



## Weymouth Nautical Archaeology Weekend - A dirty weekend – quite literally!

25/26 April 2009

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**Trip organised by John Kendall**

**Trip report by Matt & Karin**

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### The Divers:

- John Kendall (AD, organizer)
- Rachael Macdonald (DL)
- Christian Ashby (SD trainee)
- Matt Watson (DL)
- Karin Müller (SD)
- Dave ? , a commercial diver from Looe in Cornwall
- .....and his son Gordon

### Details



*Diving with Grahame Knott and his vessels DSV Lamlash (left) and his dive boat 'Outcast' (right).*

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### Diving

The weekend according to Matt:

It all started off with an e-mail from JK about a nautical archaeology project that was being run by Grahame Knott – one of the UK's top skippers – in Weymouth. The details were a bit vague as the project was still in its initial phase, but something along the lines of airlift dredges, playing in the mud and spidge. Sounded like fun to me, so I signed up.

We arrived in Weymouth on Friday evening and after saying a quick hello to Grahame and dumping our stuff on the boat (our accommodation was aboard Grahame's boat, DSV Lamlash), we headed straight for an all-you-can-eat Chinese and Indian buffet for a feed. The food was quite good for a buffet, but had the big advantage that you can turn up late in the evening starving and you can just grab a table, order a beer and tuck in to as much food as you want...

*Above are some pictures from the Lamlash kitchen and our bunk rooms.*



After a comfortable night's sleep aboard Lamlash, we were up bright and early – partly thanks to Condor Ferries moored next to us, who test their fog horns and engines at 6.30 am sharp. Over a cup of coffee we meet with Grahame and discussed the plan for the day. We were going to be diving the wreck of the Earl of Abergavenny. Sadly, the weather conditions were not good enough to be working from Lamlash on site, but given the vis had been so good earlier on site, we were keen to get out to the site and get some video and the provisional excavations that had been carried out earlier in the month and bring up a few artifacts from the seabed to add to the cache already aboard Lamlash.



After a bit of a lumpy ride out, Dave went in on his own with a lift bag and a metal detector and JK and Rachael went in with some scooters JK wanted to play with and a video rig, while the baby divers sat on the boat. Sadly, their first attempt at a dive was rather short, as they went down the line to the counterweight on the shot (d'oh). The vis was so bad they didn't want to risk dropping off and missing the excavations and had to bin it. This at least gave them the chance to ditch the scooters before hopping back in, but meant that by the time they had done their dive, Christian, who had gradually been getting more and more green, was not really in a fit state to dive, so we dropped him off back at the harbour before Karin and myself went in for a dive. The vis wasn't great, but was more than enough for the task in hand, which was to swim up and down the trenches that had been made with the airlift and sift through the spoil for any interesting bits of artifact. The site was pretty featureless above the surface, apart from a few large brass pins, but it

was clear from the trenches that there was definitely a decent sized wreck under there and the spoil heaps were teeming with gun flints, brass pins, and broken glassware and earthenware, which were all dutifully stuffed into our goody bag. There was also a lot of interesting life on the site. The bottom was covered in slipper limpets and there were hundreds of hermit crabs, various species of goby and blenny, a dragonet and some very pretty fan worms (the sort of stuff you don't always notice when the vis is good). After the dive, we went back to Lamlash to examine our finds. Clearly, we need further archaeology training, as we also managed to bag several 20th century beer and milk bottles... However, we did manage to recover several artifacts actually from the ship's cargo.

The wind had swung round to the south west, so we decided to can the afternoon dive, have a look at the spoil and do a bit of sightseeing around Weymouth, before cooking fajitas aboard Lamlash, and heading out for a drink in the King's Head, which had a rather 'interesting' live band on.

The weather wasn't looking much better on Sunday, but we decided to head out for a dive – Christian was keen to get at least one dive under his belt. JK wasn't so optimistic and decided to can it. When we arrived on site, the buoy was gone – probably run down by a ship during the night – so Grahame decided to drop us on the wreck of the 'Spaniard' inside Weymouth harbour.

Although it was a bit disappointing not to get something useful done on the Abergavenny site, the Spaniard turned out to be a nice dive. The vis was slightly better inside the harbour – nobody else was on the site which helped. I was surprised at just how much wreckage there was! We descended onto a huge bow, and although the rest of the ship was fairly broken up and indistinguishable, it still took us a good 40 minutes to work our way along the length of the wreck and have a good look at everything. I was also impressed by the amount of life – as

well as the usual squidgy stuff (this is a technical term for all those tunicates, hydroids, algae and bryozoa that don't normally even get a common name in the marine life guide), saw lots of big ballan wrasse, gobies (the muddy bottom seemed to be prime real estate with hundreds of burrows), sea pens and Devonshire cup coral. Back on shore, we thanked Graham and decided to grab lunch at a local eatery and headed back to Cambridge.

*Here's a bit more info on the Spaniard from the web:*

THE ENECURI (or THE SPANIARD) (Permit Required + advance notification to HM)

A 3000-ton Spanish Steamship, about which very little is known concerning her history. On 28 December 1900 during a force nine north-westerly gale she dragged her anchor and went aground on rocks close to Breakwater Fort. The lifeboat was unable to render assistance due to the severity of the weather, however the crew of twenty-six were able to escape to the harbour wall and were saved by the Chief Engineer who heroically swam to shore with a line attached to him. Despite the advice of the coastguard, and for reasons unknown, the Captain and his dog boarded the vessel the next day and made no attempt to escape when the Enecuri finally slipped off the Breakwater and sank. A few years later, divers working on the wreck discovered his skeleton and that of his dog in the cabin. Badly silted and well broken up, the Enecuri lies at the foot of the wall in 12m of water, almost unrecognisable as the great Steamship she once was. Lying along her port side, is a Pontoon, quite prolific in marine life.

The weekend was good fun. Graham and Dave were really enthusiastic about the project. Sadly, we couldn't really do much on the Abergavenny site due to the weather. It was a really cheap weekend too as we didn't have to pay for accommodation or the diving, so the cost of the whole weekend (transport + food and drink) came only to about £50. Beat that! Karin decided the diving and 'collecting spidge' was so much fun, she definitely wants to go again, even if there should be a small charge involved.

*Here's the archaeology bit:*

If you want to find more information on Grahame, his boats and the work he is involved in, visit the [Ship Wreck Project website](#). You can learn a little more about the Abergavenny wreck [here](#).

*The wreck*

Briefly, the Earl of Abergavenny was a merchant ship of the East India Company and was built in Kent in 1797. In 1805 on a journey out to Bengal and China, she ran onto a sand bank just outside Weymouth harbour – appropriately named 'Shambles Bank'. The crew managed to refloat her and tried to get her back into Weymouth harbour, but she sank within site of land on a cold February night with the loss of over 250 people. Her commander Captain John Wordsworth - the brother of the poet William Wordsworth – also perished in the sinking. She now lies on a muddy-silty seabed in about 18m depth just outside Weymouth harbour. So it's a good depth for SDs to work in and you don't have to suffer a long boat ride out to the site either as it only takes about 20 min to get to.

*How to help with the archaeology*

Archaeological work has been carried out on the Abergavenny wreck for almost 30 years now, but yet there is still a lot to be discovered. The reason why she is ideal for archaeological novices to dive on is the fact that about 100 years ago salvage attempts on the wreck were carried out using dynamite. Therefore, a careful scientific approach with mapping exact finding sites and using trowel and brush for excavation is pretty pointless. Several trenches have been dug across the wreck using an airlift and divers simply descend the shotline, work alongside the trenches and collect anything interesting into their goodie bags. Grahame's instructions were very simple: bring up anything that's non-perishable, such as glass, metal, ceramics, stone; leave everything that is perishable: such as textiles, leather, wood, or bones. Any organic artifacts are left to the archaeologist and their special preservation solutions.

*Our finds on that weekend*

On the first day, JK and Rachael did a first dive before anyone else to make a video of the wreck site before the vis would be ruined by the activities of other divers. Unfortunately, the vis wasn't great and JK wasn't that happy with the filming result. Dave, who had gone in using a metal detector, lifted a larger metal artefact to the surface using a lift bag. In the afternoon, Grahame used a hammer to tap off all the concretions on it and tried to find what was inside. Dave's suspicion that it was a bar shot was correct, although due to degradation there wasn't much left of it. Bar shots were hurled at enemy vessels using a canon. The missile would start spinning in the air and would wreak havoc with the enemy's sails, masts and rigging. Here's a pic from the internet, so you can get the idea:

Matt and I also found a few items, which in the afternoon were carefully laid out on a board and photographed. There were pieces, mostly the bottoms, of glass bottles – some round, some square; a lead sounding or fishing weight; a metal/brass handle which may have been part of furniture; copper sheeting from the hull of the ship; many pieces of ceramics, some with Chinese-style motives and blue glazes; and many gun flints, which created the sparks to set of the gun powder.

*This is the collection of items from Matt and Karin's first dive on the Abergavenny. Note that the embarrassing 20th century beer and milk bottles have been surreptitiously removed...*



*Glass bottles (the bottoms mainly); earthen- and stoneware ceramics, some with Chinese-style motives and blue glaze, metal (brass?) handle, maybe a furniture fitting.*



*Lead weight, pieces of coal, copper pipe, some unidentified pieces, gun flints, copper sheeting from the ship's hull.*



*Here's a pic from the internet which shows how the gun flints were inserted in the lock to set the gun powder off – probably not particularly reliable... Thanks to this, many of our ancestors survived and we can now go diving digging them up- yay!*

