Bigbury Bay Project

Neville Oldham - April 2014

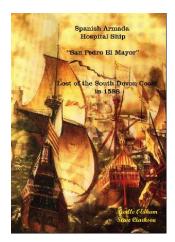
Edited by Steve Clarkson

Supported by the BSAC Jubilee Trust



The Spanish Armada Hospital ship "San Pedro"

See attached Draft Booklet Spanish Armada Hospital Ship "San Pedro El Mayor"

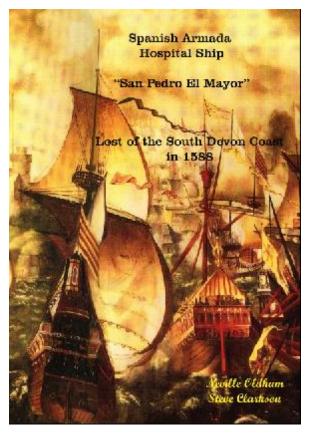


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2. Summary

This project has evolved out of efforts to locate the remains of the Armada hospital ship, the "San Pedro El Mayor" reported to have been lost in Bigbury Bay in South Devon. This project involved using electronic equipment to locate iron objects on the seabed as well as searching the relevant beaches with metal detectors. Scuba divers from various British Sub Aqua clubs were then used to evaluate the targets found on the seabed. We managed to locate many of the inshore shipwrecks in Bigbury Bay and eliminate them from the search for the San Pedro. With the amount of shipwrecks in the area, it is still possible that she lies beneath the wreckage of some of these more modern wrecks such as the Empire Harry. This project documents the result of these searches and the history of the San Pedro crew after capture. Over the last year we have also produced a booklet on the San Pedro and the Armada and sorted out the conflicts identified in the various books on the subject. During the course of the project we have trained divers in Marine Archaeology, located the inshore wrecks that still have some wreckage and found items previously not located such as the anchors from the HMS Ramillies. The cover of draft booklet on the subject is shown below.



Project achievements

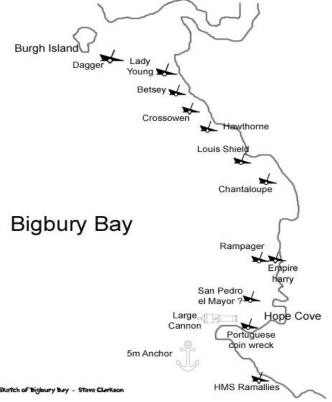
We have searched a wide area of the sea with the magnetometer, as well as the Hope Cove beaches with Metal Detectors.

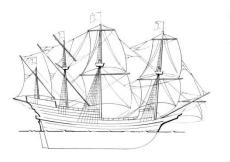
Located the position of many of the inshore wrecks

Located, what are probably the Anchors of HMS Ramillies

Trained 7 divers to NAS Intoduction and Part 1 standard and trained another 3 in site survey techniques.

Produced a draft booklet (For Publication) about the San Pedro El Mayor





3. Background to Project

What of the hospital ship San Pedro el Mayor? We are told that she took on some of the injured of the ship San Salvador, which had exploded on 31July at the first battle of the Armada off Plymouth. She would have also kept station during the battles up the Channel whilst taking on more sick and injured as well as experiencing the rout by the English fire ships at Calais. We don't hear any more of her until she limps into the little port of Vicey near the Great Blasket Island off County Kerry where she took on more sick and injured. It must have been quite a feat of seamanship navigating around the Scottish and Irish coast in rough sea conditions, with a sick crew and a damaged ship. The San Pedro was joined by two other ships and the San Juan commanded by Juan Martinez Recalde, one of Spain's most famous seamen. They found anchorage to try and get some fresh water and supplies. We don't know how successful they were in getting supplies but they left the anchorage together, the Great Galleon San Jan making it back to Spain and three day after its arrival there, its captain, Recalde died of sickness and fatigue.

The San Pedro el Mayor left the Great Blasket sound in company of the San Juan but she was in such a bad state that Captain Pedro Coco Calderon, with his ship taking in water and his crew weak from hunger and lack of clean drinking water, he could no longer control the ship. Encountering south westerly force wind, the San Pedro el Mayor was driven up the Channel onto the rocks of Bigbury Bay.

The Calendar of State Paper (Domestic) for 1588 contains all manner of information in letters and reports concerning the Amada. Two of these referrer to the wreck of the San Pedro el Mayor at Hope in Bigbury Bay.

The first is by George Cary at Cockington, near Torquay, who wrote the first letter to Queens Council dated it November 5th. 1588. The second letter to the Council was written by Anthony Ashley the sectary of the Queen's Council from Ilton Castle, The home of Sir William Courtenay's near Salcombe who was the third Earl of Devon and High Sheriff of Devon. The letter is dated November 12th. 1588.

Neville's lifetime of exploring the seabed to give up its secrets



Neville's exploits have been noticed.

Left

Extract from local paper promoting his exploits

4. Acknowledgements

Plymouth Records Office Salcombe Museum Kew Records Office Exeter Records Office Stephen George (Maritime historian and local diver) Kendal McDonald Nautical Archaeological Society British Sub Aqua Club Jubilee Trust

5. Legal Status

This area does not have any protected wreck status, although we do make reference to HMS Ramillies which was just outside the area of our research. It is possible some of the items found originated from this wreck.

6. Objectives

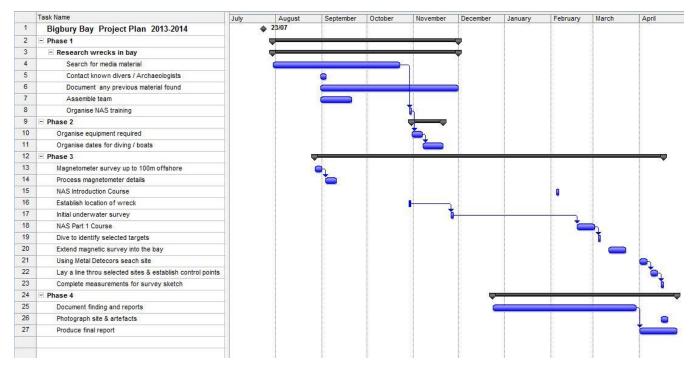
The objectives of this project were to:

- Identify the position and condition of the inshore wrecks of Bigbury Bay
- Survey the Bay and beaches using Magnetometers and Metal Detectors
- Get Divers to investigate any Targets found
- Train experienced divers to NAS part 1 qualification.

7. Plans and Approach

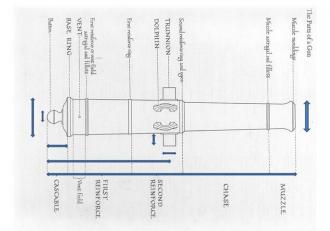
Neville & Steve's boats will be used to carry out the magnetic surveys. This data will be processed and target positions identified. A selection of these targets will be chosen as potential dive sites. These will be dives to establish exactly what they are. The divers will carry tapes and slates and some will be provided with metal detectors. No objects will be removed at this stage but will be photographed and measured in situ. The position of the targets will be measured from a shot line in a known GPS location.

See detailed plan below

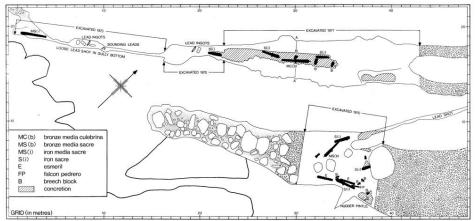


The following are examples of what measurements will be taken and what a site plan should look like.

Cannon (What to Measure)



Typical Site Plan



8. Diving Operations

Hazard	Risk	Level	Control Action
Diving practice	Poor diving practice	Moderate	All diving with be undertaken in accordance with the BS-AC <i>Safe Diving Practices</i> guidance
Equipment	Equipment failure	Moderate	Divers will use their own equipment which will be configured in accordance with BS-AC <i>Safe Diving</i> <i>Practices</i> guidance.
Shipping	The site lies within Hope Cove which is subject to a medium level of small boat and fishing traffic. There is a slight risk that the divers may be placed at risk by other water users	Moderate	Whilst divers are in the water the DSV will fly the code Flag 'A' to warn other water users that diving operations are underway. A constant watch will be maintained by the surface crew for potentially hazardous shipping movements and in the event that these occur the diver will be shielded from the offending craft by the small cover boat
Entrapment	There is no risk of entrapment within the site itself. There is a possibility of encountering nets or lines on the site. This risk is no greater than that found in recreational wreck diving.	Low	All diving will be carried out as a 'buddy pair' and all divers will carry a cutting device
Restricted Surface visibility	The onset of restricted surface visibility may place the diving support vessel and the divers at risk from collision with other shipping in the area.	Moderate	Diving operations will not be started if forecast or actual conditions indicate that surface visibility is below that which is thought to be safe (1km). A constant check will be made on the weather and the divers recalled should conditions begin to deteriorate.
Temperature	The sea temperature is expected to be around 10'C.	Moderate	All divers will be required to use either dry suits or suitable wet suits.
Access	Access is not considered to be a risk	Low	Entry to the water will be by jumping from the boat (less than 1m)

Exit will be by dive ladder. The boat carries a means of recovering an injured diver from the water

All diving with be undertaken in accordance with the BS-AC Safe Diving Practices guidance.

Breathing Gas	The depths at which the diving operations are to be conducted are less than 25m	Low	Air will be used as the breathing gas. BS-AC 88 tables to be followed. All divers will surface upon reaching a limit of 50bar
Emergency facilities	The nearest decompression facilities are at Plymouth. In the event of any incident, first aid will be given by the diving team. The vessels master will contact the emergency services and arrange evacuation	Low	The DSV will be equipped with oxygen and standard first aid equipment. The diving team will have as a minimum two members trained in Diving first aid. The DSV will be equipped with an operational marine radio and be capable of summoning help from the emergency services should this be required
Depth	Increasing depth of water can expose divers to addition risk of nitrogen narcosis and decompression sickness	Moderate	The operations are to be conducted in between 0 and 10 meters of water. At these depths the risk presented by nitrogen narcosis is low to experienced divers and there is no special risk of decompression sickness.
Weather	The site is relatively exposed to adverse weather conditions.	Moderate	A weather forecast will be obtained each day. Diving operations will not be undertaken should the forecast indicate that weather conditions would make them unsafe. A constant check will be kept on weather conditions by both the master of the diving support vessel and the diving supervisor. Diving Operations will be abandoned when weather conditions appear likely to become hazardous.
Visibility Underwater	In certain conditions visibility can be poor on site.	Moderate	Only experienced divers will be used. They will be in constant visual or physical contact with each other. Should they become separated they will surface immediately
Underwater currents	The site is exposed to some underwater currents	Low	All divers will be either connected to a buoy line or buddy line. If this is lost for any reason they will be required to surface. All diving work will be conducted at slack water.
Diving support vessels	The master of the vessel should be suitably experienced in working with SCUBA divers.	Low	All diving operations will be conducted from a MCA Code of Practice category 2 or the teams own boats. The master of all vessel's will be experienced at working with divers

9. Training & Promotion

As the majority of the divers involved had not been trained in marine archaeology, various theory and practical sessions were given to 10 of the divers during the project. This included a NAS Introduction and Part 1 course run in Brixham and Reading for 7 of the divers involved in the project.







10. People Involved

The project has involved divers from various BSAC clubs Those involved in the project are shown below:-

Steve Clarkson	Reading BSAC (Assistant Project leader)	
Neville Oldham	East Cheshire BSAC (Project Leader)	
Dave Parham Bournemouth University BSAC (NAS Trainer / Project advisor)		
Mike Turner	Totnes BSAC	
Dave Illingworth	Central BSAC	
Richard Knights	Totnes BSAC	
Bernard Hinton	Reading BSAC	
Alan Murray	Totnes BSAC	
Alec Jacobs	Totnes BSAC	
Paul Fiander	Reading BSAC	
Richard Blair	Torbay BSAC	

Photo - The alleged final resting place of the San Pedro - Shippen rock on a calm day (Not taken last year)



11. Shipwrecks of Bigbury Bay

a) Burgh Island.



It was quite common for sailing ship crews, in poor weather, to mistake Burgh Island for Looe Island which is much further to the west, resulting in the ship hitting the shallow rocks. The most famous ship that made this type of error is HMS Ramillies that was wrecked at Bolt Tail on 15th February 1760. She was an 84-gun second-rate ship of the line of the Royal Navy, launched in 1664 at Woolwich Dockyard. She was upgraded to carry 90 guns and served in the War of the Spanish Succession during which her name was changed to Ramillies in honour of John Churchill's victory at the Battle of Ramillies. Her previous name was HMS Royal Katherine.

A causeway of firm sand leads from the shore at Bigbury to the island and you can walk across during low tides. The area is heavily potted and some nets are in use making it difficult to use a magnetometer to search the area.

New diving discoveries show that the island may have had a very much bigger claim to fame in the very distant past. It now seems likely that this was the fabled island of Ictis, the Bronze Age centre for Britain's tin trade with Mediterranean and European countries. Divers found stone anchors close to Burgh Island . A settlement dating back to the Bronze and Iron Ages is known to have existed on nearby Bantham Ham.

Dividers and bronze ring



These dividers and bronze rings inset with red glass "stones" were found below the tide line on Bigbury beach with a metal detector.

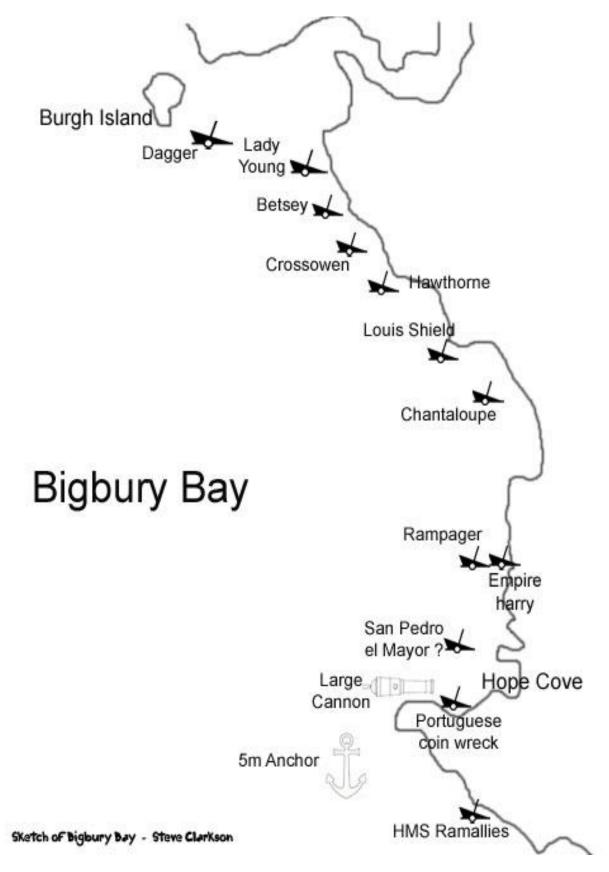


Stone anchor probably used by smugglers to hold barrels down

Bronze cannon dated 1670 alongside another four bronze cannon of various sizes. They have been identifies as being Dutch and there were a couple of unidentified Dutch ships lost in the area



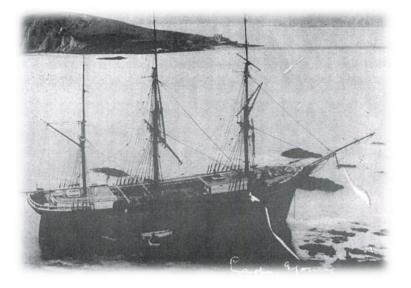
Other Inshore shipwrecks of Bigbury Bay covered in this survey



b) Dagger 1736

It is known that the Dagger met her end on the rocks to the south west of Burgh Island but divers searching the area have only found a modern steel mast or possibly a beacon pole. *Today there is no evidence of any wreckage.*

c) Lady Young 1880



The Lady Young seen above was a 589 Ton sailing Barque registered in Liverpool. She was built in Quebec Canada in 1870, and was en route to Cardiff from Hamburg under the command of Captain John Watkin with a crew of thirteen. The sea was very rough with almost hurricane force winds when she planned to seek shelter in Plymouth Sound. Distress signals were lit on the ship and seen by the Challaborough coastguard who eventually arrived to deploy rocket apparatus. At least one of the crew died in the rescue. *Today there is no eveidence of any wreckage on the site.*

Betsey 1816

The Betsey , sailing from Plymouth, was carrying French prisoners of war when she encountered bad weather and drifted into the cliffs off Thurstone. At this time there were so many Napoleonic prisoners that housing them was becoming a problem so Princetown and Dartmoor prison was built to solve the problem. The cost of housing over 10,000 prisoners was a problem so, as soon as the Battle of Waterloo was won, they were returned to France in batches on small ships. Sixty Five of these prisoners were taken from Dartmoor to Plymouth to board a small boat, the "Betsey". These were all from the French cavalry regiment "20th Regiment of Cuirasseurs". Soon after leaving Plymouth they encountered rough seas and were driven into Bigbury Bay and eventually onto the rocks at Thurstone. Twenty eight of the soldiers died and many others were injured. Nineteen of the soldiers were buried in the Thurlestone churchyard.

Today divers have found that there is no evidence of any remains of the shipwreck.

d) Crossowen 1908



The Crossowen is the *Mary Celeste* of Bigbury Bay. No one was found on board but an upturned boat and the bodies of six crewmen and a boy were found the day after solving the mystery. She was a 242 ton Brigantine built in Grangemouth in 1878 and was registered in Glasgow. The Crossowen was owned by William Charles Phillips and her captain was George Hitchens from Charletown. She was en route from Fowey in Cornwall to Leith with a cargo of china clay and it not clear why she ended up on the rocks

There is still evidence on the seabed today that a ship was wrecked in the bay

e) Hawthorn 1881

The Hawhorn was a 296 ton Barque carrying a cargo of sugar. Like the Crossowen the crew, including Captain Charles Mead, had abandoned the ship after it had hit the rocks leaving her sails still set.

Diver have found the site of the wreck and her anchor and recovered some small square portholes measuring 5 1/2" X 4" just off Warren Point. A photo of one of the recovered portholes is shown below. There is clearly wreckage under the sand indicated by metal detectors.



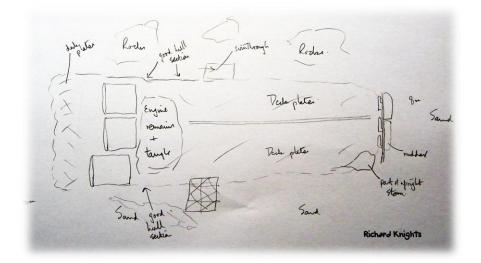
f) Lous Shield



The Louis Sheid was a large ship of 6057 tons, 418ft with a beam of 55ft. She was built in 1920 by Nord Werft of Wesermunde as the Ultor for the Rickmers Line before being renamed Kendal Castle for the James Chambers Lancashire Shipping Company of Liverpool, and then finally named again Louis Sheid for the Belgian National Shipping Line. On December 8th 1939 she was being chased by U47 captained by Gunher Prien who had just been presented with the Knights Cross for sinking HMS Royal Oak in Scapa Flow.

She was homeward bound from Antwerp with a cargo of grain and a crew of forty six. As a neutral Belgium ship and large marking on the side "BELGIE" she should not have been a target for the Germans. She was also carrying the crew and passengers from the "Tajandoen" that U47 had also sunk earlier. In order to try and escape U47 she sailed close to the Devon Coast but with a southerly gale eventually hit the rocks at Thurlstone. The Salcombe lifeboat was launched and landed the survivors at Hope Cove.

Today the boilers are visible as well as a section of the bow and ribs. see below



g) Chantaloupe1772

I found this wreck in 1988 in shallow water just to the east of Thurlstone rock. On September 24, 1772, this barque, homeward bound from Grenada for London, hit t the reef which links Thurletone Rock. Hurricane-force winds and giant seas soon started to break her up, but one woman passenger put on all jewellery hoping that if she reached the shore the locals would make extra efforts to save her. The jewels had the opposite effect. Though she reached the shore alive, the locals cut off her ears and fingers to get at the jewellery and she died.

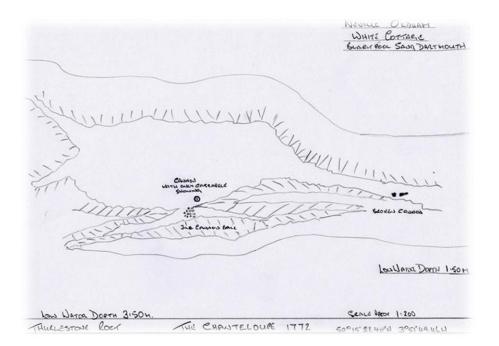
Divers have recovered cannon, musket and pistol shot and the cannon is on display on Thurlestone green.



The cannon tagged underwater



Today there is still evidence of the wreck with shot scattered in the gullies. See sketch below

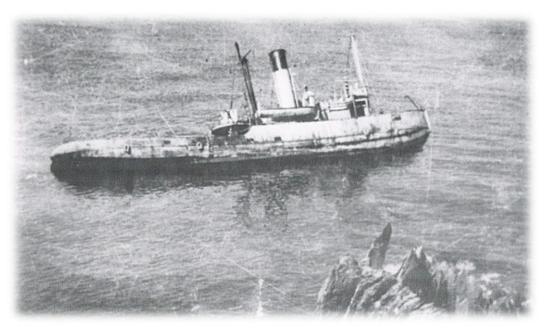


h) Rampager

Rampager, a 28ft fishing boat, sank in 1984 near Soar Mill Cove, was raised, stripped and resunk off Beacon Point close to the Empire Harry.

Today the wreck is very broken up with some plates protruding from the sand to the southwest of the wreck of the "Empire Harry"

i) Empire Harry



This 479 ton tug was launched in October,1942, and went into Admiralty service in March,1943. She was one of the Empire Larch class built by Goole Shipbuilding and Repairing Company as part of a Government programme to meet the wartime demand for tugs of all kinds. All the Larch class tugs were the same - 136ft long with a beam of 30 and triple expansion steam engines of 1200 hp.

She was towing two laden U.S.Army barges, in fog and poor weather conditions, from Falmouth to Antwerp when she went ashore on the rocks running out from Beacon Point, near Hope. The two lighters were smashed to pieces along the coast and the 19 crew of the tug were saved by the Salcombe lifeboat.

Today she is very broken up with the boiler breaking the surface at low water surrounded by plate's ad ribs scattered over a large area. A photo of the some of the wreckage is shown below.

Photo of the gun barrel recovered by the owners prior to this project



Part of the scattered remains of the Empire Harry



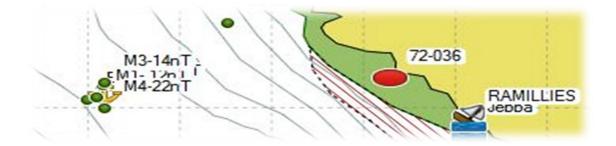
Some parts of the wreck can be seen from the shore including the boiler at low tide.



j) Anchors found off Bolt Tail

During the survey of the area around Bolt Tail a number of magnetometer hits were obtained and some of these are probably the Anchors from HMS Ramillies which went into the cliffs nearby.

The following chart shows the magnetic hits in the in relationship to HMS Ramillies.



The M4-22nT target turned out to be a 5m long admiralty pattern anchor which may well be off the Ramillies as the top of the shank of the anchor was pointing towards the shore where the wreck of the Ramilies lay approximately half a mile away. The ring on the top of the shank show below was almost 1m diameter.



This is a example of a similar anchor from HMS Victory



Sketch of Anchor found off Bolt Tail



k) Portuguese coin wreck

It may be that there were two wrecks actually in Hope Cove. as not all the coins found by the Inner Hope slipway were Spanish. When the slipway was first being built for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution in 1912, some cruzados of John IV of Portugal were found. The idea that these had been carried by the San Pedro was quickly dispelled by the date of John IV – he reigned from 1640-1656. There is one old written report of another wreck in the area and it describes the wreck of the San Pedro before going on:

"At a later date a foreign ship went upon the rocks, and the inhabitants of the village were soon aboard. Having found there a Roman Catholic priest, they concluded he was a Jesuit, come as in Elizabeth's time to conspire against the government of the country, so they locked him up in the cabin and sent for the Malborough dogs – that is the local pack of hounds – to hunt him about the country, this being a form of insult offered in former days to unpopular people. The unfortunate man was saved from this outrage by the intervention of the local gentry."

Coins believed to be from the Portuguese ship



I) Hope Cove Communion cup

In 1990 local diver, Stephen George found an Elizabethan pewter cup crushed into a crevice of the Shippen rock at Hope. Was this from the San Pedro or the poor priest on the Portuguese coin wreck? The pewter is described by experts as a travelling communion cup.



The St Peter the Great was a hospital ship of the Spanish Armada and carried 20 cannon, 30 sailors, and 100 soldiers. On July 21, 1588 she was with the rest of the Spanish Fleet off Plymouth and soon the wounded from those first skirmishes with Drake, Howard, Hawkins and Frobisher were transferred to her. Then, when everything went wrong and the Armada was forced into that dreadful circumnavigation of the British Isles, the San Pedro went too. At the end of October she was back where she had started – off Plymouth – but in terrible shape after being battered by gales almost all the way. There was now no-one aboard her strong enough to fight the winds and so a south-westerly gale blew her into Bigbury Bay and straight, they say, into Hope Cove. There, at the beginning of November 1588, her voyage of misery ended. And the looting and pillaging began.

An eye-witness of the time wrote: "The ship is not to be recovered; she lieth on a rock and full of water to her upper decks." And another report: "The ship being run upon the rocks by the Spaniards, is now through the tempestuous weather broken in pieces and scattered on the seashore." So even though there's no intact wreck to find, you would think there would be something to see. But there is no trace. And surprisingly not even a shard of pottery from all the "drugs and pothecary stuff as came to 6000 ducats" which we know was aboard.

No evidence of the San Pero's final resting place has been found during this survey but research has unearthed some artefacts from the ship. The first is some armour dug out of a wall and is now on display in the Cookworthy Museum in Kingsbridge shown below.



The second item is a plate last sold in a London auction.



Ships timbers in the Village Inn Thurlestone said to be from the San Pedro



The plaque on the barn floor that held the Spanish prisoners at Torre Abbey



Spanish barn where 394 Armada prisoners were held (see plaque above)



12. Mistry of the "San Pedro El Mayor"

To more understand the "San Pedro El Mayor" we have produced a draft booklet documenting the history of the ship and its role in the Armada. A copy is attached to this report.

During the research we discovered conflicting reports about the San Pedro and her crew.



13. Artefacts located

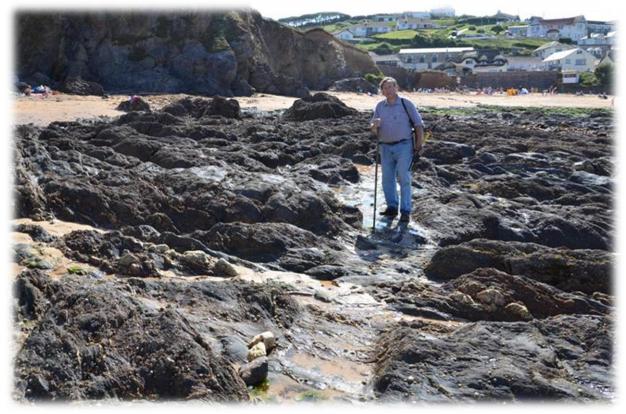
The following are a list of artefacts located/ found during this project

Identification &area	Description
Thurleston Green	Chataloupe Cannon
Hope Cove	Challis (Possibly from San Pedro El Mayor
Milton Keynes	plate from San Pedro El Mayor
Kingsbridge	Spanish helmet
Bolt Tail	Large Admiralty Anchor
Bolt Tail	Large Cannon
Hawthorn	Square porthole
Burgh Island	Stone Anchor

14. Pictures of the team at work



The pictures above show the land and sea magnetometer surveys



The above photo shows the path possibly used to salvage the San Pedro



Diver returning to the dive boat in Hope Cove



Diver with possible Ramillies anchor



Neville at the helm



Aquascan Proton Magnetometer



Neville using his 30 year old magnetometer



Getting close to the rocks



On site over Ramillies anchor



Steve on the beach looking for evidence of the San Pedro



Its hard work this diving



Some aluminium fragments found on the beach



Bernard and Mike returning to the boat

15. Research

During the course of this project we researched the following books and archives.

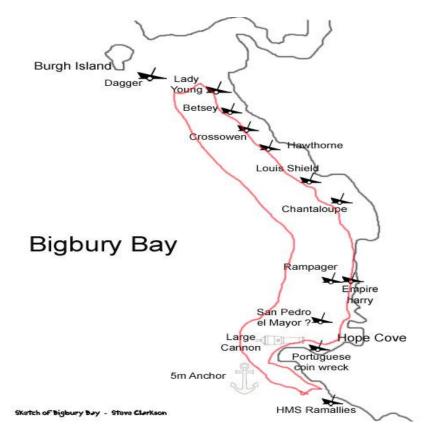
The wreck of the Almiranta Peter Earle From Merciless Invaders Alexander McKee Spanish Armada- Colin Martin and Geoffrey Parker The defeat of the Spanish Armada Garret Mattingly The Spanish Armadas Collins Plymouth Records Office Exeter Records Office Records office Paris State Papers Records Office Kew

16. Magnetometer Surveys

The magnetometers used were:

Aquascan AX2000 Aquascan AX 100 Planet Electronics MX 500

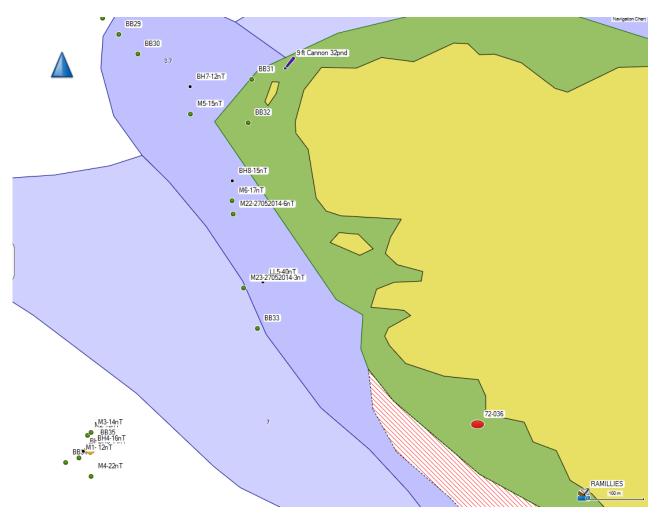
The chart below shows the area covered using the magmetometers.



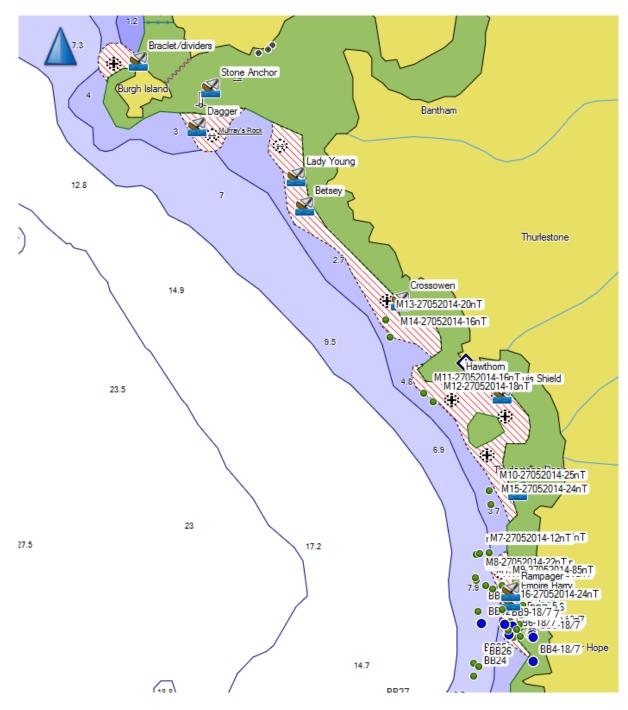
A significant number of the targets were found to be in very deep narrow gullies making them impossible to identify.

Most of the targets on the right are the Empire Harry and Rampager as well as a few sash weights previously left behind from searches.

The following charts show some of the magnetic targets found during the project. The clustesr of green dots in the bottom left turned out to be anchors, probably from HMS Ramillies. Her final position is shown on the bottom right.



The magnetometer survey to the east towards Burgh island helped us relocate the inshore wrecks and confirm their condition. The chart below shows some of these magnetic targets. Due to time constaints and bad weather we have not been able to confirm a lot of these targets.



17. Finds Disposal

Any finds recovered will be recorded, reported to the receiver of wrecks and hopefully end up in the local museums.

No items were recovered during this project

18. On site activities

28 Apr 2013	Magnetometer survey (Hope area inshore)
5 May 2013	Diving off Shipen Rock (Located previous sash weights)
17 July 2013	Magnetometer Survey Bolt Tail (Eight targets found)
6 Sept 2013	Diving Bolt Tail (Found 5m Anchor)
12/13 Oct 2013	Diving Bolt Tail (Video 5m Anchor)
2 Nov 2013	Metal detectors on beach adjacent to Hope Cove
12-15/16 Feb 2014	NAS Introduction & Part 1 courses
5 March 2014	Magnetometer survey Bigbury Bay
12 April 2014	Diving Bolt Tail (Targets probably buried)
14 May 2014	Magnetometer survey Off Thurlestone

Activity

Date

19. Conclusions

We have achieved what we wanted to achieve within the constraints of the timescale of the project. Although we have not found any remains of the hospital ship "San Pedro El Mayor" we have eliminated some areas within the bay and hope to carry on the search. The weather has been a particular problem over the last year with diving conditions not ideal. It is possible that the San Pedro broke up and drifted on the tide so we hope to do more searches off Bolt Tail where we have had a significant number of magnetic targets. In the area off shippen rock we found many magnetic and metal detector targets but unfortunately they lay in deep inaccessible gullies.

We have achieved the following:

We have searched a wide area of the sea with the magnetometer, as well as the Hope Cove beaches with Metal Detectors.

Located the position of many of the inshore wrecks

Located, what are probably the Anchors of HMS Ramillies

Trained 7 divers to NAS Intoduction and Part 1 standard and trained another 3 in site survey techniques.

Produced a draft booklet (For Publication) about the San Pedro El Mayor

20. Financial Report

The project spend was roughly in line with the planned cost. A detailed spreadsheet and receipts are available if required.

Some members of the team provided all their own personal boats .

 •	

21. **Possible future projects on the site**

During the investigation a number of magnetic anomalies were found in the bay. These need be further investigated.