



## Weymouth July-August 1999

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### The Divers:

- Sam Cockerill
- Ed Coney
- John Rubinstein
- James Harper
- James Anderson

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### Dive 1: James Fennel

Whether Saracen, Breakwater Diving Centre's ageing RNLI RIB, was originally built for comfort or speed is debatable. In her current state, with gently deflating tubes and shuddering inboard struggling against wind and tide we were able to enjoy neither, and it was with some relief that after a hour labouring around the Bill we arrived at the site of the Fennel.

Having dived here before in minimal visibility, I am pleasantly surprised to find we can see what is going on around us. Heading south from the RIB we soon come across scattered debris and some decked beams. The wreck itself lies nose into shore and is well broken, but large sections remain upstanding to make an impressive swim-through, and a well defended home for a shoal of pollock and the occasional ballan wrasse.

### Dive 2: HMS Hood

Our timing for this dive was later than ideal, and the building seaward current confined our dive to the lee side of the wreck.

HMS Hood was sunk as a block ship during WW1 to protect naval vessels inside the harbour from torpedoes. She sits almost inverted, and the racing current has taken its toll over the decades, gently fatiguing the girders and fittings loose. The structure is still ship-like with walkways and hatches recognisable, but parts of the wreck have become quite unstable. With the turning of each tide, panels heave and relax, and the audible groaning of this movement warns us not to venture too far inside.

### Dive 3: British Inventor

A few miles out into the channel we are dropped into a moderate current upstream of the British Inventor's scattered wreckage. We stumble across a bed of scallops and pocket a few for lunch. I was to find these a while later in my stab jacket pocket, and without time to cook them before our final dive, we resorted to disembowelling and eating a couple -raw- on the beach. Mmmm.. Following twenty minutes of entertaining but uninspiring drifting, we find our first section of the wreck flattened against the seabed. Perched neatly on top of this plate is a large shell. Factoring both for my propensity to exaggerate and the magnification of water, I guess that it is at least 30cm in diameter, with a menacingly pointy bit on the front. We pause for a while whilst I try to calculate the odds that this is blank, wonder how we might lift it with an SMB, and consider the possible applications at home; coffee table base, door stop, umbrella rack. Fortunately caution, and the current, get the better of us.

### Dive 4: The Spaniard (I & II)

In significantly reduced visibility the first challenge of this dive is actually finding the wreck. I am immodestly pleased when John and I complete our square search right on her midships. We investigate some of the larger holds where tens of bulging eyes peer from shadowy crevices, and re-enact \*that\* Titanic moment from the bow railings.

We later found out that James, Ed and James had found another bow section further along the breakwater. (Our skipper assured us that all sections belonged to the Spaniard, although to the best of my knowledge she had a single hull). It was here that they were privy to a brief encounter with a grey seal, recently reported to have taken up residence. Seals are not that common in Weymouth, but occasionally use the in-shore wrecks as well-stocked retreats and camp out for a couple of days to enjoy the change of scenery and the seafood.

As we left the Abbotsbury Oyster Bar that evening, filled to capacity with whitebait, mussels and of course - oysters, I reflected on the peculiar parallels between our lifestyles.

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