

The Seaton Carew Shipwreck (SCW 96)

Initial survey - September 1996

Introduction

On the morning of Wednesday, 4th August, 1996, Tees Archaeology were informed by a local resident of Seaton Carew, Mr. Dereck Hodgson, that the remains of the hull of an old sailing ship had been uncovered on Seaton Beach due to a combination of local tide and weather patterns. Staff from the Section immediately visited the site to establish the extent, condition and position of the wreck.

Actions to date

Following this initial visit and having talked with Mr. Hodgson and another local gentleman, Mr. Joe Howey, it was found that the wreck had been exposed some three or four days before the Section were informed and that the site was now slowly refilling with sand. Mr. Howey, who had spent all his life in Seaton and regularly walked the beach, could not remember having seen this particular wreck in at least the last fifty years and possibly longer.

It was decided therefore, to contact volunteers from a recently established 'Rapid Response Register', a joint project set up by Tees Archaeology in conjunction with the Northern Region Nautical Archaeology Society, to assist Tees Archaeology staff in recording the wreck before it was lost to view again under the rapidly shifting sands.

Methods

Despite the very short notice, a number of N.A.S. and various other volunteers were able to spend some useful time on site, one N.A.S. volunteer in particular, Mr. Peter Pritchard, being present on all the site visits and another N.A.S. volunteer, Mr. Mark Parkinson, travelling from Nelson, Lancashire to spend just one hour on site!

A datum line was set up between stempost and sternpost and a series of offsets taken to the centre tops of all visible frames and also the start and finish points of the visible planking. The bow and stern assemblies were drawn in greater detail as were an inner planking butt joint, the draught markings on the cutwater (starboard side) and a number of frames.

Results

From a series of compass bearings the vessel's position was calculated to be

54° 39.50'N. 001° 10.15'W. (see Chart extract) and lying bow to sea, 060° Magnetic (North-East).

The vessel measured 25.3 metres long x 7 metres broad and the timbers, though waterlogged, are in good condition.

The positions of 73 starboard frames and 48 port frames were recorded. Draught markings on the sternpost - VIII and VII - were recorded and the bow and stern constructions drawn at a scale of 1:10. A number of frames showing good detail of treenail holes were also drawn at 1:10.

Conclusions

It is probable that this is the wreck of a typical North-East collier brig or schooner of between 150 and 250 tons burthen. The exact identity, date and manner of loss are uncertain - there are currently over 50 entries on the Tees Archaeology Maritime Sites and Monuments Record for vessels lost in the Seaton area.

It is obvious from the draught markings on the sternpost and the curvature of the visible frames that a substantial amount of the lower hull of this wreck still remains buried beneath the sand. That the frames have not become displaced would indicate that the hull is also still very much intact.

It would appear that all of the frames have at some time been cut down to approximately the same level, presumably at the time of the vessel's loss and subsequent salvage.

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