

# A1 Report 2011

by Martin Davies

## Overview

This year has been good for diving in general. Though this has not helped any diving on the site of A1, conditions on the site and in Bracklesham Bay over the year have been mixed and visibility was ranging from 1 to 4metres maximum. The site remains the same with little evidence of any major decay. Marine life remains the same with many of the usual fish in regular places on the wreck.

## Diving

This year has seen a reasonable amount of diving on the site with a total of 5 visits to the site and 8 dives completed; 86 divers in total have visited the wreck.

14<sup>th</sup> May 2 dives

27 May 1 Dive

16<sup>th</sup> June 2 dives

13<sup>th</sup> July 2 dives

3<sup>rd</sup> August 2 dives

Our first dives on the 14<sup>th</sup> May were in poor conditions and with visibility less than 1m, the wreck was difficult to see and it was more a feel your way around the wreck.

The 27<sup>th</sup> May was the day that Reef TV visited the site; the company had been commissioned by the BBC to make a film about the wreck as part of a series called Britain's Hidden Heritage. The series aimed to explore various parts of the U.K. that either had significant historic value or a unique story that has a place in history that was not so well known. The A1 was to feature in the second episode with Charlie Boorman hosting the section that covered the A1. The feature told the story of the A1 from build to second sinking; there was archive cine footage supplied by Gordon Harriott showing the submarine as she was when it was first discovered. I found this footage particularly valuable as it clearly shows the platform in place where officers and lookouts stood when the submarine was motoring on the surface. That platform is no longer in place and it is unclear why it is no longer there and what has happened to it. A copy of the story will be sent to English Heritage for their records. The conditions on the day were poor as it was still early in the season and visibility only about 2 metres, only a small amount of on the day footage was used to show the wreck at the end of the program.

June 16<sup>th</sup> saw two dives from local divers dive the wreck, the dives were conducted from the charter boat SC Charters and all divers on the day reported seeing the wreck though in water conditions still were poor.

July 13<sup>th</sup> saw another two dives take place on the wreck again from SC Charters with 24 divers diving the wreck over two tides. Divers from London and surrounding area had travelled down to dive the area which A1 was to be one of their interested wrecks.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> August two more dives took place when visibility had improved to 4 metres and the submarine was more visible to the diver.

### **Wreck Condition**

The wreck of the A1 Submarine remains a stable and robust site for visiting divers to see, while she is showing signs of deterioration in many areas, the cracks in the conning tower being the most visible;



the submarine is still very much intact. The build up of sediment inside the wreck remains a concern in the forward torpedo loading hatch area along with a large amount of seaweed. The sediment and mobile silt that is carried in the water column and gives the area its poor visibility seems to be deposited in this area.

### **Marine Life**

The wreck remains a haven for marine life with lots of marine life using the wreck as a home, the most common species being Tom Pot Blenny. Other species that are regularly seen are edible crab, lobster, velvet swimming crab, conger eel, a large shoal or bib or poor cod. Sponges and sea squirts are the next most dominant animal to be seen.

### **Threats**

The wreck this year has not seen any major threats; no illegal commercial fishing activities have been seen while visits have been conducted and no damage to the wreck has taken place.

The Scour at the bow remains similar to previous years while the seabed around the wreck contains a lot of mobile silt and is very easily disturbed by careless diver fining activity.

### **Research**

Research this year has concentrated on the engine of the submarine. Little is known about these early propulsion systems that at the time were cutting edge technology of the day. The engine only described as a Wolsey gasoline engine delivering 350HP in many publications was in fact the first of many power units developed by Wolsey for the new generation and class of submarine. The engine design was incredible but by today's modern standards very inefficient for its size and horse power output. Production of the latter engine units was handed over to Vickers of Barrow in Furness who eventually reduced its size and weight for later models. A1's engine was 14ft long and weighed 17 tons!

## **Conclusion**

The A1 is as popular as ever with still much interest in the wreck and I can only see it growing greater next year as the recent television program on the wreck has already started to generate inquiries for next year's diving. The wreck is a valuable part of our history and should be seen by as many divers as is possible in the diving season.

Martin Davies