the wrecks of the *Rondo*, *Hispania*, *Shuna*, and *Pelican* will be relatively well known but perhaps the sonar maps of these sites will help visitors to better understand these important wrecks on the seabed. Many of the other sites recorded will be less well known. Project participant Richard Barton's father served as a crewman on board the Fleetwood-based steam trawler *Evelyn Rose*, lost at Ardtornish Point 31 December 1954 (see Fig. 2). Ten of her 12-man crew died in the accident. Richard's quest to locate his father's grave reached a satisfactory conclusion when remote sensing identified an intact vessel, lying at a seabed depth of 115m below chart datum, 330 m south of Ardtornish Point. Deep too is the wreck of the puffer *Logan*, lost off Lochaline Pier on 15 December 1961, on route from Troon to Skye with a cargo of coal. Fife-based rebreather diver David Greig verified remote sensing records and confirmed that the *Logan* is lying upright on the seabed, providing a welcome reminder of the contribution made by puffers as a vital cog in the economy of rural areas in the West of Scotland.

Certainly, the Sound of Mull was known to the captain of the *Tobermory galleon* in 1588, and the cartographer Joseph Huddart in 1794 confirms that the 'track for sailing from the west coast of Britain to Norway' involved a passage through the Sound of Mull, avoiding the exposed western side of Mull where shallows, currents and rocky outcrops were hazardous to mariners. The two-masted Welsh slate schooner *John Preston*, built in 1855 at Port Dinorwic, North Wales and registered in Caernarfon was one of six such vessels that foundered in the Sound of Mull between 1869 and 1896, bound for harbours in the north and north east of Scotland. A dive on the 'Slate Wreck' is only a short RIB-trip from Lochaline. To many who visit her, she is only a scattered pile of slate, rotting wood and corroded metal. But detailed analysis of the remains indicates that substantial sections of hull structure are partially buried (Fig.3). The remains of an anchor windlass, pump fittings and the ships stove can also be found down slope. There

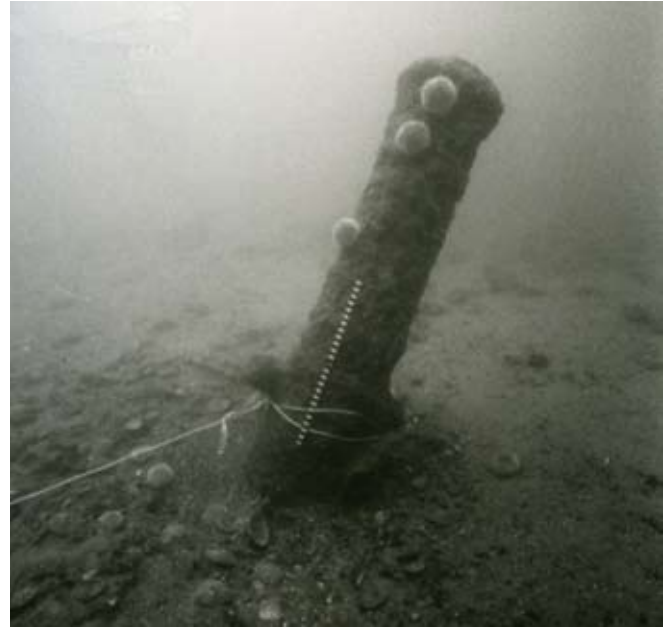


Fig. 4. Cannon underwater

Photo: Philip Robertson

is also evidence of substantial repairs, indicative perhaps of 27 years of coastal trading in slate, iron and coal, with occasional cross-channel and North Sea voyages that NAS member Owain Roberts' research has brought to light.

Areas such as Scallastle Bay are recorded as known anchorage areas, and the seabed is littered with anchorage debris. Lochaline-based scallop diver George Foster identified a collection of cast-iron guns in Scallastle Bay around 1991. SOMAP surveys confirmed six guns, a clay pipe dating to around 1830, and a lead apron cover. The enigmatic presentation of the guns is hard to interpret (Fig 4), but it seems most likely that this site is not a shipwreck but a jettisoning of material within a busy anchorage area.

The loss of the *SS Thesis* around midnight on 16 October 1889, less than two years after entry into service, has bequeathed to Scottish archaeology the substantially intact remains of a largely unaltered example of the typical, unsophisticated steamship which formed the

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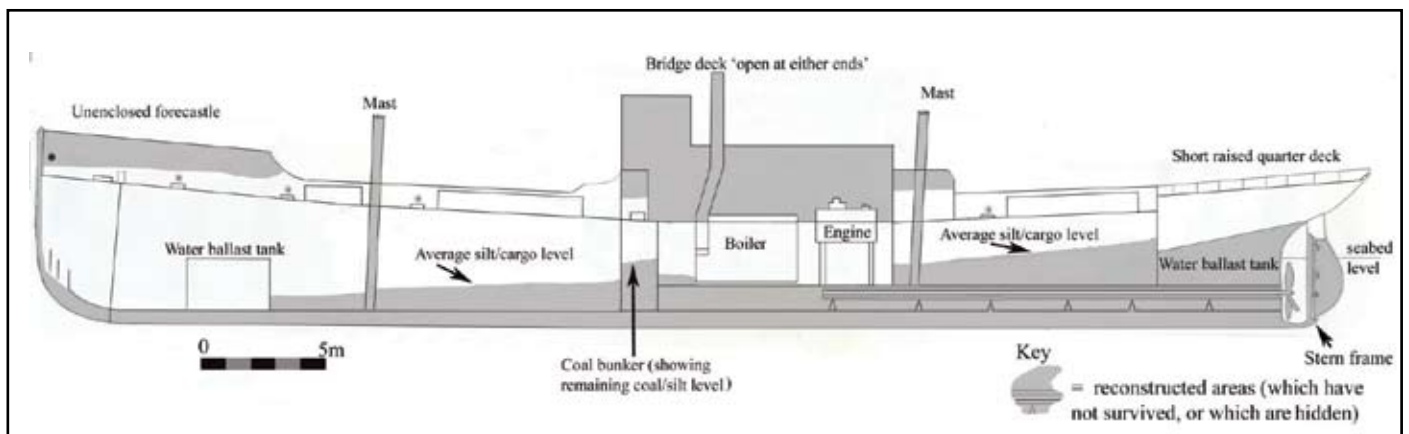


Fig. 5. General arrangement and tentative reconstruction of *SS Thesis*

Drawing: Philip Robertson

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(Continued)

basis of the British merchant fleet at the height of its worldwide presence and during a period of heavy and expanding coastal trade around the UK. Today, 'the skeleton wreck' as she was nicknamed when discovered during the 1980s, is one of Scotland's most popular diving wrecks.

Some people may believe that archaeology can add little by way of knowledge to the study of post-industrial maritime history, given the extent of available documentary evidence. Yet, as SOMAP research showed, the principal historical accounts relating to the loss of the *SS Thesis* (Lloyds List and Oban Times) contradict one another: Belfast to Middlesborough or vice versa, and with a cargo consignment of pottery and pig iron, or iron ore. Scientific analysis of the contents of the forward hold suggests an ore as opposed to a pig iron. The position of the wreck strongly indicating too that the ship originated in Belfast, most likely carrying iron ore mined in the Antrim hills, and bound for the smelting industrial heartlands around Middlesborough. The tentative reconstruction (Fig 5) is based on extensive surveys, documentary research and a photograph of a sister ship *Theme*, also built by the Belfast yard of MacIlwaine and Lewis for the Belfast ship owner William Grainger.

In common with many other industrial-period wrecks in British waters, evidence from the *John Preston* and *Thesis* indicates the pace at which these sites are evolving. Many commentators believe that, within a hundred years or so, the wrecks of iron-built ships will exist as little more than a pile of iron ore on the seabed. This is most likely due to a complex interplay of natural and, in some cases, man-made drivers of change.

We know less about marine historic sites than we do for those on land. It is therefore clear from the SOMAP project that recreational divers, with appropriate training and guidance, hold an important key to unlocking the potential of the marine historic environment, whether through enjoying and respecting marine historic sites so that current and future generations can continue to benefit from these, or through recording, to help improve knowledge about what marine historic sites exist where on the seabed of Scotland.



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**THE 'VERY SINGULAR
CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS'
THAT BEFELL THE 'JANE'**

David Carter

Weymouth and Portland has a rich maritime heritage that can be seen by walking round its two harbours and by divers exploring its waters. During the winter, diving into the archives can also reveal more of our local maritime heritage as was discovered when a chance viewing of an old newspaper article that described a 'very singular chapter of accidents' that befell the Weymouth smack *Jane*. It was followed up by research in the Weymouth Local History Unit, Weymouth Library, Dorset History Centre and Lewes Records Office plus help from Jersey Museum and Richard Keen in Guernsey to reveal a remarkable boat that could be traced throughout its 41-year life and its remarkable journey in 1855.

The *Jane* was a two masted smack built by an unknown Weymouth builder and registered in Weymouth on 18th October 1818. She was 52' 1 1/2" long and rated at 6551/94 tons. The 'Tide Survey' was undertaken by George White, Sam Sharland and James Blackman Giles. Eight years later she was still rated "A1" by Lloyd's Shipping Register. The "A" rating refers to the quality of the hull and the "1" to the quality of her rigging and fittings. After twenty two years of use she was rated "AE1" by Waterford, Corstal. The "E1" was done by Cox, Shipbuilder's of Bridport and referred to her strength and suit-ability to carry heavy cargo and infers that at least she had a double skin with a "ceiling" inside the frames to protect the hull from the cargo. On the 17th August 1843 she had been "thoroughly repaired", restored and by lengthening her by 12 feet had increased her registered tonnage to 9412/94 tons.

During her life of over 40 years the *Jane* had seven owners starting with a partnership of William Elliott, Jane Hellyen and Richard Hoare, then William Elliott as sole owner followed by Charles Buck, another partnership of John Case Beale, William Barratt and John Smith and then the partnership of William Smith, John Case Beale, Thomas Atherton, Philip Roberts followed by John Case Beale, senior and junior, and then John Case Beale (junior) on his own before finally Elias Cox. Whilst the ownership of the *Jane* passed through many hands it is also recorded that she had 13 captains starting with the original part-owner William Elliott. He was followed by Robert Shadwick, William Elliott (again), William Smith, William Goldsmith, Thomas Comber, William Diskett, John Case Beale (senior), Charles George Beale, William Beale, John Case Beale (junior), William Brown and finally Richard Rickman.

It was during the captaincy (and part-ownership with Elias Cox) of John Case Beale junior, who lived with his wife Mary at 32 St Thomas Street, Melcombe Regis, that the *Jane* had a very traumatic voyage that was recorded in the 'Southern Times' of Saturday 3rd March 1855 as follows: "The *Jane* of this port, Captain Beale, has lately met with a very singular chapter of accidents. It seems that when bound from the Channel Islands with a cargo of stone, she was overtaken by a squall, about midway between Barfleur and the Isle of Wight, and both her masts were carried away, the sea making a clean breach over her. In this situation, with several feet of water in the hold, the crew were taken on board by another vessel, it being supposed that the *Jane* must inevitably go ashore or sink. However, since the arrival of the crew in Weymouth,