

SHARPNESS HULKS UNDER SCRUTINY

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Seeking a NAS Part 2 project last July it transpired that there were some hulks needing recording remaining in the half-pound at the old dock entrance at Sharpness on the Gloucester and Sharpness canal. After a quick reconnoitre of the Purton hulks site it was decided that this project was definitely feasible and plans were made for a weekend visit to conduct an initial survey.

After speaking with Paul Barnett, adopter of the Purton hulks, the plans and objectives were outlined, and we encountered our first hurdle. British Waterways (BW), who are responsible for the canal, would need to give permission to enter the water and required a full risk assessment and project plan. This didn't seem to be a problem as a risk assessment had already been put in place, however BW were still reticent to let divers into the water. Thankfully Paul liaised with BW and permission was finally granted.



Rhys Pockett holding the prism. Photo: Matt Cass.

Saturday October 4th

Saturday morning and the four of us, plus Ian Cundy of the Malvern Archaeological Diving Unit (MADU) descended upon Sharpness. The first job was to get a feel of the half-pound and the way the hulks lay. Paul was on hand to give us some background on the wrecks and show us what was what. Around the corner of the half-pound were four hulks, three at the back next to a small cliff

face, and one by the pound wall. The identity of two were known, *Society*, a Stroudwater barge, and *Mary*, the original *Mary* barge, while the other two were unknown. The three hulks at the rear of the pound were at various levels above and below the surface, while the fourth hulk was approximately 0.5 metres below the surface.

The plan therefore was to run basic position and dimensional surveys on all four hulks while doing a more comprehensive survey on the unknown hulk closest to the pound wall (unknown hulk 1). A Total Station was then set up along the bank of the pound so as to accurately position each of the hulks in relation to each other and the pound itself.

Unknown Hulk 1

While the Total Station was being set up, a video survey of the unknown hulk 1 (UH1) was conducted. Length and breadth measurements were undertaken as well as the measurement and recording of any distinctive features. Once completed, the positions of the bow and stern were recorded using the Total Station and prism. Unfortunately by this point the rain had come, and the day's work came to an early end.

Sunday October 5th

It was still raining heavily on Sunday morning, and although the wind had died down it had changed direction making the water choppy. The day's task was to investigate an object off the stern of UH1, and near zero visibility, what was possibly the rudder was found by means of touch. An offset profile survey was then conducted, again in near zero visibility and because of this it was decided to move on to have a look at the other hulks.

An initial snorkel around the three, very closely positioned, hulks was undertaken to look at the feasibility of conducting surveys on each one. Although hampered by the presence of fallen trees, it was deemed possible to conduct a basic video and positional survey. Due to the size and position of these hulks it was decided that a return visit would be needed to conduct full surveys on each.

A great weekend was had by all despite the adverse weather and a return visit is eagerly anticipated. It wasn't possible to identify either of the unknown hulks though more is now known about them. UH1 and UH2 are very similar in size, shape and features and will need to be compared more closely after a survey of UH2.

Thanks must go to BW for allowing access, Paul Barnett for all the useful information, and to Ian Cundy for additional advice and support.

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ISBSA 2009

Istanbul: October 12-16, 2009

We have the pleasure of informing you that the 12th International Symposium on Boat and Ship Archaeology (ISBSA) will be held at the Suna and Inan Kiraç Foundation, Pera Museum in Istanbul.