

Submarine A1 Licensee report 2016

By

Martin Davies

Overview

This year has seen a fall in visitor numbers to the site, the successful implementation of the diver trail created during 2013 had helped promote diving on the site by a rise in inquiries about diving the wreck even if they have not materialised into actual dives. I have been working with local dive shops to help promote the site but sadly on every occasion the dives have been cancelled. I have made every effort to be on all of the dives and brief divers prior to diving the site. The weather has been generally good though many dives have been cancelled in the diving calendar. Despite long spells of hot dry periods and low winds visibility has been poor and this is probably down to the dredging of Portsmouth harbour this year which may have put divers off visiting the area and diving.

Diving

The wreck was actually dived on only 4 occasions this year the dates are listed below:-

30.4.16

First dive on the site after the winter storms, a group of divers from Eastley Sub Aqua Club visited the site. Visibility was around 2-3m and the wreck was seen in good condition. Nothing had radically changed on the site all of the wildlife all be it reduced in numbers was in the usual places and it was good to see that there was no damage from potting or anchoring. There had however been a movement of the starboard side which previously was leaning against the hull and now is laying flat in the seabed. I can only speculate how this has happened as it would have required some considerable force and effort to move it. Whilst it could have been the action of a winter storm it would seem more likely that this is interference from either divers or fishermen. I would take a guess that a fisherman's anchor has caught and on recovery this has raised the hatch and moved it to one side. On two occasions in the past I have had to request fishermen to move from the site, most do not anchor but some do.



3.5.16

This second dive was with a group of divers from NAS who were on a combined visit to A1 and Invincible.

19.6.16

Members of Southsea Sub-Aqua club visited the wreck site.

29.7.16

Divers from NAS visited the site that was on a combined visit to A1 and Invincible.

Condition of wreck

The condition of the wreck seems to be as it has been; no major changes were seen apart from what appeared to be a large removal of silt from the scour in the bow area which was a result of the previous year's winter storms. This still remains clear and has exaggerated the scour. The major dredging operations in the area have ceased for the time being and the large volume of suspended particles in the water column since has reduced to more normal conditions for the site.

The Diver trail

I believe that the diver trail has been a success despite that lack of visitors to the site this year; the creation of a 3D model backed up with information, stills photography and video gives divers a real feel for what they are about to see and experience prior to diving. I would fully support and endorse this approach for any future projects that may be considered on historic wreck sites and I believe that it very much helps the interpretation of the site underwater.

Conclusions

The dredging of Portsmouth Harbour has been a major influence this year on visibility in the area and Bracklesham bay always suffers due to the lack of tidal flow through the whole bay. This has meant that conditions on the site have been poor and aligned with that of previous years when Southampton water was dredged. The wreck remains stable and in similar condition to previous years with no major deterioration of the site. The main observations are to the dynamic environment that the submarine sits in. The movement of

the seabed and increased scouring effect from tidal action being the dominant factor in the equation and the marine life that the site supports appears to vary quite a lot. There is a lack of tompot blennies on the site this year, in previous years there have been too many to count, in fact the highest proportion of tompots on any site in the area to my knowledge. Some of the sponges appear to come and go, for example on the top of the bow area a couple of years ago there was a large colony of shredded carrot sponge that appears to have gone now. I am seeking professional advice on this from marine biologists as this may well be down to water quality and the lack of light penetration that has caused it to die off along with the reduction in marine life.

The greatest risk that the wreck currently faces is from diver's dropping heavy shot weights on the wreck. This year Eastley divers dropped their 56lb weight on the bow of A1 and knocked off a chunk of concretion.

Martin Davies